

MY INTRODUCTION TO TROUT CULTURE IN SOUTH AFRICA

By F. G. CHAPLIN

Photographs by courtesy of
Mr. F. G. Chaplin.

Richardson and Chaplin netting a
pond at the Pirie Trout Hatchery,
period 1903-07.



A FEW notes on how I came to hear of the Pirie Hatchery in 1903. I was for some months staying with a relation, Meyrick Bowker, on his farm "Dunskye" in the Cathcart district, where two of his neighbours, John and Frank King, very fine tennis players, were to play in a match in King William's Town.

Bowker suggested that I should ride down to King William's Town taking a pack-horse—a distance of about 60 miles. When having tea on the courts, I got into conversation with a man sitting next to me. He happened to be R. J. Dick, one of the Committee of the Frontier Acclimatisation Society, and for something to say, I said that I understood that there was a trout hatchery in the district. I told him I was interested in trout culture and would like to see the place. It turned out that he was going to drive there the next day, a Sunday, and that he would be pleased to take me.

On our way out to the Pirie, Dick told me that they were afraid they would have to close down the hatchery as they could not get a man to manage it. I was very charmed with the drive, in a Cape Cart and four horses. The country was to me very like my old home in Sussex—the South Downs. Of course added to this was that we drove through Native locations—which was rather different to Sussex. In those days they were all "Red Kaffirs" in blankets—transformed now by European dress and customs.

When we arrived at the hatchery, the forest views, trees, birds etc. so charmed me that I fell for the place at once. Of course the ponds, huts and place generally were in a very bad state, which showed me how much there was to be done to put things in order. We had a very nice lunch, but not too much for me to know what I was saying! So on the drive back to King William's Town I offered to go out and

live there for a time, until they could find a man to take charge. The outcome was that a Committee meeting was called and I was appointed to take over.

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When the time came, I found things dreadful. It was so bad that the roof of my bedroom hut leaked like a sieve—the rains continued late into May that year and I think that they had 110 inches at Evelyn Valley, the forest station just above the hatchery.

So bad indeed that I had lent to me one of the big beach umbrellas to cover part of my bed, and put waterproof sheets over the rest of it. Before getting out of bed I had to put on rubber boots, to find an inch or more of water all over the floor of the hut. All the other huts were in a worse state. Young Stenning, who was there with me for a month or so, slept in a corner of the small room used as a kitchen.

Chaplin's sleeping hut
of 1903, on left, and
newly-built
workshop.



The Committee were most kind and did all in their power to help matters, but there were no funds and little Government help. However, by degrees I got things going, with the great help of Richardson and Fuhr. These two would come out every week-end and stay with me. They were wonderful in what they did. When the new cement pipe-line was laid, we had to cut down the bush, no joke I can tell you. Those native hardwoods are indeed hard. It is not easy to remember dates so long ago, but the spawning season was coming on when I took over. The old hatching house was about to fall down. But in a way it was all great fun, especially as I had no white men helping me and I knew no native language.

All this was rather strange, as before I left England, a month or so before, I was told at a party one evening that my entire life would soon be changed. (I was then living in a very charming village, Lindfield in Sussex.) This was told to me by two ladies I had never met before, who played about with palmistry.

Well, here I was brought from that lovely English village to live among many thousands of South African Natives. Indeed a great change. One of the old ladies wrote all this down at the time and I have her notes with me now. They told me other things which have come true, but I can't believe in palmistry even now!

As the Pirie Hatchery was 14 miles from King William's Town, it was very difficult to get supplies, and the only means of transport was with an old donkey and cart and



Pirie Hatchery transport unit, 1903. "Willie" and the dangerous donkey. Background of indigenous forest.

a Native driver "Willie" (see picture). It took more than 12 hours to do the 14 miles there and back, and this journey was done once or twice a week (rain permitting). What a donkey that was! He was so clever that I really think he could have picked any lock. He would open up gates, open the door of the "dwelling" hut and upset the supper pot of hot mealies—and eat them boiling hot! How often I had wished for the death of that moke. I did try to kill him once by driving him into one of the narrow fry ponds, with the help of an iron rake, but he just stood on his front legs and kicked out at me. I was the one near unto death!

Another experience I remember only too well, when there was a "near death", was when the new hatching house was being built and all my pals were out for the week-end—H. Fuhr, Col. Knapp and Richardson. We were trying to fix the new filter, which was a tank made of wood about 4 ft. by 3 ft. by 4 ft. deep. The outlet pipe in a corner at the bottom of the tank had to have a flange screwed on firmly on the inside of the tank. The tank was near the roof of the building, and Richardson had to climb up a ladder and get into the tank head first, which meant practically standing on his head. Richardson was a big man, weighing, say, 170 lb. He started to swear before he even got into the filter, but when he got his head and hands in the corner, the language was unspeakable—I have never heard anything like it before or since!

