

Issue 193

TROUT FISHER

Fly-focussed ~ totally transferable

Winter 2025



CHASING RAINBOWS

Can we restore Christchurch/Selwyn lakes?

Confessions of an Addicted Salmon Angler

Adventuring into Australia's remote fishing spots

Clarke's Caddis REVISITED ~ HEADWATERS Reviewed

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Cover Ngaruroro Rainbow (Clive Shaw)

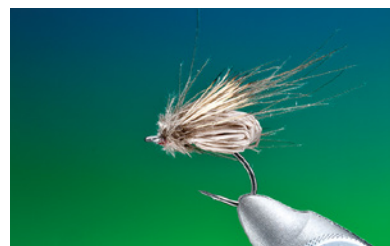
Here: Dragonflies hatch out of the water (PWS)

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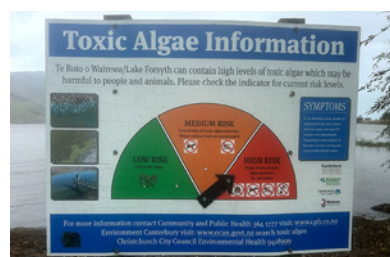
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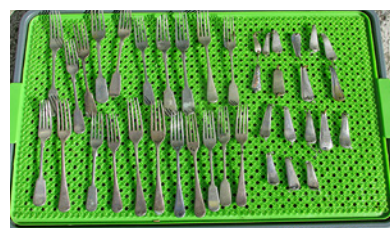
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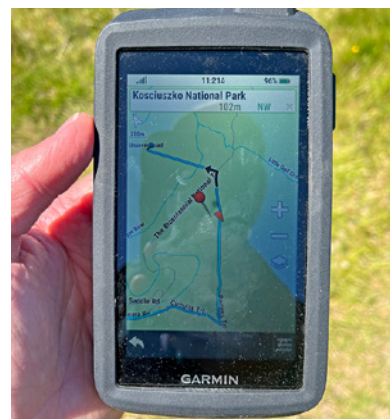
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It was getting dark when we left the Gungarlin river and Campground in the Snowy Mountains of NSW. After hiking to Daveys Hut and back earlier in the day, I then spent a couple of hours casting to splendid-looking rainbow and brown trout in a large pool, the fish showing no hesitation in coming up and sipping in my size 14 Yellow Humpy.

By Matt Hoole.



Clarke's Caddis revisited successfully in Lake Tarawera with a Dragonfly Nymph variation



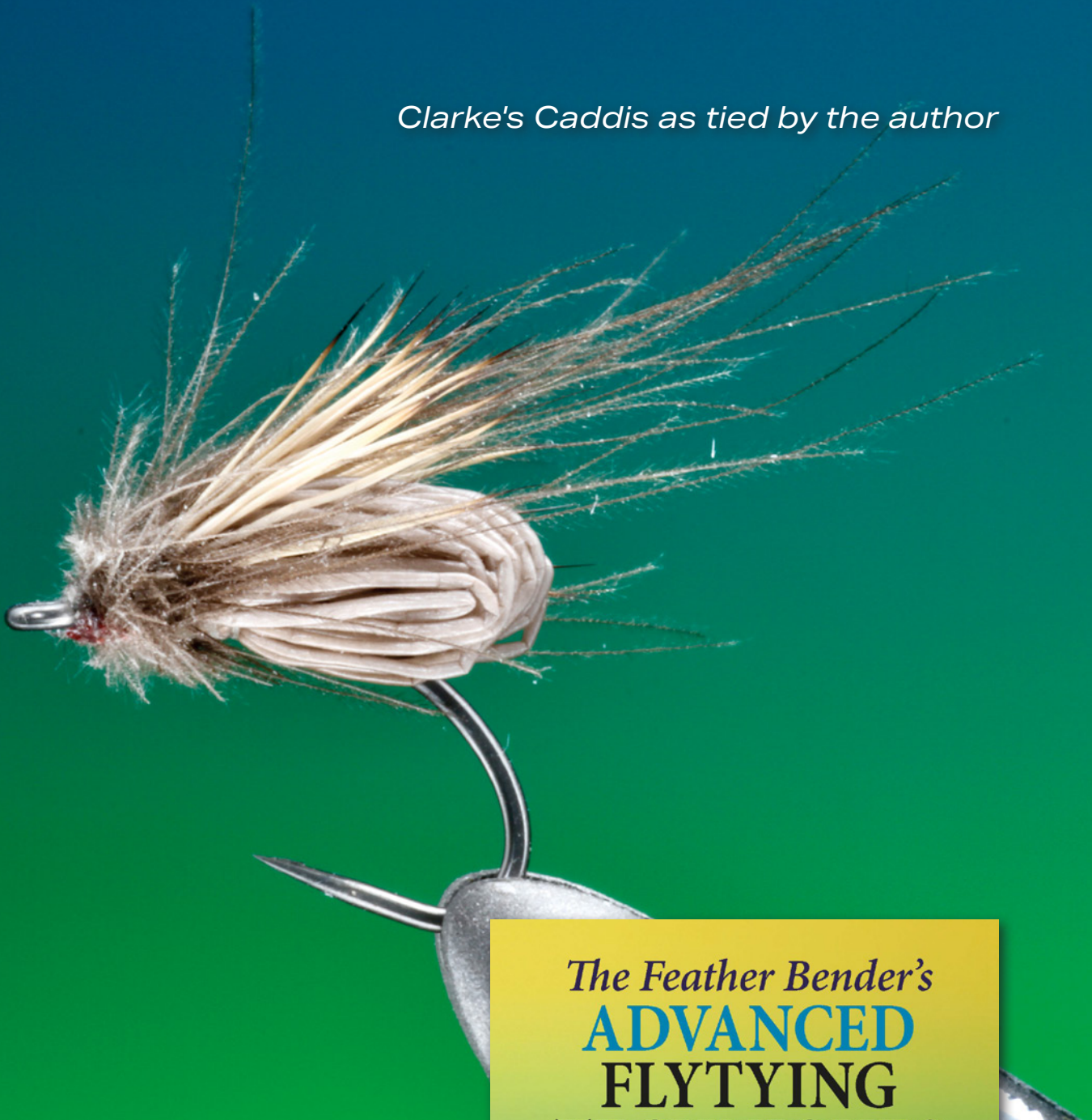
It's Winter. Water temperature is at its lowest and with it, the metabolism of those trout not breeding. Time for a fly that imitates numerous food options . . .

Clarke's Caddis REVISITED

Peter Storey reviews Barry Ord Clarke's latest book with a seasonal interpretation of Issue 191's feature fly



Clarke's Caddis as tied by the author



The Feather Bender's
**ADVANCED
FLYTYING
TECHNIQUES**

With
video link
to the author
tying every fly
featured

BARRY ORD CLARKE

Available in New Zealand through Nationwide Books



Winter involves plenty of fly tying for many of us, with local water either closed or heavily dependent on weather. Whenever prevented from fishing the lake I head into a group of highly-valued fly tying books, in search of simple imitations that use to-hand-but-rarely-used materials, which I can attempt to adapt into hand tying. This group is based around my long-term backstop, Peter Gathercole, but thanks to Joanne and Lydia at Merlin Unwin books two others have joined it in the last year; first Hans van Kilinken's **The Klink** and then, this third book of Barry Ord Clarke's.

A quick glance at the opposite page shows why Barry's work interests me. Like everyone in this small group, his fly tying is incredibly precise – something my hands can no longer manage and hence so many 'suggestive' hand ties these days. Besides this easily-followed simplicity there's also plenty of local applicability. In fact, change some of the colours and all 28 look applicable to me.

I picked Clarke's Caddis for Issue 191 because it was the most logical among the less angler-favoured (and therefore less seen by trout) Summer pattern options but also, because it is so easy to tie by hand and so widely adaptable here in NZ. I'm showing you a Dragonfly Nymph version here, along with a fatter and shorter Brown Beetle-like sequence to tie for October. Both have already caught fish here at Tarawera, out in the lake and along the local shoreline, from the surface down to about 20 metres, while the thermocline was there. (Currently 23m, mid-May.) Change the dubbing for peacock herl and the second version is a Manuka Beetle. Juggle that version around and you have a cicada, grasshopper or cricket. With only a little more imagination you could adjust this tying into a koura, bluebottle, bush fly, the freshwater shrimp that is possibly the major food source in so many lowland streams, even a mouse. Nonetheless, that initial choice was actually a toss-up between the All Purpose Emerger top right. Logically, I should tie a few of those next season too and see if the same fish hit those with any less gusto.

What about bottom right? The materials are clearly cheaper over in Europe but it's spot-on for whitebait and smelt. The articulated Worm pattern would clearly work on the lake bed after the thermocline forms. That foam ant pattern looks every bit as adjustable as the caddis to me. The Hare's Ear-style mayfly nymph top left looks spot on nationwide, as does the Hare's Ear soft hackle wet fly. Change the colour on that Damsel Fly to red and you got the local male; a creature I've watched summertime trout tracking in flight so many times, even managing to take mid air! Want to learn how to tie paired wings? Chapter 12 has one of the best selection of sequence photos I've yet seen and, like every other pattern, includes a link to a video of the entire procedure.

WATCH THE VIDEO

youtube.com/watch?v=1OV3HV80wJ0&t=339s

Tying Clarke's Caddis with Barry Ord Clarke



Each chapter begins with an on-the-bank scenario at the outset, typically featuring personal experiences. This is followed by a section covering the materials used in each tying, with specific guidelines and caveats where necessary. The photography accompanying the tying sequences is top notch and as already stated, can be compared with the video sequence.

This is a book that immediately proved highly successful for me in both running and still water, finally using a long-ignored Chamois hide and finding it highly buoyant in the process. I am certain other chapters will equally impress me, turning other materials that have sat around for decades into hand tying skills. **The Featherbender's Advanced Flytying Techniques** has rightfully earned its permanent place in my 'highly valued' group of fly tying books and I thoroughly recommend it.





THE FLIES



"I have carefully chosen each of the patterns . . . to best illustrate many different, slightly more advanced tying techniques, but they also represent some of the very best fishing flies you could have in your fly box."



