



Newsletter 16, 2023

DIRT ROAD TRADERS

G'day folks,

I trust that you all had uneventful trips back home and are well into seeing out what is left of the year.

Mark Liptrot kindly shared his very fine account of his experiences en route to and during the event. Without any further ado, I would suggest that you use the URL below and enjoy the read at;

http://www.wildtrout.co.za/images/WTA/Ranger_to_Rhodes.pdf

The dates for the 2024 festival will be from the opening on the 19th to the 23rd March, travelling home on the 24th March 2024 so confirm your possible participation ASAP as per the attached documents.

Some stats from the 2023 event;

1. The auction turnover amounted to R43 500 of which R6400 accrued to the Rhodes Animal Care project for the hand-knitted Stoepsitfees blankets.
2. Of the auction proceeds, R20 000 was donated to the FOSAF NEMBA war chest and R20 000 to the "Hare Street Hatchery" aka the Thrift Sport Fishery enterprise run by Martin Davies.
3. According to the total of 110 catch returns submitted, 1719 trout were caught at an average of 15,63/return
4. Extrapolated, this is equivalent to a possible 3250 fish!

For those of you who have not heard about part 2 of point 2, since his retirement from the Department of Ichthyology and Fisheries Science at Rhodes University, Martin Davies established a hatchery in his garden in Hare Street, in Grahamstown, now known as Makhanda. With the advent of the current eskom debacle, the WTA contributed an amount of R12500 towards the cost of a generator for the facility. More recently, a lethal combination of the failed municipality and the failing power utility, 30 000 trout were lost at the hatchery despite Davies best efforts using the generator to power the pumps and many, many cylinders of oxygen. This tragedy led to an initiative to instal a system that would allow the hatchery to function without total reliance on the municipal/eskom supply which led to the WTA contribution that will facilitate achieving the aim.

More importantly, being a canny Welshman, Davies has a back-up plan in the form of the Thrift dam where some of you may have fished already. Davies has been stocking this water for decades and over time, developed a more heat tolerant, fast-growing trout ideal for the waters of the Eastern Cape and for that matter, the entire country! Tapping into this reservoir of trout is a task that is admirable in the extreme. As I understand the process, going fishing in this case is not the fun event that the activity would imply. It involves catching both hen and cock fish when they are at their breeding peak i.e. during winter and more often than not, at night. These are stripped and the fertilized ova taken to the hatchery to be nurtured into fry, fingerlings and stock-able trout. In addition, this process is not a once-off event but is repeated several times during the spawning season in the dark of the night as the cooler weather facilitates the survival of the ova. This extreme commitment is to be admired and roundly applauded, to say the least.

Imagine the disappointment and down-heartedness when all that time and extreme effort yields nought but material for composting, if you can stand the whiff!

Although the waters of the WTA are self-sustaining, a time may come where severe drought conditions necessitates judicious stocking. What better trout could one ask for than the Davies'-developed line? This warrants our support, albeit "just in case" and preferably, at some time far into the future. I'd also like to take this opportunity to salute the dedication not only of Davies but the team of flyfishers and enthusiasts gathered from as far afield as Gauteng and directed by Alan Hobson of Angler and Antelope Guesthouse whom some of you may have met at his fine establishment in Somerset East or on the water in the region.