

bainbridge-bill-2017-06-23.mp4

Bill Bainbridge [00:00:12] Well. I have wanted to fish since I was a child. And opportunity only arose when I was a student an undergraduate at Stellenbosch University.

Bill Bainbridge [00:00:28] Where there was a trout stream running through the middle of the village at the time. So I did a lot of fishing there. And then I moved to Zambia where I worked for 20 odd years. And I did a lot of fishing up there. But fishing has actually been one of the key aspects in my life. To the extent that when I eventually retired we bought a little place and Underberg in order.

Bill Bainbridge [00:01:02] To have access to good trout waters up there. And it was since then our family has not devolved around trout but have been intimately associated.

Bill Bainbridge [00:01:14] And as part of the quality of life for me. I love fishing in pristine waters up in the mountains. Or on the Zambezi or whatever it is.

Bill Bainbridge [00:01:29] In wild areas. So that's what fishing means to me, it is a way of enjoying those areas. Nineteen forty nine. Nineteen fifty. And fly fishing was the way that one fished for trout down and that part of the world. So I started off fly fishing with flies that I bought because.

Bill Bainbridge [00:02:03] Nobody showed me how to tie flies and that's that. And. If these dreadful things, now that I think of it. But they work and that caught fish and of course an apt expression would be a way of describing that that I got hooked and.

Bill Bainbridge [00:02:25] I fly fished ever since, wherever, on the Zambezi for Tiger. Wherever all the fishing that I've done has been principally fly fishing. Except in the sea. And although we do fly fish in the sea as well here. But I've also bait fished in the sea. But I really enjoyed the fly fishing. And to me if you're going to fish for.

Bill Bainbridge [00:02:58] A quarry that will take a fly, and it actually works, it's huge fun to shift from mountain streams to a river like the Zambezi where you can get anything from Tiger fish to, I don't know if you know what is a barbel. Not a clarius barbel, but but barbel species. Yes. Which is the same as Indian masheer. We've also got those on the Zambezi. So you can get anything from one of those to a clarius to a tiger fish and maybe even a crocodile, but.

Bill Bainbridge [00:04:02] Well, it's challenging. They fight like hell. And that river is a huge river. And they've got quite hard mouths. So if you get into one, you have to keep the pressure.

Bill Bainbridge [00:04:14] Right from the [unintelligible]. Otherwise they'll shake you loose. And they're so strong. They will take you as far out as they can or break you up on some snag, and there are snags in the river. Trees, that kind of thing. Adrenaline making.

Bill Bainbridge [00:04:49] All the time. I was- When I first went to Zambia, I was with the Department of Forestry.

Bill Bainbridge [00:04:52] But then I was invited to cross over to the wildlife fisheries and national parks and I became the chief wildlife officer. So I worked in big game country all

the time. And it's a very interesting experience to be out in that kind of country and to be able to get on to a river. And then you have to watch your p's and q's.

Bill Bainbridge [00:05:21] Because the hippo there and the crocs and all that stuff. It's quite stimulating. But one of the things about fishing to me.

Bill Bainbridge [00:05:33] It's not really ethical to fish unless you actually want to eat the fish as well. So to me.

Bill Bainbridge [00:05:43] I always ask if I can eat at least one other fish. I liked to taste the fish and to see what it is, and when I return a fish, that's a favor that I've done it because.

Bill Bainbridge [00:05:57] I didn't eat him. If you know what I mean. And we always have kept our fish wherever we can in order to eat them. And you talk about catching Bream.

Bill Bainbridge [00:06:11] That this tilapia or Serranochromis one of those two.

James Thull [00:06:15] It was it was like a I think it was related to in the States we call them sunfish. It was it was almost green in color, it wasn't a tilapia. My guide called it a bream.

Bill Bainbridge [00:06:33] Yeah I know but the Serranochromis is also called a Bream. Probably that.

James Thull [00:06:35] OK.

Bill Bainbridge [00:06:37] They're absolutely delicious eating. But it's a matter of personal preference. It's a toss up between tilapia, Serranochromis.

Bill Bainbridge [00:07:02] And some of the the sea species. Like are... There a whole lot of them that are good eating. But I will eat trouts, but it's gotta be fresh.