CLARKE'S CADDIS REVISITED FOR 2025/26 – BROWN BEETLE VARIATION

Materials

Hook: #10-14, standard wet fly (this barbless model sports a claw point, which holds extremely well for me)



Thread: Olive

Tying Wax

Body & Legs: Deer Hair (this is naturally processed Chamois)

Underbody & Head: Dubbing of your choice





Pass the thread through the hook eye and whip finish a couple of times, to lock the thread to the shank. This prevents any fly or lure moving down the shank.

Wrap the shank to above the claw. Wax the base and thread.





Cut a clump of hair and remove any underhair, which can be used as dubbing in this or other tying. Naturally processed Chamois is highly buoyant. Fished on a floating line and intermediate leader this featured tying is still buoyant after half an hour's casting and retrieving, making it ideal for fishing over weed beds.

Bind the butt ends onto the shank about two thirds of the way up, bind them back to the claw and lock. (Please note that my interpretation varies completely from the





actual Clarke's Caddis here. Having found how buoyant Chamois is I am deliberately trying to trap as much air inside all my variations as possible. Also note that Clarke stacks his hair, where I prefer a wilder look.)

Wax the tread and dub it, then cover the bound area. Aiming for a brown beetle I am deliberately looking for bulk here.





Bring the tips forward tightly over the dubbing for this beetle variation and secure them. (Dragonfly variant is an elongated version of the Clarke's Caddis body here.)

Wax the thread again. Pull the tips backwards to form a hackle and secure. (I lock off at every stopping point when tying, vice and hand.)





Wax the thread and roll more dubbing onto it. Form a fat head in this instance, to give both Winter and early Spring trout another 'egg' to consider.

Tie off and trim as required. I leave far more on than necessary and only trim it back when obviously ignored. The real thing creates plenty of surface disturbance . . .





Under and overview of tying





Under and overview of the early Spring-hatching brown beetle



Fishing-wise, as expected, March and April proved even harder on Lake Tarawera. Heading into May, however, surface water temperature and dissolved oxygen levels are back in the optimum range for trout metabolism and the major Autumn pre-spawning feed-up over the reefs has begun. Like October and November, May and June typically provide sustained daytime surface feeding.

Checking what was happening at the trap with Matt Osborne at Eastern F&G:-

The winter spawning run has started strongly at Lake Tarawera. To the 27th of April 2025, 490 fish have been trapped, measured and released to continue their passage upstream. This run is double that to the same point during the 2024 winter.

Hatchery released fish (315 through) have averaged 603mm and 2.81kg. This is 23mm longer and 380g heavier on average than the hatchery origin fish in the 2024 run. We have had 175 wild fish through. These have averaged 555mm and 2.17kg. As with the hatchery sourced fish these are larger (18mm and 150g) compared to the 2024 run to the same date.

For anglers wishing to get into the action that have yet to purchase their fishing licences, the winter season licence which covers the period 1 April to 30 September provides excellent value for money.

This did not surprise me. Te Wairoa is the outflow from shallow Rotokakahi (mussel lake) and is typically too warm for trout spawning by September. Te Wairoa trout, the source of all Eastern's hatchery fish, run earlier than other upper North Island rainbows because they must; and that's why Rotorua fires earlier than Taupo.

The higher run numbers don't surprise me either. Outside of public holidays, even at weekends there's been little sign of other anglers around when out on the lake apart from holidays. With their population still recovering from extended overstocking, the average smelt in this lake is nonetheless much larger than it was 10 years ago and therefore, grows better trout. I have tried to find out exactly how long it takes trout to digest smelt many times and failed. It seems perfectly logical that the larger the ingested smelt mass, however, the longer the digestion time. What is absolutely certain however, is that the more anglers fishing the lake, the more fish will get caught and the fewer will run Te Wairoa. For those fish to be larger as well also suggests there is some logic to my suspicion, that at the very least, well-fed fish are more choosy when feeding than lesser-fed. Whatever, when it comes to extended spells of hard fishing, I suspect the hardest part of fishing open lake water without electronics is simply getting whatever is in the water in front of a fish! So when fishing near on the shoreline, in cooler water temperatures that will make already choosy trout even more lethargic, why not show fish that concentrate on smelt other readily available food items that provide plenty of sustenance?

As you can see from these variations on Clarke's theme, towards the end of the season my answer is to show trout plenty of fiery brown dubbing, mainly because that colour is present in something that's common right through Winter and early Spring, trout roe. The colour is also present in at least one of the dragonflies inhabiting the lake, however, like this one found hatching under my canoe. Their larvae are present throughout the year and I have caught mature trout at the top end of the size scale with nothing else in their stomachs, suggesting the return gained from eating them is high. Here's this column's lead off lure after being knocked around by numerous fish and the similarity of this tying with a Kilwell #2 is obvious. Since that pattern caught my largest trout ever in the lake, and with this variant now well-proven over nearly two months, I'm confident to keep fishing it into the coming Winter. Swung, hung and raised out on the lake or retrieved jerkily wading, where the buoyancy is handy over the weed bed, it's attracting the full spectrum of fish age groups, with this 3.3kg 2022 release hen the largest to date.

All examples shown here are tied from Chamois, which includes an under-layer of hair fine enough to dub, but I also have deer and elk hair to hand. So who knows where all this may lead before I get to put the feature fly into that bush stream next October. With yet another hard spell of fishing looming as the runs fade late July through August, however, it's possible Clarke's Caddis will get REVISITED again!





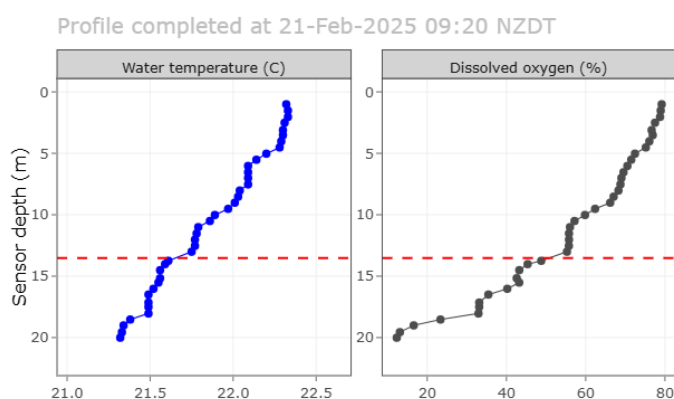
LETTERS

ROTORUA TRIP

Morning Peter,

Thanks for the latest edition. Of great interest to me as I am coming over to the North Island for about ten days shortly with some friends and we will be staying close to the Ngongotaha stream mouth for a few days. If I read your article correctly, it seems that like for us in Tasmania, your season has been less productive than usual. We are having problems here with reducing Mayfly numbers and I am involved with a group trying to work out what is happening and why.

This is a normal pattern here, Chris. As the lake warms and a thermocline develops, the fish head down with it. Perhaps the drop off in mayfly numbers over there may be due to a combination of rising average water temperature and pollution?



The thermocline is currently around 15m in Lake Rotorua and that puts it way outside shoreline limits, other than where spring-fed streams enter. Close to Ngongotaha these include, the Ngongotaha and Waiteti, and further north, the Awahou and Hamurana. That's where I'd suggest you fish.

I wanted to seek your advice about lake fishing in the Rotorua area. Again, if I understand your article, it looks like you fish the lake mostly around dawn and of course you have the canoe whereas we will just be fishing from the shore.

Yes, I am fishing at dawn and would fish evenings too if the lake were quieter. Besides these times you may find the best sport after dark at the Rotorua mouths, if carefully reconnoitred first in daylight.

I am going to try to tie up some of your escaping Koura pattern which looks very good. Quite a big fly on a size 6 hook [bigger than I am used to using here]. Are you fishing this on a Di3 or 7 [I am bringing both]? Realistically, is it worth fishing from the shore, say at the Ngongotaha mouth?

Most definitely. These mentioned mouths attract larger fish and because of their cooler temperature, brown trout especially. I would try a smelt imitation first here and fish it on a slow or medium sink line before exploring the bed with fast sinks.



('Calm-to-breezy' is somewhere between DI3 and DI7; 'windy-to-get-off the-lake', in the DI7 or DI8 area.)

Or perhaps we should try elsewhere? Malcolm Crosse suggested to me that Lake Rerewhakaaitu might be worth a go and is somewhere that was used for a previous competition he was involved in.

It's been another cooler Summer here, however, and surface water temperatures may be within the tolerable range for trout in all lakes when you get here, which means Rerewhakaaitu could be worth a look. Just watch out for random clay patches if wading there. In fact I wear a life jacket and carry a wading stick anywhere I fish these days.

Finally, I am considering having a look at the Ngongotaha stream though it sounds pretty tricky from all that you have previously said. Are there any better access spots you'd advise? I am sure you will have favourite spots and I'm not after these, just reasonable access areas as we are not the mountain goats we once were. Will the fish take small CDC imitations?

Any thoughts would be most helpful though I'll reread your article before I come.

Thanks as ever,

Chris Hilton, Tasmania.



There is a footpath along the Ngongotaha from the main road up to the Agrodome. This part of the stream is heavily overgrown in places and needless to say, that's where most fish hold. Further upstream it's more scenic and frankly, cleaner. There are angler access signs from Paradise Valley Road until just past the hatchery. Above that there is no marginal strip and you would need to ask. Fish will take small-to-medium CDC flies, larger cicada imitations, small-to-medium nymphs, even my Black Palmer (this is a #14 emerger hook). Go for feeding fish first, brown or rainbow. Any obvious but static browns that prove hard to tempt should be targeted downstream, swinging the fly across the nose as closely as possible, before moving on – even if there's still a #16 Pheasant Tail on the tippet! Have fun.



BOOKS

Habitat not hatcheries vital in freshwater fishery management . . .

HEADWATERS

Reviewed by Tony Orman

I've just read an extremely enjoyable book, "Headwaters" by Dylan Tomine, published by Patagonia. The book is best described as a warm, at times personal book. Production is not ostentatious nor visually stunning. It has no jaw-dropping photographs but instead some delightful illustrations by Frances Ashforth scattered through at strategic points. The presentation by publishers Patagonia is warmly welcoming to the reader. And it has a lot of relevance to New Zealand.

