



THE LIESBEEK

By DALE LEWIS, with maps
and photographs
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Schweppe's Pool, Liesbeek
River.

(Dale Lewis and Brian Manning are Junior Members of the Society. They served their apprenticeship in fly fishing on their home river—the Liesbeek—and are intimate with all its features.—Ed.)

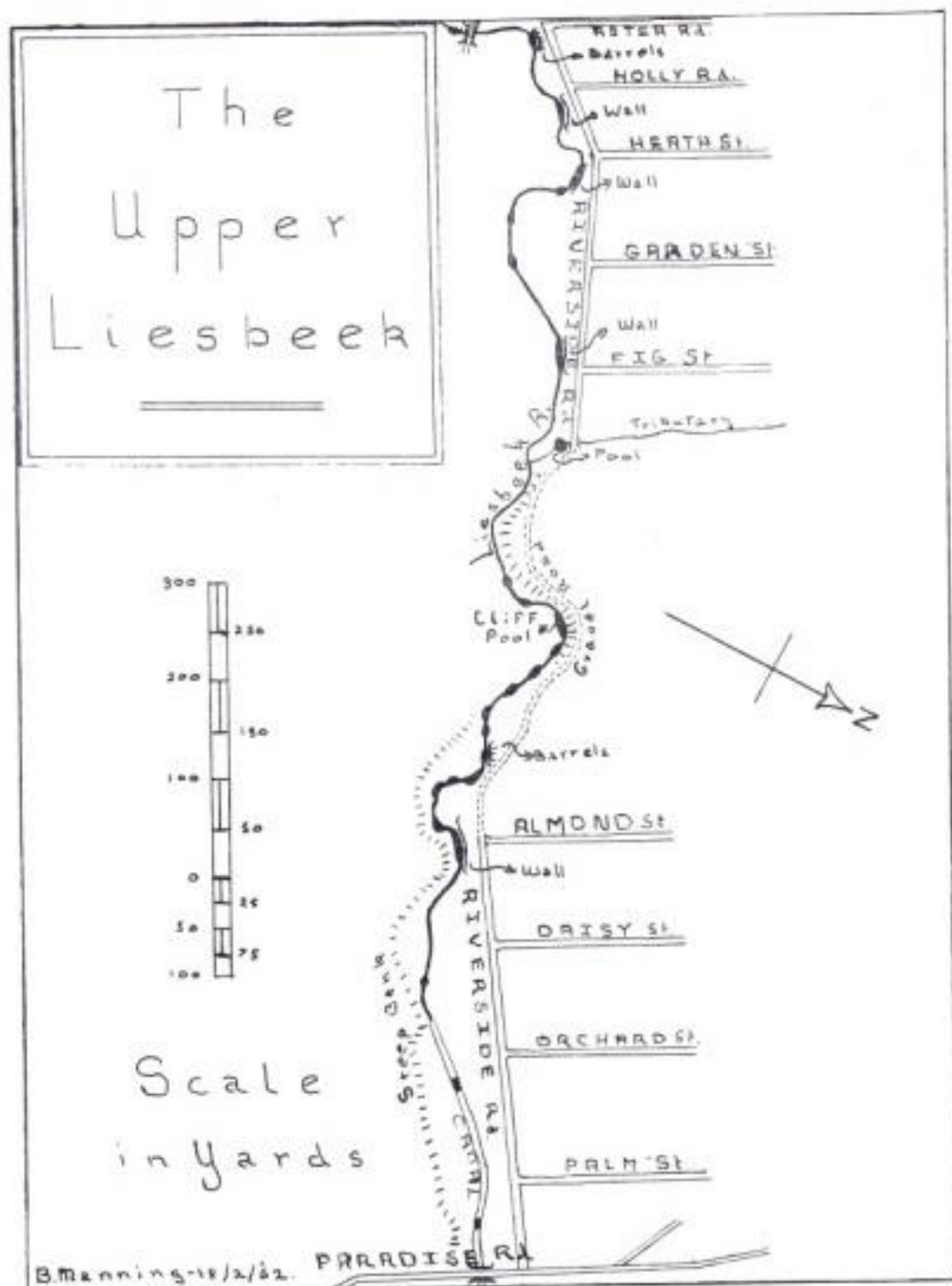
THE Liesbeek rises above Kirstenbosch on Table Mountain. Thence it flows through Bishopscourt, Newlands, Rondebosch and on through various suburbs till, after joining the Black River, it enters Table Bay at Salt River mouth. Around this river our story is centred.

