

**An Exploration Group
Report**

**THE
TWENTY-FOUR
RIVERS SYSTEM**

By ALAN YATES

Photographs: R. J. Bell

The general nature of the country above the main gorge. Looking down on the upper Kleinkliphuisrivier.

I MUST make it clear at the outset that this is only a preliminary report. Investigations into the fascinating tract of country which lies to the east of Porterville have only just begun so far as the Exploration Group is concerned, but we have seen enough to be quite sure that this general area merits a great deal more work. We have, however, already found a long stretch of really attractive water which we have every reason to believe is unstocked with trout on account of a barrier waterfall lower down the stream.

Travelling from Wellington to Porterville via Gouda, one skirts the western escarpments of the main mountain areas of the Western Cape. The Klein-Bergrivier, emerging from the Tulbagh valley is crossed, and then the road passes across the maze of delta streams of the aptly (at this point) named Twenty-four Rivers. Emerging from a kloof which lies under the shadows of the Little and Great Winterhoek Peaks, this river spreads out in a tangled mass of channels and streamlets.

Moving north towards Porterville, the escarpment which rises steeply and suddenly from the plain hides from view the fascinating plateaus and valleys which lie behind and which form one of the main catchment areas for the Twenty-four system and—further still to the east—the Olifants River. The latter, of course, flows northwards in this area, while the section of the Twenty-four with which we were concerned flows to the south.

The Twenty-four Rivers proper is the conjunction of two catchment area streams, the Klein- and Groot-Kliphuisriviere, and whoever was responsible for the original naming of these was no fisherman. It is the Kleinkliphuisrivier which is the important one, and, indeed, the summer flow of the Grootkliphuisrivier is non-existent for practical purposes. Access to this area is gained by means of a pass which begins a few miles to the north of Porterville and while the pass itself is in good condition, the farm roads and tracks to which it gives access involve some rather rough motoring.

For some distance after the junction of the two catchment area streams, the Twenty-four Rivers flow through farmland until it reaches the curve of mountainous

One of the pools of the Klein-kliphuisrivier above the gorge. Only a short section of this stream was surveyed at Easter 1958, but the flow was good and the K.K.H. should provide several miles of fishing when it has been stocked with trout.



country successively marked by the Great Winterhoek Peak, the Little Winterhoek Peak and the Solderberg. This forces the stream to the west (and thus towards the lower plain). This has resulted in the formation of a gorge, and a preliminary examination of this was one of the two objectives of our survey last season. It is in the upper part of this kloof that there lies Die Hel—the enormous pool and fish barrier waterfall which accounts for the piscatorial sterility of the upper waters.

This point was not reached during our Easter, 1958, expedition, but it had previously been visited by two members of the party: Mr. Herman Ackerman and Mr. Gus Marais. Thanks to the energetic preliminary work of these two members we were saved the labour of finding out that Die Hel existed and were, in consequence, able to move straight into a piece of “second phase” survey work—the examination of a part of the upper waters with a stocking programme in mind.

There is one further point of explanation which I should give. Where the Twenty-four Rivers divides into the Klein- and Grootkliphuisriviere it is seen that the former comes in from the east. This means that a second gorge has been formed in this most interesting system and the resultant kloof is one of the most severe yet discovered. The lower half has been traversed by Messrs. Ackerman and Marais, and the upper half was traversed during the Easter expedition by these two members accompanied by Mr. Ron. Bell and the author. Taking the Elandspad kloof as a standard of comparison, I would put the difficulties of the upper half of this gorge as slightly less severe than that section of the Elandspad which lies immediately above the Staircase Swim; but from what my friend Herman Ackerman tells me (and he is an angler and mountaineer of very wide experience) it is virtually certain that the lower half of the Klein-kliphuisrivier is considerably more difficult. Having regard to the fact that all the water we surveyed in this upper kloof was admirable from an angling point of view, with a good flow at Easter, it will readily be seen that this section of the system is extraordinarily attractive.