New Zealand's rainbow trout fishery originated from California, USA, where Dylan Tomine fishes. {Between 1877 and 1884 multiple 'shipments' obtained from Californian sources were sent to New Zealand and from those 'batches' which survived transportation, fish were raised to maturity by the Auckland Acclimatisation Society (Ed – summarising R. M. McDowall, *New Zealand Freshwater Fishes and Gamekeepers for the Nation*, where there is no indication whether these earliest 'shipments' were eggs or parr).} By 1903 rainbows had been liberated into Lake Taupo and more particularly, into the Tongariro River, thus giving birth to a world famous rainbow trout fishery, the "Angler's Eldorado" of American writer and angler Zane Grey. Wild stocks from those original and subsequent imports now exist throughout New Zealand, producing a strong link to those native Californian rainbow trout fisheries which self confessed "steelhead bum" Dylan Tomine writes about.

LEGACY

Initially Tomine was totally obsessed with fly fishing for steelhead rainbows but as he takes on family responsibilities that evolves into a larger picture of growing apprehension about the future of the fishery.

As the pages are turned, the priorities of Dylan Tomine undergo change. Fatherhood instils a caring sense of responsibility simultaneously with the increasing awareness of the decline in rivers and fish. He begins to see the well meaning but misplaced restoration efforts. Emerging, as the book is delved into, is the fallacy that hatcheries are the key to recovering the decline.

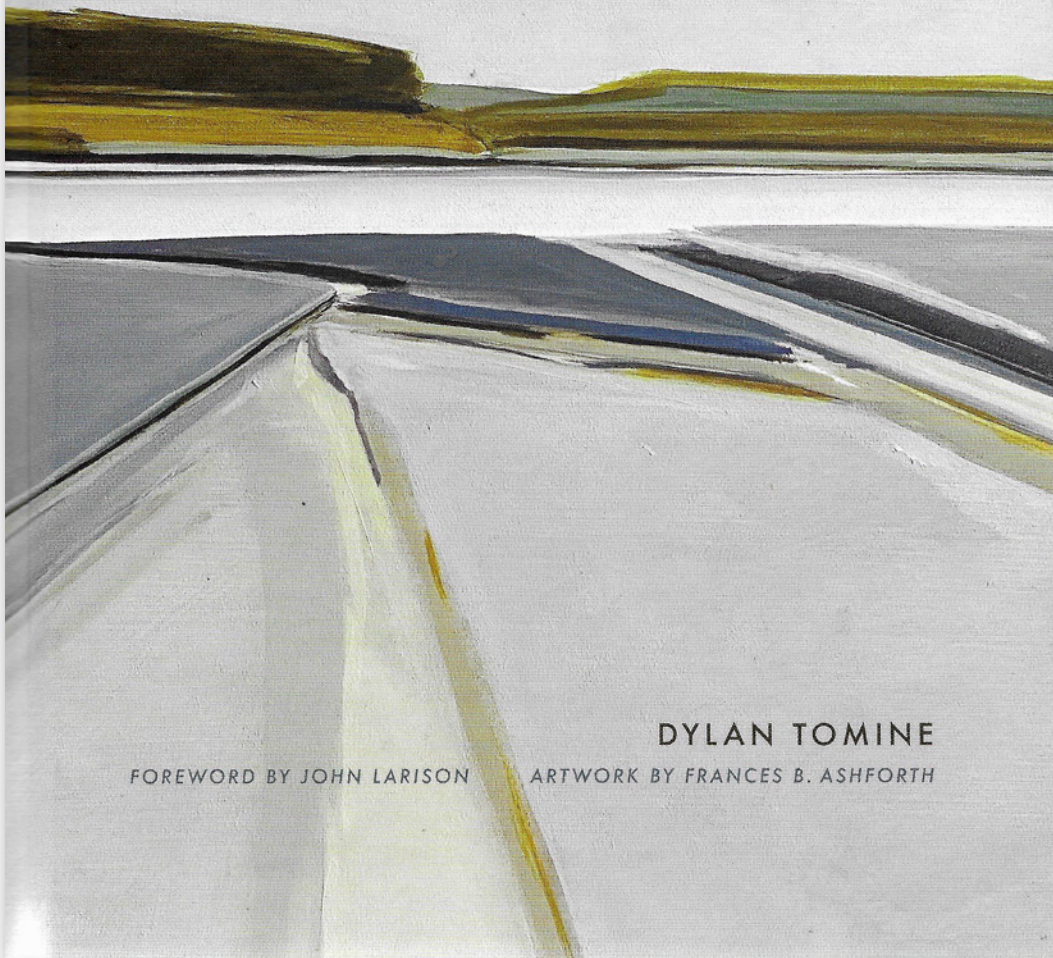
When in Washington state, USA, Mount Saint Helens erupted in 1980, it sent a boiling mass of superheated ash down the Toutle River, obliterating the river's flow and fish. "For all intent and purposes the Toutle River was dead. Or so we thought," the author writes.

Mother Nature stepped in. "Within five years, wild steelhead were back in what was left of the Toutle, finding ways to survive, reproduce and miraculously, thrive." Seven years after the eruption in 1987, there were 2,052 wild steelhead spawning in the Toutle – a number which biologists considered exceeded its carrying capacity before the eruption. Then humans interfered.



HEADWATERS

THE ADVENTURES, OBSESSION, AND
EVOLUTION OF A FLY FISHERMAN



DYLAN TOMINE

FOREWORD BY JOHN LARISON

ARTWORK BY FRANCES B. ASHFORTH



HATCHERIES

When the recovered numbers of steelhead were realised – although well-intentioned – it was decided to help Mother Nature by resuming hatchery releases. But the explosive recovery of the Toutle was stalled and eventually dwindled to match the low returns for all other hatchery-supplemented Columbia River tributaries.

People mistakenly see hatcheries as the solution to ailing fisheries. The author writes, "If guides and anglers invested the same amount of time and effort in habitat restoration . . . the end result would be a healthier, more sustainable run of wild fish." Hatchery-bred fish releases were undermining wild genetics.

On northern California's Eel River, a steelhead hatchery was built and began operation in 1964. That year the run of wild fish in the Eel was 82,000 fish. The hatchery and release of fish continued for 30 years.

"By 1994 the combined hatchery and wild run came in at 2,000 fish total."

In other words thirty years and millions of taxpayer money later, the steelhead fishery was 80,00 fish fewer. The failure was obvious. The wild Eel River steelhead were classified as "endangered" and the hatchery was closed. Twenty years later with no hatchery and the job left to Nature – given environmental safeguards – the run of wild steelhead returning to the Eel was estimated at more than 40,000 fish.

EYES WIDE OPEN

Author Dylan Tomine is emphatic and writes, "We have to grow up and face the facts: Hatcheries don't work."

He applies the same conviction to salmon fisheries. Referring to increasing salmon hatchery programmes in the Pacific Northwest, Korea, Japan and Russia there are now more juvenile salmon in the Pacific Ocean than ever before. At the same time there are fewer adult salmon surviving to ascend rivers around the Pacific Rim. According to scientists the Pacific Ocean is likely at, or beyond, carrying capacity for salmon.

"Which is to say, there isn't enough food to support the massive numbers of hatchery fish we're pouring into the sea."

The consequence is "the average size of adult Puget Sound Chinook (Quinnat) salmon has gone from more than twenty pounds to about ten pounds and the overall returns of wild and hatchery fish alike continue to fade." He urges anglers to, "double down on efforts to highlight the destructive impact of hatcheries."

HABITAT

There is a strong call to avoid complacency over the well-being of habitat. Dylan Tomine urges anglers to not be indifferent. As distasteful as politics and joining organisations may be to many anglers, it's now past time where we can just go out and fish without worrying about the resource.

"The answer is simple – get involved," he says. The threats are real and many on-going. "As long as opportunities for profit exist, threats will hover over the river". He cites natural resources such as, "precious metals, fossil fuels, timber, salmon." Shades of New Zealand's current political scenario with Ministers Shane Jones and Chris Bishop and their Fast Track law designed to exploit minerals and other resources, wherever, whenever, and without the public consent.

Paralleling also the New Zealand government's current proposal to introduce genetic technology is the author's chapter on "Frankenfish", relating to gene technology and salmon farming. Humans believed they could out-engineer Mother Nature. In the 1990s, the international fish-farming corporations claimed a glowing future with developed GE sterile salmon while ocean currents would dilute pollution.

"And now," says Dylan Tomine, "we watch wild runs ravaged by sea lice infestations, disease and pharmaceutical and feral waste from fish farms, the head of one of the largest Scandinavian fish farm companies finally admits—the net pens are damaging wild fish populations."



MAD SCIENCE?

Humans, even science, are undeterred. The US Food and Drug Administration is, "seriously considering approval of the first genetically engineered food animal for human consumption – a GMO salmon that grows at twice the rate of natural salmon. A Frankenstein fish designed by Man to once again, out-engineer Nature." The new fish designed by humans, will have growth hormones from Chinook (Quinnat) salmon.

It's not all gloom and doom however. He approves that dams which impede spawning runs are being decommissioned. "Dam removal is really important, but it isn't the key to recovering wild salmon and steelhead."

Author Dylan Tomine markets his admirable environmental conscience and strong advocacy with engaging, at times humorous recollections of fly fishing here and there, travel and adventure and his own maturing as a person and fly fisherman.

The book is an account of a man's adventures and travels as a fly fisherman, a writer and a person, skilfully woven into where he now is and his strong advocacy for the rivers and fish he cherishes and values – and the strong desire to leave them in a better state for his children.

If you are a caring angler, get a copy. Strongly recommended.

Footnote: "Headwaters" by Dylan Tomine, published by Patagonia. The book can be purchased from <https://www.patagonia.co.nz/collections/books> or through a local bookseller.