From suburban sewer to trout stream! A remarkable transformation you may say, yet it took place, mainly thanks to the industrious work of the Council of the City of Cape Town. The Liesbeek was near the scene of the first trout hatchery in the Cape Colony, where the first successful hatching took place in 1892. The hatchery was situated at the Anneberg Brewery, where a good supply of cool spring water was to be had, but strangely enough the early stocking records make no reference at all to the Liesbeek, perhaps because it was considered to be too polluted in those days.

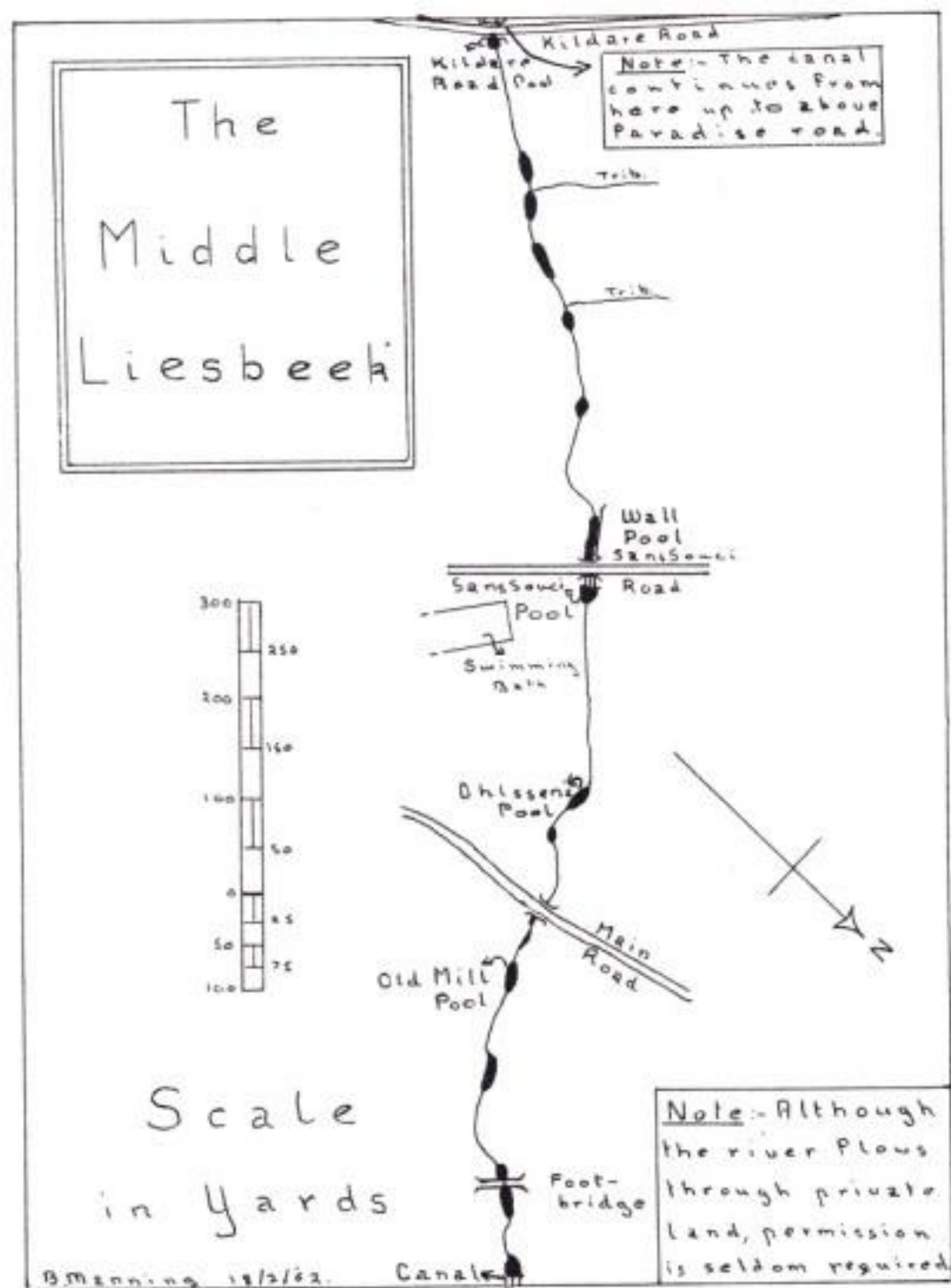
The first release of trout took place in December 1946, when 500 fingerlings were planted in the Liesbeek Lake (which had been completed in 1945) by Mr. Colin Gohl and Mr. A. C. Harrison. The first five trout recorded were taken by Mr. A. R. Dresser on September 1, 1948 (see PISCATOR No. 7), the largest being one of 20 inches long weighing 3 lb. When the river was stocked it contained indigenous Galaxias minnows and prolific insect life and also tadpoles. The lake in particular contained abundant food, for the trout there made rapid growth.

