

Issue 195

TROUT FISHER

Fly focused but totally transferable

Summer 2025



It's THAT time again!

Concentration ~ Public Servants not Rulers

A Late Start ~ Reoccurring Dreams ~ Armchair Angling

WHAT'S REALLY IN OUR LAKES?

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Cover: Hang on a while, please! (PWS; Chorus Cicada)



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At face value, float tubes are pretty laughter-inducing. The sight of me backing into the water wearing waders and diving fins, and with the paraphernalia of float tube, life jacket, rod and net can be quite comical – especially if I trip on a rock while grinning at a camera!

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There are certain moments on the New Zealand angling calendar that feel almost ceremonial. That first frost heralding the start of the Central North Island runs, opening day, and the pinnacle for me personally... that first chirp of an immature bright green cicada echoing across the garden. That sound isn't just summer arriving – it's a call to arms for fly anglers across Aotearoa, a signal that trout have shifted their gaze upwards and the summer-surface season has begun.

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Over the years, as a university student down in Canterbury, I have explored many lakes and streams across the region. As an environmental science and chemistry student, I have also been taught through lectures and field studies what pollutants and contaminants have been and still are getting into rivers and lakes around New Zealand.

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I had a late start to the 2001-2002 season as work became a priority. .

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Some rivers we visit can be extremely productive yet fail to ignite a spark within us. Perhaps the scenery is unappealing, or the rivers may lack the flow and structure we desire, making them less interesting to fish. Maybe they just feel empty of charisma. We may return, but only to catch their trout. Other rivers immediately have us gazing out of the office window, daydreaming of what lies around that next bend; opening multiple web pages at home to survey maps for new trails, desperate to find that hidden path through to untouched waters.

Matt Hoole introduces one of his favourite rivers







ARMCHAIR ANGLING

By the late RUSSELL McKENDRY





At face value, float tubes are pretty laughter-inducing. The sight of me backing into the water wearing waders and diving fins, and with the paraphernalia of float tube, life jacket, rod and net can be quite comical – especially if I trip on a rock while grinning at a camera!

I love it, though, as a change from stalking or wading, and there are situations when the float tube gets you to exactly where you need to be. Boats are great, of course – especially with quiet, electric motors – but the float tube is positively sneaky. No need for long casts on many occasions because fish seem to accept the float tube as something natural.

I'll never forget the day I was chipping a cicada pattern, near the trees at a deep drop-off. The light breeze was drifting me towards the fly and I simply retrieved slack and guarded against drag. Soon I was only a couple of rod-lengths away from the fly. My intention was to back-pedal and pay out line until I was in a position to place the fly a little farther along the tree line, but I was stopped by a sudden glint of silver in the bottle-green deep. Then another. Then a shape. Then a fish. It was coming up from very deep water and heading for my fly, swimming up in a tightening spiral. I could see it as if I were looking down a well! Very calmly and deliberately it engulfed the fly as though the float tube and fly rod did not exist. When I tightened on it I found myself a lot less calm and deliberate than I had been only moments before. That has become a very fond memory, made possible by the good old float tube.

Something else I enjoy is the simple portability of the float tube. It weighs very little and can be carried like a pack for a considerable distance, if necessary. It takes up very little space in transit and it's quick to inflate – especially with a little electric pump hooked onto a vehicle battery.







For many years I used one of the 'doughnut' type, with a truck tube in it. I never had a puncture with it. The more recent 'U-shaped' type has two vinyl bladders in its twin pontoons. More fragile, but probably safer, nevertheless.

Getting into the water with the pontoon float tube is much easier because I don't need to step into it first. With the pontoon tube, which has a cross-bar that can be un-clipped, I can pull the tube around my ankles, close the cross-bar and pick the tube up by the handles. Then I waddle backwards into water deep enough to float in. When I have pulled up the apron and 'velcroed' it into place, I'm ready to go.

Sometimes, though, getting a fish aboard a float tube can be a bit tricky. Indeed, I found out the hard way that you can easily break your rod when bringing a fish to the net in a float tube. I was too heavy-handed on one occasion and underestimated a strong fish, when night fishing with a heavy tippet. I had clamped the line with my rod hand and, as I drew the fish to the net, the rod was at maximum flex. Yes, you guessed it. The fish plunged straight down. It should have broken the nylon or maybe have torn out the hook, but this time it was the rod that broke, with a crack like a stock whip! Surprisingly the fish, a strong brownie, did at last end up in the net, with three of the five pieces of the rod still working.

I had heard about over-doing point loading but hadn't thought it through. In the first place I should have not have had my finger heavily clamped on the line. I would also have been safer using a net with a longer handle and now I do use a boat net. In shallow water we can land fish with a short-handled net without overloading the rod tip because the fish has to swim away from it. However in deep water the fish can head straight down, under an already overloaded rod tip. Luckily, being under rod warranty, the manufacturers replaced the section free of charge.





Chasing fish is something I have been known to do in my float tube. Sometimes a fish can be seen on a calm lake at quite a distance as it cruises along, mopping up midge emergers. Often it is just one fish. Funny, that. Anyway I enjoy paddling over to it, if I can, and offering it a wee shuttlecock or something similar. A rear-view mirror would be an advantage sometimes, seeing that the tube must be propelled in reverse, as it were.

These fish just seem to wander all over the place and often I have had to change course quite a bit to catch up. With a bit of luck the fish will be travelling across my line of sight by the time I get a chance to cast to it. I like that because I can make a sort of 'sighter' cast first, in its wake. With the right length of line in hand it's possible to then cast into the track that the fish is about to swim into. Usually Murphy leads the fish right or left of that track, but it's an exciting few moments finding out – and you usually get another chance anyway.



With the stealthy float tube you can chase a fish like that for quite a while until it gets on to you – or onto your fly! “Sip – sip – gulp!” Or, better still, “Sip – sip – chomp!” as it sees the comparatively large artificial and munches down on it like Captain Hook’s crocodile. Great float tube fun!

How much of a lake is unfishable from the shoreline because of trees? How much of that shoreline is populated by fish? On a bright, brassy afternoon the answer will be virtually the same to both questions as the shoreline fish head for the shadow of the trees. Float tube to the rescue. You can simply paddle out through the trees and fish back into the shadows. What if binoculars tell you that good fish are swirling and slashing on damsel nymphs but the lake is lined with swamp and the shore bottom is so soft that you cannot wade? Float tube to the rescue again. The tube isn’t the answer to all problems – of course not – and what a bore if that were so! No, it’s a lot of fun, but it’s just another approach. Literally.



Successful blind fishing demands . . .

Concentration

Talking Plenty with Peter Storey



2024 release
hen taken on
#6 Ratropinna
and S6 line . . .

It was three mornings before I landed a recovering wild fish out on the lake and then another two weeks before landing fish on multiple successive mornings. That's a typical early season pattern outside the central crater until the smelt come in to spawn. Indeed, Indeed, it always pays to remember that no part of lake outside the optimum habitat range for trout attracts many fish. Smelting is now very close but afterwards, if also tied close to the shore without electronics, I suggest working the thermocline, shown in red dashes on this extract from the limnotrack website, down to where it hits the lake bed with as much concentration as possible and, to stop once you begin to lose concentration.

Whatever the time of year and methods used, at whatever logical depth, after fishing here for over 40 years it's plain to me that there are very few days each month when fish take lures freely over an extended period and on such days, you typically hit fish within moments of putting that lure into the water. There are also *far too many* days when even the recovering wild fish that hang around the shoreline, like this 1.6kg jack to right, seem unmotivated to take lures at all. Most days trout take lures in sudden short bursts, typically heralded by hits on your lure. Add the fact that you rarely see what you hook onto this 'average' scenario and it's my opinion that if you have not hit a fish within an hour, having worked the current limnotrack picture with well-proven smelt lures and onto the lake bed with koura, it's time to take a break unless simply enjoying being out on the lake.

That's because I live here and fish like this 2.6kg 2024 release hen above will last me a week? Maybe, but knowing the local bay intimately, pretty well surface to lake bed, so far in 2025-26, with plenty of mornings lost due to wind and/or rain, I have



Lake Tarawera

Use the menu items on the lefthand sidebar to explore the buoy data in more detail, or to explore other lakes.

