

Inzinga Intrigue

Contents:

1. Introduction
2. Maps and topography
3. Books of relevance & Interest
4. Wildlife
5. Writings about the Inzinga by various authors:
 - Bob Crass
6. Details of Inzinga River conservation

Version no	2
Date	January 2021
Editor	Andrew Fowler

1. Introduction

An introduction to the Bushmans River as a Trout River

The Inzinga River is known to very few fly fishers. In fact, as I write this, you will struggle to find anyone who has ever fished it. This state of affairs is largely due to the fact that much of the portion of interest to the trout fisherman flows through private farms. Even in its headwaters, the stream is not really of a fishable size until it reaches the 1600m contour, and at that very point, it passes out of the publicly accessible Drakensberg park, onto private land. It is not until it reaches 1280m, 18.7kms later, that it again enters publicly accessible land, that being the tribal area.

In the intervening distance, and on private farms, it is unfortunately choked with wattle trees for a significant portion of its course. There are however some clear areas that look particularly inviting, and it would surely serve flyfishers of the future to preserve or indeed restore this river as a recognised and valued Trout stream..

Source:

The Inzinga , rises on the promontary of high ground that extends off the end of the Giants Castle at an altitude of 2,100 metres above sea level.

Trout Water:

Unlike the Mooi and Bushmans, the Inzinga first becomes fishable as a Trout stream at an altitude of about 1,600 metres ASL, a full 200 metres lower than many more significant berg trout streams .

There is no more than about 4 or 5 kms of feasible trout water above the road. Below the road (and the waterfall), there is approx 2.5 kms of trout water before the river enters the inaccessible gorge. Below the gorge there is approx 8km of trout water on two private farms, and then there is about 9 kms of water in the tribal area above the P127 road bridge.

Tributaries:

Major tributaries include the Kwamanzamyama and its own tributary, the Rooidraai, both of which you cross on the main Nottingham Road- Lotheni road on the way in (if you come in that way of course). This stream enters the river in the steep gorge section. The Nkolweni , which you also cross on that road, enters from the south, just below the gorge. Numerous other, largely unnamed tributaries enter below that, and all of them come off the high ground on either side of the valley, some in steep gullies, contributing cold water into what is sometimes a hot, and certainly a low lying, valley floor.

Accessibility:

Accessibility is a a problem (at the time of writing). Watersong farm has at times been owned by people who have sold day tickets for the stillwaters that have been modified and created from the cut off oxbows left there by the enormous styorm some time in the 1960's which is mentioned by Bob Crass in his 1971 book.

Below the road is private water belonging to the farmer who controls it along with the syndicate water on his nearby dam; and below that is another private farm. The tribal water appears to be publically accessible, but it might be wise to consult the local inhabitants for permission to fish.

Fish:

You can read about the trout fishing in the Inzinga in the book excerpts that follow. It would seem that the stream was originally a Brown Trout stream, but at some point Rainbows were introduced, and since that time it has been known to hold both. In 1971, Crass writes that Browns and Rainbows were more equally represented further down, but that Rainbows were more prevalent at Belmont. This after 200 Rainbows were introduced in 1904, only Browns found in 1930, and Crass stating that Rainbows were introduced in 1952. So little record exists of the fishing in the Inzinga in more recent decades that it would be a guess to quote expected catches or sizes, or in fact any other detail. (Except to say that both Browns and Rainbows are known to be present at time of writing (2018)).

Water Quality:

The water quality of Inzinga is good in that it is not contaminated in any way. Having said that, the prevalence of wattles along the course of many of the tributaries, including the very small ones, and way up into the mountains too, appears to be a contributor to slightly milky water colour at times. But for the most part, the water is good, and it certainly has all the attributes required by trout.

Wattle, bramble, gum, bugweed:

The upper reaches of the river just below the park as well as many of the small tributaries up on the Rooidraai and elsewhere, are infested with wattle. It is worrying to see how far it has been allowed to creep up towards the mountains! Then on Belmont, it is clear in the top section, but for some pretty horrible bramble. As the river enters the gorge, the wattle infestation is diabolical. The problem is that this is a hard to reach place, and it is not visible from the road.

Furthermore the task of removing it is almost unthinkable , as one cannot get a vehicle even close. Where the river exits the gorge, wattle control has been practiced by the farmer, and things look much better. It would be interesting to investigate the effect of the thick 3km infestation in the gorge, on the water below..... .

Aquatic Insect populations:

The Inzinga appears to have a good diversity of aquatic life.

