ONE HUNDRED YEARS OF TROUT IN NATAL

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The year 1990 marked the centenary of the first successful introduction of trout into Natal. However, of the many thousands of people who now enjoy the sport, very few ever give any thought to its background. This oversight is regrettable as trout fishing has the longest history and richest literature of any such pastime. Because the origins of flyfishing may be traced back to millenia before the Christian era, the history of trout in Natal is very short indeed but, because of its nature, it is as rich as any. This brief history covers some of the personalities and events involved – but only very superficially. Research has shown that there is a wealth of documented material and one is led to hope that at some future date a historian will step forward and collate it more fully. How then did it begin?

Home sickness is a most unpleasant affliction and it has caused people to do many things which they might otherwise not have done. Sometimes the results are tragic or fatal but not always so. For it was almost certainly homesickness, or something like it, that led to the introduction of trout to Natal and that action has resulted in a century of enjoyment, both sporting and culinary, to an untold number of people. There are no salmonid fishes native to the southern hemisphere and, indeed, only one native to Africa. Because of this regrettable oversight on the part of nature it was necessary for humans, wishing to recreate the fine sport fishing they knew in their northern lands of origin, to bring the fish to the colonies of the south.

John Clarke Parker.

The first attempts to bring trout to South Africa were with brown trout. That was natural as the fish were from England, and Natal and the Cape were colonies with strong ties to the mother country. Australia and New Zealand had similar bonds and the fish were translocated to those antipodean outposts in 1864. Arriving on 15 April those trout were the first to be successfully introduced to the southern hemisphere. Argentina, another southern land in which trout have thrived, received its first fish in 1903 and South Africa falls not only geographically, but chronologically as well, between the two. For it was in 1875 that a consignment of ova was shipped to this country by a Mr AR Campbell-Johnstone and was to be shared between the Cape and Natal. However the eggs did not survive the voyage, the venture failed, and nothing further was done for several years.

In Natal the next attempt was made by a John Clarke Parker. Born in Barnsley, England, on 10 March 1847, he was of a well-to-do, landed family but came to Natal as an immigrant in January 1881. At that time he was an engineer by profession and possessed, as was revealed in time, not only very practical capabilities, but boundless energy as well. However, perhaps remembering the open Yorkshire countryside of his youth, he became set on the idea of farming and, on 15 May1882, bought the farm Tetworth in partnership with his brother Edward. Situated in the Curry's Post district, it was and is considered to be one of the best in the area. At that time it was 3559 acres, 2 roods and 25 perches (1440.6 ha) in area and cost 4 093 pounds, twelve shillings and one penny! The original house was built by an earlier owner who never lived in it. Later on John Parker built another house which he called "Bronxholme" and which is now derelict. In 1915 he bought out his brother's share to become sole owner.

Just as he must have longed for the open fields, so he apparently missed the trout angling of which he had been fond as a boy. It seemed to him that the rivers of his new home were not dissimilar to those of the old country and that they should thus be able to hold trout.

To pursue this idea he wrote to the editor of the English magazine *Field* asking how the fish could be introduced to the colony.

The editor, somewhat nonplussed, passed the letter on to his friend Mr Frank Buckland who, in turn, passed it on to Sir James Maitland, owner of the Howietoun hatchery in Scotland. Sir James was taken with the idea and offered Parker 10 000 brown trout ova free of charge and they were duly dispatched. The Castle Steamship company shipped the precious consignment, again free of charge, on the "'Anglian" and it arrived in Durban on 27 February 1882. Met by friends of Parker's the eggs were, by prior arrangement, quickly cleared through customs and placed on the mail train to Pietermaritzburg. There they were stored overnight in an ice safe belonging to Mr E Stantial. The next day, in an "omnibus" owned by Mr William

Doig of the Crown Hotel, the ova were taken to the hatching facilities which had been set up on the farm Shafton in the Karkloof area. Regrettably only 18 alevins (10 in some reports) hatched out and they died soon afterwards.

At this point it might be as well to digress and describe the enormous difficulties faced in shipping trout ova around the world at that time.

