

## An Exploration Group Report

THE WAAIHOEK  
ROUTE TO THE  
UPPER WITELSBy NEVILLE FUGGLE and  
JACK MULLEN

The southern peaks of the Hex River range, behind which lies the Witels. Taken from the Breede River valley and showing the approach to Waihoek Kloof.

*(We are glad to be able to welcome two new participants in the work of our Exploration Group, and congratulate them on the following report.—Ed.)*

THE mountains are cold, bare and rugged; the route is obviously a difficult one, but in the river beyond the fish rise fast and easily; the water is almost virgin! To these obvious attractions add a report of a "mysterious route" plotted by a gentleman who wishes it to remain a secret, and you have enough to stir the interest of the exploration-minded angler.

Having read the reports in previous PISCATORS of exploration of the Witels, and the letter from Mr. L. Bybee, of Worcester, in PISCATOR No. 36, we decided that we should try to find the, as yet, unmapped Waihoek route, or at least reconnoitre in the area with a view to attempting the route later this year. We had intended to make a full exploratory trip, but the vagaries of the weather made this inadvisable.

We managed to obtain some maps of the area, and these, together with aerial photographs and a theoretical route of entry, enabled us to plot a seemingly reasonable approach.

When I phoned D. F. Malan Weather Forecast Office on Friday, May 4, 1962, I was agreeably surprised by the interest taken in our particular outing, and it was kindly arranged that Saturday should dawn clear and crisp! Trusting implicitly in the weather report, we set out early on May 5, and arrived at the farm "Vredehoek" at 7 a.m. We had roughly reckoned that the climb to the upper University of Cape Town Ski Club hut near the summit of Waihoek Peak would take us, all going well, about three hours. The farm is situated at the base of the climb to the hut, and it was from this point that we set out.

After 15 minutes gradual ascent, we discovered to our chagrin that we could have driven thus far. From this point, however, the climb becomes increasingly steeper, and is definitely not for the unfit. The path is well-trodden and clearly beacons, and there is no fear of losing one's way. We moved quite fast, and when we had covered a little over a third of the climb, we allowed ourselves time to admire the green patchwork of the valley spread below us in its early morning silence, with the shadowy heights of Du Toit's Kloof as a backdrop. It was not until we turned to continue our climb that we saw a small stone hut, built against a large boulder on our right. On inspecting it we discovered that the floor was thickly lined with *slangbos*, and that it was stocked with adequate provisions in case of emergency. We were cheered by the thought that aid was at hand for any unfortunate climber, but any resulting elation was soon dispelled by the neatly printed plaque which we discovered on a nearby rock.



The University of Cape  
Town Ski Club hut.

(Photos: Neville Fuggle)



Its words of consolation were as follows:—

“The way is long, and getting longer,  
The road goes uphill all the way,  
And even farther,  
I wish you luck. You’ll need it.  
The way is dark, and getting darker,  
The hut is high and even higher,  
I wish you luck,  
There is none.”

We laughed a little at the obvious cynicism of the University student who composed the piece, but, nevertheless, we both knew that the worst was still to come. From then on the road does go uphill all the way, and for a time we almost believed there was no end to it. There was no indication of any definite top or peak, until suddenly the bright morning sunlight glared at us. We were at the top. From there, the upper hut lies about 200 feet below the top on the slopes of Waaihoek.



Looking from the U.C.T. Ski Club hut towards  
the nek through which Neville Fuggle and  
Jack Mullen climbed to take the photo of the  
upper end of the Middle Valley of the Witels.  
See next page.





Looking down on the Middle Valley of the Witels River from the neck shown in the previous photograph.

On reaching the hut, we checked our watches and found that we had made the ascent in  $2\frac{1}{2}$  hours from the farm. We decided to take bearings and try to follow our theoretical route. In the hut we found a map similar to our own, which had marked on it a route leading to the Barrier Falls. In order to obviate the possibility of being caught by a change of weather, we determined to carry out our reconnaissance within two hours to the point of return.

We revived ourselves with some food, and on glancing through the log book, prior to signing it, we came across a reference to "five fishers from U.H." who had apparently made the ascent during the Easter week-end and reached the river at the Barrier Falls. By some roundabout enquiries we later contacted two members of this party, and discovered that they were unable to fish, due to the sudden change in the weather and a subsequent fall of snow. According to the entry in the log book they returned "frozen stiff".

At 10.20 we left the hut and headed for a neck directly in front of it, which we reckoned to be the best way to approach and overlook the Witels River.

The distance was deceptive, and it was more than half-an-hour later when we had our first glimpse of the Middle Witels. The sight was awe-inspiring. Three thousand feet below, the black twisting abyss of the river winds its way through the massive cliffs and mountains, while to the right the long flat ridges' run in parallel strips down to the river gorge.



We spent some time in surveying the terrain from this point, and we matched the "live" view with the topographical one on our map. I wanted to take some photographs, but from our position the details which most interested us were obscured by a long ridge running about 500 feet below us.

We set off again to reach this point and found the way down quite easy and gradual. Once at this point I took photographs of the area, and as far as we could make out there seemed to be two reasonable approaches to the river: one which would take us to Barrier Falls (this route was indicated on the map in the Ski Club Hut), and which we could have made in about an hour, the other a long, gradual descent which would take us into the vicinity of the 11th Swim. Either of these routes, both apparently quite practical, should take us to the river within five hours of leaving the farm. This time coincides with the time taken by Mr. L. Bybee, who once made the trip in and out in one day. For pleasure, however, it requires a week-end or longer. The trip, too, should not be undertaken lightly, as the way up is definitely arduous and tiring. We have no doubt that had it been our intention, we could have reached the river, but to do it properly one needs more than just a day.

We hope to plot the full route later this year, and we also hope that others will benefit from our explorations. The percentage of anglers who will undertake this trip is so small that to keep the route to ourselves would be both selfish and pointless.