Bill Bainbridge [00:07:18] Well, here in South Africa, catchment management used to be a government priority. And one of the sad things about the new government is that they don't even know about catchment management. So a huge amount of effort used to be put into catchment management including the acquisition of new mountainous areas with high water yield. Specifically to maintain water flow.

James Thull [00:07:58] Can you tell me what catchment man. How would you define catchment management? Is that catching rainwater and storing it?

Bill Bainbridge [00:08:05] Absolutely but maintaining the vegetable cover in good condition.

Bill Bainbridge [00:08:10] So that there's no erosion. And the prevention of invasion by adding the species which also occurs in this country. That's a huge scourge. So because this government our present government doesn't see it as a priority, heaven alone knows why.

Bill Bainbridge [00:08:29] They've got other priorities largely based on social issues.

Bill Bainbridge [00:08:37] We are seeing a deterioration of our catchments, and we are seeing deterioration of water quality in the rivers themselves. And add to that invasion by alien fish species like black wattle. That's a big problem in this part of the world. And they invade the river on area and start extracting water out of it. And water quality deteriorates because of soil erosion under the trees all that. So yes we've seen a huge amount of deterioration in the rivers. And one of the main reasons that I'm a member of FOSAF. And I'm the national chairman.

James Thull [00:09:30] What is FOSAF?

Bill Bainbridge [00:09:32] Federation of South African Flyfisher. I'm the chairman of the Environmental Committee of FOSAF and one of the reasons that I belong to that organization. In my dotage I don't have a huge amount of time to spend on NGOs. But I'm prepared to devote my time to that because I believe so implicitly how important it is to conserve our river systems. Well there's been in decline in most of our native species. And people haven't spent a huge amount of time and effort.

Bill Bainbridge [00:10:19] Into studying them. Ordinary people I mean, the scientists. So the ordinary public, the ordinary angling public don't seem to notice. Most anglers in this part of the world fish for alien species. Primarily with one exception as that yellow fish. Which is one of the barbel's species. There's a lot of interest in that. But they are definitely disadvantaged especially through water pollution from agriculture and water quality that is. So our rivers are not in a good state and our government does not pay attention to that. It's a great indictment. Well FOSAF believes that there's a place for all for species. And that implies some kind of other zoning system so that where there are sensitive populations of native species they've got to be protected. Where there are not, and where the river systems flow through private land, which is often the case in.

Bill Bainbridge [00:11:46] This province at any rate. Land owners have a rock to utilize their resources to their commercial benefit. The government will not pay a land owner to conserve land. It's unpalatable but a fact and so you can't deny a land owner the opportunity to beneficially utilize the trout and in their river. And if necessary to stop trout in farm dams and that kind of thing. So there's got to be a place for both. And it's a question of using our expertise and our knowledge to make sure that both objectives are met. That is the indigenous species where they're under threat are protected, and where they're not under threat you can use that alien species. I believe. It's not like that at all. You have to get the owner's permission to access entry across their land. So the rivers here belong to the state. Not to the landowner. So the landowner controls the access. And then he doesn't control the ending.

James Thull [00:13:30] So once you're on the river you can float through private land.

Bill Bainbridge [00:13:34] Yes but they don't like it the landowners. But it's one of the things that we have done and Underberg district. And our little farm that we bought is in Underberg district, and one of the reasons that we went to live in Underberg is that the farmers they have a very interesting and valuable service. They've created a club. It's called Underberg Trout Fishing Club. It's a very successful organization. And farmers who have got good Trout fishing give their waters to the club. And the club helps them to manage it as a.

