

AN EXPLORATION GROUP REPORT

THE HOLSLOOT

By R. O. BELL

INTRODUCTION

Mr. Ronald Bell and his angling companion, Mr. Peter Keeble, are to be congratulated on having produced this excellent blueprint of the Holsloot River. These two members of the Cape Piscatorial Society warmly welcomed the formation of the Exploration Group and lost no time in getting down to some practical work.

Although the Forest Reserve section of the Holsloot is very accessible, it has never before been properly mapped and recorded and the work done by Bell and Keeble in the 1956-57 season will, we are sure, be appreciated by trout anglers for many years to come.

May we venture to ask these two members for further notes on this river? Is it really true that the Holsloot is really primarily a "Spring River"? To what extent does the controlled outflow from the Stettynskloof Dam neutralize the summer heat? And what about some rather more detailed information about dry-fly patterns for this river? We understand that both Bell and Keeble have become enthusiastic about fly-tying. In thanking Mr. Bell for his present article we express the hope that we shall have further "copy" from his pen.—Editor.

ALTHOUGH the Holsloot is not an exploration project in the sense that we are covering entirely new ground, the Society has never, to my knowledge, published a fishing guide to this attractive river. Peter Keeble and I gained a fair knowledge of this stream during the 1956-57 season which we hope will help others to be guided over an interesting and productive stretch of water.

As may be seen from a large-scale map, the Holsloot system is fairly extensive and may be divided into four main sections:—

- (1) Lower stretch from the farm "Dwarsberg" to the lower forest boundary.
- (2) The Stettynskloof Dam and its feeder streams, including the main continuation of the Holsloot. The Dam is not covered by the Forest Reserve permit.
- (3) The important tributary which enters the stream above the road bridge near the Dam. This stream has yet to be explored. It is intended that a detailed description and map be published in the near future.
- (4) The Forest Reserve stretch, which we shall cover in the following pages.

This report is divided into two chapters: viz., ROAD DIRECTIONS for the benefit of visiting anglers; and the FISHING GUIDE.

PART I—ROAD DIRECTIONS

The lower Forest Reserve boundary lies approximately 83 miles from Cape Town and access to it is gained via the national road from Cape Town to Worcester. We pass through Du Toits Kloof and turn right at the Rawsonville signpost. The road passes through the village and then crosses two narrow concrete bridges over the Smalblaar and Holsloot rivers. Two hundred yards further on, a gravel road (sign-posted) branches to the right to Louwshoek.

We pass through three or four farms and then turn sharp right where the road is lined with gum trees on the right hand side. The road winds through three or four more farms and then plunges into bush before climbing slowly until, below, we catch our first glimpse of the river in the kloof itself. Here the motoring angler is advised to concentrate on the road and not to allow his attention to be diverted by the sight of rising fish in the pools directly below.

Continuing on for a few more miles, the road drops very suddenly round a short bend into the last farm in the valley (Dwarsberg). Very shortly we come upon a yellow notice board which informs us that we are not allowed to fish. Winding up the valley, we are constantly reminded by these tokens until, on reaching the last one, we see almost directly opposite it on the road the familiar Forestry board. Freedom at last!

This point is approximately 11 miles from Rawsonville. Holders of the Forestry Department permit may fish the following stretch and its tributaries as far as the Stettynskloof Dam. Very shortly after passing the Forestry board the road gives access to a wide "car park" on the right. From here the lower water may be very conveniently fished.

Passing on up the valley, the road winds steeply for half-a-mile and then drops almost to river level again. Stopping here, we look up the dry water course and see the wreck of a light motor van lying on the stones below. There is room enough here to pull the car off the road.

From this point the road rises very sharply, swings to the left and then winds down to a lateral stream which enters the main course through a deep narrow kloof. A track which is generally good, if sometimes sandy, branches off the main road and leads to the riverside, where both car and family can be parked for the day. This is approximately the middle of the Forestry water.

Continuing upstream, the road climbs steadily again, rounding sharp bends before dropping down again close to a long, quiet pool. The pipeline crosses this pool on high concrete pillars and forms an excellent landmark. From here the pipeline runs directly below the road until, about half-a-mile further on, road and pipe merge and cross the stream on a concrete bridge. Immediately across the bridge may be seen the bungalows housing the staff employed in the administration of the dam, in the vicinity of which the car may be turned round—for this is the end of the road and the Holsloot Forest Reserve water.

