

## Those trout were too cunning for me

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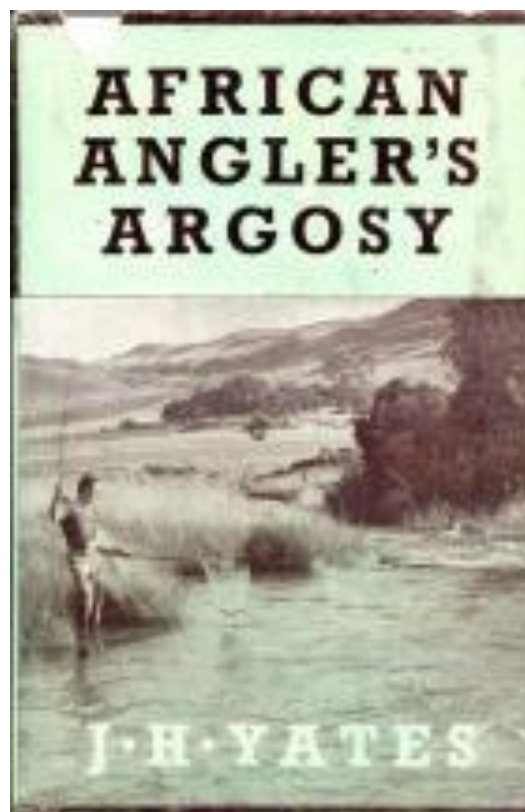
Copied from Veld and Vlei April 1957

A chance remark about fish or fishing is usually sufficient to start a whole series of reminiscences in the mind of most anglers.

When in your February issue I saw the article entitled "Where Trout Are Cunning", I immediately wondered in what part of South Africa the author had been wandering. That the article referred to New Zealand was, I must admit, a bit of a disappointment.

The reason for my feeling a little "let down" was that, a matter of ten minutes or so before purchasing "Veld & Vlei", I had been telling a fishing buddy about some of my recent experiences with cunning trout and I could not help wondering whether some other angler had found the same spot. I will explain.

Some years ago, while on a visit to Lydenburg, Mr. Braun showed me a photograph of a rainbow trout that made me whistle. If it had been recorded, that trout would certainly have captured the South African record. It was a monster.



Naturally, I wanted to know where it had been caught, but all the information I could get at the time was that it had been taken in a deep pool below a fall in a river in the Graskop or Pilgrim's Rest area. For several years following, that was all I knew and it worried me.

Then I met another angler who hinted at a river in which there were some enormous trout. You could, he said, sometimes see them but they were uncatchable. Why they were impossible to catch he could not explain, neither, for some reason, would he tell me where these fish were to be found.

At last, while in Sabie, I fell in with an angler who knew the secret and he didn't mind telling me. And

I don't mind telling you. The wonderful river, reputedly harbouring rainbow trout of incredible dimensions, is known as the Waterval River, some six miles or so from Graskop.

Well I duly arrived at Grasko. But Once again it looked as though I had struck a snag. The man I had been told to contact was not available, and, although I questioned all and sundry in the village, none had ever heard of the Waterval River. One Government Office, the Forestry, was helpful and suggested that I make enquiries at the Blyde Forester's Office — a matter of nine miles away. There I was again courteously received and given the necessary directions and also permission to camp in the reserve.

Before giving further directions as to how to find the Waterval River and its allegedly huge trout, let tell you of my experiences.

The river lies in a steeply side valley. Pine trees in orderly rows cover the slopes and through these the road that leads to the lower reaches of the valley turns and twists. The banks of the river are in most places, covered in deep grass and thick bush. Old claim pegs, white plates on little sticks, mark off what are presumably gold claims. Old worked-out claims, deep holes and piles of stones, make some portions of the banks a danger and the river difficult to reach.

The river itself is a magnificent sight. There are long swift rapids and long deep pools. Those pools I must admit, gave me a feeling sheer helplessness. Deep, anything from eight to twenty feet, they are so clear that you could see pebbles, rocks, water-logged trees and sandy patches that covered bottom. The banks drop sheer into the depths and are usually overhung with thorny bushes.

But it is the clarity of the water that is so impressive, so disconcerting. You feel as conspicuous as the Statue of Liberty and you know at, if there are any trout, they will have seen you long before you them. It is so clear that when cast, your line takes on the appearance of a tow rope. Even the nylon cast is disturbingly visible. A surface ripple or even a little colour in the water would, you feel, make things a little more equal.

Then when you see all those old (sunken trees with their thick twisted branches offering any hooked trout an easily reached snag, well, you realise that your chances of landing anything over a one-pounder are at least a hundred to one. Not all the pools have as many visible snags but I saw few that did not contain some obvious trap for the angler.

Of course I tried. The fly was worked over the bottom, round likely looking rocks, under the bank, drawn over the surface, in fact, in every possible manner could think of. I worked hard and late in run and pool but those trout, if there were any, were too cunning for me. The only consolation I had was that I was not the only one who had failed.

The following morning, fearing the threatening rain, we moved out of the valley to above the falls. Here in the shelter of a roadside tree we stopped for breakfast.

Water was required and so, taking the gallon milk can in one hand and y rod in the other, I set off for the nearest pool. I filled the can and then released the home-tied Invicta from the retaining ring on the rod. A few false casts to get line out and then I dropped the fly at the side of a rock about ten yards away. At that moment it began to rain. At the same time a fish took hard. It was unbelievable. I had made no attempt at a noiseless approach and the milk can had been dumped heavily on the rocky edge of the pool. Now I had a fish on. And what a fight that rainbow put up. Twice I was nearly snagged on some underwater branches that jutted from a narrow cleft in a nearby rock. I am afraid I was a bit hard on that trout and had quite an anxious moment or two as I eased it on to the rocks for I had no landing net. That rainbow was four-teen inches in length and in excellent condition.

The rain had now settled to a steady downpour and so I returned to the car, had breakfast and then in a rubber jacket returned to the pool. Within ten minutes the fly was again taken and after a rousing battle a sixteen-incher that had taken advantage of the whole pool, was slid gently over the rocks.

That, however, although I fished many more pools and runs, was the end. The rainbows caught were certainly nowhere as big as the monsters I had been told were to be found in the river but I had the satisfaction of knowing that I had not fished in vain.

So now, if you are the type of angler who likes to fish against cunning trout and in a river that will test your skill and luck to their utmost, here are the directions.

First of all please remember that you must report to the Forest Officer at the Blyde Forest Office for permission to enter the reserve.

The road from Graskop to the office is sign posted "To the Lisbon Falls". Keep to this road for say seven miles. At that point you cross a bridge and within a hundred yards there is a turn-out on the left. This leads to a saw-mill and a mile or so further on to the Forester's Office.

To get to the river you return to the main road, re-cross the bridge and take the first turn-out on the right. I hope your fishing will be more successful than mine.

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