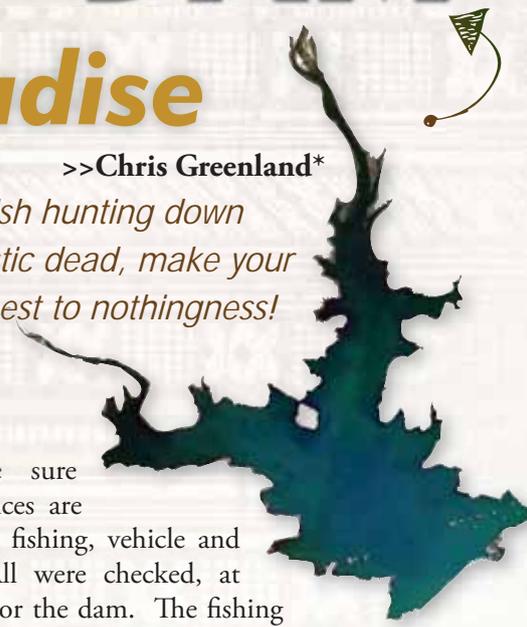
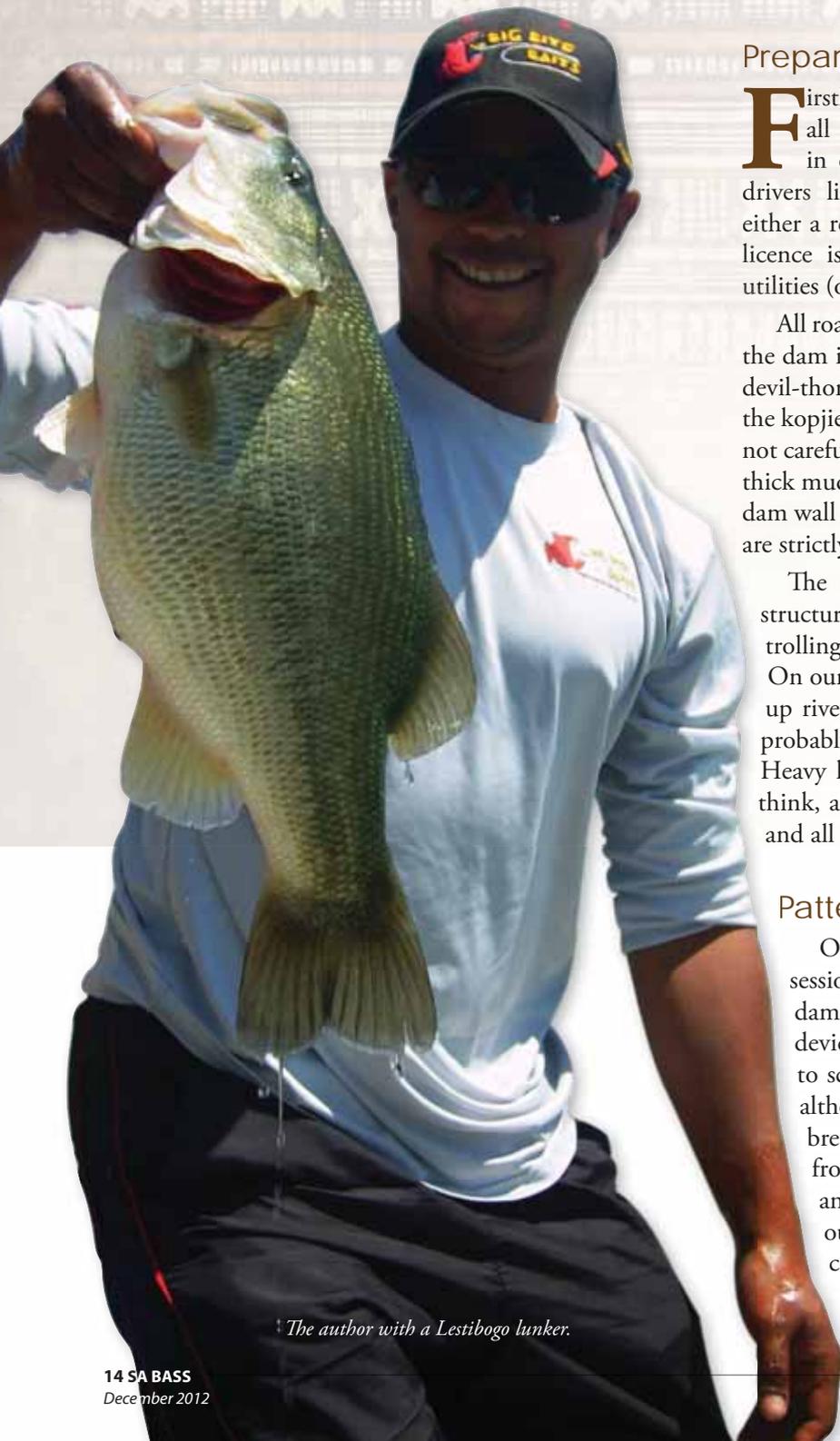