Richardson was screwing or trying to screw on the flange, and Fuhr had to hold the pipe in place outside. Nothing happened but words, and when after some minutes Richardson came to earth, I really thought he would have brained Fuhr with a hammer, but Knapp took it away just in time. I may say Richardson was a hot-headed bloke. All ended well, after a drink.

During my stay at the Pirie, my transport was an American gig with two wheels and a seat, and my pony "Trout" I broke in while with Bowker. He was a nice pony and I taught him to jump quite well. Richardson drove him for many years after I left.

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I shall never forget when we first found that brown trout were breeding naturally in the Buffalo River. We had decided not to turn out any brown trout fry for a year or more. One Sunday morning Richardson, Fuhr and I took a walk over to the river, when just by chance I was looking into some water about a foot deep and very clear, and there I saw about two dozen brown trout fry, about 1½ inches long, feeding nicely in mid-water. I shouted to the others to come and see them. We were all very excited

Chaplin's transport, his pony "Trout"
and the American gig.



and I remember throwing my hat in the air—which fell in the river, and I had a job to retrieve it.

You may think that my childish spirits were somewhat out of place, but one must remember that this was the first time of proof that trout had bred naturally in the Eastern Province.

To commemorate the finding of these fish, Richardson asked Perks, the jeweller of King William's Town, to make and engrave some small gold tie-pins of a trout about 1½ inches long. He gave one to each of us—Fuhr, Col. Knapp and myself. I am wearing mine as I write this, and have done so every day for the past 50 years.

It would seem that my tie-pin fish has a charmed existence, having been lost and recovered four times. Once on the sands at Gordons Bay, while I was playing with my two children. I offered a reward of £1 to the children of Gordons Bay; and they got all the kids they could find, sifted the sand—and found the fish. Another time I found it on a four-inch wide cement edge of a pond; once caught in my sock and once in the turn-up of my trousers.

During my stay at the Pirie, the Cape Mounted Riflemen, through the kindness of Colonel Lukin (afterwards Major-Gen. Sir Henry Timson Lukin, K.C.B., C.M.G., D.S.O.) let me have the use of a room as a bedroom in the C.M.R. barracks. This was nice for me, because I could drive into town and spend the night and see friends at the club.



I think that it was while I was at the Pirie that I sent the first trout ova to the Maclear district, to Mr. Tarr of Ugie. It was interesting because only 2,000 rainbow ova were sent to him, and they arrived without any knowledge of what to do with them—except that they had to be hatched in running water. All he could do was to put the ova in an ordinary garden sieve with a wooden cover and stones on top to prevent it from floating. I was told that all the eggs hatched, with the result that nearly all the rivers in that district became stocked from such a simple start. It was from this result that I experimented and produced the "Chaplin Hatching Box", for which there was a large demand for a time. When I went to Jonkershoek (at the end of 1907), a local carpenter took orders and supplied them to farmers all over South Africa.

Some of these floating hatching boxes were used to stock the Amalinda Reservoir near East London. Mr. Harold Brooking of that town undertook the work, and helped trout culture by writing articles in the *East London Despatch*.

I should also mention that a great help to me and the Frontier Acclimatisation Society was my friend Dr. McArthur, District Surgeon at Keiskammahoek, where he took in charge the stocking of the rivers and streams on his side of the Hogsback—the Keiskamma, Gxulu, Wolf and Tyumie.

It happened that I stocked the Klipplaat River with trout, on Bowker's farm, Dunskey, before I went to the Pirie Hatchery. When I was staying with him, I said I should like to try and hatch a few ova. He was a great sportsman and was only too pleased. I set to work to make a hatching trough, and we had a clear mountain stream running through the garden. I am not sure if the 1,000 eggs he got came from the Pirie or Jonkershoek. They arrived in good order and hatched fairly well. As Bowker owned about 20,000 sheep, livers were always to be had for fry food. (I think that wool was then at 6d. to 9d. per lb.; but, oh, what lamb! the like I have only tasted off the Sussex South Downs—oh, for those days, when one could eat and enjoy one's meat!) Some of the fry I turned direct into the garden stream that flowed to the Klipplaat River, and a few I fenced in a small pool I had made off the stream. These did well for a time, but all were killed, I fear, when a dipping tank overflowed into the pond, which was only a few yards from the river.