Weather

Latest measurements for Tarawera at 11-Nov-2025 09:00 NZDT

Air

Warm (16.2 °C)



Wind

Calm (4.6 knot northwesterly)

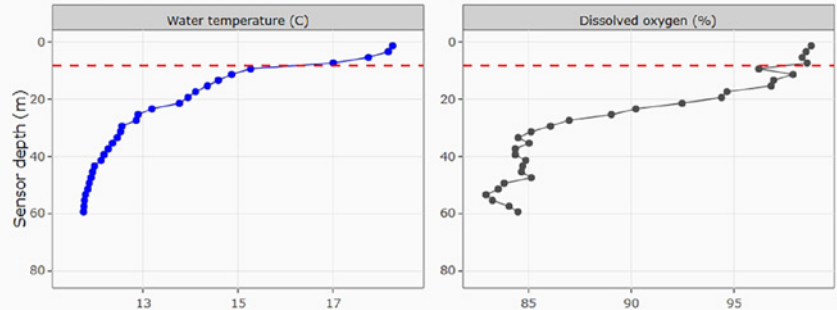
Rain

Dry (0 mm/hr)

Water

Latest profile for Tarawera completed at 11-Nov-2025 07:48 NZDT

Profile completed at 11-Nov-2025 08:48 NZDT



These plots show the change in water temperature and dissolved oxygen from the surface to the bottom of the lake. If the lake surface is more than one degree warmer than the bottom, a red dashed horizontal line shows the thermocline (the depth at which change in temperature is greatest).

https://limnotrack.shinyapps.io/wqprofiler_bop/

Recovering wild jack
taken wading, on
#6 Ratropinna and
intermediate line . . .





2024 release hen taken
on #6 koura imitation
and S6 line

landed 12 fish, split 8/4 immature/kelt; 7 wild/5 hatchery, averaging 1.5kg/52cm and 2.6kg/62cm respectively; 9 on #6 Ratopinna, 7 with Intermediate and 2 S2 lines; 3 on #6 Koura and S6 line. So what's taken lures for me has been feeding relatively high and overall, not that bad a start to a season in my experience. Checking the lake bed before calling the session off is also clearly working.

So I am content with my season so far if not happy, fully aware the Fish & Game norm for landed trout in Lake Tarawera has remained 1 fish/4 hours throughout the time I've fished here. In a nutshell, the smelt population in Lake Tarawera is again sufficient to grow trout from fingerling to this hen's size within a year. So if visiting anglers are prepared to fish those average four hours they should logically hit one feeding spree, however brief, and there's a fair chance their catch will be similar. What more could anyone want? Well, my aim is to stay inside that 1:4 ratio across each season, and preferably under 1:2, because to my mind this means I still have the right solutions to crack a typically challenging fishing environment.

The first solution is to almost exclusively fish between dawn and sunrise. Not only is this one of two well-proven feeding points each day, the changes of light, it's also immediately after the longest period without fishing each day. Smelt are still high in the water column from overnight feeding and you logically follow them down onto the lake bed as the light level rises, to these 2 year-plus koura-feeding trout I for one prefer to target.

Better still, most lake users are still asleep at dawn and while I'm not worried about anglers here – barring those who constantly head to wherever others hook up, typically arriving with plenty of disturbance – the myriad joy boaters who will be on the lake all day at weekends and holidays throughout Summer are a totally different matter. Each to their own, of course, but even without a shot hip I find it hard to concentrate amongst constant wake and incessant noise. So once any appear I

head for home (and to be honest, you see very few non-anglers before sun up unless the lake is flat calm and few anglers these days either).

Coming back to direct angling practicalities, dawn is also when the lake is at its coolest and this will soon become far more important as the Summer thermocline forms. Generally, outside of large high pressure systems, it's also when there will be least wind and that's a major plus if you are in a canoe, row boat or float tube. Frequently at dawn, and when not raining, this lake will also be covered in cloud while other lakes nearby are not. This is because warmer air coming up the Tarawera river valley from the plains gets trapped under cooler central plateau air until the sun heats that upper air to match. The darker sky this produces is another angling plus with rainbow trout, holding them closer to the lake surface until that cloud is gone.

In summary, at dawn, everything pertinent to both angling enjoyment and success in a deeper Central North Island lake is towards if not actually in the angler's favour and these days, I only fish at other times for three reasons. The first is during smelting, when I can sight fish throughout the day, without entering the water, for as long as I choose. (Yes, I for one wish there were brown trout in this lake!) The second



#6 Ratropinna and #4 Koura, smelt and crayfish imitations for open water and lake bed fishing . Both carry attractors for early/late season and are typically tied plain in high summer. Both have taken multiple fish this season.



Best fish so far: 2.8kg 2024 release tagged jack taken on #6 Ratropinna and intermediate line . . .



is when I see an obvious major feeding spell during daytime and the third, when suddenly feeling that I should. (It's surprising how often this third reason works and I would like to believe that's more than luck too!)

That first reason can definitely challenge my 1:4 aim, but who cares when you are sight fishing. The other two I try to keep as short as possible, working to the time-built conviction that most Central North Island lake trout I have caught, throughout the year and whatever the time, day or night, have been hooked within 15 minutes. Those two are mostly speculation, after all.

My second solution is to treat the lake exactly as I would a river; and although I am mainly talking tackle here, there's a strong link to my third solution here too. Basically, when fishing this lake most anglers quickly accept that anything goes in an environment where most fish are hooked by instinctive reaction to movement, rather than fooled into taking imitations of food items (and don't get me wrong here, I get the same thrill everyone else gets when fish hit out of the blue).

The fish I personally get the most satisfaction from are the average feeders, however. Those which hit my lure fairly gently and reject quickly; those I know I have genuinely *caught*. These demand total concentration. Like any other they will be approaching your lure at any angle, with time to inspect every part of your tackle closely. From numerous physical observations, typically, these average fish take that time and if unsure, peck at your lure from various directions in making their decision.

So my tackle is the same as an average river: as low AFTMA/light a rod and line as possible to accentuate touch; leader to match line colour if not clear; typically 4x fluoro tippet, rubbed with pumice to get rid of the surface shine; no larger a lure than the average size of the food item imitated. Throughout the session I concentrate on staying in touch with the lure, whatever the depth, assuming my target is this 'average' fish. The others will hook themselves, or not react at all.



My third and still worst-kept solution is to stop fishing the moment I lose concentration. With only about 20% of its 42km shoreline developed along a single side, Tarawera, at dawn, still feels as close to wilderness as only Okataina actually remains these days. Typically alone, listening to the tuis and bellbirds in half light before the Europeans chime in with colour, I aim to maintain as close to 'advance to contact' awareness as possible in a surprisingly similar (if lower adrenaline) environment. That's how I break the 1:4 ratio consistently and why I rarely fish beyond an hour without action – excuse the pun.

In closing, should you catch a fish with a tag just behind its dorsal fin in any of these Te Arawa Lakes, please send the data in to Fish & Game Eastern. These fish have known parentage and are tagged so that these combinations can be assessed for future use in the selective breeding programme, by the staff at the Ngongotaha Hatchery. You can ask to see where your fish sits in this group and to be entered into the draw for next year's licence, but will help keep the programme on track at least. The following details are needed: tag description – this one means 2024 release, T hatchery pairing; the fish's length from tip of the nose to the centre of the tail; its weight in kilograms. You can ring, email or post the data to the hatchery or do so online: <https://www.surveymonkey.com/r/QCH5ZR6>

Looking ahead, late November will prove better for sure once smelting begins in earnest; probably after full moon. Todd comes back before then and we are planning to put a spin/jig-based column together next issue, to compare against my fly. Meantime the hip operation is booked for immediately after this issue has been distributed and exactly what I will be able to do for six weeks afterwards remains to be seen. I have a float tube that should help recovery and by then, the thermocline will likely be around 20m. So once able to drive again, after the usual morning session, I am looking forward to getting back onto the Ngongotaha. It's been *far too long* since brown trout have challenged my sight fishing ability, as much as Tarawera rainbows do my blind fishing concentration . . .



Public Servants, not *Rulers*

Opinion, by Tony Orman

In the 1860s the new colony of New Zealand set up an "acclimatisation societies" administration which over a century later in 1990, morphed into the current Fish and Game organisation. Ever since then successive governments have tried to take over the administration of trout and salmon fishing and duck and game bird shooting

The motives behind some of the government takeover moves might have been monetary, i.e., Fish and Game licence money. But in the last 50 years the clear motive has been to remove another potential obstacle to government policies to exploit resources such as river water for irrigation and for hydro-electric generation, or just to overrule opposition to freshwater pollution. The current coalition government's Fast Track Approvals Act passed undemocratically under "urgency" has been championed by ministers Shane Jones and Chris Bishop. Its aim is unashamedly full exploitation powers of natural resources, including rivers and public lands. Minister Jones isn't satisfied even with the Fast Track law and wants greater speed towards further exploitation of natural resources. The fact many of these resources are public property does not seem to matter.

