

Issue 188

TROUT FISHER

Fly-focussed

Autumn 2024

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Beards & Snow Trout

The King Cometh!

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Beards & Snow Trout

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I worked the rifle in small increments when the line came tight right in front of a large submerged boulder. The weight came on and the fish slipped beside the boulder and ran hard downstream.

Simon Hoole fishes in Sichuan Province, China



Confessions of an Addicted Salmon Angler

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That fish weighed 35lb, just under 16kg. The men were standing around admiring the large fish, when the lady spoke, "If that all there is to salmon fishing then I am not interested". And next day she brought a chair and sat and read the rest of the week. A few male anglers' heads went down after that comment. We had a quite laugh about it.

Part 5 of Larry Burke's 40 year experiences

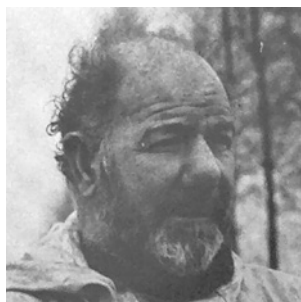


WORKS!

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By my time in 1 Glosters, a primrose back-badge on a black background was intrinsic to regimental identity – similar to a corporate logo. This colour combination is also very attractive to trout and so, over the years, as much for nostalgic reasons as practical, I've created numerous flies and lures that combine them.

Talking Plenty/At The Bench with Peter Storey



KENZIE The Wild Goose-Man

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In addition to being among the best huntsmen, he was also the middle-weight boxing champion of Lincolnshire. Willock was quite fond of Kenzie, and so was I, as I also came to visit him. He was a very adventurous individual; independent, born of gypsy blood, with negligible school attendance – and a target of the local police due to his unfriendly habit of poaching.

By Garrett Evans



Long Tippet Flies

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What is needed is a fly that it light in mass, but also provides slight "shuttlecock" wind resistance or pull back. An obvious choice of material for this is CDC. Fine synthetics such as Tiemco Aero-Dry Wing also work.

Around Ruapehu with Nick Taransky

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I found a campsite just as it starting snowing again – securing shelter became top priority. With the tent up my next task was a fire. I've learnt to always search for driftwood if it's available. It tends to be drier and burns hotter than fallen beech. Soon a hot fire was warming my hands and drying my feet as my billy boiled in prep for a feast of Moroccan Couscous a La Backcountry.

By Ainsley Haslett



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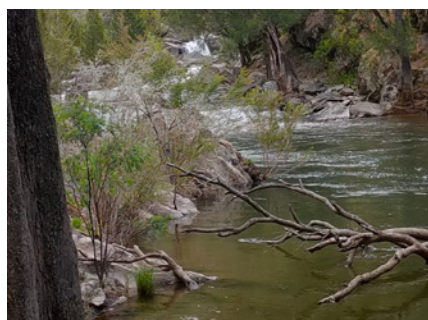
From I Love Fly Fishing, Kilwell and Manic

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I stumbled upon this river several years ago when camping at Micalong Creek at Wee Jasper, in the NSW countryside. Its tumbling heads, spilling into deep emerald green pools had me hooked early.

Matt Hoole profiles the Goodradigbee River, NSW



The King Cometh 40

I "guesstimated" its length and girth by placing the rod in the water and using it as a measure, resulting in an estimated length of 39 inches and girth of 32 inches. Although tempting, after much deliberation I chose against casting to it as I had my Sage Vt2 - 9-foot 9- weight single handed rod, aka "Tinkerbell"

Chasing quinnat on the Kitimat River, British Columbia, with Garry Scrimgeour and Pat Fargey



Trout or Salmon Pâté 52

This is a recipe we used as part of a platter in catering a wedding in the New Year. Special Thanks to friend, colleague and wonderful chef Rex Morgan for the recipe idea and in fact making it for the occasion . . .

Wild to the Table with Tony Smith



Cover

Another willow grub down the hatch (Nick Taransky)

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Beards & SNOW TROUT

By Simon Hoole



For Christmas, my wife and I decided to explore the Sichuan region of China, moving up to the Tibetan Autonomous Prefecture and the extremely beautiful Jiuzhai Valley National Park. Luckily for me, Elena had made contact with an extremely keen fly fisher, Ling Yu, who was the owner of a true gem of a fly fishing shop in Chengdu: Beard Fly Fishing Outfitters; and yes, he and his friends did seem to be sporting proud beards; hence the name. Ling Yu was a total gear nut, who keenly traversed around his homeland and travelled to the jungles of Thailand and the mountains of Norway to chase fish on the fly. He was also a mad keen fly tyer, with boxes of beautifully-tied bombs and caddis and some jungle streamers that made the baitfish I had previously tied for GTs in Aitutaki look simple and sparse.

After a great chat at the shop and a spicy Sichuan-style dinner with his wife and young son, plans were made for half a day to fish for liefu yu (*Schizothorax*) or the commonly dubbed 'snow trout (link on Latin name and it's worth the look - Ed).' These good string-pullers were found in the clear mountainous waters that flowed from the Sichuan region. As it was Winter and the temperature had suddenly plummeted over 10 degrees in 24 hours, we were warned that fishing wasn't going to be easy. However, for me, any fish landed was to be a blessing and an unexpected reward of our overall holiday. I was happy just to have the chance to go fly fishing and feel out another new environment



*In Ning Yu's Fly Tying room
<https://www.instagram.com/bfochengdu/>*



Ling Yu is awesome. All I had needed to prepare were my waders and boots, while he had prepared 2 weight, 10'6" Euro nymphing setups, tippet and after taking a look at my fly box... flies. One typo and the translation said like these (pictured fly box) but 'not' with orange heads, so my black, silver and gold bead weren't going to cut it. I inquired, but swinging was no go. The fish were sucking caddis off the rocks and because of the drop in temperature, feeding hard on the bottom in fast rifles and sitting in rocky grooves, and so it was a necessity to get the fly dribbling by right under their noses to get the eat.

We met at his shop the following morning and set off to the countryside, only stopping for a hot bowl of spicy noodles and guo kui (a Sichuan answer to the kiwi meat pie).

We got to the river, set up and started working the water. Snow trout are fast water bottom feeders, with suckers to hold onto the river bed. So rather than the pockets I kept working, Lingyu instructed me to bomb the head of any piece of white water, get it down and slow the drift as much as possible. It was working for him, as he managed to hook a nice fish right out of the same rifle I had fished through only minutes before. Unluckily, the hook pinged out and he yelled out that it was foul hooked anyway. We worked that area a bit longer, then decided to move on to new water.





In our second spot, I struck success in a rifle that Ling Yu had found gold a few days earlier. I worked the rifle in small increments when the line came tight right in front of a large submerged boulder. The weight came on and the fish slipped beside the boulder and ran hard downstream. I was ultra timid in playing this one, not wanting to slip up on what could be my one and only opportunity. I knew it wasn't the hugest of snow trout but it was a shiny golden nugget for me. After a solid back and forth battle, Ling Yu scooped the fish in the net, we snapped a picture and sent it back off to its white watery home. Ling Yu managed to hook and lose 4 fish in quick succession, with one sizable specimen flopping about on the surface before shooting off with a snap, taking barbless hooks and leader in tow. As a consolation, he kept a smaller version on the hook, giving us a couple on the board for the culmination of an interesting afternoon on a beautiful highland river. We kept fishing and working every rifle possible until the light was fading and Elena was starting to shiver on the other bank.

We arrived back in Chengdu for quality BBQ kebabs in a crowded smoky den full of chatter, sitting on minute plastic chairs that luckily didn't buckle under my festive frame. Plans were made and the next day was to be a full day out on a much larger river with a decent journey to get there.

The next day we caught up with Ling Yu's old friend and fishing partner, Randy, for a 2 hour train ride and 1 hour Didi (Chinese Uber) to a big river for the powerful Baija fish. These, I was told were one of the strongest pound for pound fish in China and I was ready to have a wrestle. Randy showed me a video of his Epic 20 minute battle with one that pinged him just as he got it in sight. In classic fly fisher style, I could feel the pang in his voice and thirst for redemption that had been plaguing his dreams.

On arrival at the train station in Yibing, we met our Didi driver, chucked the gear in the boot and began peeling down the road...

seriously peeling down the road. This guy was a Chinese Colin McRae, who was going to get us there without a second to spare. Traffic weaving, squeaking tires and a smell like his car was going to catch fire at any moment, this guy just chatted and cracked up while answering calls and hurtling down mountain roads. I tried to focus on the fish ahead, not throwing up and relaxing my white knuckles. At least this was on the highway, so the traffic was heading the same way with his wild overtaking!

This river was large and powerful. I asked Ling Yu where I should start, and he told me to take my pick as he had never actually fished the river before himself. Randy was already waist deep and working the water that he had managed a few fish out of his last trip. We all worked the water incrementally focussing on the seam to the softer edge and an area that indicated boulders below. After around an hour, my line went heavy in the same spot I had broken a rig off a few casts earlier. Then I noticed the snag had moved by a metre and then another. The snag, obviously pissed off, turned and proceeded to peel line off the reel in a non-bouldery fashion. This was one strong fish! It ran down and then turned and came up current, before turning and running back down again. After a solid fight, I eased it into the soft water and Randy put it in the net. It was an interesting fish with a thick strong body, finger nail-sized scales and thick lips for sucking caddis off the rocks. I was elated to have another species landed and happy to get him off back to the depths.

In a lower run, I managed to catch a small, beautiful patterned Mandarin fish, which apparently was an absolute unicorn to catch in that season. I took that as a lucky blessing as I marvelled at its glistening print and seemingly glass-blown transparent fins. It wasn't a large fish but it sure was beautiful.

Those were the only fish caught that day apart from two noted across the river from locals lobbing big balls of bait into the deep fast runs on giant 12-foot tenkara style rods. It didn't stop us trying, however, with continuous casting until the darkness and cold crept in and it was time to trek back to the city.

For a reason unbeknownst to me, our driver chose a village-style mountain road on the drive home, a little rutted gravel and dirt road that wound through the mountains – just wide enough for two cars to squeak by. "Colin" was in his element and my pants were soiling themselves as we overtook on blind corners, nosing back into gaps that were unconceivable and skidded around tight bends. The guys were asleep and I questioned whether it was the tiredness or the easiest way to ignore the impending doom. I grappled with myself and decided to face whatever was coming head on, rather than wait for the possibility in gloomy darkness. After 30 tight-gripped minutes, we were back on the highway and the tar sealed speed felt safe and secure next to the Grand Turismo action that country road had entailed.



Back safe and sound in the city with fresh pants, it was enlightening to sip tea and reflect on a great experience, with genuine people who were willing to go that extra mile to catch fish on feather and fur. We did our best at managing chatting and translating but spoke the common piscatorial language with that gleam in the eye when telling tales of tails, past and upcoming fly fishing experiences. More time would have been amazing, but it's never enough, is it? I thought back to how lucky we are in New Zealand with the quality of fish in our rivers and oceans and some of the pristine rivers we have. I found plastic packaging strewn around banks on the river hard to stomach at times and couldn't help myself to pick up a piece or two as I went, although it felt rather futile. It was, however, an eye-opener of how important it will increasingly be to keep our resources protected as the population grows.

For the next leg of the trip, we followed crisp, crystal clear mountainous rivers up toward the stunningly beautiful Jiuzhai Valley National Park, just without a rod in hand. My eyes continued to gaze into the riffles where Snow trout were likely to be, prospecting and imagining where they would be lying and the best angle to tease them out. It was a great experience to fish this remote, albeit populous region of the globe and one I'm eternally grateful to those special people who made it happen, beards and all!

The blue waters of the beautiful Jiuzhai Valley National Park





Never say you have got a fish until you get your hands on it . . .

Confessions of an ADDICTED SALMON ANGLER Part 5

By Larry Burke

The 23rd of January, 1995, I got my first limit bag for the season. The first was 14.3lb/6.5 kg and tagged, a well-conditioned hen fish of 29"/73.5cm length and 19"/48cm girth; I did not that season record the time I caught fish but would think it was the morning. The second fish was slightly bigger and longer, a jack of 15.5lb/7kg), 31"/78.5cm long with a 19.5"/49.5cm girth. My next fish was a bit of a let down, a precocious tagged jack of about 2 lb/1kg, 16" length and 10.5" girth. These little salmon are only about 18 months old but are spawning fish, as you can tell by their body shape and bright silver colour. It is nature's way of ensuring every egg on the spawning grounds has a chance of being fertilized. They are fat little fish and great on a barbecue. A lot of anglers say they all should be killed as they will produce smaller returning salmon; however, studies and experimental breeding from them has shown otherwise. I then had 13 days until I got another fish while the rest of crew, those fishing the other side of the river and boats, were getting some big fish! That season there were always good numbers of fish taken and our crew were well in amongst it.

