



Issue 196

TROUT FISHER

Fly focused but totally transferable

Autumn 2026

THE HUTT: hanging on by a thread?

Cool & Well-Oxygenated ~ Sparse – the name of the game

More adaptations ~ Trout Moods

DODGING BEARS AND SEALS

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All enquires to Peter Storey:-
Email: peter@nztroutfisher.co.nz.
Telephone: +64 7 3628914;
Mobile and What'sApp: +64 274844494.

Cover & Here: Passion Vine Hoppers. (PWS)

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Talking Plenty with Peter Storey highlights the basic facts behind successful high summer and early autumn fishing and introduces an alternative profile to show to river fish.

SPARSE The Name of the Game

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Tony Orman contends that human vision and perception is at odds with a trout's vision and perception.

THE HUTT: *hanging on by a thread?*

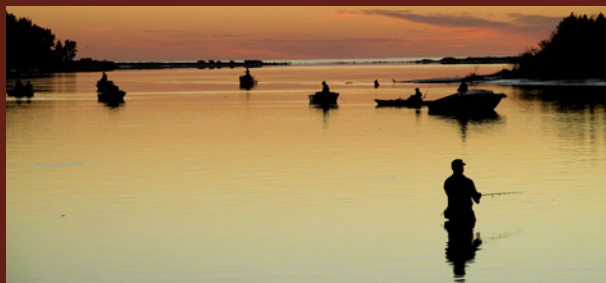
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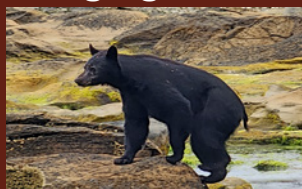
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Matt Hoole suggest that, 'if you've been fly fishing for a long time, you would've no doubt come across trout that really do appear to display certain emotions, not unlike humans.'

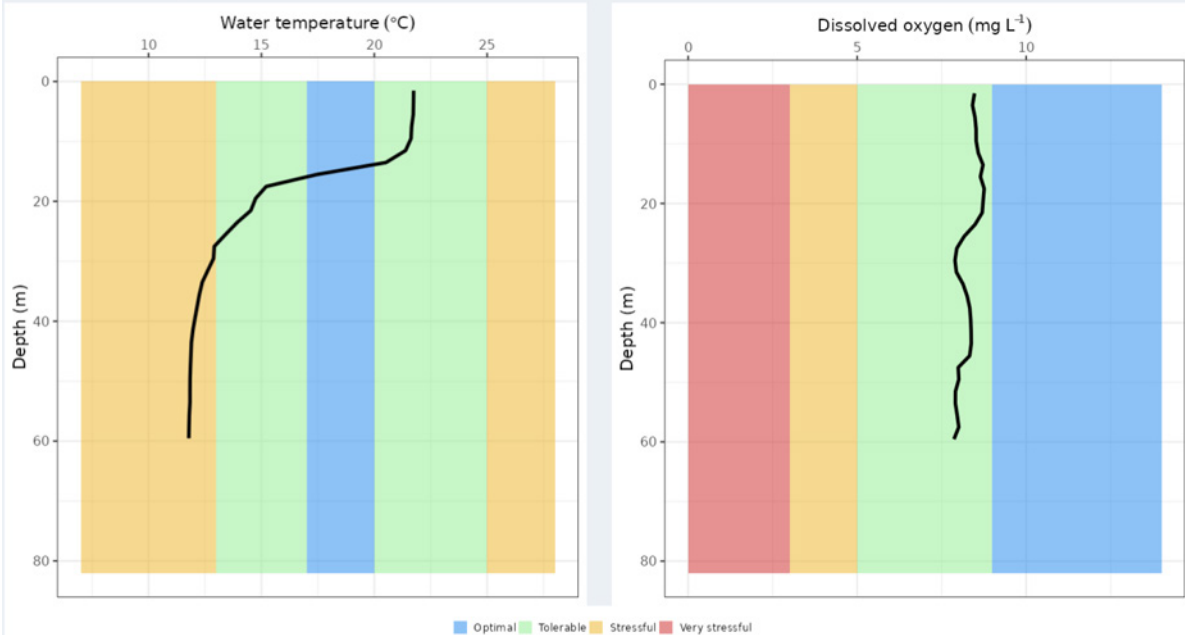
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Fish habitat suitability at 08 AM 17-Jan-2026 NZDT

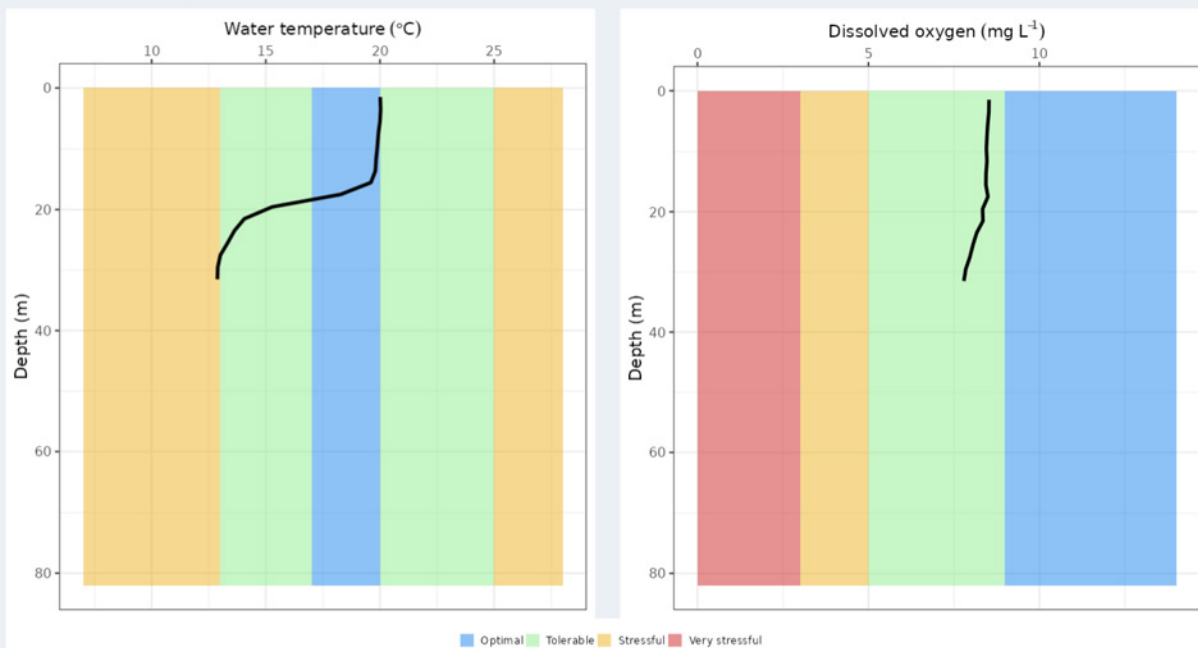


For the next three months, fish where trout are . . .

Cool & Well-Oxygenated

Talking Plenty with Peter Storey

Fish habitat suitability at 07 AM 22-Jan-2026 NZDT





Mid-January, midday, and it's 22°C. Earlier this week it was 28°C and we can expect more of that over the next three months. Even if they are cooler than usual, the black line crossing the blue area on these charts will be mainly headed one way until April, and that's downward. Surface water temperatures will soon be beyond tolerable levels for rainbow trout and already here in Tarawera, at the coolest part of the day, dawn, even 1 year-plus fish are feeding where optimal temperature and maximum oxygen levels coincide within that comfort range.

Having written that, just five days later, after heavy rain, strong wind and low teens Celsius peak daytime temperature, that same water column is back to where it was in late November and the trout, for now, can again feed wherever they choose. Nonetheless, this 'anomaly' supports the title's claim and shows precisely how valuable these Limnotrack charts can be to anglers. Especially, I've also recently been reminded, when comparing physical depth markers against electronic readings. A lot depends on the quality of the latter, of course, but for my money there is NO substitute for something you can both hear and feel when fishing in poor light. A blob of superglue on my fast sinking fly line, 20m from the hook, works fine.

The same goes for rivers of course. The coolest will be those fed by spring water and/or at higher altitude in natural forest; the warmest, lowland rivers. Now add human activity onto that reality. The greater its flow and the better protected from pollutants, the more trout a river supports. It's that simple; and why this government's plan to weaken regional Fish & Game council response to both threats alarms me; especially when it's flagging the removal of regional government, while weakening freshwater protection in resource management legislation. (Will Kiwis still be happy to trade freshwater quality in 2026, seeking relief from a free market-driven, and so logically ever-upward, cost of living?)

In all rivers, year round, dissolved oxygen is highest in riffles, runs and rapids and these and pool heads are where most fish will be in water over 20°C. Minor temperature changes throughout any day, in any river, can be felt or measured. The optimum water temperature for trout feeding feels a little chilly to me, after about five minutes' wet wading. Otherwise, just pack a thermometer.



PASSION FRUIT HOPPER

The fluffy ones are immature but all can hop and readily will if disturbed! (A habit worth exploiting.)

Ever had a shop-bought fly slip back down the shank on you? If it has been tied on a barbed hook, the entire fly keeps moving up and down the shank each time you cast; if on barbless, that's probably all you have. Just a dollar or so down the drain when I started fishing here, that now represents at least \$4. Comparing what was available in tackle stores against what it was supposed to represent, first got me tying my own flies . . . and soon after, finding my own tying was much the same in this respect. It wasn't until I started tying by hand, on the river bank, that the logic of thread security in fly tying finally dawned on me.

This isn't surprising. How many fly tying sequences have you read which start off with something like, 'Bind the hook shank . . .' ? Even the world's most widely-known hand tyer implies that all you need is, ". . . an even covering from bend to eye with fine red-coloured wire." He adds that the wire needs to be, "locked so that it cannot spin around the hook shank", but that's all. My first hand ties followed the basic eye-to-bend logic implied and typically crumpled once snagged or taken.

It wasn't until I had dropped enough hooks onto river banks that the answer finally dawned. Ever since my sequences have begun with, "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." Tying on the bank, it also ensures the hook is still attached to whatever tying medium, when you drop it!

As we head into high summer and autumn, with even the coolest and best-oxygenated trout likely to be angler-savvy and therefore, wary, here's a small but locally very common insect profile those trout are less likely to have met. A tying which incorporates thread security and along the way, another eureka moment . . .

I owe my interest in Passion Fruit Hoppers to the late Renton Hunger, who pointed them out repeatedly along the Waikato Mangatutu, early April, 1990s. It was a cool, showery day but hoppers were everywhere and the trout, keyed into them. I've since noticed that chickens and many other birds deliberately target hoppers too, even wasps; all of which suggests a seasonal target with a significant protein content.



So, with my hip sorted and whatever the next three months bring weather-wise, there are hoppers-aplenty around Rotorua; and as soon as I feel strong enough to tackle Ngongotaha silt, I intend to find out if something few other anglers are likely to present this Autumn produces a confident response, from both species . . .

My standard river pattern, that Black Palmer hand tie, obviously cannot work here. Rent's pattern was a #14 standard hook, hare fur body, a triangular slip of red cock hackle overlaid for the wings, and a sparse red cock hackle; and it worked fine. I suspect it covered the plentiful small caddis as well. Whatever, throw a hopper onto water and it floats flat as a pancake, supported by those highly unusual wings.