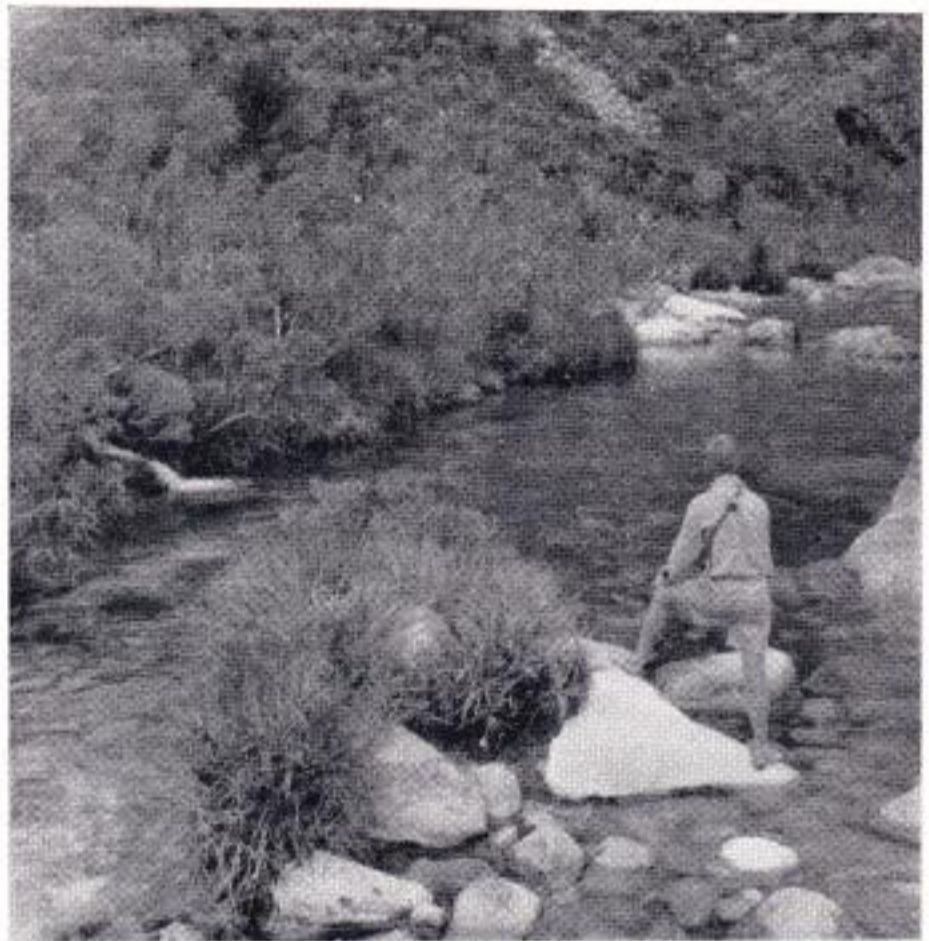


A good pool in the K.K.H. gorge. This point gave the party an awkward bit of "kloofing", along the smooth and sloping overhang on the left bank.

Looking down on the largest pool discovered in the K.K.H. kloof. There are routes around it on both banks, and yet another way through was that chosen by Gas Marais (in foreground) who stripped and dived in. The depth was estimated at about 20 feet.



The main river in the lower part of the Twenty-four Rivers kloof. Being below the barrier at Die Hel, this section of the river is well stocked with trout. The pool shown here was about three-quarters of a mile above the Exploration Group's Easter camp site.



I am not including a map with this preliminary report since we have so far gathered detailed information in respect of only small sections of the system. A.C.H. agrees with me that the map which we hope eventually to produce will involve a substantial and expensive printing operation and funds are better conserved until the whole job is completed. Interested readers may, however, consult the 1:250,000 sheet 3319 Worcester which is available in the Society's Club Room, as well as the Reconnaissance Series prints obtained from the Trigonometrical Survey Department, also available in the Club Room. Unfortunately, Trig. Survey maps in the 1:18,000 series are not yet available for this area.

