

30 November, Pietermaritzburg

We parted with our motor van at Durban and Ernest, the chauffeur, sails from there early in December. Our touring car we have kept – partly because we could not obtain an adequate bid for it and partly because we wanted to use it for the journey to Mont aux Sources, the first stage of which was to Pietermaritzburg.



Dr Bews at the Botanical Gardens

It was oppressively hot today, with thunder threatening in every quarter. Accompanied by Dr. Bews, an Orcadian botanist, we visited the Botanical Gardens about 2 miles out which H. Wilson describe as the best in the Southern Hemisphere. It was certainly very interesting containing fine specimens of trees and some very large bushes of Japanese Azaleas (*A. simsii* ?)

1 December, Winterton

Winterton was not on our programme; but a sudden downpour of rain brought it very much into prominence and made it an extremely desirable, if not a necessary, stopping place. Five miles short of this little township the roads became well-nigh impassable. Being an un-metalled surface it was soon rendered so slimy by the rain, that the car slithered about like a cake of soap on a sheet of ice, and it was only with the utmost caution that we managed to cover this last five miles and take cover from the deluge.

Like the Transkei, the grasslands of these inland hills are almost destitute of flowers at this time of year – we saw a few *Watsonias*, a yellow-blossomed bulbous plant*, some *Convolvuli* and, in one place, a very striking scarlet *Erythrina* – but otherwise absolutely nothing to beguile us by the wayside. Some

of the birds, however, were interesting, especially the paradise whydah*, with his embarrassingly large tail and peculiar flight. This extravagant caudal appendage displayed to advantage as he flies with elaborate, flickering wing beats, striking the air with very deep, butterfly-like strokes. The male red-shouldered whydah***, so common near Port Shepstone has somewhat similar rowing wing-beats, so this form of “display” flight is not necessarily associated with the long tail. We passed several Wheatear like birds which appeared almost uniform sooty black until they showed their white wings in flight. The flickering manner in which they flew made it evident they were intentionally displaying the white as an adornment. (Apparently, the ant eating chat *Myrmecocichla formicirrosia*)

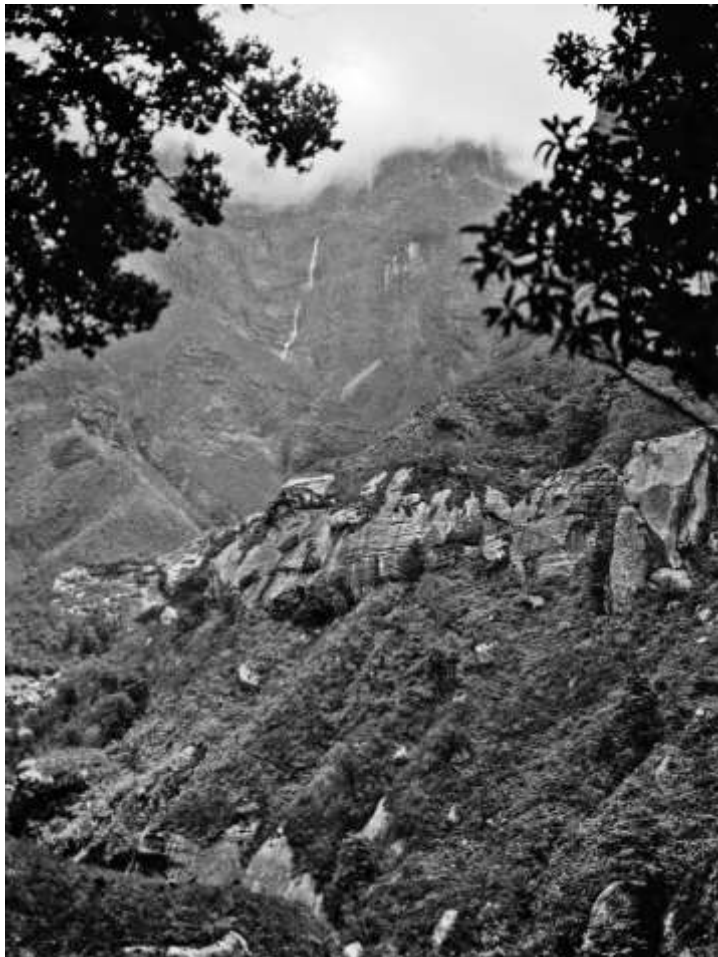
**Hypoxis* sp.

