

A historical perspective on niche tourism: recreational trout fishing in South Africa

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Abstract. Niche tourism is an important focus in current tourism scholarship. Although the international literature on niche tourism is relatively recent in origin it must be acknowledged that niche tourism is not a new phenomenon and that many types of niche tourism have a long history. The aim in this paper is to address a knowledge gap in current niche tourism literature by examining its under-researched past with a case study of recreational trout fishing in South Africa. Using archival sources this study documents the emergence of trout fishing in South Africa and gives historical insight into its origins as a niche form of rural tourism. The popularisation of recreational trout fishing was given an important boost by the infrastructure and agency of the South African Railways especially its publicity and marketing material. Enhanced automobilities and the emergence of early drive tourism, a by-product of improvements which occurred from the 1930s in South Africa's road network, further boosted the growth of trout fishing as a niche in rural tourism.

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1. Introduction

During the early 2000s the concept of ‘niche tourism’ came under scrutiny and consolidated as a significant focus for scholarly research and debate (Novelli, 2005; Ali-Knight, 2010; Novelli, 2018; Sousa et al., 2022). As is stated by Novelli (2022: 344) niche tourism products “are tailored to meet the needs of specific market segments whose size and nature can vary considerably according to the demographic characteristics and the social status of the tours as well as the geography of the destinations involved”. Importantly, niche tourism products offer a counterweight to mass tourism products which involve large numbers of tourists and occur in staged settings (Novelli, 2018). Distinctions are drawn in the literature between ‘macro-niches’ which include culture and heritage, business, and sport and adventure, and then further segmented into ‘micro-niches’ such as gastronomy, cycling or astro-tourism (Novelli, 2005).. Over the past two decades there has occurred the burgeoning of niche tourism offerings in both urban and rural spaces (McKay, 2014, 2017; Mitura et al., 2017; Rogerson & Rogerson, 2021a; Novelli et al., 2022; Kosmaczewska, 2024). Further, in the COVID-19 environment the tourism sector experienced shifts in patterns of mobilities and in consumer demands which have boosted interest in niche tourism products and driven by the confidence of travelling in smaller groups and a less risk-prone environment (Rogerson & Rogerson, 2021b, 2021c). For destinations there are several benefits of stimulating niche tourism (Ekka, 2024). Arguably, niche tourism offers the potential to galvanize inclusive growth and employment opportunities that require more specialized skills than in mainstream mass tourism (Novelli, 2022). In addition, the products of niche tourism might encourage a better geographical spread of the benefits of tourism (Novelli et al., 2022). For Novelli (2022, 347) therefore niche tourism “appears to offer greater opportunities for more sustainable development to restart and build tourism back better post-COVID-19”.

With the rising importance of niche tourism there has occurred a growth of writings on different facets of niche tourism and with contributions to the literature from both the contexts of the Global North and Global South (McKay, 2017; Agarwal et al., 2018; Novelli, 2018; Pforr et al., 2021; Rogerson & Rogerson, 2021a, 2021b, 2021c; Novelli et al., 2022; Sousa et al., 2022; Rodrigues & Carvalho, 2023). Although the international literature on niche tourism is relatively recent in origin it must be appreciated that niche tourism is not a new phenomenon. Many

forms of niche tourism have a long history. Examples include the activities of sport hunting (Lovelock, 2008; Sillanpää, 2008) or mountaineering (Beedie, 2015; Musa & Sarker, 2020; Apollo & Wengel, 2022; Gill, 2022; Rogerson & Rogerson, 2024a). In general, however, the expanding academic writings around niche tourism exhibit the defining feature of ‘present-mindedness.’ With certain notable exceptions (Drummond et al., 2022), the extant literature is overwhelmingly concentrated on contemporary issues. This dominant focus on present-day issues is not surprising in light of the growing volume of research on niche tourism which has been driven by policy imperatives and its potential benefits for destination development (Rogerson & Rogerson, 2021b; Novelli, 2022; Novelli et al., 2022; Sousa et al., 2022; Rodrigues & Carvalho, 2023). Arguably, research on tourism geographies of the past is undeveloped within extant international scholarship and not received adequate attention (Saarinen et al., 2017). It is against this backdrop that the aim is to bridge a knowledge gap in niche tourism literature by examining an aspect of its under-researched past. The specific case study is of recreational fishing in South Africa and its role as micro-niche for small town tourism development. Following the presentation of a contextual literature review and a brief discussion on methods and sources, the early evolution of trout fishing in South Africa is traced as a study in historical niche tourism.