One day there were a lot of anglers fishing the other side of the Kaiapoi and there was a lady fishing about 20 metres or so above the men. From the conversations we heard, it seems she and her husband had come down to salmon fish from Hastings, after hearing about the number and size of fish being caught. She was a good angler from the way she fished but had not fished for salmon before. The day was going along well with one or two fish being taken, when suddenly she got a take from a heavy fish. That created a stir among the male anglers. At first the fish didn't want to move, then suddenly it turned towards the shore, shot across the surface, and ran up the bank beside her; all they had to do was pick it up. That fish weighed 35lb, just under 16kg. The men were standing around admiring the large fish, when the lady spoke, "If that all there is to salmon fishing then I am not interested". And next day she brought a chair and sat and read the rest of the week. A few male anglers' heads went down after that comment. We had a quite laugh about it.

It was during this time I hooked my largest salmon ever. I was fishing The Point alone, casting down the Waimakariri into the out flow from the Kaiapoi river, and had just started retrieving when the spinner was hit. I could immediately tell by the weight and head shakes it was a good fish, and held on; then it broke the surface, and REALLY got my heart going. Instead of running down the river this fish stayed just under the surface and swam up the river for about 50 metres and out about 25 metres from me. I was by this time getting a bit arrogant about salmon fishing and thought to myself, 'I have got you'. WRONG! As if he had heard me, he turned and exploded across the river, ripping metres of line off the reel, with me just hanging on. About 200 metres of line later the KNOT GAVE WAY! I was gutted. I had a good look at that salmon and it was easily the biggest I have ever hooked to this day. That was a valuable lesson – never say you have got a fish, until you get your hands on it.





Inside the Waimakariri River mouth

My cousin Martin had a similar experience a few weeks later when he hooked a large salmon off the point. Martin was much more experienced salmon angler than I and had already caught at least two 30 lb plus fish; his biggest, 32lb, hooked while fishing the Hurunui river mouth in the late 1980's. That fish took him right up the beach for a kilometre or more north of the Hurunui mouth and he fought it for at least 45 minutes. When he arrived back at the mouth he found his brother, Owen, had hooked and landed a limit bag – which in those days was 4 salmon. Back to Martin's big Waimakariri fish. This one acted differently to mine. It shot straight down the river like an express train, and with Martin using overhead reels his thumb got burnt. That fish just about spooled him before breaking the surface by the white 200 metre post that marked how close you could fish to the Kaiapoi mouth (it no longer applies), where his knot also gave way. Another lesson learned. Retie your knots regularly, when fishing for salmon.

In the next 42 days I was to catch another 11 salmon from 14.3lb/6.5kg to 28.6lb/15.95kg, 6 of them were over 20 lb, and losing a couple as well. We decided, because we were having such a good season, we should maybe fish some other spots in March. We had heard they were catching good numbers at the Waimakariri mouth and decided to give that a go on the 2nd. The Waimakariri mouth is different from all other South Island east coast rivers, as it sand opposed to shingle and sort of estuary like. The north side, Kairaki, having a holiday camp and permanent housing, is the most heavily fished area in the country. The main species taken are kahawai and yellow eyed mullet, followed by salmon and a few sea trout. It is also a productive white baiting spot, with some baiters camping there the whole season. In the 1990's, whenever the fish were running, you would find up to 200 salmon anglers on the north side and about a 100 on the south (more difficult to get to, needing either a 4WD or quad bike, plus a key to get through a park).

River mouth anglers, once established, mostly return to the same side for some reason. Fitting into the line can sometimes be a problem but you always fish the outgoing tide so the line is constantly moving forward. Most anglers back then were friendly but if you kept tangling that could cause a problem. When casting you had to cast at about 35-40 degrees upstream and then retrieve, letting your line swing round in the current and finishing the retrieve along the edge and that is often when a salmon was hooked. (That technique no longer applies, mainly because advances in the gear we use.) Anyway, that day we fitted into the line and I managed to hook a fish. I use 14lb breaking strain line and most down there





At the Waimakariri River mouth

then used 20lb, which meant they could put more pressure on the fish than me. This was a problem to some of the line as they thought I took too long to land my fish. The anglers all wind in and step back when you hook up, you see, to give you space; and if your fish decides to head back to sea the whole line moves out of your way. My fish decided to do that and had me on the run – something we cannot do when fishing The Point. However I finally was able to draw it into shallow water, turn it on to its side and tail it up the beach. It was a really fresh shining silver 21lb/9.54kg salmon. Despite the few negative comments, I had my first Waimakariri mouth salmon. Martin and brother Colin also got fish that day. Martin went there after work a day later and got a 29lb/13.18kg fish, his biggest ever Waimakariri salmon.

We went back again on March the 5th. I got into a bit of a 'discussion' with one of the local lady anglers, who did not like my way of fishing. Not long after that I hooked a fish which held about 3 metres from the edge. I tried to comply with local custom but when putting pressure on the fish it turned the wrong way, so that the hook was on the far side of its mouth, and that was enough to nick the hook out. Another lesson learnt. Didn't have too long to think about it though, as I hooked another fish which gave a great fight and had my heart going and knees weak. The other anglers gave me plenty of room as they saw it was a good fish. After down and up the beach a couple of times it was finally was beached; another fresh run silver bullet, 26.5lb/12kg, 38"/96.5cm long, 21"/53cm girth.

That night we decided that the next day (6th March) we would travel up to the Hurunui river and fish the surf at the mouth. This is one of my favourite salmon fishing places. My cousins and another mate had fished it for over 15 years, from caravans that a farmer friend moved down to the river at the beginning of the season and back at the end. When Al and his wife decided to buy a home at the local township he sold me his caravan and our family used it for a couple of seasons, before selling it on. My kids still talk about standing at the top of the cliff on cloudless calm nights, watching the huge full moon rising out of the sea and sending a silver shimmer over the ocean.



After an early morning start we arrived at the cliff overlooking the mouth just after 6am. I had never caught a salmon up there and was hoping this would be the day. The sea was fairly calm and the gut – the body of freshwater leaving the river mouth – was flowing north along the shore. The lagoon was also narrow and looked shallow. We kitted up chest waders and all the gear needed, held our packs high and waded through the lagoon, mindful that the incoming tide would give us about 4 hours fishing time before coming back. Other anglers were already there; some coming across in boats from both sides of the mouth and others, coming up the beach on 4 wheel bikes from the south side.

The gut would have been between 25 and 50 metres from the beach; with the river flow curling out and flowing north, there would have been a pool of softer water inside. Salmon often rest here but when they move towards the river they choose one of three paths where the flow is softer; their focus being to find the easiest path upriver, conserving as much energy as possible. At the head of a gut there are three such passages. The flow is fastest on the two edges and where those two flows meet in the middle of the gut there is tumbled water and that presents a softer flow. Further down the edges of the gut are also softer, until the head of the gut is reached, as above. Most gut salmon anglers fish the edge. However I have found fishing the middle of the gut works just as well. Even then, you can catch a salmon in places you don't expect them to be!

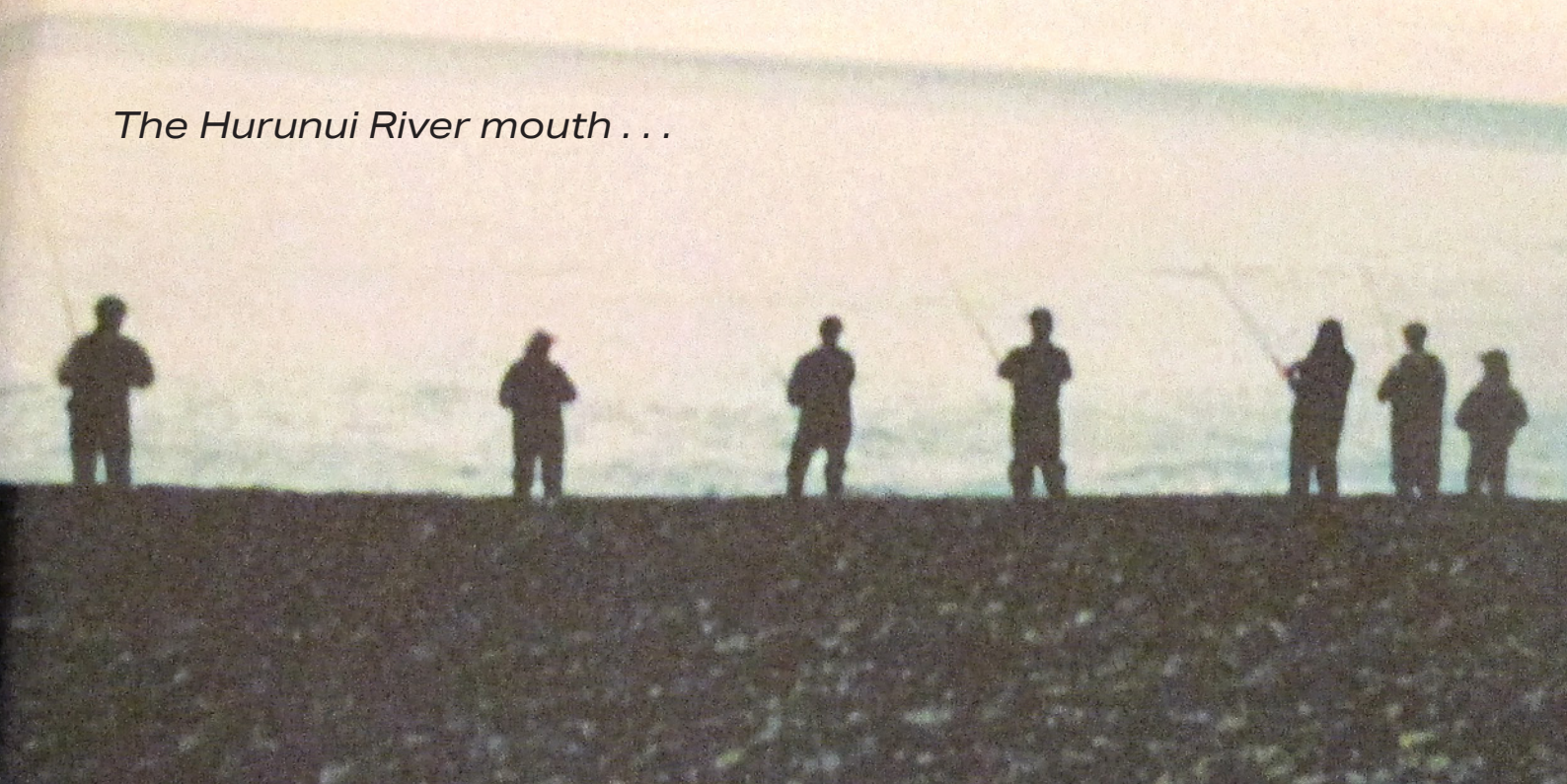
This day some number of fish were being caught but it was seeming like I still wasn't going to break my Hurunui duck. Just when I was thinking that I got a HIT and was fighting a salmon. Playing fish in river mouth surf is different to fighting one in a river. You still have currents but they tend to be all over the place and on top of that, you have the surf close in and even small wave can lose you a fish. Beyond that you have the wide open ocean and a fish can take you up and up and down the beach. After all that, if your skill and luck hold you will be able to run the fish up the beach on a wave. All these factors held with me that day and I landed my first Hurunui fish. What a fish too – a bright silver, perfectly shaped, 26lb/11.81kg, 34"/86cm, 22.5"/56.5cm girth hen fish. I went home very happy that day, agreeing that we would be back on the 9th.

We arrived again after 6am, to find the river was now flowing south; something it did not do often. However that changed nothing as Martin and Owen had a Porta boat you could transform from a flat pack into a dingy that could hold 3 people and all their gear, to row across the river, and this we did. Heading down the shingle beach was not easy when you have chest waders on carrying a full pack and rods, as, like most anglers fishing the mouth of the shingle rivers, we were carrying two; a shorter 7'2m

Martin, waiting to net Al's salmon at the Hurunui River mouth



The Hurunui River mouth . . .



'gut rod' and a 12-13'/3.5m 'surfpole'. It was about a kilometre to where the gut was pooling, so there were already a few anglers when we started fishing at 7am.