PART II—FISHING THE HOLSLOOT

THE Forestry stretch offers excellent rainbow fishing, with the chance of an occasional smallmouth bass. Spring and autumn are perhaps the best seasons as the valley becomes hot in the summer months. There is a constant flow of water from the Dam, but owing to the fact that the stream is fairly open, the water becomes warm during the day. I have found fishing most comfortable and profitable during the hours from dawn to 10 a.m. From then on fish and angler seek the depths of shade, to emerge again in the late afternoon.

Keeble and I decided to combine a swim with a fish count one hot afternoon. Donning our underwater goggles, we slid into the cool depths of The Lido Pool (approximately 10 ft.). We were pleasantly surprised to find two rainbows of about 14 inches long, three 11-inch fish and ten smaller ones, ranging from 6 inches to 10 inches. A large eel showed itself for a few minutes, much to our concern.

Immediately after the first Forestry board one can drive a car off the road and park it between the road and the stream on a wide, flat area scattered with tins and bones—apparently a road camp at some time. As we shall travel upstream, all directions are given as left or right of the stream in that direction.

Directly below the "car park" the river bed lies in a strong run: a really encouraging stretch which should yield two or three half-pounders. It may be mentioned at this stage that the Holsloot valley supports an abundance of airborne insect life and about 90 per cent of our fish during the 1956-57 season fell to bushy, hackled dry flies.

Looking upstream we see two pools (Adam and Eve), ideally shaped, each having a strong, narrow run-in to deep gravel basins followed by stony tails. Above these pools lies a stretch of water approximately 200 yards in length. It is physically different

from the rest of the Holsloot bed and really resembles some of the boulder-strewn Smalblaar/Elandspad runs—particularly the one above Inaccessible Pool.

Passing on upstream we come to the middle section of the Forest Reserve water. The formation of this is remarkable in that it consists of two sections, very similarly made up with deep krantz pools and shallow, stony runs. Each section contains a beautiful sickle- or boomerang-shaped pool.

The river becomes narrow and bushy for about 100 yards, breaking out suddenly into the first of these pools. The depth is three or four feet in mid-summer and one should keep to the left bank, which is reasonably open. Above this a short, narrow neck of gravel and we arrive at what is probably the best known pool on the Holsloot: Peninsula Pool. To fish this we start from the left bank at the tail; from this point the whole section below Peninsula Rock is within reach of the fly.

After fishing the lower part of this pool we cross to the right bank via the shallow tail and skirt the bush round the edge. The head of the pool is open and almost free from backcast hazards. The most rewarding practice here I have found is to drop a fly on Peninsula Rock and allow it to roll into the water, where the current will carry it into the lower section. The little bundle of feather and fur drifts slowly downstream. There is a sudden flash of silver and the fly has gone; one's throat constricts as the rod-tip rises and suddenly dips again as the weight of the trout takes temporary command!

A mature Holsloot rainbow is a strong fish and this one is no exception. The battle ranges up and down and across the pool until at last the net is lifted triumphantly from the water.

Tobacco smoke drifts lazily into the air. How unlucky are those who have never known what angling is!

Moving up, we fish a fast run for 50 yards or so. A fairly deep channel provides the next bit of encouragement. At the head of this water on the left bank is a huge boulder, which provides excellent cover. Late one afternoon Keeble and I watched three or four large fish rising here, their bodies glinting as they rolled on the surface.

Higher up, the stream is bushed on both banks for about 200 yards. We must either wade up the stream or skirt the bush on the left bank and fish from odd clearings. Looking across the dry course to the left we see the derelict van lying beneath the pipeline.

A little higher up the river bends sharply to form The Hackle, a small, deep pool, heavily bushed. This should be fished from below the run-in. Gavin Lestrangle took a 1½ lb. fish here on his first visit to the Holsloot.

A short distance up, the bush clears and a fairly wide, pebbly stretch cuts diagonally across the bed. Up to this point the pipeline has been on the left. Here it crosses to the right bank on concrete pillars. Next we come to the Shingle Pools, connected by shallow, gravelly necks. The first is shaded on the left bank by bush. The second is deeper and more rounded; and the third, long and deep, holds numbers of fair-sized fish. All along these pools the right bank is fairly clear and they can be fished easily from either tail or head. My best fish to date came out of the third pool.