History

It is not clear exactly when Trout were first established in the Inzinga River, but it cannot have been long after the first three rivers were stocked in 1890. It is listed as one of the rivers stocked with the successful hatchings of 1893. Crass records that Rainbows were introduced in 1904, but did not survive in 1930. Presumably there were Browns in the river before 1904. In the 1936 book "Fishing the Inland Waters of Natal", Mr G Boik is named as the conservancy secretary who could advise you on fishing on the Inzinga (and lotheni), and Mr SG Adlam of Belmont was mentioned as the person who could sell you a trout fishing license. "Seven and sixpence" for 7 days!

You could also contact W J McDonald and arrange accommodation at the "Impendhle Hotel", which would allow you to fish 5 miles of the Inzinga, or Mrs AC Carter at Belmont to stay there and fish "25 miles of the Inzinga River". [By my measurement, the water from where the river becomes fishable in the headwaters to its confluence with the Mkomazi, measures just 35 kms (21 miles). It does therefore seem possible that even back then the Inzinga was not all that well known, or that the old publications may have punted it as a venue with limited accuracy or knowledge.]

In that same publication, the river is listed as a brown trout river.

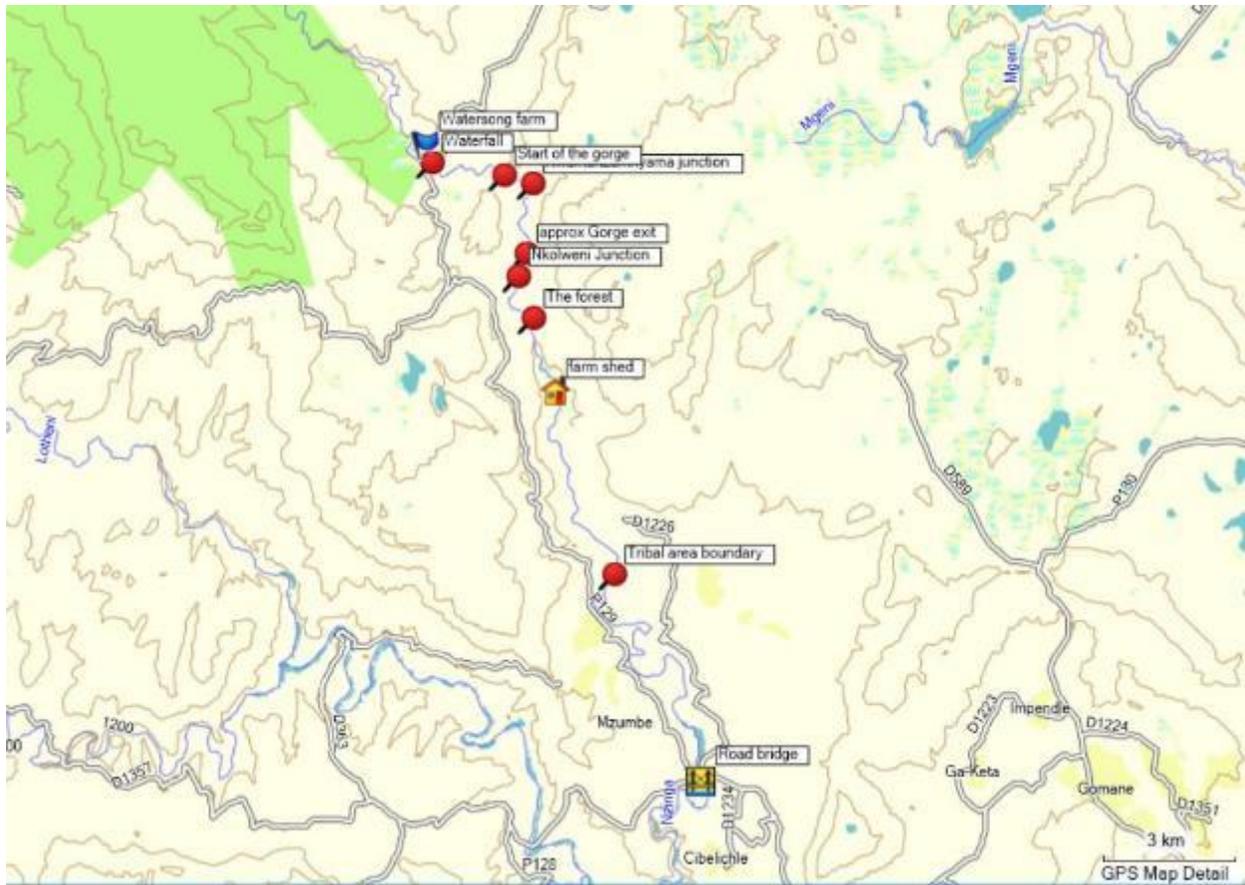
In 1946, Bob Crass published a scientific paper dealing with the diet of Trout, and his sample included 12 browns from the Inzinga.