2. Literature context

The growth of fishing as a popular recreational activity is observed in several parts of the world with the Nordic countries emerging as particular hotspots (Bauer & Herr, 2004; Hjalager, 2010; Solstrand, 2013; Mordue, 2016; Pokki et al., 2021). Lovelock (2008) observes that fishing is one of the most popular forms of recreation across many countries. Preston-Whyte (2008: 45) points to the wider geographical appeal of fresh and saltwater fishing and states fishers travel to destinations where environmental conditions favour the occurrence of trout or other gamefish “in South and North America, Australia, New Zealand, Africa, Asia and Europe”. For Hall (2021: 361) recreational fishing represents “fishing by those who do not rely on fishing to supply a necessary part of their diet or income” albeit the caveat is added that in some instances angling may have a dual role of providing recreation and tourism opportunities as well as fish for personal consumption. This activity of recreational fishing encompasses “both ocean and

coastal activities as well as inland fishing on lakes and rivers” (Hall, 2021: 362).

According to Czarkowski et al. (2023) angling is a type of fishery and is defined as a specialized form of tourism and recreation that demands special skills as well as dedicated equipment. Hall (2021) considers that such fishing must be viewed now as a major tourism activity and integral to the ‘blue economy’. It is observed by Hannonen and Hoogendoorn (2022: 6) that recreational angling “is a primary form of outdoor recreation activities worldwide, and participation in recreational angling is steadily growing”. Recreational fishing or angling tourism is understood as tourism trips outside a person’s normal place of residence which involve amateur angling using strictly regulated equipment in line with the established customs (Czarkowski et al., 2023). It was identified as “a form of niche tourism within the umbrella of wildlife tourism” (Preston-Whyte, 2008: 45).

In terms of historical development Mordue (2016) traces the ‘performances’ of freshwater game angling and argues that they uphold sporting traditions which date back to fifteenth century England and cemented in the Victorian era. Davies (2003: 209) considers that traditionally the roots of flyfishing are found with trout and salmon angling “where it has been recognised as an important and valuable recreational fishing method since the seventeenth century”. The geographer, Preston-Whyte (2008) highlights the transition of fly-fishing from a survival strategy to a consumptive recreational pursuit. This transition was “shaped by emerging technologies and innovative strategies in the creation of rods, flies, lines and reels and how to use them” (Preston-Whyte, 2008: 45). The spread of British colonisation precipitated a geographical diffusion of the sport, its protocols and fish to all continents with the exception of Antarctica (Davies, 2003). Lovelock (2008) pinpoints New Zealand as one of the first-mover countries for promoting fishing tourism alongside sports hunting. Indeed, it is argued that recreational fishing shares commonalities with game hunting and shooting as it necessitates travel to often distant locations, use of costly equipment, the willing expenditure of time, the acquisition of specialist knowledge and the search for solitude (Preston-Whyte, 2008).

Notwithstanding the boom in angling as a recreational pursuit Hall (2021) points to the relative underdevelopment of scholarly research on recreational fishing. A recent ‘state-of-the art’ scoping review of angling tourism confirms this broad assessment (Hannonen & Hoogendoorn, 2022). This systematic review disclosed that the

largest share of international research emanates from the Nordic countries which have both ocean shorelines and inland water bodies as potential assets for angling. Beyond the Nordic countries other notable research destinations included Ireland, the USA and South Africa. Thematically, three core themes were identified as prevalent in the existing body of scholarship. The first concerned issues of angling tourism management which encompassed management strategies, regulation issues, species management and sustainability and conservation themes. The second cluster of research was styled as a general category which spanned works addressing the motivations and decision-making of recreational anglers, segmentation, stakeholder perspectives and the different genres of angling such as game-angling, marine angling, and catch and release. The final theme was related to tourism development, issues around impacts both on destinations and local economies, and environmental concerns (Hannonen & Hoogendoorn, 2022). The conclusion was reached that the field of angling tourism merited a significant boost in terms of research focus.

South Africa emerges in this international review as one of the more well-researched countries for angling tourism. The most significant early work is, perhaps, that by the geographer Robert Preston-Whyte (2008) who applied actor-network theory to unpack ‘the lure of fly-fishing’ and its ‘performances’. Several other tourism-linked investigations have appeared most notably around economic impacts and local development potential. Rogerson (2002) identified the importance of trout fishing as one of the drivers and attractions for route tourism in the Highlands Meander region of South Africa’s Mpumalanga province. In addition, the local economic development ramifications of fly-fishing are interrogated for the small town of Rhodes in Eastern Cape province in studies by Du Preez and Lee (2010a, 2010b) and Du Preez and Hosking (2011). It is evident from these investigations that trout fishing can be valuable and a vital component for contemporary small town and rural economic development. Hoogendoorn (2014) isolated the under-researched character of fly-fishing tourism in South Africa and mapped out the contemporary geography of different fly-fishing destinations across Southern Africa for various fish species as well as the infrastructural initiatives established to support this form of tourism. Trout fishing became part of the tourism image of Dullstroom according to De Jager (2010). Butler and Rogerson (2016) focused also on this fly-fishing destination in Mpumalanga province and pinpointed issues of inclusive tourism in this small town.

One critical undeveloped topic across the entire international literature on recreational fishing is the historical dimension and its evolution as a specific niche tourism in various countries. This is certainly the case for South Africa where minimal research attention has been devoted to the historical evolution of trout recreational fishing as a niche form of tourism.