LETSIBOGO DAM

PB Smashing Paradise

>>Chris Greenland*

If you have ever pondered what it must be like to have 3.5kg fish hunting down your baits, gripping and ripping your cranks or stumping a plastic dead, make your way to Letsibogo Dam in Botswana and smash that personal best to nothingness!



Preparation

Firstly, make sure all your licences are in order – fishing, vehicle and drivers licences. All were checked, at either a roadblock or the dam. The fishing licence is cheap and easily obtainable at water utilities (or by pre-arrangement with lodge owner).

All roads are in good condition, except the roads around the dam itself. These roads are dirt roads cut between the devil-thorn bushes and it is best to take your time and use the kopjies as a reference. Punctures are common if you are not careful and once you are through the labyrinth of trees, thick mud awaits you at the water's edge. Stick close to the dam wall where the ground is firmer. Motorized watercraft are strictly prohibited on the dam.

The dam itself can be very windy and is heavily structured with trees in many areas. A decent power trolling motor with good deep cycle batteries is a must. On our last fishing day, a few pontoons were blown way up river and stranded. The sun is dangerously hot and probably 5-8°C hotter at its worst than Gauteng heat. Heavy line is critical because no matter what you may think, at some point you will hook into a potential PB, and all the structure favours the fish.

Patterning

Our first day of fishing was only an afternoon session. We arrived to white horses racing across the dam and with careful manoeuvring and a clamping device, fished some sheltered tree lines. We managed to scratch out eight fish between 1.2 and 1.8kg and although it was fun, we had travelled a long way to break our PBs. Fortunately, when we took shelter from the wind on an island, we met the very talented and knowledgeable Zies van Zyl. He took pity on our slightly forlorn expressions and told us to try crankbaits the next day. The pattern rang true and I had remembered another angler, Alan Kenney, searching for big crankbaits on Facebook shortly

*The author with a Letsibogo lunger.

before our trip. So we retreated for a hot shower, dinner and re-rigging. The bag weight for our five biggest fish for the day was 7.34kg.

Our second day's fishing was truly something to remember. The weather played its part and only a soft breeze stroked the water. We decided that we would fish deeper water and headed to kopjies a few hundred metres from the dam wall. As we fished, we noticed the sonar was showing large schools of baitfish. Just under the surface of the cloudy water, you could see schools of tilapia staging in the deep water. My partner got off the mark with a few nice fish on a soft bodied minnow bait. As I began knocking my deep diving crank around the submerged rock piles, it got heavy and then started towing the little inflatable around a bit. After a two minute argument, I landed our first big fish of 3.1kg. Whilst sitting there letting the adrenaline wear off, with a smug expression as I had just topped my buddy's PB, Donovan casually said "I'm on". Since we had just taken photos of my fish, I decided to video his fish, not realizing it would be a PB smashing 4.05kg!

To say that the next three hours were the best bass fishing of my life is an understatement. Between us, we caught eight fish over 3.2kg with three of them just topping

the 3.7-3.9kg mark. We caught too many fish between 2.6 and 3.2kg to count, maybe 30. This kind of fishing was something new to us. It often meant retying after each fish as the jagged rocks present quite a challenge, but for some blessed reason we didn't seem to be losing fish. In the late afternoon, the bite died down but it didn't matter. We'd had more than our fill by that stage - at least I thought so, but Donovan still saw fit to peg a 3.36kg fish right in front of the bank anglers at the launch with a light Texas minnow bait. The bag weight for our five biggest fish for the day was 18.89kg.

The third day was a lesson in bass fishing. The weather upped its tempo and the wind decided to gust a little. Overconfident with the previous day's success, I decided to double down on my big fish pattern and fish some giant swimbaits. While still wondering what kind of fish would swipe at the swimbait, it got knocked on the second cast. I mistimed the strike but gained even more confidence. A few minutes later I hooked into a very strong 2.13kg fish and Donovan was kind enough to video it for me. I decided to throw deeper and cast out whilst the bait was falling. I tried to readjust my footing on the spinning pontoon, but this was a mistake. The bait was murdered and the rod almost yanked out of my hand. I never did manage to get a good hookset and as the fish jumped for the second time, I was forced to watch what was undoubtedly the bass of my lifetime, spit my lure cheekily right over my head.