Over the decades, both acclimatisation societies and Fish and Game have often been to the fore in conservation issues, advocating for the "wise use of resources."

Both organisations, for over a century, have been involved in the biggest fights to save our environment: the "Save Manapouri" campaign, opposition to trout farming, the proposal to build an aluminium smelter at Aramoana near Dunedin, and countless hydroelectric and irrigation projects.

But then Government interference with outdoor sport administration goes back a long way. For example, in 1907, the government of the day cut Rotorua and its lakes out from the Auckland Acclimatisation Society region and put them in their own government region under control of the Tourist Department.

That deprived the Auckland Acclimatisation Society of most of its licence revenue. In doing so, the government arrogantly ignored a select committee's recommendations against this move — an action one paper said was "gross abuse of administrative authority".

But governments continued to enviously eye the sporting public's fishing and shooting administration and management.

Other takeover moves ensued. Acclimatisation societies fought back.

"The New Zealand Fishing and Shooting Gazette" in its September 1, 1939 issue in an editorial telling the Minister of Internal Affairs W "Bill" Parry that his idea for a government department to take over acclimatisation societies was nonsense.

STATE CONTROL

The president of the Auckland Acclimatisation Society then starkly spelt out that the choice was between acclimatisation societies or state control. The bid by governments for state control of fish and game has been both open and covert.



In 1968, the National government showed its hand when it set up a Commission of Enquiry into the Organisation of Wildlife Management and Research. It became popularly known as the Hunn Report.

An editorial in the New Zealand Outdoors magazine (May 1971) said "the dominant theme of the Hunn Report is a government administered management of the country's fish, game and wildlife resources." The target in the sights of government was the Acclimatisation Society organisation, the fore-runner of today's Fish and Game organisation. The editorial commented on the Acclimatisation society model as having "some faults, some domestic and some national, but one thing is undeniable in that the Acclimatisation Society organisation does give the sportsman the right and voice in managing his/her own affairs."

The Hunn Report was shelved with a change of government in 1972 when Norman Kirk led Labour to a landslide election victory with issues such as "Save Manapouri," opposition to trout farming, land sales to foreigners and commercial exploitation of fishing and hunting to the fore in the election campaign.

But the envious desire of government didn't go away and the intent on seizing control of Fish and Game was only just below the surface.

The Labour government that had been strongly elected in 1972 disintegrated into a leaderless party after the death of Prime Minister Norman Kirk, himself a keen outdoorsman.

The new prime minister was the weak and inept Bill Rowling. With Kirk no longer there, bureaucrats in departments set Henry May, Minister of Internal Affairs, on course to make yet another state grab for control of Fish and Game administration.

Entitled a "National Executive Scheme" another state control bid was launched by government. Some weak, compliant acclimatisation society heads were ready to surrender. At the Marlborough Acclimatisation Society AGM meeting, I proposed a motion strongly opposing government's takeover plans. The acclimatisation society's solicitor angrily spoke against the motion and (said "you'll f--- things up."

The motion was strongly endorsed by the meeting, only the solicitor, chairman and one other voting against.

MAY'S TIRADE

As a spokesman for the NZ Federation of Freshwater Anglers (NZFFA) I opposed the proposed government interference and wrote to the Minister of Internal Affairs Henry May. His reply was a three-page rant in which he labelled me as "ignorant, emotionally obsessed and loose with the facts."

Of course his abusive tirade had been written by a departmental bureaucrat, but there again he had signed it. As John Henderson pointed out to me, I had struck a raw nerve because otherwise he would not have devoted three pages to me, plus the verbal abuse. After all, Henry May as minister could have just thanked me in a single sentence for my views.

Soon afterwards, NZFFA secretary the late Ted Bason and myself took the opportunity to see Prime Minister Rowling who was in Picton and available for interviews.

On entering the room at Oxley's Hotel and introducing ourselves, the Prime Minister emotionally exploded and shouted in an extraordinarily hot tempered outburst, "I know who you are, you took a swing at my minister!" He continued to shout abuse until he realised Ted and I were bemusedly smiling.

It's worth recounting this to emphasise the arrogance and depth of takeover intention and the verbal abuse that will usually be government's response.

Don't be afraid of politicians, they are merely public servants. But sadly for democracy and too often, they forget it.

SOLE AGENDA

Now I doubt if both Minister Henry May or PM Bill Rowling had ever gone trout fishing. Their sole agenda was state control of fish and game administration.

Although Rowling's Labour government at the 1975 election was defeated by National, led by Rob Muldoon, the threat of a government takeover loomed and then



surfaced. So in 1976 the late John Henderson, myself and Alan Simmons went as a deputation on behalf of the Federation of Freshwater Anglers to see Minister of Internal Affairs, Alan Highet, who assured us that no threatening gestures such as the Hunn Report would be implemented.

A New Zealand Outdoor magazine editorial (June 1976) slammed successive government's attempts to control fish and game administration. It urged acclimatisation society regional councils and the national council to "not be cowed by dictatorial ministerial demands." Where are those brave voices in 2025?

FIGHT OF THE CENTURY?

John B. Henderson, an ardent conservationist and former councillor on the Wellington Acclimatisation Society, had in presidential addresses to annual conferences of the New Zealand Deerstalkers Association, strongly criticised governments trying to control acclimatisation societies.

"Can you imagine the Prime Minister having the gall to seize control of rugby or racing — he would buy the fight of the century — which makes his manoeuvres with the fish and game sports all the more inexcusable."

He spoke of several attempts going back to the 1930s of government attempts to takeover fish and game administration.

Among many letters to the "New Zealand Outdoor", in the June 1976 issue, Alan Simmons wrote supporting "political independence for outdoor sportsmen" and rejecting government interference.

New Zealand's acclimatisation societies were primarily founded in the 1860s which makes the democratic model over 160 years old.

Now in 2025, it seems proposals designed to disinherit the outdoor sporting public of its multi-decades right to administer the public sports of trout and salmon fishing — and duck and game bird shooting — are in government's sights again. Quoting from the Beehive press release the reform of Fish & Game legislation under the new Minister of Hunting and Fishing will make several key changes, including: *Clarifying the roles and responsibilities so that regional Fish & Game councils focus on delivering hunting and fishing opportunities on the ground, with the New Zealand Council responsible for administrative tasks and policies.*

Shifting to a nationalised fee collection system to reduce double handling of licence fees and ensuring funding follows the demand on the resource.

Making more licence holders eligible to vote and stand in Fish & Game elections and requiring councillors to comply with professional standards.

Requiring Fish & Game councils to better consider the interests of other stakeholders such as farmers and the aviation sector in decision-making.

Requiring a national policy around advocacy and restricting court proceedings to within that policy.

A stand-alone Fish & Game Act will be created, to better recognise the organisation's contribution to helping New Zealanders hunt and fish.

Legislation will be introduced this year, and the Select Committee will provide an opportunity for stakeholders and the public to provide feedback on the proposals.

USER PAYS-USER SAYS

It seems to me that Fish and Game will have its wings severely clipped under these proposals. Take that on court action — such as opposing any despoiling of rivers for instance. This could only be taken by Fish and Game at regional level if the minister and the Fish and Game national office agree to allow it. At the very least, this will slow up Fish & Game's ability to respond to issues that negatively affect trout, salmon and native fish species habitat. Whatever eventuates, the outdoor sporting public will likely have much less say in the management of trout and salmon and protecting the environment of free flowing clean rivers.

Another proposal in discussion is for the new Hunting and Fishing minister to have the right to appoint at least two councillors to each regional Fish and Game council, and it least one iwi member. License holders (through Fish and Game) will pay the costs of these members riding roughshod over community values.



Analysing it all, there is the strong odour of the Fast-track legislation and harking back, the stench of the repugnant action in 2010 by National's Prime Minister John Key — and ironically the Minister for the Environment Nick Smith — in adopting a communist-styled takeover of Environment Canterbury Council. The motive was purely to launch the expansion of corporate dairying into drylands low-rainfall regions with subsequent heavy irrigation. They installed their own sycophantic puppet commissioners to speed up the exploitation.