3. Methods

In terms of research methods, the foundation was an examination of existing academic studies and accounts surrounding the development of recreational fishing in South Africa (Harrison, 1956; Bradlow, 1973–1974; Davies, 2003; Draper, 2003; Britz, 2015; Nustad, 2018; Nustad et al., 2023). To explore further the growth of South Africa as a fishing destination an historical approach was pursued through the mining of archival sources. The time period under scrutiny in this paper is from the 1890s to the early apartheid years of the 1950s.

The practice of archival research has been acknowledged as a key research method in disciplines such as geography with scholarly research excavating historical influences on contemporary places (Craggs, 2016; Wideman, 2023). For this investigation the research is anchored on primary documentary material which has been accessed at the South African National Library Cape Town depot. Extensive use is made of the collection of guide books and information booklets most of which were produced through the Publicity and Travel Department of the South African Railways and Harbours (SAR & H). This government-owned agency is viewed as highly influential in the early development and promotion of tourism in the Union of South Africa, especially during the period 1910–1940 (van Eeden, 2011). In addition to material from the railways organisation other guide books and publicity material from the South African Tourist Corporation issued in the 1950s were examined. Arguably, the guidebook is an historical object and demonstrated to be a valuable archival resource for tourism researchers (Peel & Sørensen, 2016; Meulenduks, 2017; Ziarkovski, 2021; Didkovska, 2023). Regarding the key constituent factors that Peel and Sørensen (2016) identify as characterizing guidebooks the South African examples utilised in this research exhibit utility, substance, ephemerality, and assistance. In terms of utility they offer practical information and fishing locations and how to get there. The substance focuses on practical and place information; the ephemerality is to target transient visitors, primarily international

audiences. Most importantly the SAR & H guides provide assistance by evaluating facilities and sites to assist potential tourists with their travels.

In the adoption of an historical archival method this study aligns with a new ‘tradition’ that has appeared in South African tourism research. It has been observed especially during the past decade that a notable trend in South African tourism scholarship is research which engages with tourism past, tourism history and the historical geography of tourism (Rogerson & Rogerson, 2023). Arguably, this advance of an historical focus in South African tourism studies is distinctive within international tourism scholarship and in particular for tourism research relating to the Global South (see eg. Grundlingh, 2006; Bickford-Smith, 2009; J.M. Rogerson, 2017, 2018; Rogerson & Rogerson, 2018, 2019; Sixaba & Rogerson, 2019; van der Merwe, 2019; C.M. Rogerson, 2020; J.M. Rogerson, 2020; Rogerson & Rogerson 2020a, 2020b; Drummond et al., 2021; Rogerson & Rogerson, 2021d, 2021e, 2021f; Drummond et al., 2022; Pirie, 2022; C.M. Rogerson, 2022; Rogerson & Rogerson, 2022a, 2022b; Sixaba & Rogerson, 2023; Rogerson & Rogerson, 2024b; and, van der Merwe, 2024). Noteworthy is that much of this recent strand in South African tourism studies has been authored by geographers (van der Merwe, 2019; Rogerson & Visser, 2020).

4. Recreational fishing as early niche tourism

The research demonstrates that following its establishment in South Africa recreational fishing, and specifically trout fishing, was identified and promoted as an early form of niche tourism. The discussion of findings is presented in three subsections of discussion. These relate to:

- establishing the foundations for trout fishing,
- the agency of the South African Railways in promoting this activity for both domestic and international fishers, and
- the establishment of trout fishing as a micro-niche in rural tourism.

4.1. The Early Foundations

The establishment of recreational fishing in South Africa must be traced back to the late 19th century and before the formal establishment of the Union of South Africa which occurred in 1910. The introduction of trout into South Africa was part of European colonial expansion which involved not

just the movement of people but also of animals and plants (Nustad, 2018). Both Thompson (1913) and Britz (2015) draw attention to the fact that the earliest colonial policies related to the development of inland fisheries rather than South Africa's rich assets for marine fishing. The colonial focus was "on the establishment of traditional British freshwater angling species" (Britz, 2015: 615). The rationale for this emphasis on inland fisheries was given by Thompson (1913: 121) as follows: "The Colonist especially of British blood, seems unable to settle down in a new land until many of the animals and plants that minister to his pleasure or profit in the homeland have followed him: his horse and dog, his beehives and flocks, his fish". Nustad et al. (2023: 3) points out that beyond "making rivers productive by stocking them with fish that could provide both food and sport, British colonists introduced trout to South Africa because fly-fishing for these fish was an important part of reproducing British identity". These attitudes gave impetus to initiatives in the colony of Natal and in the Cape Colony for the introduction of alien fish including trout following their successful introduction from Britain to Australia, New Zealand and Tasmania (Nustad, 2018).