Bill Bainbridge [00:14:20] Consequence. So if you're a tourist or a visitor to Underberg or a resident. And you want to go and fish and you're a club member you have access to a

huge variety of waters from still waters and there are many dams and in Underberg district for irrigation especially. But nearly all of them are stocked with trout. Unfortunately bass as well in some instances to the detriment of the trout. So you can if you're a member of the club you can have access to any of the club waters for a nominal amount of money. It's not expensive. And that's a wonderful system. Out as opposed to one of the alternatives which are so-called syndicates where a group of people buy the right to fish that water and then you have to pay but then access is limited. But there's also state land, and where there's state land with trout in it, you can buy a permit to get there. So anyone who wants to fish virtually in South Africa can. Over a hundred years ago. And the interesting thing to me is that the attitude of the authorities in those days was to promote the introduction of trout. Because they believed well wanted to better eating fish. Then the yellowfish. But too they saw the opportunities for tourism and tourism related development. So it was nearly all of the hatcheries initially were run by the state itself by the provincial government. So it was done with the active support of provincial governments both here and in the Western Cape.

Bill Bainbridge [00:16:35] And elsewhere in South Africa. So it's a strange thing now that we have a Department of Environmental Affairs. Which is very concerned about biodiversity conservation. And that's good. They should be. But they are finding it quite difficult to make up their minds about how trout and other aliens should be permitted to stay. I would have thought that it was a relatively simple thing to have a zoning system as I've described, and we've said that to the government. And I don't see it all at all complicated to do a thing like that. But they've got some purists who are not at all happy about this. And they quote literature from other parts of the world that trout are invasive. Which I suppose they are. But there's a very interesting anomaly that the legal definition of invasive is not the same as a biological definition of invasive. So I think that some other experts that are advising the government don't really understand that difference. But also our law fundamentally says that and making decisions about the environment, the interest the rights of people must be taken into account and given precedence. And they haven't done that. The department. So they quote all the experts who talk about the invasive capacity of trout all that stuff. But I haven't seen any any the use of people from tourism and also from.

Bill Bainbridge [00:18:47] Human rights about the rights of communities. They don't seem to have taken that into account and we are very critical as a result. Well that's critical. But it is the same, in fact but more accentuated to the white. Here. Simply from an historical point of view. And we are making efforts to do that. To rectify that. North, what do they call these days? I forget but one of the chapters best round about about Johannesburg and you'll meet people like Chris Williams if you're going to the trout expo. They are taking active steps to introduce fly fishing to young black people. But it's a slow process. And it's going to take forever. A long time to get those youngsters to a situation where they become politically active. I would imagine that it did play a role. But how much of a role it played, I'm not sure. Bear in mind that in places like Uganda, and maybe you have the opportunity to visit there, there are trout streams in black areas. Very few pale faces actually get to those areas. So they're black residents, black populations living cheek by jowl with a trout with trout streams. And they've fished using worms and all the rest of it. But nobody's really shown them how to fly fish. So they are acquainted, and that research that Malcolm supervised indicated that they do fish. Not all that amount but they do fish, and they fish with bait and there's nothing wrong with that. It's what happens in Scotland and elsewhere. And I think that if anyone had shown them early on how to tie flies and how to fly fish, that they would have done so.

Bill Bainbridge [00:21:24] So it's our job now to start showing them. I loved it. My first attempt was in Yellowstone, and I went over to one of the world wilderness congresses. And do you know Paul Weingarten? Do you know.

James Thull [00:21:58] The name rings a bell, yes.

Bill Bainbridge [00:21:59] He was in Missoula. But he was ex-US Forest Service. And I met him here in South Africa and he invited us to go to the states. And when I went to the one world wilderness congress, I did a trip up to stay with them and he arranged for some people to take us out. And one of them. his name was Frank but I can't remember his surname now. Was a retired US Fish and Wildlife Service Professional Officer. And he took me out on several to fish several streams. But I also wanted to go to Yellowstone simply because I was interested in protected area management. And I wanted to see what how would in the states. So while I was there of course I had my rod with me. Because I don't travel to an area where there's fishing unless I had my rod my equipment with me. And I fished several of the streams and also fished lake Yellowstone. And I'm delighted to say that I'll never forget it. I'm used to fishing in remote areas where there are very few other people. And I couldn't get over all of these people in Yellowstone. Don't even talk about them walking down the road next to a buffalo and all that. So I went to, we drove to the lake, and there was a line of people so I found a place where there were very few people. And I hardly cast a couple of times when I was into a fish. And I'm delighted to say that the fly that I was fishing with was one that we use in this country all the time. And as soon as I was into this fish people started coming up and they said Hey man.

