

THE EXPLORATION GROUP OF THE CAPE PISCATORIAL SOCIETY

The successful formation of an Exploration Group, on the lines suggested in PISCATOR No. 36, for May, 1956, is detailed by Alan Yates in this report to the General Committee.

I am very glad to be able to record that the 1956 Annual General Meeting was followed by a most encouraging response to the idea of an Exploration Group. Nearly twenty members indicated their interest in the project and I really do hope that in this small "founder membership" the Cape Piscatorial Society has a nucleus of enthusiasts who will do a great deal in the next few seasons to open up considerably more "new" trout water in the Western Cape.

Interest in certain specific projects was expressed at the very outset by several Exploration Group members, and some preliminary work has already been done. It is hoped that this will result in at least two or three river reports being made available to the Society this season.

As a body, the Exploration Group has held two evening meetings, both of which were well attended.

The first, on September 18, began with a showing of Mr. Colin Kisch's film of the exploration of the Witels. This was followed by a general survey of the main trout fishing areas of the Western Cape, with particular reference to waters which would appear to merit detailed investigation.

At this meeting it was decided that steps should be taken to build up a library of maps and air survey photographs, to be held in the Club Room for the benefit of all members. Mr. W. F. Buchanan and Dr. A. M. Whitaker volunteered to assist in this matter and initial orders have since been placed with the Trigonometrical Survey Department. At the same time Mr. C. Kisch volunteered to make a number of stereoscope viewers for use with the air survey photographs. These have since been completed and will be available in the Club Room and on loan as soon as the other material comes to hand.

A second meeting was held on October 11. This began with a demonstration of certain items of general camp and other equipment required for field work. A short talk on camp provisioning and cooking was given by Mr. W. G. McNaught, and this was followed by a talk on reporting technique. A summary of this latter paper is given below.

Summaries of these two meetings have been issued to members of the Exploration Group in the form of newsletters, and the assistance of Mr. Buchanan in arranging for the duplicating of these is warmly appreciated. The courtesy of the Proprietors of the Alexandra Hotel, Cape Town, and Cogill's Hotel, Wynberg, in providing accommodation for the meetings is also acknowledged with gratitude.

At the time of writing, the "roster" of the Exploration Group includes the following members: Messrs. R. O. Bell, W. F. Buchanan, A. B. Hazell, A. D. Helps, P. J. Keeble, C. Kisch, G. K. Lestrangle, D. S. M. MacDonald, W. G. McNaught, E. L. Morom, R. A. Murdock, R. F. Pennington, G. K. Powis, J. van Schalkwyk, A. M. Whitaker and A. Yates.

With the 1956/57 angling season well started, it is not envisaged that the Exploration Group will meet again as a body until mid-December or January, when it is hoped to discuss general progress made in actual field work.

Preparation of Exploration Reports

The following is a summary of a talk given to the Exploration Group on October 11, and issued to members of the Group in Newsletter No. 3:—

The recording of rivers, and sections of rivers, is, perhaps, the prime object of the Exploration Group. This is based on the viewpoint that no river has been fully explored until a report on it has been published. The fact that any given water may be well known to a few individual anglers is of little or no practical value to the rest of the members of the Society.

The basis of good reporting is clear thinking and a realistic approach to the requirements of the individual case. At a fairly early stage it is quite possible to draft a list of questions to be answered—but it must be remembered that the focus of attention differs from river to river. Some rivers demand very strong emphasis on “how to get there”. Others, well served by roads or tracks, may require little or no attention being paid to this point beyond a general description of the geographical locality and a note or two on the road to be followed.

There are, of course, certain principles which are applicable to nearly all reports and up to a point these can be specified. But the special circumstances—the unique feature—will nearly always be there and it is this which gives any report its real flavour of character and individuality. This—the speciality of the river—can only be sought on the spot.

What are the basic essentials of a good report:—

No. 1 The answer to the question WHERE?

Into this answer will, naturally, come geographical location, illustrated by map or diagram where necessary. But “Where”? in a good report goes much further than this. There are the special circumstances of location, the landowner over whose ground it is requisite to pass, the friendly farmer who will garage a car or lend a donkey, and so on. Then, too, are any special permits required? And, if so, from where are they to be obtained? And what do they cost? In short, the “Where?” section of the report should include all the information necessary to put one on the river bank, fit and ready to fish or march.

No. 2. The answer to the question WHAT?

This aspect of the report must obviously be built around a description of the river itself. Having got there, **WHAT DO YOU FIND?** It will be partly compounded of a map (or maps); partly descriptive; and partly photographic. Each are self-explanatory, but a word or two as to procedure may be helpful.

(a) The Map.

This is the real foundation of any report. Start off with as good raw material as you can! If possible work from the 1:18,000 Trigonometrical Survey sheets. Reduce these to basic outline for annotation in the field. If you can begin with a certain amount of preliminary annotation (as the result of reconnaissance expeditions and/or study of air survey photographs), so much the better. But while good foundations help, they are not absolutely vital.

(b) The Description.

In the field make no attempt to write the final report. Make the rough notes you will require when it comes to preparing the final report later on. Where a sketch or rough plan will help as an aid to memory later on, make one! Keep a keen eye open for interesting special features: the fishing qualities of individual stretches, the pattern of evolution in kloof and pool formation, and so on!

All this takes only five minutes or so every now and then. It gives you a rest in the shade of some handy tree or bush; and as you look at a pool or run or valley with the careful—almost critical—eye necessary to jot down the essential details, you find yourself beginning really to understand the river. A notebook and pencil can, very speedily, begin to add enormously to one's own angling pleasure, and to one's knowledge, skill and experience . . .