The Cape Colonial legislature Act 10 of 1867 provided for the introduction into the local waters of non-native species of fish. This legislation was expanded further in 1884. It was felt that such introductions could provide good quality fishing that the indigenous small coarse (non-game fish) species did not offer (Davies, 2003). Efforts to establish brown trout in the Cape Colony were undertaken as early as 1875 and made possible by the fact that the "technology for trout farming was well enough understood so that fertilised eggs could be shipped in chilled containers to South Africa" (Davies, 2003: 209). The history of recreational trout fishing in South Africa is considered to begin in 1884 when "arrangements were made by a few enthusiasts to procure consignments of trout ova from England" (South African Railways and Harbours, 1916: 5). Initial results were, however, unpromising in terms of the acclimatization of trout. Issues arose from the long sea voyage, frequent changes of climate and temperature, together with lack of expert supervision and the absence of suitable hatcheries and hatching appliances (Nustad et al., 2023). The year 1890 is seen as a pivotal as with the grant of money from the Cape Government "an expert was engaged to bring from England a large consignment of ova; from this and subsequent shipments the efforts have been crowned with so much success as to negative conclusively the formerly accepted

theory that the artificial reproduction and culture of trout in South Africa was an impossibility" (South African Railways and Harbours, 1916: 6). Davies (2003) considers important the first major hatching successes which occurred from egg importations at the Anneberg Brewery in Cape Town between 1892 and 1894. Other critical innovations were the establishment of state hatcheries at King William's Town (1891) in the eastern part of the Cape and at Stellenbosch (1893) close to Cape Town.

In the colony of Natal Nustad et al. (2023: 3) record the introduction of trout after the defeat of opposition to British colonial rule and that in their attempts to introduce trout "the colonists sought to 'domesticate' the region's land and waters, i.e. to make them in the image of those in Britain". Importantly, South Africa adopted restrictive practices based on English notions of sportsmanship and class, such as fly-fishing only (Nustad, 2018). Such practices "were modelled on those associated with the sporting ethos developed by the Victorian bourgeoisie on English chalk streams" (Nustad et al., 2023: 7). Overall it was considered that much credit was due to the early pioneers of the trout movement for the experiments they undertook to identify the most suitable waters for trout and where they might thrive best. Arguably, the initial motivations for introducing trout were driven by "affects and pleasure rather than monetary gain" and not for tourism development (Nustad et al., 2023). Nevertheless, by 1908 accounts started to appear of the opportunities for trout fishing in the Cape Colony (Manning, 1908) and in following years that the successful stocking of rivers in the Cape and Natal "attracted considerable attention not only in South Africa but even in England" (South African Railways and Harbours, 1916: 6).

4.2. The agency of the South African railways

Following the establishment of the Union of South Africa in 1910 the South African Railways played a critical role in establishing an infrastructure for tourism development in South Africa and for publicizing the country's tourism assets both to domestic and international audiences. What became known (from 1922) as the South African Railways and Harbours assumed a strategically significant role for travel and tourism in South Africa (Foster, 2008; van Eeden, 2011) as well as the wider region of Southern Africa (Rogerson, 2023). During the period 1916-1940 the Publicity and Travel Department of this organisation assumed an active role in leveraging tourism possibilities associated