Temperature is a key factor and, ideally, should be between7 deg C and 14 deg C for optimum development. When kept in gently running water within this temperature range, trout eggs will hatch in five or six weeks. During most of this time they are extremely fragile and it is only in the last few days before hatching that they become hardier and more tolerant of movement. Nowadays, with jet travel, we capitalise on this fact and only move the ova at that stage. In Parker's time the ova would either have had to go through most of their development on board a ship, which would have been unlikely to offer the needed water circulation system and which was almost certain to experience rough sea conditions – or else they would have had to be frozen. Either option was perilous and high mortality rates were inevitable. To further compound matters, trout spawn in winter and so their eggs were shipped to the heat of the southern summer. Transport on arrival was either by train or by horse-drawn vehicle and constant refrigeration was difficult. That much was known and efforts to overcome the problems could be made, but there was a further and hidden pitfall. A century ago the toxic properties of zinc to fish were not known and, because the metal is corrosion resistant, many of the containers used were either of zinc or were zinc-lined. The resulting poisoning must have killed many ova and young fish that otherwise might have survived.

Parker was disappointed by the failure of the whole operation, but Sir James Maitland urged him to persevere and, in 1883, he sent a second consignment of 10 000 ova. These underwent a similar journey but fared no better and were all dead before reaching their destination. Attempts to introduce trout were then abandoned for some years but the idea smouldered on. In 1889 the member of Natal Parliament for Pietermaritzburg County, Mr Cecil Yonge, proposed that a fresh start be made and obtained a vote of 500 pounds to do so. A committee consisting of himself, Colonel Henry Vaughn and John Parker was set up to attend to the matter and they wasted no time. The farm Boschfontein was selected for the hatching site. It belonged to Graham Mark Hutchinson and had a cool stream flowing out of a forest patch on a south facing slope. This would provide suitable water and, as the railway line was not far away, transport problems could be relatively easily overcome. Parker built a brick weir across the stream and from this led water to the hatching boxes. These were supported on brick pillars and these works, without the boxes which were later removed, remain to this day. A railway siding was constructed at Juli's Crossing and, in a note dated 13 January 1890 from the Governor to the Colonial Secretary, arrangements for daily deliveries of ice and for a system of signalling the train's arrival with flags were set out. On 8 March 1890 a batch of 30 000 ova arrived. They came from the Solway Fisheries Hatchery which had been selected as the reserve supply after the Howietoun source. The brother of the owner was resident in Pietermaritzburg and, through his experience, was able to supply a design for the hatching facilities. The ova hatched after two days and, two weeks later, there were some 2 000 fry alive and feeding. Thus Natal had the first successful hatching of trout in South Africa, although attempts in the Cape had come heart-breakingly close to success.

By May the young brown trout were considered ready for placement into rivers and so the first introductions were made. The Mooi River was stocked with 500 fish on 2 May. Unfortunately the fish were placed too far downstream, near Rosetta, and did not survive and breed. The Bushmans River was stocked with 498 fish on 7 May and the Umgeni River with 444 fish on 10 May. In these rivers the fish survived and, finding their new home to their liking, they bred and established viable populations. In addition 12 fish were placed in the Boschfontein stream and 50 went to the Botanic Gardens in Pietermaritzburg. Presumably the latter went into a pond for display purposes.

In 1891 some 70 000 ova were imported, 75 000 in two shipments in 1892 and 175 000 in 1893. Amongst these were some thousands of salmon and brook trout eggs. Some of these hatched but the species were not successful and simply disappeared. With current knowledge we can easily see why they did so, but the disappointment must have been great as people realised the effort was a failure. Parker's notebook records some of the anguish as the following extracts from 1892 reveal:

6 February: "Entire box of Fontinalis (brook trout) arrived dead."
27 February: "Fish (brown trout) ready to feed."
5 March: "Transferred 4 287 fry to the 20ft plank ponds."
9 March: "Salmon ova arrived."
16 March: "Fry (brown trout) looking very sick."
19 March: "Most salmon dead."