The hostile takeover of ECan and now the proposed covert takeover of Fish and Game have much in common. There's more than a mild suspicion that corporate interests have been lobbying hard to get rid of Fish and Game.

In 2021 the Labour government commissioned a review into Fish and Game, released 27 April, 2021. Yet the then minister said Fish and Game's role was to "[protect] the freshwater and other values so precious to all New Zealanders." Those "precious values" now seem ignored by the coalition government. Already there are reports of some Fish and Game councils of not wanting to upset the Minister of Hunting and Fishing. They don't seem aware that the minister is a public servant — not a ruler of the public, nor the owner of the public property of rivers.

One thing should be abundantly clear — the policies and management required to sustain the large, egalitarian sports of fishing and hunting are the prerogative of the user, not politicians who have never held a rod in their lives and never will. Make sure to analyse this legislation when introduced to parliament and to have your say, where necessary, when it goes to Select Committee.

Footnote. Tony Orman has spent a lifetime fishing and hunting and is the author of some two dozen books, mostly on the outdoors. Former president of NZ Recreational Fishing Council and spent 30 plus years on acclimatisation society/fish and game councils.





Shared Trout Tapas

Wild to the table with Tony Smith ©

This is a simple preparation, easy and quick to put together, tasty and summery, a dish to share as an appetiser. You can adapt it to your own taste. Ideally, use a shallow serving dish that can be taken from oven to table. A Paella pan is ideal, an oven proof shallow baking or gratin dish good as well. The oven temperature appears high but we want to finish the dish quickly. This recipe would also work well in an outdoor pizza oven.



INGREDIENTS

500g Trout fillet cut into thumb sized pieces

A good grind of sea salt

2 pinches sugar

A little chopped dill

1 small courgette sliced (145g)

1 Small red onion diced (50g)

2 cloves garlic crushed

12-14 Cherry tomatoes cut into halves if they are large or just use a whole punnet.

3 small new potatoes cooked, cooled and sliced.

12 Olives of your choice.

150g Feta cut into 1cm. squares (use a knife dipped into hot water to make clean cuts)

A grind of black pepper

Some cold pressed New Zealand olive oil

A few extra fresh herbs such as dill, basil, chervil or parsley.

Fresh bread such as baguette, ciabatta or sough dough.



Season the cut fish with a generous grind of salt, add two pinches only of sugar and a little chopped dill, mix well cover and leave in the refrigerator for an hour. (You are slightly curing the fish)



Place the rack quite high in your oven and pre heat fan-bake to 220° c. We want a really high heat

Put a dash of oil into a fry-pan and flash fry the courgette onion and garlic, just a minute will do. Scatter them over the base of your baking pan or dish.



Arrange the tomatoes and potatoes onto your dish, then the trout pieces, feta and olives. Season with a grind of pepper. Place into hot oven, check after 5 minutes, it should not take any longer than 8 minutes.

Place the whole platter onto your table, garnish with the extra herbs, drizzle over a little extra oil and invite those around to come and enjoy.



riversmith55@gmail.com



Cicada's, sandflies and sunscreen . . .

It's **THAT** time again!

By Andrew Harding

There are certain moments on the New Zealand angling calendar that feel almost ceremonial. That first frost heralding the start of the Central North Island runs, opening day, and the pinnacle for me personally... that first chrip of an immature bright green cicada echoing across the garden. That sound isn't just summer arriving – it's a call to arms for fly anglers across Aotearoa, a signal that trout have shifted their gaze upwards and the summer-surface season has begun.

Spring has been a weather disaster for much of the country this year, it's a season start most of us just want to forget! Ahhh, Summer . . . January thru February is a fantastic time to be on the water . . . and although it often coincides with family xmas holidays, that doesn't mean it should curtail your fishing...

Of course, the Kiwi summer doesn't exist in a vacuum. Most of us aren't wandering alone through beech forests on week-long backcountry pilgrimages. We're in campgrounds, baches, Airbnbs, campervans and lakeside cabins, surrounded by kids, coolers, beach towels, inflatable unicorns, and in-laws who seemingly always want to know, "how long you'll be gone for"...

There's nothing subtle about a New Zealand summer. The light is sharper, the heat punchier, the air filled with the drone of insects and the smell of sunscreen. The rivers low and clear, tree branches trembling with cicadas, so loud they drown out conversation. Trout feel it too. Summer inspires confidence – in fish and anglers.





If there's one truth I've learned across nearly forty years of wandering New Zealand's rivers and lakes in pursuit of trout, it's this – they so often sit right under our noses. You don't always need to march into the wilderness, bash through matagouri, or cross three swing bridges to find fish. Sometimes the smartest angler is the one who doesn't stray far from camp.

Time and again I've watched keen, backcountry-obsessed anglers disappear into the hills all for a couple of slabby trout - while the old boy at the campground wanders down in his jandals, flicks a cicada up the foam-line in "the run above the bridge," and calmly hauls out a thick-shouldered seven pounder! It borders on rude how often this happens, especially on our lowland and even estuarine waters. There's a quiet magic in remembering that trout are creatures of logic and opportunity. Food, flow, shade, and a little cover – get those ingredients right, and the fish will be there. You don't always need to chase the horizon; sometimes the best water is that you can hear from your tent flap.

Summer is also a time when you can get away with sloppiness – beginners rejoice!... With cicadas falling from the trees like drunk paratroopers, the trout are patrolling the edges with their eyes locked skyward and you can get away with a bit of average-angling.

Presentation still matters... a bit, stealth never goes out of style, but hungry surface-feeding trout tuned to the sound and silhouette of big terrestrials aren't counting micro-drag ripples or analysing wing angles. They hear the "plop", see the protein, and instinct takes over. Overcasting, a splashy landing, even a twitch born from excitement rather than skill can all trigger an explosive eat. This is also when you tie on something outrageous: a foamy cicada the size of a matchbox, or a gigantic rubber-legged creation your seven-year-old tied for you as a xmas present.

There's a unique thrill in watching a trout rise to a big terrestrial. It begins almost lazily – a lift of the head, a slide toward the target – and then, when the decision is made, it's violence in slow motion. A white mouth appears, water erupts, and suddenly the fish is thrashing, shaking its head like it resents your optimism.







SIMPLICITY...

New Zealand summer trout don't ask much of holiday anglers – certainly not a pack full of gadgets or enough gear to summit Mt Aspiring. When the water's warm and the banks are buzzing, you can leave half your kit back at the campground and wander light. A rod, a handful of big dries, some \$12 polaroids from the local service-station, tippet, and you're in business. Jandals? Sure. Are they ideal? Absolutely not. Will you wear them anyway? Of course – because summer fishing isn't about perfection; it's about freedom!

Wet wading in shorts, gravel between your toes, sun on your shoulders, fly box rattling in your pocket – you feel like you could walk the whole river with nothing but the essentials and a grin. In the holiday season, simplicity isn't just enough; it's part of the magic.

Two hours. That's usually all you get before someone texts asking if you've seen the sunscreen (more on that in a bit!) or whether the kids can have an icecream for breakfast. And honestly? Two hours is enough. In those dawn sessions, before the cicadas reach full volume and before sunscreen begins sliding down your face stinging your eyes, life feels pretty bloody good!



Presentation still matters . . . a bit, stealth never goes out of style, but hungry surface-feeding trout tuned to the sound and silhouette of big terrestrials aren't counting micro-drag ripples or analysing wing angles . . .







BUZZZZZZ BZZZZZZZ, SWAT!

Then there are the sandflies. Nature's IRD collectors. The unrelenting gatekeepers of every beautiful river or lake margin in the country, especially in the south. No amount of romanticising can remove them from the story, and why would we? Summer in New Zealand wouldn't be authentic without leaping from a riverbank like a startled possum the moment a cloud of them decides you look like the lunch buffet.

You try everything. chemical sprays, natural balms, examining the bottle for any sign of that naughty word DEET (still the ONLY one that works for me!). You lather your ankles, your hands, the back of your neck, and still one (or a dozen) sneaks past like a ninja – honing in on that ONE HOLE in your poly-prop leggings, leaving a welt that will itch until February. Tip... make sure your poly-props have NO holes!

SLIP, SLOP, SLAP...