I hooked up on the third cast and think I got as much a surprise as the fish. The fight was a short one; I use 20 lb line in the surf to put more pressure on and also wanted to get out of the way of the other anglers, in case there was a pod of fish sitting out there. Landed, despatched and buried in the stones, it was 22lb/10kg, 34"/86cm long, 21.5"/53cm girth; a good hen fish. I went straight back into the spot I caught it, beside Owen, had one cast and then he asked me where I hooked it. I replied, "I will show you", cast to roughly the same spot and wouldn't you know it, immediately had another salmon take the lure. Another brief fight to get out of everyone's road and I beached a 14.3lb/6.5kg hen, 30"/76cm long, 18.5"/47cm girth. Put it with the first fish, looked at my watch and couldn't believe it: only 7.25 am?



My 2 fish from the Hurunui River mouth, 9 March, 1995





That was my fishing day done. I spent the rest of the morning watching, walking down the beach picking up old fishing line, getting a little bit bored. Only one other fish was caught that morning, a 25lb/11.36kg beauty by another angler who often fished The Point with us. These two fish prove my theory that the hardest fish to catch are: the first one each season; the first one in a new spot; and the first one in a place you have never fished before. Certainly seems to apply to salmon fishing.

Around lunchtime Martin and Owen decided to call it a day and now, besides my waders and other gear, I had around 36 lb/16kg of salmon extra to carry. (We have a rule: you catch the fish, you carry them out.) I was drenched in sweat by the time we got to the dingy but still a very happy and thoroughly addicted salmon angler.

I did not get another fish that season until the 31st March, an 11lb/5kg tagged hen fish. We usually finished our season then, even though we could fish for salmon to 30th of April, but Martin and I decided we would go out one more time to The Point, just after Easter that year, on the afternoon of 3 April. As we came out of the trees onto the track by the river a salmon rose in a slow porpoise, moving up the Kaiapoi. Martin said, "I will have that", put his pack down and cast in front of where the fish was heading. He immediately hooked up, had a great tussle and landed a nice silver fresh-run salmon. What a great start to the afternoon.

A bit later on I was fishing the Waimakariri side of The Point when I had a take and after good fight with a unseen fish, managed to persuade a 22lb/10kg, 35"/89cm long, 20"/51cm girth hen to come off the bottom and up the side of the hole. Later still I hooked and landed a 15.4lb/7kg jack. What a great way to end the season.

All up in the 1994-95 season I caught 18 salmon at an average of 17.95lb/8.16kg, 31.85"/81cm long and 19.18"/48.5cm girth. Stored in our 22 cubic foot freezer, most were bottled into pint preserving jars, a couple presented whole on centre tables at family weddings, and we found a continental butcher who would fillet, hot smoke and vacuum pack the rest at a very reasonable cost.

The next season 1995-96 was also a big one but not for me, starting great and then something greater happening. I finally found work as a Reliving Residential Social Worker, at a youth justice facility at peak salmon season and although, it was meant to be casual, it turned out anything but with shift work 24/7. At the end of 1996 I had another shock. My marriage of 26 years ended when my then wife decided she did not want to be wife and mother, and I became a solo father. That had an effect on most of the 1996-97 season until March, when another significant change happened, that has impacted my life since. Nonetheless, I still have 26 years to cover and since digital cameras came along, thousands of photos around salmon fishing and the restoration and enhancement work that I have been involved in. Watch this space . . .



WORKS!

Talking Plenty with Peter Storey



It was mid-January before I finally gave those emergers from the Spring issue a trial, due to a combination of poor weather and the business commitments leading to the closing of the print side. They worked, of course – that's the nymph at the top of my hand in this rainbow's fork, but all of them and despite the #8 hooks – because CNI rivers have remained at Spring levels and frequently, carried colour, El Nino or not; all of which is showing in this rainbow too – a lot thinner than this time last year. Another reason they worked would be the large numbers of dark brown-black-pale underside Stonefly nymphs in the target stream – pull any piece of rotting driftwood out and they will be all over and inside it. Overall, however, I suspect the reason is simply that black items amongst the drift are probably easiest for trout to spot; at any flow or colour level. Whatever. It was great to be back on flowing water again and even better, in the backcountry; with tui, bellbird, kaka and cuckoo song filling the air above and who whistles and grunts frequently amongst the action. A very welcome contrast to daytime summer holiday Lake Tarawera . . .

Casting is generally challenging in this sort of environment and even when I can see fish I tend to fish side on, flicking the line upstream and letting it drift past (to my side of sighted fish), with the pressure of the flow loading the next cast. Standard leaders are okay for this, as are poly, but for my money the leader that really comes into its own in these situations is that furred from nylon. Not only do these soak up more water for better loading, they also provide far more shock absorption, and that's a real plus in any kind of water where you must control fish or most likely, lose them. Here's the one I'm currently using, made from 3.9kg/0.2mm nylon. Approximately 12'/3.5m overall, and roughly split 50/50 between tippet and 75% 4 strand/25% 2 strand leader, combined with a DT4 and my Dry Rise CTS Quartz custom 7 foot, I can cover about 40 metres of rapidly-flowing river with an easy, almost lazy flick. There's a knack to making them but once you have the feel, they become straightforward. You can find plenty of 'recipes' online and the one I re-learned the skill from last winter is set onto the photo. It was this nylon Nick Taransky sent which prompted me to tie some more and having used mostly braided leaders over the last few years, the increase in performance the extra weight and flex provided was immediately obvious. If you have never tied a furred leader before give them a go and maybe, they will help you in full bush situations like this too.



https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=mZ_p3Cl4Hzo



GIBSON'S CHOICE

#14 Barbless Grub Hook; Black Rabbit Fur body and tail; 5mm Yellow Foam Cylinder head; Black Kevlar thread.



Feed the thread through the eye, whip finish to secure. Wax the thread.



Cut another small bunch of fur. Dub it onto the thread and cover the body area. Secure and cut the excess away, Whip finish.



Cut a strip of yellow foam about twice as long as the width. Split it diagonally. Secure the tapered end of one half at the eye of the hook, leaving about half the length free above the hook eye. Bind the remainder back towards the tail.



Even without the pelt rabbit fur is heavy. It pays to test the result actually floats!



Cut a small clump of rabbit fur from a strip – the pelt will be too heavy. Secure to shank.



Out on the lake, fishing remains as tough as I can remember over the 40 years I've fished here. My read is that the fish, as your can see, are simply too well fed and this makes them ultra-picky more often than not. That said, these fillets came from a 2.6kg 2022 release immature jack which was the first contact made in three mornings around the January full moon – about 4 hours' fishing time – and there was nothing in his gut whatsoever – and that's nothing new around here either. So who knows and when this is the result, really cares?

Well, I certainly do. This season has seriously challenged my understanding of how to catch trout with minimum effort in an historically four hours per fish environment. I could, of course, simply fish at night, when the fish lose their natural caution. As the years pass, however, that's becoming even less attractive and so I stick with the next best and personally most favoured option – about an hour on the water after first light – and the numbers of visible anglers fishing at this time, even during the holidays, clearly suggest I am not the only one finding this season challenging. Some days, with excellent visibility, I cannot spot another angler anywhere on the lake.

With so much hard fishing, even before surface water temperatures rose I was fishing the lake bed and still struggling to connect with the koura imitations that have proven so effective in recent seasons. So working on the principle that picky feeders need encouragement and knowing the rainbow trout's natural curiosity, I reverted to Plan Z: show them something small but obvious, to catch the attention of passing fish and provoke reaction. Soon after heading down that road I reached this issue's lure, Gibson's Choice.

In 1694, John Gibson raised what soon became the North Gloucestershire Regiment. That unit wore primrose facings on their uniforms and won the distinction of wearing cap badges back and front, after fighting off simultaneous front and rear attacks by French infantry and cavalry at the battle of Alexandria, 21/3/1801. By my time in 1 Glosters, a primrose back-badge on a black background was intrinsic to regimental identity – similar to a corporate logo. This colour combination is also very attractive to trout and so, over the years, as much for nostalgic reasons as practical, I've created numerous flies and lures that combine them.

Immediately successful, Gibson's Choice, a low light smelt body with a 'What's THAT!' head, is already my most successful lake bed



lure this season and as long as it puts fillets like these in the smoker, will stay on my SA SVI #6 lake bed rig. I've mostly used it solo but also, during one prolonged blank session spell, in combination with the normal koura imitation. I don't like multiple rigs and in this case the lure quickly got twisted around the lower tippet, besides increasing the opportunity to snag during sessions when typically, nothing works – knowledge which should have stopped me in the first place! I've tried this pattern larger and smaller, of course, and translated the colour scheme into variations around a full size dragonfly nymph, but for whatever reason, fished solo, this #14 gets hit most often and has landed multiple fish on several occasions. (The #16 here was nailed, though; after another spell of blanks, plus another empty gut.)

Yes, there is more than just nostalgia in play here. Not only does this highly personal colour combination bring back many memories, it also highlights the main colours in a hatching dragonfly nymph as seen by trout at depth. While we see many hatching along the shoreline – they frequent do so under my canoe, having crawled across sand to get there – they also hatch out on the lake surface. Hatching dragonflies fluoresce and you can still see some fluorescence in this one I've picked up off the lake. Whether the bent belly is part of the hatching process or damage I am not certain but the fly could flex it nonetheless, so I'm guessing it's the former. Something else I have not spotted before are the two highlights behind the eye – and if they look flashy to you they are – the sunlight caught them multiple time, as strongly as tinsel. Additionally, there are male bullies dying at this time of year after breeding and the colour combination works here too.

With still too many blank sessions, however, I'm also packing a second rod loaded with a medium (SA Wet Cell S2) sink #6 line and fast sink leader, set up with two Ratopinna – one with a teaser head and the other, plain. When there's no interest in the lake bed rig, this set up works the water column from the bed up to the surface, searching for the smelting trout that move freely around, before finally calling off the session. This set-up will reach the thermocline – currently around 18m and likely to sink further with settled autumnal weather – in about two minutes. Mid-February, however, surface water temperature and oxygen levels are still well inside the tolerable habitat level for smaller fish at dawn and this medium sink set-up has picked up fish at all levels.

In closing, I'd like to thank whomever made the decision to stop area-spraying Lake Tarawera with Diquat and concentrate on launch sites. It's now two years since Te Karamea Bay was last fully sprayed and things are finally looking up. Dragonflies are everywhere again, I am getting hit by koura as well as fish and hopefully, there will be multiple bullies around my boots when wading this coming winter, maybe even koaro. Benthic fauna inhabit benthic flora . . .

With high summer and early autumn imminent, the older fish will be maturing and the hardest fishing lies ahead. This issue's message is therefore: make sure you know that less-motivated fish can see at least one of your lures; and make it one you know WORKS.

Additionally, there are male bullies dying at this time of year after breeding and the colour combination works here too . . .



Not only does this highly personal colour combination bring back many memories, it also picks out the main colours in a hatching dragonfly . . .





Photo from: <https://www.heritagesouthholland.co.uk/article/mackenzie-thorpe>

KENZIE The Wild Goose-Man by Colin Willock

A review by Garrett Evans, Transcribed by Alyssa-Mae Hughes



Kenzie is among Willock's best works as an author. He wrote for the Shooting Times and other outdoorsy publications for years, and I've corresponded with him; in some instances, Kenzie himself.

Mackenzie Thorpe was a steadfast boxer in Lincolnshire, his main sites being the area of King's Lynn and Long Sutton. Known for their huge concentrations of ducks, geese, pheasants and hares, to be out on the open saltings was a prolific space for hunting in all of Britain. Kenzie was one of the last of the great poachers, the total game he shot was quite phenomenal and was very useful to the local people during the Second World War - when rationing was fairly strict. Kenzie was a great friend of ornithologist Sir Peter Markham Scott and the actor James Robertson Justice. 1942 was Kenzie's record year. In September, he had 77 head - mostly partridges and hares - October; 108 head including 15 mallards, 9 pigeon, 24 partridges. November; 105 head. December; 183 head of a mixed bag - widgeon, shellduck, wild geese, and pheasant. To highlight this magnificent feat, peculiar tides upon the saltings would come in during arduous and early mornings, having swept hunters and drowned them... Still Kenzie harboured no fear. There were even rumours of Kenzie climbing trees, shooting where the geese had roosted! The mad man . . .

In addition to being among the best huntsmen, he was also the middle-weight boxing champion of Lincolnshire. Willock was quite fond of Kenzie, and so was I, as I also came to visit him. He was a very adventurous individual; independent, born of gypsy blood, with negligible school attendance - and a target of the local police due to his unfriendly habit of poaching. There were two policemen in the small town. One liked Mackenzie. The other absolutely despised him! This I found rather odd, but also rather interesting. Kenzie married a local girl, having several children; his work - other than poaching the salt flats - consisted of seasonal labouring, especially in the summer months . . . Though outside work was always uncertain and atrociously paid. Kenzie's father, for example, earned five shillings for a day's work of treading potatoes.

