

NOTES ON THE "TWENTY-FOUR RIVERS" AREA, PORTERVILLE DISTRICT

By Godfrey Hoehn

(At the Annual General Meeting in August, 1946, Members were asked to report on this lowest mountain tributary of the Great Berg River — with a most peculiar name. Mr. Hoehn kindly stepped into the breach — and up to the present there have been no other takers!—Ed.).

EXPLORATION

AS regards to the possibilities of trout fishing, this area appears to be little known, and the following notes made during a mountaineering trip from October 5 to 7, 1946, may be of interest. No fishing was done on this occasion.

The area is clearly shown between Gouda and Porterville on the map attached to the brochure "Fresh Water Fishing at the Cape." There is a tarred road practically all the way via Wellington, Hermon, Gouda and Saron (85 miles from Cape Town).

The waters fall into two distinct areas — the delta, from whence the name "Twenty-four Rivers" is obviously derived, and the river proper. The delta begins immediately the river leaves the mountains and enters the level plain, forming a huge marshy area of several square miles. This marshy area was entered at several points from the Saron (southern) side, but it is really dangerous owing to bogs and high growth of palmiet, interspersed with small shallow channels of crystal-clear water holding small trout. Fishing would be hazardous and far too arduous. The northern side of the marsh was not visited, but from a view obtained from a nearby mountain, it seems that conditions would be similar.

To reach the river proper, turn to the right, off the main road to Porterville, on to the Saron side road (the sign post was illegible!) and follow the telephone wires up to the Mission Station — there turn left down a road lined with cottages and continue to follow the telephone wires to the gate of the De Hoek Estate. Permission should be requested to go through as the bottom of the river gorge is on the estate, but it seems that there is still a public right to use this way to reach the old Roodezand Pass, formerly leading to Tulbagh before the present Tulbaghweg was opened. After leaving the farm buildings, keep straight along the track in the direction of the kloof for perhaps 500 yards, and where the road turns right, go on through a gate as far as possible and leave the car under the trees. The mouth of the river kloof can be reached in about twenty minutes walking along a rough track and past an old farm house. If this track is improved it would be possible to reach the river by car.

The river appears to be entirely choked with thick bush, but one should go into the dry portion of the stream bed just above the intake of an irrigation furrow, and in a quarter of an hour at most, without undue difficulty, one is in the open bed and free from any further obstructions.

The river is perhaps rather larger than the upper Berg River, but is enclosed by high mountains leading up eventually to the Winterhoek range. The scenery is superb and the vegetation quite unspoiled by fire or axe.

Although the river valley was ascended for about five hours, there did not appear to be a very appreciable rise in altitude. The stream is a series of runs and fine deep pools, some of great size and depth, seemingly ideal for trout. On every side are towering mountains, which make it finer and wilder than any of the more accessible rivers nearer to Cape Town.

The water of the main river was slightly peat-stained. It appeared to flow with a good volume, fairly evenly throughout the year, as the banks were not

unduly eroded and carried quantities of moss and flowers in the upper part. The flood water mark was not as high as would be expected in this relatively narrow valley.

A few fish were noticed, and these appeared to be trout of about eight inches long. Each evening, a few small fish were seen rising, but it was not known if they were trout. On two evenings some of these fish became very interested in small floating pieces of chicken thrown to them within a foot of the bank.

This river is only worth visiting for those who are prepared to do considerable walking and to camp at their car or up the river. Whether or not it contains enough trout to make fishing worth while, it is certainly a fine river amidst wonderful scenery.

The mouth of the river kloof can also be approached from the farm Dasbos, by going right around the marsh from the main Porterville road on the northern side, but access to the open portion of the river is very difficult owing to the rocky nature of that side of the kloof. None of the local people knew if the river contained fish or was visited by anglers.

A FISHING TRIP

A subsequent visit was made to this area in February, 1947, during the period of drought prevailing in the Western Province. The river was very clear, but the water was flowing strongly. The troublesome horseflies, so numerous in the Spring, had fortunately disappeared! We made for a large pool about two hours scramble up the valley. This pool had previously been named "The Lido." Its long sandy beach on one side, with large shady trees at either end, make it an ideal spot for bathing and as a camp-site.

The object of the visit this time was to endeavour to ascertain if trout were present in the river. A small fly was fished until dusk, but only a few Cape Kurpers were caught and no other fish were seen.

Next morning at dawn, a few more kurpers were taken. A large witvis was seen in a rock pool and many small minnows, as well as redfins in the shallows. The witvis in deep water took no notice of the fly, either at the surface or when it was sunk to his own depth by means of small shot.

After breakfast, bread-bait was tried which was readily eaten, of course always after it had come away from the hook! It was then noticed that there were two large fish in the pool, cruising around slowly and each passing the same spot at intervals of about ten minutes. On one occasion a fish was hooked but freed itself after a struggle.

Later, a small Red Polly was put on. Tiring after an hour of fruitless fishing, the unusual expedient of buoying it with a small piece of white wood was tried, but the witvis were not at all interested. Near noon, just as it had been decided that lounging at "The Lido" would be more comfortable than fishing in the strong sun, without warning, a large trout suddenly came up from the bottom and seized the *float* firmly! The rod was lifted immediately and the slip of wood pulled away from the fish — which promptly took the real lure and was firmly hooked. It was a large rainbow having unusually dark spots, long and rather thin, with a hooked lower jaw — perhaps a cannibal in view of its pronounced teeth. His stomach was empty. He was cleaned, cut in half to fit into the frying pan, and shared for lunch with two other piscivorous but non-angling friends.

Since then, Twenty-four Rivers has been proclaimed as an area where only the artificial fly may be used for all kinds of fish,