

ADVENTUROUS TROUT-FISHING TRIP UP JAN DUTOITS KLOOF

By JOHNY BOTHA

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SUMMER holidays meant one thing to Craig Hunter and myself—plenty of trout fishing. We arranged that five people should go on a trip up Jan Dutoits Kloof; two nonfishermen and three anglers, Craig, Denis Footman and I. We were to stay five days in the kloof at the Overhang Camp, although the other two fishermen, Craig and Denis, actually stayed for one day less.

We were to go in two different parties, Craig, Denis and Andrew from Somerset West, and Simon and I from Cape Town. The two of us from Cape Town left at 6.15 a.m. and proceeded under murky conditions to Goudini. Fortunately, as usual, the clouds cleared over Du Toits Kloof Pass. We arrived at "Somaarso" farm at 8 a.m., and after obtaining permission from Mr. Slabber we pushed on up the kloof.

I believe that the hardest part of the hike is the walk from the car park to the entrance of the kloof. Simon and I collapsed, thoroughly exhausted, with five days of tinned food on our backs! While sitting well below *Palmiet Pool* we saw numerous trout fingerlings. Overhang Camp was reached at 11.50 a.m. and we were welcomed by only a dive-bombing swallow whose nest was in the Overhang.

The rest of that day was spent, not fishing, but anxiously waiting for the other party to arrive. They did, to our relief, at 12.50 p.m. the next day!

In the early hours of the next morning I descended a cliff at the tail of *Overhang Pool* and began fishing it; standing on the side opposite the camp and casting across the pool into a little bay with a dry Muddler Minnow fly. On my second cast I received a smashing take with the trout jumping high as he took the fly. I have found the trout in this kloof extremely fast and this one was no exception. Simon, having heard my shout, thought I had fallen down the cliff and hurried to the top, only to see the fish being landed. It was 14½ in., 1 lb. 12 oz., C.F. 59, very short and deep bellied.

We fished up the river in the morning as far as *Stapelia Pool* without landing anything, although I pricked a few. Much to our relief Craig joined us at *Monolith Pool*. He told us that the others were at the camp and that they had slept the night near *Buttress Pool*, due to arriving late the day before. They had seen fish but had not got any to take. We returned to the camp and spent the rest of the day there. At 5.30 p.m. I caught a rainbow of 10 in. in *Bit Pool*. It was hooked below the boulder on which I was sitting and took quite a time to land.

At supper around the fire that night we enjoyed the two trout and planned our fishing for the next day. We were to fish right up to the *Ladder* and down again. Simon and Andrew were to remain in camp. We saw numerous fireflies that night and received rather a fright to see numerous "eyes" peering at us from the dark.

(See *Frontispiece of this issue. Map of Jan Dutoits River, by John Beams.*)

A Snakey Business

Early next morning, while the others slept, I "spidered" my way down the cliff to fish *Overhang Pool* again. (See photo of *Overhang Pool* in previous article.)

If you stand on the bank opposite to the camp, about a quarter of the way up the pool and up to your waist in water, you may cover the whole pool with your casts. Here I had a horrible experience. I had just covered a rise when I heard a loud "Schlupp-Schlurpp" behind me. Turning to investigate I got the fright of my life. A large black water snake with an enormous frog in its mouth was making straight for me! I am quite sure I saw some malicious intent in its eyes. Acting quickly, I slammed at it with my rod, whereupon it ejected the frog and circled me—head back and moving from side to side, left right, left right. Suddenly he struck at me and I struck back, grabbing his neck from behind. He was annoyed with me of course, but I had known that he was non-poisonous. Needless to say, a rather startled Denis awoke to find himself sharing his sleeping-bag with a 2½ ft. water snake.

Up the Kloof for the large Rainbows

After a quick breakfast the five of us proceeded along the upper path to *Monolith Pool*, and from there we fished up. At *Stapelia Pool* a giant trout followed my fly but would not take it. Craig also got numerous follows from it. Denis lost a fish in *Royal Pool*, and we went on up the kloof, seeing many fleeting glimpses of trout in potholes.

At *Rio Pool* we saw a 12 in. trout lying under a submerged boulder. Watching the fish from behind a rock, someone dropped a fly down in front of the boulder, but to no avail. While Craig and Denis continued to try for this fish I went to the head of the pool and cast down with a wet Jock Scott. Craig, who was now standing on the edge of the pool halfway up, saw the take. The rainbow socked the fly and a thrilling fight ensued. The rod vibrated and the trout ran and jumped many times. Finally it was drawn over the "landing net"—Denis' felt hat. It was scooped out with difficulty, 15 in., 2 lb., C.F. 60, beautifully coloured and shaped.

