

# ‘Must slowly’

On a sea-fishing trip to the Wild Coast, **Nick Dall** learnt that he should stick to rivers and trout. But he also learnt something far more valuable...

ILLUSTRATIONS NICOLENE LOUW

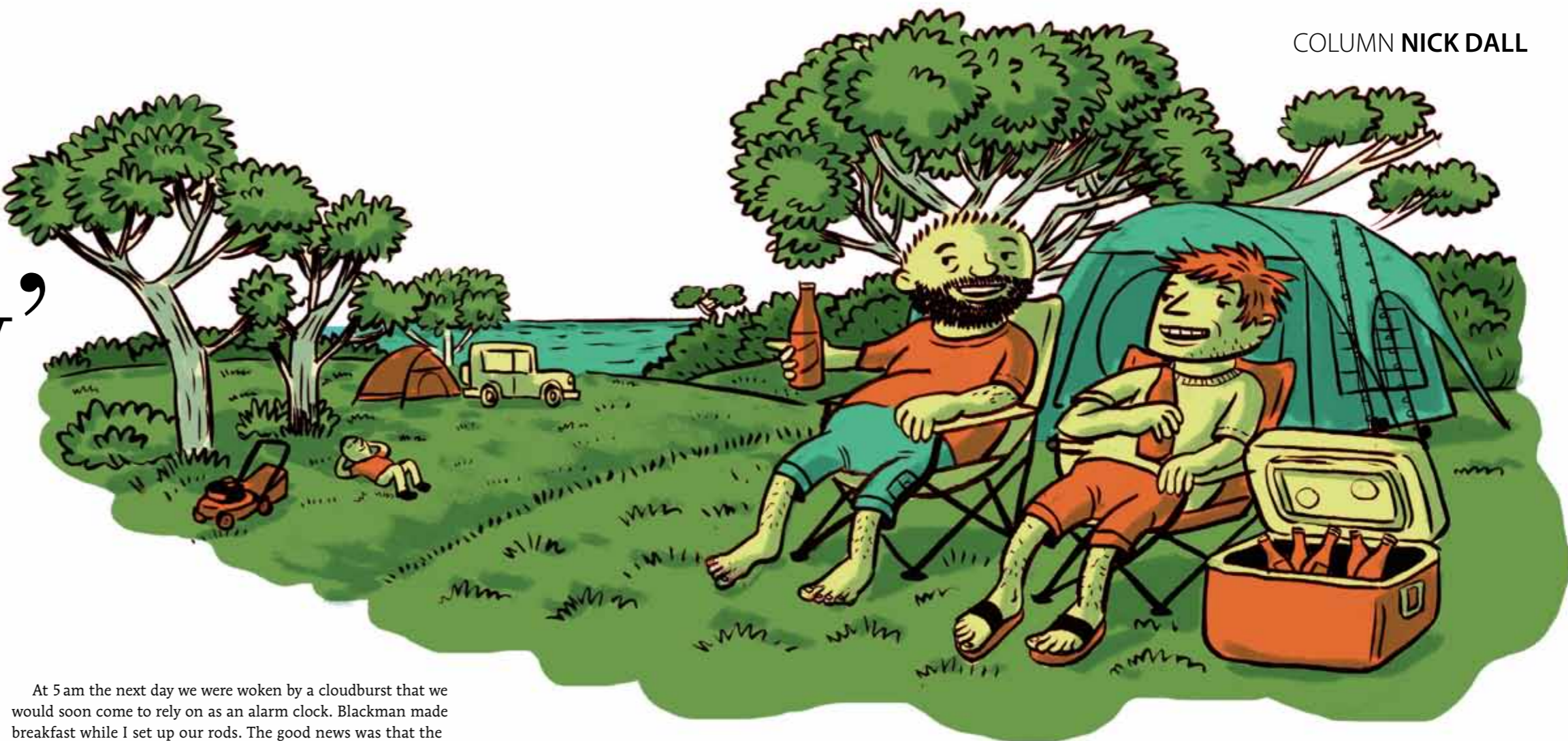
As soon as my friend Blackman and I were done with our post-grad degrees, we hit the road. Destination: Dwesa. Blackman's once-white Golf was piled high with a mouldy canvas tent, three yellow ammo boxes, a prawn pump and too many cases of Black Label quarts. On the roof, two 14ft fishing rods whistled in the wind, while a selection of shorter rods poked out the back window.