The standing record for the Liesbeek is a rainbow trout of 20½ inches, 4 lb. 2 oz., caught by Mr. R. Fitzwilliams in the Liesbeek Lake (see PISCATOR No. 22). Other large fish in the 3 lb. bracket have also been taken, and the river yields at least one 2-pounder each season. The river has the normal opening date of September 1st, but closes later than most, on June 1st, to allow fishing for the migrating trout. Above the Durban Road bridge the river is a proclaimed Trout Area, while below it is a General Fish Area.

The river may be divided into six sections, viz.: (i) Source to Paradise Road. (ii) Canal from Paradise Road to Kildare Road. (iii) River from Kildare Road to below Rugby Ground. (iv) Canal from Rugby Ground to Observatory. (v) Liesbeek Lake at Observatory. (vi) Liesbeek Lake to sea.



The first section is of interest to anglers from Bishopscourt downstream. There are some fair pools in this stretch but it is very dependent on rain for its flow. As a rule there are not many big fish here, but we have taken a number from 11—13 inches and slightly larger. There are no large rocks in this stretch and it is very changeable in character. As may be seen from the map, there is no private property between the river and Riverside Road, and thus it is not necessary to ask for permission to fish in



many places. Unfortunately this reach is not really worth fishing on Sundays ("Never on Sunday"), as it is then crowded by hordes of bathers, picknickers and children sailing boats, etc., etc.

It is most definitely of benefit to stalk these pools, though we have caught fish after plodding up to one and standing on the bank gazing into it; in fact one trout even swam up and lay in the shadow which I cast on the water. The stretches of water



Cliff Pool, Riverside Road stretch,
Bishopscourt area.



Kildare Road bridge pool.

between the pools marked on the map are not really worth fishing, even after a spate. The best method is to fish one pool thoroughly and then move on to the next, neglecting the intervening water.

Section two is a cement canal and is not worth fishing at all. There are some specially-constructed pools, but these no longer merit attention. However it was in one of these pools that we saw our first trout, and since then we have seen and taken some very nice fish; but now the canal has been tampered with, the sand has been scoured out, and all rocks have been removed, and it has lost its stock of trout. There is no doubt that trout do at least pass through it, as I will mention later in the theories of lake and sea-run trout.

The third section is probably the stretch of most interest to us. It has large pools and the trout also tend to be slightly larger. The uppermost pool of this reach is one below the Kildare Road bridge, and from it we have taken a number of good-sized fish, despite the fouling of its banks and water alike. The fish lie under a ledge in the upper right hand corner and come darting out at a fly carefully dropped into the corner. I remember once when Brian did this and a nice-sized trout came out and took the fly securely. It put up a good fight and then wrapped the line around a piece of concrete reinforcement. I had to climb down and loosen the line, with Brian shouting at one end and the trout thrashing at the other. He finally landed the trout, 1 lb. 9 oz. of it!