There's another predator in summer: the sun. It burns through clouds with the efficiency of a laser beam, and somehow a gentle breeze tricks you into forgetting you're slowly roasting. No Kiwi summer fishing yarn is complete without at least one adult returning to camp looking like a cooked pāua, claiming "Nah, just wind burn mate". We all do it. We pack rod, flies, net... and forget the sunscreen sitting in the car centre console. And yet we know better. Summer dry-fly fishing is an endurance sport. Your face, ears, hands, and neck all face the sun, and the river reflects it right back at you. Sunscreen isn't optional — it's gear. Just like floatant or tippet! The trick is remembering to put it on before you leave the driveway. Because once the trout start rising, discipline evaporates. You're waist-deep in warm current, eyes scanning for shadows and subtle rises on the far bank, and the tube in your pack may as well be 300km away...





FAMILY, FISHING AND THAT KIWI BALANCE

What makes the holiday season so uniquely special isn't just the fishing – it's how it fits around everything else. The kids running wild on the lawn. The smell of sausages and sunscreen. The cricket set permanently leaning against a chilly bin. The ritual of fish in the morning, river swims in the afternoon, and deck-chair naps in between.

For all the escapism, fishing and family aren't competing forces. They hold hands across December through February. And sometimes, if you're lucky, a small person joins you, asking a thousand questions and pointing excitedly every time they think they see a rise.... then the trout spooks because of their wildly-waving arms...







DO YOUR HOMEWORK...

In New Zealand, it feels like every truly great river or lake has a summer-holiday campsite tucked just around the bend. Do a little homework, sure – but half the fun is the gentle family persuasion. Plant the seed early. Talk up the bliss of icy-clear river swims over crowded surf beaches, the freedom of plunging into a glass-calm alpine lake at dusk. Leave a YouTube clip “accidentally” open – some grinning influencer wading into turquoise gin-clear river with mountains towering in the background. It works. Trust me...

One of my most cherished family summer escapes was to Twizel, camping lakeside beneath big skies and even bigger mountains. Days spent swimming and boating in the cool, glacial waters; evenings wandering shoreline tracks with warm dust underfoot, and at dawn, slipping off to nearby streams – one of a dozen world-class options at your fingertips – to tempt trophy browns in the fading light of day. Thirty-degree afternoons, smoky camp-kitchen dinners, kids falling asleep sun-kissed and satisfied. That’s the stuff that hard-wires itself into memory.

Head too far north – beyond Taupo – and those postcard-perfect, trout-rich playgrounds thin out a little with saltwater fly becoming a more viable option. But across the rest of the country? The list is dreamy. Roxburgh and Cromwell, Wanaka, Nelson, Napier and Hastings. Rotorua’s volcanic lakes, the raw green brilliance of Taranaki – not forgetting the Waikato, with its network of pasture-lined spring creeks that feel like secret water, somehow overlooked by the rest of the planet. Even far-flung West Coast locations like Haast and Hokitika offer amazing fishing and no shortage of family activities and amazing walks to partake in by day. Then there is the Catlins... oh my heart!

Ask anyone who grew up with summers spent near rivers and lakes, and they’ll tell you: these days stick with you. These sensory memories become the soundtrack to a lifetime of fishing, family, and sun-soaked nostalgia. The simple truth is a river or lake in summer doesn’t care about your deadlines, your inbox, or the stress you carried into the holiday.

It demands your attention, your patience, your presence – and in exchange, it offers life-long memories, a feeling to be thankful for.





What's Really In Our Lakes?

By Todd Storey

Over the years, as a university student down in Canterbury, I have explored many lakes and streams across the region. As an environmental science and chemistry student, I have also been taught through lectures and field studies what pollutants and contaminants have been and still are getting into rivers and lakes around New Zealand. Born and raised right next to one of New Zealand's most beautiful lakes, it is almost a guarantee for me to visit the most popular lake for university students, and anyone else in the Canterbury Region wanting to get away from the heat, but not a big saltwater person.

The Roto Kohatu Reserve is an extremely popular site during the summer time. The two-lake area consists of Lake Tahī, a privately-leased lake for jet powered vehicular fun, and Lake Rua, a public lake for swimming and recreational fun like paddle boarding, tree jumping and popping manus off the pontoon. The Roto Kohatu Reserve also has multiple other uses. There is a walking track that goes around the lakes and areas for people to park up get a barbeque going for the day. While this seems like a place that would be located somewhere away from the city, the opposite is the case; the Roto Kohatu Reserve is actually located just outside of an industrial sector, just a few km away from the Christchurch airport, heading towards Kaiapoi and Kaikoura.

The first time I drove me and my friends to the lake, I remember driving through the industrial sectors while passing signs saying we were going to the Roto Kohatu entrance or towards other nearby recreation areas, like the Orana wildlife park and the Harewood aviation park. This was a bit of a surprise to me because I had never thought of a lake being in an industrial area, but not as surprised as to find out it was a man-made lake which was previously used as gravel pits and landfill. This information made me both appreciate the change and wonder what affect that has had on the environment. For four years, I did not think too much of it, just going about my business and enjoying a lake I could go to during the hot summer times with my friends. Until Lake Rua had a spike in faecal bacterial contamination last summer and had to be cleaned back to lower levels back for public safety.

Recently, for my chemistry degree, I had the opportunity to do a lab-based course which displayed the skills we had learnt throughout the course. Immediately I thought about the lakes, the industrial sector built around them and the faecal spike. My curiosity was enough to convince me to use my love for fishing, lakes and science to combine them all into my project. Something not well known about these lake is that there are fish – brown trout and salmon, tench too – in them which can be caught, although I am yet to do so nor see anyone else catch one. This aspect combined with the numbers of people who use the waters and soils around the area got me thinking. Besides the former gravel extraction and landfill, what effect is the industrial area having on their environment?

First I researched the industrial area, to see what kind of work was going on and what might be emitted from those worksites. It's split into two different sectors. A building, concrete, timber and insulation-based sector located closest to Lake Tahī, to the west, and a road based sector, traffic, construction and trucking closest to Lake Rua, to the east. Along the north of both lakes was rural land with what I would describe as an undisturbed wetland nearest to the lakes.



Lake Tahiri





Stream leaving
Lake Tahī





Stream entering
Lake Rua





Lake Rua

So, using this information, I narrowed down what I wanted to look at in my project in terms of what was in the water and in the soils. I then looked at the best analytical chemistry methods to use for examining the soil (grass around the area and from the shores of both lakes) and lake water samples I wanted to collect, and what could be examined using those methods. In the end, I used microwave-plasma atomic emission spectroscopy (MPAES) and x-ray fluorescence (XRF) to analyse my soil samples for heavy metal like lead, cadmium, arsenic, zinc and copper, while using Ion Chromatography (IC) to analyse the lake water for anions like chloride, bromide, nitrate, nitrite, fluoride, sulphate and phosphate.

These MPAES and IC methods I had learnt throughout my chemistry degree and knew they could produce viable results to understand if the industrial sector was having any effect on the environment.

MPAES recorded the concentration of elements within a solution through the emission of light by a plasma ray, exciting the elements within the solution and emitting back a light which can be recorded and compared within the wavelengths of the given element.

IC analyses the affinity certain ions have to the stationary phase within the IC machine. The affinity of the ions is measured through the peak area of each ion and when compared to a calibration of the examined ions, allowing for a concentration to be determined. The solution was tested next to tap water, to observe any difference between the lake water and standard drinking water.

While I had not yet used XRF and could not, due to the restriction on who could use it, the process of XRF is like MPAES. It encompasses the use of an XRF gun to excite the elements within a sample, using high energy X-rays. This allows for a concentration to be bounced back to the gun through light being redirected. Thanks to a professor at the university, I was able to observe the use of the XRF machine and gain further information on the concentrations of certain heavy metals in the soil.

In all soil samples taken there was a high presence of zinc which was higher than background concentration. Lead and copper were very similar, with overall low concentrations and the industrial areas having higher levels. Arsenic was the lowest but the industrial site soil closest to Lake Tahi saw the concentration rise just slightly higher than background concentrations. While most of these metals are naturally found in soils through rock erosion over time, there could also be a case made that for zinc and lead (the two highest) some impact from industrial work could potentially be releasing these metals into the environment.

The water was the most interesting thing. Chloride and sulphate levels were higher for both lakes than those from the tap water, while fluoride and nitrate were way lower in concentration. The sulphate levels were the ones that shocked me, even though they were lower than recommended, because the main way sulphate gets into water is through mining. This could be attributed to possible use of gypsum – a soft sulphate mineral which is used in building materials, fertiliser and soil conditioner. For chloride, the levels in Lake Tahi were slightly higher than New Zealand Standard acceptable levels, which was concerning as this can have effects on the aquatic and bird life which inhabits the lake. Lake Rua samples were lower than the acceptable level but still concerning, since the stream which connects the two lakes during high rain fall periods could be moving more chloride into the lake.

