



Wild Trout in the Mountain Kingdom of LESOTHO

By Fred Steynberg – Linecasters Outfitter

Not many among the world's fly-fishing fraternity (beyond our borders) have ever heard of fly fishing in the mystical Mountain Kingdom of Lesotho in Africa. This could possibly be contributed to the fact that this tiny landlocked country has never had the means to market these assets. Few have travelled through Lesotho and even fewer have had the privilege to fish its rivers. It is a holistic experience, one that not only caters to anglers seeking large, wild, river trout in a breathtaking, remote, mountainous area, but also allows for interaction with an African nation that has a unique culture and way of life. Lesotho is made up of a glorious, refreshing mix of smells, sounds and panoramic scenes that stimulates ones senses.

Lesotho is geographically situated almost in the centre of South Africa and it is the only independent state in the world that lies in its entirety above 1000 meters above sea level and with its lowest point of 1400 meters above sea level, can be considered the highest. Most of the mountain passes and peaks are so high that they are often covered in mist in summer and snow in winter. Travelling through this highland country one often feel as if momentarily trapped in one of J.R.Tolkien's novels, 'The Hobbit' or 'Lord of the Rings', expecting to encounter some extraordinary being or creature.



The country's rich diamond mines, along with its rich supplies of water of which a large percentage is dammed and tunnelled through to South Africa, makes up two of its largest economic assets.

8lb mark might surprise anglers when a well presented imitation is offered, but it is the lucky few who manage to bring one to the net to finally pose with fish in hand.

Some of the rivers have large brown trout with exquisite colours in shades of gold's, browns, reds and blacks and although they are rare, specimens of 2- 6+ lbs have been caught but they are few. These fish are selective and often refuse the most idyllic bug looking nymph to move a couple of meters from their lie to gulp in a badly presented hopper pattern in true brown trout fashion.

The road infrastructure in Lesotho is generally quite poor and often fly fishermen have to travel off the beaten track using 4x4 vehicles or ponies to sample some of its better trout waters. Less than a handful of legal fly fishing guides and outfitters organize fly fishing excursions from South Africa

This mountain kingdom is home to the tradition-bound Basotho people who, generally, earn their keep by subsistence farming with cattle, sheep, goat livestock. On small cultivated lands, maize and sorghum crops are grown in summer, which act as a staple diet and last throughout the year. In the rural areas the Basotho's still use Basotho ponies as their main mode of transport, often dressing up in Basotho blankets and traditional hats and riding proud, not much unlike the Gauchos from Argentina. Donkeys transport supplies to remote huts and villages high up into the mountains and are also often used by the young herd boys to round up the stock. A great number of the country's young men, if not herdsman, become migrant workers, ending up working in the gold mines around Johannesburg in South Africa and money earned is sent home to provide for the families.



into Lesotho (see www.linecasters.co.za).

The fly fishing can be as exhilarating as the 'walk-and-stalk' fly fishing in New Zealand. Technically, it definitely rates with some of the best. Rainbow trout are more prevalent and large trophy fish, 20 - 26 +'' (3 - 7+lbs), will take anglers into their backing on 4 and 5 weight rigs, leaping high into the air and darting under rocks and undercuts. I have hunted rainbows across the globe, Patagonia, New Zealand and Europe and I can without hesitation state that the Lesotho monsters will match the strongest. Occasionally a massive specimen around the 7 -

Smallmouth yellow fish migrate up from the Orange River into the highland tributaries each year to spawn between October and March and become a magnificent species to target on fly in the clear mountain streams.

Some of the large females choose to winter in the deeper pools and can be targeted during spring (September) and autumn (April and May). These underrated indigenous fish are often referred to as the 'fresh water bonefish' of



invertebrates and crustaceans that trout also eat such as caddis flies, mayflies, midges, dragonflies, damselflies and crabs to name some.

All of this sounds out of this world and too good to be true but truth be told, the fishing is nowadays not even 20% as good as what it used to be 7 or more years ago. Many factors have contributed to the fish now

Southern Africa because of the way that they feed and cruise into the shallows or riffles and runs, appearing from and disappearing into deep pools like ghosts. After hooking these often selective golden beauties they will take off in a series of strong, lengthy runs that can make the most experienced fly angler pay attention.

Lesotho streams are rich with insect life that both the indigenous yellow fish and trout, which were introduced between 1915 and 1930, thrive on.

Dry fly and upstream nymphing techniques are used to target the yellow fish as they selectively feed on a variety of terrestrial food sources such as hoppers, ants, beetles, grubs as well as all the

having a price on their heads. This fishery could potentially become a world class again, as it was many years ago. It is hard to understand why the Lesotho government cannot recognize it as a huge money spinner that could create much needed income for thousands living along the clearwater streams. One of the most popular options for fly fishermen who want to sample these waters and enjoy success is to accompany a fly fishing outfitter that knows where the fishing is still good and that understands the local ways.

Although fit anglers in their 70's plus often take on the challenge, a typical Lesotho fly fishing trip can be considered adventurous. Intrepid anglers that venture onto these crystal clear, mountain streams that flow between heaven and earth are often well rewarded with memories that will last a lifetime.

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