A wild Chinook – natural 'engineering' personified. (Garry Scrimgeour)

BOOKS

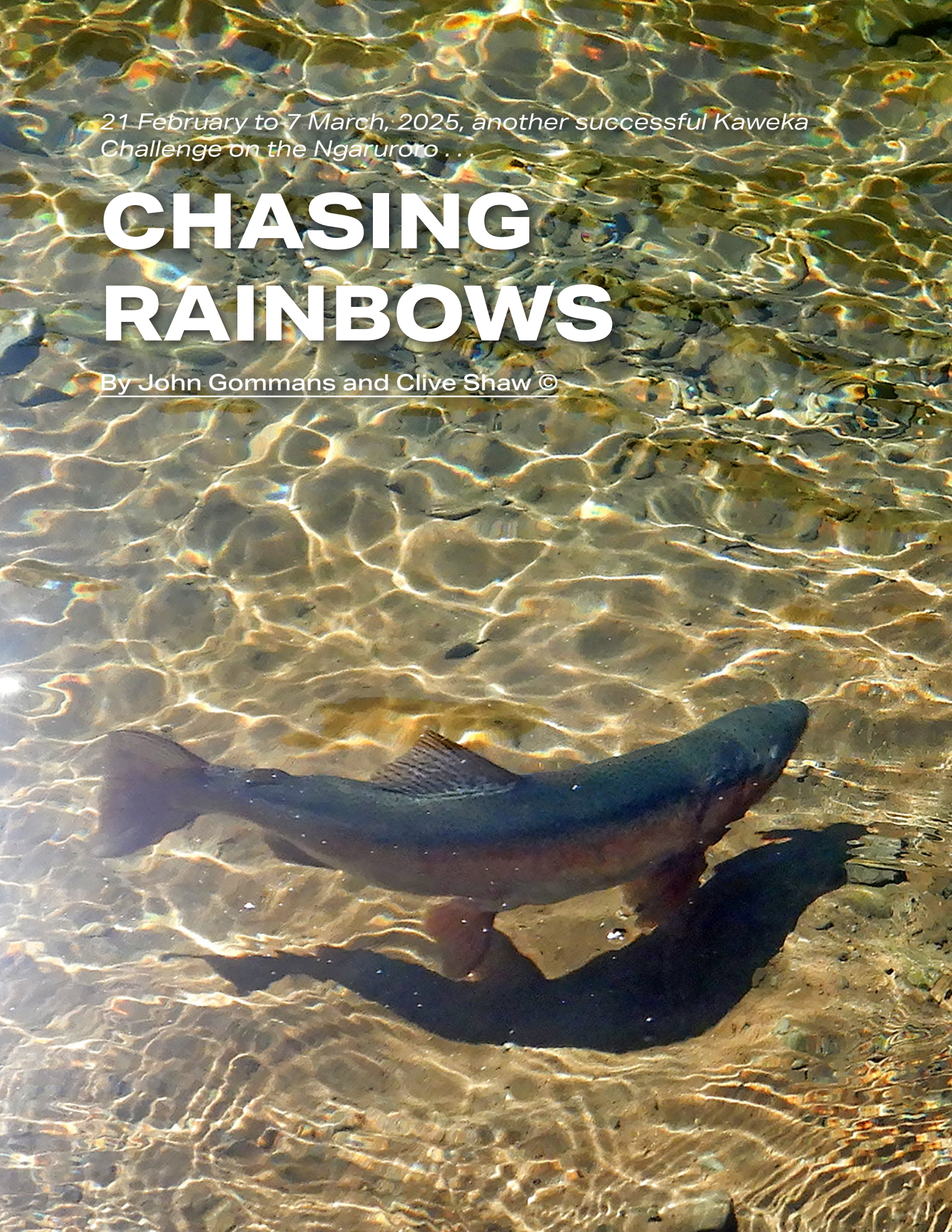
SEE ALSO PAGES 2-5



21 February to 7 March, 2025, another successful Kaweka
Challenge on the Ngaruroto . . .

CHASING RAINBOWS

By John Gommans and Clive Shaw ©





How time flies! Clive and I had done 12 back-country trout fishing and tramping trips over the last 27 years but our last one was in early 2020. Time for our lucky thirteenth!

One of the joys of being semi-retired is having more free time and flexibility. This combined with Clive working in Gisborne for 6 months, instead of needing to fly in from England, enabled us to plan our first back-country trip since COVID closed our borders. However, in my case aging was also associated with a major flare of arthritic back problems last year that, although settled and successfully tested on an overnight trip up the Waioeka River north of Gisborne, still had the potential to recur during a prolonged tramping trip.

We therefore needed a flexible itinerary that allowed for a more leisurely pace than our usual back-country adventures, and to select a river that allowed for an easy exit should aging bodies fail to cope. The choice was easy; a venture close to home, into the upper reaches of the Ngaruroro River in the Kaweka Ranges; chasing rainbows in late summer. The Ngaruroro River is well known to us from previous trips. It has several huts and potential campsites and is served by a number of helicopter companies enabling easy access and food drops, significantly lightening our packs. Thanks to improvements in technology, we no longer needed the heavy mountain radio sets and could simply text or email for a helicopter pick up via a Garmin InReach.

The flexibility proved helpful too. Only three days before our planned drop off at Rocks Ahead Hut, the helicopter company realised that they already had a long-standing booking from another fishing party for the following day. Clive and I altered our plans to accommodate them, starting our trip further down river at Kiwi Mouth Hut and extending it to 15 days. This proved advantageous as it gave us more river to fish and HeliSika rewarded us with two free food drops instead of the one originally planned, meaning even lighter packs and less reliance on freeze-dried food; it also enabled Clive's new passion for homemade camp bread cooked over the fire and eaten with extra honey to be indulged, and much appreciated.





The long helicopter trip gave us an excellent overview of the stretch of river waiting for us and soon the Kiwi Mouth Hut and helipad appeared below. We disembarked, waved goodbye to our ride and briefly basked in the silence and sunshine, but the river was waiting. Packs were rapidly emptied onto bunks in the vacant hut, fishing vests donned and rods assembled. We headed upstream for the afternoon and were not disappointed. Rainbow trout were abundant with numerous juveniles attacking our nymphs with abandon, confirming good recovery of the fishery from the devastating effects of Cyclone Gabriel in February 2023. Several larger trout were caught and two very satisfied fishermen eventually stumbled back to the hut late afternoon. After collecting firewood, dinner was prepared and enjoyed, and a whiskey savoured as we celebrated our first day and looked forward to the rest of our trip.







The Ngaruroro River drains a large watershed and floods easily and at times dramatically, as Cyclone Gabriel demonstrated in February 2023. Tramping upriver requires multiple crossings and the section between Kiwi Mouth and Rocks Ahead Huts is especially tricky; DOC advising that this can take up to 10 hours and "...is a challenging walk following the Ngaruroro riverbed and should not be attempted in higher water flows".

Luckily for us, while Hawke's Bay had started 2025 with a very wet New Year, by late February it had been dry for several weeks and we encountered low river levels and clear water making for easy trout spotting and river crossings. On previous trips we had to choose between a swim or climbing high to avoid some bluffs but this year a deep wade was possible, and much quicker and safer. Even better, we had great weather with only one hour of rain in our first 11 days.





The next morning, we walked down river for a couple of hours and fished back up to the Hut; twice spooking red deer at the river's edge, a red stag and a group of three hinds. On the third day we packed up and hiked further upriver, fishing as we went before eventually stopping late afternoon at a good campsite. After setting up the tent we went to catch fresh trout for dinner but conditions were so good that within 20 meters we caught two but had to release them as they were too big! Finally, a three pounder was landed, prepared with lemon pepper and ginger, wrapped in tinfoil and placed directly onto the embers of the fire – delicious. That campsite was our base for another day's fishing before we moved to Rocks Ahead Hut on the 5th day to restock on food.











This late summer trip proved very successful, especially in the many rapids and faster flowing pools with several 4-6 pound trout, occasionally bigger, caught each day. Most took nymphs; mainly Pheasant Tails, Hare and Coppers or stonefly variants. In the afternoons, the faithful Royal Wulff with a Pheasant Tail dropper also proved very successful.





From Rocks Ahead we continued our fishing trip moving slowly upriver to another campsite and then the Omarukokere Bivouac, which only sleeps two but has a large enclosed entrance area for cooking and eating. This bivouac doesn't get used much and the hut book was over 20 years old, and contained entries from our previous trips in 2006 and 2014 -nostalgia!





Day 9 we finally reached Ngaawapurua Hut for our second food drop and meet other people for the first time; four hunters who had helicoptered in with ample supplies, and had been successful so our diet was further enhanced with venison steaks and excess curry. Unfortunately, two of them were also fishermen and the waters above the hut had got some attention so the next day's fishing was less satisfying. However, we couldn't complain as our experience so far had been amazing. Despite 40 plus years of flyfishing I remain an amateur, at best managing 1-2 days a month over the summer and frequently less. My enjoyment comes from not just sighting, stalking and the exhilaration of actually capturing these freshwater torpedoes but also from the whole outdoor experience. So trips like this, shared with a great companion on a glorious back-country river surrounded by native bush are just magic.





Despite the low river conditions, we choose not to attempt to travel up the difficult gorge above the hut, instead hiking up the Harkness track in 30-degree heat and sunshine to finally reach Tussock Hut. Our joy at reaching our destination was enhanced by discovering that several cans of beer had been left by a previous hunting party; a most refreshing welcome. The updated forecast via our Garmin InReach informed us that the good weather was ending with a wet southerly due.

Next morning, we climbed over the hill and dropped into the upper Ngaruroro River where it meanders through a wide-open tussock valley. In overcast conditions we dropped our main packs, put raincoats and some food into our day packs and hiked downstream to begin fishing. This section usually gets a lot of attention as there is a private Hut and helicopter access at the Gold Creek junction above the beginning of the gorge, and an airstrip further upriver, above the steep moraine wall near Boyd Lodge. Despite this and deteriorating weather with occasional light showers and increasing gusts of southerly wind, luckily mainly upstream, we had a great session. The very deep clear pools were largely devoid of trout but we soon discovered they were sitting in the faster water at the head or tail of the pools and occasionally in the longer runs; perfect conditions for the Royal Wulff and dropper combination. Casting into likely spots was frequently rewarded with an obvious swirl as the dry fly disappeared. Just as we reached our packs, the rain settled in so we made our way to Boyd Lodge where we made ourselves comfortable in front of a warm fire and sat out the cold southerly storm for two nights. Well at least I did. Clive couldn't resist going out to catch yet one more trout despite freezing stormy conditions.





CHASING RAINBOWS

Authors Clive Shaw and John Gommans ©

Our trip ended with a hike over the saddle into the upper Oamaru River where we met three intrepid trampers, even older than ourselves, recovering from an overnight bivouac in freezing conditions as in the bad weather they couldn't find a safe route up the moraine wall to Boyd Lodge – a reminder that packing an emergency foil or plastic bivouac sack is always a good idea. We finished at Oamaru Hut, sited a few 100 meters above the junction with the Kaipo River that signalled the start of the mighty Mohaka River. After an overnight five degree frost we got back to our car the next morning, marking the end of our 15 day trip; another successful Kaweka challenge, chasing rainbows.