Moving down from here the angler may be rather disheartened by the lack of good pools, but should persevere as this is just a barren stretch, ended by a pool easily recognised by an oak tree lying across it. The fish usually lie in the undercut of the bank below the tree. Brian has already taken a pounder from here this season and we have seen several others.

Following this there is a succession of small pools culminated by one we call Wall Pool; this being directly above the Sans Souci bridge. Wall Pool is fairly deep and the fish lie in the undercut of the wall. After this we come to a pool known by all who have fished the Liesbeek—Sans Souci. It is difficult to advise how one should fish a pool, but the best method here seems to be to fish from the corner of the wall on the bank opposite the new swimming bath. Unfortunately, being a large pool, boys swim in it at every possible opportunity. Another detriment is that the outlet pipes from the swimming bath empty straight into the pool. Nevertheless Sans Souci is definitely worth fishing.



Sans Souci bridge pool, looking downstream to Ohlsson's Pool. Many rainbow trout, up to 3 lb., were caught in this pool soon after the Liesbeek was stocked.

The next pool of any consequence is Ohlsson's. From here Brian took a 2½-pounder last season, while I have lost two nice fish this season and seen several others. The angler can then walk on fairly rapidly to the water below the Old Mill. Sad to record, Old Mill Pool has been filled in by Council workers, but the water is gradually scouring it out again. A pool which we call Rugby Pool and another we have named Schweppes' Pool (which is the last pool before the canal) end this section. Schweppes is always worth fishing after the spate, as it will hold any trout newly ascended from the lake.

Section four, like section two, is a canal and is not worth fishing at all. It has no holding pools whatsoever and indeed provides something of an obstacle to ascending fish. The fifth section is the Liesbeek Lake. This has been sadly overrun with carp, but there are definitely trout there, some, no doubt, very big. Mr. G. H. Godley reported losing a big one there some time ago.

The carp should not really be scorned; Brian and I have caught several which gave good fights. Carp of up to 37 lb. have been caught here, and we have seen a few trout taken on the dough used as carp bait. Before carp got in, trout made rapid growth on the abundant food existing here, but now the conditions for these have deteriorated. Nevertheless it does appear that trout descend to and stay in the lake during the summer, where there is at least enough water for them and also a fair amount of food. Then, when the first good rains come at the end of the season, they re-ascend to the spawning beds at and above Bishopscourt. This is the lake-run theory.

In making the next statement I may be rather sticking my neck out, but anyway . . . Is it not possible that, as in the Eerste, the Liesbeek may receive an annual quota of

Ohlsson's Pool, Newlands.



sea-run trout? Surely, even if one accepts the lake theory, there are more trout in the river at the opening of the season than normal river growth would account for? Anyway, there it is, I've stuck my neck out far enough for someone to slice it with an anti-theory axe. I should just mention that spinning is permitted in the lake, as it is a General Fish Area.

After the lake the river is not very interesting, as it is all canal right down to the sea, thus offering no pools at all. Canalization, especially of the stretch between Paradise and Kildare Roads, has obviated the risk of further erosion, but it has also destroyed many of the beautiful pools which used to be the joy of the river. Surely, if just a little expense and trouble were taken, our stream, already unique, could be enhanced beyond all measure. The reach along Riverside Road could become a trout paradise, with very little work and cost; and buried deep in the City Hall is a plan for constructing a lake and park in the Bishopscourt area. What has happened about this?

Yes, the Liesbeek is a river full of surprises; you never know what may happen. Apart from other things the river has been stocked regularly with rainbows, and also with some brown and brook trout. So far I have only caught one brown and have never heard of any brook trout being recorded, but they may be there. I hope this article may be of interest to those who have fished this grand little river, and may prompt some of those who have not to go out and try fishing for these trout on their doorsteps.

(As usual, 1,000 rainbow fingerlings were planted in the Liesbeek River at Bishopscourt in October 1961.)