

CHAPTER THREE

Fish out of Water?



*You need never lack interest in life so long as
you can hold a rod in your hand.*

HELLEN B. HILLIARD¹

*So when you hold one in your hand or when you look at a brook
trout, at the speckled sides with that surprising line of red dots, it
is as though you are staring not only at the side of a fish, but at
some mystery as well. The colouring seems to imply the enclosure
or the completeness of the streams, since the fish have that aspect,
or suggestion of the forests and stones through which and over
which the water flows.*

CRAIG NOVA²

In 1990 the J.L.B. Smith Institute of Ichthyology at Rhodes University held an exhibition on flyfishing in South Africa called

'Of Priests and Vices' (nothing to do with the Catholic clergy). For the benefit of non-flyfishers, a 'priest' is a small, heavy, truncheon-like implement used to kill a fish once it has been landed (so named because it dispenses the 'last rites' – flyfishers being as fond of weak puns as the rest), and a 'vice' is the device used to hold the hook in place while one is tying or 'dressing' the fly.

In explaining why an institute previously regarded as hostile towards trout as an introduced species was participating in such an exhibition, Mike Bruton wrote: 'We recognise that trout have been in South Africa for about 100 years, and should perhaps be regarded as naturalised aliens, like the oak tree.' Bruton praised the ethos of flyfishers, and continued: 'Surely trout should rather be regarded as part of our cultural heritage, along with oak trees, the Cape Town squirrels, Stellenbosch's vineyards, domesticated sheep and cattle and Scottish whisky!' On this basis, he continued, the 'management of trout could then be seen from the cultural perspective and evaluated using socio-economic criteria'. After all, 'they were introduced not for their own sake but to be caught by man, and what we are really preserving is a cultural tradition inherited from our British and American forebears'.³

I would agree with Bruton to a certain extent (especially about the whisky), but I think he misses a crucial point. Recognising the importance and legitimacy of trout and flyfishing in South Africa is not simply preserving a 'British or American' inheritance: it is acknowledging the incorporation and adaptation of those inheritances into the complexities and enfoldings of what makes up present-day South Africa – whether that be in relation to opera, rap, motor vehicles, cinema, dress, religion, cuisine, ballroom dancing or recreational angling.

Imported trout have adapted to local conditions, and in many

rivers they have established distinctive genetic patterns. So has flyfishing in South Africa – while continuing to draw on and be enriched by historical and contemporary developments elsewhere – developed an identity far removed from the stereotypical elitist ‘tweed and deerstalker’ or ‘pioneer American backwoodsman’ associations still conjured up by some authors in their simplistic responses to the trout debate (these contrasting traditions are discussed in the interview with Wolf Avni later).

In this respect, it is astonishing that at the height of what were referred to as the ‘trout wars’ in 1986, Chief Director of the Cape Department of Nature and Environmental Conservation, Dr Johan Neethling, described trout anglers as ‘self-confessed elitists who without blinking or blushing refer to all other freshwater anglers as coarse fishermen’.⁴ That is an appallingly ignorant statement. The term ‘coarse fishing’ was certainly used in the United Kingdom historically to distinguish flyfishing from bait and lure fishing, and undoubtedly had elitist associations in which the upper-middle classes and the aristocracy distinguished the ‘finesse’ of their mode of angling from the ‘coarseness’ of fishing with worms or spinners. But I do not think I have heard the term used for decades in South Africa, and certainly not seen it in any recent South African publication. In fact many flyfishers, myself included, practise other forms of fishing, and seek rather to join forces with anglers of other disciplines in campaigning for tighter ecological controls on water extraction, pollution and the spread of invasive vegetation, rather than creating dissension amongst our ranks.

Perhaps debates about the eradication of trout in South Africa – rather than, say, carp, which are known to be far more invasive and destructive to aquatic environments⁵ – have been so strident

because of the associations of trout and trout fishing with notions of elitism and colonial English aristocracy, and also of whiteness and maleness, though the gender and racial profiles of flyfishers are changing rapidly both nationally and globally. Contrary to popular assumption, women have in fact been involved in trout fishing from fairly early on in its South African history. In his book *Trout Fishing in Natal*, fish specialist Bob Crass says of the author of *A Trout Rod in Natal*, who provides the epigraph to this chapter:

One of the Umzimkulu's most devoted adherents was the late Mrs Hilliard, known as Madame to members of the Underberg-Himeville Trout Fishing Club. For years she used to spend each summer at Underberg, where she devoted much of the time to catching rainbow trout. Of the local streams, only the Umzimkulu interested her. If shown a dish of trout from, say, the Polela, she would remark: 'Yes, yes. Very nice. But no fish have the same beauty as those from the Umzimkulu.'⁶

There is no denying the colonial origins of the importation of trout, nor the implication of their early history in the process of 'frontier acclimatisation' and the 'Europeanising' of the landscape and its leisure possibilities (which I detail later), under the guise of 'improving' it. There is a well-known flyfishing club, based in King William's Town, that still bears the unfortunate name the 'Frontier Acclimatisation Society'; and the Western Cape trout-fishing association to which I belong has the quaintly archaic name 'Cape Piscatorial Society'.⁷ W. Wardlaw Thompson summarises this attitude: 'The colonist, especially if of British blood, seems unable to settle down in a new land until many of

the animals and plants that ministered to his pleasure or profit in the homeland have followed him.’⁸

The importation of trout was literally a colonial inscription of identity upon the landscape, which was perceived to be ‘lacking’ in suitable freshwater angling species. It should also be noted, however, that an engagement with the literature about trout stocking also suggests their significance as food resource, something very often overlooked in these debates. We frequently assume a simple and false dichotomy between recreation and food gathering in relation to fishing and hunting, especially in the colonial context.⁹ Whether the history of trout should (over)determine the future of the species remains questionable.

In terms of its perceived elitism, flyfishing equipment is no more expensive than that required for any other form of fishing, and while there are some exclusive and expensive syndicates and private clubs, annual membership of one of the many flyfishing clubs, such as the Natal Fly Fishers’ Club, the Underberg-Himeville Trout Fishing Club or the Cape Piscatorial Society, costs little more than a coastal angling licence, and offers fishing 365 days a year.



The sun has just slipped behind the hills, and the swallows dip low over the water, skimming the surface with their beaks. Lake Isabella, which has all afternoon seemed utterly fishless, comes to life. A strong swirl indicates a good fish feeding, but it is out of casting distance. Shortly, fish are boiling all around my float tube. I bite off the Damsel and put on a small orange Woolly Bugger, the scruffy ones I tie, with lots of lead wire under the body. Cast to the

rise and strip the fly back as fast as I can. The take comes almost immediately, an aggressive lunge. I fish until my arms ache; it is too dark to see, and I suspect my leader is impossibly knotted. And still the fish rise.



Much has been written recently about the impacts of imperialism and colonial occupation on the environment. Amongst the major studies is William Beinart and Lotte Hughes' book *Environment and Empire* (2007). In their introduction, they argue that 'European imperialism was extraordinarily far-reaching: a key global historical process of the last 500 years ... lock[ing] disparate societies [and I would add plant and animal species] together over a wider area than any previous imperial expansion'. 'European imperialism was also inseparable,' they argue, 'from the history of global environmental change.'¹⁰

But their study has little or nothing to say about fish of any kind in the imperial-environmental engagement, beyond brief mentions of fish in canal irrigation in India and of the shrinking shrimp and sardine fisheries in Egypt as a result of British irrigation schemes.¹¹ While no study can be exhaustive, it is a curious omission, for fish are central to the diets, cultures and ecosystems of many of the regions Beinart and Hughes discuss.

An important part of the imperial and colonial project of environmental transformation in relation to the landscape involved the importation of fish species, in particular trout, to South Africa, New Zealand, Australia, India, Sri Lanka, Indonesia, Zimbabwe, Lesotho, Swaziland, Kenya and Tanzania,¹² where they continue to thrive. Of course, colonial occupation also led

to the decimation of indigenous fish species. There are accounts of wagonloads of grunter being transported back from fishing trips to Eastern Cape estuaries by single families. The rainbow trout in the Eerste River in the Western Cape adapted so well to the area that they established one of the rare sea-running (anadromous) trout populations in the world, and there are reports of treknet catches of trout in the Strand area, which may suggest that the same happened in the Lourens. Unfortunately, as with the Lourens, the lower reaches of the Eerste River now resemble an open sewer, so those runs can no longer occur.