One snowy January morning, Kenzie and his friend left Sutton and spent three days on the marsh in a derelict hut, that eight-years previously, housed the German Prisoners of War working on the sea wall. It was a very crisp and cold area. Severe, as the glacial winds swept right through Poland. And in the town of Sutton, there is a lively stream that curved throughout, filled with trout. The sun would catch the scales, splitting silver... I would miss the saltings area a great deal. It was a place of true, wild, shooting. Dangerous, risky, but worth the hours and the sweat - even the risk of being swept by the tide! I could tuck myself in the sheltered area of the saltings and work a bit upon my Lord Byron thesis.

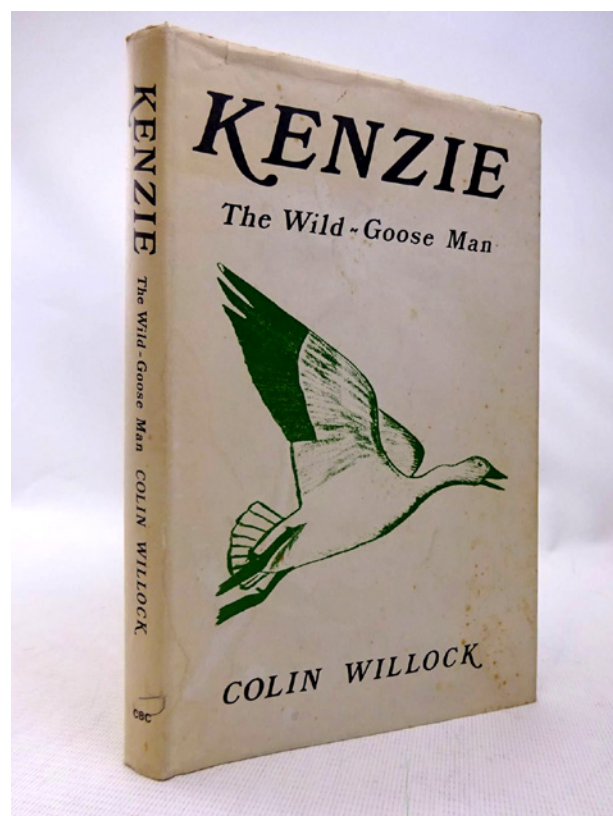
*There is the moral of all human tales:
'Tis but the same rehearsal of the past,
First Freedom, and then Glory; when that fails,
Wealth, Vice, Corruption, barbarism at last.
And History, with all her volumes vast,
Hath but one page . . .*

(Childe Harold's Pilgrimage, CVIII)

It was a good place to toil upon my thesis. Byron was a local boy; who lived at Newstead Abbey, which wasn't that far away at all from Sutton.

Willock has done a splendid job with Kenzie's biography, it is a book that I am quite pleased to own. Illustrated partly by Kenzie himself.

Both Willock and Kenzie are now in the happy hunting grounds. I miss them, and treasure their memories. As whenever I look upon my thesis, my thoughts go to Sutton and the wild goose-man who used to live there.



*Japanese-style fly with CDC wings,
Aero-Dry-Wing post and sparse
parachute hackle*

Long Tippet Flies

Around Ruapehu with Nick Taransky

My third season living in Taihape has been a strange one. The Hautapu has been dirty more often than not, with the rain seemingly timed perfectly to muddy the waters each time they start to clear. The fishing Gods might be telling me that I should be making rods and not fishing. In truth, there have still been plenty of chances to cast to sighted fish, even in less than pristine conditions. Of course, as soon as things warmed up, the home pets got into their steady diet of willow grubs.

JAPANESE "LONG TIPPET" FLIES

Aside from the obligatory willow grubs, this season I have fished almost exclusively with Japanese "long tippet style" dry flies. The driver for this has been my conversion to the Japanese long tippet method for most of my fishing. This involves a soft, full action rod, 15 foot thin-butt leader and an additional 6 or 7 feet of tippet, to generate long, drag free drifts through a controlled collapse of the leader.

This thin 21-22 foot leader might be great for defeating drag, but most "normal" flies can wreak havoc on the system. Heavily hackled flies like Wulffs or Humpies, and flies with stiff feathered wings tend to spin like a top, leaving the whole leader and tippet in a tangled mess. Aside from the spinning issue, any "heavy" fly (yes, "heavy" dry fly) like a Deer Hair Caddis, Humpy or Stimulator will tend to have too much momentum and swing off target.

What is needed is a fly that is light in mass, but also provides slight "shuttlecock" wind resistance or pull back. An obvious choice of material for this is CDC. Fine synthetics such as Tiemco Aero-Dry Wing also work. When it comes to hackle, interestingly, older, cheaper capes, with slightly softer, finer barbules are better than modern genetic capes with dense, thick, stiff barbules. Also, sparse hackling, parachute style rather than around the hook further diminishes the propensity of the fly to spin. A test for the right type of fly is to drop it from shoulder height to the ground. It should float down slowly, with minimal spin or rotation.



No hackle CDC Caddis with Deer Hair veil over-wing



I've really enjoyed sitting down at the vice and restocking my fly box with these flies, tying some new patterns and also adapting some old regulars.

An example of adaption is a deer hair caddis. Rather than use a solid wad of deer hair for the wing, a thin "veil" of deer hair can be applied over the top of a CDC wing. This gives a similar silhouette to the original fly, without the mass. I really like how these flies present, even when using a normal leader setup. With less weight, you can cast more assertively and closer to the fish. The fly tends to just "arrive" or appear on the water, without any splash or commotion, resulting in less chance of spooking the fish.

There are a couple of minor downsides to these flies. Firstly, there are times when you do want a splashy presentation, say to imitate a grasshopper or other terrestrial landing on the water. The other issue is that without weight, they don't bow and arrow cast as well as heftier flies. On balance though, I really like how effective they have been, and I don't see myself turning back.



CDC Spinner



KIWI CANE UPDATE

We now have a venue for the 2024 Kiwi Cane bamboo rod gathering. The inaugural Kiwi Cane will be held at the Ruapehu Ski Club Lodge in Ohakune, from Friday the 19th of April to Sunday the 21st of April. The layout at the lodge offers an open area for daily presentations, discussions and meals, as well as providing accommodation facilities. There is also a large grassed area outside where we can "taste test" a huge range of bamboo rods. There will be everything from #1 weights to #10 weights, 5 footers to 13 footers, solid and hollow, 4, 5 and 6 sided rods, old rods and new.

As many readers will know, Ohakune is located in the middle of some superb, diverse fishing. We have secured accommodation at the lodge before and after the gathering (from the 13th to the 29th of April) for people who want to take advantage of the Ruapehu fishing. Miri and I have spent some time in the area this season reacquainting ourselves with familiar streams and exploring a few new ones. Suffice to say, I think that there will be no shortage of options (or fish) for the Kiwi Cane attendees.

For the event, we have put together packages including a fully catered option with 4 nights accommodation and all meals, and a day attendance option if people want to stay off site. At the time of writing, we already have nearly a full house, but there are some places still available.

The schedule is also starting to take shape, with a balance of technical presentations, group discussions and of course, casting lots of bamboo rods. A full suite of rodmaking tools and equipment will be there for hands on demonstrations. I will also bring my bamboo rod library of over 50 books and DVDs, to educate (or confuse)!

More details are available on the Kiwi Cane website – www.kiwicane.com

ROD CLASSES

As part of the lead up to Kiwi Cane, I will be running several bamboo rodmaking classes in Taihape. The dates are 11-15 March, 25-29 March and 8-12 April. I also have a class scheduled for later this year from 19-23 of November. Again, the classes are filling, but there

are a few places left. My own rodmaking started at a similar course with Jeff Wagner in the USA back in 2002. It's hard to believe how quickly that time has flown by.

Left: Bamboo field testing on a Ruapehu stream

Above Ruapehu Brown

Right: Ruapehu Rainbow





A maturing 6lb jack, just developing a bump on its head. What a beautiful fish . . .





Camping In Snow – No Better Time

By Ainsley Haslett (aka nzadventurer)



The weather had been rough all week. Cyclone Lola had just hit Vanuatu and the North Island was getting another lashing of rain and high winds. Snow swept up from the South of the Mainland bringing freezing temperatures and strong Southerlies. No better time for an adventure in the backcountry! It was also the weekend of the RWC final (you know, the one with the new TMO?!). The plan was formed: walk in Friday, fish Saturday in clear weather and walk back that evening in time for the Sunday match.

I finished packing my bag as snow flakes continued to flutter down, then completed the important task of letting family know my plans and to assure them I wasn't crazy. There was always a hut if the weather turned really bad and plus, I've got confidence in my gear. As well as the Personal Life Beacon I carry an emergency bivvy bag, medical kit, and cold weather camping setup aka a tiny tent. I probably have way too much equipment in my bag most of the time but unlike in my 20s and 30s, I actually think about risk and safety these days - must be a sign of ageing!

The plan was about timing. Walk in through the last of the bad weather, find a sheltered camp with an amazing view and wake up to clear skies in the morning. Fishing after a fresh on a clear frosty morning – that did sound like adventure bliss – what could go wrong?

The walk in started well. With 17kg of gear moulded smoothly to my back I headed into the wilderness. As I strode on, occasional snow fell from the beeches above. Korimako (Bellbird) sung happily and Toutouwai (South Island Robin) danced on branches around me.

A few hours into the walk the skies were still looking very gloomy indeed. Snow continued to lightly fall, dampening the walker and the surrounds. Rounding a bend in the track I bumped into two local legends (and fishing guides). I'd spent years sitting behind a desk dreaming of having them helicopter me off to a #ginclear river and catching an easy ten pounder with my name on it. But right now I was face to face with these legends and all of a sudden unsure what to say! Why didn't I ask them how the fishing was? What fly should I use? Why don't you wear backcountry skins in the snow? None of these things came to mind. Gleaming in their fresh coats of Guideline armour, it was such a surprise to see them out in such bleak, windy conditions in a snow storm. Certainly not the "Purefly" content I've been watching from my television. As I walked on I noticed their footprints had left a unique pattern of small round dimples similar to that of a touch rugby boot. Little did I know that I was to be haunted by those footprints . . .

As I crossed into the riverbed and searched for a campsite, every nice pool I came to was accompanied by patterns of fine round dimples in the ground. Fishing in the footprints of those two was going to be extremely daunting!

I found a campsite just as it starting snowing again – securing shelter became top priority. With the tent up my next task was a fire. I've learnt to always search for driftwood if it's available. It tends to be drier and burns hotter than fallen beech. Soon a hot fire was warming my hands and drying my feet as my billy boiled in prep for a feast of Moroccan Couscous a La Backcountry. My top tip is, always add chilli flakes and it tastes awesome.



Skies cleared overnight, true to the forecast. I was up at dawn fire blazing and listening to an incredible dawn chorus as Kea sung overhead.

It was just before sun rise that everything froze. I guess in -4deg you'd expect that. I sat close to the fire. For some reason I thought if my boots and socks were in the tent overnight that they'd be OK. Apparently not! My socks froze and took some gentle warming by the fire to convince them to return to the supple, soft creatures I had hoped they'd be. My boot laces were a different story. Like me, camping in the wild they needed a swim to wake up. Being a huge fan of wet wading I had a sneaking suspicion that this was the last time my feet were going to be remotely warm for the rest of the day. However, even that knowledge doesn't quite prepare you for that first crossing at 8am on a -4deg morning. Needless to say, deep crossings must be avoided at all costs.





As the sun broke into the valley I explored a few pools only to reveal those fine dimpled tracks of our guides. This wasn't looking good.

I pushed upstream beyond sign of any dimples and soon after hooked into a nice fish on a tungsten nymph, in a beautiful pool with a stunning backdrop. It took many casts to present well due to the strange swirly back eddy that made the drift much more difficult than first expected. Just as the joy of the take had melted into the suspense of regaining line, the TMO interrupted and freed the fish. Apparently, three casts earlier the indicator was offside.



Further upstream and as the sun rose higher I located a fish sitting deep in a lovely section of edge water, but feeding readily up in the water column. This had to be a sitter for a dry fly. Careful presentation of the dry enticed the fish up and next minute I was rock hopping downstream attached to a superb fish. Across the river I went trying to pry the fish out from every undercut, rooty bank and boulder it could find. Back across and upstream, then back down, after ten minutes the fish was in the net. As I unlocked the net's scales and quickly lifted the fish, I came to understand the situation surrounding such an intense battle. At 7lb this fish had no doubt done this before and it made a strong departure, swimming swiftly upstream. Success! What a feeling to land that first fish of a trip, and what a fish it was. Thankfully no interruption from the TMO. This was a try right under the posts.