Trapping the enclosed air brings deer hair close to foam in buoyancy with natural colouring and, arguably, a far more life-like presentation. Why not Passion Fruit Hoppers? A string of surprisingly close house/bushfly imitations chasing the body shape, followed by a far too fragile-fibre, parachute-style, twin-hackled outline variant later, I finally asked myself the question below and decided to find out how many hairs it took to float the chosen hook with the outline alone (Eureka!2).



PASSION FRUIT HOPPER – TROUT'S VIEW

What will trout react to here, within a few seconds maximum? Looking at this one shot through a window, at first glance I see a dark, roughly triangular shape. Next I notice a solid conical centre, what I know are legs but could just as easily be antennae, and plenty of inner wing patterning, none of which override that basic first glance outline, which is typically 70mm-100mm long and wide around here. I know it's a mix of browns and opaque spaces, but the first impression is simply, dark.



PASSION FRUIT HOPPER



Hook: #14 short shank; H 260 BL here.

Body, Legs & Wings: deer hair (chamois used here).

Thread: black or dark brown; black kevlar used here and .

Heavy hook wire? Regardless of the insect, that logic must be driven by what you are likely to hook and where. In the snag-infested lower Ngongotaha, that's 2kg+ fish of both species which typically must be held for go to have any chance of landing.



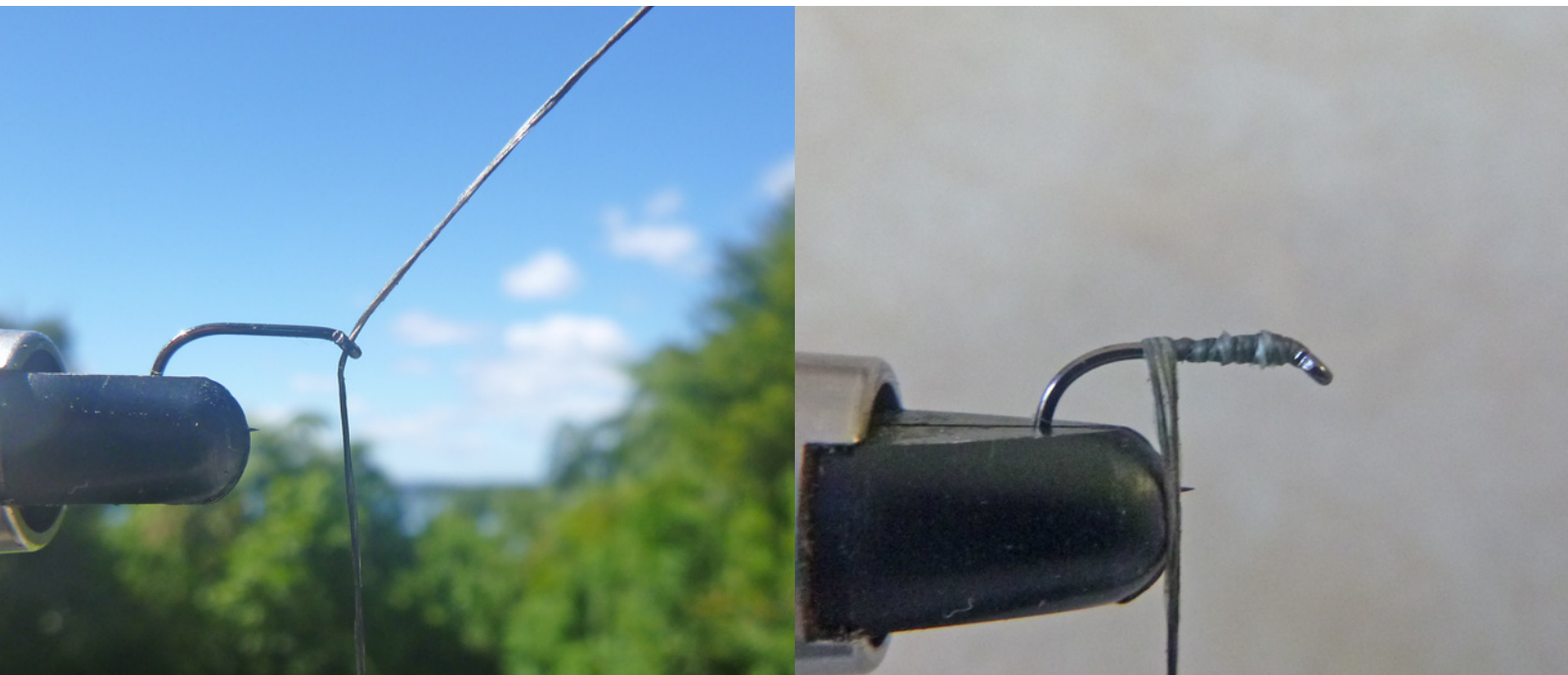
Wax the thread.

Waxing features heavily when I'm tying with deer hair, keeping loose hairs together and helping to secure each stage. ,



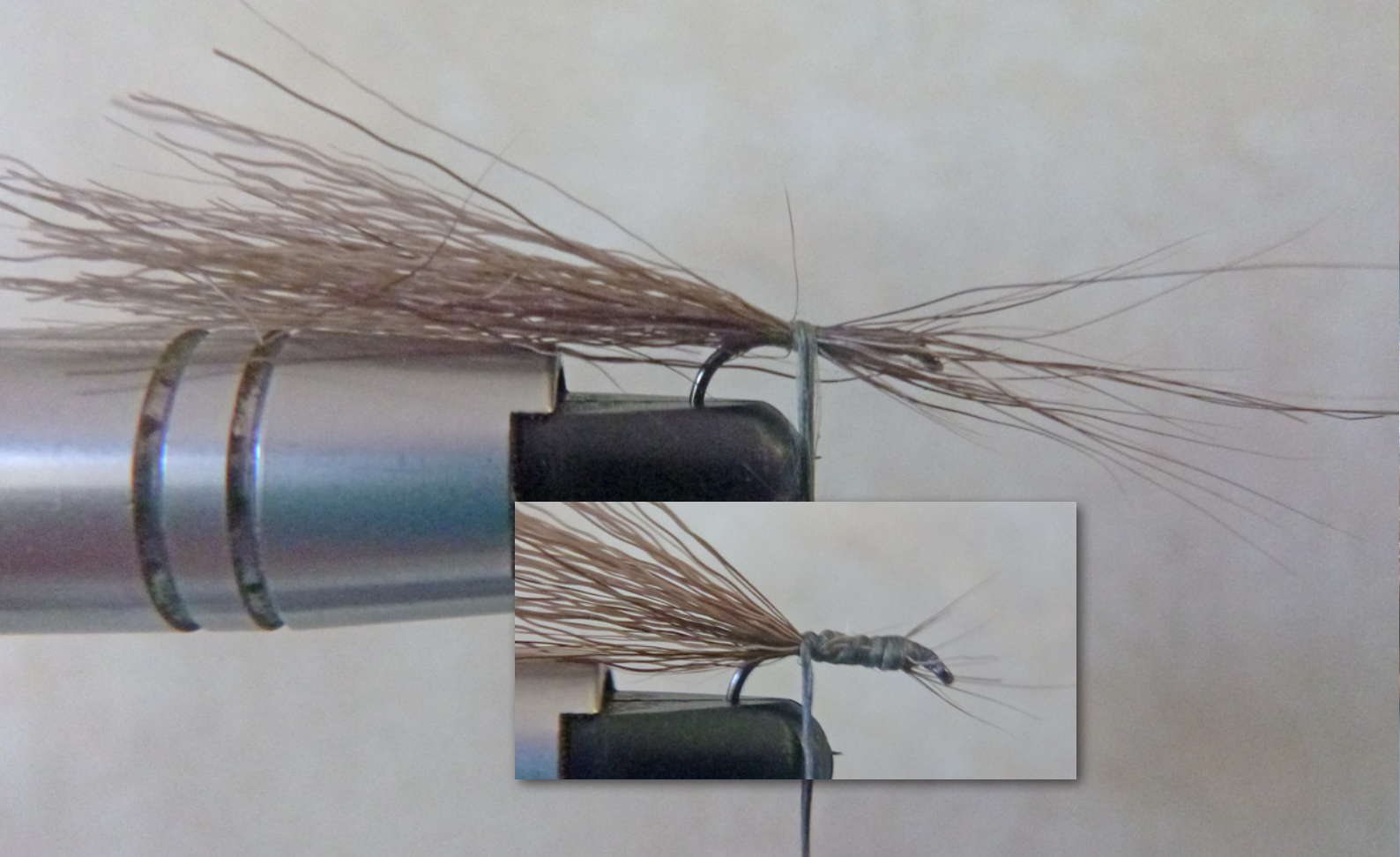


Cut a small clump of deer hair. Chamois has quite a lot of finer hairs between the larger outer ones and being buoyant can be used for body dubbing, here and other dry flies. Chamois is considerably shorter than red deer but possibly more buoyant.