Trout were successfully introduced to South Africa for the first time in 1890.¹³ It was, as Paul Curtis says, 'a story full of drama, of bitter disappointment, of money well spent and wasted, of governments lobbied, and of prominent citizens rallying together, with the odd charlatan thrown in for seasoning'.¹⁴ But trout were not the first 'exotic' fish to be propagated in the country, for carp had been stocked into some stillwaters in the Western Cape by Charles Fairbridge and Saul Solomon in the late 1860s.¹⁵

In 1867 the Cape Colonial Parliament passed Act No. 10, a bill 'for encouraging the introduction into the waters of this colony fishes not native to such waters'.¹⁶ At this time trout were being moved from Britain to Australia and New Zealand. The first successful shipment of salmon and trout eggs from Britain occurred in January 1864, and led to the establishment of brown trout populations in Australia, New Zealand and Tasmania.¹⁷

There were many failed attempts in the South African context. A.R. Campbell Johnston imported salmon and trout eggs to stock the Eerste and Liesbeeck rivers in the Western Cape in 1875, but none of the ova survived the journey. The same happened with J.D. Ellis's attempt in 1882 to import trout ova to

stock in the Eastern Cape. One of the more successful individuals in this process was Lachlan MacLean of the Donald Currie steamship company in Cape Town who imported 20 000 brown trout ova from Scotland at his own expense.

Curtis records that MacLean was spurred on in his endeavours by having attended the International Fisheries Exhibition in London in 1884, which 'highlighted the success of trout and salmon rearing in Canada, America and New Zealand'.¹⁸ Of the 20 000 ova that arrived, 17 000 hatched, but almost all the alevins (hatched fish with the egg sac still attached) died because of poisoning from the zinc lining of the rearing trays. There was a short-lived success, however, when a few trout were stocked into the stream running through the Anneberg Brewery in Newlands – but they failed to survive a severe, unseasonal flood. Three fish were kept in a pond and lived for a few years, one of which was apparently stuffed and mounted on his office wall by MacLean.

The Cape government then stepped in and established a Fisheries Committee, which hired the foreign fish specialist, Ernest Latour, to assist. Hatchery facilities had been set up at the Brewery in Newlands, but Latour considered these inadequate, and so arranged for the 60 000 ova sourced from a hatchery in Guildford, Surrey, to be deposited in the upper reaches of the Eerste. Failure again. Ova were hatched in 1892 and 1893, and seeded into the Eerste, Lourens, Berg and Breede rivers. Few, if any, survived.¹⁹ The Fisheries Committee then funded a hatchery at Jonkershoek, which was built in 1894. It continues to operate to this day under the auspices of Stellenbosch University, and has been declared a national monument. The original hatchery ponds are no longer in use, though they were until the end of 2010 stocked with trout for recreational angling.

Latour was apparently quite a character. Curtis refers to him diplomatically as ‘controversial and somewhat unpredictable’; Brandon-Kirby calls him ‘feisty’; and Crass pulls no punches in describing him as ‘a somewhat pig-headed man’.²⁰ Latour had denounced the Newlands facility and demanded a new hatchery, but refused to move to Jonkershoek as it was apparently ‘too far off the beaten track and away from the bright lights and social life of Newlands’.²¹ After initially insisting on returning to Europe, he accepted a position at the new hatchery established at Pirie in the Eastern Cape by J.D. Ellis after his failed attempt to import trout ova in 1882. Quite what heady social life Latour experienced in the metropolitan sophistication of late nineteenth-century King William’s Town is less clear. With Latour’s departure, John L. Scott from Armistead Solway Fisheries in Scotland was hired to replace him at Jonkershoek. Despite the hatchery’s early successful production of fry, attempts to stock the Cape streams met with little success, possibly because the water there is rather acidic.

In Natal, endeavours met with more positive results.²² On the farm Boschfontein, John Clarke Parker imported brown trout ova from Scotland and, after eight years of failure, in 1890 hatched ova he had sourced from Howietoun Fishery. According to the well-known author and flyfisher Tom Sutcliffe, the key to Parker’s success was that his farm ‘was on the main railway line between Lidgetton and Balgowan and since the eggs were delivered by train from Durban harbour – along with plenty of moss and ice – they didn’t have far to travel before arriving at Parker’s makeshift hatchery’.²³ The Natal Government Railways apparently delivered ice on a daily basis until the ova hatched.²⁴

On 2 May 1890 the Mooi River was the first South African river to be stocked with trout (500 fry), followed by the Bushman’s

on 7 May (498 fry) and the Umgeni on 10 May (444 fry).²⁵ I was fortunate enough to catch some of their beautiful progeny during the years I lived in KwaZulu-Natal. In 1926 a sundial monument was erected in memory of Parker at Trout Bungalow on the Mooi River reading: 'Erected to the memory of John Clarke Parker by lovers of the gentle art of Trout Fishing. By his untiring efforts Trout were first introduced into Natal circa ad 1884 thereby giving much pleasure to many persons.'

