

THE GIBSON DAM AND AN OLD BUFFER

By Garrett Evans

The other day at the invitation of Dennis De Klerk and Prof Wim De Haas and their trout fishing club, I fished the Gibson Dam on top of the Platberg. It was spectacular - it is a proper mountain Loch just like the ones found in isolated areas of Scotland and yet it's right here on top of the mountain. It was once a good trout dam and now it's a good trout dam again.

With a No 12 Walkers Killer and an 8 foot Hardy's 'Perfection' rod (which De Haas got for me in Holland) I quickly had four plump trout without any trouble at all. There it's all utterly silent and isolated and beautiful. The dam's about a kilometer long and in most places well over 100 metres wide. The dam wall's made of that fine hand-cut stone one sees in the dams in the Botanical. Apparently all three dams were built roughly after the turn of the century. De Klerk and De Haas spoke of laying a gravel strip or gravel strips where small streams come into the dam. This would be for breeding. This is what has been needed at the Sterkfontein Dam for years, and will increase the trouting and save a great deal of money on restocking in both waters if it's done. We chatted about all this, having a beer and a snack, while lying there by the truck. Our rods were leaned against it and we lay out in the grass in the sun and lazed. There wasn't much wind and only a gentle ripple on the water, and the whole scene was warm and pleasant but I expect, with the altitude and all, that spending a night up there might be a fairly chilly experience.

And so the Gibson's water is crystal clear and full of scrappy trout. It's become part of the large and successful game reserve that has been so quickly and so well developed right here next to us. The higher one goes up into the mountains the better it gets. Way up, when one is there and off the fairly hair-raising concrete track, one can see the town rather beautifully and there are pigeons and ducks flying over small dams far far below.

The Sterkfontein's going strong once again too. After a fairly disappointing coarse fishing season, the trouting is excellent. Apparently there are large-mouth yellow fish stocked now. They grow to enormous size - astronomical proportions - that should liven things up in a season or so. During the troutless years I took to hurling porridge for carp and yellows - if you can't beat 'em, you join 'em. I've got to like it. Some of my more snooty trouting friends have severed all contact with me but that may be for other reasons. With winter the trouting has taken off - it's a fish that likes the altitude and the cold weather. There are literally thousands and thousands of trout. A chap I met the other day had caught 40 in a few hours - to his credit he released almost all of them. Trolling from a boat remains the best method. The trout fishing should be made fly only - there are too many trout being killed. A gravel bed or two are needed at the top so the trout will breed better - this would increase the trouting and save a great deal of money on the restocking.

Up on the mountain or out in the boat, an old instructor and friend has been much on my addled mind lately. John Speirs was from the Highlands and educated at Aberdeen and Cambridge. He's dead now. He taught at Exeter, the most pleasant university in England. His father tried to teach him trouting, but John, who was very tall, would stand there like a lighthouse and show himself to the fish. But he was an outdoorsman and there was none of the modern slickness about him - he was a good and gentlemanly scholar of impeccable taste and great moral courage. Not only did he have these qualities that are often so lacking today, but he had great presence and great charm.

One evening toward the end of the Exeter years, after a party at his hall when all the others had finally cleared off, we sat quietly in front of the fire with our feet up on the fender, sipping port. I told him of being on a high hill over Exmoor and of the cloudy still afternoon with pheasants and woodcock on the wooded slopes and of ducks circling out from the River Exe far below.

“ There are many sorts of flies...and their breeding is so various and wonderful, that I might easily amaze myself and tire you in the relation of them.

Izaak Walton, The Compleat Angler, 1653 ”