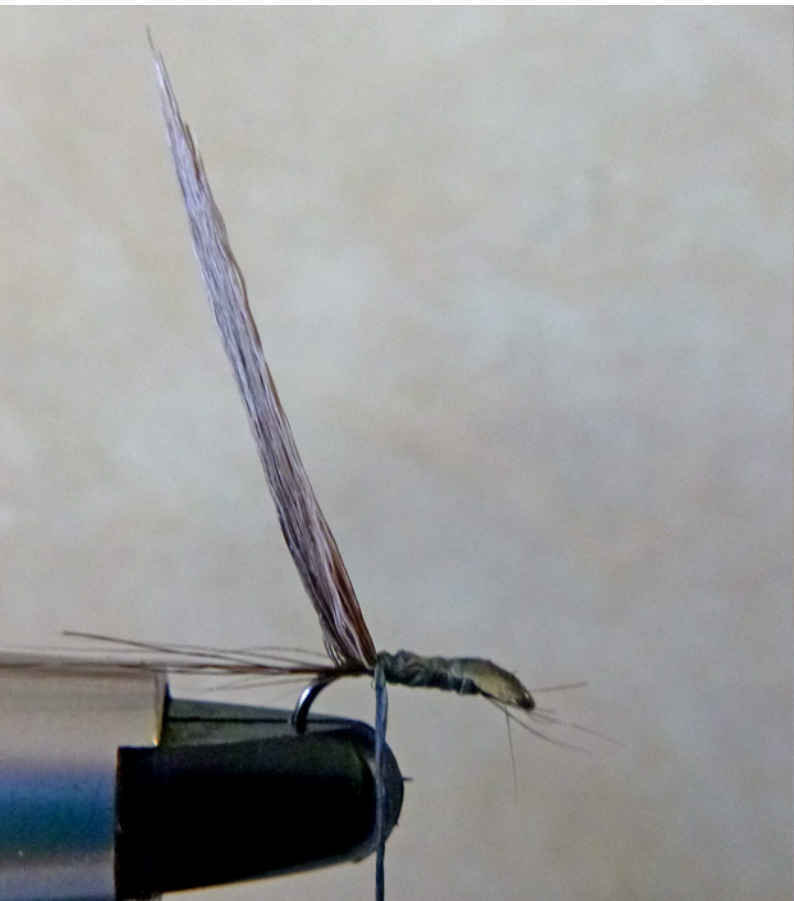


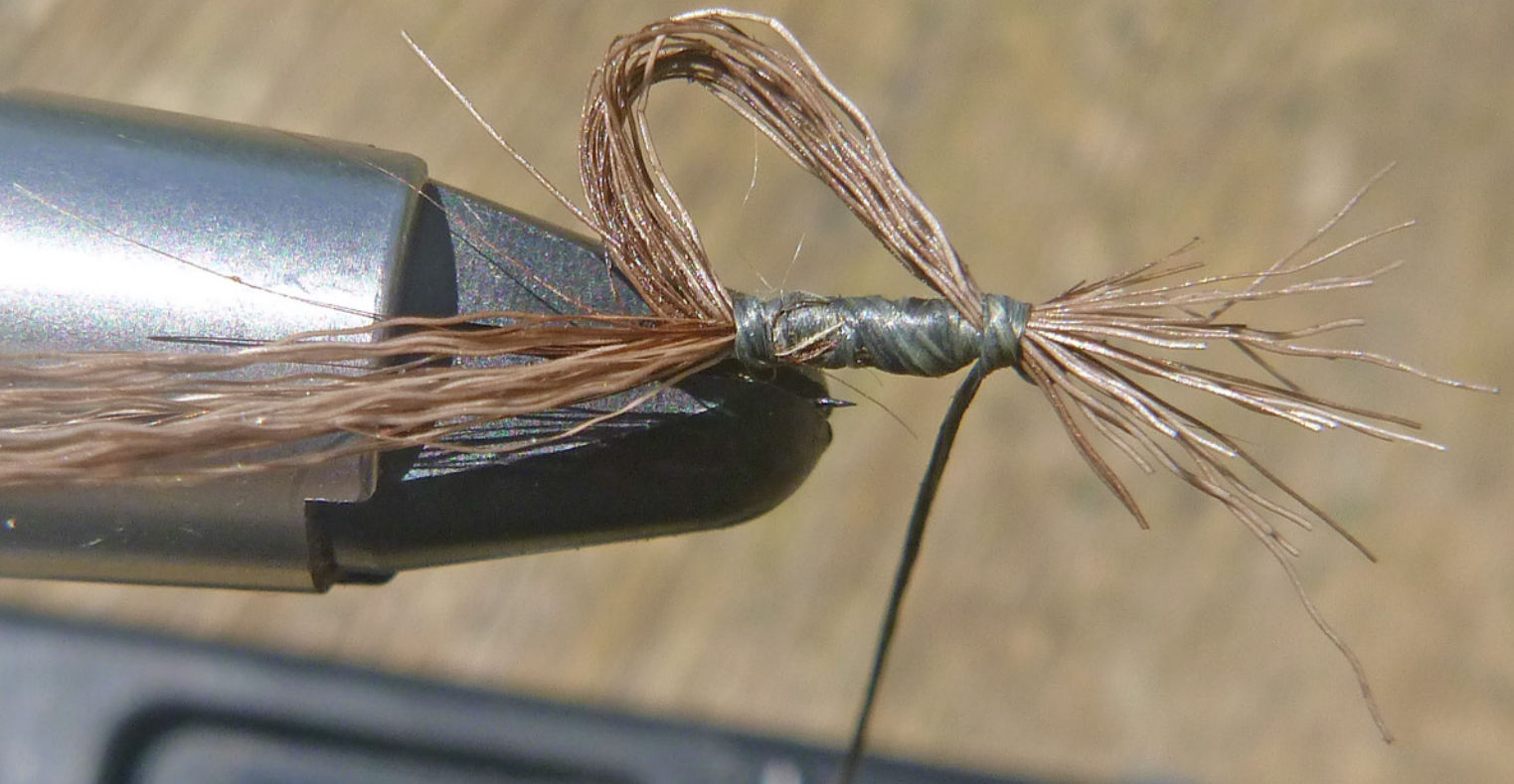
Pass the thread through the hook eye and bind the hook. I typically lock the thread end at least five turns along the shank before clipping the end away. Bind the shank. Wax the binding and re wax the thread.

Loose strands are a constant feature with kevlar but judging from trout reaction, they make no difference. Clearly I could use a finer tying thread here but kevlar's high strength is very handy, tying on the bank or at the vice.



Wax the thread. Trap a clump of hair on top of the shank, tips forward. Bind them to the shank up to a short head's distance of the eye. Pull the tips back over the bound shank. Bind back to bend. Wax the butt ends and split them.





Bring the split wings forward one by one, catching each one at the eye. Lock them both firmly with a whipped loop after completing the second wing.





Bring as many loose butt ends back over the lock. Bind them down, forming a small head, working backwards. Lock with two or three final whip finish turns. I have darkened the head and under body with a black felt tip before cementing the head.

Looking at the finished profile against the Leaf Hopper's, while clearly still struggling I am happy enough to use the result. Pulling more of the right wing forward would have produced a better rear profile and more dark bulk up front. The outline clearly needs more tidying and I must find way to shorten the head and tie off securely; basically, the profile still looks more bushfly than hopper.

Whatever, something has been plain to me all along this creative process. That over the coming three months, however each attempt turns out, here's another simple tie which clearly extends my range of insect profiles most likely to pass over cool and well-oxygenated, but likely angler-savvy trout.



SAWYER GREY GOOSE

SIZE



12

Frank Sawyer

SPARSE

The Name of the Game

By Tony Orman



Very recently a friend showed me some flies that were actually tied by the late Frank Sawyer. Now for those who may not have heard of Frank Sawyer (1906–1980), he was an English river-keeper, writer, and inventor of such flies as the Pheasant Tail nymph, Grey Goose and Killer Bug. He wrote a classic book on nymph fishing entitled "Nymphs and the Trout" – well worth getting. When I was shown the Frank Sawyer-tied nymphs two features stood out, (a) their simplicity and (b) the sparse tying.

Ever had a look at natural nymphs in a trout stream? Pick up an underwater boulder and look at the tiny, crawling creatures. They are tiny, far smaller than the artificial trout nymphs you see on sale in tackle shops. I've always said often shop flies are over-dressed and designed to catch fishermen rather than trout!

That view was first imprinted on my thinking many years ago when as a teenage boy, I fished tributaries of the Manawatu River. We used wooden greenheart fly rods and fished the little traditional English wet flies with three of our favourite patterns being Hardy's Favourite, Red Tip Governor and Peveril of the Peak. The trout were mostly small, under the legal limit, but they were fun to catch and then release.

As trout after trout after trout and more trout were caught, often the shop-bought flies became bedraggled and sparse as they got torn. But here's the significant thing – the sparser they became, the more effective they seemed to be. The savage maulings by the numerous little brown trout reduced the dressing to a more realistic imitative level.

The point is that what we as anglers see in the tackle shop's fly assortment, our perception judges it to be ideal. But perhaps the trout has a significantly different perception? The factor may be that we just don't see eye to eye with trout. Our vision and our perception is at odds with a trout's vision and perception.

Perception is the key word. It is what the eye transmits to the brain and the brain's ability to process it that is so important. It's nothing new.

The English "father" of nymphing, G E M Skues, in "The Way of a Trout With the Fly" written in 1921, discussed trout vision and saw through it all. "The nature and needs of trout differ greatly from those of man," he explained, "and it need not therefore surprise us if examination should lead us eventually to the conclusion that his (the trout's) perception by eyesight differs materially from that of man."

Research many years ago in the US examined the eye sight of frogs and said frogs do not actually see the whole insect but detect "insectedness". In other words frogs perceived the "insectedness," a term coined by a trout fishing writer in the US, Ted Trueblood. He applied it to fishing flies.

I always admired Ted Trueblood's articles which featured in the American "Field and Stream" magazine around the 1950-1960 period. He was down-to-earth, never conceited, always open-minded, practical and realistic in trying to fool trout with flies.

Take the example of an artificial trout fly. We instantly see a hook sticking out of it. We wouldn't be fooled by it. But the trout is – perhaps occasionally – fooled. Trout, even if they are being selective, take an artificial fly and obviously did not see, comprehend or perceive, there was a hook sticking out of the imitation. We, with human eyesight, immediately see the hook.

As Ted Trueblood observed, the trout is limited in intelligence, and doesn't see the hook, because it's totally focused on the fly.

Skues, put it a bit differently, and wrote, "The balance of probability, I think, leans to the theory that the trout is so obsessed by the pressure of appetite that he sees only what he wants to see – his supposed insect prey."

The reality, however, may be that the trout only sees and perceives not so much what it "wants to see" but what it is able to see and perceive. It's not so much that the trout doesn't see the hook but it doesn't have the perception, via brain, to recognise the hook. It is too obsessed with feeding; plus, it doesn't have the brain power to analyse.

A trout has a low intelligence and consequently a low ability of perception. Back in 1974 in my book, "Trout With Nymph", I wrote, "If we fail to catch rising or nymphing fish, it is not the trout's intelligence and cunning which causes it to ignore the artificial, but simply our failure to match the particular trout food at the moment."





One of the most surprising aspects on reading Frank Sawyer's classic book, "Trout and the Nymph" is that he used just four patterns – the Pheasant Tail, Grey Goose, Killer Bug and Bowtie Buzzer.

All four were basically simple creations. The Killer Bug for instance, is "of very simple construction, so simple that anyone looking at it, could be forgiven for thinking it could not possibly deceive a fish," as Sawyer explained. Heavily weighted with a double even covering of wire, the body is simply a Chadwick's darning wool of a pinkish-fawn shade wound around the hook.

The Pheasant Tail is just cock pheasant herl and copper wire. The Grey Goose uses herls from the wing feather of an "ordinary farmyard grey goose" of "a lightish grey, green, yellowish appearance," ribbed with gold coloured wire.

My perception of nymphs that are used today, compared to twenty years ago, is the use of smaller hook sizes such as 14, 16 and even 18. But in this trend, the flies are of more realistic size (i.e. tiny) than the once oft-used 10 and 12 sizes.

Again with patterns such as the Pheasant Tail, Grey Goose and Killer Bug, they are so simple that a human would see it for what it is. But a trout doesn't.

Ideally you tie your own trout flies. Dubbing, whether hare, possum or rabbit fur, is an ideal material as it seems to have that "insectedness" Ted Trueblood wrote of. Peacock herl has that quality too? So keep dubbing nymph bodies lightly dressed. In the main, naturals are not fat and bulky.

It's not just nymphs either. Dry flies should not be heavily dressed. Look at a natural riding down the current they're flimsy. I remember the late John Morton, fly tyer and fly fisher extraordinaire, emphasising that in tying his wonderful Hob Nail Boot night fly lure, to dress it sparsely. "Don't overdress!" he repeated.

It just doesn't apply to trout either. Over the last few seasons I've tended more and more to chasing kahawai with the fly rod. It's just such superb sport and prepared properly on capture and cooked adeptly, it's fine dining. But I digress.

Again I think in tying up saltwater patterns the tendency is to overdress the fly. Kahawai can on occasions be extremely fussy, especially when they are homing in on small bait fish. I've found that lightly dressed flies are so much better. I deliberately don't over-do the flashy materials either. Just a suggestion rather than "over-kill".



One evening recently I noted the kahawai just following the fly in almost trout-like behaviour. So I went to a smaller, lightly dressed fly, slowed the retrieve down and bingo! On another occasion I stood alongside three spin anglers. I hooked and landed over 20 kahawai on a small sparsely tied bait fish version I had whipped up at the vice. The spin anglers caught one kahawai between them.

The difference was the spinners were far too big, call it "over-dressed." But my small, sparse fly matched the bait fish that spilled out of the kahawai's stomach. That evening showed even kahawai can be selective and you have to apply "match the hatch" strategy. In the kahawai stomachs were very small bait fish which the spinners didn't match, but my small saltwater fly did.