More successful hatchings and stockings followed, with two of the most famous Underberg rivers – and two of my favourite – the Umzimkulu and the Ngwangwana, being stocked in 1902,²⁶ with further stocking of the Umzimkulu in 1913. The Ngwangwana is the river in which both my father and I caught our first trout, both from the same pool. Eight inches long would have probably been an overly generous estimate of both fish, but that detracted nothing from our immense pride.

There was an unsuccessful attempt to stock the Polela in KwaZulu-Natal in 1906, and then successful restocking in 1918,²⁷ and a spectacularly unsuccessful attempt to establish salmon in the Umkomaas. Trout were successfully established in the Umkomaas by Willie and Bert Root in 1917, who transported fish caught in the Loteni River (itself stocked in 1907 by John Parker and Donald McKenzie) by horseback for release near what is now the Vergelegen Nature Reserve.²⁸ What must be amongst the earliest records of a trout caught in South Africa is that of a 12-inch brown trout landed by Graham Hutchinson in April 1892 on the Boschfontein stream, and a good fish of 2 lb 2 oz by Parker a few months later from the Bushman's on a March Brown fly.²⁹

In the Western Cape, John L. Scott reported to Parliament in 1895 that 5 000 trout were stocked into the Breede and Berg

rivers from Jonkershoek.³⁰ Crass, Sutcliffe and Brandon-Kirby claim that the Eerste and Lourens were also stocked at this time.³¹ As both these rivers are now rainbow trout waters, and this species first arrived in South Africa only in 1897, it seems that the original brown trout were later displaced by rainbows. Henry Birch Reynardson records catching brown trout in the Lourens in 1927, but notes that over the following years rainbows began to comprise the bulk of his catch.³² The Lourens is a river I fish most often at present, and its fish are – if transnationalism, border-crossing and displacements are the measures – truly what literary scholars would call ‘postcolonial subjects’: rainbow trout, native to the Pacific coast of North America, which were translocated to South Africa from Britain.



It is the middle of a bitterly cold winter, and the sun provides little warmth as I paddle my float tube along the nearside bank of the dam Grantchester. Across the water, up the slope, a fire roars and crackles its way through the grass, consuming all in its path. I assume the farmer is letting it burn itself out, because there is no one battling the blaze with water carriers or wet sacks. It has been a hard, dry spell. Ash drifts down onto the water, and I carefully eye the road for encroaching flames. I catch several cockfish in breeding colours right up to the margins of the water, where they are engaged in a futile attempt at spawning. Most are lean, with pronounced heads, and a ‘don’t mess with me’ look about them. All go back into the water to fight another day. As I wend my way home on the R103, fires rage across hillsides, along the roadside, and through plantations. Flames are leaping 20 feet into the air. I

drive home through a vision of apocalypse; a surrealist representation of hell.



While the introduction of trout in KwaZulu-Natal and the Western Cape has been fairly well documented, less has been written about the Eastern Cape, to which we must follow Latour. The Frontier Acclimatisation Society, mentioned earlier, had been established in June 1894. Under its auspices, a shipment of ova was imported in 1895, from which between 45 000 and 50 000 fry were hatched. Of these 6 080 survived – an enormous attrition rate for hatchery conditions that were apparently very good. Curtis records that 4 050 fish went into the Buffalo River, 500 into the Gonubie, 400 each into the Little Kabusie and Toise, 150 into the Keiskamma, and 180 into waters at Carnarvon Farm, Wodehouse.³³

The success of some of these stockings is unclear, but a recent article in *The Complete Flyfisherman* magazine recounts successful fishing of the Cata and Mnyameni rivers, amongst the earliest waters in the areas to be stocked. The former of these is said by the author to hold ‘possibly the purest lineage anywhere of the Loch Leven strain of brown trout’.³⁴

On a recent holiday to the Eastern Cape, my son Mike, nephew Matthew, and I made the trip up to Keiskammahoek to visit these waters, which are indeed spectacular and virtually inaccessible. It was mid-summer, and the Cata River was warm and discoloured, but it was immediately evident why it must have seemed an eminently suitable stream for trout to the early propagators, as it has lovely pools, riffles and runs. Our river ranger, himself

a skilled flyfisher, directed us instead to the beautiful Mnyameni Dam, on the river of the same name, which holds a population of wild-breeding rainbows.