Takiritawai River inflow, Lake Forsyth

Can we restore Christchurch/ Selwyn Lakes?

Asks Todd Storey ©



While Christchurch and Selwyn are well known for their picturesque rivers and forward thinking wetlands, another thing they also share are concerning lakes. I have covered Lake Ellesmere before, looking into the streams connecting to it and how land use in those catchments has negatively impacted on what used to be a beautiful lake. However, in the wake of the mass death of Tuna (eel) in Lake Ellesmere, I decided to take another trip down to the lake as well as its neighbour, Lake Forsyth, to see how these lakes have fallen so far from grace.

Lake Forsyth, also known as Te Roto o Wairewa, is about 6 kilometres further along SH75 from the eastern end of Lake Ellesmere. It was an important source of eels for the Ngai Tahu tribe, similar to Lake Ellesmere. Lake Forsyth has one main inflow, the Takiritawai River, which connects from the Okana and Okuti Rivers, and one main outlet that connects directly into the ocean. This outlet was created to improve the lake and is looked after by Wairewa Runanga. It is only opened during heavy rainfall periods when the risk of flooding is high. Without this outlet Lake Forsyth would become a true freshwater lake over an extended period of time.

While the lake used to be an important source of eels in the past, nowadays it has been plagued by algal blooms which have made the water toxic. As you can see in one of the photos, there is a sign situated by Lake Forsyth, instructing people the toxic algae level at any current point, in this case on 17 April 2025, red, which is high risk. The risk of the algal bloom is so high that boats are not permitted to be on the lake, for fear of spreading the algae and the mortal danger its toxicity poses to any animals, swimmers and boaties entering the lake.



All of this has been caused by the deforestation of the hills close to the lake. The silt eroding from those hills into the lake contains extremely high phosphorus and nitrogen levels which cause low oxygen levels in the lake and are the main cause of the algal blooms. As a result Lake Forsyth is classified hypertrophic.

At certain concentrations, nitrogen and phosphorus compounds are fine, and can even benefit the lake and its ecosystem, but the higher the concentrations get, the more damage they do. At higher concentrations both help the growth of algal bloom and other weeds that take over the lake and make it increasingly more difficult for aquatic life (and other life forms around) to survive. This can be seen where dogs and some farm animals have passed away from drinking the lake water. Looking into the LAWA water quality page on Lake Forsyth, they also say that any fish or shellfish taken from the lake can have toxins in them and the consumption of these should be avoided. While they do say if fish is to be eaten the guts and liver should be removed and to wash the fish with clean water, the chances of the toxins still being present within the flesh of the fish would still be quite high. The lake also has its fair share of problems when it comes to the warmer parts of the year. This is because



of a bacteria known as cyanobacteria, which is commonly found in algae where high concentrations of nitrogen and phosphorus are present. Both cyanobacteria and algal bloom benefit from warmer temperatures and low winds, allowing both them and the lake to become ever more toxic.

When exploring the lake some things caught my attention immediately. Firstly, when looking for directions to the lake, Google Maps shows the lake clearer than Ellesmere with abundant weed beds, both native and exotic I've since found, almost an appealing lake capable of providing food and water. Once there, looking closer at the lake you can immediately see the murky, greeny-brown colour the water possesses. Standing by the sign a foul scent started to become prominent. This led to the discovery of a dead swan lying on the rocky shore bed, with a makeshift barrier of sticks deliberately placed around it. While other bird life around the lake was still humming along as though nothing was wrong, the pile up of debris and weed along the shoreline told a different story. This was a struggling lake, the combined powers of the algal bloom from the silt disturbed by deforestation and the small amounts of oil slick glistening on the edge of the water showed this.



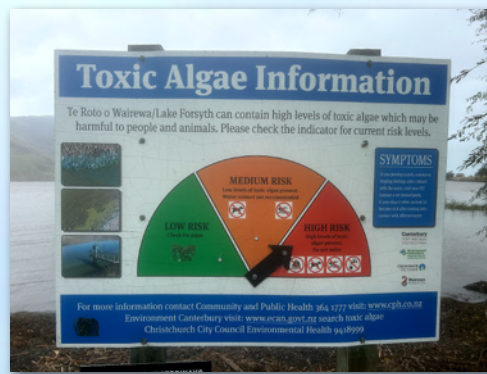


After a bit of a wander around the lake I decided to head back to the lake that started the whole trip, Lake Ellesmere. While the loss of eels had taken place a week before hand, this trip was to see any difference from the last time I had been. While not much had changed with the water, something that had changed was the presence of lichen on the rocks. The yellow "algae" that can be seen on the rocks had not been present the last time I was there, looking into it, this can be a good thing for the lake. While the lichen is like algae, this species can help with shoreline and ecosystem health. Lichen can be feeder food for bugs, insects and some fish, providing important nutrients. The lichen also helps with the nutrient overload in the air and water around the area. What I thought was a fungus taking over the land and potential harming it was benefiting the ecosystem.

Looking around the lake, the bird life was still as prominent as before and so with nothing too much changed and the rain starting to set in, I made the decision to head back to the flat and turn to the internet to better grasp what could be done to help improve these lakes for the future.

The lake's poor water quality was not responsible for the eel deaths. The whole situation was natural, due to the beach crest being too high when the ocean receded and the eels becoming stranded on the crest. However, what got me thinking about the future was the decision made to now lower the beach crest to help make the migration trip easier for the eels . . .





Do we want to restore degraded freshwater like Lakes Forsyth and right, Ellesmere, nationwide?

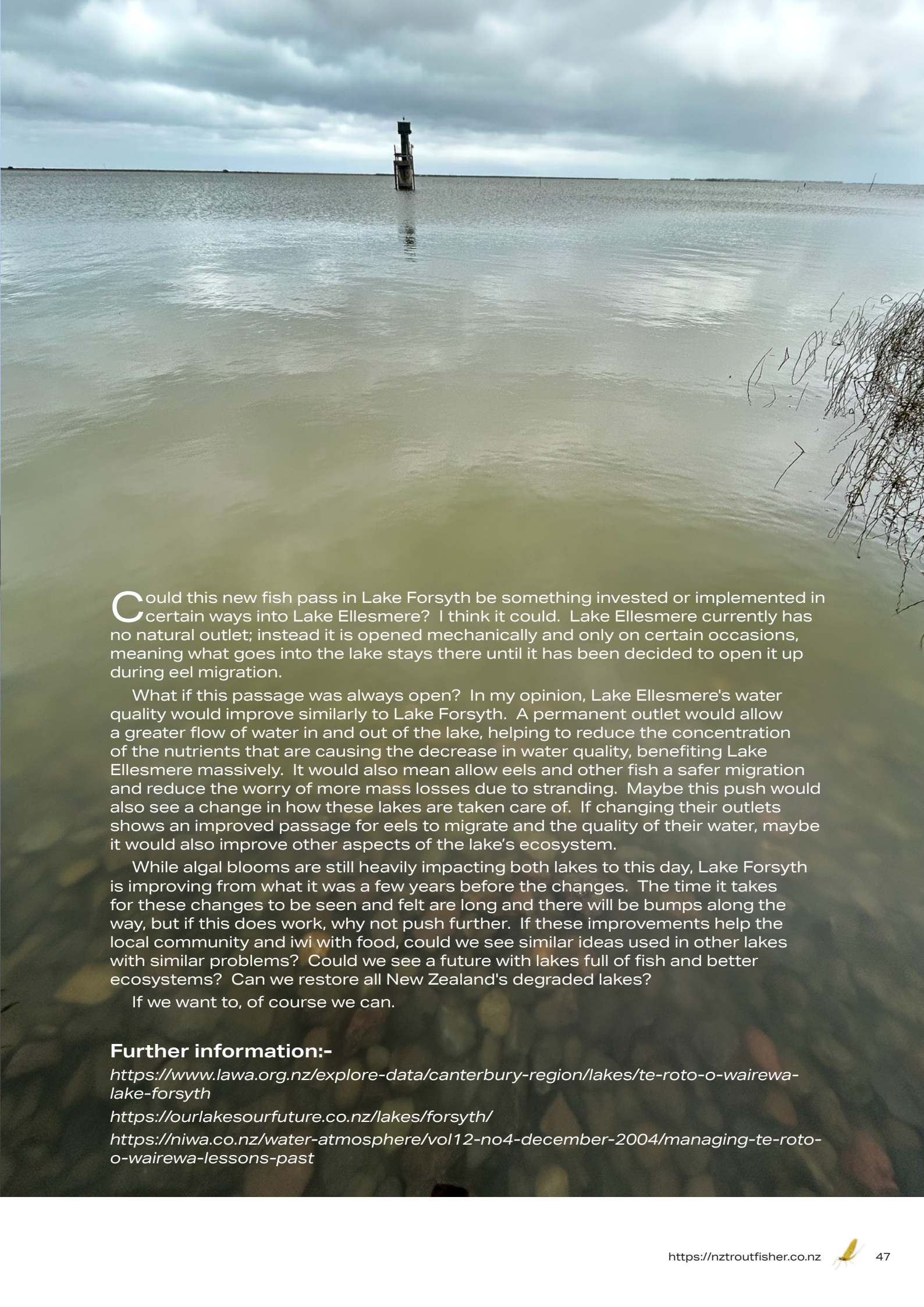


There might still be hope for Lake Ellesmere and this can be seen from the changes made to Lake Forsyth. As touched on before, Lake Forsyth had an artificial outlet which helps the health of the lake. Its construction has shown improvements in the lake water quality, albeit not to the extent that makes the lake safe just yet. While Lake Ellesmere has experienced a travesty with the loss of so many eels, changing the outlet here could see an improvement in the health and ecosystem of the lake and all of its life.

Lake Forsyth has been trending in a positive direction. Iwi-led innovations have been the main reason for this and the local iwi is also looking towards more innovations, to continue the push for a better lake for the future. Currently, it is investigating a new take on a fish pass, called Ko Awa Ika o Wairewa. This would be a long box anchored to the seabed, allowing eels a safe passage to and from the lake while the water flow contributes towards the restoration of the lake. The idea is that this long box connects the lake to the ocean 24/7, rather than the current practice of only during high tide or periods of heavy rainfall.