We used to have great fun on Dunskey. There were numbers of otters in the river and I shot quite a few from the house with a rifle, but I soon stopped doing this, as when shot they always sank and we only found them days after when they floated to the surface. Perhaps I should not call this fun. Bowker did not, as he was, as I said, a great sportsman, as are all the Bowkers, and he always said that everybody should do all in their power to save the wild life of South Africa—and how true are his words today. The otter is a beautiful animal when you can sit and watch them as we could from the garden.

Another thing we used to do when the Klipplaat River was in full flood. (The river on this part of the farm took a horseshoe bend.) We would put the boat, a rather fragile one, on the waggon and take it to the upper water. We would get in and away we went over the rapids. This was only possible when the river was very full as the rapids were all rock and quite dangerous unless well covered with water. When we got to the end of this sporting reach we would come ashore. The waggon would come back for us and we would do the trip over again. We would do this sometimes for three goes, but if the river was in flood on Sunday morning, so much the better. The church was many miles away.

Sometimes we would take a crowbar up on the top of Gaikaskop and shift boulders to see them bound down. There was no danger in this, as it was grass country, so that one could see that all was safe and clear of sheep before we started this so-called "sport".



I forgot to mention before that in the Pirie forest there is found (I am told the only place in South Africa) a fine black mole, a very big fellow and with a lovely skin. I should have some of the skins now, if I could only find them. Stenning used to get them to send to Europe and America, where they fetched a high price.

The wild life in the Pirie bush was most interesting. Lots of bushbuck, monkeys and bush babies, and the latter kick up a weird row at night, quite enough to frighten one unless one knew about them.

The Natives around the Pirie used to go into the bush hunting buck or anything that they could get, from bushbuck to blue buck—which is the smallest South African buck, about 1 foot high. It was a fine sight to see say 200 Natives, armed with any kind of stick or assegai. (I have even seen them use sparklet bulbs in their guns.) It was expected of the Forest Ranger to catch these chaps. Personally, I would rather have gone with them—but then I was always a funk.

Being a funk reminds me of what happened on my return journey from King William's Town to Dunskey. I had left the town rather late one evening, and was about six miles from Debe Nek, riding and leading the pack-horse.

It was raining, as only it can in the Eastern Province. I was wearing, I remember, a hunting apron, but I was wet through; when a man with a cart and two horses overtook me. This I thought very strange on such a night. Through my usual funk,

I at once thought of "murder on the highway", etc., and all the dreadful things that could happen in Darkest Africa (English ideas). As he stopped and asked who I was and where I was going, that made it worse, so I promptly asked "what the devil it had to do with him?" I saw he had a gun in the cart beside him. I also had a revolver in my pocket, not that I could have got at it, wrapped up as I was.

To my rude remark, he burst into a loud laugh, saying, "Oh, I can see you are an Englishman—a Rooinek!" (At that time I did not know the meaning of "rooinek".) However, after a bit of a chat, he said, "You had better come on my cart—we can tie your two horses to the back and drive on to Debe Nek where my waggon is outspanned."

We got to Debe Nek, had a good supper, and early next morning started for Middeldrift. On his waggon he had a new double harness he had bought in King William's Town, so I suggested that we put my two horses in the harness and drive four-in-hand to Middeldrift. My horses had never been in harness before, as I had helped to break them at Dunskey. However, after a bit of trouble, we drove in fine style to Middeldrift, outspanned, had lunch and afterwards went up the Tyumie valley to Yellowwoods, where my friend (please note, friend) lived and kept a store. I left him there and commenced a lonely but slippery ride to Dunskey, the road being very bad with mud after the heavy rains.

I took over the Pirie Hatchery a short time after this.

Stellenbosch, August 1955.



Some of the Committee of the Frontier Acclimatisation Society, about 1905. Standing : Col. Knapp, W. T. Trollip, Col. Style, T. W. Heywood and F. G. Chaplin. Sitting : R. J. Dick, Col. "Tim" Lukin, H. A. Fuhr and Tommy Fletcher.

TROUT PIONEERING IN THE EASTERN PROVINCE

No. 10. F. G. CHAPLIN TAKES OVER

THE preceding part of these excerpts from the records of the Frontier Acclimatisation Society, King William's Town (PISCATOR No. 30) dealt with the end of the Stenning story in May 1903. Furthermore, it was also the end of the first phase in the history of the Pirie Hatchery, a very troublesome period of some nine years, during which the King William's Town pioneers had to deal with the whims and dissatisfactions of two professional hatchery-men brought out on contract from Britain. The new phase, lasting from May 1903 until October 1946, was very different in this respect as both Frederick George Chaplin and William Speakman Richardson were men of quite another breed. Both of them undertook the task for the sheer love of working with trout, and starting with limited private experience, ended their active careers as recognised experts.

