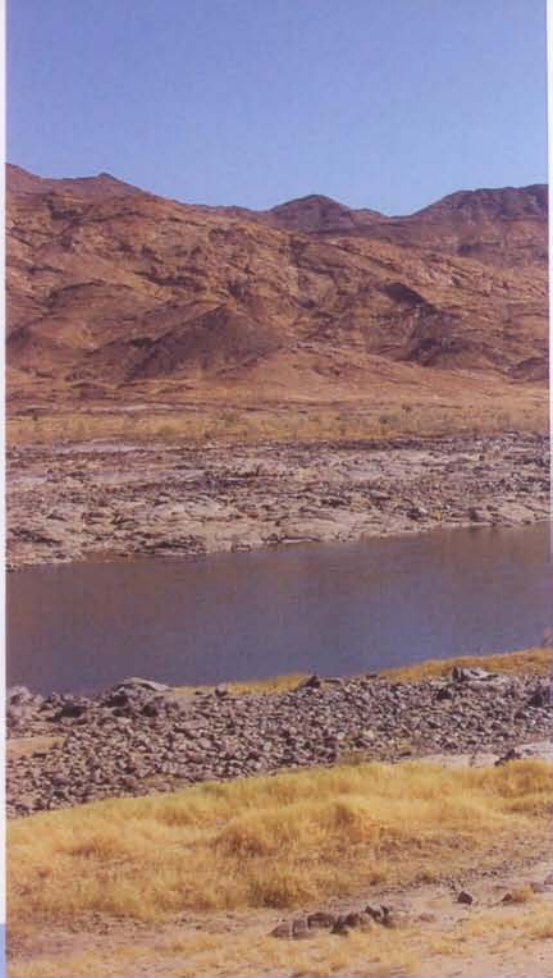
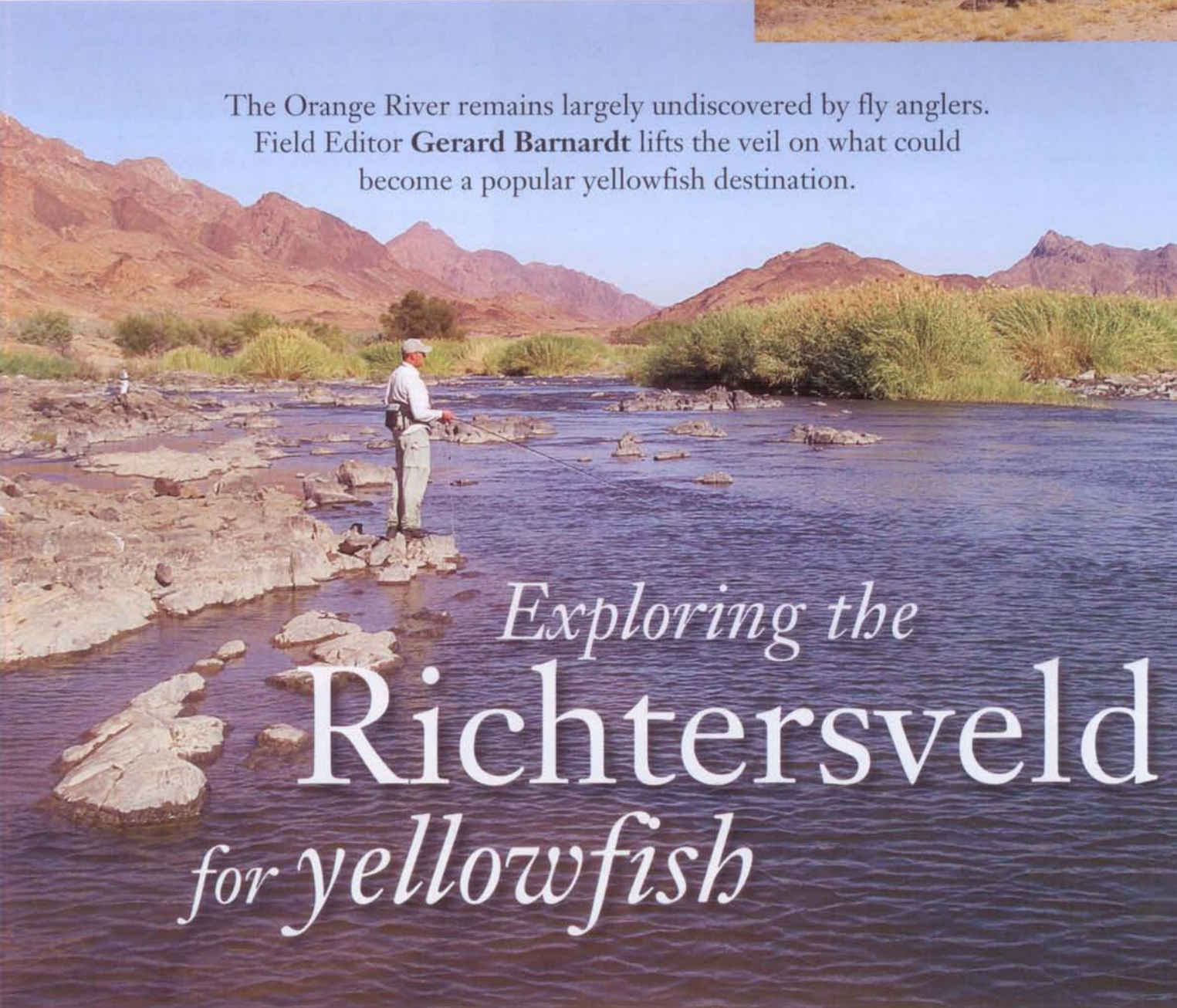