The road was bone-jarring, even in an Isuzu, and the courteous Xhosa assurances of our river ranger, 'No, it's not too far', proved indeed to be diplomatic rather than accurate. But we pulled up at a dam of exquisite beauty, high in the Amatola mountains and unfolding from a deep cleft lined with indigenous forest. It was as fine a location to hunt wild trout as any I have seen. It was late in the day when we arrived – we had earlier made an ill-fated trip, involving a disastrous wrong turning, to see what was left of Pirie hatchery – so our fishing time was rather limited. Mike landed a lively young fish, and I dropped one, but just finding the trout in this remote region was cause for wonder.

The Keiskammahoek trout project is a very significant one. With the assistance of Martin Davies of Rhodes University and others, the local community has developed a successful recreational trout fishery on the Cata River and Mnyameni Dam that employs local people either as river rangers or to clear invasive vegetation, and generates revenue by charging rod fees to those who wish to fish. As the trout in the river and dam are wild-spawning, and fishing is strictly on a catch-and-release basis, there are no funds required to stock fish, and money generated by paying visitors goes directly back into the community.

Returning to the nineteenth century, Latour left the Eastern Cape in some disgrace after convincing the Frontier Acclimatisation Society to move the hatching ponds to a lower altitude – with disastrous effect – apparently partly because he was averse to making the long trip to the ponds at higher altitude. Or perhaps the opium dens, champagne and caviar of Victorian King

William's Town were proving too much for him. He was replaced by an Englishman, A.N. Stenning, in 1896, whose efforts to breed trout under very basic hatchery conditions proved much more successful.³⁵

In 1903, one of the foremost propagators of trout in South Africa, F.G. Chaplin, took over the Pirie hatchery and continued the work of establishing trout populations in suitable rivers in the Eastern Cape. Then, in 1907, Chaplin moved to Jonkershoek in the Western Cape, where he remained until 1942. Sydney Hey said of Chaplin that he had 'put practically a life's work of ingenuity and skill into the establishment and it would be a difficult matter to compute the value of his work'.³⁶ Chaplin was also responsible for the introduction of largemouth bass to South Africa in 1929.³⁷

Paul Curtis also records two charming and possibly apocryphal accounts of trout stockings that are not part of the official record. The first involves two 'carboys' of trout (a carboy is 'a large glass bottle, which could be the size of wine barrel or larger',³⁸ fairly commonly used at the time in transporting fish), an anonymous figure who is possibly Latour, a drunken government official and what was possibly the earliest trout stocking in the Western Cape – into the Hex River by the Heatlie family in 1893. The second is an account of what may have been the first stocking of rainbow trout into the Eland's River in what is now Mpumalanga in 1900, during the South African War. It is a curious tale of chance and mystery, involving a British army officer acting as stationmaster, Sir Percy Fitzpatrick (of *Jock of the Bushveld* fame), and the unlikely appearance of a tank full of dying fish on a train carrying military supplies. The account seems to find corroboration from Bob Crass, who mentions a stationmaster in 1900 depositing the

remaining survivors of a dying consignment of trout into the Eland's River.³⁹ But those are Curtis's stories for the telling and I direct readers to his account in *Fishing the Margins*.⁴⁰

In the years that followed, brown and rainbow trout were stocked in almost all suitable rivers in southern Africa, with a systematic and exhaustive survey and stocking programme commissioned by the Fisheries Survey Committee set up by Parliament following a debate in 1925, and detailed in Sydney Hey's *The Rapture of the River*. Trout were stocked into rivers as far afield as Kimberley, Carnarvon, Britstown, Colesberg and Aliwal North, many of which now hold nothing but dust, testament to global warming and environmental degradation.⁴¹ There can be no doubt that some efforts were quixotic, and the trout populations died off very quickly, and also that the stocking of trout into rivers containing healthy populations of indigenous angling fish, the various yellowfish species being examples, was completely misguided. The establishment of state-sponsored trout hatcheries in KwaZulu-Natal, Mpumalanga and the Eastern Cape also saw the spread of trout into numerous stillwaters of sufficient altitude.