Geoff Pascoe, retired traffic chief from Pietermaritzburg, who grew up in the Elandskop area, recalls going to Impendle and buying a day permit, and then fishing the Inzinga in the tribal area for Brown Trout. That might have been in the 1960's. Keith Hobday remembers Tom Sutcliffe, High Huntley and others , fishing the river in the valley below the gorge, and catching numerous small fish that were then transported and stocked in the dam of George Lourenz at Mount LeSueur. That would have been in the early 1970's.

2. Maps and topography

In Bob Crass' two books, he claims that the stream rises at 1800m (6,000 ft). In his 1986 "Trout in South Africa" that the river rises at 1800 m ASL, away from the main berg. In his 1971 "Trout

Fishing in Natal”, he mentions it rising at 6,000 ft. But in fact the stream rises at an altitude of 2100m, within a kilometre of the Reekie Lyn stream, out on the ridge that extends from the end of Giants Castle. Either way, it passes through a steep gorge on an old title deed appropriately called “Devils Dyke”, within the Umkhomazi Wilderness area, before emerging into more open ground at around 1500 m. From here it passes onto “Pot Luck” farm (now known as Watersong) where it apparently once had meanders not unlike the Mooi at the lower end of Kamberg Reserve, but the stream’s course is now more direct, and arguably less interesting , before it passes under the road, and over the falls. On the farm Belmont below the falls, there is some beautiful water for about two and a half kilometres. From that point it enters a very steep gorge, made all the more inaccessible due to the thick wattle infestation. That gorge continues for a kilometre before the river is joined from the north by its sizeable tributary the Kwamanzamnyama. A further two kilometres later, it emerges from the gorge, and the wattle infestation, and provides open and accessible river banks for about eight and a half kilometers on the farms Silverstreams and Pendleton. This water is interesting, and includes some boulder strewn sections, a piece of forest lined bank, some fast water, and meadow type water where there are sheep pastures and poplar trees along the river. This river valley is time consuming to reach and requires a four wheel drive vehicle, as the valley is a steep one, with just one or two basic farm tracks that come down from the district road on the south bank (The P129), that runs along the course of the valley. The high ground to the south , (the slopes of Mount LeSueur), tower some 400 metres higher, as do Kilalu and The Cairns to the North, in the vicinity of the high ground above Umgeni Vlei (The source of the Umgeni). This makes the valley an imposing one, and quite unlike any of the other Trout streams in the area. Where the river emerges into the tribal land, there are some very large and deep pools, but as the river descends for nine kilometres from the private farms at 1300m to the road at around 1200m, the effects of erosion and habitation become more and more apparent, and the river looks less promising for Trout.



3. Books of relevance & Interest

- Trout fishing in Natal ...by Bob Crass
- Trout in South Africa....by Bob Crass
- Fishing the inland waters of Natal (1936)...Natal Provincial Administration

THE INZINGA

TRAVELLERS who follow the picturesque route from Nottingham Road to Himeville and Underberg pass through the valley of the Inzinga River. Many people probably cross the little river without stopping, but some pause to look at the waterfall plunging into a deep pool a couple of hundred metres below the road.

The Inzinga rises on the dissected tableland of the Drakensberg foothills, between the valley of the Loteni in the south and the Mooi in the north. It does not reach the main escarpment of the high Drakensberg but originates in springs and seepage areas about 6 000 ft. above sea level. As the headstreams come together, they sink into a deepening gorge, from which the river emerges some 2 miles (5 km.) above the road. Below this top gorge, a series of deep pools extends down a rocky section. Because the pools are large in relation to the size of the stream, which carries only a few cusecs at low flow, this part of the river has been known to produce some good-sized trout.

The best fishing, however, used to be within two kilometres of the bridge, where the river flowed quietly through an open valley. There was one stretch, in particular, that always held trout. It was not deep but had cover along the banks and some submerged rocks conveniently situated for trout to shelter behind. On a fine autumn day when a fall of winged ants brought the trout to the surface, rings would be visible at intervals all up the pool. Careful stalking and delicate presentation of a black-hackled fly might bring three or four brown trout to the net.

In that particular area, good fishing is now a thing of the past since a violent flood cut a new, more direct, channel and left very little holding water for trout. To obtain permission to fish above the bridge would not therefore be worthwhile today.

Below the bridge, the Belmont water continues to produce fish, although there are very few in a droughty year when the stream shrinks to a mere trickle. In a good year, the owner's

guests catch some well-conditioned trout; the river bed carries a prolific supply of insect larvae and crabs for the fish to feed on.