A. N. Stenning left the Pirie Hatchery in April 1903 ("having received a more lucrative appointment") to go to the new trout hatchery at Potchefstroom, Transvaal, and for some weeks the Pirie Hatchery was in the charge of Stenning's son, Sydney.

Mr. F. G. Chaplin took over the management on May 15, 1903.



As previously stated (p. 53, No. 30) the records of the Society at this stage were in a fragmentary condition, Jack D. Ellis, the former Secretary, having left King William's Town in March 1903, and his successor R. J. Dick having only returned from England to take over in May. The press-copy book contains no letters at this period, except routine communications to the Secretary for Agriculture, Cape Town, regarding the payment of the grant, and some excuses for non-attention to other correspondence.

Trout Fishing Permitted for the First Time

On September 17, 1903, the Under-Secretary for Agriculture wrote to R. J. Dick, mentioning a letter from the Society of July 1903 (which cannot be traced) and forwarding 25 copies of Proclamation No. 273 of September 15, promulgating the regulations under which trout fishing was allowed. The Society had submitted a draft of proposed regulations, including the suggestion that licence fees be charged. The Under-Secretary regretted that certain objections had been raised by the Law Department to the Society's proposals, and that the Government had not the powers under the Fish Protection Act to charge for permits. The Government intended seeking enlarged powers: "meanwhile it has been considered best to start with the Regulations, as printed, as a tentative measure". (The "Fishing Bill", introduced in 1904, failed to pass at seven sessions of the Cape Legislative Assembly: no increased powers and trout licences were obtained until after Union.)

In spite of this modest description, Proclamation No. 273 of 1903 was an historic document. For over ten years the Society had been battling to establish trout in the rivers, but it had been illegal to "fish for or destroy any trout in the waters of the Colony" since a proclamation of February 1894. For the first time a trout season was opened on October 1, 1903, until March 31 of the following year, in the Eerste, Lourens, Berg, Breede and Hex rivers in the western area, and in the Keiskamma, Buffalo and Kubusie rivers in the eastern area.

The conditions for both areas were that any angler must have a permit from a Resident Magistrate (issued without charge), must fish with the artificial fly only, must not take trout under 12 inches long (no daily bag limit was mentioned), and must have the consent of the owner. There was a maximum fine of £20, or three months for contraventions.

The minute book is also mutilated at this stage, and the first surviving entry is for a Committee meeting of October 20, 1903, attended by Dr. Chute with Messrs. Heywood and Trollip and R. J. Dick. The latter explained at some length the action he had taken in regard to the engagement of a Curator in succession to Stenning. ("Every effort had been made to secure a man from England, but the small salary available made it impossible to obtain a qualified man.") In conjunction with Dr. Chute he had engaged Mr. F. G. Chaplin from May 15th. It had also been found necessary to engage an assistant, and a Mr. Nash was taken on. This action was confirmed. Lt.-Col. R. Style and Mr. T. W. Heywood were elected to the Committee in place of the Rev. Gladstone Hawke and Mr. T. R. Sims.

The Committee met again on November 11, 1903, when Dr. Chute had taken over the secretaryship. Mr. R. J. Dick now presided, and Col. Style and Mr. J. Storr Lister were the others present. Mr. Chaplin had been active in liberating trout fry in the Buffalo River; and had applied for the fencing of the furrow feeding the hatchery as the public were damaging it, and for a rifle to reduce the numerous vermin. At the meeting of December 9, Mr. H. A. Fuhr of the Public Works Department was brought on to the Committee, and was to prove a tower of strength in future troubles. Difficulties had been encountered in attempts to transport trout fingerlings for greater distances; in one case there had been considerable losses due to train delays on the way to Alice, and in another "the disselboom of Morgan's waggon broke" on the way to the station with a consignment for the Little Kubusie River, and the fish had to be put into the Buffalo River.

A special meeting had to be called on December 23rd, as a violent thunderstorm with prolonged heavy rainfall had wrecked about 30 yards of the fluming, and the water supply for the trout was seriously endangered. Emergency measures had been taken ("Morgan's waggon took out a workman and materials"), but Mr. Chaplin was not satisfied with the safety of the fluming and asked for an inspection by Mr. Fuhr. Mr. Fuhr reported on January 8, 1904, that Mr. Chaplin was right: it was no use patching up the fluming, and it should be replaced by galvanised iron pipes cased in concrete, and this was sanctioned. On January 13th, the Committee discussed various items for progress; and not the least was the breaking down of a barrier and they decided to ask their Curator to attend future Committee meetings. Thereafter Mr. Chaplin took a very active part in all discussions.