***Vidua paradisca*

****Urobrachya brocagii*

2 December, Mont aux Sources

It had cleared by this morning and the roads appeared to be passable, so we continued our broken journey at an early hour. We made good enough progress



to Bergville but beyond that our way was fraught with difficulties. Our tyre chains came off; we repeatedly stuck on the greasy slopes; we twice wazed round on to the veld and, on one occasion, our engine was quenched in the midst of a flooded spruit. Poor Fredo (Johnny’s Italian servant) was a little perturbed at the car’s misbehaviour “Doucement, doucement, il faut marché avec grand prudence” he kept advising. We finally covered the 40 odd miles to our destination (The National Park Hostel)

The grass became more and more verdant as we approached the mountains – eloquent proof this, of an abundant rainfall. Unluckily

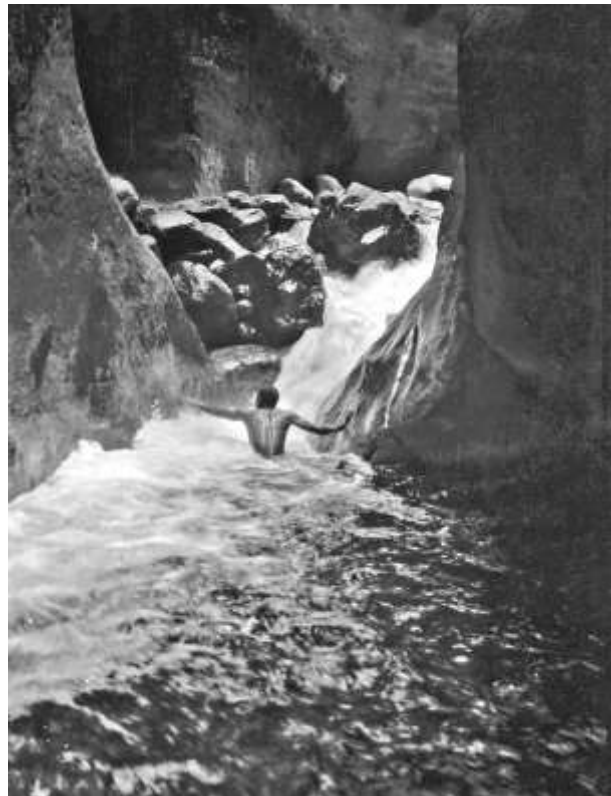
the peaks were shrouded in a canopy of cloud but we saw enough to convince us of the grandeur of the scenery should these blow away. On our way up we passed

a number of white storks (*Ciconia alba*) feeding, almost invariably in pairs, in the lush grasslands. Whydahs were very abundant and their curious hovering forms with drooping tails, were frequent objects by the wayside. In the National Park, another, smaller species, almost entirely black, could be seen in numerous flocks mixed with other finches and weavers.

3 December, Mont au Sources

At this point the Drakensberg range rises in a series of slopes and cliffs to the sheer wall of broken rock – in places the vertical face must be nearly over two thousand feet in height – that forms the culminating peak of Mont aux Sources. The slopes are mostly of a quiet gradient and uniformly covered with smooth grass and dotted with ancient round topped protea trees, mostly *Protea konpelliae* I believe. Bews gives a list of 8 tree-like *Proteas* occurring in the Drakensberg and says they are all aerophytic forms. One would have thought this character scarcely necessary in a district with a fairly ample and apparently reliable rainfall. In their park-like pastoral aspect, these undulating grasslands contrast sharply with the savage severity of the precipices that rise so abruptly from them. When one stands near these immense escarpments and becomes fully conscious of their towering height they give one the appearance of walling in both sky and earth; with a canopy of cloud resting upon their edge they might well be a banner forming the world's end. I have never seen mountains quite like them – they have a character all of their own, with their smiling slopes and terrifying cliffs.

After breakfast we rode on horseback up to the gorge of the Tugela – a river reduced now to a brawling burn, running crystal clear among rounded boulders. A mile or so beyond it falls over the lip of the precipice in a series of spurting cascades – a drop of over 2800 ft. At one point the Tugela forces its way through a very narrow defile, boiling and foaming in its straitened channel. Up this canyon we attempted to go, but when the water rose breast-high and we could barely keep our feet we thought it prudent to abandon the attempt. It was an amusing sight to see the black guide and three whites with our clothes over their heads struggling with the torrent!



