

Big East Griqualand Rainbows

By Green Nymph

Veld and Vlei July 1957

While I cannot complain that I have not had my share of big fish while fishing in Scotland for salmon, sea-trout, brown trout, pike, etc., I have been singularly unlucky in regard to out-sized trout — that is, trout of 4-lbs. and over.

All my life I have had the ambition to catch a 4-lbs. trout. I might have got a monster from one of the Scottish lochs, such as Rannoch or Ericht, had trolled a 1-lb. trout behind a rowing boat. If one perseveres in trolling one is bound to catch a large brown trout sooner or later (they are known as ferox), and time and again I have been tempted to give it a trial. The temptation has been strong when I have seen boats returning to the landing stage with a trout in the teens of pounds. The largest I saw was one of over 16-lbs., taken at the end of a long day of trolling, but I have seen larger trout in the show cases of hotel vestibules and lounges.

I am always sorry I did not try just once, but next day I would be fishing my usual three flies by casting from the shore or from a row boat. I preferred this type of fishing to the monotony of trolling.

Not long after I came to South Africa I saw the mounted 10-lb. brown trout from Mertheley Lake, Greytown, caught by Cyril D. Browning. I heard also of large rainbows being taken in East Griqualand from such rivers as the Krom, the Tina and the Tsitsa and from the rivers around Matatiele.

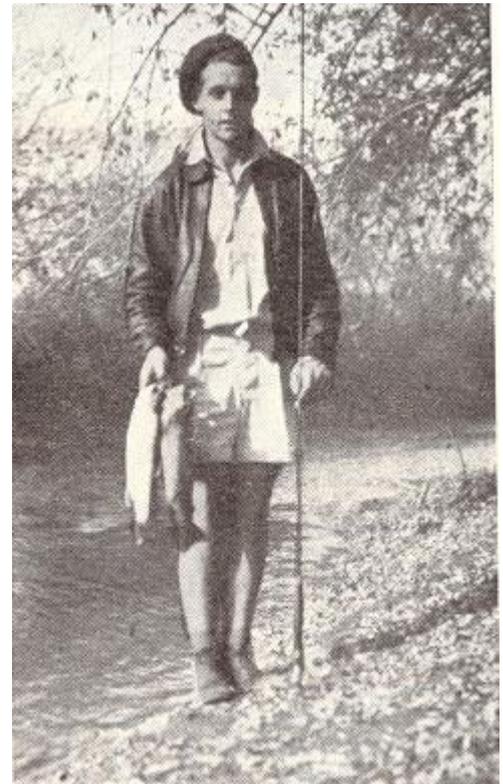
In its palmy days I fished the Krom with my good friend and host, "Rhino" Cathcart. In those days the average weight of the Krom rainbows was about 2-lbs., but, like many other streams, especially the Gungununa, the average weight has gone down to about half a pound. In the palmy days, however — I hope they come again — I had great hopes of at last catching a four pounder, but the hoodoo continues.

One morning as we started to fish "Rhino" asked me to cast upstream and close to my own bank. "There's a four-pounder waiting under that bank." Two seconds after I dropped the fly it was taken and I struck hard. The fish tore upstream for about ten yards, jumped high, and the hook came away!

When we returned to the car for lunch "Rhino" wanted me to try for the fish again, but I felt my luck would be out once more. "It's your fish," I said, so "Rhino" proved it was — 4-lbs. 5-ozs. of shining silver.

Since that day "Rhino" has netted for me a Krom fish of 3-lbs. 15i-ozs. and I have drawn ashore on a sand- bank another of the same weight, but an honest - to - goodness four pounder eludes me. From the rivers around Maclear I have caught my share of three-pounders, and have had similar brown trout from the Loteni, Umkomaas, and the Polela — a rare catch nowadays in the latter river, which seems to have surrendered to the rainbows.

