

An Exploration Group Report

THE UPPER KROM RIVER

By R. O. BELL

INTRODUCTION

THE Exploration Group undertook a survey of the Upper Krom River on March 12 and 13, 1960. This survey is significant for two reasons:

(1) The decision to stock this stream means that the Group's stocking programme of the Breede System will be complete. Close on 50 miles of trout streams are now open to the angler in this system.

(2) A short route to the Second Tributary of the Witte River (see PISCATOR No. 47) is now open. As this tributary and the Upper Krom are separated by only a low ridge at one point, a week-end trip will provide a choice of two rivers in close proximity.



The Upper Krom begins its flow in a narrow kloof at the base of the northern slopes of the Witteberg. The stream flows west for about two miles and then—at a point near the Krom River Mountain Club hut—it swings south, eventually to plunge over the Step Falls into the Krom Lake Pool.

Our party of six started off from the parking area at the summit of Du Toit's Kloof Pass on the morning of March 12. We climbed steadily for about 700 ft. on a well-defined path. This first leg—by no means killing—is the worst part. For the next three-quarters of a mile or so the path follows minor undulations across the plateau. Here, on the banks of little streams, we saw and photographed many red disas. For the rest the going is virtually straight and level across open vlakke. The plateau ends rather abruptly where the track passes between two tall rock outcrops. This feature we named the Krom Gate.

From this point—only 90 minutes' walk from our cars—we could see to the left the Second Tributary of the Witte; straight ahead was the Western Leg of the Krom and, to the right, the Southern Leg. Ten minutes later we were starting our morning brew-up in the shade of the Mountain Club hut.



Viewed from the Krom Gate. The Second Tributary of the Witte River (Bain's Kloof) flows north-east down this gorge to join the main Witte River in the valley under the range in the background.

(All photographs: R. O. Bell)

Viewed from the Krom Gate. The Western Leg of the Krom River, with Barriers Nos. 3, 4 and 5 indicated. The route to the Witte River is over a low ridge on the left of the picture behind the Mountain Club hut.



Viewed from the Krom Gate. The Southern Leg of the Krom River flows through an open valley for a mile or so, and then enters a narrow gorge containing deep pools which may be future homes for large trout. The arrow indicates the approximate position of the 1,000 ft. drop over the Step Falls into Krom Lake Pool.



The First Barrier Fall, which marks the entrance to the gorge on the Southern Leg.

This pool, a few yards above the entrance to the gorge, has deep undercut sides. The fall at the head is considered to be a probable Barrier and has been marked as No. 2 on the map.



There are two good camp sites at Barriers Nos. 3 and 4 on the Western Leg and both are beside beautiful pools. We chose No. 4, where a tree provided some shade. This camp will sleep about 10 people.

After lunch the whole party set off downstream to begin work on the Southern Leg. This is for the most part an open valley similar to the Lower Krom, with the banks of the stream fairly well wooded. There are numerous runs and small pools with adequate cover for trout. Although the river was only just flowing after an extremely dry year, the water was remarkably cool. Two little feeders, draining the plateau, were still running.

We were astonished at the prolific frog life on the whole river. The usual dragonfly, mayfly and caddis larvae were found in fair numbers.

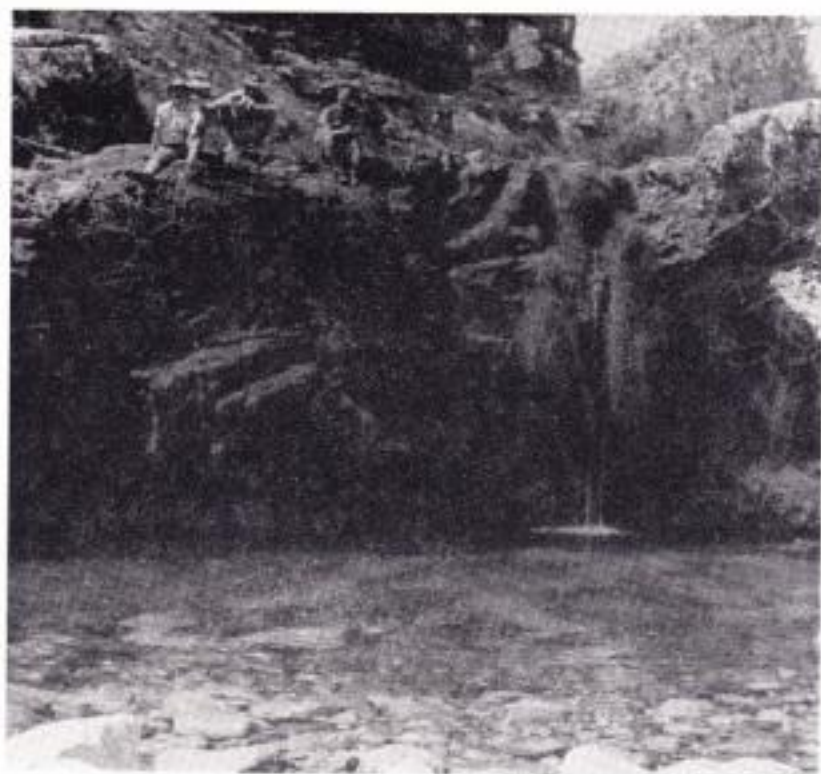
The kloof then closes up into a narrow gorge. The entrance to this is marked by a waterfall with a deep pool below (Barrier No. 1). Here our party split into two groups—one to climb out on the East Bank in an attempt to skirt the gorge and reach the Step Falls—the other to "swim it"!