As the afternoon sun continued to shine I was able to lure a few more fish to the surface, moving steadily upstream. What a superb afternoon it continued to be. By 3pm it was finally warm enough to take off my jacket. When I say superb weather – I didn't mean warm!

My leader had served me well but was due for replacement and I retied my knots and affixed another Adams. Soon afterwards I sighted a superb fish holding in a pocket of edge water. I watched for a while, seeing how the fish slurped periodically in the current. One cast and it was all action. I tried to restrain the fish and save the pool for another riser but that was flawed. The fish tore upstream before planting itself under a bank across and 30m up from the eat. I became nervous that the TMO would intervene at any moment. Surely not a yellow card? But the fish remained tight on the line, planted under the bank. I finally freed that fish from it's hide by jerking the rid tip and changing rod angles – a technique I learnt battling Kingfish. The fish had become suitably irritated and came out from the bank, back downstream and it was in the net. (The TMO remained silent thank goodness). A maturing 6lb jack, just developing a bump on its head. What a beautiful fish.

Back at camp everything was dry, making pack down a joy. A Weka made a quick visit to see if I had anything to donate to its nest. I had to apologise as I planned to keep all my gear this time.

The walk out is one of those things you just don't think about until it's happening. As I walked the river flats downstream, I carried my rod fully assembled in the hope of a lazy riser but all I found was little dimple footprints and pools devoid of fish. "One more fish," I thought as I trudged on.

Eventually packing away the rod and hitting the track triggers the reality of the walk out to set in. Passing by a hut I stopped to hang with a group of guys setting up for a Saturday night party. No TMO here. Plenty of beers, a roaring fire and a decent spread of snacks did look tempting and they invited me to join them for the night. Tempting indeed but I was looking forward to the RWC final early the next morning. I stopped a while to rest and made a solid attempt at finishing their venison salami with a few chunks of chevre. This was level up camp





cuisine and a lot more desirable than the instant noodles and porridge I had remaining.

Extracting myself from their fire, onward I pushed. One step after another while recounting events of the day. The walk out is always time to replay the ones that were missed (was it the drift, the presentation, the fly?), as well as to cherish those fish that made the net. Let the mind wander as long as the feet keep moving ahead. Eventually making it back to the car just on dusk. So happy to see the bottle of water and bag of chicken chips I left myself on the passenger seat! What an amazing adventure.

Ainsley is an addicted flyfisher and full time adventurer. Follow his adventures on [YouTube](#)



NEW PRODUCTS

OPST MICRO SKAGIT D² 8FT TIPS (DUAL DENSITY T6 & T8)

Micro Skagit D² (Dual Density) Tips (sink/float) are built with the OPST 3WT-5WT Micro Skagit series, 5wt and up single-hand rods, and Trout Spey Rods in mind. Ed Ward being one of the original creators of the MOW tip, saw a need for a lighter, dual-density option for customers chasing trout. The specs are 8 feet long with one being 8ft full sink, one 6ft sink/2ft float, and the final one is half and half 4ft sink/4ft float. These are designed to cover most on-the-water needs. These tips will give you a different angle of attack in the water than OPST's density-compensated tip options and are a Must Have tool on the water. They help you effectively fish pocket water and areas without a clean even flow, to drop the fly into fishy slots.

OPST D2 Tips

FITS TUNGSTEN TURBO TUBES

If you enjoy fishing tube flies and want to try another revolutionary fly tying product from Mikael Frodin, then look no further. Turbo Tubes can be used in several different ways. They let you add weight central to the fly and allow a design that opens up soft materials without collapsing – all to create that perfect swimming fly. There is enough room to tie a lacquered head or to finish your fly with a cone, just let it slide down tight in front of the tube. FITS TTT are made to fish with a loose hanging hook, lined with XS Tubing, but are just as good to integrate with M FITS Tubing to use as a short body and hook holder.

Froding Turbo Tubes

OPST MICRO SKAGIT RODS

Autumn is coming and that means it is a great time to be swinging flies on a double handed rod. OPST bring the fun to swinging for trout with their Micro Skagit category consisting of three rods rated to cast 275 grain heads or lower. Their tapers have been designed to pleasantly accommodate both single-handed Spey/Skagit-type casts and two-handed Spey/Skagit-type casts. Whether you're picking apart small to medium sized rivers on foot swinging soft hackles, throwing big streamers into the bank from a boat, or busting big bushy intruder flies into the teeth of an afternoon breeze, these nifty little hybrid rods should have a permanent place in your quiver. The 9'9" 3wt, 10'4wt, and 10'4" 5wt all fit a variety of New Zealand river sizes and with them being far truer to single hand weight, keep the fun of casting to and playing an average size fish.

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The Primal ZEN Euro Nymphing Rod is your gateway to Euro nymphing. There's a ton of buzz around euro style nymphing, so getting into it without breaking the bank is key to enjoying it. The ZEN is made with a 55 MSI blank to give a good balance between power and sensitivity. Longitudinal Fiber Alignment (LNR) and Low Mass Scrim (LMS) enhance feel and responsiveness, so you can cast with precision and you will feel any takes. It's light, so you can fish all day and your arm won't fall off. The Primal Quick Fix warranty provides peace of mind, so if you break it Primal will fix it without a fuss and without 6 months of waiting around.

Compared to premium Euro nymphing rods, the ZEN sits in a more affordable category, making it the best way to step into the Euro nymphing world.

Sizes: 10ft - #3, #4



PRIMAL RELAY FLY ROD

The Primal RELAY is a mid-level fast-action rod that is the ideal next step up from the learner combo. The multi-modulus blank construction gives you a great blend of power for effortless casting and sensitivity for delicate presentations and strike detection – crucial for any angler, but especially for those transitioning from their first rod. The RELAY has a low-shine, stealthy green finish.

The mid level, RELAY doesn't scrimp on the tech. Primal's Longitudinal Fiber Alignment (LFA) enhances feel and responsiveness and Low Mass Scrim (LMS) sheds unnecessary weight without compromising strength. It also means that you won't tear a rotator if you are casting all day.

All Primal rods come with a cordura rod tube and a protective cloth rod bag plus Primal's Quick Fix warranty service provides peace of mind, knowing you're covered in case of any unexpected mishaps. Primal will fix it quick and get it back to you just as fast. No long wait.

Sizes: 7'9" #3 & #4, 9ft - #5 - #8, 10" #6.



LAMSON LIQUID S

The Lamson Liquid is a reel that is extremely well known in fly fishing circles. Bulletproof and a great price. It's passed the test of time and now Lamson have gone and made it better. The tag line is more 'Liquid courage' and that's what it delivers.

The Liquid S has increased diameters and larger arbors compared to its predecessor. The result is faster line retrieval and better handling of fish. Additionally, the unique

pocket spar frame and spool design aim to achieve a higher strength-to-weight ratio, keeping the reel light without sacrificing durability and cleaner spooling. The drag knob is larger than the first model so it's easier to make mid fight adjustments for more control during the fight.

Available in Daybreak - in sizes 3+, 5+, 7+, 9+ & spare spools are available



AIRFLO PREMIUM FLUOROCARBON & NYLON



Airflo's Premium Fluorocarbon tippet is 100% fluorocarbon construction giving near invisibility in water. Manufactured to precise Japanese standards for consistent quality and performance, Airflo's 'Premium' tippet is ideal for all your freshwater needs. Each spool is made from recycled material and the large diameter reduces memory. The tippet range snaps together in a series of bright colours so you can quickly pick the right spool on the river.

Airflo Premium Fluorocarbon is available in 30m spools, 0X to 6X. The same 'Premium' series tippet is also available in Nylon. Airflo Premium Nylon is available in 50m spools, 0X to 6X

SIMMS G3 GUIDE BOOT



Simms G3 Guide Boots have earned a reputation for superior comfort, durability, and performance that elevates your fishing experience. In short, they do what they are meant to do and they do it well.

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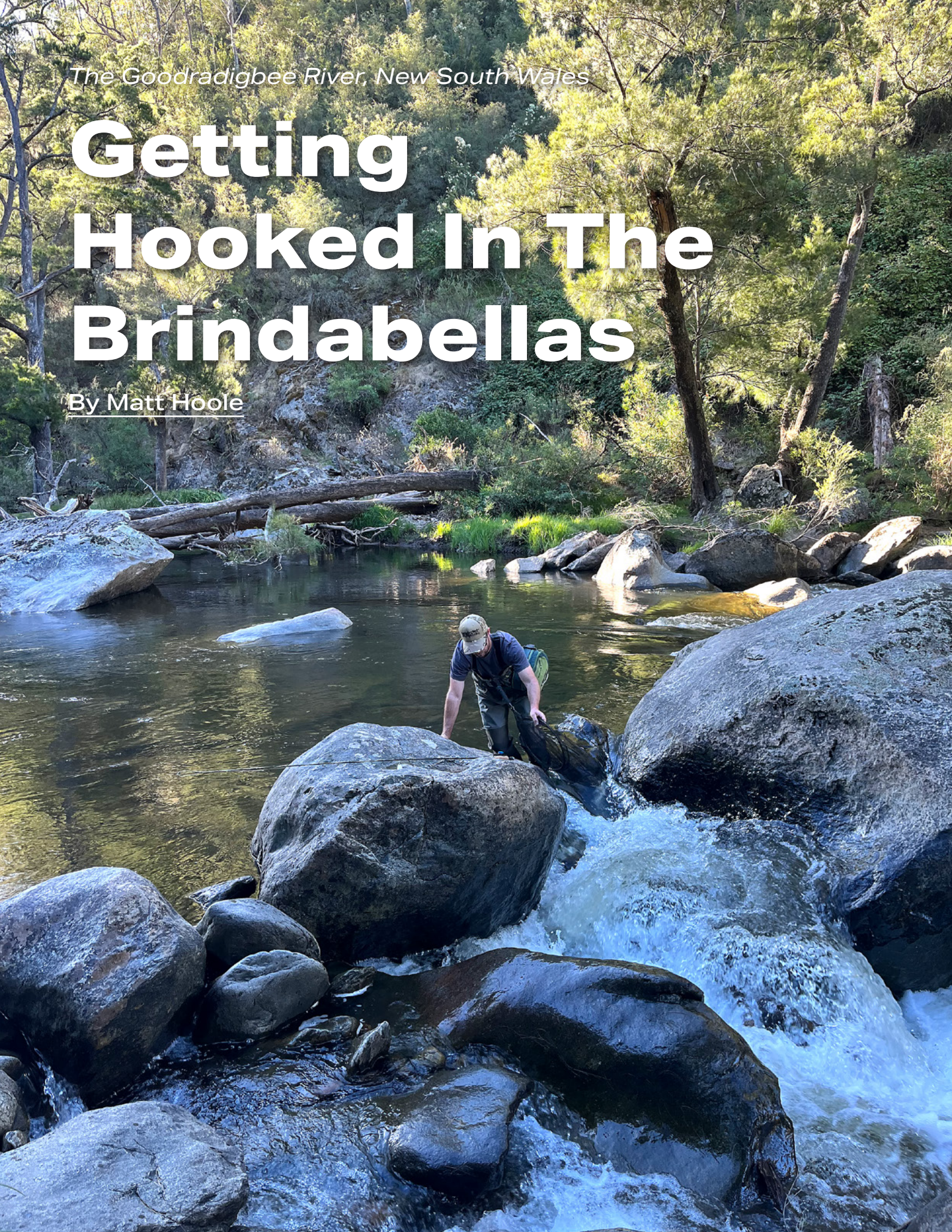
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The Goodradigbee River, New South Wales

Getting Hooked In The Brindabellas

By Matt Hoole



Emerging from a trickle in the Australian Alps, the Goodradigbee River begins its journey below Mount Morgan, from its headwaters in the Snowy Mountains of NSW. Here, it's only a few metres wide and strangled in vegetation, as it snakes through classic alpine high country. As the river widens out, side creeks and tributaries merge, increasing the river's volume. It then tumbles down through steep and rugged terrain, dissecting the Bimberi Wilderness. In this location, you'd have to question how much of the water is untouched, as there's very little accessibility in a remote and unpopulated section of the river.

Further down, the river passes by Brindabella Station, rich in family history, as it flows through the Brindabella National Park. It's here in the Brindabella's, I've found a home in a place reminiscent of my childhood memories and adventures fishing in NZ. Sometimes you can't quite put your finger on why a certain river grabs you, pulls you into its charm and has you searching and craving for more! Perhaps, it reminds me of the scenic Waitawheta River, in the Waikato region of the North Island, where I picked up a fly rod aged 13 and caught my first rainbow trout, from which my lifelong obsession had begun.