The Orange River has been described as the “giver of life,” flowing through long stretches of semi-desert terrain and bringing much-needed irrigation to communities along its banks. It rises in the Drakensberg in Lesotho (where it is known as the Senqu) and flows westward for some 2200km, entering the Atlantic Ocean at Alexander Bay. Through construction of the Gariiep and Vanderkloof dams, thousands of hectares of arid land have been turned into a highly productive agricultural area. Established irrigation schemes, such as that found at Vioolsdrift in the Northern Cape, have also benefited from regulation of the river flow. But the Orange River does not just provide irrigation, it harbours 15 recorded indigenous fish species. Of these, the most notable for fly anglers are yellowfish and mudfish of the family Cyprinidae, as well as catfish of the family Siluriformes. The yellowfish species include both small- and largemouth, with the first-mentioned being more prolific.

The Orange River remains largely undiscovered by fly anglers. In recent years a number of exploratory trips have been undertaken, with the focus being on the Richtersveld National Park. Although one of the smallest parks in our country, it is arguably the most beautifully diverse, boasting plants with evocative names such as halfmens, koekemakranka, cancer bush and honnepisbos. Classified as a mountain desert, the area has a harsh and dry climate with temperatures soaring up to 50°C in summer along the riverbanks; hence most fly fishers prefer to visit during winter and spring when average temperatures are more bearable.



The Orange River remains largely undiscovered by fly anglers.
Field Editor **Gerard Barnardt** lifts the veil on what could
become a popular yellowfish destination.



Exploring the
Richtersveld
for yellowfish

Previous page bottom and left: Some areas of the Orange River offer harsh but impressive desert scenery.
Insert left: A kokerboom – a plant that is typical of the Richtersveld.
Below: Although this is a rather small specimen, largemouth yellowfish grow to huge sizes in the Orange River.
Bottom: Michael Gruddage with an Orange River smallmouth.



