

Issue 185

TROUT FISHER

New Zealand's dedicated magazine

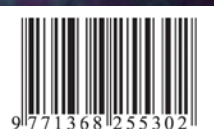
Winter 2023

Confessions of a Salmon Angler
Beginning of a Journey
Deja Vu – in Southland
Downstream Dredger
Shoreline Wading

\$11.95



Another Back-Country Experience



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Cover

Clive admires an Allen River fish (John Gommans)

Here

An obliging pair of Whio (PWS)

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"Climate change is a threat to human well-being and planetary health (very high confidence). There is a rapidly closing window of opportunity to secure a liveable and sustainable future for all (very high confidence)." (IPCC 6th Assessment Report for Policymakers, 19 3 2023)

IT'S UP TO US

200 years ago, you could probably have found less adaptive native birds like these Whio – imitating the male blue duck's whistle – the female rattles like a slowed-up mallard drake – all round the country. The main reason you cannot is simple: their natural habitat and food source has been severely diminished, by human activity. Add predators like stoats, weasels, feral cats and dogs into the equation and frankly, it's amazing these unique birds still exist.

Whio have much in common with trout. They thrive best in cool, clean streams that support a heavy population of aquatic invertebrates, on which both species feed; exclusively, for whio and juvenile trout. Remove the trees around such streams and numbers of both trout and whio immediately decline. Pollute the water and their numbers decline further. Draw water from the flow and further still. If climate change raises average water temperature above 24°C, trout are extinct here. Should those rising water temperatures also destroy the food source, so too are whio.

This year's election provides yet another opportunity for New Zealanders to say, 'ENOUGH!' In the last 30 years we have let successive governments do nothing while streams and rivers have been exposed, extracted and polluted all over the country, for short term economic growth. If we care about '*a liveable and sustainable future for all*' – trout, whio and humans – it's up to us to ensure future governments protect New Zealand's freshwater.



2017 Mokihinui, Allen and Johnson Rivers

Another Back-Coun Experience

By John Gommans



try



C live and I had long dreamed of a return to the Mokihinui River system on the West coast, after enjoying our back-country fishing experience in 2000. Our initial plans for late February in 2017 were for a similar trip, starting at the fork of the North and South Branches. However, the increasingly popular 'Old Ghost Road' tramping and mountain bike route that now traverses the valley enables an influx of visitors that would significantly impact on our desire for a wilderness experience. The clincher was our helicopter pilot advising that our dates also clashed with the annual ultra-race along the 85km trail.

After hasty discussions and exploration of maps we rearranged our plans and despite the likelihood that the headwaters had already been heavily fished, decided to land in the North Branch above the gorge, explore its upper reaches and then use the Johnson River as our route out onto the Little Whanganui-Whangapeka.

Our pilot made a small detour on our way in, allowing us to spot some good-sized trout in a small landlocked lake on the left Branch of the Allen River. A further detour down the North Branch of the Mokihinui demonstrated very challenging conditions for anyone contemplating traversing or fishing up the gorge. Instead, we landed on a wide open area at the junction with a dry creek, well above the gorge. Once the noise of the helicopter had disappeared, we set up camp and managed a short fish in the adjacent rock pools – early success was followed by our traditional post-dinner malt whiskey while watching the sun set; this completing our transition into another wilderness fishing experience.

For our first full day we headed downstream, gradually descending towards the gorge. We didn't expect this to be particularly fruitful given what we had seen from the helicopter and apart from the first few hundred metres we didn't spot many trout. The boulders became massive, pools deep and swift, and the crossings fewer and further between, and finally too dangerous to contemplate. Time to turn around and fish our way home. Unsurprisingly we had very little luck until returning to gentler waters closer to our campsite but it was great opportunity to immerse ourselves in truly rugged, wilderness conditions.