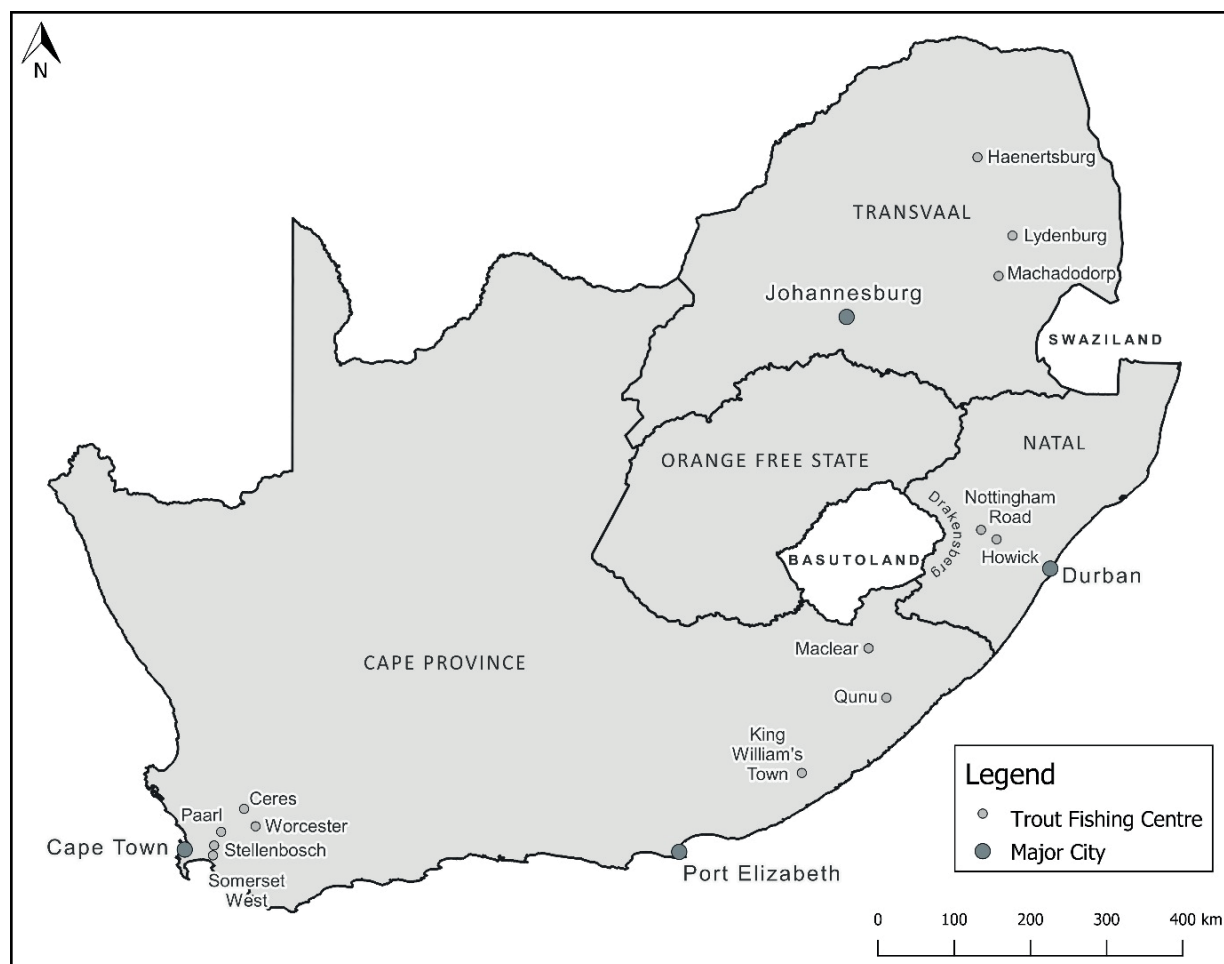


Fig. 1. Location of Leading Trout Fishing Centres 1890 -1940

with recreational fishing. These possibilities were acknowledged by South African Railways which began to promote trout fishing to local as well as international visitors as part of its marketing of South Africa as the 'Land of Outdoor Life' (South African Railways and Harbours, 1923).

This agency issued several guidebooks and publicity material to promote the assets of South Africa as a fishing destination. The guidebooks provided detailed information on a geographical basis of the opportunities for trout fishing (as well as sea angling) across different parts of South Africa (Fig. 1). By 1916 the potential for South Africa to attract international visitors for its trout fishing possibilities already was being promoted through the publicity material and guide books from South African Railways. It was proclaimed that "South Africa at the present time affords the most perfect trout fishing, within easy access of all anglers. The incredulous hopes of many years are now realised and it is becoming very popular for the lover of the art to spend the holidays in the trout

districts" (South African Railways and Harbours, 1916: 5). As a result of careful game laws and stocking of rivers it was stressed "there are many localities which afford good fishing" (South African Railways and Harbours, 1916: 5). Details were given of variously the rivers and streams across the country "which afford good sport, and the towns and villages from which to fish from." (Hey, 1925: 3). In addition, special attention was accorded to locations where recreational fishing opportunities were deemed excellent as the rivers and streams were heavily stocked with fish. In one guidebook much attention was given to which species of trout – Brown or Rainbow – was most appropriate for the South African fishing environment. According to the influential Sydney Hey (1925: 5), who assessed the condition of inland fisheries in the Union, the "climate of South Africa is similar to that of California, the home of the Rainbow, and consequently it thrives better here than it does in Europe, where the climate is probably too cold".

The books produced for South African Railways and Harbours by Hey (1924, 1925) sought to showcase what South Africa had to offer for a mainly male-target audience of trout fishers. In terms of regional descriptions, the guidebooks concentrated on three of the four provinces of the Union of South Africa. Focus was on the Cape, Natal, and Transvaal, with little or no discussion given to the Orange Free State. For the Cape Province a distinction was drawn between the Western area close to Cape Town and surrounds and the Eastern area which was viewed as comprising the towns of Alice, King William's Town, Maclear and the Transkeian Territories. In the Western area the most recommended streams for trout fishing were located in the surrounds of Stellenbosch, Somerset West, Paarl, Wellington, Ceres and Worcester where the best months for fishing were October–December. In addition to its natural scenic beauty the “Cape rejoices in unusually excellent fly fishing, which is now rapidly becoming a prominent feature in the Province as one of the most alluring, successful and popular of sports” (South African Railways and Harbours, 1916: 17). Of the rivers close to Cape Town considerable attention was given to the Eerste River near Stellenbosch with a state hatchery at its headwaters and described as “the most available, and the scenery is as fine as the fishing” (South African Railways and Harbours, 1916: 19). This river was one of the first in South Africa to be stocked with trout and in a context where the general quality of South African accommodation services did not match international standards (Norval, 1936), the area was made especially attractive to potential visitors by the existence of “good hotel accommodation in Stellenbosch” (South African Railways and Harbours, 1916: 21). Other acclaimed trout fishing sites close to Cape Town were the Lourens River at Somerset West, described as easily accessible and therefore a favourite haunt for anglers, and the Berg river at Paarl “a paradise to the angler and the starting point of many excursions” (South African Railways and Harbours, 1916: 23).