I stumbled upon this river several years ago when camping at Micalong Creek at Wee Jasper, in the NSW countryside. Its tumbling heads, spilling into deep emerald green pools had me hooked early. Although it became tough fishing after years of drought, floods and bush fires in Australia, I longed to return to its waters. After moving to Canberra in 2022, I now had the Goodradigbee River only a stone's throw away from my doorstep. Maybe it was always meant to be this way.

The Goodradigbee River fishes very well for trout up to 3lbs. I'm sure there are larger fish holding in certain sections of the river, but as for the numbers of them, am unsure. There's a great population of rainbow trout and whilst I haven't seen many brown trout, there's nothing to suggest they wouldn't thrive in these conditions.

The rainbows fight extremely hard given their size, utilising the swift currents to their advantage. Their markings are magnificent and their general condition is obvious. With population numbers high, the competition for food source is therefore competitive, suggesting why the trout don't grow to significant sizes. However, on my Traper Silence 10 foot, 4 weight rod these fish have kept me well entertained.

As well as trout, carp are prominent in the mid-lower sections of the river, with numbers declining at higher altitudes where water temperature levels cool. They're quite docile in nature and can be mistaken for larger brown trout, moving slower and feeding on the bottom. With an abundance of food source available, the carp grow to significant proportions. Although placid, the carp will take various artificial imitations more opportunistically but have a wary demeanour, so care is needed approaching them.

There are also some large Murray, as well as other Cod species taking refuge in this pristine waterway for the angler seeking a different thrill. These species are more prominent in the slower, lower sections of the Goodradigbee, before it enters Burrinjuck Dam. The Murray Cod are beautifully marked like a camo jungle predator, hiding in wake of its prey. They are known to take huge streamer-like patterns, hitting the bait fish imitation with an explosive force!

The Goodradigbee River is stunning, surrounded by Elms, Casuarinas and Gum trees that frame the riverbank, providing shade and protection. It's postcard settings; a pool, run, glide formation, with numerous gorges interspersing the Brindabella forest.

When fishing or navigating these gorge sections, I would suggest taking care, as the water is turbulent and often difficult to pass. The river bottom also changes from a stony, shingly bottom to a sandy bottom in the larger pools.

The water clarity is very clear, making for some interesting sight fishing, especially in summer months when fish rise to a variety of surface activity. It can be action-packed fishing, with many fish holding in the one stretch of water. So fishers who are willing to dissect the holding water carefully will be highly rewarded.

On one memorable, baking-hot summer's afternoon, I left my waders off after a quick dip in the river with my wife and kids. I picked up my rod and after working a nice pool over, eight fish had come to the net in about an hour's fishing, while standing in the river still in my board shorts. Occasions like this, leave a lasting imprint in your mind.

There are several campgrounds positioned alongside the river that offer basic amenities for camping, all with riverfront access. A 4WD is required to reach these campsites given the loose seal and steep terrain. Be careful in attempting to reach these locations in or after wet weather, as the dusty trails get muddied up and are extremely slippery and dangerous.





Last February, we decided to take Webbs Ridge Trail from Flea Creek over to McIntyres and Lowells campgrounds. Turning off onto the trail, the Colarado grunted loudly, as it began what felt like, a near vertical climb. The Ute showed some horsepower as it roared up the ridge, the snorkel coughing out puffs of dust in the hot and dry conditions.

Once committed, there was no turning back, as we carefully navigated the steep inclines, large rocks and rocky trail, eventually making it atop Webbs Ridge. The view over the Brindabella ranges was breathtaking as we stopped to soak in the sights.

After checking out McIntyres campground, we went on to spend the afternoon at Lowells, feasting on cooked chicken skewers on the gas cooker and drinking cold beer in the sun. We had a great time, fishing and chilling out, while the kids found a new playground on the riverbank.

As the sun began to set, we had to make a break for it, to escape the bush and trail before dark. With 1.5 hours return drive to Flea Creek, and a further 40 minutes drive out of the Brindabella's, made for an enthralling trip home.

The river passes through kilometres of wild national park in the Brindabella mountains, therefore exercise caution when venturing out, as some areas of the river are secluded from civilisation, thus, always be prepared with the necessary safety equipment like an emergency beacon for outside communication in case of an emergency.

The Brindabella's and Goodradigbee River hold an aura. Perhaps it relates back to the old pioneering days from the Franklin family at Brindabella Station.

Once such a prolific fishery, it feels like you're standing on the grounds of a world class river, that's been fished, conquered, and lost, by many notable anglers before you.

So after years of recent devastation to NSW and ACT waters, the Goodradigbee River is rebounding to its former reputation and glory, as one of Australia's finest trout rivers.





Photos, in sequence:-

Fording the upper river

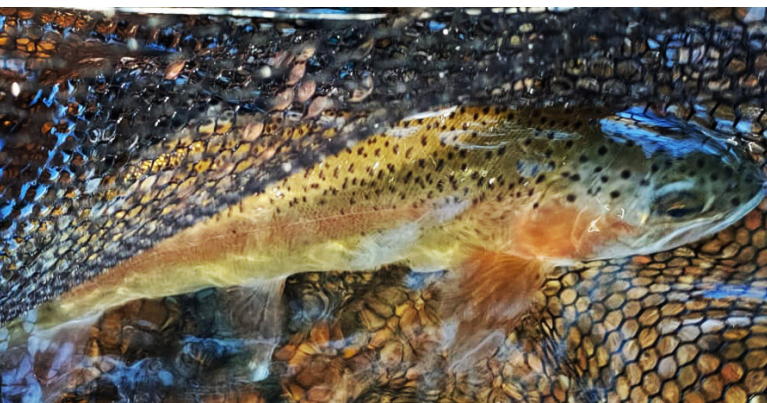
The home pool at Flea Creek

The fast water often produces plenty of takes

Lowell's Campground

Flea Creek Campground, another great place to take the family

The rainbows are always well marked



A large rainbow trout is being held by a person's hand, showing its silver scales and dark spots. The fish is positioned vertically over a stream bed of smooth, rounded stones. The water is clear, and the background shows more of the stream bed and some greenery.

A 15 pounder . . .

The King Cometh

Chasing quinnat on the fly with Garry Scrimgeour and Pat Fargey



We, chasers of salmon on the fly, are a rare breed. Always misunderstood, typically tormented, seldom successful; stewards of books by Louis L'Amour. Pat and I had unfinished business chasing King salmon on the fly - we sought resolution. In July 2018, Pat and I had our first experience chasing King salmon in British Columbia, Canada. We naively hypothesised that we could land three species of Pacific salmon including King salmon, on the fly, during a single fishing trip to the mighty Kitimat River. After a week of determined spey fishing our hypothesis was soundly rejected. In fact, we barely managed to land two species: pink salmon [*Oncorhynchus gorbuscha*] and chum salmon [*Oncorhynchus keta*]. The third species, the mighty King salmon, evaded us entirely. In hindsight, Pat likely hooked at least one King salmon but unfortunately wasn't able to land it. Without rubbing salt into the wound, that King salmon took liberties with my mate Pat and to say that he was spanked by it, although harsh, would not be too far off the mark (sorry Pat). And yes, I can hear Pat saying, "Well, at least I hooked one" to which I would offer, "a merciless yet fair comment". In addition to the disappointing number of species landed, our collective tally of four landed fish over those five days in 2018 was modest at best - pitiful at worst. Leaving the Kitimat, with our tails (and fly rods) firmly between our legs, we knew that we had unfinished business. So, in June 2020 we took a second crack at big Kitimat River salmon. Thirteen July marked our departure from Edmonton, Alberta, as we yet again headed west as part of 2736 km round trip. We are not addicted to fishing, it's just a dedicated relationship that would require 32 hours of driving. Here, we recount our trip. It's a tale of fishing chums, rods and tackle, majestic early mornings, craft beer and battles with the prodigious King salmon.

KING SALMON AND THE MIGHTY KITIMAT RIVER, BC

In North America, King salmon (*Oncorhynchus tshawytscha*) are also known as Spring salmon, Tyee, or Chinook salmon. In New Zealand they are more often known as Quinnt or Chinook salmon. The common name "Chinook" originates from the North American indigenous Chinookan peoples. The origins of its scientific name, "*Oncorhynchus*" translates into round or lumpy snout, and the species name of "*tshawytscha*" is based on the Russian common name of "chavycha" reflecting that the specimen first identified came from Russia.

Kings are the largest salmon on the planet, with the heaviest on record 126 lb (57.2 kg). However, the majority of anglers in Western Canada and Alaska encounter King salmon in the 10 to 25 lb range, with lengths between 24 and 36 inches. King salmon that weigh north of 40 lb are not uncommon and are the stuff of photographs. The largest King that I (Garry) have landed (and released) is 32 lb. I caught it in the upper reaches of the Vedder River, British Columbia. It was a well coloured fish with deep spawning colours and perhaps not the best-looking fish that I have landed. The largest King salmon that I have seen was in the Harrison River, British Columbia. It was probably 50 lb. The fish hadn't spawned and was swimming in crystal clear water just a few feet from the rivers' edge where I was standing. I "guesstimated" its length and girth by placing the rod in the water and using it as a measure, resulting in an estimated length of 39 inches and girth of 32 inches. Although tempting, after much deliberation I chose against casting to it as I had my Sage Vt2 - 9-foot 9- weight single handed rod, aka "Tinkerbell". That was probably a good decision.



Big water of the Kitimat River

The Kitimat River is located in coastal British Columbia and has a run of King salmon that peaks between May and mid-June. Fly fishers' angle for them between the mouth of the river to a bridge located about 25 km upstream of the ocean. Consequently, the majority of



fish that are caught are fresh run fish and those encountered in the lower reaches, where we fished in June 2020, are stunningly silver in colour. They are also immensely strong and feisty. Kings are a formidable fish and not to be engaged without careful consideration of rod type and length, line and leader weights.

As is our normal custom, we adopt a do-it-yourself approach to chasing King salmon. We camp at the [Radley Campground](#) on the outskirts of the small township of Kitimat where we set up Pat's 10 by 15-foot canvas wall tent. We access fishing sites along the river by driving and walking. However, there are lots of clean and comfortable hotels and motels in the region, several of which specifically cater to anglers, including offering guided float trips. If you are new to the area and don't have time to complete a reconnaissance, then staying in hotels and using local guides can be a viable and effective approach, worthy of a modest financial investment.

CHASING CHINOOKS ON THE FLY

Chasing Chinooks on the fly is typically done with 13 to 15-foot double-handed spey rods. There is a powerful elegance to fishing with them. Pat and I have mostly mastered the double spey, circle or snap-T, and roll casts (Pat more than I). We are efficient, but certainly not expert casters. On a daily basis, there are times when our casting goes "all to heck". When this occurs our spey lines resemble spaghetti noodles. They become wrapped around our bodies and Pats' hand-crafted flies transition to self-guided missiles that become lodged in waders, vests, and body parts. A note of caution, the mechanics of spey casting are governed by the physics of levers and resistance forces. When mastered, casting generates all sorts of loading to the rod that results in casting velocities exceeding 100 km hour. If you do choose to chase salmon in big rivers in British Columbia, you will encounter casters of true magnificence who are able to effortlessly cast 120 feet or more covering the water with incredible precision and ease. Pat and I encountered two incredible casters on the Kitimat River and we simply sat back and admired their talents. One point to note, fly fishing for King salmon requires knowing and applying fishing etiquette, much like fishing the Tongariro River. For instance, if there is another angler(s) swinging flies, you always enter the run upstream of them so that they get to fish all the way down through the run. Don't be accused of being a "low pooler". When in doubt ask other anglers about local etiquette. Most anglers are more than happy to share knowledge, flies and stories that contain dubious levels of accuracy.

IT'S A SMALL WORLD

Beer and anglers are a match made in heaven akin to fish and chips, pavlova and cream, farming and gumboots. Pat is an amateur, yet master brewer, and generously shares his knowledge of brewing and delightful flavour creations with me – he is currently a big fan of sours. We both trend towards impressively flavoured craft beers, irrespective of style. There is, of course, a place for mass-produced light crisp beers which we often title "lawn mower" or "swilling beers". I digress. Pat had put together a splendidly eclectic medley of craft beers for our trip to the Kitimat. While the quality, variety and availability of craft beer has blossomed over the last 10 to 15 years in Canada, finding a suitable bevy of craft beers in somewhat remote Canadian towns is typically problematic. With this in mind, after a 12-hour drive from Edmonton to Smithers, British Columbia, our expectations were low for finding a great pint of craft beer in the small town of Smithers. The hotel where we stayed had a pub adjacent to it, so the location was going to work well for us. After sitting down at a table, we cautiously asked the server if they had any craft beers



The beer turned out to be a delicious, full-bodied hazy ale . . .



on tap. The server responded with a look of dismay and bewilderment and her outside voice said: "Yes – we have several from Smithers Brewing Company". Her body language however was telling us a very different story. We interpreted it as "Yes - you old farts – we have craft beer but I am a millennial - so hurry up and order as I am expecting a text". Pleased with her outside voice, our spirits were lifted akin to the favourable results of prune juice. We were subsequently presented with a Hudson Bay India Session Ale in an artsy glass that featured a stylized salmonid. Hoppy beers, including session ales, are one of my (Garry) favourite flavour profiles. The beer turned out to be a delicious, full-bodied hazy ale, full of pithy grapefruit, citrus, and pine notes, accompanied with a gentle bitterness and a velvet softness. It was simply spectacular. After raising our glasses to Rob Davidson, one of our New Zealand fishing chums, we dove in. I had three pints – Pat had two!