However, some 4 500 brown trout were reared from the various importations and a number of rivers were successfully stocked. These included the Tugela, Klip, Umvoti, Umlazi, Umkomaas, Umsinduzi, Loteni and Inzinga. Thereafter came a lull in trout stocking activities. The committee had spent 1 334 pounds, some of which came from private donations, but over 1 000 pounds had been provided by the Natal government. At that stage the latter may well have wondered if their money was not being wasted as there would have been little to be seen for their efforts. For the trout stocked in 1890 could not have spawned before 1892 and the numbers of fry produced would have been small. Futhermore it was known that there had been setbacks. The Loteni River had, for instance, been scoured by floods and the trout were presumed to have been washed away.

By 1899 it was apparent that the trout had in fact taken hold and the Minister of Agriculture, Mr D H Winter, requested Parker to continue his efforts. Apparently the desire to go fishing superseded the threat of impending war! It was decided to move operations to Parker's own farm, Tetworth, and with government funds a hatchery was established there. Some of the equipment was brought over from the Boschfontein site which then fell into disuse. The Cape government, which was by then breeding its own trout at its six-year-old Jonkershoek hatchery, offered 10 000 ova. From these, some 2 500 fry were raised and a notably successful stocking from the new hatchery was the upper Mooi River. In regard to the losses, Parker wrote that he "was still at school" in regard to learning about fish hatching and that "the lessons had to be learnt, often in an expensive manner, by making mistakes, which could not be put right for 12 months". In 1900, at the suggestion of the Minister of Agriculture, two cement ponds were constructed at Tetworth to hold brood stock. They measured 50ft x 4ft x 4ft and great hope was placed on them. However, of the 50 fish put into the first one, an otter killed 33. The author, who ran the Natal Parks Board's hatchery at Underberg for a number of years, had a similar loss and has no difficulty in imagining Parker's feelings!

Consignments of ova continued to come in from the Cape and, on 23 August 1901, the first rainbow trout ova were hatched in Natal. The Cape had been having success with these fish from the Pacific Ocean seaboard of North America and had been breeding them for some four years. Parker placed them in the Polela and the Jacksons, the stream on his own farm. There they did well but, in the Polela, they only lasted a few years before disappearing. He viewed these American fish with some misgivings and, in 1907, he wrote that "the rainbow is a fraud, a snare and delusion – but for all that, if you catch one on a light tackle, he has more fight in him than his relative the brown trout". What he was probably intimating at was the unsuspected anadromous character of some strains of rainbow trout. In these, the urge to run to the sea is strong and, while that was tolerable in rivers such as the Eerste in the Cape where the fish could make their way in and out of False Bay, the nature of the Natal rivers made survival of the migrants impossible. As the Natal fish came from the Cape it seems likely that a migratory strain was inadvertently used.

John Clarke Parker ceased hatchery work in 1907, as he was then 60 years old. However, he remained active in fishery affairs and, in December 1919, he was a member of a committee appointed by the Natal Trout Fishers' Association to investigate a site for a hatchery at Estcourt. His signature, which appears at the bottom of the report, is shaky due to the infirmity of old age. Six years later, on 29 April 1925, he died but he had been able to enjoy the fishing he had created to within a month of his death and was not without recognition as one of Natal's great pioneers. There are numerous articles on him and they record his very active role in agriculture, his string of race horses, and his ability as a golf and tennis player. In 1904 he had been presented with a gold watch and a silver dinner service by the Prime Minister of Natal, the Hon G M Sutton. He was buried in the grounds of St Mark's Church which, appropriately enough, is situated on a portion of the old Shafton farm.

After Parker's death his wife sold the farm to FJ Deane on 22 September 1925. The new owner continued to run the hatchery on behalf of the Lions River District Conservancy. However, a series of violent storms and floods made the rearing of fish there almost impossible.

Parker had known of this hazard and had also realised that his site was really at too low an altitude to be suitable for trout. However, the hatchery had served its purpose and had featured prominently in the introduction of trout to Natal.

By the time it fell into disuse virtually all the more suitable streams of the province had been stocked, the Umzinkulu and the Ngangwane being notable exceptions.