High recommendations were awarded to the rivers in the eastern district of the Cape and most especially around the towns of Maclear and Qunu (Fig. 1). Hey (1925: 12) observed “I should strongly advise the fisherman who wishes to spend a really enjoyable holiday to go on to Maclear”. It was stated that in terms of trout catches in “the Maclear district one rarely has a blank day” (Hey, 1925: 14). Moreover, it continued that “Here, in my opinion, is the cream of South African fishing - a glorious climate and beautiful surroundings.

The fisherman has a stretch of 400 miles of well-stocked trout water on which to exercise his skill”. The remoteness of this destination and long railway journey would be compensated by “the beauties of the river, the surrounding grass-covered hills, the rugged mountains in the background, the sunshine and clear atmosphere” (Hey, 1925: 13). Another region of South Africa celebrated for trout fishing was the Midlands of Natal where the fishing centres included Nottingham Road and Howick (Nusad et al., 2023). In this area it was described that “anglers find ample reward; in fact, there is no other part of South Africa where the fisherman can find better sport with rod and reel than in these waters” (Hey, 1925: 21).

In the Transvaal it was considered that trout culture “has made considerable headway in recent years, and a number of streams now provide trout fishing of a high class” (Hey, 1925: 27). The potential fisherman visiting the eastern areas of the Transvaal could enjoy its “rugged mountains” and with “the added attraction of ‘wildness’ to recommend it” (Hey, 1925: 27). Indeed, the publicity for the Transvaal was directed at specific challenges for the international fishers from Europe: “the rivers reveal a certain impetuosity and waywardness which intrigue the Northerner, accustomed as he is to a less harsh environment in his angling excursions”. Lastly, only limited focus was given to the Orange Free State where the stocking of rivers “has not up to the present resulted in that measure of success which was anticipated” (South African Railways and Harbours, 1916: 117). It was considered that “the trout have not so far displayed any especial partiality towards the Orange Free State rivers, although determined efforts have been made, with varying degrees of success, to stock the streams” (South African Railways and Harbours, 1916: 117).

4.3. Trout fishing as tourism micro-niche

In establishing trout fishing as a niche tourism activity the advantages of South Africa's climate were given major focus as an attraction for potential international visitors. It was argued that the “fly-fisherman of the Northern Hemisphere has, for the most part, a somewhat dreary outlook in the winter months. The joys of his chosen recreation are apt to resolve themselves into recollections of past achievements or visions of future exploits.... Psychologically the trout fisherman is in the same category as the game-hunter; he craves the outdoor life, and wants constant activity, but he has an even more limited period in which to follow his pastime

.. To him the close season is like a prison!” (South African Railways and Harbours, 1929: 3). The contrasts between the bleak Northern hemisphere winters of Europe were repeatedly spelled out: “In the Southern Hemisphere, where the seasons have a reverse application, and Christmas is spent in a silk suit rather than a fur coat, the trout fisherman of the Northern World will find a safety valve for his pent-up desire. The Union of South Africa, particularly commends itself to the Northerner, for the land of the springbok, and the Zulu has shown much enterprise in stocking streams within its boundaries some of the South African rivers are now comparable with the best trout streams of the Northern World” (South African Railways and Harbours, 1929: 4). The marketing of trout fishing in South Africa at the end of the 1920s is presented on Figure 2.

With the geographically variable conditions for trout fishing across the country it was stressed that “the fly-fisherman changing his venue will find satisfactory sport for ten months of the year” (South African Railways and Harbours, 1929: 4). This message was repeated in several publicity brochures directed at international travellers that in South Africa fly fishing “can be followed for ten months of the year by moving from one district to another” (South African Railways and Harbours, 1934: 4). The attractions of trout fishing related not only to the sport of catching but also “in the exquisite beauty of the varied scenery” (South African Railways and Harbours, 1916: 7). This was portrayed as follows: “Close by is a miniature waterfall, foam-flecked and rainbow-arched, while beyond, the little stream goes murmuring on its happy way between dark recesses of stately rocks. There is a lavishness of scenic beauty to captivate the eye and enthuse one’s soul with the grandeur of one’s surroundings” (South African Railways and Harbours, 1916: 7). In particular, South Africa was seen as blessed with scenic attractions to captivate potential trout fishermen. “Among the varied physical features of the earth, rivers and lakes have always appealed most keenly to man’s sense of the beautiful in nature, and in these respects South Africa meets the most exacting requirements of the beauty-loving tourist, and presents a perfect field for the fly catcher” (South African Railways and Harbours, 1916: 7).