Every year "Piscator", the magazine of the Cape Piscatorial Society, shows photographs of 5 and 6-lb. rainbows, and, for several years now, I have striven hard to get my 4-lb. fish. In September, at the end of this season, I fished the Mabela for three days and did not catch a trout. I did get three plucks in three successive casts by a trout of about 2 1-lb. which I saw distinctly, but fish are weighed on the bank and not in a river. This river is unfishable, except for



Wally Le Roux with a 2lb rainbow taken from the Mabela river, East Griqualand

about a month at the beginning and at the end of the season. Summer storms keep it dirty throughout the rest of the trout-fishing. What is a good pool at the beginning of the season may silt up during the storms and local knowledge is essential

I not think it will be over fished because of this. The fact that it is exceedingly difficult to fish at all is its best preservative. The water is either privately owned or is in Native reserves and anglers must have the riparian owner's permission, or a permit from District Commissioner, which costs £1 for the season in addition to the trout licence.

It should be noted that a Natal licence does not cover fishing in the Cape Province. By kind permission of Mr. K. C. Biggs, I fished his water, which was also being fished by a local storekeeper, Mr. L. Tarr. It would be impossible meet two finer sportsmen. They took me along the river bank showed me not only where to fish but how to fish, which was even more important. Let me explode the belief that all the big Matatiele rainbows are caught on 10 to 15lbs nylon and by using worms spinners.

Biggs and Tarr were using a N 4 Walker's Killer fly and 5lb nylon leader. The conventional chenille body seems to be used most but the fly box also contains yellow chenille "killers".

The stream is canal like and slow flowing and most of the best fishing places are among willow trees. Trees grow close together along the bank and often meet overhead and with their branches dipping in the water. Branches break off and fall into the stream during a storm and eventually sink and collect a festoon of other branches and willow leaves. Most anglers would have a look at such places and pass them by, for it is utterly impossible to cast overhead. In three successive days Tarr had 7, 4 and 4 trout, including a four pounder and two three-pounders.

I followed Biggs on the last day and without success, tried one or two places he recommended. I preferred to watch his technique with my mind on a return visit. Biggs who already had a 1-lb. 5-oz. fish which I weighed, was thinking of packing up about five o'clock when he changed his mind — fortunately I as it proved — and decided to try one other pool.

"Try in here," he said, when we got to the place, but I persuaded him to fish it. "You'll be sorry," he said, and, at his second flip the rod he sent his leaded fly over to the other bank, a short cast about four yards. Immediately was into a strong fish which dove and tugged and then went down stream and turned and came back on the near side of a sunken branch which protruded from the water.

My heart was in my mouth, and "here is the end" I thought, but the line slid over the branch and the fish started to thrash on the surface. When the trout turned Biggs had been obliged to strip line by hand, and, with this line lying at his feet Biggs was obliged to jump across a narrow backwater as the fish showed signs of going upstream. I saw that the line had bunched into a knot and jumped across and tried to undo the tangle. I had no sooner succeeded than the fish tore upstream and round a bend where floating rubbish threatened the end.

Biggs felt something strike his hand and realised it was the knot joining his line to the backing. Had the fish continued and the knot reached the rod rings I couldn't finish this account on a pleasant note. Fortunately, the fish was persuaded downstream and equally fortunately little rubbish fouled the line.

Pierre Leroux had seen the excitement and had brought his adequate landing net, into which Biggs steered the fish. It was a well-shaped cock rainbow weighing 5-lbs. 8-ozs., with a length of 22 inches and girth of 13.3 inches. Time and again I thought "if I hook a fish how shall I land it in this jungle?"

Biggs and Tarr hook their fish first and then tackle the problem of landing afterwards. Rather than lose such a fish I would be tempted to take to the water — yet would I? It must be remembered that the streams come from the Basutoland and East Griqualand mountains and that they are ice cold at the beginning and end of the trout season. I never drink spirits but for many years have carried a flask for emergencies, yet I believe I would be tempted to

sample its contents were I forced to take an ice-cold bath to land my first four-pounder. Those streams are about twenty miles from a country town but farmers are kindly folks and would no doubt have a bottle of the "hard stuff" at home. I wrote of the sportsmanship of Biggs and Tarr, but they crowned it by insisting I take the 5.1-pounder from Biggs and a 3-pounder from Tarr.