Here's the interesting part of the story. Fishing on the Kitimat River can be slow especially during the middle of the day when sunlight beats down on the water. This is what we encountered on Day 2 of our trip. As one does when the fishing is slow, we started chatting with other anglers. The conversation typically goes, "How are you?", "How's the fishing?" – followed by, "Where are you from and how did you choose the Kitimat River?" I started chatting with an angler in his mid-40's and mentioned that we were from Alberta and that just a few days earlier had driven 12 hours from Edmonton and had spent the night in Smithers. Neither one of us are extroverts, but Pat is more of a conversationalist than I am, but for some reason I shared our story of encountering this amazing beer produced by Smithers Brewing Company and how the beer was an absolute highlight for us and would likely be mentioned in an upcoming issue of NZ Trout Fisher. The chap that I was chatting with looked at me and then suggested that I share my story with his fishing buddy who was sitting 30m downstream. So, I did. Well, it turns out that his fishing buddy is Blaine Estby the owner of [Smithers Brewing Company](#). Blaine turned out to be a genuinely friendly chap. Pat joined us and we chatted about craft beers and Blaine shared the story of his company. He turned out to be a proficient spey caster, offered to tour us through his brewery and did indeed get a kick out of our story. If you see yourself travelling through Smithers, British Columbia, drop by and say hello and enjoy a delicious beer (or three) with Blaine and his team. We are hop-to-mistic that you will enjoy the experience.

SIDE NOTE

Without being overly critical, Pat has many strengths. Keeping track of time while fishing is not one of them. With this in mind and given our overall general excitement, our first day on the river didn't quite go to plan. After Pat set his alarm for 3:30 am, we woke, donned our gear, made coffee and then jumped into Pat's car. Waking at 3:30 am does feel early, even to morning people like me (Garry) - but it felt especially early on Day 1. So, thirty minutes after waking we were in the car slowly heading out of the camp ground when we both looked at the car clock. In luminous chartreuse-green it informed us that it was 3:00 am. After doing the arithmetic, we figured out that Pat had set the alarm for 2:30 and not 3:30. I attribute this error to a combination of ETOH the previous night, lack of technical acumen in setting of alarms, and overall excitement. After sharing a laugh, we headed to the river, parked and made the quick 15-minute walk to the river. Not surprisingly we had the entire reach to ourselves and had time to sit and drink our coffees in the early morning tranquility. However, our alarm clock error actually turned out to be blessing in disguise as the first glimmers of light appeared much earlier than we had both anticipated and by 5:00 am we were both into fish. In fact, our first day was super productive - both landing salmon.

RODS, REELS AND FLIES

When targeting big fish, both Garry and I (Pat) fish with [Echo King spey rods](#) which are high power, medium-fast action. Garry has the 13 foot – 9 weight version whereas I have the 13 foot-10 weight since I am built like a Number 8 and Garry is better suited to being a half back or water boy (ouch says Garry). Garry paired his rod with an [Echo Ion 10/12 weight fly reel](#) which is a remarkably well priced reel with a solid drag. Keeping with my personality, I have a [Nautilus silver king fly reel](#). Our reels were both spooled with 300 m of 60 lb gel spun and progressive density [Airflo Skagit F.I.S.T.](#) (Floating, Intermediate, S3) heads with 10 to 12 foot T17 to T22 sink tips. We both fished with 3 to 5 foot 30 lb fluorocarbon tippets. We opted against using 25 lb line as our flies often hit bottom and line abrasion likely reduces the effective strength of our leaders to being equivalent to 25 lb. Using 20 lb line, or less, in large rivers with large salmon would be utter madness.



I (Pat) had agreed to tie all the flies for the trip: 25 flies each. For some reason Garry had yet to unpack his fly-tying gear after his move from Calgary to Edmonton. Clearly questionable priorities or perhaps he had just “Tom Sawyered” me. When researching what flies to tie it seemed like larger flies, 3 to 5 inches in length, were used most often. This was quite a bit bigger than the flies we typically use for Coho and Chum salmon. I also decided to weight most flies because Chinook tend migrate upstream using the deeper sections where there is considerable current. Anything that would help get the fly deeper was desirable. I also wanted a fly style that had a larger profile but did not require a huge amount of material. This would improve ease of casting and increase sink rates. I picked an Intruder-style pattern that included rubber legs inspired by the Scott Howell’s [Squidro](#) style of flies. Everything was tied heavy duty. I wanted to be sure that if Garry hooked a big Chinook, it did not get off because the hook part of the equation failed. Chartreuse coloured marabou [Popsicle](#)-style flies show-up hanging in the corner of the mouths of disproportionate number Chinook salmon photographs in fishing magazines. Garry, ever the conspiracy theorist, figures that this is being done by guides trying to put other anglers off the scent and they had actually swapped the fly out for the photograph. I tied a range of colours but Chartreuse was definitely the ticket. In hindsight, I could have tied three chartreuse flies for each of us and been done with it. Oh well, time tying flies meant less time watching Netflix - no one needs to watch more Netflix.

I have always been a fan of denier thread which I like because it is thin yet strong and supple and also as it can be coloured using felt pens. I tied all flies for our trip with 100 denier thread. For shanks I used a mix of [Waddington’s](#) and some old 4/0 saltwater hooks I repurposed to the task by cutting off the hook and using the long shaft as a surrogate

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for the Waddington's. Shanks ranged in length from 1.0 – 1.5 inches. For the hook loop, I used Senyo's Intruder Wire measured to fit a [Gamakatsu 3/0](#) octopus hook. The intruder wire was rated to 20 lbs so doubled it should be 40 lbs. For kicks and giggles I backed it up with a loop of 80 lb braid fishing line. This combination can be threaded through the eye of a 3/0 hook without too much of a problem. I then tied in a range of medium and small tungsten and nickel-plated lead dumbbells and secured them with crazy glue. I was confident that this set-up would not fail Garry when he hooked his Moby Dick of a King salmon.

I decided to make the back collars of flash and rubber legs with a sparse collar of fox fur. The rubber legs and flash (krinkle [crystal here – Ed] flash looks great but any tinsel style flash is fine), were secured pointing forward to maximize the sideways flair in the finished fly. If I did not have the right colour of rubber legs, I used ostrich plumes instead. A wire dubbing loop was used to secure a small ball of dubbing followed by a collar of fox fur and minnow shimmer. You can tie in an extra-long dubbing loop wire and use the tag end to wrap around the hook and hook loops. I do this because I don't like the way the hook on intruders sometimes droops down below the plane of the shank. The flash was trimmed to line up with the hook. A wrap of tinsel separated the back collar from front collar. I constructed the front collar in one of two ways. The intent was to contrast the back collar by tying in flash with a dubbing loop of fox fur and/or a wrap of marabou which was tied popsicle-style. The head was typically finished with a pinch of rabbit fur tied in above and below the dumbbell.



Early morning on the Kitimat

A TYPICAL DAY CHASING KINGS

Following our learning on Day 1, a typical fishing day started at 3:00 am; we started casting just before first light and typically, had the most action within the first three hours. The morning fishing typically ended by 10:30 and we headed back to camp for coffee and breakfast. Although we often had an afternoon-evening fish our luck was in the mornings. A few fish were caught in the afternoon-evening by other anglers but the fishing crowds were much larger at these times, and in relative terms, the mornings were more productive.

On a typical day Pat and I would encounter at least two of the three different size classes of King salmon. Small ones ranged between 6 and 9 lb's – these fish were quite easy to control and land on our 13-foot speys, but were still lots of fun. The second and most predominant size class was the 12 to 15 lb range. In big water like the Kitimat, these fish put up a tremendous fight and were more than capable of stripping 50 to 100 metres of line from our reels. The third size class were trophy fish that were north of 20 lb's and were totally uncontrollable, especially during the early phase of the fight. They exceeded 30 inches in length and were broad across the back, with appreciable girth.





OK, math is hard...

GARRY'S KING SALMON

As for all of the fish that I hooked while fishing the Kitimat River, the strike came out of nowhere. Swingers of wet flies and steel headers know this all too well and that's why you often hear anglers spout the line: "The tug is the drug". Well if the "drug is the tug" is true for steelhead and other trout, it's well even more addictive when fishing for King salmon. King salmon typically crush flies – they destroy them – they take no prisoners – the tug is not merely the drug – it's ecstasy. So true for the big King that I hooked on Day 3 when I was fishing in the lower section of a favourite run. In fact, I had just fished unsuccessfully through the middle of the run which, in my opinion, was the better-looking water. I didn't expect to hook a fish in the lower section of this run and always feel trepidation when fishing these areas, because hooking big fish here is accompanied with an increased risk that the fish will simply turn downstream and run you out of line. Seldom are you able to keep up with them even if you have 300m of backing.

The cast had been nothing special – probably 80 feet, hardly majestic, but King salmon don't hold score cards for artistic impression or technical difficulty, like Olympic judges do. If they did, I could simply bribe the Russian King salmon and all would be sorted! The cast was followed by a heavy mend and as the line straightened and started to swing it was "crushed". It resulted in a squeal of excitement from me – yes, the high pitch from a choir boy does come to mind. I leaned into the fish to set the hook, gauge its weight and encourage it to move upstream. I was successful in the former but not so for the latter. This fish was bigger than all of the others that I had hooked so far in the trip. It began to strip line from my reel at a disturbing rate. I actually find losing 50 m of line in seconds quite exciting. Losing an additional 100 m is intriguing. The loss of the next 100 meters initiates a fear response. After only five minutes, 20 rotations of backing on my reel remained and full panic set in. This fish had taken 298 m of line in less than five minutes despite the reel being set firmly against it. It was also heading downstream.



I am quite fond of my 660 grain Skagit line, partly because it's new, partly because it's perfectly weighted for my rod, and partly because it cost \$100.00. Losing a \$100.00 line hurts – this likely reflects my Scottish heritage. In less than a minute after hooking into this behemoth my skagit line was 50m away and heading further into the abyss – possibly never to be seen again. I began to reminisce about my skagit – what a great line it had been, loyal, how it had served me well – it would be missed – Don't forget me – I beg. Perhaps Adele could sing a song about it. I was about to lose this fish and there was a distinct possibility of it stealing my skagit and 300 m of backing. More importantly, I didn't like the idea of losing the line because it would result in this fish dragging it while making its way upstream to spawn.

As an experienced angler, I like to believe that I had strategy to deal with hooking into big King salmon on the fly. It was a sophisticated plan – hang on like crazy – pure and simple. I had absolutely no control of this fish and it was unlikely that this was going to change anytime in the near future. There is a point during playing a big fish when the option of simply throwing in the towel and breaking them off becomes a consideration. In less than five minutes of the fight, I had only a few winds of backing remaining. So, I threw in the towel. I simply cranked the drag on my new Echo Ion 10 weight reel to maximum, pointed my rod directly at the fish so that the rod wouldn't take any more of the tension and waited to see what would happen next. This approach typically results in one of four outcomes. First, it causes the hook to bend and the fish escapes. In this case, it was unlikely as we were using high quality 3 OT Gamakatsu octopus hooks. Second, the hook would be simply pulled from the fish's mouth – this was a real possibility. Three, one of the connections between my fluorocarbon leader, skagit, or backing would snap. Four: the fish might actually turn and head upstream – my option of choice – OK, OK it was the one I was begging, pleading and praying for. After cranking down on my drag I felt the line surging and stretching as the fish changed position in the current. Its downstream progress had been halted or at least curtailed temporarily. And then the fish did what I didn't expect it to do – it turned upstream. This was the good news part of the story. The not so good news was that it had swum across to the opposite side of the river and the fast water between the me and it had created a massive arc of line. This was the beginning of an eventual shift in who was controlling whom and over the next 15 minutes I gradually regained the line. After twenty minutes I could finally see my Skagit, at least for short period of time before it took another screaming run. Big Kings make appreciable runs even late in the fight where progress reeling in line suddenly disappears in a 30 second 50m run. Eventually my fish came to shore and with gymnastic athleticism (even a Russian judge would have been impressed), Pat netted it. It was a beauty. It was 33 inches long with a girth of 24 inches. Our length-weight-girth equation estimated it as being = 23.8 lb.'s – being generous I rounded it to 34 lb.'s (OK, math is hard... 24 lbs).