Comparisons were drawn between the assets of South Africa’s fishing waters with those of other countries: “Anglers who have fished in most places say that trout fishing in this country compares very favourably with that obtained in English and Scottish waters” (South African Railways and Harbours,

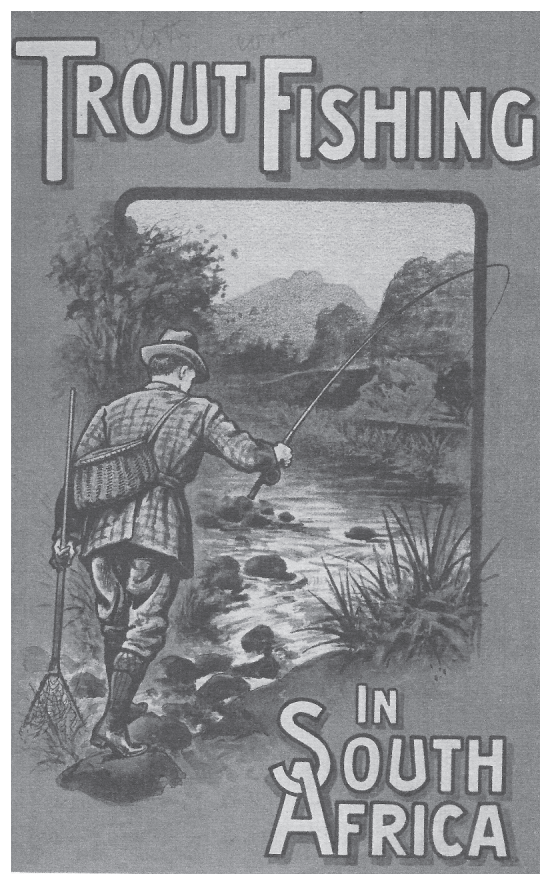


Fig. 2. Promoting Trout Fishing in South Africa
Source: South African Railways and Harbours 1929

1916: 7). In particular, the trout fishing countryside of Natal was likened to the Scottish Highlands. Overall, as compared to the United Kingdom the landscape of South Africa was expressed in terms of “largeness, spaciousness, even grandeur rather than sylvan charm” (South African Railways and Harbours, 1929: 5). Special mention was given to the grandeur of the Drakensberg National Park in Natal, the source of many rivers that offered trout fishing. The lure of South African rivers and streams for fly-fishing was highlighted by the use of photographs to celebrate the ‘performance’ of (predominantly male) trout fishers in attractive scenic settings (Fig. 3). For potential international visitors beyond the attractions of trout it was stated they might enjoy a “visit spiced with adventure, since the country has a fascinating spell, and its history is full of romance” (South African Railways and Harbours, 1923: 227).

By 1929 there is evidence that trout fishing was on the increase in South Africa, the majority domestic fishers but with continuing efforts by South African Railways to promote fishing tourism across South

Africa to international markets. Much emphasis was given to improvements in infrastructure and accommodation services that facilitated the country's competitiveness for fishing. During the 1920s and 1930s the poor quality of accommodation services, especially of hotels, in South Africa was identified as a major constraint on the expansion of international tourism (Norval, 1936). As a whole the overall standards of hotel and accommodation services in South Africa were far below international standards until the late 1960s (Rogerson and Rogerson, 2022c). It was acknowledged therefore that despite all its advantages South Africa offered in the way of sport that it "was not altogether commendable for fishing excursions" (South African Railways and Harbours, 1929: 5). The guidebooks sought, however, to assure visitors with a more positive picture of the availability of 'comfortable lodging' albeit acknowledging that South Africa "still retains many of its primitive features, but in the things that matter, such as transport and accommodation, the country is getting much nearer to the standards of the Northern World" (South African Railways and Harbours, 1929: 5). In some 'country areas' local farmers with fishing rights provided lodging for visiting fishermen. A sense of adventure was offered with the prospect for visitors that much of South Africa still belonged "to the untamed portion of the globe" (South African Railways and Harbours, 1929: 8). Among the other advantages of South Africa as a destination were stated as that trout fishing was noticeably 'less commercialised' than in the Europe and the assistance available by the growth of angling societies which provided sources of local information for overseas visitors.

Notwithstanding the considerable promotional material targeted at international audiences the steady growth of recreational trout fishing during

the 1930s and 1940s remained predominantly a domestic affair. Trout fishing became a small niche tourism activity within the broader rise of rural tourism in South Africa (Rogerson and Rogerson, 2021e). The expansion of rural tourism was advanced by improvements occurring during the 1930s in the national road network which were accompanied by growing commercial vehicle ownership. In 1935 when the National Roads Act was legislated, the number of motor cars in South Africa was reported as increasing at an annual rate of 16 percent such that there was a total of nearly 200 000 private vehicles (Floor, 1985). Arguably, the improvement in the road network as well as the advancement of drive tourism therefore became important stimuli for rural tourism in addition to the activities and network of South African Railways (van Eeden, 2012). The decades of the 1930s and 1940s witnessed the consolidation of trout fishing as a recreational sport in South Africa. The geography of the sport of trout fishing continued to focus in the western part of Cape Province around the towns of Stellenbosch, Paarl, Worcester and Ceres; in the eastern part around Maclear it remained the most celebrated for "the best trout fishing in South Africa" (South African Railways and Harbours, 1938: 24). The Drakensberg was described as "the cradle of many waterways, and the best trout streams in Natal flow from the mighty ramparts of this mountain playground" (South African Railways and Harbours, 1938: 14).