From that point, I was completely flustered. My next two bites snapped my line where the braid met the leader and when I tried to fish straight braid, the rocks simply sawed it through. My partner wasn't escaping unpunished either. He was hooking up and then after a short fight, the fish would manage to spit the bait or straighten the hook! At lunchtime, we sat on deck looking at each other a bit stunned. After much consideration, we decided the only safe way to fish these fish was to use hard baits and keep them above the rocks. We cruised around the kopjies for the afternoon using rattletraps and cranks and began settling into fish again. At one stage, we had three double hook ups in a row, with the best being a 2.75kg and 2.23kg at the same time! The best fish we managed was a 2.88kg on a RattleTrap, which sounds amazing, but we had to swallow a bitter pill knowing there were better fish that were just too powerful or clever for us to catch on the day. I think to be fair, it is a little tougher on an inflatable platform on a windy day. The bag weight for our five biggest fish for the day was 12.71kg.

Summary

I think Letsibogo is a venue that any bass angler who dreams of catching big fish should visit. I have had the pleasure of catching bass all around Southern Africa, but I have never fished such a beautifully balanced and well-stocked bass fishery as Letsibogo Dam.

During my pre-trip research, I was very skeptical of



<http://youtu.be/ZnpQXsNSNgU>

See Donovan landing his PB of 4.05kg

Donovan with his personal best of 4.05kg

the stories of line snapping and hook straightening action but I can now officially confirm they are true. Even though we arrived in what was probably the post spawn period, once we got on a good pattern we were in for all the lunker hunting action we could handle. I think the government's decision to ban motorized watercraft will function to

protect the water from overfishing. Hopefully, if all of us who visit from South Africa can act as ambassadors for our sport, the local authorities and community will realize that management and development of Letsibogo as a bass fishery could prove to be a commercial asset for the town. In return, you could safely and affordably attempt your PB annually.

Trip Computer

Fishery	Letsibogo Dam Botswana: *Field Editor Rating 9/10 PB Breaking Venue!!
Coordinates	S21°50'18.16" E27°42'40.87"
Distance from Pretoria	564km: Travel Time 6 hours, N1 – N11 – Martins Drift border post
Road Quality	Very Good: 90% tar, 100% tar option. 4x4 not required but definite advantage at the actual dam
Nearest Town	S21°58'36.68" E27°50'11.08" Selebi Phikwe: Predominantly a mining town: 20km from dam
Accommodation	Phokoje Bush Lodge: 3 Star rated, Camping Facilities Available: Best Value for money in town
Forex Requirement	Botswana Pula 1:0.91 ZAR (Card Facilities at Phokoje Lodge)
Fishing License	Required: Very Cheap & Easily obtainable at water utilities or by pre-arrangement with lodge owner (recommended)
Borderpost	Zanzibar: Extremely quick and easy but not available during the rainy season. Alternative: Martins Drift
Entrance Fee	None: The road to the dam is under construction. *Offroad difficulty 7/10: Punctures, Extreme Mud
Fish observed	Largemouth Bass, Tilapia, Carp, Barble
Restrictions	Motor watercraft strictly prohibited! Pontoons/Inflatables powered only by an electric trolling motor
Structure	Rocks, Submerged Rock Piles, Kopjies, Humps, Ridges, Water Grass, Submerged Trees
Best Tactics	Large Plastics, Crankbaits, Super Strong Line: Minimum 20lb

Phokoje Bush Lodge



Reception at Phokoje Bush Lodge

Botswana has a harsh climate and the instant you cross the border the changes are evident. The grass disappears making way for barren desert sands heavily fortified with devil thorn trees. The area is currently desperately in need of water and that is visible in the condition of the trees, plants and domestic animals. Fortunately, for the travelling angler there is an oasis available in the form of Phokoje Bush Lodge. The lodge itself is perfectly situated 17km from Letsibogo Dam. It is a thatch complex including a fantastic restaurant with private dining facilities available, bar, conference facility, children's play area, braai area, chalets and camping facilities with ablutions and electricity. The chalets are extremely good value for money. They have air-conditioning, roof-fans, mosquito

nets, double beds, hot water shower, DSTV and a daily maid service. They are fitted with two double beds so can effectively sleep four per chalet. The charming friendly manner of the staff will have you feeling right at home. We enjoyed affordable quality nightly dinners and drinks at the restaurant, only walking distance from the chalet. This is where we retreated to relax every evening.

For more information or bookings please contact Phokoje Bush Lodge on +267 2601596 or e-mail info@phokojebushlodge.com

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