Both brown and rainbow occur in the Inzinga, with a predominance of rainbow on Belmont. Farther downstream, the two species are more equally represented, although a greater number of rainbows are generally caught. This does not necessarily indicate that rainbows do actually outnumber brown trout. The latter are known to be harder to catch, so angling results are not always a reliable index of the relative abundance of the two species. Brown trout were the first to become established in the Inzinga, and it was not until 1952 that rainbows were introduced.

The Inzinga valley is unique in its topography. As one approaches by road, either from north or south, one has the sensation of entering a vast sunken basin. The bottom of this basin is below the falls on Belmont where the river winds across the valley floor before entering a deep, narrow gorge with sandstone cliffs towering above the watercourse.

For several miles the valley remains steep-sided with little level ground near the river. Its inaccessibility adds charm to this part of the Inzinga, where pools form some 10 per cent. of the total, most of the course consisting of shallow running water.

Finally, the river breaks free of the encircling mountains and enters an open valley in a Bantu Location. The road to Impendhle runs parallel with the stream, so access is easy for anyone who has a permit to enter the reserve. The fishing is not easy, however, due to the steep banks that have become covered in silver wattles, not to mention the long grass and other herbage that grows in summer.

To reach many of the best places, one should be prepared to wade. With deep holes appearing at intervals, a wetting is on the cards unless the angler watches his step. Beds of silt are found in backwaters but these also can prove a trap for the unwary. Nevertheless, the location water of the Inzinga offers rewarding sport under the right conditions. Generally the best time is on a spring or autumn evening.

Daytime fishing is seldom good in this rather hot valley, unless the weather is cloudy. I remember finding little sign of trout on a bright sunny day, the only fish taken being a 16oz. brown trout. I noticed the fish cruising slowly, close to the surface, in a long pool. When I cast my flies in front

of it, the trout took the tail fly on the second attempt. It fought rather sluggishly, and the reason became obvious when I saw the hind legs of a frog projecting from its mouth. The frog was, indeed, so big that the fish was unable to swallow its meal completely. Yet it had taken my artificial fly!

One can only conclude that that particular trout was unusually greedy. Anyway its capture saved what might otherwise have been a blank morning. Blanks are by no means uncommon if one fishes only in the heat of the day. On a favourable evening — not one with a cold east wind — the pools come alive with rising trout. The majority will probably refuse to take an artificial fly, but they give an incentive to go on trying.

Near the bottom of the open valley the road to Impendhle crosses the river and below that the character of the Inzinga changes. Its gradient steepens as it cuts through a great mass of dolerite and winds in its rocky course to join the Umkomaas in an inaccessible valley. The Inzinga ends as it began, far from any road, its waters hidden from the traveller's eye.

From "Trout in South Africa" , by Bob Crass 1986:

The Inzinga is a fascinating little river that rises short of the main Berg, at about 1 800 m above sea-level, and has no holding water for trout until it is within 3 km of the main road between Himeville and Nottingham Road. Below the road there is a 10 m waterfall into a deep pool which, like most waterfall pools, is not as productive as shallower places with a better food supply.

The waterfall marks the river's entry into a remarkable sunken basin in which the once horizontal rock strata dip at a crazy angle. The river leaves the basin through a narrow defile and flows through a deep valley that looks almost unchanged since the day in 1930 when I caught eight brown trout of up to a pound in weight. There were no rainbows in the Inzinga at that time, although 200 had been introduced in 1904.

Farther downstream the valley opens out, with the river winding through cultivated fields. Above the bridge on the road to Impendle long, deep pools occur with rather heavily silted beds. The final section of the river is rocky, as the valley deepens to join that of the Umkomaas.

From "Fishing the Inland waters of Natal" 1936:



FISHING
THE INSINGA,
BELMONT WATERS

The Inzinga now (2017):
Belmont above the gorge:





Looking upstream across Belmont from the start of the gorge:



Wattle congestion in the gorge: Looking up towards the junction with the Amanzinyamna:



Open water below the gorge:



Looking down towards the forest:



4. Wildlife

Some animal species you can expect to encounter on the Inzinga:

- Leopard
- Baboons
- Bushbuck
- Reedbuck
- Eland
- Mountain Reedbuck
- Vaal Rhebuck
- Duiker
- Cape Clawless Otter
- Slender Mongoose
- Porcupine
- Black backed Jackal
- Aardvark

5. Details of Inzinga River conservation

In the headwaters, there have been several hap hazard attempts to remove wattle, conducted by the government agency “Working for water”. But the work has been fragmented and random, and will have achieved very little. There are no other visible attempts to conserve or preserve this upper river catchment.