PAT'S 26 LB KING SALMON

Highways and walking trails provide good access to the Kitimat River and there are multiple access points within 5 to 15 minutes of town that lead to good salmon fishing river runs. In fact, there are at least three very well known long deep runs located on the outskirts of town one of which, upstream of the main highway bridge, had been particularly good to me (Pat). In fact, I had hooked a big fish earlier in the trip but it quickly peeled line off as it headed into the thinner faster water downstream before ditching the hook. I always fished this lower section of the run with confidence and no small measure of trepidation because if you caught a truly big fish, it would likely head downstream into the faster water leaving only 100 meters of bank available to follow a fish before encountering an impassable oxbow channel. At this point you either miraculously become Jacques Cousteau and are able to follow it, or the fish snaps off.

The early hours of Day 3 found me fishing the lower reach of the highway bridge run. Here I formed a short (but meaningful) relationship with the biggest fish that I have ever encountered on the fly. The beginning of this bond was not subtle. It hit my fly like a locomotive. I knew right away that I had hooked a massive fish and like greased lightning, I was into my backing. News flash: I needed to stop this fish or I would be in big trouble. I was willing to risk pulling the hook out in order to avoid being spooled (aka schooled or spanked). Note to self, when fishing for big salmon always set the drag on your reel before you hook a fish. Trying to readjust drag when you have big salmon on the reel is just darn right dangerous. Many anglers will however only make the mistake once as adjusting the drag when the reel is screaming out like an egg beater on max increases the risk of fingers and knuckles being hit by the reel handle. This typically results in a bloody mess – Garry has made that mistake just twice (did I mention most anglers only make it once?). So, prior to





my rendezvous with the largest King salmon of the trip, I had already set the drag. My plan was simple. I only needed to get control of the fish, slowly move out of the deep water, walk towards shallow water, move close to the shore, figure out the Pythagorean Theorem for angle of return, and let reel and rod do their work.

In hindsight I wasn't ready for this dreadnought. It was a complicated relationship. After five minutes I had reset the drag for the third time and only then was I able to stop the fish and I began to gain backing onto my reel. After ten minutes I had successfully coerced the salmon from the lower reach of the run back to the middle reaches. This was where the real battle occurred. Tactics see-sawed multiple times, where the fish had control for long periods, interspersed for short periods when the advantage swung my way. Big Chinooks have a habit of thrashing their heads and constantly moving short distances sideways, upstream and downstream in between making appreciable runs. The Echo King and I, were taking a beating from this fish. The head-thrashing and short changes in position constantly varied the strain on the rod and me, resulting in heavy jerking of the rod tip. When combined with the shared weight of a big salmon, the drama was unnerving me and tiring me emotionally. The fight was also making me sweat – likely due to a combination of excitement, anxiety, and physical exertion. Despite short runs and small shifts in its position, I didn't make much headway with this fish for at least 10 minutes. Being the supportive fishing chum that he is, Garry, who was 200 m away, continued to fish the top section of the run. He did offer words of encouragement though.

After fifteen minutes, the fish and I had settled into a routine where I would take 3 to 5 meters of line from him followed by him taking back 1 to 3 meters of line. The outcome was that I was gaining the upper hand – slowly but surely. I had a good solid stance on the river bed and had moved into shallower water near the rivers edge, my rod was nicely lodged against my body so that I could lean into the fish. I was getting more comfortable with the fight. The comfort began to disappear though as questions swirled in my mind: How solid was the fluorocarbon attached to my fly line? How solid had I tied on the fly? Did I use enough "knot sense" to seal the knot? This was non-sense. From time-to-time a hooked King salmon will decide to come up from the river bed and roll and splash at the water surface, combined with intense tails wags. My fish did that repeatedly – all of which contributed to my mounting anxiety. The battle continued for another five minutes until I was able to drop the rod tip and apply side pressure. This, in the end, was what encouraged him to come to net after 25 minutes. In total, I recalled being at the fish's mercy for at least the first 10 minutes of the fight during which: it took almost of my line; headed downstream and then across the



Hooked up . . .



. . . who's bragging?



river; blasted at least 6 big reel-screaming runs of 20 meters or more; and incorporated eight episodes of fish thrashing at the water's surface. The fight required me to strike a balance between playing the fish assertively, begging for mercy (OK – I added that (Garry)), while also being patient. Patience is also required when netting big salmon – there is seldom any great rush to grab the net and go after the fish. Garry eventually stopped fishing and came across and grabbed the net. While he didn't net the fish on the first attempt but rather chased it around a little bit, as half backs tend to do, he did net it on the second attempt. Also, to be fair to Garry, King salmon have evolved with grizzly bears as predators so we forgive them for being a little net shy.

Garry and I are very cautious when landing fish and taking photos, to ensure they are exposed to air for only short periods of time. So, we kept the fish in the net in the water while we measured it and when everything was ready, I lifted the fish for a quick photograph and then placed it back into the water-covered net for its final period of recovery, before I released it. The fish turned out to be the biggest fish of the trip. Did I happen to mention that it was the biggest fish of the trip? It was a full 36 inches long (fork length) with a girth of 24 inches. Our length-girth equation predicted it to be 25.9 lb.'s – being generous we rounded it to 26 lb.'s. What was interesting to both of us was although my fish was only two inches longer and a little fatter than Garry's, it was a discernibly larger fish. Garry described my fish as "magnificent" – who am I to dispute that? I also landed a second trophy fish that also came in north of 20 lb.'s but who's bragging?

CATCH STATISTICS AND FIVE LEARNINGS

Both Pat and I are biologists so our science geekiness manifests itself in different ways, including how we summarize fishing trips with numbers and ratios. Here are some statistics from our Kitimat trip. Over five full days of fishing, we had 23 bites in total. On average, we each had two bites per day, which, when averaged over a 6-hour fishing day, equates to one bite every three hours. Of the 23 bites that we thought were King salmon we hooked 20 of them which is a hooking efficiency of 87%. True, we don't know for certain that all bites were King salmon, but we think that the vast majority were as there really isn't anything else in the river at that time that fights like a King salmon. In the majority of cases we actually saw the fish when it surfaced – typically to throw our hooks back at us. Of the 20 King salmon that we hooked we landed 16. This is a landing efficiency 80%. Considering that we were chasing King salmon on the fly, we actually thought that these numbers were quite respectable. Especially when compared to the miserable statistics that I (Garry) have for Atlantic salmon and those that Pat has for rooster fish – sorry Pat I had to mention that - salt into the wound twice in a single article – that is horrid behaviour from a co-author! Overall, our general impression was that we hooked and landed about as many fish as other anglers on the river but that was probably because Pat had done such a great job with internet reconnaissance before the trip.

Our learnings from the Kitimat River suggest that the keys to successfully chasing King salmon on the fly included:

- 1) **Time of year and time of day.** In 2018 we fished for salmon in mid-July and were probably two to four weeks off the peak run for King salmon. While it may have been only a few weeks, we think this was a primary reason why we didn't encounter many King salmon that year. The best time for King salmon in the Kitimat River is probably between mid-May and late June so our trip in 2020 was well timed. We also had the best luck fishing very early in the morning.
- 2) **Habitat.** We fished long and fast run habitats that included slower deeper pockets of water and had a lot of luck at the bottom of the runs, often referred to as "tail-out habitats" where flow is constrained before forming rapid and riffle habitats. River flow changed appreciably among days and pockets of water that often-produced fish on one day moved either upstream or downstream depending on water level.
- 3) **Fly depth.** Positioning flies close to the riverbed is a key to success. As did all other anglers that we chatted with, we fished the lower one third of the water column. We seldom hooked the riverbed but did often bounce our flies on the bottom.
- 4) **Fly colour.** Despite Garry's conspiracy theories, chartreuse coloured flies work best. We distinguish between two chartreuse colour variants: chartreuse-yellow and chartreuse-green, depending on whether there is a predominant yellow or green tinge. We had the most luck using chartreuse-yellow. I came across a fishing quote related to King salmon flies that



offered: "If it ain't chartreuse, it ain't no use". Perhaps a bit of an over statement but truth therein. However, I did get my first fish on an all black and silver fly. As a kiwi living abroad – how could I (Garry) not have been naturally drawn to that combination!

5. Effort. Catching a King salmon requires appreciable effort. There is a "numbers game" aspect to chasing them. On a typical day we fished hard for at least 6 hours. My (Garry's) increasingly frail body couldn't handle too much more than that, plus I had to find time for a snooze each day, and prepare delicious meat-laden meals, and imbibe beer, wine, and green ginger wine. It's a demanding job this fishing.

REFLECTIONS

Unlike the first, our second trip to the mighty Kitimat River was a resounding success. Our unresolved failure had fallen to a well-executed business plan, and along the way two fishing chums caught up with each other and shared stories about families, friends, and fish. We revisited our experiences of having big King salmon smash our flies followed by impressive fights to land them. If you need to add to your fishing repertoire try chasing King salmon on the fly in the Kitimat River, take in the magnificent scenery and imbibe craft beers along the way. Pat and I have unresolved business with Coho salmon in the Squamish River, British Columbia. We have the sketching's of a multi-front strategic action plan to rectify that in fall 2021. It includes Coho salmon, Christmas Tree flies, and of course craft beer – so stay tuned.



... we kept the fish in the net in the water while we measured it and when everything was ready, I lifted the fish for a quick photograph and then placed it back into the water-covered net for its final period of recovery, before I released it.



This is a recipe we used as part of a platter in catering a wedding at the New Year. Special Thanks to friend, colleague and wonderful chef Rex Morgan for the recipe idea and in fact making it for the occasion . . .

Trout or Salmon Pâté

WILD TO THE TABLE with TONY SMITH

This recipe makes a 300ml ramekin, but in fact this type of recipe is open to plenty of adaption. Just use what you have and provided you mix everything to a nice texture, it will be fine. Crème fraiche may not be a common ingredient you have on hand but this wonderful cultured cream does make a difference; available at your local supermarket in 250g tubs.

INGREDIENTS

250g fresh trout or salmon, preferably wild

½ a cup of cold water

1 bay leaf

1 teaspoon salt

30g butter

150g hot smoked trout or salmon

2 good tablespoons of Crème Fraiche

A good pinch of cayenne pepper

Extra salt and white pepper to season

Put the fresh fish (not the smoked) into a saucepan; add water, the bay leaf and teaspoon of salt. Bring to a simmer; take off heat, cover and leave to rest for 5 minutes.

Strain and discard the bay leaf. Place the fish into a stainless bowl; add the butter and mix until melted. Leave to cool in refrigerator.

When cool, mix in smoked fish, (the oils may separate a little at this stage.) Lastly add the crème fraiche, mix well; this addition will make the pâté nice and smooth.

Season to taste with the cayenne pepper and a little more salt and pepper to your taste. Place in a suitable ramekin, cover with cling film and chill until required – it will keep for up to 5 days.

Serve with fresh bread, crackers, salad, capers etc. Any way you like in fact!



WILD TO THE TABLE

Tony Smith was born in Dunedin, educated in Temuka, Alexandra and Gore, and has been a professional chef for more than 40 years. A keen outdoorsman and conservationist, who loves trout fishing and small game hunting, Tony sees himself as a typical Kiwi bloke – a fan of rugby, BBQs, beer and wine, with a penchant for NZ's Pinot Noirs. Copies of his book, *A River Rules My Kitchen*, are still available on TradeMe. Contact: riversmith55@gmail.com



Lake Georgina

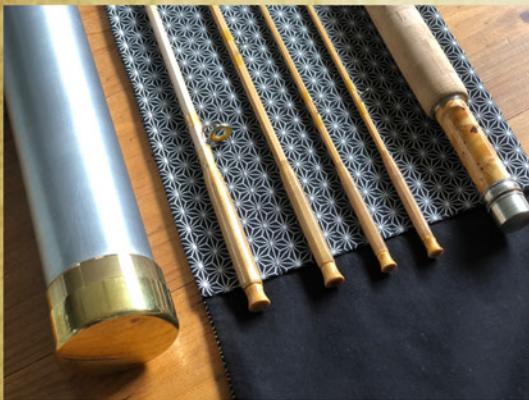


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