After Parker's death the province showed its continued interest in the sport angler and, in April 1926, it appointed Lionel A Day as the first Inland Fisheries Officer (part time). The choice was an obvious one as he had been involved with trout management for years and had served on the committees of the Natal Trout Fishers' Association and the Escourt Trout Acclimatisation Society. He was a schoolmaster and, despite an awkward manner, was clearly a practical man. Realising the risks and problems associated

with hatcheries, he wrote that it would be "more economical and certainly more satisfactory" to move fish from overstocked rivers to places where they were needed. Thus he concentrated on this form of management rather than on hatcheries and produced a specially designed fish holding and transporting container. The boxes had a removable perforated inner liner. This would be placed in running water and anglers would place live fish in it. At the end of the day it was placed in its box or tank and the stress to the fish due to handling was kept to a minimum. Although Day shied away from hatcheries, it should be noted that a number of small operations were in fact set up. These were mostly run by river conservancies of which there were six in 1929, by local authorities or by enthusiastic individual landowners. Their purpose was to provide fish for smaller streams or else to supplement stocks in rivers which had been subject to one form of natural disaster or another. It should also be noted that, in those early times, dams were relatively uncommon and still water trout angling was very much less important than it is now.

An event of major significance during Day's term of office was the introduction of the North American bass species in 1930. These came via the Jonkershoek hatchery just as the rainbow trout had done and were first released on the farms of Mr Catchpole at Nottingham Road and Mr G Symonds in the Karkloof area. From the progeny of these fish, and from further importations, these fish were soon spread far and wide. The purpose of bringing bass in was to provide sport fishing "in Natal waters at levels where it was impossible, through high temperatures, to establish trout". This aim was well achieved and today bass angling has an ardent and dedicated following. However, this has not been without cost to the trout angler. Within a few years it was realised that bass would compete with trout and so a policy of keeping the two separate was adopted. Unfortunately it was not adhered to and, through the years, some fine trout fishing was lost. Particularly hard hit has been the Underberg area where, during the 1980s, a number of individuals, through a mixture of ignorance and malice, spread bass widely.

Following Lionel Day as Inland Fisheries Officer in September 1936 was Cherrington Sutton. It was perhaps natural that he should show an interest in matters piscatorial as his father, Sir George Sutton, as Prime Minister of Natal, had done much to encourage Parker in his efforts. By the time he took office there was relatively little stocking to be done and he devoted is energies in another direction. This was to provide angling for the public. The Natal Fisheries Board had, in 1932, attempted to get the rivers of the province made available to the man in the street. This was to be done in two ways:

- declaring all perennial streams or rivers to be public rivers for the purpose of fishing;
- giving the Government the right to expropriate rivers or sections thereof that had been stocked from public monies.

This met with absolute rejection on the part of riparian owners and, doubtless being a powerful political bloc, they won the day. All subsequent attempts to gain right of access for the public have met with similar results. It might be of interest that the most recent such sally was made by the author's predecessor as a fishery officer shortly before he left the post. At my first farmers' meeting I had to "face the music" and would rather forget the evening!

Sutton, being a farmer himself, was undoubtedly sensitive to the situation and took a different approach. Speaking their own language, he persuaded farmers to lease their waters to the Provincial Administration which in turn would offer angling to the public for a fee. Although he focused on the Underberg and Himeville districts, his activities were widespread. To this day the system, in a slightly different guise, persists and many thousands of people owe Cherry Sutton their gratitude for finding the means to get them their angling. At the same time it must be noted that the landowners themselves have shown an unprecedented public spiritedness and it is to be hoped that the happy symbiosis will continue.

With Sutton's retirement from the post in 1946 an era came to an end. Parker had brought the trout in and Day had continued his work establishing the fish populations. Once that stage had been set Sutton opened the next act by making the fishing available. None of the three men were well rewarded financially and so each had to find other sources of income. It was their dedication that drove them and one can be certain that they were at times frustrated at not being able to give more time to their trout related activities.

Sutton was succeeded by Harold Towner Coston who was the first full time fisheries officer, and in the same year Lesley Acutt became the first full time fisheries inspector.