Bill Bainbridge [00:24:13] What are you a fishing with? And they'd never see one of our woolly wells that looked like that. But I not only caught a Cutthroat, and I don't know if I was supposed to or not but I ate it that night. OK. I arrived back from Zambia where as I told you I was with Wildlife Fish and National Parks. And I came back here and I was offered a post with the Forest Department. And at that stage the Forest Department used to have custody of large areas of the Drakensberg. Now when I was a lad, a boy, if you flew over not that I ever flew but if he drove over much of this province because you're in Natal, there were extensive areas of wild country. And I came back only 20 years later and I was absolutely appalled to see the extent of the development that had taken place in that short period of time only 20 years. So I had worked up a bunch of Zambia in really remote areas and really wild areas. And by really wild I mean really wild. Nobody had ever lived there. Or not modern man anyway. And that included places, I'll never forget this, in one place that I went to which was a sleeping sickness area. I don't know if you know what that is. Tsetse fly carry disease one strain of which will affect humans and they are not sure how that persists when there were people living there. But they think that when people are not around is carried by baboons which also are prominent. And anyway I went into this area and I could see from the trees. Now in Zambia they practice a kind a form of agriculture.

Bill Bainbridge [00:26:48] Called Chitemene. And what happens is that the people come up into the trees and they lop the branches, stack the branches in between the trees, burn them, and they grow crops in the ash for the nutrients that are there.

Bill Bainbridge [00:27:08] For as long as those nutrients last. And after five years something of that order, the nutrients or are leached away and have been utilised and they have to move on. So they go in a big circle. I could see that those the trees there had been lopped but a long time ago I mean something like 30 40 years. So when I walked into this area with my staff, the antelope came running out of the trees to see what we were. They

had not had contact with humans. So that's wild country. So when I came back down here, I was astounded to see the extent of the development and how much it disappeared. And it's- of the wild country had disappeared. So our Department of Forestry had custody for extensive areas of the Drakensberg. And that was my introduction to get to really know the Drakensberg and I've been working in the burg now for something like 40 years. And really got to know. And I saw that that was some of the last of the wild country that remained in this province. Our chief director, the secretary of forestry for the at the time was Danie Ackerman. He had just brought in legislation to make it possible to proclaim wilderness areas on state land. He had been a student at Yale, and had come across the Wilderness Act in the states and so on. And he introduced into the Forest Act legislation that made it possible to proclaim wilderness in this country on state land. On state forest land. So I put out proposals to have portions of the Drakensberg proclaim wilderness. Projec- I mean motivation. And we ended up with four wildernes areas being proclaimed in the Drakensberg. And that's a nice little achievement for me.

James Thull [00:29:45] That's wonderful.

Bill Bainbridge [00:29:46] That I was actually able to do that. That, is can be visited by man but man may not remain. It's very similar to the way that you do it. it can't live in the area.

Bill Bainbridge [00:30:15] Why are you still saying don't go fishing because it's a disease and it will get you and you will never escape. No. Fishing to me is being part of my life for a long time. And I've taught my sons to fish and now my grandsons. We were addicts. I think that's the right word. And I own a bit of property now on a trout stream specifically so that we can fish.

Bill Bainbridge [00:31:07] The the Western Cape government provincial Government started to look critically at the presence of trout in some of the areas. And Dean will be able to tell you more about that. So when a group of fly fishermen saw what was happening, they decided that they should set up an NGO to promote the presence of trout. It was a strange change in attitude in government official thinking that they should have moved from that are being pro-trout to the extent that they used to spend government money on running the hatcheries to suddenly saying But hang on a moment, we've got to be careful here what we do. And if you if there is such a thing as a collective official mind, which I think there is, they're still are uncertain about that situation. They don't really know what to do. Or we don't see any clear signs of that anyway. Now there are even people in the Department of Environmental Affairs who seem to be determined to eradicate trout throughout the country. Or at any rate to make it so difficult to manage trout waters that it's not really feasible. Now we see this is not really intelligent. And.