Overall, the project produced some interesting results and many questions still need to be answered. If I had more time, resources and knowledge, this project could become a significantly important study into human impact on our environment and lakes. With the resources councils and experts in this sector have, I would hope that these results will not have future impact on the lake, the soil and the life within the ecosystem.

However, given this is a place that is so special to both locals and university students, how long will it be before contamination levels are higher than safely allowed? How long until something is done to protect not only this but other lakes and all parts of our environment from pollution?

Contact: toddstorey@hotmail.co.nz



A Late Start

By Larry Burke



I had a late start to the 2001-2002 season as work became a priority. Always short-staffed and with casual staff unsettling the residents, the staff agreed to work 96 hour fortnights, giving two full days out of fourteen off and never together. It was January 2002 before the Labour Department decided this was against the law.

Meanwhile I discovered trademe had some freshwater fishing pages and there were salmon anglers selling old beat up Zed Spinners rather than replating them and I got these mostly for around a dollar each and bought all that I could. Occasionally bulk lots came up and one lot was 600. These were sold by an angler who had unfortunately become too old to fish, a toolmaker who had made his own die. These were slightly weight-forward, 23 grams, and all silvered – I soon changed that. We paid \$600 for the lot and divided them between Martin, Colin and me. Along with other lots like 200 24 gram, I had plenty of painting and nail polishing to do.

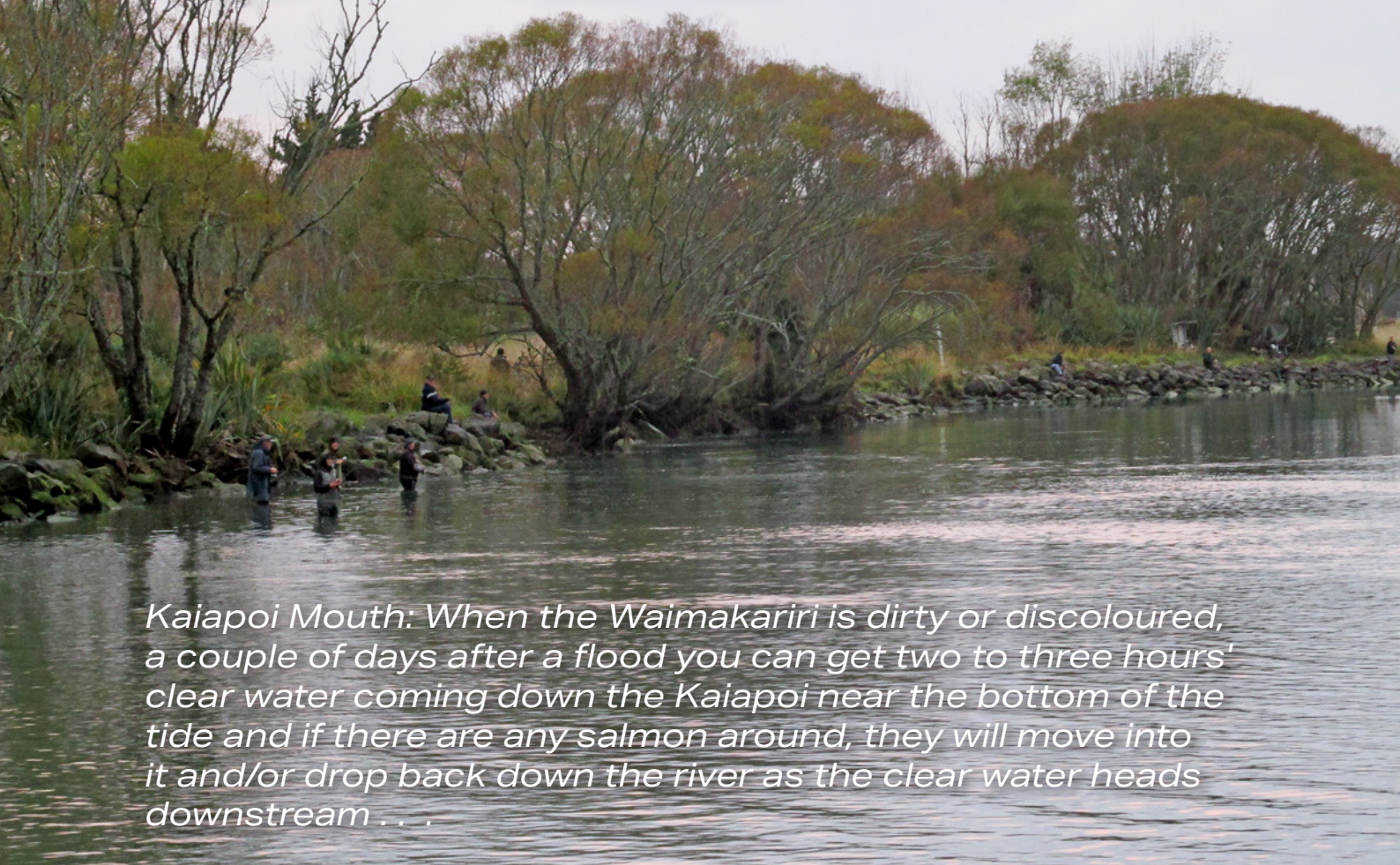
I was also looking for a new reel as my ABU one was wearing out and there were no spare parts available. I had already acquired two ABU-ALU reels, a 298 for river and a 398 for surf but they turned out unsuitable for salmon spinning, having a long stoke and an unskirted spool, which meant the line kept getting wrapped under the spool at the end of the cast. So I kept looking and discovered a Tica Taurus reel (type T-Tp 4000s/Tp 4000Sh) at the New Brighton sports store, which had 14 ball bearings in it! The draw back was the price, \$600. So I looked at it for a few weeks, checked it out on the net, finally gave in and brought it and could not wait to use it.

Now all I needed was a back up rod. Thanks to Trademe, I came across a rod like the one I have been using for the last 5 seasons, a Fenwick HMG Classic GS70MH 7-28 gram lure 4-8kg line. I got it for \$20, hardly used, and so was set for the season.

Having a computer had opened a new world for me. I could research all sorts of stuff about salmon, download any I fancied, and buy books – old and new. While there are few books written about salmon here in NZ, there are a handful I have read through completely and use mostly as text books. Some were hard to get hold of, like *Game Keepers of the Nation*, by R M McDowall, and another of his books *New Zealand Freshwater Fishes* has been well used. Another book that I have consulted often is *The Book of Lures* by R Calutt and Tim Simpson. This contains a chapter on selecting lures from the fish's view point which I have adapted and used. Another book written about Atlantic salmon (*The Complete Salmon Fisher*, Malcolm Greenhalgh) made me think about salmon eyesight, ranging from uv to infrared.







Kaiapoi Mouth: When the Waimakariri is dirty or discoloured, a couple of days after a flood you can get two to three hours' clear water coming down the Kaiapoi near the bottom of the tide and if there are any salmon around, they will move into it and/or drop back down the river as the clear water heads downstream . . .

I finally got out to The Point late January, only to find that while you could fish the Kaiapoi river mouth the hole off The Point had again filled with sand over the winter and the main stream of the river was now running down the Stewart Gully side. After a couple of trips with nothing happening, I decided on the 10th of February to head over to The Gully, hoping my luck would change – there always has to be a bit of luck involved in salmon fishing!

I did not get out to the river until around 9am and by that time the local salmon anglers who fish there were heading home, informing me there was nothing around. Did not look promising. So I took my time setting up with the new reel and was just getting into the rhythm of casting when my line stopped, I struck, and was into what felt like a good sized fish. A bit of a panic adjusting the drag which I hadn't done and then it was back into first fish of the season syndrome – familiar weak knees, etc – taking it easy, hoping it would stay on; and it did, I was able to beach it too, as it was near the bottom of the tide. What great fish to start the season with. 14lb/6.36kg, 30"/76cm long and an 18"/46cm girth; a fresh-run bright silver hen. What a start!