From 1947 on, the story of trout in Natal becomes inextricably entwined with that of the Natal Parks Board which was formed in that year. Originally called the Natal Parks Game and Fish Preservation Board, but usually referred to simply as the Parks Board or the NPB, the fledgling organisation took its fish related responsibilities very seriously indeed. So much so that procedures set up at that time spread elsewhere and some persist to this day. The first fishery posts were retained by Towner Coston and Acutt and

they helped to continue the healthy relationship between officialdom and its public. Amongst Acutt's duties was the allocation of daily fishing beats to anglers visiting the Underberg area. This he did from a small thatched rondavel in the grounds of the Underberg Hotel. This room later became the office of the Underberg/Himeville Trout Fishing Club when it was founded in 1954. The club took over the leases of the fishing rights for the benefit of its members and the public at large and so continued the good work started by Sutton.

One of the board's first actions in trout management was the construction of a hatchery. Several options were considered, but finally a site, some 8km from Underberg, on the farm Tretower was selected. Owned then by Michael McDougall it was offered to the province for a nominal annual payment of one pound. Although situated on the banks of the Umzimkulu River it drew its water from a side stream. Constructed by Acutt, there were initially only two small ponds and a crude hatching room. However, it expanded rapidly and, in wet years, for it was always plagued by a shortage of water in times of below average rainfall, it was capable of producing hundreds of thousands of trout fingerlings. Initially the trout were allocated free of charge to anyone who had a good dam but eventually a system of charges, based on the size of the fish, was introduced. The public continued to get preferential treatment however, in that clubs received fish at a discounted rate, a practice which continues to the present day.

The existence of a hatchery meant that the farm dams which were starting to proliferate all across the landscape could be stocked for angling. Trout will not breed in still water and, as their life span is normally only three to five years, sustained restocking is necessary to provide continued sport. Despite this, stillwater angling soon became popular as the dams produced big fish and were a reliable standby when the rivers were unfishable due to high or muddy water.

With time a corps of still-water specialists developed. Keen hunters of trophy fish, they developed techniques and flies of their own. The rewards have proved rich with fish of over five pounds being common and specimens of double figure proportions for the fortunate few.

On 1 February 1950 trout management in Natal entered a new phase. The NPB appointed Robert Saunderson "Bob" Crass as fisheries research officer and so the stage was set for a more scientific management of the fishery. As a boy, Bob grew up on the banks of the Little Mooi and, under the tutelage of his father who was himself a trout fisher of renown, it was perhaps natural that he should develop a deep knowledge and love of the river. His skill in "circumventing the wily trout" was recognised by many, including such luminaries as Neville Nuttall of whom more will be said later. Blessed with a naturally perceptive and enquiring mind he soon sought answers to the riddles of the stream and became a noted authority on riverine ecology with numerous publications to his credit. It should be noted that his expertise was not restricted to trout only. His book, *The Freshwater Fishes of Natal*, is still the definitive work on the subject and his writings in the field of entomology are respected to this day.

Crass was responsible for the planning and development of the Parks Board's second and third hatcheries at Royal Natal National Park and Kamberg Nature Reserve respectively. Another significant contribution was his role in the instigation of the board's Trout Fishing Liaison Committee in 1974. This committee meets twice a year and serves as an interface between the authorities and the angler. All the trout angling clubs (there is also a General Fresh Water Fishing Liaison Committee to cater for the warm water fraternity) and river conservancies, as well as the trout farming industry, are given representation and no moves in regard to legislative, management or policy changes are made without reference to the committee. The result has been a wonderfully open relationship and many of the problems which have plagued the other provinces have been amicably avoided. In this manner the board has won over many critics and has gained the support of thousands of anglers. A recent innovation at the committee meetings has been the attendance of a delegate from the Kwa Zulu Bureau of Natural Resources. That organisation has control over some of the finest trout waters of the region and the liaison committee has served, not only to reinforce links between the two official bodies, but also to give the trout angler a previously non-existent hearing within Kwa Zulu. As with the board, the relationship is useful to both parties.

Bob Crass rose to become Principal Scientific Officer and as such was involved to some extent in almost every theatre of the board's wildlife management activities. However, trout fishing remained his first love and, after his retirement in March 1983, he became manager of the Underberg/Himeville Trout Fishing Club whose waters he still regularly fishes. Using his time fruitfully he wrote the book *Trout in South Africa*. Broad in scope, and warmly written, it is a veritable mine of information and this author acknowledges, with gratitude, that he drew freely from it.