At the meeting of February 10, 1904, the Committee resolved to go on with Fuhr's plans to erect a better house for the Curator ("the wattle and daub huts were so dilapidated as to be beyond repairs"), in spite of the refusal of the Government to increase the "Parliamentary Grant". Mr. Chaplin read his first report on the working of the Hatchery, as follows (original manuscript):—

"In reporting the work carried on at this Hatchery up to February 1, 1904, I am only able to do so as from May 15, 1903, on which date I took over the management of the same.

"I was much handicapped by arriving here only a few weeks before the spawning season commenced. All the hatching troughs etc. had to be re-charred and varnished before the ova could be laid down. I was also unable to empty several of the ponds as the outlets were stopped, but these I cleared eventually.

"I stripped the first fish on June 24, taking 1,100 brown trout eggs, but not being able to obtain any ripe brown trout milt was compelled to fertilize them with Loch Leven trout milt. These were the only eggs obtained from common brown trout as there are only three hen fish of this breed in the ponds. The hen Loch Levens were quite barren, and the cock fish produced little or no milt, so it was quite useless to keep them, as the food they consumed was needed by the other fish. This being the case it was decided by the Committee that all the barren and useless fish should be killed. This I did and sent them to the Secretary on October 24, 1903, who distributed them amongst the town's people etc. of King William's Town. Some of these fish weighed as much as 17 lb. each.



F. G. Chaplin with some of the large "Loch Leven" trout—up to 17 lb. each—which he removed from the ponds of the Pirie Hatchery on October 24, 1903.

"On July 6th, I stripped the first rainbow trout, which yielded good eggs, both in quality and quantity. The last fish stripped was on September 15th, and the total of ova taken was about 107,000.

"Towards the end of the season the milt became very scarce and of poor quality. The weather at this time was getting very hot and the poorness of the milt, together with the fact that all the stripping had to be done in the sun, accounts in a large measure for the ova taken latterly not proving as fertile as I should have liked it to have been.

"The following list shows the number of ova and fish distributed for the season 1903-4 (condensed). In August 1903, 100 yearlings and 110 two-year-olds were distributed in various parts of the Buffalo River. In September 1903, 18,000 eyed ova were despatched to various parts, including Kokstad, Maclear and Umtata. From late October 1903 to date, some 50,000 fingerlings were liberated in the Buffalo, Keiskamma and Tyumie rivers, and about 1,000 retained at the Hatchery. 986 fry were lost when the water supply was stopped from storm damage to the fluming in December.

"The first fry distributed were about six weeks old and were over an inch long; the last four lots varied from 2 to 3 inches long. My idea of turning down fry as large as possible is to give them a better chance of taking care of themselves; but of course this entails much more food and labour, which amounts to a considerable item in rearing say 50,000 fry to the age of 3 or 4 months.

"I am sorry to say that from keeping the fry for so many months here, I have been unable to leave them to visit the various rivers in the Colony, but I have heard of fish being seen from time to time in the Buffalo, and from the Keiskamma the reports of fish being seen are very good. I fear from what I have heard and seen of the rivers stocked with trout that they have many enemies to contend with in the form of otters, birds of different kinds etc. Could steps be taken to destroy these, I feel sure that much better results would be obtained from every river.

"The stock fish now in the ponds are all in healthy condition, but would be better if more food could be given them, but this I hear is out of the question as the funds on hand will not allow of more expenditure; and this is owing to heavy expense during the last season in transporting such large fry, as they require so much water during transit and the horse hire is proportionately greater."

The Large "Loch Leven" Trout at the Pirie Hatchery

The trout that Mr. Chaplin knocked on the head in October 1903 are of some historical interest, as they had served to draw much public attention to the possibilities of trout culture in the Eastern Cape at the beginning of the century, and in fact they were cherished by the Committee of the Frontier Acclimatisation Society as exhibits for this purpose. It is also unlikely that such large and unproductive trout have since been tolerated at the hatcheries, or have survived in the open waters. (The largest brown trout on record from a river was that killed by a native in the Umzimhlava River, near Franklin, East Griqualand, on November 21, 1913, which was 31½ inches long and weighed 15½ lb. See PISCATOR No. 4, p. 11.)

They came from ova imported on February 11, 1895, sent by Thos. Andrews of Guildford, Surrey (15,000 brown trout and 15,000 Loch Levens), and Ernest Latour, who was in charge at the Pirie Hatchery at that time, reported that a fair number of fry had been hatched. Subsequent losses, for which Latour came under severe criticism from his Committee, reduced the stock to only a few hundreds.