The good thing of tying flies sparsely is that you get more economical use out of your material - "more bang for your bucks" as the saying goes. Unfortunately, a lot of tackle shops don't stock fly tying materials but I've found the mail order at "The Fly Shop" at Methven give great service and a wide range of materials.

There should be no hard and fast rules. There are exceptions; trout pattern terrestrials like the cicada and brown beetle and aquatic morsels like the dragonfly nymph require a good dollop of dressing. But for many and most nymphs, keep it sparse. For kahawai, cover the range of herrings to tiny bait fish with the latter demanding light dressings in the pattern.

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.



THE HUTT: hanging on . . .





... by a thread?

By Andrew Harding



There are rivers that feel remote, untouched, and safely distant from the pressures of modern life. Then there is the Hutt River – a fishery that runs straight through the machinery of a capital city, Wellington, and somehow, stubbornly, remains an incredible fishery for those who are prepared to accept its challenges... and there are many.

To fish the Hutt is to accept contradiction. It is a river under almost constant assault – mechanised, reshaped and cross-bladed by a Regional Council completely detached by the realities of how a river functions and its special meaning to the hundreds of people that enjoy its presence every day. Hemmed in by stop banks and suburbia, the Hutt, remarkably, continues to produce beautifully marked and well-conditioned browns. Few rivers in New Zealand test the resilience of both trout and angler quite like the Hutt.

The Hutt is a river under diggers however. On any given day, it is not unusual to arrive at the Hutt and find excavators sitting in the channel, reshaping gravel bars, trimming willows, pushing shingle, or re-profiling banks – the muddy slicks sweeping downstream for many kilometers. Flood protection work by the Greater Wellington Regional Council is a near-constant presence, particularly through the lower to middle reaches. The stated aim is safety – protecting homes, roads, and infrastructure from the river's frequent floods – but the cost to the river's natural form is obvious. The Hutt has been here long before humans walked its banks, let alone readily granted consents to build on its floodplain.

Cross-blading, a practice banned in almost every developed country due to its ecological impact, is still used throughout New Zealand. Gravel is flattened and redistributed into ruts, runs are filled, and braids simplified. The natural river is converted into a fast, shallow, shingle chute from source to sea; long sections resembling a managed drain, rather than a living river system. Invertebrate habitat is stripped away, spawning gravels disturbed, and holding-water disappears overnight. And yet, somehow, the fish remain, and in some stretches... in staggering numbers.

How?! The quality of its water . . .





Despite flowing through dense urban development, past roads, industrial areas, and stormwater outfalls, the river often runs clear and cold for the most part, thanks to its stable headwater environs. After rain it drops quickly, and in settled weather its clarity rivals far more remote fisheries. High summer can see toxic algae present, however those of us who have fished it for 30+ years will recall there was never any toxic algae prior to the onslaught of council river management ... coincidence?



The trout know better than to trust appearances. Hutt River browns are lean, sharp-eyed, and unforgiving. They spook at poor casts, reject drag instantly, and vanish if your shadow twitches a mere millimeter. Success, here on the Hutt, is often measured by a single fish fooled...

That these fish persist – feeding, spawning, surviving – in such a manipulated environment is a testament to their adaptability and to the underlying resilience of the river itself. Anglers often travel great distances to fish the Hutt as well, many driving for several hours from their homes or having a casual flick whilst in the CBD for business.

The Hutt receives pressure from so many angles. Urban proximity cuts both ways. The Hutt is accessible to everyone, and everyone uses it. Commercial rafting operations churn through prime water year-round, adding colour and noise to already pressured pools; and good on them, the river is not just for fishers and we need to share it to ensure its survival. Dog walkers are constant, often well-meaning, but frequently throwing sticks directly at that fish you've lined up... Swimmers and children cool off in the shallows, while four-wheel drives chew up spawning gravels and margins whenever the river drops low enough to invite them in.

None of this is malicious. The river is loved – perhaps too much – and its role as a recreational corridor is undeniable. But for anglers, especially those seeking solitude and subtlety, it all adds to the sense that the Hutt survives despite its popularity, and certainly not because of how it is managed.







Then there is the wind. Wellington's reputation is well-earned, and the Hutt Valley funnels northerlies into full-force gales that can turn casting into an exercise in humility. But here the river offers a small, local miracle around Upper Hutt. Between the Whakatikei confluence and Harcourt Park, the surrounding hills and valley orientation conspire to flip the script. The same northerly wind that howls into your face elsewhere, quietly drops in behind you, smoothing presentations and granting anglers a rare advantage of a wind assisted cast! On days when the rest of Wellington is being sandblasted, you can find yourself casting with a helping hand instead of fighting it. It is one of those pieces of local knowledge few are aware about that transforms a difficult fishery into a welcoming one.

Remarkably, the resilience of the Hutt is not just anecdotal – it is measurable. Recent drift-diving surveys by Fish & Game recorded a staggering 164 large browns per/kilometre in some sections, a figure that would be celebrated on far more remote and carefully protected fisheries. That density, achieved in a river subjected to constant physical disturbance, heavy recreational pressure, and urban confinement, is almost unbelievable. It speaks to both the productivity of the system and the adaptability of the fish that live there. Few rivers enduring this level of modification sustain such numbers, let alone large, mature trout. The data confirms what regular anglers already know – beneath the digger tracks and reshaped gravels, the Hutt remains a serious trout river.

Perhaps the most extraordinary thing about the Hutt River is how close it is. This is not a destination that requires helicopters or multi-day hikes. It flows within minutes of central Wellington, easily accessible by road, train, or even on foot. Heck, I even take my Vespa on warm summer days, although that was recently stolen whilst I was fishing... the joys of an urban fishery, I guess! Cruise ship passengers disembarking for a day ashore can, with minimal planning, find themselves stalking trophy (to them) trout in clear water before lunch, an experience long lost in their home countries.!





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In many ways, the Hutt is not an outlier but a warning. It is increasingly typical of rivers across New Zealand, where flood protection, urban expansion, gravel extraction, and recreational pressure steadily erode natural systems in the name of progress and safety. The same tensions seen on the Hutt – between protection and destruction, access and impact, short-term engineering solutions and long-term ecological cost – are playing out nationwide. What makes the Hutt different is not the challenges it faces, but how visible they are. Flowing through the heart of a city, its struggles cannot be ignored or hidden behind distance. In that sense, the Hutt is a measure of how New Zealand chooses to value its rivers in an increasingly crowded landscape.

The Hutt stands as an asset – one that Wellington should be fiercely proud of and far more protective toward. It proves that wild fisheries do not need to be distant to be valuable, and that proximity should inspire stewardship rather than exploitation... Take note Greater Wellington Regional Council







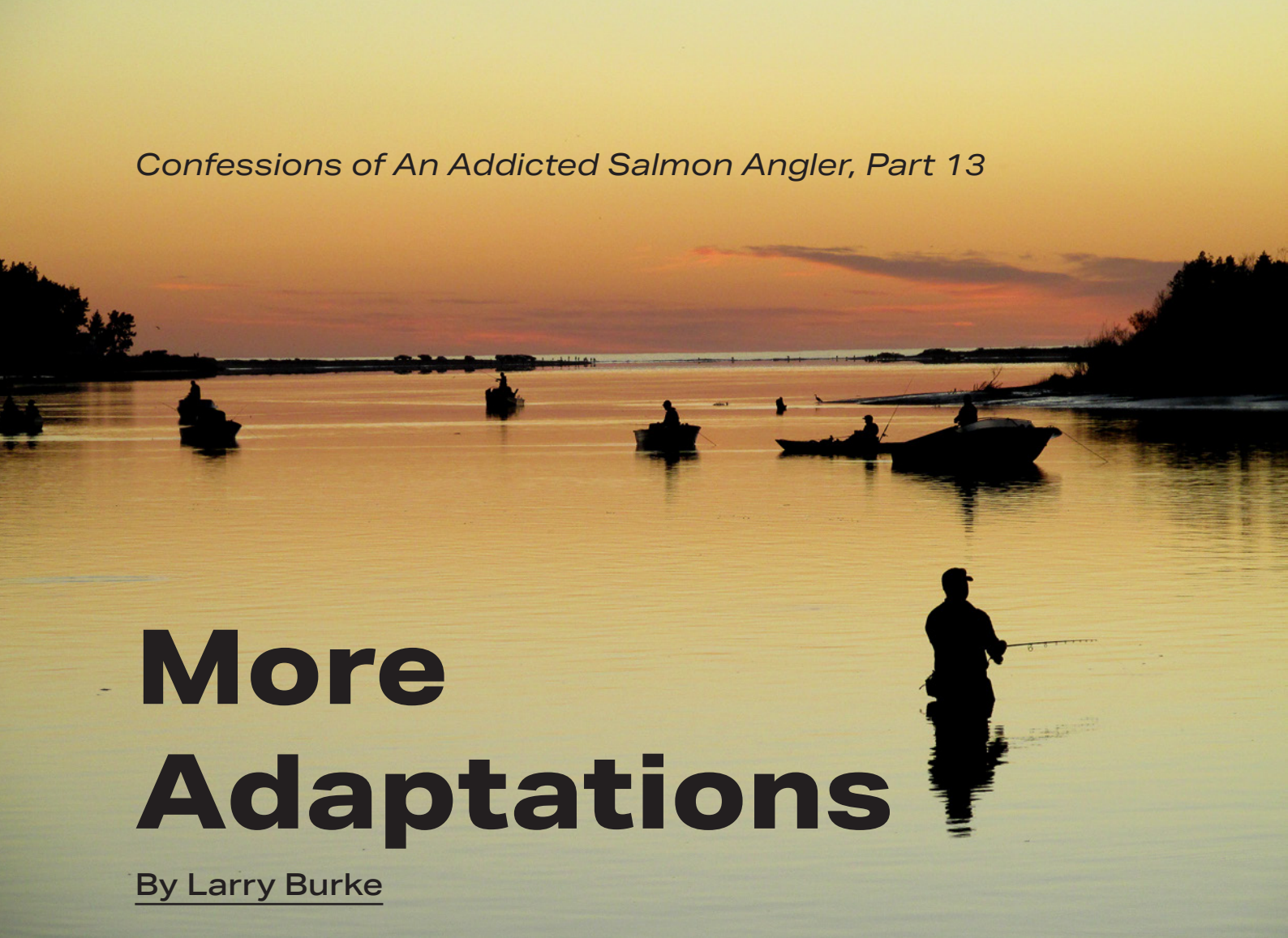


CROSSBLADING . . .

Realigning naturally-mobile river beds into a single straight channel. Here, a section of the Hutt River before and during the process, its downstream and after effects.

*Primary Purpose: To manage rivers . . . to protect pastoral, horticultural and urban land; maintain . . . flood carrying capacity and minimise lateral erosion.
(Horizons; Lower Manawatu River Scheme Meeting, 7 August 2024.)*





More Adaptations

By Larry Burke

The 2002-3 season kicked off more traditionally, after New Year. I had been out before then, of course, and it nearly paid off. Looking for changes in the hole off The Point, early December, there was just me and an angler on the McIntosh's side of the Kaiapoi river mouth, when out of nowhere I was into a salmon that did not feel right. There was no take, no line stopping, just a sudden weight and then the pull of a very angry fish, no head shaking; the hallmarks of a foul hooked fish. You never have full control over these fish; all you can do is hold on and hope the hook pulls. If that does not happen then you play the fish until it tires enough to get in to release, and that was the case with this one, a nice fish, probably around 12 or 13 lb. I said to the angler on the other side, "it's foul hooked". He said, "keep it, I won't tell anyone". I let it go nonetheless, hoping I had not worn it out to much.