Under the Crown government, governors-general of the provinces received annual reports on 'the success or otherwise of acclimatisation and stocking policies', where poachers could be imprisoned, and anyone caught fishing with worms could be fined up to a pound (see the epigraph from Roy Campbell at the beginning of Chapter 8).⁴²

While MacLean, Parker, Latour, Scott and Chaplin are amongst the figures to have pioneered the introduction of trout to South Africa, it was the next generation of fishery specialists, many of them self-taught and using their own financial resources, who

ensured the continued viability of the fish populations, and who also stocked some of the streams that have since become legendary trout waters.

W.S. Richardson, ably assisted by his wife, ran the Pirie hatchery in the Eastern Cape until 1946. When the hatchery passed from the control of the Frontier Acclimatisation Society to the Cape Provincial Administration, Lieutenant-Colonel J. Geddes-Page was placed in charge.

In Natal, Lionel Day, who was appointed Inland Fisheries Manager in 1926, was sceptical of hatcheries as a means of propagation, and preferred to stock waters with fish captured from already established breeding populations.⁴³ In 1936, he was succeeded by Cherrington Sutton, who was instrumental in negotiating a series of agreements through which farmers would allow members of the public access to their water on the basis of financial reward and assistance with fisheries management. These agreements, and the good relations on which they were based, provided the foundation for the subsequent formation of fishing clubs such as the Underberg-Himeville Trout Fishing Club and the Natal Flyfishers' Club, which offer members access to some of the finest fishing in the province at a very reasonable annual fee.

With the establishment of the Natal Parks Board, trout-rearing in the province increased, with hatchery sites set up in Underberg. Bob Crass was appointed as the Natal Parks Board's Fisheries Officer in 1950, and went on to make an enormous contribution to the propagation of, and research into, freshwater fish, not only trout, both in the province and the country. His books remain standard reference works to this day. Hatcheries were later built at the Royal Natal National Park and Kamberg, though

what is now Ezemvelo Wildlife no longer engages in the production of trout at these facilities. With his appointment to what was then the Natal Parks, Game and Fish Preservation Board in 1975, Jake Alletson brought a wealth of scientific and practical experience to the maintenance and preservation of trout fisheries in the region. Trout fishers in KwaZulu-Natal owe him a huge debt of gratitude.

In the Cape, Arthur Cecil Harrison (known to many as ACH) was a key figure in ensuring the continued existence of trout. Although, like many of the other characters in this story, he lacked any professional scientific qualification, he was appointed Provincial Fisheries Officer, Secretary to the Provincial Advisory Committee for Nature Conservation, and also Secretary of the Cape Piscatorial Society, of which he was both a founding member and driving force from its establishment in 1931. And all of this while continuing to run a business repairing typewriters, which provided his livelihood.⁴⁴

Harrison produced some of the most significant scientific work on freshwater fish in South Africa, much of it appearing in the Cape Piscatorial Society journal *Piscator*, of which he was editor, and which remains to this day a publication of quality and renown, now under the editorial hand of Ed Herbst. Harrison was widely consulted as an expert on freshwater fish, and awarded an honorary Master of Science degree by the University of Cape Town for his work. Bob Crass says that he ‘made a greater contribution to our knowledge of fisheries biology and management, in relation to angling, than any professional scientist’.⁴⁵

In 1942, Douglas Hey took over as curator of the Jonkershoek hatchery. He attained both master’s and doctoral qualifications from Stellenbosch University, with a particular focus on

the fertility of trout ova, and rapidly expanded the scope of the Jonkershoek operation.⁴⁶ Hey understood the potentially false distinction between fish as source of recreation and food, referred to earlier, and was also aware of the need to conserve indigenous fish species, as indicated in the Inland Fisheries Departmental Report No. 7 of 1950, which states:

The primary object is to develop all inland waters to their maximum productive capacity, selecting the most suitable species of fish from the viewpoints of table and sporting qualities. In so doing, there should be a nice balance between the interests of economic fisheries, sport fishing and the natural fauna ... The Department is well aware of its obligations to provide well-stocked waters for resident anglers and the attraction of visitors. Care should be taken to preserve the indigenous fish fauna in certain areas for scientific and educational purposes.⁴⁷

In 1953, Hey was appointed Director of Nature Conservation in the Western Cape, a position he held for many years. His book, *A Nature Conservationist Looks Back* (1995), offers some extraordinary insights into conservation efforts and the coexistence or competition between 'indigenous' and 'alien' species.