However, 180 of the fingerlings were sent in 1895 to Halse Bros., Carnarvon Farm, Halseton, in the Sterkstroom district, and placed in a farm reservoir. A sensation was caused in March 1898 when two of these trout were killed, a male of 9 lb. and a female of 7½ lb.; but even greater interest was aroused in February 1901 when another was

obtained from this reservoir which was 28½ inches long and weighed 14 lb. 2 oz., at an age of about five years. (PISCATOR No. 4, p. 11.)



Those remaining in the ponds at the Pirie Hatchery suffered further heavy mortality in February 1897 in hot weather, and Latour's successor, A. N. Stenning, encountered the wrath of the Committee this time, and he was accused of overfeeding them and producing excessive fatness. It is recorded, however, that the largest fish from the imported eggs of February 1895 were up to 18 inches long by that time, and the Committee were thrilled to hear Dr. Chute's report that when he opened the dead trout he found that they contained well-developed ova—as no "Colonial" ova had been obtained at the Pirie Hatchery before 1897.

Stenning took a few eggs from the surviving two-year-olds in July 1897, but again lost most of the fry. In the winter of 1898 he had about 18 large fish (the largest male of 5 lb. and the largest female 3¼ lb., both Loch Levens) and from these he took a number of eggs.

But by July 1901, Stenning was complaining that the eggs from the old Loch Levens had fertilized badly, but that the milt was still usable. Some fish from a later importation appear to have been added to his stock of big "exhibition" trout, as he asked the Committee to let him get rid of 30 large Loch Leven males, but they were evidently reluctant to give permission. Stenning reverted to the matter in June 1902, stating that the large Loch Levens were "injurious to the Society". Finally, Stenning in his letter to Chaplin in June 1903 mentioned that a large pond contained a surplus of old, useless male fish "which I have been trying to persuade your Committee to do away with for the last three years without success".



On March 26, 1904, Mr. F. G. Chaplin wrote the following to the *Cape Mercury*, King William's Town: "No doubt the sporting readers of your paper will like to hear the result of a few hour's fishing in the Buffalo. On Monday, March 14, I went down the river but was only able to fish for about two hours. I caught seven brown trout, the largest about 10 inches long, all of which I returned to the river, being undersized. The next evening I was also out, when I caught four. These happened to be all rainbow trout, one of them being a beautiful fish of about 1 lb. This I killed, as I wished to discover upon what it had been feeding. I found the chief food to be insects, flies and young crabs. I was very pleased to find the latter, as in time (provided there are enough fish in the river) they (the fish) will destroy great numbers of crabs; and as crabs feed largely upon trout eggs, the fish will destroy one of their greatest enemies. The trout all seemed to fight well when hooked, and gave good sport. The flies used were quill gnat and Cock-y-Bondu. I feel sure that there are numbers of trout in the river, and that the largest fish would be found below King William's Town and in the deep water."



The next record of a Committee meeting is for May 11, 1904, when it was reported that the Secretary for Agriculture had placed an additional £100 on the Estimates for the Society. Mr. Fuhr stated that the work of replacing the open fluming with a pipe encased in concrete was completed, and that there was no risk now of floods interrupting the water supply. He had made satisfactory arrangements for the completion of the Curator's house, and the Public Works Dept. would take over and finish the work.

They were unable to raise a quorum in June, but met again on July 13, 1904. The Secretary for Agriculture had asked the Society to give an opinion on the desirability of closing the rivers to trout fishing in February and March. This originated from a proposal by the Western Districts Game and Trout Protection Association in Cape Town and was based on the normal low state of the Eerste and other rivers at that time of the year; and R. J. Dick had lost no time in pointing out that conditions were very different in the summer-rainfall area of the Eastern Province.

At this July 1904 meeting the Committee resolved that 15,000 assorted trout ova be ordered from England and that the matter be left in the hands of the Curator. A discussion took place with reference to "the evil and nuisance of persons, when picnicking near the Hatchery, running all over the place", and it was resolved to insert a paragraph in the local paper forbidding the practice. Mr. Storr Lister had promised to assist in the matter as far as the Forest Department were concerned. Dr. McArthur moved that some action should be taken to restrain owners and occupiers from fishing for trout illegally; and he was asked to furnish some notes upon which legislation should be asked for, and the co-operation of the Western Districts Association could then be sought.