From *Rio Pool* upwards we lost fish in almost every pool. The water was extremely clear and fish easy to see. Some time after *Rio* we reached *Archie's Dilemma Pool*. Fishing the lower half we got nothing; then as Craig couldn't cast around a boulder under the waterfall, as his rod was too short, he asked me to try as mine should do it. This carried the condition that if anything was hooked he should play it! On the first cast there was an incredible take, and after a few seconds I passed the rod to Craig. We shouted stringent language across to Denis to bring his "felt" landing net. The rod was easily bent double as the fish fought deeply all over the big pool with fantastic speed. Quite some time later I landed the flapping slab of muscle. It was a beautiful silvery fish with shape to match. A Jan Dutoits three-pounder at last: 17½ in., 3 lb., C.F. 56—by combined effort!

Denis lost a trout of about the same size later, while trying to land it. I got one of 14 in., 1 lb. 8 oz., also C.F. 56, in the *Blowhole Pool*. To get above *Chute Pool* you have to swim it, and this is where disaster struck. In my rush to reach the other side of the pool in freezing conditions, one of my boots fell off. The pool is of unknown depth and no persuasion and bribes could induce Craig or Denis to retrieve it! So I had to ??????????. We found no trace of trout up to the *Ladder* and returned to camp. Craig got a rainbow on the way down, which, when hooked, jumped onto the rock beside him. It was 10 in. long and he returned it to its natural element.

At camp we all celebrated our good fortune with coffee laced with—powdered milk. We also enjoyed some most refreshing swims in a nearby pool of the *Brandwagpiek* tributary stream. That night we had a large meal of trout, three of them completely packing a large braai-grid. These were the best trout any of us had eaten. We drank hot coffee and fed ourselves well. One thing is for sure, nobody goes hungry in our camp after our experience on a recent trip up Jan Dutoits when we went too light and were half-starved.

My Biggest Ever

After a good night's sleep we had an early breakfast, and bade Craig, Denis and Andrew farewell, as they had to leave that day for their lift at 1.30 p.m. at Somaarso farm. Simon and I had already planned to go upstream again that day. This was a grand day because I got eight rainbows as well as my largest ever!

The largest came from one of the *Stepped Pools*. We could see this fish quite clearly under a ledge at the tail of the pool, and to me it looked to be easily 5 lb. I spent an hour floating flies past him, most of which he "nosed" and ignored. We had lunch and as we were eating sardines I threw one in for him as well, but he didn't even look at it—obviously he was not hungry. Then as a last resort I jerked a wet streamer fly past him. It was taken and the rod registered a jar—the fight was on. These pools are pretty small, and 15 minutes later a much shaken angler landed a very annoyed trout. It was a male with a tiny head, silvery sides and shaped like a galjoen—17 in. long, 3 lb. 2 oz., C.F. 64.

The day continued on this high note. Another seven trout, all around 1 lb., were caught and released. One rainbow of 14 in., 1½ lb., was taken by hand when found paddling in a puddle about 1½ ft. square at the side of the stream. I lost very many trout due to the lack of a landing net, and some were large. At camp that night we missed the entertainment of the others, but were content with an excellent supper and night's sleep.

A Near Miss

The following morning of the fifth day we packed everything and spent half an hour cleaning the camp and collecting rubbish to be burnt. We started down at 7.30 a.m. and by 9.00 a.m. we had reached the *First Barrier Pool*. This is where we had our first accident. I was edging along a ledge when my foot slipped and my pack pulled me over backwards. I bounced once and completed two somersaults to fall 30 feet down into the pool! I lay there in a semi-conscious state and began to sink, but Simon hauled me out. I was thoroughly soaked and shaken, and even more so to find my boot missing again! Simon found it 30 minutes later. We spent some time there to allow me to recover and dry in the hot sun which we had had each day.

While sitting in the sun I practised my casting in the pool into which I had just fallen and disturbed. On about the 200th cast I had a terrific take and played and landed a rainbow of 2¼ lb. on a 7 ft. fly rod. This fish took a Coch-y-Bondhu nymph. (Our 16-year-old junior angler was unbeatable!—Ed.) By 5.00 p.m. we were back at the parking place where the car had just arrived. After coffee and biscuits we left the much-enjoyed kloof.

WARNING. If a trip up this kloof is intended, make sure you are quite fit as there is a lot of rough walking. If you have a knack for getting into accidents, stay away, or you will have your final one! Jan Dutoits Kloof must be treated with respect!