

The following article takes the story of the early importations a bit further; and shows how widely the trout had spread in a few short years.

SOME CAPE TROUT STREAMS

PART I

By ERNEST GLANVILLE

(From The State journal, Vol. IV, 1910. With regard to the Mr. Manning mentioned early in the article, see The Early History of Trout Acclimatization above.—Ed.)

FLY fishing has now taken its proper place in the Cape Province as one of the most alluring of sports, and in time there will grow up a literature of angling as full of charm perhaps as the stories that are told again and again of anglers' hours on the ancient streams of Britain. Already Mr. Manning, whose chatty accounts of his experiences in Bechuanaland have been appearing in "The State", has written a guide to trout fishing in the Cape, and his illustrations of noble fish caught in rivers from the Eerste at Stellenbosch to the Ugie in Griqualand East are inspiring assurances that the trout have become "rechte Afrikanders". Before the "uitlanders" arrived there was fishing in the rivers. Barbel, white fish, yellow fish, and springers gave sport to the leger-rod

anglers who used a roast mouse, worm, grasshopper, or flying ant for bait. The fat flying ant is a deadly bait for springer. I recall one deep hole where the fish were on the feed for 20 minutes and shouldered each other in their eagerness. We had camped out on a bitterly cold and pitch-black night, and a puff-adder, vast in girth, came near the fire for warmth. It was the first thing to greet us in the early morn. I was thankful that in my gropings for fuel in the night I had missed his silent form. As boys we sometimes fished by the light of a fire in a deep pool under a high krantz, and crept together at the ominous sounds that came from the dense woods. Anglers also have found sport in sea fishing off the rocks all the way from Kalk Bay to the mouth of the Bashee in the far east, and in the lonely stretches of beach have seen the fresh spoor of leopards and heard the white-headed fish eagle fling his piercing cry as he soared above some still backwater. Not a few of these shore fishermen have been caught by the tide and marooned on rocks, while too many have been swept off their feet and drowned. But there is a zest in the sport that comes from the driving spray, the sparkling air, and the stately procession of the roaring waves.

The first stocking project of the Cape Piscatorial Society. Experiments with trout in peat-stained, acid water. Transport of brown trout to the Silvermine (Muizenberg) Reservoir, on December 5, 1931. Halt at the break-pressure tank, half-way up the bridle path. Ranger, A.C.H., A. D. Harrison and Joan Simpson.

Photograph per R. G. Simpson



The light 10-foot trout rod, the frail tackle, and the artificial fly with its ritual and its literature have added a quite new field to a people who have a natural leaning to outdoor sports. Men who have learned to get the full fling of the thong from a 15-foot wagon whip will learn to get out a long line from a trout rod, and I have seen boys at Hermanus whipping for harders with a skill that would soon master the light rod and tackle. An estimate made by an angler who has watched the stocking of our waters places the number of fly anglers in the Cape at a thousand. This seems a formidable number, and the question arises whether there are rivers and trout enough to go round. In 1884 Mr. MacLean at his own expense placed 20,000 ova in the Breede at Michell's Pass; Mr. Ohlsson followed this patriotic example; and about 1892 a start at hatching was made in pools at Jonker's Hoek, placed at the service of the country by Mr. Watermeyer.

Mr. Chaplin, the curator at the hatchery, handles the fish in the beautifully-fitted ponds as Izaak Walton did his frog—as “if he loved them”. He has sent off hundreds of thousands of eyed-ova, last season despatching 160,000 eggs, including a batch to far-off St. John's, where almost the entire lot hatched out successfully notwithstanding the long journey. Some nine rivers with their tributaries have been declared open for fishing. Trout have been distributed over the country at more than one hundred stations. The range is from Table Mountain Reservoirs to Kokstad near the Natal border, the

farthest north point in the Cape Province being Colesberg. The Worcester Angling Club alone controls 40 miles of water. The highest running water containing trout is, I think, a tributary of the Breede at the top of Bains Kloof, where there are perched a few rest-houses used by the people of Wellington in the summer months when they need a whiff of bracing air. Each year fresh streams are opened, and many riparian owners and riparian townships have adopted the hatching-box supplied from the Government Hatchery. A large number of still pools and farm dams have also been stocked; and Mr. Chaplin has successfully introduced carp, which will do well in farm dams. A number of carp have been placed in Princess Vlei, where are a few patriarchal trout that will not take the fly and may be tried for by spinning tackle as determined by regulations. In 1897, under the direction of the Frontier Acclimatization Society, a Government Hatchery was started in the Pirie Forest near King William's Town, and this Hatchery has been busy supplying ova to stock the many suitable rivers in the east.

It will be gathered then that there is ample water for both the fish and the anglers. As yet the country does not realise what an asset may be made of its perennial streams and also of its reservoirs. For instance the Wynberg Reservoirs, as I understand, are not stocked because no one has moved, though the presence of fish in the water is advantageous, as they keep down the frog spawn and the water insects. The Amalinda Reservoir, like the Wodehouse and the Hely-Hutchinson on Table Mountain, is stocked to the advantage of East London, but I cannot say if Queen's Town has followed this example by stocking its mammoth reservoir. Stocking should undoubtedly be systematically carried on. The cost is £1 per thousand eggs. At a standing order of only £5 a year places like Ceres, for example, could keep their waters in good fishable condition season by season.