A Letter from Ernest Latour from New Zealand

After his departure, Ernest Latour had written several letters to South African papers, mainly derogatory and belittling the chances of our rivers of becoming trout waters. On July 14, 1904, he wrote again to the *Cape Mercury*, King William's Town, from Gisborne, New Zealand. He had been sent copies of that paper containing Chaplin's first report and letter of March 26, 1904, and the following are some extracts from his letter:—

"Allow me to make a few remarks, all in good faith and not with any feelings of animosity, for though I left the Pirie much against my wish I do not now regret doing so . . . I read that in August 1903, 100 yearlings and 110 two-year-olds were distributed in the Buffalo, and that on March 14, 1904, the present Curator went a-fishing and captured eleven of these recently liberated captives, for of course it was so (!) I also noticed that this gentleman discovered on the above occasion that trout devour young crabs. Surely it must be within the recollection of visitors to the Pirie that I used to feed the fry on the thousands of little crabs carried at a certain season of the year in the breasts of the old ones?

"It has always been my contention that the crab will prevent the natural increase of the trout in South Africa, and there is still not an atom of trustworthy evidence to show that naturally-hatched fry exist."

Latour went on in the same strain, and detailed some of the plantings of trout from imported eggs that he had made in the Buffalo, Kabusie and Keiskamma rivers in 1895-96: "The latter river appeared to me to be the least use of the lot and would make a good pike river, and probably this fish would grow to an enormous size in South Africa. The only chance of finding a large and ancient trout, one of the same generation as the large ones killed and eaten (ugh!) after years of liver feed, is in the deep water by Pautz's or better, the Convent, but I hardly think there can be any in the water save those turned in recently. It is a pity the old fish were killed for they only required different feeding to give good ova and milt. *Salmo levenensis* and *fario* are one and the same fish, particularly in South Africa where there is no dark-bottomed pond. My Newlands fish could not be distinguished ordinarily from fresh run sea trout." He then recommended that the Acclimatisation Society should turn their attention to other forms of sport—suggesting pheasants, red and fallow deer.

The Committee resolved at their meeting on August 17, 1904, that no reply from them should be made to Latour's letter. But Mr. Chaplin replied in the *Cape Mercury* on September 12, 1904:—

"I see that Mr. Latour queries several things connected with the result of trout acclimatisation in this country.

"He states that the fish I turned out in August 1903 (100 yearlings and 110 two-year-olds) were the same fish I caught in March this year." This is not so, as it happens that all the fish I turned down in August were rainbow trout and most of those I caught in March were common brown trout . . . Some of the fish I caught I succeeded in getting to the hatchery alive, as my stock of this breed is very small, and a few

weeks ago I took eggs from one of them which hatched out very well. Had I not caught the fish it would have deposited these eggs in the river, which is proof that trout breed in South African waters . . . I also had another proof last year of their breeding when I found a number of small trout in the brook which supplies the hatchery—about 1 inch long and just commencing to feed. In the Keiskamma Hoek district last year, a trout of about 17 inches long was picked up in shallow water, a hen full of ova; and again this year another fine fish was killed by accident in the Kabusie at Stutterheim, 18 inches long and full of eggs. This was without doubt one of the fry liberated some three or four years ago by the previous Curator (Mr. Stenning), and speaks very well for the rapid growth of trout in South Africa. Fish feeding naturally on young crabs is a very different thing to feeding them to young trout in hatchery troughs, as young trout can be made to feed upon many things which they would refuse in their natural state."



The Committee held their next meeting at the Pirie Hatchery on September 14, 1904: Mr. Fuhr in the chair, Dr. McArthur, Dr. Chute, Mr. Chaplin and the Hon. Secretary, Mr. Dick (who had forgotten to bring his minute book!) They discussed the results of the postal despatch of eyed ova, some of which were unsatisfactory from delays en route. It was decided to use special postal labels in future, size 9 inches by 9 inches.

Dr. McArthur brought up his recommendations for the better restriction of fishing in waters running through private lands: "I think that Salmon and Trout must be made Game Fish and in this way it will be possible to charge an Annual Licence for fishing. At present the permit system is faulty, inasmuch that the riparian owner is exempt, which apparently applies to his whole family, who fish indiscriminately, judging from personal knowledge and experience in my District; I am also aware that fishing by these persons with illegal bait takes place. The close season is not defined in Proclamation 273 of 1903, nor is any provision made regarding illegal possession of fish during such close season." (Proclamation 273 of 1903 permitted fishing for trout in certain rivers in a defined open season, and the Government Biologist pointed out in a letter of September 30, 1904, that this was merely a modification of Proclamation 142 of 1902 which made it a punishable offence to capture trout in any rivers of the Colony and would apply at other times of the year.)

