

STOCKING JAN DU TOIT'S RIVER — 6TH APRIL, 1984

BY ROLEY HUTCHINGS

A week of blazing heat in Cape Town, it reached 37°C, preceded our second attempt this season to stock the Jan du Toits River with Rainbows. However, our friends in the Meteorological Office at D. F. Malan Airport had forecast a cooler day, but no rain, for Founders Day the 6th of April.

Although all 12 permits to enter the area that weekend had already been issued Mr. Röscher the Forester in charge of the area had agreed to let our party in with the fish. The Van Zyls, owners of the farm Somaarso, were to be away that day so we had been put in touch with their son — “Please park your cars in the farm yard behind the house as the big black dog doesn't like visitors too near the house!”

Tony Smith of Jonkershoek had arranged for his staff to come in to pack and load the fish for us. A set of aerating equipment had been made up, and Roy Patterson who was to collect and deliver the fish for us, had loaded up a bottle of oxygen. Maps

for the porters had been printed after annotation. Gavin Grapes had established where in the river he thought the fish should best be placed. Of the five vehicles being used, two would go to Jonkershoek and we were all due to rendezvous at Somaarso at 8.30 to 8.45 a.m. So by Thursday evening all was set. Gavin was to have arranged for 10 to 13 of his fellow students to help carry, and I had gathered a group of friends from the Mountain Club, the Ski Club, Zeekoevlei Yacht Club and the C.P.S.

Imagine the anguish at receiving a phone call from Gavin at 9.55 p.m. saying he was unable to establish contact with any of his colleagues — far too late to be able to put the expedition off. Relief some 10 minutes later when the phone rang again with Gavin saying he had four people plus himself. So we were now reduced to 16 instead of 23; but there would still be 25 bags of fish to go up!

We arrived at Jonkershoek at 6.50 a.m. just as it was getting light to find their staff arriving all cheerful and puffing clouds of condensation as they walked up to ponds. Very quickly they filled plastic bags with 12 to 15 litres of water, placed 30 fish in each, and then put a further 15 to 20 litres of pure oxygen into them before tying them up lightly and placing them in a second bag also tied up securely. The fish were yearlings of about 90 mm. in length, and we had 750 of them safely loaded onto the truck by 7.40.

Somaarso was reached at about 8.55 where the porters packed their cases in the yard; and after leaving a copy of *Die Burger* for Mr. Van Zyl, set off walking to the outspan where we would take the bags of fish out of the truck and into our back-packs. There was some excitement on the way up when we found a beautiful but rather large boomslang overhead in the trees — several of us had already walked underneath him.

With the excess of bags of fish over carriers some of us had to take 2 bags each. This turned out to be extremely difficult and tiring. Not too bad if you could get two bags into your back-pack, but to carry the second one by hand needed extra care to avoid its being punctured by the thick bush we were walking through. The track on the way to the entrance to the kloof took us past the rather smelly remains of a horse, a sad sight and one wonders how he died; snake-bite, a broken leg, or even lightning perhaps?

We had to leave four bags of fish at the entrance to the kloof, carefully placed in the river, intending to take them up later in the day. However some kind visitors who came in after us saw the bags, realised what they were, and took them up for us.

The first fish went into the river at 11.45, above the first barrier falls. Meanwhile the younger and fitter members of the party were setting a much quicker pace, and they were able to get their last bag in right up at Archie's Dilemma. The fish were well spread right up the river, and we only lost one bag of fish, which was punctured and lost its oxygen, and then became too hot.

By 6.00 p.m. we were all accounted for at the bottom of the kloof and set off home. On the way back someone in the car said "Look, sausage clouds — that could be snow." "What? Snow early in April? Must be amateurs." Back home the weather forecast says possibility of snow on the mountains of the South Western Cape. I should have remembered they were members of the Ski Club!