In 1973 Dr George Hughes rejoined the board and held the position of trout biologist. He had been a ranger in the 1960s but left to read for a degree and achieved his doctorate in the biology of marine

turtles in the South Western Indian Ocean. Of Scottish descent he was naturally drawn to the mountains and their sparkling streams but soon gave up his post as a fishery research officer to rise through the ranks to the post of chief director. Thus he follows the board's previous head executive, John Geddes Page, who had also been a fishery officer. Dr Hughes has retained his ties with the trout fishing community and is keenly sought after as a speaker at club and other functions. Unable to fish as often as he would like, he retains his skill and, amongst the group who have fished with him for many years, is still the man to beat in the friendly rivalry that prevails.

Following George Hughes as trout biologist in 1975 was this author. Fortunate to have taken up the reins at a time when there was a worldwide proliferation of knowledge and interest in trout, I have been able to study the ecology of Natal's trout streams from a base of modern ecological theory. One finding was that the streams are vitally dependent on their catchment for the organic matter which forms the base of the food chain. As elsewhere in the world, the condition of the streamside vegetation has enormous influence on the trout's prey organisms and hence on the fish population biomass. Initially belittled, these ideas are now well accepted and have led to a change in the board's fire management practices which are now designed to encourage the growth of woody vegetation along the river banks.

I have also been able, through scientific and popular literature, to study the relationship between trout and angler. It has become quite apparent that, climatic vagaries aside, the angler has full sway over his chosen prey. It can be easily demonstrated that unwise fishing practices lead to the decline of a fishery and hence the future of trout angling is literally in the angler's hands.

During the middle and late 1980s trout became the subject of heated debate. There were probably three components to this which were: (a) the feeling that trout are not indigenous to South Africa and thus do not deserve so much attention from organisations dedicated to the preservation of the indigenous fauna and flora; (b) the fact that other conservation bodies in South Africa had ceased to support the trout angler and were, in some cases, taking active measures to eradicate trout and other introduced species, and (c) the worsening economic climate, which meant that nature conservation's income was being reduced.

In Natal the net result of these, either individually or collectively; was that the Underberg and Royal Natal National Park hatcheries were shut down. However, the Parks Board still actively supports the trout angler and will continue to do so unless confronted with irrefutable evidence that the fish are causing permanent damage to their aquatic environment.

Trout angling has become extremely popular over the past few years. This is reflected, in the most mathematical sense, by the increase in sales of licences; six in 1926 to somewhere around 10 000 at present! However, numbers alone do not tell the story. Tackle sales might do it as the big sporting goods stores have trout sections that almost match the ever popular sea angling departments and there are speciality flyfishing-only shops that do brisk business. Resorts that offer good fishing are always fully booked in season. But these things are only indicators and, akin to the instruments in a biology laboratory, they tell little about the vibrancy of the life processes that they measure. As more and more people, experienced anglers or other, turn to trout fishing one must wonder why and what this means for the future. That these people don't fish for the food is certain. Catch-and-release angling is becoming the norm for many and food from the supermarket is much cheaper anyway if the costs of tackle, transport and accommodation are taken into account. No, there is more, and for most people it probably lies in the absolute escape from the pressures of modern life. Perhaps it is in the tackle, as the rods and lines of the flyfisher are almost living things. Supple and sensuous in their curves and movements, every cast is a little pleasure in its own right. And the flies, with their rich palette of furs, feathers and forms, are a reflection of the very life of the water.

Perhaps there is some magic alchemy of clean air, clean water and challenging fish that soothes us. When we return to the daily routine of our lives it is good to know that the water is still out there, rippled or calm, and that there are reflections on its surface, distorted sometimes by the rings of rising fish. Perhaps it can be summed up by the words of Christopher Camuto in a review of a book. He sees trout fishing as a balm for people who are "hemmed in a bit more by life than they would prefer and too often cut off from the places that feed their souls and free their more reckless selves".