Upstream from this point the cliff face drops steeply to form one wall of The Channel. This is a short, narrow stretch of fast water formed by a sudden lift in the bed, over which the water cascades almost at right angles to the channel. Judging from the number of fish seen and taken here it would seem that trout move from the pools below to feed in this channel. Standing at the head of the short cascade, we are confronted with Partridge Pool, a fairly wide, calm pool, some 50 yards long. Bushed on both banks, it is fished fairly easily by wading the shallow right side. Peter Keeble proved the worth of this pool one afternoon by taking two rainbows, 15 ins. and 13 ins. One of these, a lively hen, leapt out of the water to take his fly



The Lido Pool. Situated about half way up the Forest Reserve water, this splendid pool always holds a number of good rainbow trout. Bell and Keeble made an underwater inspection here, as detailed in this report.

Photo: R. O. Bell

and landed on the bank, a foot from the water. She was soon back, streaking up the pool, and was brought to the net four minutes later.

A few yards up, the river makes a 90 degree bend to the left. At the corner is the Lido Pool, a deep, dark hole at the base of an overhanging rock face. It has an excellent run-in over stones where trout rise freely to a dry fly. This spot holds pleasant memories, for on the bank immediately above it four of us sat late one evening tucking into four delicious "pink" rainbows, their heads and tails hanging over the edges of our tin plates. Then followed pancakes and cinnamon washed down with mugs of "smoky" coffee. A true campers' banquet! This is the point to which (as previously mentioned) a car can be brought down to the riverside.

Next we pass through White Valley, a barren-looking stretch a quarter of a mile long. The stream is shallow and fully exposed to the sun for some half its length before it plunges into dense bush under the left bank cliff. It is as well to avoid this "Bushwack" and continue up the dry course to Loch Ness. Here we have a beautiful stretch of water spanned by the pipeline. The upper end of this pool can only be fished (to my knowledge) by wading down the centre from the run-in at the top and allowing a long line to be carried downstream by the current. Keeble and I produced an artificial rise one afternoon by inducing some of a mass of snipe-flies to fall onto the water, and the top end of the pool became alive with trout rising to the live flies as they drifted past.

Above this point the stream is temporarily divided into two halves by a bushy island. Breaking into the clear again, we come to the Boomerang Pool, similar in shape and size to the pool noted lower down (although the Boomerang Pool is considerably deeper). This should also be fished from the left bank, facing upstream. Again there is a shallow neck (cross here) separating it from the pool above, Atlantis Pool, which is similar to Peninsula Pool, the only marked difference being that this has an island of rock in the middle which becomes submerged when the water rises.



White Valley, which lies immediately above the Lido Pool. This picture shows the open nature of a considerable part of the Holsloot River valley. The service road to Stettynskloof Dam can be seen on the left.

Photo: R. O. Bell

Above this the stream becomes almost a splot for a few yards as it tumbles down through a narrow furrow. The stream begins to veer to the right and we reach the Monolith Pool. It is easily recognised by the huge stone pylon at the tail.

From here we have the choice of two routes: bushwack the left bank to fish from the odd clearing or do a bit of ledge trotting under the krantz on the right. This is not dangerous as the angler is at water level most of the way. The disadvantage of this route is that the ledge ends about 100 yards up and then the river must be crossed. There is some good water in the next 200 yards or so, but the stream is fairly narrow and well bushed. Any alarming sounds emanating from the nearby bush can safely be attributed to the cattle that frequently graze in this area.

A little higher up, past the Black Pool, is the bridge over which the road crosses the Holsloot on its way to the nearby Dam. An open stretch of water leads us to the Koffiegat—a deep pool under a left bank krantz which must surely yield a notable trout to some fortunate angler sooner or later.

Just above this, an important tributary enters the main river; unexplored, so far as we are concerned, at the present moment.

We move on—past the “Old Bridge” Pool and up to the Homestead Pool—almost a replica of the Lido Pool lower down. Odd how the Holsloot keeps repeating its special features!

And this is the end, or nearly so. Immediately above us towers the high concrete wall of the Dam, and the end of the main section of one of the Western Cape’s most lovely and most rewarding rivers.