In the "Description" section of the report note camp sites, natural shelters from rain, interesting side streams, etc.

(c) *The Photographs.*

A really good camera is doubtless of true value in connection with this aspect of the report, but I can assure you that it is not vital. Excellent photographs can be taken with equipment costing only a pound or two.

Take plenty of pictures and keep a note of what you have taken. Where circumstances permit, include somebody or something which will provide a standard for height or size comparison (the landscape equivalent of the tape measure — or matchbox — when photographing a fish!) The Cape Piscatorial Society has undertaken to underwrite or subsidise photographic expenses where these result in material for publication.

No. 4. *The answer to the question HOW?*

We have dealt with WHERE (is the river)? We have dealt with WHAT (do we find when we get there)? Now we come to HOW (is it fished)?

It is in this section that we deal with the really individual aspects of the river — those specialities which give it its true character. It is here that we consider the relative merits of individual sections and evaluate these with practical considerations of camp sites, access roads, etc.

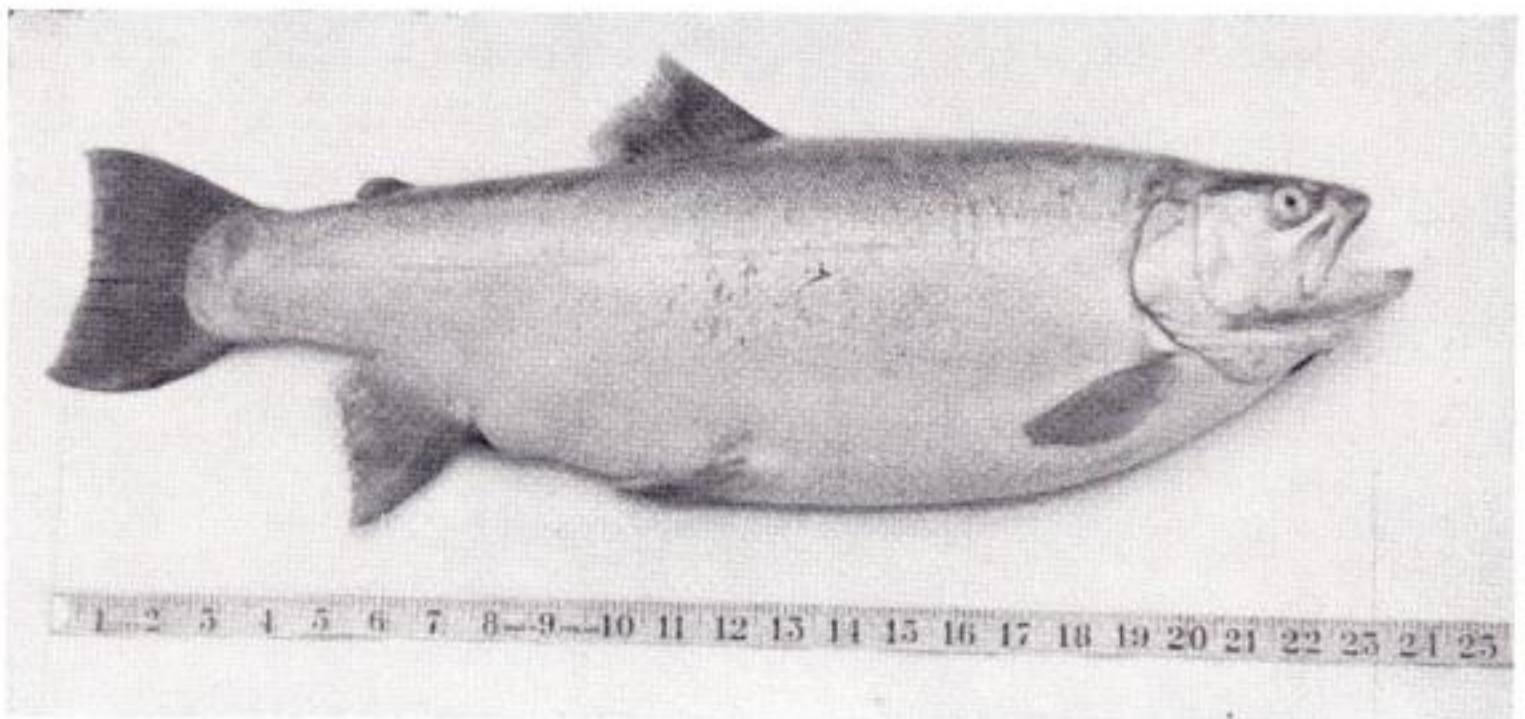
Here, too, can come suggestions for stocking, for path making, for bush clearing, and other general improvements. In this section we deal with naming of pools, with fish and river "health", and so on.

No. 3. *The preparation of the REPORT.*

It is suggested that one member of any exploration party should act as the "official" reporter or notetaker. But the job is really a communal one. It will be found by most parties that a great deal emerges from leisurely discussion round the camp fire in the evening . . .

With regard to the "naming" of pools, it is suggested that the truly traditional name should be sought out and perpetuated (unless really good cause can be shown to the contrary). Where we are dealing with virgin water, it is up to us to name.

Finally, if any help in drafting a report, or giving it a final polish, is required, the writer will be very glad to assist to any extent desired.



(Photo: per L. H. Cooper)

Rainbow Trout of 23½ inches long, weighing 7 lb., Condition Factor 55, caught in the Umzimvubu River, Matatiele district, by Mr. Tom Jelliman, on May 31, 1956.
(Report in *Piscator* No. 36.)