At the close of the 1930s the Transvaal had consolidated further as a new destination for trout fishing. The leading centres were around Lydenburg in the eastern part of the province and Haenertsburg in Northern Transvaal. The recorded progress in the opportunities for fly-fishing in these areas was flagged with the caution that in these areas the infrastructure was less developed than in the Cape or Natal such that "in some parts pathways alongside trout streams are but crude animal tracks" (South African Railways and Harbours, 1938: 25). Nevertheless, the advice was offered to potential recreational fishers that "for the angler who does not mind a spice of adventure the conditions are ideal" (South African Railways and Harbours, 1938: 25). Post-World War II infrastructural improvements in terms of road access took place and mirrored in a changed tone by the early 1950s in the promotional literature issued by the South African Tourism Corporation (1953).

In the early years of apartheid (from 1948) the Transvaal was viewed as "the Fisherman's Paradise" with an abundance of coarse fish, game fish as well as trout (South African Tourism Corporation, 1953). In particular, the localities of Lydenburg and



Fig. 3. The 'Performance' of Trout Fishing in South Africa 1920s

Source: South African Railways and Harbours 1929

Machadodorp were pinpointed as prime spaces for recreational trout fishing in the Eastern Transvaal. In the northern part of the province the well-stocked streams of the Haenertsburg area were deemed as equivalent to the finest fishing waters of Canada or New Zealand (South African Tourism Corporation, 1953). During the unfolding apartheid years of the 1960s trout fishing consolidated further as a driver for small town tourism, part of the boom of (mainly white) domestic tourism in this prosperous decade (Rogerson, 2015). Improved automobilities and the growth of drive tourism contributed to the expansion of trout fishing as an incipient form of niche tourism. For example, the small town of Dullstroom began to grow in popularity as a tourism destination linked to trout fishing as a result of improved access to South Africa's major economic centres (Butler & Rogerson, 2016).

According to Davies (2003) trout fly-fishing in South Africa only 'came of age' from the 1970s when the legislative environment surrounding this recreational sport was radically restructured. The official deregulation of the recreational fisheries caused the privatisation of trout hatcheries, a proliferation of trout farms as well as fishing activities and even the appearance of syndicated fisheries alongside fewer, more accessible commercial fly-fisheries. Trout fishing became now a popular basis for tourism destination development for many small towns (De Jager, 2010). More specifically, trout as an asset for small town destination development was an opportunity in the 1970s and 1980s to be leveraged mainly by those small towns which fell geographically within the apartheid-designated 'white' space of South Africa as opposed to the spaces of the former 'Black' Homelands (Donaldson, 2018; Donaldson & Majiet, 2023).

5. Conclusion

'Presentism' is a defining characteristic of most international research on niche tourism. This study builds upon an emerging geographical tradition of research in South African tourism scholarship which explores past tourisms to examine the historical evolution of one popular form of niche tourism. Recreational fishing for trout has a long ancestry especially in the United Kingdom. The colonial connections between South Africa and the United Kingdom were a significant foundation for the introduction of trout fishing into South Africa (Nustad, 2018). Nustad et al. (2023: 3) write of the 'Anglification' of South African waters and assert that "trout introductions were meant to make South

African landscapes 'natural' in a way that resembled streams in the UK". The findings from this archival research evidence that during the 1920s and 1930s tourism promoters in South Africa acknowledged the potential for maximizing opportunities related to special interests such as trout fishing and to attract international visitors especially from the United Kingdom.

Arguably, for the historical period under scrutiny from the 1890s into the early apartheid years of the 1950s, recreational fishing for trout emerged and subsequently consolidated as a micro-niche in the economy of rural tourism in South Africa. Although a small number of international tourists were attracted by the recreational fishing assets of South Africa, the major participants in the sport of trout fishing remained domestic travellers. The popularisation of trout fishing as sport and recreation was given an important boost by the expanded network infrastructure of the South African Railways as well as the publicity and marketing material generated by this organisation. Further impetus to the growth of trout fishing arose from enhanced automobilities and early drive tourism encouraged by improvements which occurred beginning in the 1930s from the development of the national road network of South Africa (Floor, 1985; van Eeden, 2012). While the growth of trout fishing was a stimulus for the development and rudimentary upgrading of hospitality services in rural areas the standards of most accommodation facilities in 'country areas' lagged that of developed countries until (at least) the 1960s. Overall this research offers historical geographical insight into the recreational sport of trout fishing and its birthing as a form of niche tourism.

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