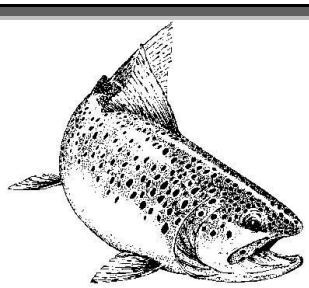

DIRT ROAD TRADERS

2025 Festival Newsletter 6, September 2024

G'day folks,
Spring is upon us and thank goodness August is over. What with severe wind and the dust that it causes, it must surely be the worst month of the year!

Remarkably, the Bell River is still trickling away happily, mostly fed by the Kloppershoekspruit that has its origins on the Lesotho border and the Sterkspruit/Herschel district. Loch Ness is at the upper end of this catchment. The Ben McDhui ridge that extends to the east and the escarpment is the watershed between RSA and Lesotho. The southern aspect of this ridge was well covered by snow this winter, the vestiges of which can still be seen in the shadows. In fact, the snow was so deep that the usual Rhodes Trail Run route had to be changed this year.

The word may have spread already but for those "in the dark", it would be remiss not to provide a brief update on developments here at "The Centre of the Universe". Having been in the hospitality industry in the Eastern Cape Highlands for more than three decades, I have decided to call it a day and accordingly, have put Walkerbouts Inn on the market. However, the good (or the bad news) is that Susan and I are not going anywhere else. We intend staying in Rhodes unless circumstances dictate otherwise. Finding a suitable buyer may well take time so all still remains to be seen.

The most important aspect of this decision is that I will not be abandoning the Wild Trout Association that I have nurtured since 1991. However, divesting myself of certain aspects of the WTA operation started in 2018 when I decided that Day permit sales should be attended to at the Rhodes Info Centre (RIC) and no longer at Walkerbouts. More recently, in order to facilitate the permit's administrative process, a Point of Sale (PoS) system, complete with a dedicated card device was funded by the WTA. This funding was compliments of both donors and buyers at the annual festival auctions. Our sincere thanks to them, yet again, for letting us improve the WTA & RIC systems. FYI, the improvement was simultaneously extended to the RIC who consequently have their own PoS for sales administration. Accordingly, festival auction donors and buyers have made a tangible contribution to the fabric of Rhodes and is very much appreciated.

The fishing prospects for 2025? Well, as I have maintained for some time, inclement weather is one thing but a variety of (spurious) platitudes come to mind, such as "the fishing is always as good as the fisherman" or the answer to "what is the best fly to use?" is "the fly in the water"! So, having said that, recovery from the devastating effect of the drought several years ago is unquestionable as shown by festival catch returns for the past 12 years that included the drought.

2013	2014	2015	2016	2017	2018	2019	2020	2021	2022	2023	2024
1726	969	445	93	321	244	1243	1053	533	2362	1669	1367

Statistics, of course, can be manipulated to prove almost anything, depending on the preferred outcome so bear in mind that the recent decline as shown above is more of a reflection on "illiterate" flyfishers who don't submit any or not all of the daily returns – for whatever reason!
Cheers,
Dave.