Things had changed around the keeping of foul-hooked salmon by now. Resting salmon can be highly territorial and will sometimes hit a longer spinner in the middle, shake it, then spit it out. Some get hooked on the outside of the mouth nonetheless, making them much harder to control and possibly, able to jump more often. This leads some anglers to say that any salmon which jumps is foul-hooked when that may not be the case. So, traditionally, if a salmon was hooked around the mouth or by some, even anywhere on the head, it was accepted the fish was going for the spinner. The exception was lure fishing, where large, feathered flies were used below a weight on a specialised heavy flyrod with heavy line, fished along the edges near the mouth of the main rivers. (AKA 'Stroke-Hauling'. Ed.) This method often foul-hooked salmon and a few who fished this method would keep any fish they hooked.

Anyway, that was the start of my season.

I did not get out to the river again until 4th January as extra shifts during the Christmas New Year took my time. (In the 27 years coming up to 18th January 2026, I have had only about 4 complete Christmas and New Year off. I haven't



mind. I get paid extra and more importantly, get extra stat days to add to my salmon holiday in March each year.)

Out at The Point early, there were a good number of anglers already there including Mike, Martin and Dave, and McIntosh's was packed as usual. The weather was good, as was the atmosphere of normal fishing banter. Occasional salmon broke surface, keeping everyone interested, and a couple were caught on the McIntosh's rocks further down. We waited, knowing when the tide reaches its low point any salmon would be around the Kaiapoi mouth. They seem to wait for the tide to turn and then push up the Kaiapoi. Some that pass The Point even head back downriver into the next incoming tide flow and we often get a second chance at them. Around 10.30am, as the crowd on the rocks side was thinning out, my line stopped and instinctively, I struck. This time there was the familiar headshake, then the line stripped off the reel. I loosened the drag, so I could control it with my finger – this has become a habit on some of the reels from the past and besides, the first fish of the season to me is always the hardest to catch. After a few tense minutes Dave netted it for me. I was off the mark and had a good early fish to start the season, bright silver jack of 12lb(5.45kg), 28.5inches(72.5cm) long, with a 17.75 inch (45cm) girth. Caught on one of the few all black spinners I had left.

My record of salmon caught in January is an average of just under 1 fish, so I did not have much hope for the rest of the month. To my surprise, fishing The Point alone with most of the crew back at work, 2:40 pm on the 23rd, I hooked up again and successfully beached a slightly smaller well-conditioned hen at 11.5lb(5.23kg), 27 inches(68.5cm) long, with an 18inch(45.5cm) girth. I had equalled my January best total and the fever was strong.

5 days later, on my next days off, I was out daylight. A time I always like at The Point, as it is usually calm and the only disruption is boats coming down the Kaiapoi, looking for the best place to anchor in the hope of a salmon. The sun had hardly risen and I was fishing the Kaiapoi, just up from the mouth where there always was a good chance to hookup, something in the bottom structure of the river made it a good place to fish. The tide still quite high and I was using one of my dulled down silver zed spinners that I tended to use first thing in the morning. It was a soft take, almost like you nearly snag the bottom or pick some debris floating down the river. The head shake told me different. It is always different fighting salmon in the Kaiapoi. If they run up the river you are on a short line and it is easy to put too much pressure on, and pull the hook. A light drag or none at all, using finger control is best. This salmon seemed more interested in going up the Kaiapoi. Got it under control and beached a slightly smaller fish than the last two but still in great condition for its size, another hen of 10.5lb(4.77kg), 26inches (66cm) long, 18inch(45.5cm) girth. Fairly certain this was a Silverstream hatchery fish.

Although it seemed every fish this season was shrinking in size, I had broken my January record. The fever was strong and 2 days later (30th), instead of going to bed after night shift, I was back on the river a little later as I waited until Hazel had left for work, knowing she would not be happy about me going out there with no sleep. Low tide was about 11am so could back in time to have a nap before she got home. It was worth my while. 9.30am, fishing the Waimakariri side of The Point, casting in between the anchored boats, I again hooked into a strong-fighting salmon. This one felt bigger and stronger than the others and took a while to subdue, keeping it away from boat anchor lines and walking it up and down The Point until finally able to get it up and over the ledge. Another hen, 13lb(5.91kg), 28 inches(71cm) long, girth 18.5inches(46.5cm); another good fresh-run fish caught on a black and white Zed Spinner. As soon as the tide turned, I headed home for sleep, (and yes, Hazel was not happy when finding out I went fishing instead of going to bed). 4 salmon is still the best January I have had.

The fever was now at boiling point. 3 days later, 1st February, I was out there again Morning tide, not early as low tide was early afternoon. The easterly wind arrived as usual around midday, strong enough to stir the silt up along the edge. Most boats had left and I too was thinking about it when my spinner stopped on the swing, I struck before my brain registered it had, and was hooked up. I still haven't figured





The Point Crew

out what it is that causes me to strike. Maybe just my mind not catching up with the feel of the spinner action? Whatever, I was attached to another strong fish and had plenty of room to play it. Salmon become a little harder to land when the easterly has stirred up silt along the edge. They keep away from it and the waves along the edge can make landing difficult. I overcame that challenge and landed another fresh hen 11.75lb(5.34kg), 28.5inches(72cm) long, with an 18inch(45.5cm) girth); again on a black and white Zeddie. Getting on a roll.

Sometimes, when walking the mile to The Point I sense I am going to get a fish and I felt it the next day, out earlier as the tide was higher. This meant fishing the Kaiapoi, as even wading could not get you close enough to the ledge and your spinner sometimes gets stuck in the silt and clay. It was a calm day; the only disturbance, the occasional boat. These upset some anglers but I and a few others have realised that whenever nothing much is happening, a boat going past can change things. Perhaps salmon waiting to head up the Kaiapoi get out of their way but whatever, quite regularly fish will be hooked after boats pass. This day it happened again; I hooked into a fish down towards the main river and immediately needed to turn it away from the hole off The Point. If they get there, they sometimes sit under the ledge and there is nothing you can do to move them except wait and hope. I managed to turn him and hold on until he was tired enough to try and land over about 10 metres of very shallow water. The trick here is to have drag off, just enough tight line out, and the rod to the side where the hook is in the fish's mouth . . . maybe. If you can get them on their side and hold them like that you usually win but with any slack line they will upright themselves and be gone. Landed a 12lb(5.45kg), 28.5inch(72.5cm) long jack with a 17inch (43cm girth); my sixth fish of the season and only once before had I caught this many fish at this time of the season, in 94-95.



3 days later, between a night shift and a day shift, I was out there again with Colin, who had decided he wanted spin for a salmon instead of float fishing for them further up the Kaiapoi. We arrived late morning, low tide being well into the afternoon. Little was happening and Colin was having a snooze on the old couch pulled out of the river. Me, I was right on The Point casting down the Waimak when out of nowhere suddenly I was into a salmon. While concentrating on playing it an angler on the other side yelled out, "Behind you!". What looked like a whole willow tree was coming down our side of the river, about 10 metres away. I yelled for Colin. He didn't move! The anglers on the other side yelled. He didn't move! The tree reached me and I was trying to push it away while playing the fish, which luckily didn't run too far. By the time I landed the fish Colin had still not moved! Picked it up, walked over, and dripped water from it on his face. He woke up, looked at me and the fish, "When did you catch that?" I still laugh about that 10.5lb (4.77kg), 26inches(66cm) long, 17.5inch (44.5cm girth)' hen!

Next weekend I was amongst a crew that was growing week on week, with Environment Canterbury developing a regional park on both sides of the Waimakariri. Some of them seemed to know me, which I found strange. Out on the river, you tend to recognise fellow salmon anglers by the fishing gear they wear. This hit home when I brought a new hat. Anglers on McIntosh's side did not say much to until I had been out there several times and one of them asked, "Is that you Larry?" This day a few salmon were around and I netted one or two, just happy to catch up with everyone. Around 1400 I was again hooked up on a black and white Zed; a jack, 11.5lb (5.23kg), 28 inches(71cm), 17 inch (43cm) girth.

Another strange thing with salmon fishing is you usually have a time during the season when you don't catch anything for several weeks. All your fishing mates might be catching but you don't. The next 16 days proved a blank.

From 24th February I was on holiday, with 36 days of salmon fishing as long as the river stayed clear. Around 6pm, another salmon took my black and white spinner while fishing in the prime spot in the Kaiapoi. A scrappy fish, 10lb(4.55kg), 27inch(68.5cm), 16inches(40.5cm) girth, and a great start to my holiday.

Fishing was a little slow for the next week, out there every day, fishing peak times. Week days I was sometimes the only one fishing The Point, work getting the way of rest of the crew. Many were talking about moving holidays to cover the peak run, with autumn looking settled. My next fish hooked up 2nd March, late morning again, in the Kaiapoi; an 8lb(3.66kg), 24inch(51cm), 15inch(38cm girth) hen in great condition; a Kaiapoi hatchery 2 year at sea fish. (Seemed like the size was getting smaller and more hens showing up with the hatchery only releasing hens.) Two days later I caught the 11th fish, another hen, smaller than the last one at 6 lb(2.77kg), 22 inches(56cm) long, 14inch(35.5) girth – we call fish like this footballs (rugby) because of the shape. I seemed to be on a roll again.



A 'football'





Mike, Dave and Paul retrieving snags and lost lures

Next day, 6th March, fishing the afternoon just as the easterly sea breeze was kicking in again, fishing the Kaiapoi side of The Point, the black and white Zed worked again and I was into a surface fight with more anglers out this time, which makes things a bit more interesting when trying to land a salmon. Colin was also there with his movie camera, to see if he could get a fish on film. He did not get much with this one, another slightly bigger hatchery hen.

1.45 pm, again fishing the Kaiapoi, I almost had my rod pulled out of my hands with a savage strike that woke me up from the rhythm you get into with repeated short casting. This salmon did something totally unexpected; it shot down the Kaiapoi, into the Waimak, the drag screaming. This fish was like a jet boat, with half its back out of the water, taking metres of line; me stumbling after it, with anglers trying to get out of my way. It must have taken nearly 50 metres of line. I thought it was foulhooked but then saw the spinner in its jaw. Then it went deep for a while before turning back downstream towards me. Frantic winding to keep the line tight; concern with the hook now on the far side while putting a little pressure on, to turn the head upstream. Meanwhile Colin was trying to film all this. It was netted for me; easily, with most of its energy used up. My 13th fish for the season and a limit bag for the day. Another hen, 12lb(5.45kg), 28 inches(71cm) long, with a 17inch(43cm) girth. That was my last salmon on The Point that season, as a small flood arrived couple of days later and the run was off up the river.

Time to put Plan B into operation. On a low tide we waded out into the Kaiapoi and try to remove the snags full of balled up nylon and braid, built up from long lengths of broken line in tidal flow. Hook into one and you have no chance of getting your lure back. Occasionally, someone in scuba gear will come along and get buckets full of lures to sell back to anglers. We, however, try to get there first with sticks and rakes once the fish move on upstream and the tides are right, even getting some of our own lures back.

With little happening afterwards, next I decided it was time to pay a visit to the Silverstream hatchery. The first thing Selwyn Hawk (manager at the time) asked was, "Are you catching any jacks where you are fishing?" Thought that was strange until he explained about the 500,000 xx hens they had released. That's when I found about xx jack salmon, and how they manipulated the genetics, as the salmon farms only want hen fish. Did quite a bit of research on the subject after that.