This connection to the sea could see a restoration in water quality in the lake. While the idea of algae-infested water going into the sea sounds bad, the sea is not taking all the lake's problems but rather assisting in the restoration. The passage could see an improvement in lake water circulation and in turn dilute the current pollutants in the lake. While the passage is open 24/7, the function of the passage is not to allow more contaminants or invasive species, rather it is to balance the two entities and allow them to work harmoniously to reach the main goal of safer travel for the eels and improving the water quality of the lake. The local iwi is also pushing for a similar change in the outlet of Lake Ellesmere to the ocean.





Could this new fish pass in Lake Forsyth be something invested or implemented in certain ways into Lake Ellesmere? I think it could. Lake Ellesmere currently has no natural outlet; instead it is opened mechanically and only on certain occasions, meaning what goes into the lake stays there until it has been decided to open it up during eel migration.

What if this passage was always open? In my opinion, Lake Ellesmere's water quality would improve similarly to Lake Forsyth. A permanent outlet would allow a greater flow of water in and out of the lake, helping to reduce the concentration of the nutrients that are causing the decrease in water quality, benefiting Lake Ellesmere massively. It would also mean allow eels and other fish a safer migration and reduce the worry of more mass losses due to stranding. Maybe this push would also see a change in how these lakes are taken care of. If changing their outlets shows an improved passage for eels to migrate and the quality of their water, maybe it would also improve other aspects of the lake's ecosystem.

While algal blooms are still heavily impacting both lakes to this day, Lake Forsyth is improving from what it was a few years before the changes. The time it takes for these changes to be seen and felt are long and there will be bumps along the way, but if this does work, why not push further. If these improvements help the local community and iwi with food, could we see similar ideas used in other lakes with similar problems? Could we see a future with lakes full of fish and better ecosystems? Can we restore all New Zealand's degraded lakes?

If we want to, of course we can.

Further information:-

<https://www.lawa.org.nz/explore-data/canterbury-region/lakes/te-roto-o-wairewa-lake-forsyth>

<https://ourlakesourfuture.co.nz/lakes/forsyth/>

<https://niwa.co.nz/water-atmosphere/vol12-no4-december-2004/managing-te-roto-o-wairewa-lessons-past>



Reassessment

By Larry Burke



The end of the 1998-9 season brought a time of reassessment. It had been a good season, fishing a new place and learning new tactics, like you don't always need to fish deep water. Adjusting technique should never be far from your thinking. Looking forward to the next season there would be differences. The main one was that I now had stable employment. Knowing what days and hours I would be working several weeks in the future would make planning easy. It also brought annual leave, which meant I could plan when to fish and for how long. I have always planned for 5 to 7 weeks' possible annual leave, calculated by how many hours I worked and adding in statutory holidays to get an extra week or two.

September came round and just month to go, when out of the blue there was a massive shock for the family. We were 16 cousins who had always done a lot of stuff together. We had two amazing mothers but our brother fathers were a different story and at one stage most of us lived together in one house. Cousin Owen, pictured here to the right of Martin, was the youngest I think and also probably the fittest. He did not smoke, hardly drank, and looked after his health. He had a dental appointment – just a checkup – and during this the dentist turned away to do something then turned back, and Owen had passed away. Turns out he had an undetected genetic cholesterol problem. This led to a lot of doctor visits and the conclusion that those who were the fittest were more likely to have inherited it. Thoughts of salmon fishing faded until we decided Owen would want us to carry on.

I always admired Owen's fishing instinct – especially how he could detect a salmon take when fishing the surf with his line still ballooning before he wound up the slack. Think I understand some of it, as often when retrieving my spinner I will strike before my brain registers that it is a fish. Sometimes, fishing blind, whatever the conditions,





you just sense there is a fish taking your lure. But Owen was so good at this he holds some 'folklore' among us. One is from the 1980's when he, Martin and Al were fishing the Hurunui surf. Martin hooked a large salmon that took him hundreds of metres down the beach and took nearly 45 minutes to land, a 32lb/14.54kg fish. By the time he got back Owen had finished for the day, catching his 4 limit bag in the same time and all good sized fish. Owen also still holds the record for the largest salmon caught on The Point, at 30lb/13.63kg.

Then in October Hazel and I brought another home, renting the old one out. I liked the new house; especially because it has a double garage, most of which has become my fish cave – along with about half of the third spare bedroom where there are around 140 antique fishing reels, books, reports and papers – they are all another story. So although I managed a few sorties without any luck, I didn't start fishing seriously until 27 December.

At this time we were still fishing the Stewarts Gully side as were not sure of The Point and a little bit to my amazement I caught my first of the season. We salmon anglers have this sort of tradition that the first fish of the season is always the hardest to catch and there is always a sigh of relief when you do so. It is as always a nervous time when you set the hook and know there is a salmon on. No matter how many you catch, your knees go weak and you fumble around, adjusting your reel drag, wondering if your knot is good enough and whether you have room to follow the fish and keep the shortest line. After that you slowly calm down though still have the adrenaline running through you and the longer the play, the relief when you beach or net that bright silver fighting fish is something else. Sometimes you just stand there, almost mesmerized.





This was a good jack, 13lb/5.9kg, 30"/76cm long, 17.5"/44.5cm girth, caught on one of my dulled down silver Zed Spinners. I had taken to dulling them down as I had this theory that bright shiny spinners on a sunny day are like mirrors flashing in your eyes – you see it but don't quite know where it is.

Another thing that had been bugging me pre-season was the loss of spinners, something every salmon angler experiences. Some seasons are worse than others and I had lost 50, mostly on many snags. Salmon use snags as resting places so you are always fishing close to them and given the price of spinners, I am always looking for means to reduce the on-going cost. Sometime in this off season I was out with Hazel at a second hand shop and looking around, noticed some old cutlery and, at a few cents each, thought some of the spoon and fork handles could make good salmon spinners. Hazel thought I was mad but I was off to the new man cave!

The next salmon was caught on one of the results. We were standing on a small beach that forms on The Gully side at low tide; I think there had been one fish caught and it was near lunch time. The tide was getting ready to turn and I had put the spinner on making a bit of a joke about it, just really wanting to see how it moved in the water. I was bringing it along the edge when old Bill who was a couple of places down suddenly said, "There is a fish following your spinner", and as he said that, it struck right in front of him. After a bit of a fight I beached a 9lb/4kg hen fish, 29"/73.5cm long, 14"/35.5cm girth; about average condition but it showed my idea with the cutlery worked. So I made up a few more, which the crew started calling 'Half A Fork' spinners and used them until other ideas came along.

Three weeks were to pass before the next fish. There was, if I remember right, a rather large flood following a typical summer northwest storm; hot in Canterbury, very wet on the West Coast. The main Canterbury rivers rise very quickly afterwards and the Rakaia faster than the Waimakariri, where it takes 14 hours for flood water to reach the mouth from the gorge. Knowing salmon anglers take advantage of this as it seems to stir the salmon up and get them moving into the mouth and lower





river. This next fish came as the river was clearing to fishable. (In those days, I knew little about salmon eyesight and how, as they move from one habitat to another with varying levels of light and clarity, they shift the light-sensitive pigments in the cone cells of their retinas to cover a broader colour spectrum than us humans, including infrared. Something I was to learn only a few years ago.) We were still on The Gully side when I hooked up with that fresh-run jack salmon, played a stroppy fight, and landed an 11lb/5kg, 30.5"/76cm, with a 15"/38cm girth.

This was a better start a season for a quite a while and I was looking forward to my first month salmon holiday, starting end of February. Before then, as part of my employment and as a team, we were required to take the people we supported on holiday. Our team decided to do it as a house and settled on a horse trekking holiday farm that catered for disabled people, situated not far from the Waiau river, a river I had never fished.

Staffing required a night shift. Starting at 2300 and finishing at 0700, I saw this as a chance to get some fishing in. We decided to have 3 days and 2 nights, 21 to 23 February. A week before my leave started, this gave me two afternoon fishing sessions. The Waiau is not an easy access river lower down so I decided where they launched jetboats would be a good place to start. 21 February was a good bright day and the river was crystal clear, so I decided on a dulled silver Zed Spinner. Had a few casts, gauging the water, when suddenly behind my spinner was a salmon following it. Telling myself, wind slowly, don't panic, a bright silver fresh run salmon getting closer, slower winding, willing a take, stay calm, with only 5 metres of line left, a sudden spurt and it was on! Flicked the bail arm over to feed some line out using my finger. Adjusted the drag and was nervously playing a feisty fish, as it has been a while since I last hooked a salmon in shallower, up-river water, but was finally able to beach a beautiful fresh-run Waiau hen salmon weighing 14lb/6.36kg, 30.5"/78cm long, with an 18.5"/47cm girth – amazing condition. I couldn't believe it. About 15 minutes or so on a new river and I had a fish. Luckily the holiday camp had a large





freezer to put it in. Went back the next day, saw plenty of trout and some followed various spinners and spoons but did not take. It was a good couple of days. Got the salmon smoked later and shared it with the work team and house residents.

Back home, my days off coincided with the start of my leave giving me an extra couple of days. We were still fishing Stewarts Gully but thinking it was time to move back to The Point, as they were catching a few along the McIntoshs rocks side. It usually takes a day or two's fishing to settle into full holiday mood and I was surprised that first afternoon to hook and land a bright silver hen fish of 10 lb/4.55kg, 28"/71cm long, with a 15"/38cm girth on one of our special black Zed Spinners. Already beginning to think I was on a roll, that fish confirmed it was time to go back to The Point.

We found the "hole" at the mouth of the Kaiapoi was back and salmon were there. Early mornings became the norm, arriving at The Point just on daylight, watching the sun looking like it was appearing out of the sea; one of the favourite times to salmon fish. It was the right choice as the fish were caught by Martin and one or two other anglers who had worked out how to get there. Me? I think I was getting overconfident having a good start to the season; you begin trying every spinner and spoon in your tackle box or in my case, boxes. About a week later I finally hooked one!! I was using a small Finny, an old style spinner, as you do when you think you are overdue for a fish. This salmon was a little strange and even to now I still wonder about it. Condition wise it was great at 8.5lb/3.86 kg, 25"/63.5cm long, with a 15"/38cm girth. It was a hen but had no eggs! Nor was it mature. I wonder now if it was one of the experimental salmon the Silverstream Hatchery on a Kaiapoi tributary were working on around that time.

