

Helicopter stocking of the Upper Elandspad

A newspaper account

Campbell Lyons

Piscator issue No 53 published in 1961 carried an article headlined 'Trout Airlifted to the Upper Elandspad' which described how a Sikorsky helicopter of 17 Squadron based at Ysterplaat Air Force Base in Milnerton, Cape Town ferried trout from the Jonkershoek trout hatchery near Stellenbosch to the upper reaches of the Elandspad where they were released.

Seeking further information I went to the South African National Library archives in the Company's Garden in Cape Town's CBD and looked up the relevant issues of the *Cape Times* and the *Cape Argus* to see how they covered this joint exercise between the South African Air Force and Cape Nature Conservation as it was then known.

The *Cape Times* carried a front page preview of the operation on the morning of 28 November 1961 while the afternoon newspaper, the *Cape Argus*, carried two front page photographs of the stocking earlier in the day and a report on page 13.

In 2004 I interviewed the late David Susman who had a holiday home on this section of the upper Elandspad about 5 kilometres above the stream's junction with the Kraalstroom tributary.

The water in this section of the stream is peaty, acidic and not conducive to trout reproduction because a colloidal coating covers the eggs and smothers them. Susman said that the majority of the brown trout stocked here quickly lost condition becoming thinner and thinner before eventually disappearing altogether.

What is clear is that the water from the Kraalstroom reduces the acidity making the water below the junction of the two streams more habitable for both trout and the aquatic insects that they prey on.

The Cape Times

28/11/1961

Helicopters will Airlift Boland Trout

The men who fly the South African Air Force helicopters have had many unusual assignments in recent years - but none so fishy as the job they have to do in the Boland today.

Provided the weather is favourable, a helicopter will be used to 'airlift' a consignment of trout fingerlings from the Provincial Administration's hatcheries at Jonkershoek near Stellenbosch to the upper reaches of the Elandspad river near Du Toit's Kloof, at a height of about 3,500 feet.

The operation which has been arranged at the request of the Provincial Department of Nature Conservation, will form part of the helicopter crew's routine mountain-rescue exercises.

All being well, the plan is for the helicopter to fly from Ysterplaat Air Station early this morning, alight in the mule paddock at Jonkershoek – the mules having been removed – and collect its cargo, contained in plastic bags with a supply of oxygen.

With only the trout and the crew on board, the helicopter will then take off and after a flight of about 20 minutes, land on the Agtertafelberg Vlaktes.

One of the members of the helicopter's crew has had previous experience of stocking rivers with trout, and he will have the job of introducing the fingerlings to their new home.

In the past, efforts to stock the upper part of the rivers, barren of trout because of waterfalls, have taken the form of lengthy mountain expeditions in which the fish, in their plastic bags, have had to be lugged in rucksacks over miles of rocky terrain.

The Cape Argus

Trout flown by helicopter to Dutoitskloof

More than 1,800 fingerling trout were flown by helicopter from the Provincial Administration's hatcheries today to stock the previously barren upper reaches of the Elandspad River in Dutoitskloof.

The South African Air Force, working in conjunction with the Provincial Department of Nature Conservation and other organisations, carried out the assignment with military precision.

Early today a helicopter with a five-man crew aboard took off from the Ysterplaat Air Station.

Twenty minutes later people in the valley between the wooded peaks at Jonkershoek, heard the familiar beat of the machine's rotors.

The arrival of the helicopter provided an unexpected thrill for 66 children from the Bloemhof Primary School who were on an educational trip visit to the hatcheries.

Plastic Bags

After circling the area once, the machine touched down in a tiny clearing among the trees.

A truck drove into the clearing and nine plastic bags, each containing more than 200 hundred fingerlings, were transferred to the helicopter.

Within minutes the machine was airborne again heading for Dutoitskloof and the Elanspad River, 3500 foot above sea level.

After touching down in Dutoitskloof, the crew had instructions to take various precautions – such as equalising the temperature of the water in the containers with the river temperature – before transferring the fish.

The senior officer in the crew emphasized that the operation had only been possible because it formed part of the crew's routine mountain rescue exercises.