Wondering what to do with the rest of my holiday I decided to try float fishing for salmon holed up upstream in the Kaiapoi, waiting for the right time to head into the hatchery. Selwyn said with the next southeast rainfall they would be there. I brought some of the large floats, snapper hooks and pilchard bait that were assembled with 2 hooks. As for snapper fishing, the float was on a running rig with a moveable stopper, so it could be set about 300 to 500mm off the bottom. You cast out into wherever you knew salmon were and let your float move in the current.

The trick (as I found out) is all in knowing when to set the hook. Salmon do not swallow the bait, they just seem to want to crunch it up. So the float moves differently. It goes under but you don't set the hook because the float will reappear and continue moving around. Only when it goes under a second time do you strike and hopefully, hook up, be that a salmon, eel, yellow-eyed mullet, or the occasional trout. Me? I was too impatient and struck too soon. Got laughed at and asked if I was trying to pull their heads off.

On the 24th and the 25th of March I finally managed to catch 2 small, 2-year old jacks; one 18inches(45.5cm) long, 12inch(30.5cm) girth, weighing 3.5lb(1.59kg); the other, 19inches(48cm) long, 12inch(30.5cm) girth, weighing 4lb(1.82kg). (Have thought since Mother Nature has a way of making up shortfalls with these 2-year-maturing jacks ensuring a continual flow of returning fish..)

That was the end of my holiday and season. I had a tally of 15 salmon, 10 hens and 5 jacks that averaged 9.68 lb(4.4kg), length 25.63 inches(65cm), with a girth 16.22inches(41.3cm) number wise good size ok. My 22 cubic foot freezer was full and only 7 months to the next season. Time to get them smoked and bottled on days off, then look at new adaptations and paint more lures, 11 of those salmon being caught on my painted black white Zed Spinners. As for the pilchards, I decided I would never use that method again.



The fish that took off like a jet boat





Trout Moods

By Matt Hoole



TROUT, like people, clearly display moods. Of course, we can't always differentiate each and every one of them, we're not all the Jeremy Wade's of the world. But if you've been fly fishing for a long time, you would've no doubt come across trout that really do appear to display certain emotions, not unlike humans. You need not be a rocket scientist to discover this, just have an observant eye for detail and perhaps, a lack of maturity in order to enjoy the humour of trout moods. So, let's rip the lid of this Tom Foolery and dive straight into the analysis of the moods of trout.

HAPPY TROUT

Happy trout like this, after being ripped around the pool with something sharp stuck in the top of their lip, are somehow still smiling at you once settled in the net. They emanate this feeling, that if we're to release them back into the water today, they'd only be too happy to do this again another time. When lifted out of the water for a grip and grin picture, their smile widens, perhaps to say to their comrades below, "Look at me lads, this is my moment with the fly fisher dude!"

My brother Dan caught an absolute cracker on a backcountry mission. This fish's smile was so big, it looked like a chimpanzee with a barrel full of bananas.

Happy trout look high on life, their body language exudes enlightenment, not unlike people who are also happy, these fish are living life to the fullest but in the underwater world. When a rainbow trout jumps high out of the water to snatch a dragonfly mid air, their buddies are no doubt reaching down to the bottom, dusting the algae off and ready to raise that 10/10 sign.

SAD TROUT

The type of sad trout that come to mind are the ones with big buggy eyes that look like they're rolling around like balls in a pinball machine. This, coupled with a narrow jaw and a more pointed face, reminds me of one of those cartoon gerbils shedding a tear with that sad downwards frown-look. I do remember catching a fat five pound rainbow jack, and when I finally landed him after he continuously nose dived down to the bottom, he portrayed a particularly sad look. However, he was completely beaten after fighting extraordinarily hard therefore his sad face was excused that time. We allowed him plenty of time to recover before he puckered up those lips and powered away once more.

I don't know if it's just me, but when I see another animal make a sad face I instantly feel warm and sympathetic towards them, however a sad 'trout face,' just makes me want to laugh! Of course there's exceptions to this rule of never wanting to see a fish in pain or discomfort, which I'm sure most fly fishers are in mutual agreement of and would always do their best to minimize interaction with the fish. However, just something extremely humorous when we come face to face with a sad looking trout, our stomachs instinctively tighten up in knots full of unrelenting





Looking so sad until sent back home . . .

laughter, our bottom lips may twitch or tremble with uncontrollable natural reflexes, it's exceptionally hard to draw ourselves back to our adulthood ways.

ANGRY TROUT

Angry trout have those sour expressions, the curled lip with a staunch face, like the stereotypical old fashioned boarding school teacher, strict and no longer tolerant of students' behaviour. They bully you around the pool with anger or rage, tearing fly line off your reel and somehow tangling it up in knots on the riverbank beside your feet. They're brutal in nature, retaliating with hostility and aggression. They remind me of Bull Hurley in the arm wrestling movie 'Over The Top,' quote - "And all I want to do is hurt him, cripple him, get him off the table." "And so he never dares try compete against me again." I'm sure angry trout is threatening the same thing underwater, while thrashing his head around vigorously preparing to snap you off.

When they do finally succumb to the net, she's still thrashing around like the fight has only just begun. Have you too noticed, these trout also make a habit of sticking up their dorsal fins to you in spite, when they swim away?



SCARED TROUT

Sure, trout are naturally scared, fearing many things from predators to environmental concerns; however, some trout when caught act absolutely terrified, careering around the pool, jumping up out of the water or flipping about madly on the surface. But wouldn't you, if you had a piece of monofilament hanging from your nose stud getting pulled around YOUR neighbourhood, against your will? In saying that, have you caught that awfully scared looking trout, those frozen eyes glaring back at you like they're staring up at a great big Neanderthal about to take a bite into their raw flesh? Not a kind human face just getting a kick out of fooling them. I guess we're not that far down the evolution chain after all and perhaps to them, we do look absolutely hideous! Maybe their IQ is far greater than we give them credit for and it's an intellectual ploy to feel sorry for them in order to release them back into the water.



Scared of the camera or the fly fisher?



SLEEPY TROUT

Ah, the sleepy brown trout. I'm sure we've all experienced a brown trout that fights in a very lackadaisical manner, like it's just awoken from a coma or still in one and has no idea what's going on. Browns are one species that fascinate us, causing such fixation on them. Why? Well for a start, they look pretty rad in their brown spotted jump suits, but I think it's more to do with their sporadic feeding habits and indifferent fighting behaviour. The sleepy brown trout when hooked, often pulls back and forth performing a few lazy half-runs, and if you're lucky, you might get a couple of head shakes from them, not quite resembling a Metallica concert. Yes, browns can be notorious for slacking around early on, therefore a quick netting job is very doable if you're particularly sharp! However, just when the sleepy brown is tantalisingly close to the net, they awaken! The fight has really only just commenced - you're perhaps already slightly overconfident into the fight and now, the NOT so sleepy brown trout often takes the upper hand. Perhaps the most annoying brown to deal with, is the one that decides to 'wake up' as it slides into the net.

SULKY TROUT

Sulky trout often display this emotion when caught, or when released. Rather than shifting gears into six speed and taking us for a tail-spin up river, they'll sink to the bottom where they sulk. If it's a big fish, they'll often anchor themselves hard on the bottom, motionless! Browns will typically do this, but I'm sure we've all caught the odd large rainbow that's sat down and just refused to budge. It can sometimes feel like you're snagged on a big object and lead you to believe the fish may have gotten away, especially when it's no longer visible. Of course this is a good way for the fish to conserve its energy levels, but also tricking us into thinking we've caught one of those 'stick fish'!

The next type of sulky trout are the ones that either get off or are released. They hang around, sulk close to the bank or at your feet. Even after giving them a few gentle pricks and prods with the end of your rod, they barely move an inch. The sulky trout radiates a somber energy in these situations, almost to say, "How could you do this to me? I'm just a vulnerable trout."



HUNGRY TROUT

We all know trout are rapid feeders. Selective or not so selective, a variety of food drifts down the current throughout the day offering a buffet of delicious appetizers. What we also know is, the more trout present in the one piece of water the more competition for food source and the less potential for trout to grow. There are of



course 'other situations' for instance, when trout become trapped in a pocket or pool of water for a period of time without the ability to 'move,' therefore perhaps get starved of food supply. A great example of this is when fish become trapped on a waterfall.

My elder brother Simon caught one hungry trout years ago as we were making our way down a waterfall in the NZ backcountry. This fish slithered like an eel and turned out to be almost as elongated as one. The piece of water Simon hooked the fish in was so small, the trout looked like a humongous, but



Finally, AWAKE!





*Simon's greedy rainbow clearly has
no table manners . . . nor does this
greedy Brook trout waits for others!*



anorexic serpent swimming manic circles in a confined Kelly Tarlton's fish tank, its head and tail, far superior than its body. Myself and twin brother Dan were in tears of laughter, crying out and teasing Simon for actually hooking a long finned eel that he'd somehow mistaken for a trout. Eventually when he removed the fly from the fish's mouth for a photo, 'hungry trouts' big jaws were chomping away madly like it wanted to chew my brother's left arm off, for that long awaited meal.

GREEDY TROUT

As anglers, we love catching these trout because naturally they add another pound to the scales and our 'fishing egos.' Greedy trout don't get big for no reason, they're usually the alpha of a pool with first dibs at the latest food cuisine. I mean, do you really think they would let that juvenile rainbow sitting on their flanks rise up and nail that giant cicada before them? No way! A quick tail slap in the face is often enough to remind 'little mate,' "This one's mine buddy, you wait your turn!" The next one's likely theirs as well... It's quite funny actually seeing how aggressive trout can become when competing for food sources.

It brings me back to my upbringing, remembering Dad carrying in the Friday Chinese takeaway, before slapping it down on the dinner table where the hungry wolf pack waited, the kids jockeying for the best table position. I certainly wouldn't classify it as traditional, nor sophisticated, in our liberal ways. In this family, 'the pecking order' came first, tearing into the assortment of dishes like their life depended on it, before mum and 'the young,' cleaned up the scraps, not unlike vultures finishing off a carcass. Hey, that's life I guess, 'the strong will survive!' Greedy trout have learned the hard lessons in life too. If they want to get big and one day be mounted on that trophy wall for all to see and admire, they too, have to be a little selfish and dominant. The only drawback of being a greedy trout is, their eagerness to put their stomachs before their intuition may lend them more vulnerable to ending up on the kitchen bench, being covered in brown sugar, spices and a splatter of bay leaves.