In salmon farms some xy (male gene) jacks tend to mature earlier as do some xx (female gene) hens. This causes uneven growth and commercially, farms profit is maximised by uniform growth and settled fish. Chinook are very temperamental fish according to those who work with them and New Zealand is about the only





country that is farming them successfully, Atlantic Salmon being easier to deal with. This limitation of supply makes farmed chinook salmon more valuable on the world market, especially during the northern hemisphere off season. So around this time Silverstream was trying to produce only hen fish as they are best for salmon farms, for a number of reasons. To do this they need to change the sex of the fish they want to breed from to xx gene Jacks. Around the early 1990's passing an electric current over ova about to hatch would hatch out xx genetic jacks but by this time they were beginning to use a testosterone wash just after the ova hatched. Changing females to xx Jacks produces only female offspring.

The next 25 days would produce only one fish for me but it was to be my largest for the season. We had been fishing since daybreak and now at 2.45pm, 13th March, I hooked a large fish that looked at least 20lb in the water. That alone makes you tentative enough and it does not help to have your fishing mates commenting, "That's a good fish!", 'He's going to run!', and stuff like that. Anyway I managed to land it and was a little disappointed; this fish was 34"/86.5cm long, with an 18"/42cm girth and weighed 16lb. The widest part of it was its head. We ended up calling these fish Barracuda Salmon, as by the end of the season a few fish like this were caught. They were an older year class than the smaller fish caught that season and so it seems like there might not been that much food at sea the first year or so they were out there.

We fished hard for the next 17 days, apart from a couple of days off when the river came down and coloured up. You start to wonder if that's the end of the season. Lucky for us it was not, the number of salmon anglers was thinning out and the tides were now afternoon in the last week of my holiday. With low tide around 4pm, 30th March, I was able hook up to my 8th fish of the season, a nice fresh-run fish of 11lb/5kg, 28"/71cm long, 16.5"/42cm girth – exceptional condition, especially this late in the season.



I would have been happy if that was where my season ended but it was to get better. The next afternoon, around 4.45 pm, I hooked and landed another good fish a 12.5 lb hen, 30"/76cm long, with a 17"/43cm girth. These late season salmon must have found a good food source at sea.

My day did not end there. An hour later, just as light was starting to fade, my spinner got hit again and playing a fish in fading light was something I hadn't done for about 20 years, adding a little bit more to the fight. Beached, this fish was in even better condition, being the same weight as the one I had caught yesterday 11lb/5kg, 27"/68.5cm long, with a 17"/43cm girth – amazing fish.

Our season usually finished 31st March, for no particular reason. However Martin and I decided to try one more day and on 3 April headed out to The Point; not really expecting any fish, just a wind down and reflection on the sad way it started with Owen's passing. Walking out of the trees near The Point on a calm morning a salmon rose, heading up the Kaiapoi. Martin said, "I will have that", dropped his pack, cast to where he thought the salmon would be and got it right. The fish hit hard and fought well – what a great start to the day. It wasn't going to end there. About 30 minutes later I was fishing out into the Waimakariri when I got a hit and before I could strike,



this fish had hooked itself then swam deep in the hole, seeming to have some weight. It just about gave up once I managed to lift it off the bottom, however, and turned out to be another Barracuda Salmon. Nonetheless I was happy; my philosophy is that it's a salmon first and weight is a bonus.

The last for the season was a 15lb/6.82kg, 33"/84cm long, 18"/46cm girth. It was a great end to a season tinged with sadness. I had caught 11 salmon averaging 11.91lbs/5.41kg. I usually bottled them after the end of the season having a 13 cubic foot freezer to store them whole, but we had now found a Continental butcher who would take your whole fresh or frozen salmon, fillet, hot smoke and vacuum pack them for \$15. Some of these 11 went there, others ended up cooked whole for weddings, and the rest were bottled.

Things were starting to happen in the Kiwi Salmon Angler's world. Other rivers that had relied on hatchery releases from Glenariffe were starting to show decline in numbers and discontent was growing. This was the start for me about getting involved in the other side of my Salmon Addiction, how to protect and enhance the fishery.



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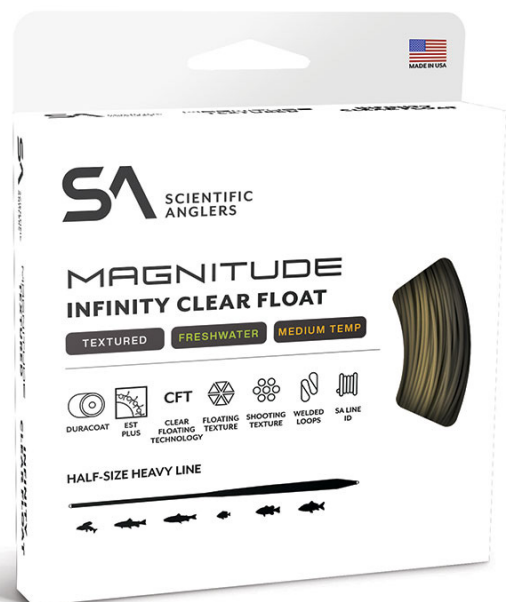
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<https://www.manictackleproject.com/collections/nymphs-1>

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Features include:

- Durable and lightweight, TPU-based synthetic woven upper material
- Moulded, rubber toe wrap and abrasion panels protect against wear and tear
- Lace-up closure with reinforced eyelets
- High cushion dual-density EVA midsole for comfort and stability
- Vibram® idrotrip with Traction Lug outsole optimizes stability while walking and wading.
- The outsole is compatible with



Simms Hardbite and Alumibite Star Cleats and Hardbite cleats/ studs

- Drain holes to prevent water pooling

The new Flyweight boot comes in sizes 7 to 14, and also in a women's model from size 5 to 12. Seen here to the right.

<https://www.manictackleproject.com/collections/simms-footwear/products/simms-flyweight-fly-fishing-wading-boot>

<https://www.manictackleproject.com/collections/simms-footwear/products/simms-flyweight-womens-fly-fishing-wading-boot>



PRIMAL ZEN EURO NYMPH RODS

The Primal Zen is the perfect gateway rod to Euro nymph style fishing. But don't be fooled, this rod is still packed with features, including High Modulus 55 MSI Blanks, Custom Downlocking reel seat, Lightweight single foot guides. As well as LNR (Longitudinal Fibre Alignment) and LMS (Low Mass Scrim) technologies.

And as with all Primal rods, if anything goes wrong you are covered by the Primal Quick Fix warranty service.

Available in 10' #2, 10' #3 and 10' #4 models.

<https://www.manictackleproject.com/collections/primal-euro-nymph-fly-rods/products/primal-zen-youth-freshwater-fly-fishing-rods>



NEW TACKLE





Adventuring into Australia's

REMOTE FISHING SPOTS

By Matt Hoole ©



It was getting dark when we left the Gungarlin river and Campground in the Snowy Mountains of NSW. After hiking to Daveys Hut and back earlier in the day, I then spent a couple of hours casting to splendid-looking rainbow and brown trout in a large pool, the fish showing no hesitation in coming up and sipping in my size 14 Yellow Humpy. It was a memorable rise on dusk and as the sun dipped and the shadows appeared over the river blackening out the waters surface, the action suddenly went quiet.

Slipping the Ute into 4 wheel drive we began tackling the first steep incline, the 4X4 clambering its way up the clay-covered banks. For a few seconds we rocked back and forth violently like being trapped in a cranky Dyson washing machine, before reaching the top, the tyres kicking up copious amounts of dust behind us.

Down the trail, masses of kangaroos lay banked up against the roadside. As we lit them up, they bounded off in all directions like skittles being sprung, while a rogue hare flirted with its life by zigzagging down the road in front of us.

Out here it's a picture of serenity, quintessential alpine land. The fishing is calming and mostly rewarding, however it is isolated and certainly no place to be stranded if you were to blow a tyre or puncture the fuel tank. The joy ride on this loose trail would quickly be forgotten, replaced with a nasty 'slap in the face,' insurance claim back home.

Once safely back on the tarmac, we began discussing the dangers of being trapped out in a remote location like Gungarlin Campground. It also made us think seriously about what outer body protection we needed to install on the Ute to ensure it's safely equipped for the terrain and environments we travel in.

Let's face it, as fly fishers we're always on the look out searching for the epitome of fly fishing destinations. Places that are deep within, places that are rarely touched or disturbed by human presence. These locations often require putting in the miles. They also require good planning and preparation, safety, and the right vehicle to get you in there. The purpose of this article is to highlight the key benefits of being set up well to travel into these remote locations in Australia, in order to go fly fishing. To keep things simple, I've broken it down into 5 pillars below that I think are essential when going off grid.



PILLAR 1: PLANNING

As Benjamin Franklin once quoted, "if you fail to plan, you are planning to fail." This couldn't hold any truer in the 21st Century. Whether you're planning a day trip, an overnighter or a multi day trip, when venturing out into more secluded locations you need to plan well first. Here's a few important checks I'd recommend making before you head out.

Pre planning Study the route and location beforehand by researching the location and topography. This will help you gain knowledge and an understanding of what's to be expected. Formulate a back up plan in case things take a wrong turn and always take note of the weather and predicted forecasts. Out in the wild things can change very quickly, therefore be prepared, flexible and ready to alter plans if required.

Lists We always make a packing list and cross reference the list before leaving home. Packing the car the night before ensures minimal time and stress is spent in the morning. It also helps reduce the likelihood of forgetting important essentials.

Fuel We always fill up the fuel tank just in case we have to travel additional unexpected kilometres. The last thing you want to do is run out of fuel far from civilization.

Tyre pressure Its a good idea to check tyre pressure and lowering the tyre pressure can provide more traction to the ground on loose trails and roads.

Food and Water We always ensure we have enough food and water. A life straw or a life straw squeeze bottle is a great addition for water filtration, so long as a water source is available to you. Fill them up the night before and ensure you have enough food packed. It's important that the food you take provides both sustenance and energy.

Dry Bags We put our clothes in dry bags to ensure all items stay dry. They can be a life saver after a fall in a river or when experiencing heavy rain. For overnights and multi day trips we also secure our sleeping bags in dry bags.

Tents We take two-man tents into the wild. These are small, easy to assemble and dismantle. Even if you're planning on staying in a hut or shelter, it's still a good idea to take a tent or fly set-up in case you fail to reach the hut or campground.





Food pre-packed and ready for another overnight adventure.

LifeStraw squeeze bottles are a great form of water filtration on the go. The filtered water from the squeeze bottle can also be used to boil tea, coffee and cook your meals.