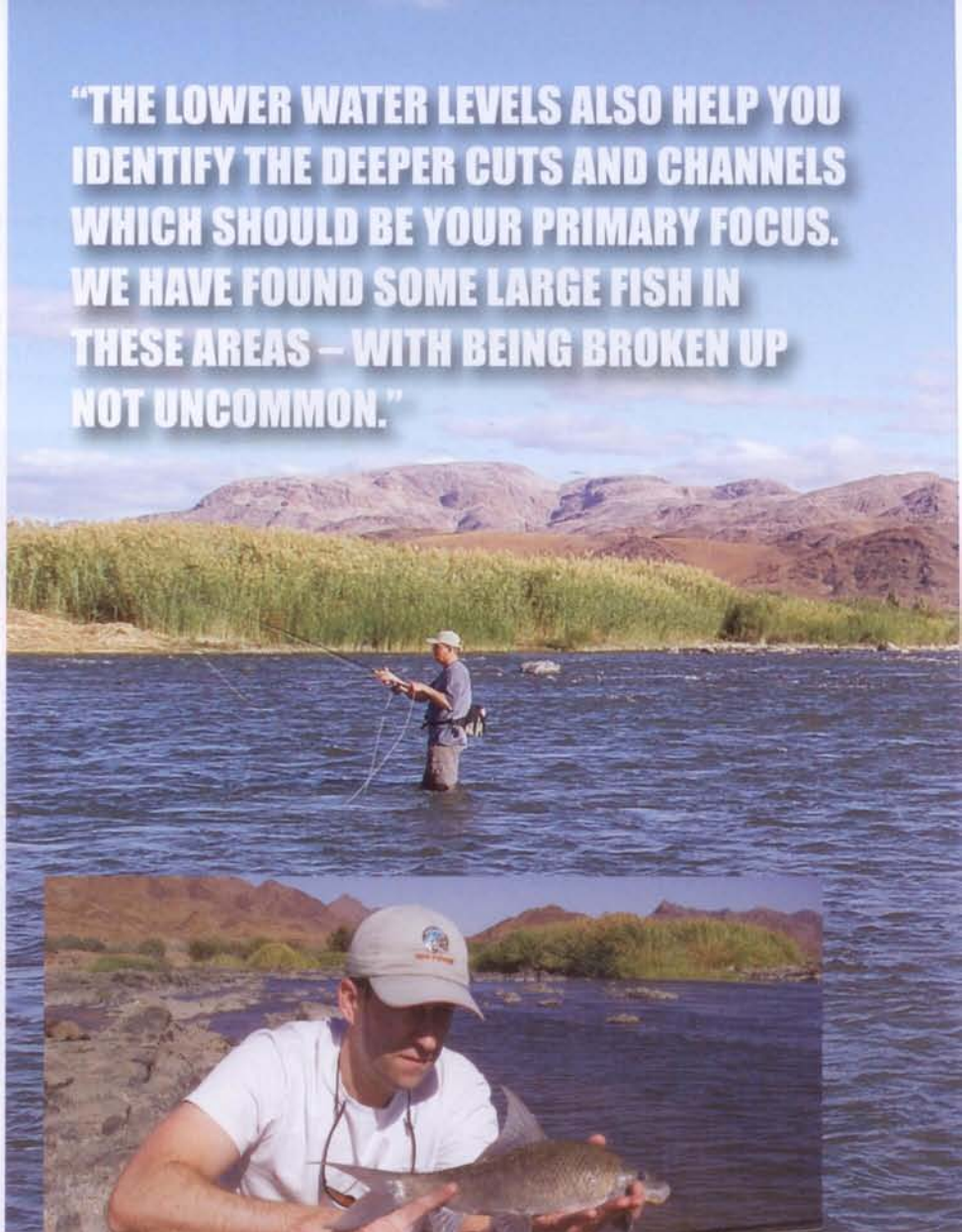
Photo: Morné Strydom

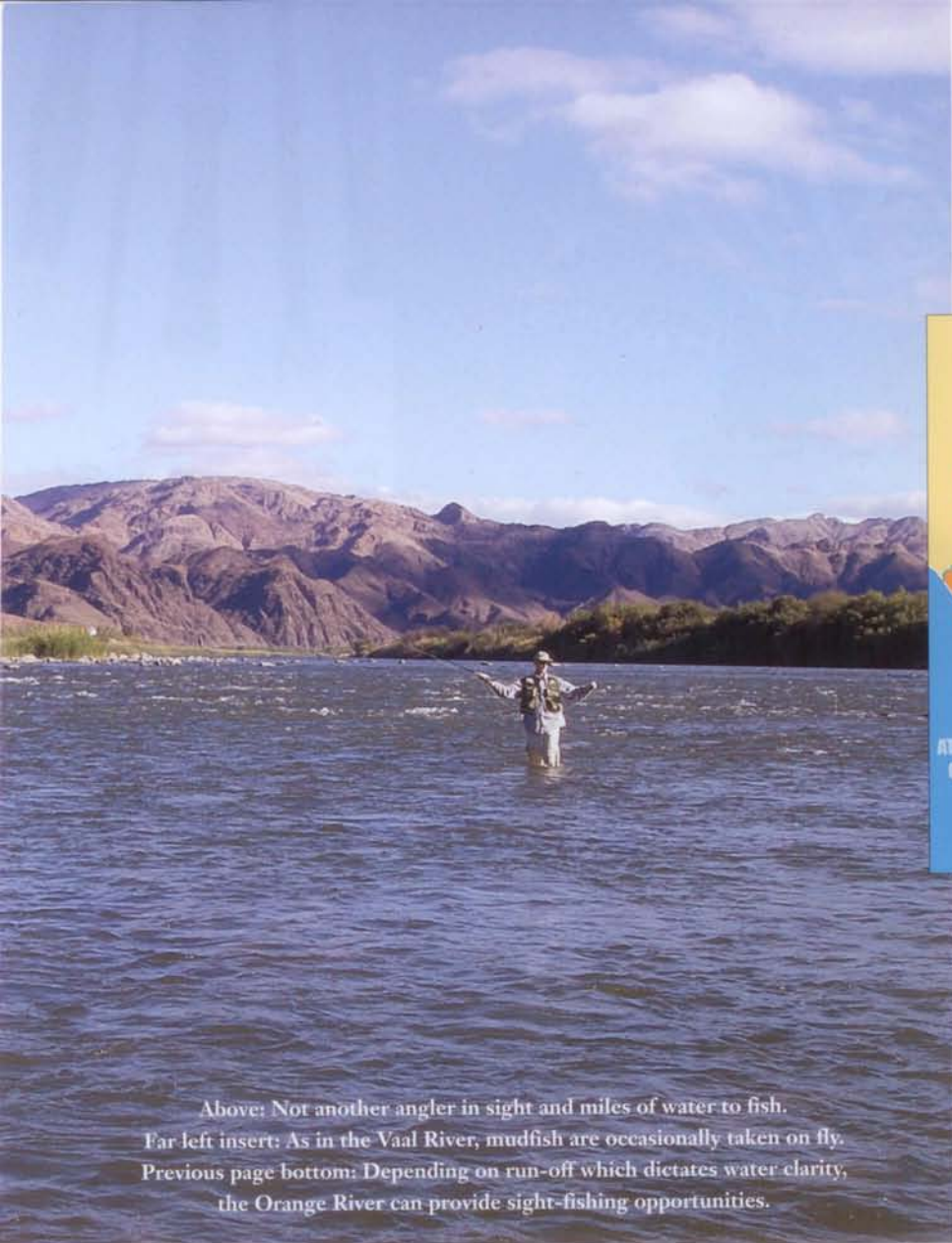
THE FISHING

The size and structure of the section of the Orange River that flows through the Richtersveld is quite diverse, with flow rate having a large impact on the fishing. However, with so much water to fish there is always an area which is optimal at the time, so it helps to explore a bit. You will often find an abundance of smaller fish in the rapids, which makes it difficult to hook up with larger ones (especially if you're using small flies), so it pays to step up on fly size. Although the rapids are probably the most popular place to start, explore the deeper cuts and channels, which can be very productive for larger fish if fished correctly.