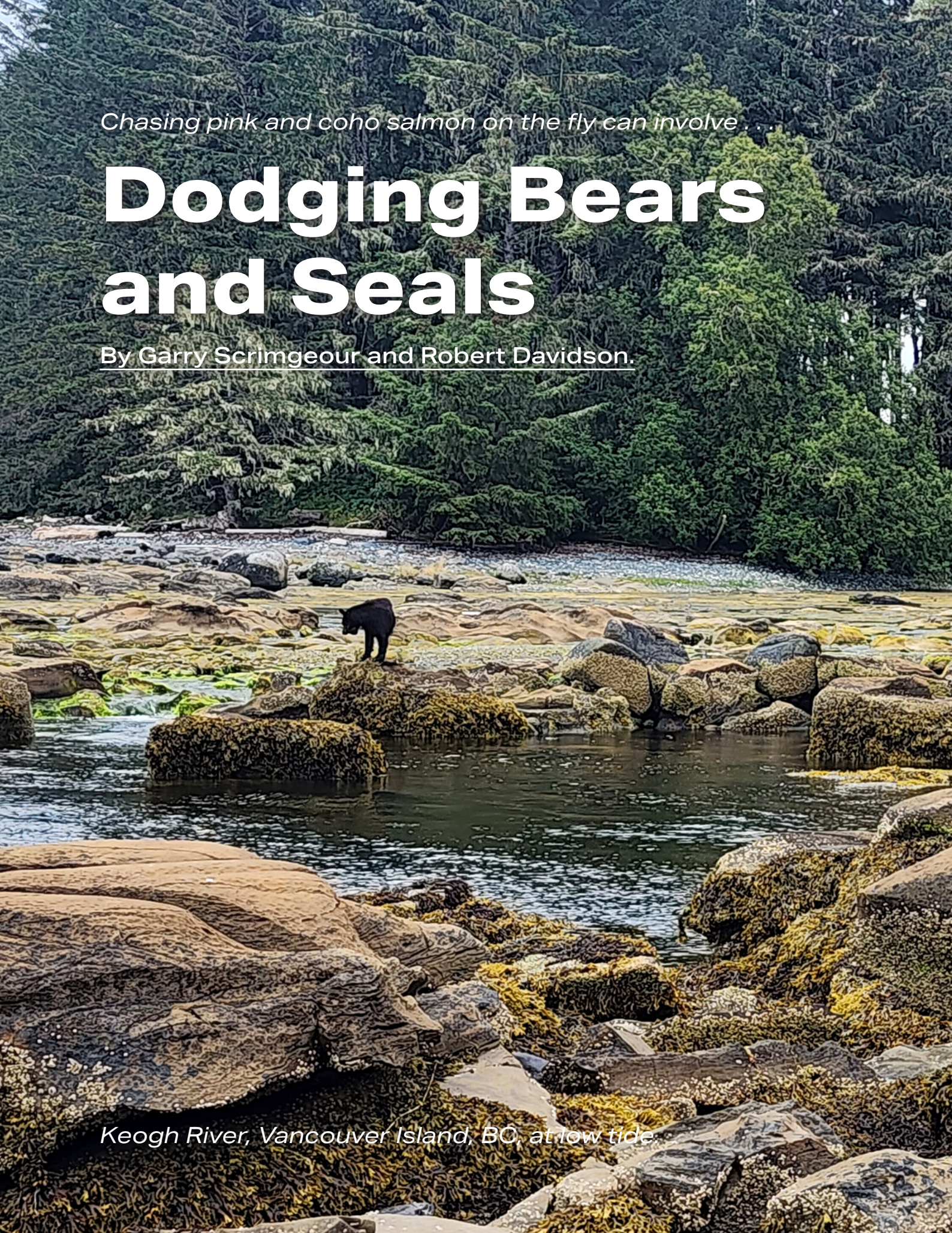
At the end of the day, I'm sure all fly fishers out there can relate to not only being able to see the irony in the nature of trout, but also the humour. Of course, more often than not, we catch fish after fish that don't necessarily stand out, trout, being trout. But, just when we've become accustomed to some 'cookie cutter' trout behaviour 'Happy Trout' takes your fly in full flight, demonstrating positive energy and vibes that could spark the Sky Tower's New Year's Eve show, while always showing off that charismatic grin. At the end of the day, it's another element of fly fishing that keeps us entertained and coming back for more. Just like 'we humans' have good and bad days displaying various emotions and personalities at will, in the underwater world, make no mistake, there are trout moods. So don't be a Sulky Trout, get off the couch and go witness some!



Chasing pink and coho salmon on the fly can involve . . .

Dodging Bears and Seals

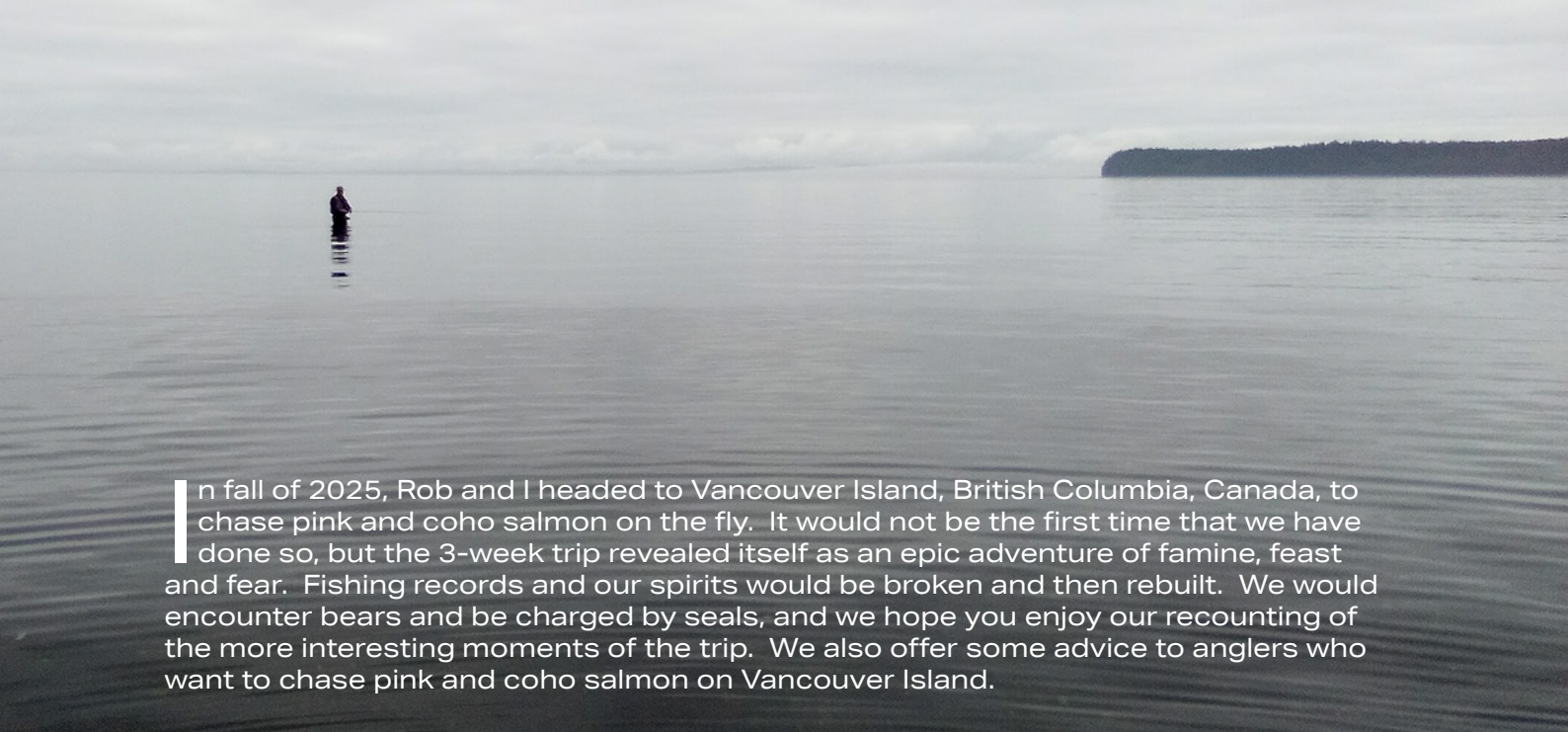
By Garry Scrimgeour and Robert Davidson.



Keogh River, Vancouver Island, BC, at low tide.







In fall of 2025, Rob and I headed to Vancouver Island, British Columbia, Canada, to chase pink and coho salmon on the fly. It would not be the first time that we have done so, but the 3-week trip revealed itself as an epic adventure of famine, feast and fear. Fishing records and our spirits would be broken and then rebuilt. We would encounter bears and be charged by seals, and we hope you enjoy our recounting of the more interesting moments of the trip. We also offer some advice to anglers who want to chase pink and coho salmon on Vancouver Island.

PINK AND COHO ON VANCOUVER ISLAND

Pink salmon are the only salmon to have a fixed two-year life cycle. Eggs are deposited in gravel stream beds in the fall and early winter. In 4-6 weeks, newly hatched alevins emerge and develop by drawing upon a generous egg sac full of nutrients before promptly heading downstream to the ocean. They feed ferociously for about a year and half and then head back to spawn in the streams where they hatched. All returning fish are two years old. Curiously, the number of fish returning to spawn, often called "run size", varies rather predictably between years. On Vancouver Island, large runs of spawning pink salmon occur in even numbered years with smaller runs occurring in odd numbered years. Genetic differences have also been discovered between those that spawn in even and odd years. Runs of salmon on Vancouver Island in odd years (i.e., 2025) are still appreciable. In fact, Rob and I prefer not to fish during big-run years as the number of returning fish can be staggering and the fishing can be too good – akin to shooting fish in a barrel. Pink salmon runs supported by hatcheries are quite consistent between years.

In contrast to pink salmon, the life cycle of coho salmon is more variable. Most fish return to spawn as 3- or 4-year-old fish that range in weight from 6 to 12 lbs. Females are often larger than males and older fish are usually larger than younger fish. After hatching, Coho typically spend 4 to 6 months in redds before leaving the area to spend an additional 1 to 2 years in freshwater, followed by an additional 1.5 to 2.5 years in the ocean, before heading back to their natal streams to spawn.



TACTICS, TIDES AND THE LEGENDARY CAP OF SHAME

Vancouver Island, located on the west coast of British Columbia, is about 12.5% the size of New Zealand, and offers spectacular salmon fishing. Most of the migrating salmon enter the archipelago from the north and swim south towards their natal streams. Like the salmon, we began our trip in the north end of the island (Cluxewe and Port Hardy) and then drove south to the Adam and Eve Rivers and finally to the Campbell River.

What would fishing be without celebrating stupidity? There has been the odd, rare (eye roll) occasion when Rob or I did something stupid before, during and/or after fishing. In preparation for this unlikely event, I bought a propeller cap – a Cap Of Shame – to be worn by the architect of something particularly embarrassing, until the next act of idiocy. Think of it as a relay race, but with more embarrassment and less athleticism, the propeller hat having to be worn in public.

Regrettably, I “broke in” the Cap Of Shame, as rumour has it that I hit a rather large pothole while driving to one of our fishing spots. Rob, whose primary purpose was to not wear the hat, had seen the pothole but was willing to risk life and limb by pretending to ignore said pothole. Leaving a beer in the freezer overnight also warranted wearing of the cap, as did tripping over an imaginary obstacle. We would both wear the hat, but it’s use wasn’t split evenly. By the end of the trip, the cap had more mileage than our rental car and was rather stretched (did I mention that Rob has a bigger head than I do?) – and arguably had more character.

CLUXEWE AND PORT HARDY

Our initial efforts to chase pink salmon at Cluxewe had been futile. Multiple times a day we had slogged the 4 kms along the shore in waders. We fished – relentlessly. The exercise was good for us but if we wanted a workout we could have dusted off Garry’s Richard Simmons or Jane Fonda VHS and saved ourselves the wader chafing.

Back to fishing - we hadn’t seen a pink salmon let alone hooked one in two full days. This was the famine part of the trip. Rob, being the more social member of the dynamic duo, had received some fishing intel. Salmon were being caught at Lady Ellen Point located just a few kilometres south of the Cluxewe Resort. Getting there would be simple: a short 10-minute car ride followed by a 20-minute walk along a forest path to the beach. My (Garry) legs had taken a beating from the previous days walks so I ditched the heavy and hot waders and walked to Lady Ellen Point in my running shoes.