In the evening the clouds completely lifted and we had a magnificent view of the whole range. According to our Zulu guide there are three species of *Gladioli* (he calls them Gonzuana* -- or something like it) growing in this district and I was fortunate in getting specimens of all three. One is said to be red, another white and the third pink.** This last was growing in a large dense colony, thousands of plants occupying a space of many square yards to the entire exclusion of other plants. I have not seen other *Gladioli* behaving in a similar way; as a rule they are scattered singly.*** All three species belong to the broad leaved section (the red and pink ? had very broad foliage, especially the latter) and were growing in rich alluvium. The climate here must be fairly moist and particularly so in summer. We also found a very handsome *Moraea* with an iris shaped flower about four inches or more across, of a soft smoky mauve colour. This was also growing in alluvium, but in a rather damper and more peaty spot.

(* "Nkonhlana" is said to be the correct spelling!!)

**The so-called "red" one I subsequently saw in flower. These were a dirty brownish-yellow and I think the plant must be *Gladiolus psittaciniis*.

***It is very likely that this is an *Antholyza* and not a *Gladiolus*: from plants seen subsequently I believe this to be the case.

5 December, National Park Hotel, Mont aux Sources

Yesterday we rode up to some caves on the northern slope of Mt aux Sources and spent the night there. As these caves are about 10000ft above sea-level they were none too warm and despite an excellent fire kindled by our Zulu guides and a large number of rugs, we found the night unpleasantly damp and cold. The floor too was hard and unyielding. As I lay awake listening to the hollow drip, drip, drip of falling water, trying to conjure up thoughts to while away the endless hours, I became firmly convinced of the undesirability of a troglodyte's existence.



At last the triangular opening began to pale with the dawning of day and we found that the rain of overnight had ceased and that there was promise of fair weather to come.

Climbing through a narrow pass on to the upper plateau I found myself in brilliant sunshine above the clouds. These lay like a shining sea of billowing

folds below me, pierced here and there by the jagged escarpments of the blue-black mountains.

On the westward side the clouds had broken up in to a series of islands and these had floated away still on the same level plain, across the grassy flanks of a lower and distant range until they finally became lost in the halcyon blue beyond. Very gradually the nearer clouds surged upwards until they reached the lip of the plateau and completely shut out the floor of the amphitheatre three thousand feet below. To stand in sunshine on the brink of these stupendous cliffs and look down upon a white void/emptiness (for they drop absolutely sheer from the very edge) stimulates the imagination and is a somewhat awe-inspiring experience. The Zulu with me hurled a great boulder into space and it was instantly disappeared/swallowed by the mist. So great was the distance it had to drop that not even a murmur of its fall reached us – it merely vanished into space! This brought home to me very poignantly the terrifying height of this amazing wall of rock.

All the morning the white mist clung to the N. E. face of the great massif, while the other side remained quite clear. The sharp demarcation between the two sides was remarkable, the clouds ending precisely with the ridges of the crest.



Brunswigia cooper

The plateau, whose average height must be about 10,600ft, contained many interesting plants – a small *Kniphofia* in full flower, a yellow *Cyrtanthus*, a beautiful mauve-pink *Arctotis*; several species of *Moraeas*, a *Geum** and a host more of an alpine character. But the most striking plant of all was the *Brunswigia*, whose favourite site was along the rocky mountain ledges. Above its few broad, prostrate leaves this lily throws up an immense rounded head of bright rose pink star-like flowers. It is very common in this Upper Tugela valley reaching an elevation of 8 or

9000ft and in places the cliffs were coloured with its showy flowers. Baboons

appear to be very fond of the fleshy pedicel for I saw large numbers of the discarded heads lying withered on the ground.

On my way back I actually saw an old dog baboon pluck an inflorescence and holding it with both hands, gnaw along the stem. This baboon, by the way, was very bold and showed considerable resentment at my presence by uttering loud and angry barks as though to frighten me away. Taylor had a somewhat similar experience, but in his case the baboon held his ground so obstinately that Taylor deemed it advisable to make a detour in order to avoid him.

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