Bill Bainbridge [00:32:54] The trout industry is terribly important in this country. It it provides a lot of employment. There are a lot of businesses that are dependent specifically on trout. Other species not so much, black bass and so on. But trout yes a lot. So economically trout are really important in this country. And what is interesting to me is that if you buy, it's almost impossible to buy trout that has been grown commercially in this country in supermarkets. And they're even occasionally extent of importing it from overseas. And we think that's absolutely crazy. So if there was a proper zoning system as we've discussed, and people were allowed to get on with managing their trout waters as they think fit, sensibly taking into provision or the to protect indigenous fish all that's stuff. But if they were permitted to do that we believe that the onus on managing the trout sustainably, emphasis on a sustainably, should rest on the land owners themselves. The

industry shouldn't be policed by government, it should be policed by us and we should have our own standards. And that's the role that I see myself playing in the organization rocking those unit standards to which we anglers adhere. Critically important. And the problem is that parliament is largely black. So we better be really smart when we go to talk to Parliament. If it ever gets that far. Because we pale faces.

Bill Bainbridge [00:35:05] And there may not be all that sense of a trust so argue our arguments better be good. So there is. And you know we all read the classic angling literature and we read all that the classic American things. I believe and I haven't seen that much effort going towards this. That the international organizations should have some kind of a linkage. I don't know how that would work or who's going to do that. I certainly don't have the energy or the time to do it. But I would like to see FOSAF linked to some appropriate NGO in the states who got similar interests to us. So that we can strengthen bonds. And so anglers from the states can come and visit us. Now you see that for a book there. Have a brief look at it. That's our little place up in Underberg.

James Thull [00:36:22] It's beautiful. Why don't we, why don't you hold that for us so we have it in the shot. OK. That's excellent. And so this is your. This is the farm? Wonderful. And that's a place you guys purchase to be able to fish at. That's beautiful yeah. That'll work nicely right there.

Bill Bainbridge [00:36:41] Because. The river that you can see down at the bottom down here is the border between the world heritage site which is there and our land which is this side.

James Thull [00:36:56] So it's it's a running continuum between the two.

Bill Bainbridge [00:36:59] Exactly.

James Thull [00:37:00] That's wonderful.

Bill Bainbridge [00:37:01] This is the Drakensberg. This is the little Berg.

James Thull [00:37:04] Oh OK. So that's one of the part of that near the wilderness areas that you have to establish.

Bill Bainbridge [00:37:10] Wilderness areas just at the top of that.

James Thull [00:37:11] Wonderful. Well that's a great. That's wonderful. It's a job well done sir.

Bill Bainbridge [00:37:17] OK. Well. Show you the river. That that photograph by the way is a village called Bainbridge.

James Thull [00:37:31] Bainbridge.

Bill Bainbridge [00:37:33] Yes. In the United Kingdom and Britain. And.

James Thull [00:37:39] Then is that where your heritage is, is British?

Bill Bainbridge [00:37:42] You bet. Yeah. I. Haven't been able to prove it but I believe so. That's the farmhouse. And this is one of my grandchildren.

James Thull [00:37:59] Wonderful. And he said you've passed that fishing tradition on to your children and grandchildren. That's great.

Bill Bainbridge [00:38:04] And this is the trout river that runs through our property.

James Thull [00:38:07] OK. That's great. Let's just hold this up just a little bit. There we go. We got that right in the shot. Wonderful.

Bill Bainbridge [00:38:14] Okay. I was, I was going to tell you about Frank. Frank is that, I wish I could remember his sur name but I don't. From US Fish and Wildlife Services, yeah. He came to to us and it was he that took me fishing in Montana etc. Now, he showed me once I tried to fish the Montana Rivers where the trout were because where.

Bill Bainbridge [00:38:57] The macrofauna in our rivers is not the same as yours. So if you'd come to fish in the Drakensberg you're going to learn what our insects and so on what our aquatic insects are and how to get the shot to take which fly to use all that stuff. And he showed me how to do it in Montana. I would never have caught a fish if it hadn't been for Frank. How did I get onto this.

James Thull [00:39:29] We were talking about the camaraderie between anglers.