During winter the water level often drops, exposing a lot of the floodplain. The lower water levels also help you identify the deeper cuts and channels which should be your primary focus. We have found some large fish in these areas and getting broken up not uncommon. Although stepping up your tippet to guard against disappointment is an obvious choice, it may prove more difficult to fool leader-shy fish, thus finding the right balance will be a factor in your success. Fishing at the correct depth is also very important. If the fishing gets slow, go deeper – if you don't feel your fly bumping the bottom, you're too shallow.

“THE LOWER WATER LEVELS ALSO HELP YOU IDENTIFY THE DEEPER CUTS AND CHANNELS WHICH SHOULD BE YOUR PRIMARY FOCUS. WE HAVE FOUND SOME LARGE FISH IN THESE AREAS – WITH BEING BROKEN UP NOT UNCOMMON.”





FAST FACTS

Orange River

CLIMATE AND TOPOGRAPHY:



Above: Not another angler in sight and miles of water to fish.
 Far left insert: As in the Vaal River, mudfish are occasionally taken on fly.
 Previous page bottom: Depending on run-off which dictates water clarity,
 the Orange River can provide sight-fishing opportunities.

The Orange River catchment varies dramatically both in climate and topography from east to west. To the east, at the source of the Orange River high in the Lesotho Highlands, the precipitation (some of which occurs as snow) can exceed 2000mm/a in places, which, together with the relatively shallow soil cover and low evaporation, results in significant run-off. As the river progresses towards the west, the lush pastures of Lesotho are gradually transformed into harsh but impressive desert areas where only the most drought-resistant plants can grow. The desert areas of the lower Orange basin are among the driest in the world with an average rainfall of less than 50mm/a. Although by southern African standards there are some well-watered areas in the Orange River catchment, by world standards the catchment as a whole must be classified as arid. A good source of flow rate information can be found on the Department of Water Affairs and Forestry website at www.dwaf.gov.za

FLY PATTERNS

The selection of fly patterns for yellowfish can be broad, but in my experience you will generally get by with the standard Vaal patterns. It pays to have an open mind, since conditions may require some variation to the tried-and-tested techniques. Although we haven't found the Orange River yellows to be totally selective, they do have their moments. I recall one afternoon when the only fly that produced results was a small black mayfly which had previously been christened (during an outing with Horst Filter on the Pongola River) the "maybe" fly. It was one of those patterns you revert to when all else has failed. Most fly fishermen I know have a fly which they will fish as testament to the "courage of their conviction" – so if you have one, bring it with you just in case.

The size and location of the river promote fishing in solitude. During our last trip we didn't see another angler,

although we did meet up with a group of river rafters. The breadth of the river meant there was more than enough space for all.

HOW TO GET THERE

If planning to travel through the Richtersveld via Sendelingsdrift, you will require a 4x4. This can be a tedious trip, but it has its appeal if you fancy off-road driving, camping and general outdoor living. A few fly fishing guides offer packages tailored to make the most of your stay, a good option for first-timers. A more comfortable alternative is to explore the river from the Namibian side. From Cape Town take the N7 north to Vioolsdrift – a distance of about 670km. The road is tarred all the way to the border. Once you have crossed the Orange River and Namibian border post, you take a left turn following the Rosh Pinah gravel road which twists its way alongside the river. Please remember that a passport is required to access Namibia.

ACCOMMODATION:

There are a few camps and river rafting operations along the banks, which can be contacted for accommodation and access to the river.

- Richtersveld National Park: www.saparks.com/accommodation/richtersveld_national_park.htm
- The Tourism Information Centre: Tel/Fax: (027) 851-7108 www.richtersveldguesthouses.co.za