In this brief journey through the history of trout and trout fishing in Natal it has been apparent to the author that the gentle pastime has attracted some outstanding personalities whose contributions, unlike most of the people mentioned so far, have been totally in their private capacity. They are numerous and it is not possible to mention them all. The thumbnail sketches that follow represent the author's choice of people who have made a public contribution and who are publicly known. Undoubtedly, other writers could make different choices and there are many backroom workers who quietly make enormous contributions. Thus no offence is meant to any persons, either living or dead, who have been left off the list.

❒ **Neville Nuttall**. A school teacher for most of his life, Neville Nuttall was able to convey his love for trout fishing to many a pupil, this author included. His subject was English and woe betide the boy who split infinitives or failed to learn by heart the allocated lines of Shakespeare! However, underlying the iron discipline of the classroom was a truly gentle man and this is apparent in his books. Ever generous, he would often take enthusiastic youngsters to the river and willingly show them his secrets as a master fisherman. In addition, and perhaps more importantly, he passed on a strong sense of right and wrong. Waterside manners and respect for the quarry were just as important as finding the lie of a good fish in a swift riffle. His fishing books, hard to come by now, are highly sought after.

❒ **Lionel M Walker**. Lionel Walker was a New Zealander by birth but came to this country to marry a woman he had met when she was in his country as an exchange teacher. Having become a trout angler at home it was natural that he should fish here, but he was also a keen magician and president of the Durban Magic Circle. He was a keen fly dresser and developed some seven patterns which bore his name. Perhaps he passed a little of his magic on to one of them for the Walker's Killer is to many people *the* South African fly and is known around the globe. Thus his place in Natal's trout fishing history was assured.

❒ **Helen B Hilliard**. It could be argued that this remarkable woman was really only known in the Underberg area. Nonetheless I have included her in my pantheon of significant personalities as she produced a little book on trout angling and it contained a section on casting instruction. Thus a measure of public mindedness is indicated and so her inclusion is justified. Born in England at about the time that John Parker was doing his early pioneering work, she was a member of a fishing family. Her first memories were of fishing for minnows in the Lakes District and it seems that, despite missing the sport in some years, she loved it all of her life. Married by 1908, she and her husband took annual holidays in Europe and were in France at the time of the German invasion in 1940. The only escape was through Portugal to Lourenco Marques and on to South Africa. Too old for war work, the couple found their way to Underberg and settled there and soon she established herself as a skilled and respected angler. Particularly good at fishing at times of high water, she took many good fish from close to the banks. However, she was unable to swim and her friends insisted that she be accompanied by a ghillie at all times. The precaution was a wise one as she had to be pulled out of the river on more than one occasion! The book makes interesting reading about times gone by but it is the explicit descriptions of fishing techniques that make it outstanding.

The following profiles are of persons still living. Thus, although one cannot view them from a historical perspective, I consider that their contributions to the trout angling community at large merits their mention here.

❒ **Jack Blackman**. Jack is widely known as a trout angling instructor and has been the mainstay of the Parks Board's fishing clinics since the time of their inception. These involve a weekend of demonstrations and instruction on all aspects of trout fishing ranging from casting to fly tying to talks on trout fishing in exotic places. Jack has participated in the full spectrum of these and is known for his endless patience in helping a tyro overcome the seemingly impossible mechanism of casting or the intricacies of winding hackle onto a dry fly. He has written a small book which focuses primarily on flies and fly tying and countless articles for magazines and journals. Yet another aspect of his contributions has been through fishing clubs of which he has served several as a committee member.

❒ **Tom Sutcliffe.** A doctor by profession, Tom is a man of boundless energy and a natural leader. He has often stated the philosophy that one must repay to life the benefits and pleasures gained and, in terms of trout fishing, this he has done and with considerable interest added on. Always in demand at club or other functions, he is both a skilled speaker and noted wit. He has produced two books which, like Neville Nuttall's *Life in the Country,* are anthologies of short stories and articles which first appeared elsewhere. They are illustrated with the author's own sketches and photographs and make for lively reading. As with Jack Blackman, Tom has been a regular contributor to fishing clinics but, perhaps his most significant contribution has been in his efforts to foster the sport at large. At a time when there is considerable opposition to trout on the part of the authorities (in the Cape Province all legal protection of trout has been removed), Tom has taken up the angler's cause. As a key member of the Federation of Southern African Flyfishers (FOSAF), he has gone to a wide number of influential people and even to the highest halls of government in order to gain support. As a result the future of trout fishing, and not just in Natal, but throughout the country, is considerably more secure.