These two man tents are great to begin your overnight adventures, being affordable and easy to use.





PILLAR 2: VEHICLE

A mate once told me, 'find the vehicle that suits all of your wants and needs first, before you go kitting it up with any extras.' It's sound advice. Ask yourself some of these questions:-

Do you have any preferences with makes and models and does a particular model of vehicle offer more value to you?

Where do you want to go? What are the tracks and trails like to get you into these places to fish?

Will your vehicle allow you to add sufficient outer body protection to protect your vehicle from both animal strikes and terrain?

How much ground clearance do you need to get into these locations? Will the vehicle allow you to raise it up later?

Do you plan on towing a caravan or trailer in the future? If so, does your vehicle need more horsepower or towing capabilities?

If it's a 4X4, will the Ute have enough tray space? You may want to fit drawers or a fridge in it once a canopy is perhaps installed.

These are some, but not all of the important questions you could ask yourself before selecting the right vehicle for you. Also think about the long term plan.





PILLAR 3: GEAR (PROTECTION, RECOVERY & SAFETY)

If you're looking to venture off grid, you may need to consider adding some additional accessories to your vehicle to ensure you're travelling safely while also meeting the demands of your trips. A good way to begin this process is by assessing your lifestyle and where you're planning on travelling, then build a plan around adding the most important accessories first. Prioritise a risk assessment. We chose to add bull bars, spot and fog lights, snorkel and side steps as a safety-first measure, before adding the canopy for additional space and storage. Think about your own situation, lifestyle and where you want to go, then plan and progress from there. I've compiled a list of gear which I've classified as essential (need to have), or additional (has value). Of course this is subjective and will change as per persons needs. If you plan on pulling a camper van, for instance, then a rear towing bar and protection would be considered essential.

Essential Items

Bull Bars

Bull bars are essential for frontal body protection, while side rails and side steps are not essential, but can also help protect your car from animal strikes or road debris getting churned up into your side panels. In my opinion, side steps add more value by allowing you to get into your vehicle safely and when loading gear onto the roof, like into a roof top bag secured onto a base plate, for example.

Winch

When installing bull bars, consider installing a winch at the same time given most bull bars would have to come off again later, adding to the overall labour charge. A winch is essential to pull you out of being bogged or stuck without outside help.

Spot Lights

In ACT and NSW, kangaroo strikes are common and can not only damage your vehicle severely, but can also cause a road accident. Wombats have been known to rip engines out upon strikes. Since installing spotlights, I've had several instances where the spotlights have saved our vehicle from animal strikes.

Recovery Gear

A recovery kit, as above, is essential if you were to become stuck or bogged far from civilization and need to get your vehicle out, if you haven't a winch installed.





(PILLAR 3: GEAR) ADDITIONAL ITEMS

Side Steps & Side Rails

Safety is paramount when travelling off road in Australia. Animal strikes are one of the largest dangers on our roads and some states may dictate how much outer body protection you choose to install on your vehicle.

Rear Towing Bar/Protection/Base Plate

A rear towing bar and protection is also not essential, however if you're planning on pulling a caravan in the near future it would be advisable.

Snorkel

Essential if you ford streams regularly.

Larger Side Mirrors

When installing rear protection, consider upgrading your side mirrors as well to enhance your visibility behind the vehicle. Many of the new brands and models are fixed on an extendable arm providing better range and boast larger duo mirrors, offering better clarity.

Canopy, Tub Liner & Drawers, Awnings & Roof Top Tents

A canopy is a great edition for any 4X4. A canopy creates additional space allowing you to take more gear while also providing more options. You may choose to fit drawers to store your equipment permanently. A canopy also allows you to lock and secure your rear, where a tonneau cover doesn't and leaves your gear vulnerable. A tub liner helps keep it all dry. Awnings and roof top tents make your vehicle close to a caravan.

Lift Kit

Fulcrum is a good brand of suspension kits in Australia and I'll be getting my Ute done next year. They calibrate your lift front and back, depending on how much



you need to go higher with weight distribution. I've got bull bars on the front where canopy on the back weighs nothing, for instance. When I jump from 31 inch tyres to 33 inch tyres I'll gain significant ground clearance – while still meeting regulations, of course. It's always best to check the regulations in your state and talk to your mechanic/automotive company before raising your vehicle, as heavy penalties apply if regulations are breached.

Radio/Antenna

UHF, Ultra high frequency range; typically for 4X4, trucks and camper vans. On-the-road communication where vehicles on the same channel can communicate with each other – e.g if there's a tree down on the road or an accident, when someone mentions it, others on the same channel can hear and communicate back.

A lot of the places up in the mountains here lose reception when you leave the nearest town, however. Antennae work on a line of sight basis and different types work better for different terrain – e.g. flat versus rugged and hilly.

If you require additional space to store all of your gear, consider installing a canopy.

An awning is a must for shade and protection on those hotter days.



PILLAR 4: NAVIGATION

Venturing into remote locations without adequate navigation is like choosing to strut 'The Running of the Bulls' in Pamplona, Spain with a red cape fixed around your back. Danger is lurking! Put it simply, navigation is paramount. Too many things can suddenly go wrong when you're out fishing and walking in remote locations. When you need to get yourself out quickly and safely, having navigational resources on hand and being able to use them effectively, is a must! Not only that, tracks and trails can disappear, landmarks can become confusing and disorienting and conditions can deteriorate rapidly that limit your ability to rely on visual cues.

Below are 5 forms of effective navigation.

Offline Apps

Apps like Backcountry Navigator and in particular its new Pro version, are great forms of offline navigation on Android devices which utilise Topo Maps. They can hold reception in some pretty rugged and remote locations. At a relatively small fee, these apps are a great form of navigation when venturing out into new territory, or when doing multi-day trips long distances from your vehicle.

Advanced GPS

We use for example, the Garmin Montana 700I Rugged with InReach touchscreen satellite technology. With a RRT of \$1,199 this is a serious handheld GPS unit. It includes: Topoactive Australian and New Zealand maps to view rivers, elevation and various other landmarks. Also on and off-road mapping, therefore you can use the unit for navigation when driving to your remote destination. You can pinpoint your location while also marking landmarks and saving routes. This is great when you're traversing off the beaten track and trying to find a way through. InReach weather forecasts provide updates on weather to your Garmin 700I and other devices you have paired. It's IPX7 waterproof-rated and extremely robust and durable.

From a safety perspective, I carry this unit on me at all times in my fishing waist pack, not in my backpack, given the last thing I want to do is lose my backpack. 18 hours of battery life when fully charged. An external SOS activation button in the event of an emergency will send a message to Garmin Response, with a an additional subscription (making it also a PLB). The unit also allows you to send sms from your location with a subscription.

Hand-held Walkie Talkies

A good source of navigation when travelling with groups or families. Can also be utilised when travelling in the car for directions or when traversing tricky terrain by letting the driver behind know of any approaching dangers. Can maintain communication between parties of each other's whereabouts, a comfort when splitting up and going separate routes

Physical Maps

Maps are always a good source of navigation when venturing out. Ensure the maps you're using are current or updated and always carry them in a waterproof sealed bag to keep them dry. Maps will always prove useful, especially when other forms of navigation that require reception fail.

A Compass

Always a great tool to establish orientation, especially when paired with a physical map. They're generally small, lightweight and therefore easy to carry and access. In low light conditions, fog or mist, a compass can prove pivotal in steering you in the right direction.

An advanced handheld GPS is a great form of navigation when venturing out into remote locations, navigating tricky terrain and spending longer periods of time further from your vehicle.







PILLAR 5: SAFETY

Safety is paramount when venturing into the wilderness or more secluded locations in Australia. Below is an overview and recommendations.

Ensure you're well equipped and prepared

Pack all essential items. Be prepared to adjust your plans, remain flexible when things take a turn and make good choices. Carry sunscreen, hats, long layers to properly cover the skin, insect repellent and any necessary medications and/or pain relief.

Emergency Blanket

We take it for overnights and multi day trips, an emergency blanket is a necessity when cold or injured.

First Aid Kit

We never leave the house without it. Luckily, we've only ever needed it for a few superficial patch ups, but you never know when a more serious incident may occur.

Snake Bite Kit

In Australia, you need to take a snake bite kit in case of an emergency, providing instructions on how to treat a potential snake bite. In spring and summer, snakes are out finding warmth and food. They generally stay clear of humans, but coming into contact with a snake is always a possibility.

PLB (Personal Locator Beacon)

A one press SOS button can be activated in the event of an emergency, sending your location to Search and Rescue of.

If you're not in the market to purchase a PLB, an alternative is to hire one from a retailer in Australia, like Macpac for example. For a reasonable price, it's almost a lifeline if someone was seriously injured far from civilization.

One of the biggest joys in fishing is reaching those spots or locations that present a feeling of being completely alone and the environment you're in feels untouched.

Australia has some remarkable places to visit and an abundance of quality waterways, but it does come with some risks, on and off the roads. I've spent several nights out in the wild sleeping in a two man tent with one eye open listening to threats. Snakes, spiders, lizards, wombats, feral cats, foxes, brumbies, the list goes on. But it's not just the wildlife that can make you extremely anxious, high winds, lightning storms, extreme heat, severe cold snaps and blizzards, swollen rivers and other environmental factors can be very concerning. But, rather than letting it intimidate or even scare you, good planning and the appropriate safety measures will instill both confidence and peace of mind when out there, however always be prepared for when any setbacks occur. Like living any passion in life, the rewards can far outweigh the risks.

We never leaving home without our survival first aid kit, snake bite kit and PLB.

The rewards can far outweigh the risks.



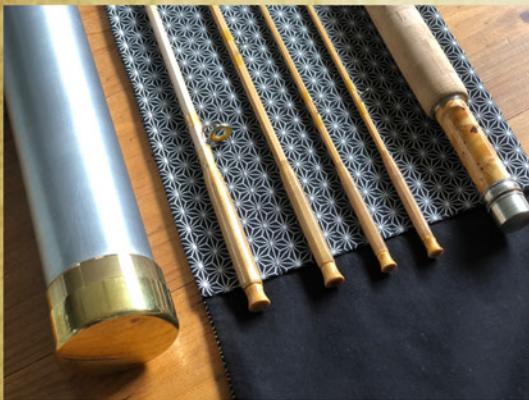


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