We broke the journey in Plett then pushed on to East London, where we bought bait and dry ice and taped the cool box closed. But further along the N2 the red thermometer icon on the dashboard lit up.

We slowed down and limped into Mthatha. All I could think of was the pilchards and chokka that had probably already started to thaw. But we were in luck. After an intervention by an Indian mechanic we were on the road again, with real hopes of making it to Dwesa before sunset.

Those hopes were dashed by gangs of “pothole-fixing” kids armed with shovels, who regularly blocked our path and demanded small change for safe passage. By the time we finally got to Dwesa, there was no denying that night had fallen.

The gatekeeper technically shouldn't have let us in, but on the Wild Coast rules are there to be broken and he waved us through with a smile. Supper was a bag of Niknaks and a bottle of Old Brown Sherry.



At 5 am the next day we were woken by a cloudburst that we would soon come to rely on as an alarm clock. Blackman made breakfast while I set up our rods. The good news was that the dry ice was still dry and our bait hadn't even begun to defrost. The bad news was that our coffee plunger had shattered, so we had to filter it through our teeth.

**I'll be honest: I'm no sea fisherman.** I'm a keen trout fisherman, but every galjoen I've ever caught has been a fluke. And Blackman? Don't even go there.

Nevertheless, we found a suitable rock and readied ourselves for a morning of serious fishing. But after a few crow's nests and a couple of quarts, neither of us had even got a bite. So we headed over to the beach, picking our way carefully between cows and cowpats.

The beach proved more productive. We each caught and released a sand shark. Soon some other fishermen turned up and within minutes the biggest and hairiest of them had hauled in a sand shark that was at least three times bigger than our two. He cut off its head with a bait knife and threw it down next to his tackle box.

“What you going to do with it?” I asked, incredulous that he hadn't released it.

“Eat it.”

“Oh, what does it taste like?”

“Fish.”

**We trudged back to the campsite** for lunch, only to discover that monkeys had got into our

ammo boxes and eaten (or spat on) most of our dry food. Luckily they'd ripped open the Tastic packet but hadn't bothered with its contents: We wouldn't have to eat our bait just yet...

A guy I'd met at the ablution block told me he'd been catching kob off the point. After lunch (Provita, Marmite, Black Label) I got directions and made a tentative plan to meet him there later that afternoon.

But the early morning and all the Black Labels had taken their toll. Blackman and I dozed off in the lazy shade of a jackalberry tree. The meeting time came and went.

I woke up in a panic, shook Blackman and we rushed out of the camp. In the process, I tripped on a loose stone in the road and went sprawling. “Must slowly,” said the gatekeeper nodding his head. “Must slowly.”

The point was strewn with burly men and their crew-cut sons. Most were shirtless, but a couple of the older guys wore sky-blue tracksuit tops with the words “Noord Transvaal Hengel” and a Barberton daisy embroidered on the chest. We were in auspicious company.

Despite our best efforts, we couldn't cast even half as far as the youngest, puniest *Bloubulletjie*. Not to mention the old Brahmans, who were throwing their bait well over 200m. We were living proof that fishing is not a question of luck: It's about getting the right bait in the right place at the right time. The *Bulle* continued to haul out kob while we did a good job of hooking every piece of seaweed in the intertidal zone.

After that disastrous outing, our trip became more of a holiday and less of a fishing mission. We spent lots of time in the campsite, chewing the fat and watching the world go by. There was one guy whose job it was to mow the lawn. He arrived every morning at around nine o'clock, had a drink from the garden tap and lay down for a nap. At about 11 am he'd wake up and mow a bit. At noon he'd stop for lunch, a siesta and maybe another hour or so of mowing. Considering that the campsite at Dwesa has more grass than Augusta National, I reckon he mowed the whole place maybe twice in an entire year. As the gatekeeper said: “Must slowly.”

But we didn't give up on the fishing entirely. One morning, on the way to our favourite sand shark beach, we bumped into a local herder. He didn't speak much English, but he did point at the most random and unassuming rock on the Transkei coast and said: “Castorage.”

We obliged and within minutes Blackman had landed a fat blacktail: the best fish of our trip yet.

**I might have gone to the Wild Coast** with the intention of catching the fish of a lifetime, but by the time we packed up our dank possessions and bumped our way back to the N2, I realised that I'd got my hands on something far more valuable: I'd learnt the mantra of Must Slowly.

Now, more than a decade later, that mantra still governs everything I do. The monster kob can wait for another day. There's no rush.