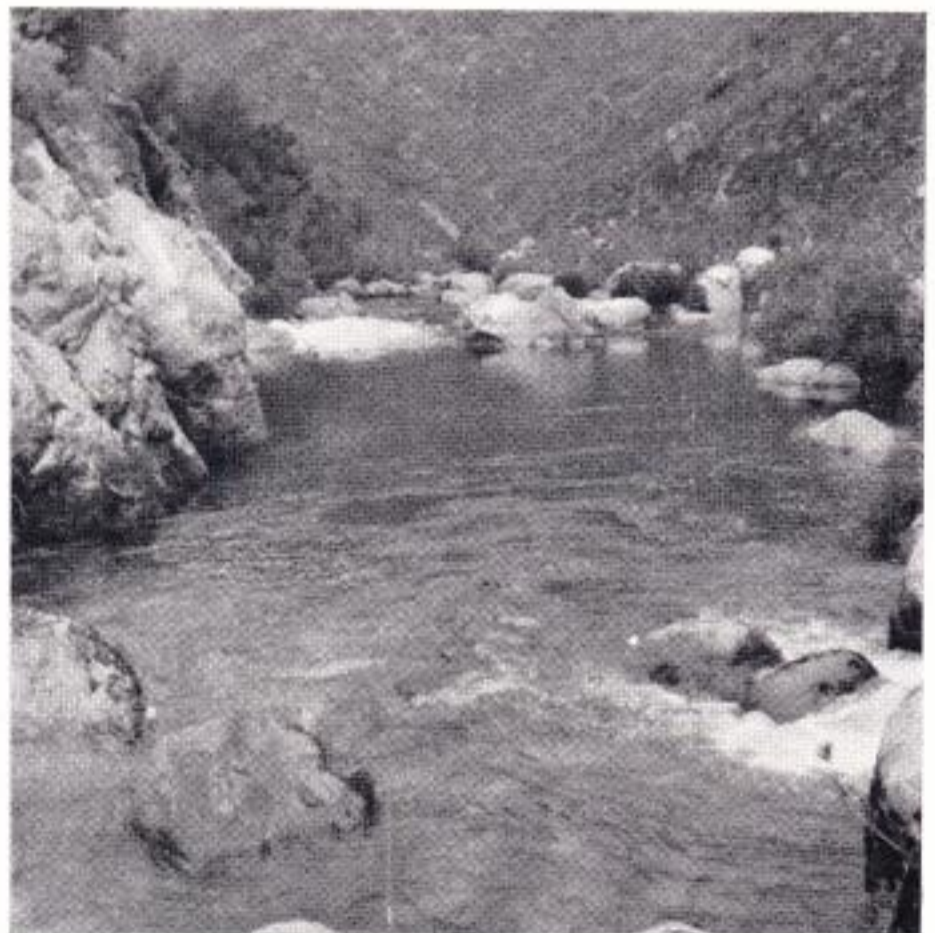
Our Easter, 1958, expedition was divided into two phases. Half our time was spent in the upper valley and the main expedition here was devoted to exploring the very good track which by-passes the Kleinkliphuisrivier gorge and leads to the farm outpost, Perdevlei. This joins the river about half-a-mile above the top end of the gorge and we spent a short time moving upwards before turning back and following the stream down through the kloof. As already mentioned, this was a most interesting experience and both Ron Bell and I were disappointed when an appraisal of the distance still to be covered in relation to the daylight hours remaining, caused us to leave the river bed and "short-cut" back to camp over the mountain slopes approximately at the point which Herman Ackerman and Gas Marais had reached, travelling upstream, on an earlier trip. While we were thus engaged, Bill McNaught and Colin Kisch had the rather less exciting (but still important) task of discovering that the Grootkliphuisrivier petered out and could be disregarded from the angling point of view.

It is interesting to note that perseverance along the track to Perdevlei (to the headwaters of the Kleinkliphuisrivier) would bring the energetic angler into the general area of watershed divide which this river shares with the upper Olifants River. Once we have accomplished the stocking of the Twenty-four Rivers system above Die Hel, this may afford an interesting special expedition to any party camping in this general



Another attractive pool in the Twenty-four Rivers kloof, about 20 yards long and 10 feet deep in the centre.

This considerable pool lies still lower down the main Twenty-four Rivers kloof. Some indication of the strong flow of the river at Easter can be gathered from this photograph, and this factor will have to be taken into account if expeditions are planned for early Spring.



area for a week or ten days. I am sure that no objection would be raised by riparian owners of the upper Olifants to requests for a day's angling made by responsible members of the Society.

Having had a look at the upper water, we moved down to the entrance to the Twenty-four Rivers kloof and spent a most enjoyable two days in the lower part of this very lovely gorge. Our thanks are due to Captain Jack Basson for according us the hospitality of his farm for the parking of our cars during our brief trip up the kloof. We must also thank the landowners in the upper valley who permitted us to camp on and move over their properties.

The demarcation of ground in the general area of the Twenty-four Rivers system is complex, but a detailed indication of this will be included in later reports. It includes a section of Crown land (part of the Great Winterhoek Forest Reserve) which embraces a part of the lower section of the main river.