Calmed down and back into it without much movement. Around 11am the tide turned and I was thinking I should go, with plenty to do around home. Got into closing mode – 6 last casts – never finished as I felt the line go slack, tightened up and struck. Line screamed out, with the drag on the new reel working well; this salmon had a lot of fight in it did and some impressive runs before I was able to subdue it. Landing between me and the bank was a little difficult on the incoming tide. A shorter jack fish, with more muscle; 14lb/6.36kg, 29"/75cm long with a 19"/48cm girth. What a morning!

Heading home, very happy, I brushed off something that happened with the new reel which turned out a fault, that I snapped off a spinner during a cast when bail arm clicked over. This would become a repeated nuisance, one day losing 8! The reel was so smooth that if you put power into the cast the bail would click over, sending the spinner sailing across the river. Eventually I trained myself to lock the bail arm at The Point where it clicked over and that solved the problem. I think other anglers had the same problem, as over the next few years I was able to pick 3 more of these reels at very good prices through Trademe.



Was the 19th before I returned, with Stewarts Gully the destination again; a late afternoon fish to coincide with low tide. There was not much happening and I was thinking I should going to get home before Hazel got back from her evening job – amazingly she has never complained about me fishing so much, "At least I know where you are . . ." – when a salmon hit. You never get used to that moment. Everything comes alive and it seems like time stands still, focused on you and the fish, until it is landed. A 13lb/5.90kg hen, 29"/75cm long with a 17.5"/44cm girth. Another good salmon and all 3 fish of these fish were caught on my newly painted black and white Zed Spinners. THEY WORK.

This start had me looking forward to my now annual salmon fishing holiday, just 9 days away. Before that happened there was a large flood down the Waimakariri, big enough to clear the sand from The Point hole, though the river would be discoloured for much of March.

The first few days of my holiday were not encouraging. The river was still recovering from the flood and this one was a mixture of the high country and foothills run-off. That creates a problem wading, as the foothills put loess silt into the river, which is sticky and takes a while to wash away. I tried The Point first, the bed looked firm but I immediately sank up to knees in loess silt and could not move. The only way to get out is to move your feet around one at a time to loosen the silt, move forward a half a metre and then repeat with the other foot. I did not go back for a couple of days, watching the tides and easterly winds which, when combined, wash the silt away fairly quickly – the only time we appreciate a strong sea breeze there.



A great fish taken on the Tica Taurus . . .



16 pounds and freshly-run . . .



By the 3rd of March things were a lot better. Usually by myself on The Point side with everyone else at work, this day one of my now adult foster kids and her boyfriend wanted to try salmon fishing and came with me. It was an interesting day. Angler numbers on the other side of the Kaiapoi mouth were building up and a few salmon had been caught; it seemed like a run and strangely, they were all smaller and younger salmon. We were fishing an out-going afternoon tide. When the Waimakariri is dirty or discoloured, a couple of days after a flood you can get two to three hours' clear water coming down the Kaiapoi near the bottom of the tide and if there are any salmon around, they will move into it and/or drop back down the river as the clear water heads downstream.

I set up their gear using 12 and 14 gram zed spinners instead of the heavier ones used in the main river. I hooked a fish around 4pm, could tell it was a small one, beached it was a precocious jack. These small jacks are nature's way of making sure every possible egg is fertilized. They good eating. 4lb/1.8kg, 19.5"/49.5cm long with a 12.5"/32cm girth. Twenty five minutes later I was into another fish, this one was bigger and took a little longer to subdue. A fresh run hen. 7lb/3.18kg, 24"/51cm long, 15"/38 cm girth.

That was my day done however Bev's boyfriend was to get his first salmon and with some coaching, landed a small well-conditioned salmon. They went home happy with one of my fish as well. The small hens caught that day were hatchery salmon but the jacks were natural spawners.

Two days later my wondering if the rest of the season was going to be a small salmon one disappeared as late afternoon using larger 17gram of black and white zed I hooked into was it turned out the biggest fish of my season. Fighting a fish in the Kaiapoi river be stressful if there are anglers on both sides of the river usually the prime fishing from half tide down gives a river width of between 20 and 25 metres. Most anglers give you space if on The Point side always but sometimes the other side some will keep casting and as you don't have that much control sometimes where a salmon will run tangling line can happen I try to get the fish to run out into the main river but if the main river is discoloured that does not happen and you end up playing a salmon on a short line break offs are not a rare thing in such situations. I got it under control and beached it to find I had a 16.5lb/7.5kg, 32"/81cm long and a girth of 19.5"/49.5cm fresh run in amazing condition.

The next afternoon half a later than the previous day 5.30pm another salmon took a liking to my black and white spinner, other anglers were starting to notice this. Jeremy said there had a couple of enquiries at the shop for them commenting "I know who you have been watching" I landed a nice 12lb/5.45kg, 30"/76cm long, 16"/42cm girth. Beginning to think that this was going to be another great season.



Hazel must have been talking at her work about the salmon I had been catching as there was a request to take a friend of her boss's daughter salmon fishing. He was English, had done a lot of trout fishing in his home country but never salmon. Taking him out to The Point, I set him up with instructions on the Kaiapoi, casting across and upstream on about a 45 degree angle, winding fast until the spinner was opposite then slower, and bringing up against the current, then set up my gear. He asked, "Am I doing it right?" "Just about," I replied, "show you how". Casted, got the spinner moving, and just as it turned into the current it was taken in a heavy hit by a good fish. After a couple of good runs and surface splashing it was beached. "There, that's how you do it, but don't ask me for a repeat." The rest of the crew fishing the Waimakariri side of The Point turned around, "Might have known it would be you," was the comment. A 15lb/6.82kg, 31"/78.5cm long Jack, 16"/40.5cm girth.

Four days later, 12th March, I caught what was to be my last fish for the season, again in the Kaiapoi after another small fresh in the Waimakariri. It too was a good fish, another jack, 14.5 lb/6.6kg, 30"/76cm long, girth 18.5"/47cm.

The river flooded again but after it cleared the run had gone. We could have gone up river chasing them but fished a couple of days after the river cleared, until a strange thing happened. One morning, with the river like glass, suddenly it erupted. The whole of McIntoshs was boiling – a mass of Kahawai were chasing something. Then we found out why, as salmon smolt about 6 to 8 inches (15-20cm) long started hitting our spinners just about every cast. We stopped fishing, wanting these smolt back in 3 years time as spawning fish. It was an amazing sight. The smolt quickly learnt not to stay bunched up as Kahawai chasing individual smolt did not seem to be able to catch them. On the way home I called into the Silverstream hatchery, to see if they knew anything about the smolt and it was part of an experiment. They were releasing 500,000 over a short time period to see, in 3 years or so, if that resulted in an increase in numbers of returning spawning adult salmon. They had released them early this year to see if that made a difference. This was their second release. The last was after the close of the salmon season and had gone virtually unnoticed and those adult salmon were due back next season. Something to look forward to, we hoped.

Since then we, however, have started to find the run getting later, year on year until now (2025); mid March and April has become peak time on the Waimakariri. Water abstraction causing higher water river temperatures reaching 26 degrees midsummer on low flows, depleting oxygen, or so we thought. More about that later.

Meantime I was being asked about my black and white Zed Spinners that all my fish were caught on this season. Ended up with a large number to paint, not only for Martin, Colin and some of the crew. The Point too was becoming a more popular

place to fish, some anglers also bringing their partners and wives, finding we were a friendly bunch.

2001-02 Season
Average; 9 Salmon:
12.22/5.55kg, length
28.28"/71.8cm, girth
16.94"/43cm.

Time to start thinking
about the next season . . .



Releasing a foul-hooked fish at The Point, late March 2016.





Fly fishing has a way of connecting us deeply to some environments it presents . . .

Reoccurring Dreams

By Matt Hoole

Some rivers we visit can be extremely productive yet fail to ignite a spark within us. Perhaps the scenery is unappealing, or the rivers may lack the flow and structure we desire, making them less interesting to fish. Maybe they just feel empty of charisma. We may return, but only to catch their trout. Other rivers immediately have us gazing out of the office window, daydreaming of what lies around that next bend; opening multiple web pages at home to survey maps for new trails, desperate to find that hidden path through to untouched waters.

These are the rivers that hold meaning. It's as if they own us, pulling our emotional strings up and down like a puppet in the hands of a puppeteer. My dad used to have a good expression to define one of his. Throughout the time I was growing up, he'd say, "the bivio (bivouac) is calling me again", whenever he was getting a pull back to that special North Island backcountry river.