Dr. McArthur related that a trout weighing 3 lb. had been killed by a native at a drift in the Wolf River—"thinking it was an eel". The Assistant Resident Magistrate at Keiskamma Hoek had decided that no law existed to allow the institution of a prosecution against the person who had received the trout from the native.

At the Committee meeting of October 4, 1904, Mr. Chaplin reported the very great difficulties he met with in distributing the fry to the various rivers—owing to the ignorance, carelessness and apathy of the public. (It is on record that on one occasion, after all arrangements had been made in detail with the consignees, Mr. Chaplin took two carboys containing 300 trout fry to Blaney to be put in charge of the guard of the train for Cathcart. On arrival at Cathcart, there was no one to meet them, and special arrangements had to be made to try to keep them alive through the night. The survivors were fetched next morning by an ox-waggon, not by horses as previously promised.)

It was resolved that Mr. Chaplin should frame a letter of directions and instructions of precautions needed and how fry should be cared for in transferring to rivers; and that in future applicants for fry be required to deposit in advance £1 per 1,000.

They also decided to write to the Commander of the Cape Police in the District asking that the powers given by the Proclamation protecting trout be enforced and that police at out-stations be instructed to make every endeavour to detect and prosecute in any case of illegal fishing for trout. Dr. McArthur was requested to endeavour to obtain a prosecution of the native who had destroyed a large trout in the Wolf River.



Dr. McArthur succeeded in the latter, and in November 1904, Ndawa Mbaxa was duly charged at Keiskamma Hoek and pleaded not guilty. Dr. McArthur and Mr. Chaplin watched the proceedings on behalf of the Society.

The sergeant of police showed that the prisoner's name did not appear as a licence holder. Stofel Ndwalaza, a native private in the Cape Police, stated that he served the summons on the prisoner and explained the charge to him. In reply the prisoner remarked that he killed the fish, it being taken by a native girl for a snake. A trader at Wolf River took the fish.

This trader (the man they could not prosecute as a receiver) was called into the witness-box and said that it was the first trout he knew of being taken from the Wolf River. The sergeant told the Court that an extract from the *Government Gazette* had been sent to all native headmen in the sub-district, and the meaning of the same was duly explained to a meeting of headmen.

The accused elected to make a statement, and said that he was called down to the river by the girl, who said there was a snake in the water. It was between some stones in a pool, not in the main stream, and he killed it with a stick. He left it by the river and went and told the trader, who sent his native servant for it. He did not know it was wrong to kill the fish.

The Magistrate said that the Government had put the trout into the river at considerable expense as far back as five years ago, and it was everyone's duty to protect those fish, and everyone should know by now that they were specially protected and not to be killed indiscriminately. Notice had been given to the headmen, and they no doubt had warned the people under them. This was the first prosecution so far as trout were concerned, and all in Court should take especial notice that such fish could not be taken from the water except by duly licensed persons, and then only at certain seasons. The natives should all know the difference between trout and other fish, and any person hearing of a trout having been caught, accidentally or otherwise, should immediately report the same to the police office, as there were not enough police stationed there to be constantly patrolling the rivers. The prisoner was found guilty and fined 10s. or 14 days.

On December 1, 1904, public notices were published in the press, that whereas the Curator of the Trout Hatcheries in the Demarcated Forest of Pirie had reported that the successful rearing of fry was being jeopardised by picnic parties polluting the stream leading to the Hatcheries and tampering with the water pipes and flume, persons so offending were liable to prosecution under the Forest Act. This was signed by J. Storr Lister, Conservator of Forests, King William's Town.



LIESBEEK NOTES

THE new trout season opened on September 1, 1955, with all the rivers in spate after the heavy August rains. But Mr. R. H. M. Edleston opened the ball on that day by taking a rainbow of 15½ inches long, weighing 2 lb. 1½ oz., C.F. 57, in the river at Newlands—a fine fish for our suburban stream and reviving memories of the wonderful catches of 1948 and 1949 when the Liesbeek was at its best.

A notable catch was made on August 31, 1955, by Mr. C. Ross-Munro. He fished below the bottom weir of the Liesbeek Lake, when the water was dark and dirty and flowing strongly, using a small Abu spinner—which is now permissible in this part of the river. He caught a smallmouth bass of approximately 1½ lb., a most surprising event, as there is no record of smallmouth bass being introduced to this river system. Its scales showed that it was 4+ years old.

THIRTY-INCH RAINBOW TROUT: Most members will have seen the press messages announcing the capture of a rainbow of 30 inches long, but weighing 8½ lb. (Condition Factor 31.5), in the reservoir stream, Maclear, on September 13, 1955. Details are awaited with much interest.