Bill Bainbridge [00:39:32] And that's just a little example to me of the benefits that could accrue from that kind of association. I have another example. My daughter and son in law lived in Pensacola.

James Thull [00:39:50] Florida.

Bill Bainbridge [00:39:50] Yes. For awhile. And we went to visit there and I went to speak to the sea trout is it?

James Thull [00:40:05] Sea trout. Yes the there's sea trout in Florida. Yeah. Speckled trout.

Bill Bainbridge [00:40:11] But nothing to do with trout.

James Thull [00:40:13] No no. They just call him trout. But they're salt water. Yup yup.

Bill Bainbridge [00:40:17] And. So I gave a presentation on fly fishing in this country. And in return they took me fishing out in the Gulf of Mexico. And incidently we were catching fish that have got different names but are identical pelagic fish that we've got in this country.

James Thull [00:40:40] That's great.

Bill Bainbridge [00:40:43] So that was the kind of experience that I think is really worthwhile for anglers from different countries to meet and to experience different angling conditions. It's quite amusing to find yourself as a what you consider to be an experienced angler and you have no idea how to fish on that river. And somebody is going to show you. But that's just part of the experience that I think everyone should have. Absolutely. And it doesn't matter where you go. You know, if having fished for for rainbow trout in an Alaska below Anchorage, that was an experience as well. Having fished for rainbow there, it's a

totally different way that you have to fish to what we're used to. And it's just amazing to think that the same species has become adapted to conditions here compared to where they came from.

Bill Bainbridge [00:42:18] But I don't remember titles.

James Thull [00:42:20] That's OK. That's OK. Kind of more of the classic angling literature? Yeah. Yeah. Wonderful.

Bill Bainbridge [00:42:27] I do read these new magazines to an extent. And when a Frank came to visit us, he went through all my collection of magazines local magazines on local angling. But I loved going back to those old stories. And I also read, I wish I could remember... Which angler. Which who that also was. About fishing and in Russia.

James Thull [00:43:02] Prosek wrote a book about fishing, James Prosek did. There's been a few people but yeah yeah they it's. I'm hoping to go there someday maybe next year and fish for the tiamen. I think that would be an amazing experience. But yeah one of my favorite quotes is by Roderick Haig Brown. I don't know if that name rings a bell at all. He wrote Fishermen Summer and Fishermen Spring, some really great books but his quote was "maybe for me fishing was just an excuse to be near rivers. And if so I'm glad I thought of it." Because I think we've all seen some just amazing things just being out in those wild areas where the fish live. But.

Bill Bainbridge [00:43:45] Well quite. And preferably for me, I'd like to be the only one on the river.

James Thull [00:43:52] That's always nice. Yes.

James Thull [00:43:55] That's when I would say about Yellowstone. They say 90 percent of the visitors from that go to Yellowstone never go more than 15 feet off the road. There are some great areas where you can not see another soul if you're willing to hike back. But if you if you just pull up and fish you're probably going to run into other anglers. But.

Bill Bainbridge [00:44:17] Let me tell you a little story. Shelia and I, my wife and I, and she's a similar ilk to myself about loving wild areas. And not where there are a lot of people. We decided that we wanted to go and fish a river. So we drove some distance from the camp where we were staying. Huge place.

James Thull [00:44:45] And where was this here.

Bill Bainbridge [00:44:46] No Yellowstone. And I found a place where I could park the car or walk down to this river. Little tiny stream. And we, I'd hardly begun to fish when I looked up and there was a bull elk down the river. I said to Sheila.

Bill Bainbridge [00:45:17] "Look there." And this thing started to walk up towards us. If you come from where I come from, where there's wildlife a big thing like that, you better be careful that you know what you're doing. I knew nothing about them. And I didn't know how you know he would what he would think about us. And to our amazement we didn't have to talk and stop talking. He came right up to us and he was we were in his path. So I was getting ready to climb up a tree with Shelia. He walked right past didn't even notice that we were there or didn't care. And it was amazing to me.

Bill Bainbridge [00:46:17] I personally feel privileged to have had those experiences. And wide and varied. I would be very sad to think that my grandchildren didn't have the same opportunities. So I think that we have to spend a lot of time and effort in preserving what we have.