Such rivers can be on our doorstep, or a stretch far away that requires various modes of transportation to get in. Either way, as fly fishers we'll devise the most impressive of reasons, explanations and excuses just to get back there. When we're unable to venture out into these 'happy places', we're not unlike little lost puppy dogs with drooped lips and sagging ears, whimpering and complaining about our misfortunes.

As much as the rivers I'm referring to here are the places we aspire to go, have you too visited a river and experienced something more metaphysical? Something that dives deeper into the human psyche, for reasons we may never understand. What I'm alluding to here is 'The River', the one that constantly plagues our dreams.

In these reoccurring dreams, the land is wondrous, almost magical – like Charlie stepping into Willy Wonka's chocolate factory for the first time. Your senses are heightened; your feelings, magnified. You can hear the wind rustling through the trees and feel the warm earth massaging your feet. When hunched over, flicking a size 16 Black Gnat to a 3 pound trout tucked near-bank, you can almost read the fish's mind before it chooses to eat it.

These dreams often evolve. Mostly a mixture of triumph and near misses - like fly fishing at the best of times, however, always in the element. I often wake up when that large brown is almost to the net, or when I reach that elusive bend that's yet to be explored. And while the dreams have progressed over time, I've been fortunate enough to have now fished beyond that last bend. However, more often than not, I'm annoyingly pulled out of a euphoric state by my alarm clock bleating ignorantly at me, if only it could sense the occasion and slip into an automatic silent 'snooze' mode, for heaven's sake. I'm trusting that I'm not the only one here?

A decade ago, I picked up a fly rod again and started covering some spectacular waters across NSW, finding rivers that I hold in the highest regard, each having their own way of luring me back. But one captured my soul. I became desperate to see more of it, dragging my wife behind in upwards of forty degree heat while she was six months pregnant (I feel awful to admit that one). The sheer contentment felt when fishing its sandy golden pools was that compelling.





We had made the trip across from Sydney to a campground on the western side of the Kosciuszko National Park, Khancoban Lakeside Caravan Park. Nestled on the foreshore of Khancoban Pondage, we pitched the tent in searing summer heat while ominous storm clouds loomed on the horizon.

After settling in with light fading, we feasted on nachos with all the toppings while enjoying the facilities of the camp kitchen. Suddenly the sky had changed face, from sky blue to a mix of purple shades with gigantic jet black clouds swarming overhead, like dementours from Harry Potter about to suck the life and soul out of the place! Without hesitation, we bolted back to dismantle our gear, storing it under the fly for shelter when a heavy clap of thunder made us jump.

Lightning always amazes me. Even if you know it's coming, when it hits, it still scares the living pants off you.

There was no time to think, within minutes a magnificent electrical storm had arrived. It lit up the sky like fireworks being sprung from Luke Skywalker's lightsaber, before petering out almost as quickly as it had begun. Luckily for us, it didn't rain hard, barely enough to cool the ground surface down, which was gagging for water after a recent drought had plagued NSW for months. We dodged a bullet this time, being safe and sound without a moat surrounding the tent, but the opportunity to fish the evening rise had been squandered.

The following morning while sitting waiting for the gas burner to boil, I watched ducks comb the fringes of the dam for food. It was an eerie feeling, being so calm and still; hard to believe a lightning storm had ripped through the place just last night! We cooked up a warm breakfast before treating ourselves to a new blend of Italian ground coffee. It was definitely on the sweeter side, however tolerable, the caffeine hit at least helped boost morale.

Gear packed up mid-morning, we were on the road making the steep climb up the mountain. Benched through the Kosciuszko N.P, it was a beautiful twisting and turning road showcasing spectacular views of Eucalyptus forest. As we descended slowly, winding our way back down the other side, the Geehi Campground suddenly sprung on our right. Packed, especially along the river, but that was no surprise given it was Australia Day. We decided to pull away from the crowds by crossing the river and following a well benched track downstream.

This was the Swampy Plain river. Its beautiful gliding rapids flowing over perfect-looking round river stones. They tipped into sandy golden pools surrounded by heavily dense bush, which looked so manicured and presentable it gave the impression someone had just taken to it with the secateurs.





Standing on the bank, surveying, I was back in fishing heaven, on 'The River' again, the one that had been sweetly haunting my dreams. Everything about the river and its surroundings just fitted my eye.

I quickly stripped out some line, flicked my Pheasant Tail Nymph into the riffles, watching the indicator eagle-eyed as it began a toppling drift down into the next pool. Within a few short drifts, my indicator dipped. Raising my rod, a lively rainbow began jumping for glory on the other end, showing a bright band of red across its rib cage. I yelled out to Maïke in excitement and when I turned around, she was already there, armed with her camera, snapping the action.

What could have been the perfect start, ended in tears of laughter after realising I had forgotten my net. I fumbled around trying to bring the fish to hand, before it wriggled off the hook, right at my feet. Fishing, aye!

The biggest challenge of fishing the Swampy Plain on this particular day was not the fishing, but rather dodging people's lilos, rubber rings and swimming antics. Every perfect-looking pool we approached was either met with a cannon bomb exploding into the river from a nearby bank, or people cruising down river on a blown up Australian iconic animal flotation of some sort. Although frustrating, I had to see the funny side of it and couldn't help but feel I was the one intruding today. We had good chats with crocodile riders and watched the Aussie larrikins with great humour, before carrying on our ways.

I caught a few small rainbows that afternoon, but concluded that the warm water levels and extreme heat of the day made for challenging fishing conditions. We'd decided to call it quits when a large u-shaped bend presented itself with an attractive piece of water at the bottom. I was hell-bent on getting there, but as we began, it meant cutting through waist high grass with our legs and ankles completely exposed. In summertime in Australia, this is never a good idea!





The huts stationed alongside the Swampy Plain River are made from the grey river stones from the river bed. Built for fisherman and grazers in the early to mid 1900s for shelter, these immaculate historic huts both highlight and preserve the history of the place.

After checking out Keebles Hut at Behrs Flat Campground, and its lifesize brown trout replica of Mrs A Nankervis' 1954 catch on the doorway, we continued down river to also take a look at Doctors Hut.







With my wife overheating and debating profusely against continuing, the odds were increasingly stacked against me, therefore we turned back. However, because I tried I'm often still reminded about it to this day. By the time we'd arrived back at Geehi Campground, our thermostats were literally busting out of their internal shells. We hadn't anticipated going far at the beginning of the day, and therefore had only brought one bottle of water along with us. However, because the river was so intriguing, we'd been pulled further and further downstream like a magnetic force showing us the way forward. Now, feeling more and more concerned for Maike, I found a large sandy pool for her with an overhanging plantation creating natural shade. Boy was it a beauty! With clothes and all on, we lay in the river almost completely underwater, until our core body temperature had reached a workable level. It was 42 degrees when we arrived back at the car. We dared not touch its paintwork being black and sitting scorching in the hot sun for hours. With a spare change of clothes waiting, plenty of water available and an air con getting pushed to its limits, things started to look up. Unfortunately that meant having to leave, with a modest seven hour return drive to Sydney's northern beaches.

This is the river that has plagued my dreams, a river known for holding some big brown trout and a reputation for a great evening rise. No, I still haven't returned to its riverbanks for over seven years, yet I think about the river often. There have been many occasions when my wife and I were planning a camping trip there and for some unknown reason, we steered in another direction for something new. I know I will return, however. I need to know why this river keeps 'calling me'. Is there something waiting for me there that I desperately desire? A trophy brown perhaps? Or more than likely, could it be the river here in Australia where life made sense and all of my worries and problems faded away, disappearing down its tranquil riffles – following over its perfectly symmetrical river stones.

As fly fishers, maybe we all have these rivers, their magnetic forces drawing us – entering our dreams, and calling us back to find out their secrets – and ourselves in the process. I will be back and until then, those recurring dreams will have to do!



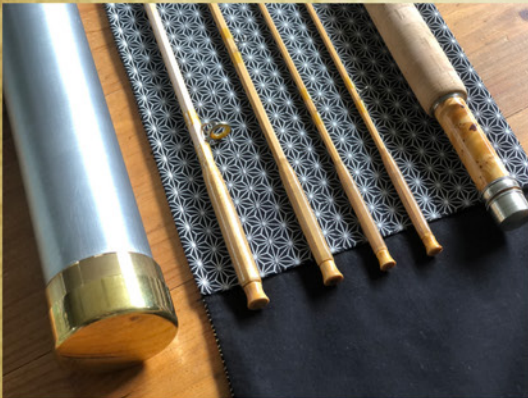


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