In time a history will grow up about each river—an angling history of course, distinguished with quite human and agreeable lapses from the shivering and naked fact. Anglers will have their favourite inns, their legendary trout, their classic reaches, and their own private runs where on some memorable occasion they missed landing a monster. In time also visitors will come from across the seas for the fishing as they now go to Newfoundland for caribou shooting, to Canada for salmon, and to Florida for tarpon. It is to be hoped, however, that the fishing will be open and that the sportsmen who shoot and fish on a big bank balance will not buy up the fishing rights on the best waters. As it is the sport is not within easy reach of the poor man unless he is equal to the tramp up Table Mountain—where he may fish on week days on payment of half-a-crown to the Corporation—or lives near a stocked water. I have heard anglers say that the cost works out at about a sovereign per fish for the season, taking into account railway fares, hotel expenses, and price of tackle. Flies cost nearly as much as golf balls, and are easily lost; and though there are good guinea rods the price for a greenheart or split cane runs to three pounds and more. Then there are the silk line, the gut cast, and the reel and landing net. There are men who can make their own flies with a hank of coloured silk, a collection of feathers and assorted hooks of midget size; who will catch trout with a cheap cane pole. But even though the cost be high the pleasure is with the angler long before and long after he lands his fish. I doubt if there is any form of sport that has such a reminiscent twang as fly fishing, because each struggle with a good fish has incidents which stamp their mark on the memory. Moreover the pursuit takes the angler into scenes of haunting beauty, under conditions of quiet which unfold to him many secrets of the wild not disclosed for example to the gunner, whose weapon sends the creatures to cover; or to the pedestrian, who naturally gets away from the winding and bush-covered banks

The idea persists that the angler is a lazy lout who sits over the water in a state of coma, interrupted only when he lifts his line to see the fish that is not there. I would

like to meet one of these critics after he had fished five miles down Michell's Pass with or without waders, and I think he would admit that he was one vast ache crying for liquid within and liniment without. There is no rest for the trout angler—neither for his feet, nor his wrist, nor his shoulder, nor his eyes, nor his nerves, nor his patience. There is no place for idleness: the sport lures him on from one pool to another as he nurses "the unconquerable hope", and the end of a long day would put a dot to a record of strenuous toil. It is that unconquerable hope that dissipates fatigue. The next pool, the reach round the corner, hold the big fish! The biggest fish, however, are not always the best fighters, and it is the fighting fish that give a special bouquet to this sport. In my early days as a novice I had the novice's luck to hook and land a five-pounder. He simply hung on for fifteen minutes with no more life in him than a log. The other day a two-pounder scared the wits out of me by his tempestuous antics, ending finally in his escape. The rainbow trout take the fly more readily than the brown trout, grow much faster, and put up a stronger fight. But the fighting powers vary with the condition of the waters. In the mud reaches of the Eerste and of the Dwaars at Ceres the fish are sluggish, while on the gravels of Michell's Pass, the upper Hex near Jordaan's farm, and the clear reaches of Jonker's Hoek the fish are vigorous fighters. The gravelly bottoms of the Berg in the Paarl valley should be the home of lively fish, though I have no experience of those waters. I am speaking broadly, and I know there are exceptions, as Mr. Steytler would say in reference to the Dwaars, where a four-pounder gave him a terrific struggle. That fish, however, had his hover in a soft bottom at the foot of a gravel run, whereas the fish I caught lived above mud only. The rainbow are travellers, and are believed to make their way to the sea, but they undoubtedly spawn in our waters, and as long as food holds out they will stay in the rivers. At the start of the season in October last I saw many small fish in the Hex, where there are splendid spawning beds. No doubt the big fish drop down into the Breede, as they have made their way down the Zonder Eende whence there came last year stories of "big white fish" taken by farmers who were bottom angling for eels. A story was told me of a river in the mountains beyond Ceres where there were strange fish a "yard long", probably survivors of the fish put in by Mr. Ohlsson. After four years trout lose their shapeliness; and though they grow, their growth is in the head. I saw a veteran taken out of Jonker's Hoek stream who looked like a sawn-off alligator.

I will venture to give no hint about the fine art of casting, but it is easier for a beginner to fish down stream than up, unless the wind is with him up stream. Trout lie with their head to the current, and if the angler comes towards them he is seen long before he can put his fly over the fish. None the less it is simpler to fish with the current than against, and the fish have not yet learned to associate the man on the bank with the danger of a hook disguised as a fly of sorts. When the mayfly is a-flying on English streams the trout gorge as the fish do here on the succulent ant fly, but our streams have no such harvest. I saw fish rising on the Hex at gnats, and in the evenings there is a strong flight of moths, many falling into the water, with beetles and grasshoppers, which with crabs and frogs go to the larder of the lordly trout. A fly like the Durham Ranger and other gaudy flies have a trace of the grasshopper, but drab-coloured flies like the March Brown are eagerly taken: that is to say, when the fish is anxious to change his diet. Fly gathering, however, is a craze like that of stamp collecting, and when two disciples meet upon the bank they take out their fly books and stray away into paths that lead to much picturesque fiction. When an angler is not fishing he takes out his fly book and finds in each flannel page a story of enthralling interest.

Here for instance is a story that is told by a couple of flies that stand side by side, one a rather draggled March Brown, the other a Durham Ranger under the three-quarter-inch limit, and each strung on casts of drawn gut warranted sound. The casts were soaked overnight in a tumbler of water to make them pliant and prevent cracking, to which infirmity even the best gut is liable.