

An Exploration Group Report

THE LOWER STEENBRAS RIVER

By RON BELL



This is a picture of the start of the true gorge. From here up, the strata run across the river, producing a series of high steps and large, deep pools.

(Photographs: Ron Brice)

EARLY in April 1960, Ron Brice, Hannes Conradie (a mountaineering friend) and I climbed up the Steenbras River gorge and reached a point approximately half-a-mile below the dam wall. Here we were forced to return because of the large deep pools and sheer rock walls barring further progress.

We started from the bridge over the short Steenbras estuary on the coast road and entered thick bush almost immediately. The river bed is absolutely choked with palmiet rush for about half-a-mile, up to the point where we had to climb out. There is a path leading up the kloof, but it is difficult to follow because of the number of baboon tracks.

We encountered two or three good pools but saw no sign of fish. Higher up, the bed changes very abruptly and the bush and palmiet growth gives way to solid rock

This is one of the three larger pools in the Steenbras gorge. The climb around the ledges on the left is rather tricky. Above this point, the party encountered a "swim" and waterfall which barred further progress.



pools with steep sides. At one place we walked along an unbroken slab of rock about 100 yards long and 20 feet wide.

The gorge becomes very steep until it forms a series of high waterfalls and large, deep basins. After climbing three waterfalls, we halted by a pool about 80 feet in diameter, surrounded by vertical walls of rock, hundreds of feet high. Here we caught and released two smallmouth bass about 13 inches long, in poor condition. We saw no trout although we spent almost an hour watching and fishing.

The lower Steenbras gorge is probably the most rugged and spectacular I have climbed, and it cannot be recommended for a day's fishing!