

SHARLAND EAST-URQUHART

Interviewer:

1. A lot of us, if we are asked what fishing means to us, have a hard time putting it into words; but if someone asks us to tell a story that captures the essence of what fishing means to us, it can be an easier task. Do you have a story that does that for you?

Sharland East-Urquhart:

Fly fishing 25 years ago for the first time at a friend's trout dam up North, I realized my focus was entirely on the water and my line. Nothing else mattered. I did catch but did not hold a rod again for about 12 years. Owning my first 5w rod all those years later I began to take myself off at weekends to a series of dams in the Jonkershoek valley, Stellenbosch I was mistaken in thinking, for the next two years, that practice makes perfect and that I could teach myself. I did however derive great pleasure from the many serene and perfect moments during those years. Whatever the weather, rain or shine, I would travel to Stellenbosch to fly fish. This brought me into contact with special people who remain fly fishing friends today. Subsequently the use of a professional guide on rivers improved my casting.

Interviewer:

2. Do you have a favorite spot or body of water to fish and if so what makes it special to you?

Sharland East-Urquhart:

We have a home in a village called Rhodes which is situated in the Southern Drakensberg Mountains, and surrounded by magnificent mountain streams filled with wild trout. I am happiest fly fishing on a rather difficult stretch of water called Boarmans Chase, high up on the Bell River surrounded by majestic mountain views. Open skies, no trees, nothing but large tufted and windblown indigenous grasses. Incredibly isolated. Tough fishing. Great fishing.

Interviewer:

3. If you could go anywhere to fish, a dream trip, where would you go and why?

Sharland East-Urquhart:

Montana. Big sky country. I have always wanted to travel there, for both fly fishing and painting. Having recently finished a lengthy writing course I would appreciate 'just being' under those skies with a view towards the mountains and below the perpetual never ending motion of the river.

Interviewer:

4. In addition to the oral history project MSU also collects and preserves information and materials on angling. What in your opinion is the value, both to society and anglers, in having institutions like the Trout and Salmonid collection at MSU?

Sharland East-Urquhart:

Preservation for the world at large. For all who share things piscatorial to visit MSU, to further their knowledge and to impart whatever valid information they may have been fortunate to garner over their life time.

Interviewer:

5. In terms of developing a love and life-long passion for angling who had the greatest impact on bringing you into the sport?

Sharland East-Urquhart:

Dr. Tom Sutcliffe in Cape Town, South Africa, Mr. Ed Herbst in Cape Town, South Africa and last but by no means least the incredible Joan Wulff.

Interviewer:

6. Over your lifetime of fishing what have you seen us improve or gain regarding angling opportunities, access, crowding, fisheries management, etc. and what have you seen us lose?

Sharland East-Urquhart:

As I have not been fly fishing that long I cannot make that judgement call. I can say that our government is not doing what it should be doing to keep our rivers clean, to maintain fly fishing for trout as both a sport, and as a sustainable source of employment for those that reside closest to the rivers (and often lack other employment opportunities). Instead we in SA have a massive battle on our hands at present with the decision makers wanting to 'get rid of those alien trout' and replace them with indigenous fish. Since self-sustaining populations of wild trout have lived in our streams for over a hundred years, this attitude is difficult to understand.

Interviewer:

7. What do you see on the horizon in terms of threats or opportunities to angling and/or trout and salmon habitats?

Sharland East-Urquhart:

Pollution. Governments that do not care.

Interviewer:

8. What piece of advice would you give to a new angler?

Sharland East-Urquhart:

Start with a guide for basic casting practice and the ethos of protection of our fish. Practice only catch and release, and learn how to do so without harming the fish that you do catch. Always, without exception, use barbless hooks.

Interviewer:

9. What qualities have you found that make a person a good fishing partner or a good angler?

Sharland East-Urquhart:

Patience, kindness and a joyful spirit.

Interviewer:

10. What's special about fishing in South Africa?

Sharland East-Urquhart:

We are blessed with some spectacular rivers. Some rather tricky ones in Cape Town. Many more in Kwa-Zulu Natal which has its own magical beauty. The mysticism of those plentiful rivers in and around Rhodes, where it is even possible, should you so desire, to fly fish in the snow!!

Interviewer:

11. I believe anglers understand that the waters trout and salmonids live in are fragile and can go away if we are not persistent in protecting them. What can/should anglers be doing to protect trout and salmonid habitats? And finally are there any organizations you feel are doing great work in this area today?

Sharland East-Urquhart:

Support any organization that is dedicated to protecting and sustaining our fisheries. FOSAF (Federation of Southern African Flyfishers) is currently very active and effective in this area.

Interviewer:

12. How important is it for an angler to be politically active and aware?

Sharland East-Urquhart:

Given the world we live in today I believe it is vital that we all as a community of flyfishers participate where and when we can to help each other and our provinces.

Interviewer:

13. In the US and other places I have seen around the world most anglers look like me i.e. middle aged plus white guys. Is it important to get more women and minorities involved in the sport and if so do you have any thoughts on how we can do it?

Sharland East-Urquhart:

Being a lady flyfisher I can see the inroads being made in our country towards a healthy inclusiveness for women. We need to place more emphasis on education and sustainability. Outreach programs like Trevor Sitole is busy doing in Natal where he guides and educates with regard to his passion for fly fishing are extremely worthwhile.

Interviewer:

14. In your experience fishing around the world is there a common language, comradery, etc. among anglers? Does it help break down political, religious, etc. barriers?

Sharland East-Urquhart:

Yes.

Interviewer:

15. Do you have any favorite angling authors, books, or artists?

Sharland East-Urquhart:

Tom Sutcliffe. Tom has a way with words and an awesome wit. Same with Gierach.

Interviewer:

16. Can you tell me a bit about your rod preference and about what you see as the values and negatives in graphite, fiberglass and bamboo rods?

Sharland East-Urquhart:

I have a special affinity with my hand made bamboo rods, made by Steven Boshoff and Stephen Dugmore, both resident in Cape Town. These are unfortunately not often used enough as they are difficult to travel with. My Sage 3w ZXL is my go to rod for most river conditions. I do wish that Sage had not discontinued this rod! For still waters my Orvis 5w. I have tried a few different rods and believe each and all of us are different. No two people cast the same. One must find the rod that suits your casting style.

Interviewer:

17. Can you talk a bit about your experience as a woman in a sport largely populated with men? Do you feel you there were barriers that a man would not have had to face? (My ex-wife was a much, much better angler then me but whenever we would stop at a fly shop or see people on the river I would be the one they approached while it was really her knowledge and skill they should have been seeking!)

Sharland East-Urquhart:

Fly fishing shops in our country reacted differently 10 years ago to a woman walking into a shop than they do now. Huge inroads have been made in SA. I can well remember being ignored in a particular shop in preference for the male species who had just walked in! Even in New York recently I was left alone to look at a rod and the gentlemen rushed over to my husband (he was looking at a magazine, about to sit down. Cycles. Does not fly fish) When the fellows realized their mistake they could not have been nicer. Ended up only purchasing a cap but spent time being shown their latest catches and a promise to take me out the next time I was in NY! It has not always been easy but most certainly has become 100% better.