What then for the future of trout angling in Natal? There is no doubt that the board will continue its open relationship with the angler and that, what ever may happen, it will have been worked out by all the parties concerned. However, this author feels that the machinations of authority are not of the greatest cause for concern. This short history has shown that trout angling in Natal needed two things. First the fish and,

second, the angler. But the angler was non-existent until access to the fish became possible.

These things are irrefutable and are thus the key to the future.

Taking the fish first, it is becoming apparent that trout in Natal or, more specifically, in Natal's rivers, are a threatened resource. While the rivers in the conservation areas probably have as secure a future as is possible, the best fishing lies in waters that are privately owned or else which lie in KwaZulu. Thus the dual threats of water abstraction and/or environmental degradation come into effect. Without going into the processes involved, it is sufficient to say that rivers with reduced flow or those that have been silted up are going to have reduced trout stocks. The combination of the two factors is certainly greater than the sum of the parts. That the two factors are going to become more severe is indisputable and the threat of global warming should also be taken into account.

At the same time, there are likely to be more and more anglers. They will become increasingly well-equipped and will be better informed and more skillful. Thus there will be more pressure on the fish themselves and this will have to be checked in some way if the fisheries are to survive. A part of the pressure may be directed to dams but most anglers prefer rivers. Put-and-take management has been suggested as an answer but, to provide good fishing, it is extremely expensive and has only worked in special cases such as the chalk streams of England. Elsewhere it has not been really successful and has seldom resulted in anything other than mediocre fishing. In this country, where the changing political arena implies less money for luxuries (either real or perceived), the prospects for put-and-take trout management in rivers are minimal. This implies that anglers are going to have to make better use of their fish and so reduced limits or total catch-and-release strategies must become the order of the day. Thus the trout anglers of the future are going to have to become more self-disciplined for the survival of whatever fish stocks the environment may allow will certainly be in their hands.

The second component in our examination of the future of trout fishing in Natal is the angler's access to fish. From the time of Cherrington Sutton onwards the trout angler has owed an enormous debt to the public spiritedness of the farmer. Initially through the province and later through the clubs, the farmers have selflessly allowed an endless procession of "townies" to move across their land and to fish their rivers. Quite apart from the loss of privacy there has always been the very real risk of open gates, litter, disturbed livestock and, worst of all, accidental fires. In retrospect, there have been remarkably few mishaps, but the fact remains that the farmers are the heroes of the piece. I know of no other place in the country, or even in the world, where such a comparable relationship exists.

However, there is a threat to this happy situation. Farming is a difficult business and, with costs soaring, the farmer must look to all possible means of increasing his income. Thus the prospect of leasing trout water to big businesses or to a private syndicates, rather than to a club, becomes attractive.The subsequent income is in thousands rather than in hundreds and the number of people (and hence risks) is reduced. The clubs could counter part of this by raising their subscriptions but it will still be the farmer who has the final say. Thus, in summary, it seems to this author at least that the future trout angler in Natal will face a scenario of fewer streams, higher costs and, perforce, greater restrictions. He (and she) will however have better equipment and will have a deeper knowledge of the fish and hence more skill. There will be a need for fresh champions to come forward and, through their efforts, the essential ingredients of fish and angler will continue to come together. I for one would be deeply saddened if this were not to be the case.

■ ***Editor's note:*** *This report was written by Jake Alletson, then with the Natal Parks Board, for the Federation of Southern African Flyfishers and is carried with permission.*

'To those who have no soul for scenery, and to whom there never comes that intense longing to be steeped in the thousand odours, colours, and delicious sensations of spendthrift summer, which has always seemed to me inseparable from the pastime of the angler, dry fly fishing cannot be sincerely recommended.'

George Dewar, "The Book of the Dry Fly"