John Chalmers, Graham Craig and myself duly stripped down to boots and plunged into the first pool. With a south-east breeze drifting up the gorge, and the sun blotted out by the high, sheer walls, it was no pleasant afternoon swim.

Eventually—after three wettings!—we emerged from the gorge and entered a short stretch of open kloof some 200 yards long. Below this was another gorge and the beginning of the 1,000 ft. drop to the Krom Lake. By this time it was late afternoon so we decided not to attempt the descent.

High up on the slope above we saw Arthur Helps and his party making for home. It was with sundry misgivings about our chilly future that back we swam. Some time later we joined the others, who had also failed to reach the Falls.

The limited flow of water over Barrier No. 4 into Camp Pool shows the level of the river when the Exploration Group did the survey trip.



Back at the camp we settled down to the traditional sundowner and Saturday night dinner. By this time Joe Brooks had joined the party, having hiked from the parking area in under an hour.

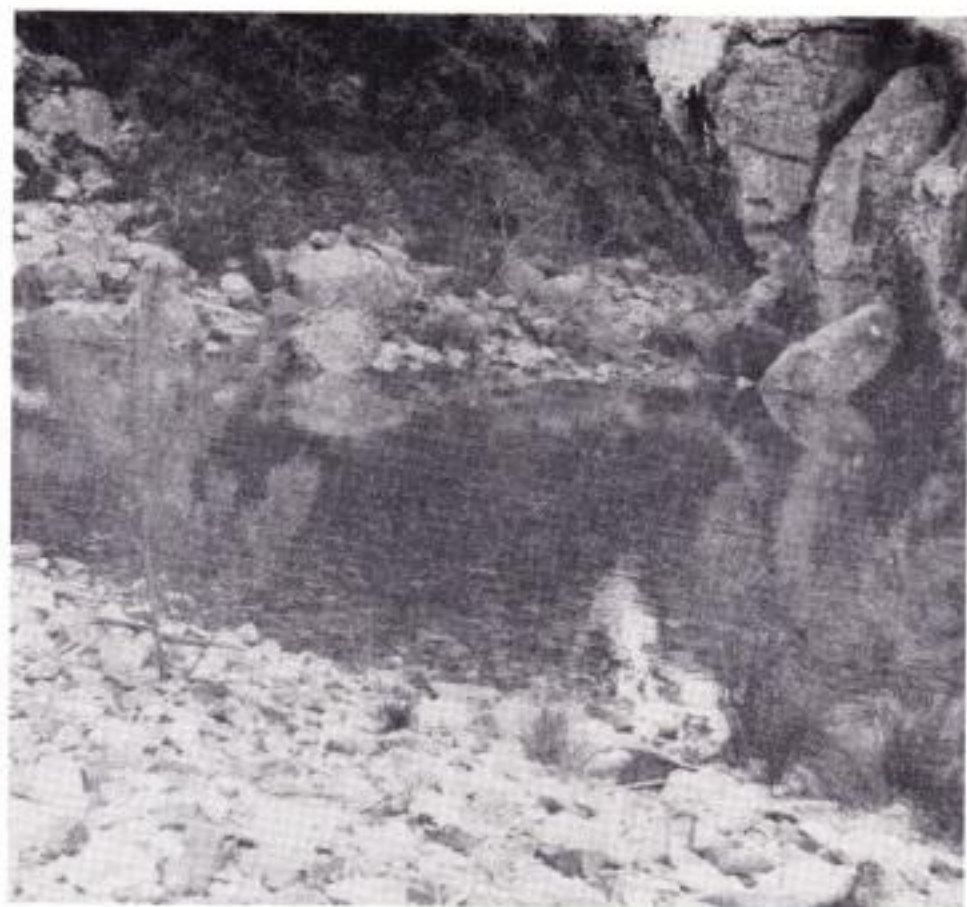
The rest of the evening was spent round the campfire, quietly chatting and drinking coffee.

On Sunday morning Chalmers and Brooks set off for the Step Falls. Travelling overland they dropped into the river at our point of return of the previous day. In the gorge below their progress was halted by a waterfall some 30 ft. high, and below it a large, deep pool. Here they climbed out on the East Bank and ended up on a high ledge from where they looked down on the final rocky stretch of river bed. Although unable to see the Step Falls they could hear the roar of water way below.

The rest of the party set off up the Western Leg and a short distance from the camp found another barrier, a waterfall of about 20 ft. dropping into a circular pool about 30 ft. in diameter scoured out of solid rock. The name has been recorded as "The Punch Bowl".



The "Punch Bowl", with Barrier No. 5 water dropping in on the right of the picture. This is the last pool of any size before the Upper Krom Lake pool is reached near the river's source.



The Upper Krom Lake pool, the highest point of the survey.

From this point up, the river becomes less interesting as the pools are mostly small and shallow. Numerous rock falls have choked up the bed and in some places the stream almost disappears under enormous boulders. Further evidence of these rock-falls may be seen in the form of comparatively unweathered sections of cliff-face hundreds of feet above.

At one stage we felt a little uneasy when a troop of baboons put up a protest, fortunately only vocal, as it would not have needed much to start one of the slides moving again.

After two hours' slog we were very pleasantly surprised to find a large, round pool set in an amphitheatre of almost sheer rock walls. This pool, although smaller, is physically very similar to the Krom Lake. It is fed by a three-step waterfall about 200 ft. high. Here we had a breather and then sped back to camp for lunch.

Our journey back to the cars was distinctly unpleasant as the sun beat down on the completely shadeless plateau. In spite of this, a couple of hours later the chaps were eagerly discussing the next trip to the Upper Krom when it is hoped, we will carry new life into this interesting little kloof—as yet unstocked with trout.