While Western Cape streams such as the Witte, Elandspad and Smalblaar are legendary for the trout populations they have sustained for over a century, the famous Jan du Toit's River was stocked as late as 1968. It was regarded by John Beams, one of the best-known South African flyfishers, as epitomising the magnificence of an untamed kloof, and is accessible to only the most intrepid anglers.⁴⁸ In the heart of suburban Cape Town, the Liesbeeck River held a population of breeding trout until the

late 1970s, though the wild-spawned fish were supplemented by hatchery fish from Jonkershoek. Before the river suffered from pollution arising from urban encroachment, catches of fish in the 3–4 lb range were recorded.⁴⁹



One of my favourite poems about flyfishing is by Tim Wright, a wonderful man, a gifted teacher, and someone who really got it – in all senses of the word. Here it is:

Glengarry

What did you catch?

*The silhouette of sedges piercing a marbled sky,
the fragrance of dewed Leucosidia*

*stirred by my passing. Tentative coot calling –
testing the permanence of the evanescent light.*

A Kingfisher flash,

A champagne face-wash,

That feeling of being part of another day's stirring.

Nothing you could eat for breakfast.⁵⁰



In what was then the Transvaal, many waters were stocked through his own initiative and resources by the German immigrant, Frank Charles Braun. He was a jeweller and watchmaker by trade, but was subsequently appointed Honorary Secretary of the Lydenburg Trout Protection and Angling Society.⁵¹ Braun's passion for trout and flyfishing is evident in his reported

comment to Henry Birch Reynardson in 1933: ‘Yes, up here they think I am mad – a *dumkopp*. But I say to them, well you have your tennis and your billiards – they are your hobbies. But my sport is to make things grow – my hobby is Life.’⁵²

While initial trout stocking in the Transvaal was undertaken by individuals such as Braun and others, the Provincial Fisheries Institute was established in Lydenburg in 1948, under the directorship of one of Douglas Hey’s protégés, S.S. du Plessis. Subsequently, the De Kuilen site became at the time the largest trout hatchery and rearing station in Africa.⁵³ There were also many private hatcheries established, including one run by the Mondi forestry company. Du Plessis was succeeded by Richard Pott, who saw flyfishing especially as a means to encourage environmental awareness and engagement. There was even a hatchery set up in Potchefstroom between 1903 and 1911, which received ova from Jonkershoek and Pirie, and apparently once from New Zealand.⁵⁴

Slightly further afield, the Sabie River was stocked in 1904, the Broederstroom in Magoebaskloof in the same year, and the Haenertsburg Trout Association was formed in 1906.⁵⁵ In the Broederstroom, as a schoolboy I caught what remains to this day my largest river trout: a beautiful brown cockfish of 3 lb 6 oz, which fell to that legendary traditional English fly, the Red-Tailed Invicta.

In the northeastern Cape, which has become for many anglers South Africa’s premier flyfishing area, the first rivers in Barkly East were stocked in 1910. Since then almost all of the rivers in the region – including the Langkloof, Kraai, Bokspruit, Riflespruit, Bell, Vaalhoek and Saalboom – have had trout introduced, as has the Karringmelkspruit near Lady Grey.⁵⁶

As pointed out earlier, the stocking of trout into South African waters was part of a global trend, in which 'colonial acclimatisation' played no small part. This process saw trout being introduced to Australia, New Zealand and East Africa, as well as 'non-indigenous' trout species (including brown trout) to North and South America. Despite what many trout detractors say, South Africa's history in this regard is comparatively benign. The introduction of brown trout to North America almost destroyed the indigenous brook trout population, and some species of rainbow and cutthroat trout were also threatened or destroyed by indiscriminate cross-stocking of species from one river to the next.⁵⁷ Seven of the 13 indigenous species of trout in the western United States are threatened with extinction, mostly due to ill-considered or misguided stocking policies leading to competition or hybridisation.⁵⁸ These issues are explored in relation to the stocking of rainbow trout in the US in the book *An Entirely Synthetic Fish*.⁵⁹