That, as it turned out, was a mistake. Lady Ellen Point is a great spot to fish. It supports extensive kelp beds, where pink and coho salmon like to forage, and there is a massive deep-water drop-off just 40 m offshore where pink salmon, coho and chinook venture as they migrate along the coast. Waders mandatory...

Top left: Cluxewe River estuary, waders mandatory. Bottom left: Pink Salmon. Below: Cluxewe Beach at low tide



THE GREAT NETTING FIASCO

Rob is a seasoned and innovative (read crafty) angler. So, when he snuck away from the cluster of anglers and started to fish a kelp bed to the north of Lady Ellen Point, I smelled a rat and kept an eye on him. Twenty minutes later, I heard the reel screaming and a yahoo of delight. He had either passed a kidney stone or had hooked a coho. To me, it looked like a modest-sized coho of perhaps 5 to 6 lbs. But after Rob fought it for 10 minutes on a 6-weight rod with little progress, its diminutive size was questioned. Keeping up the fight, it finally came fully out of the water. It was an appreciable coho of 14 to 16 lbs and would be a record for Rob. My full attention was now required. Did I mention that you should wear waders here? Even relegated to the shore, I am usually an effective netter of fish but there are occasions when a coho will be lost at the waters edge when they roll and flap around. Waiting at the ready, I realized that Rob was going to take time to play this record fish. All was going well as the fish was coaxed to within 3 feet of the waters edge where I was to net it. My first attempt had failed as the salmon turned and headed back out to deeper water before I was able to sweep it into the net. A second attempt would be forthcoming and soon the fish would be in the net. Celebrations would follow. Our names would go down in history, interviews would be requested – I digress. Just as I was about to scoop up the fish Rob exclaimed that the fish had thrown the hook – it was off. I had a fraction of second to net it while it lay stationary two feet from where I stood but the chance had been missed and the fish dashed back out to deeper water. Rob, as usual, was a good sport about it but couldn't help but look down at my running shoes wondering if that may have made all the difference. He was probably right and I accepted my fate and wore the Cap Of Shame for several days, only removing it to sleep. Partial redemption was achieved when I landed two pink salmon, and more importantly, by picking up the hefty beer tab at Devils Bath Brewing.

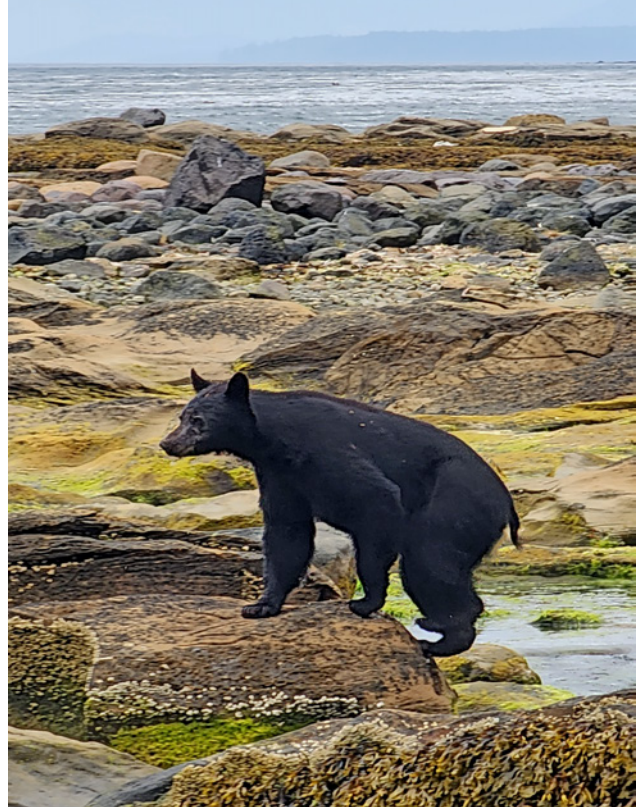


KEOUGH RIVER – BEARS AND SEALS

After licking our wounds (and tattered egos) at Cluxewe, we set our sights on the Keough River. This river is located south of Port Hardy and is one of the better-known places for pink salmon and coho, as well as being a prime black bear photography site. The 2.5 km walk along the beach to the mouth of the Keough River is tiring, especially wearing or carrying waders and boots. The rewards are however, high. As for all new fishing locations, it takes at least a few hours to figure out how the fish are moving around and which lines, flies, and retrieves are successful. We also had to work out the local bear commuter schedule – after all, nothing ruins a good fishing spot like becoming the catch of the day. We had already been strongly cautioned to not kill a salmon or to make too much of a fuss when playing and landing them, to avoid attracting bears.

Our first observation was that bears preferred the south side of the river mouth and the heavily vegetated areas immediately upstream of where the river flowed into the ocean. Once we had figured this out, we could focus on how to catch Keough River pink salmon and potentially coho. Several hours later Rob and I had independently identified the primary salmon swimming lanes and that they were receptive to a slow retrieve of a very small pink or rainbow-coloured fly. The pinks were schooling at the head of the Keough River inlet ... and so were the bears. So, after giving the bears priority, we were in full fishing mode. The pink salmon were coming and going in waves of 20 to 50 fish. However, they were skittish, as seals were patrolling the area which meant that delicate casts were required. The fishing was terrific. On many occasions fish were hooked and landed on consecutive casts, and both Rob and I would be fighting fish at the same time. For several hours, the fishing was nothing short of biblical proportions until the tide changed, and the sun reached its zenith.

Seals are effective predators of salmon and often race through schools like submarines that create enormous bow waves. They are also very opportunistic and are known to snatch fish while they are being played by an angler. I (Garry) had been fishing with success when a seal of Moby Dick proportions started to take a little too much interest in me landing fish. It casually swam back and forth, with its head out of the water, watching as I played a fish and then would sink silently and effortlessly down into the depths. The hunter, was being hunted. It turns out, seals are the original opportunistic fishers. I should have predicted what was going to happen next as I was about to net a pink salmon two feet away. I was on one knee hunched over so that I could slip the net under it. Then all heck broke loose – the fish went absolutely berserk and suddenly I saw a huge bow wave coming toward me at speed. The harbour seal lunged and bit the salmon just 3 feet from my hand. It then turned and tore off out to sea. This seal was big – 6 feet in length weighing about 180 pounds. Miraculously, I still had an arm and the fly held for just a few seconds, giving me time to clamp down on the reel drag before the fly line disappeared along with the 30 lb backing, and ultimately, my brand-new Rio Outbound fly line. Replacing the line would require a 4-hour drive to the closest store and these lines aren't cheap, especially for someone of Scottish heritage. The incident with the seal may have also invoked a brief school-boy squeal of surprise and terror (no not from the seal) but to be fair this was a bowel-challenging event. The whole incident was witnessed by Rob who simply howled with laughter; which he later said was sympathetic laughter, the incident clearly warranting the propeller Cap Of Shame. Our time at Cluxewe and Port Hardy had come to an end and we headed south to the Adam and Eve River.





ADAM AND EVE RIVER

Thoughts of fishing the Adam and Eve summon strong memories as it is a special fishing spot for both Rob and I. Rob's all-time record is landing 26 pink salmon at this location. My record is in the low 20's but my favourite record, and the one that I readily share, even with total strangers, is landing 13 pink salmon in consecutive casts.

The Adam and Eve can be divided into three areas: i) river mouth and estuary; ii) lower river to the corner pool (about 1.5 km from the ocean); iii) middle and upper sections. The middle and upper sections are seldom fished due to access and an abundance of bears, including grizzlies. The lower two sections are strongly tidal. An incoming tide early in the morning provides the most consistent fishing but cool and overcast conditions can result in good fishing throughout the day, especially in the lower section to the corner pool. The head of the lower river includes a long and modestly deep pool often referred to as the Kiddies Pool - where apparently even kids can catch salmon. This pool ends with a shallow, hairpin-angled, riffle where the river abruptly heads south. Salmon will migrate through the shallow riffle at night and early in the morning, or when the incoming tide floods the riffle allowing fish to swim upstream more easily. Few salmon migrate through the riffle at low tide. Consequently, the Kiddies Pool accumulates fish during low tide as they wait to rocket upstream "en masse" with the incoming tide. This is an impressive sight but there is no guarantee that salmon will be caught. On many occasions we have fished the Adam and Eve, and even the Kiddies Pool, and have left empty-handed.

Our first day on the Adam and Eve River was promising but it was a Sunday so the fishing was crowded. We encountered 30 or more anglers returning to the campground from their morning fish as we walked to the river. Most were carrying freshly caught pink salmon. Anglers leaving the river suggested that fishing may have already peaked with the early incoming tide. However, as the tide was still coming in and the weather was overcast and cool, we continued to be optimistic. At the river mouth and lower estuary fish were swimming upstream, porpoising, and thrashing at the water's surface and a few were still being caught. Floating lines with modest leaders and small pink flies or multi-coloured flies tied with bodies of spun tinsel were the lures of choice. Fishing started off well as Rob found a spot where fish could be encouraged to take a fly when they navigated a steep riffle-rapid section. Five fish were landed in short order but the tide had peaked and the weather changed to hot with clear skies. We continued to fish for another 4 hours with mixed luck. However, we celebrated our return to the river, the rainforest and

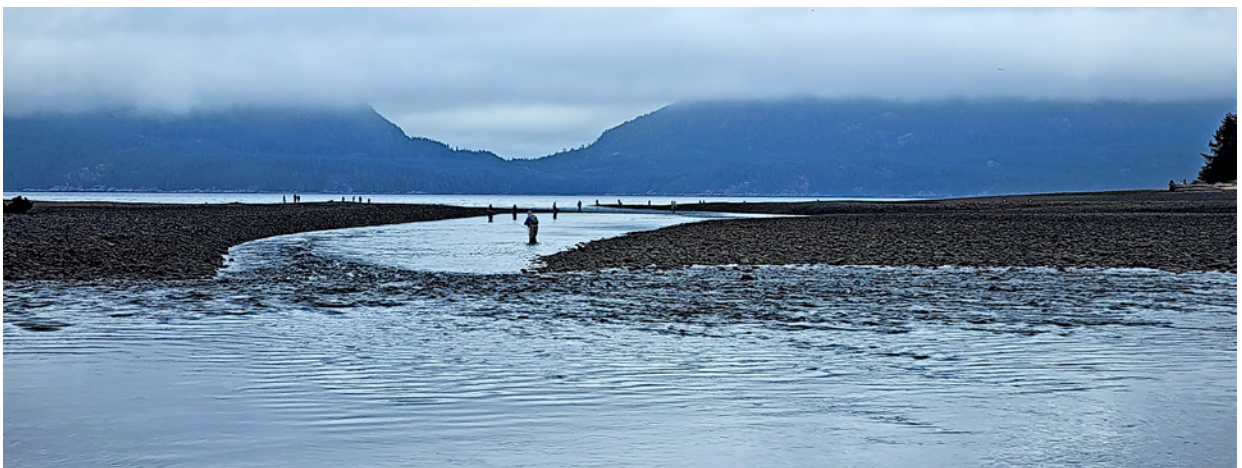




The estuary



The rivermouth at high and low tides





Rob and Garry with Pink Salmon from the Kiddies Pool

the ocean that had given us so much enjoyment over the years. There are times when anglers recognise that fishing is over and other activities, such as drinking beer and rearranging fly boxes and gear, takes priority. Ending the day with 15 fish landed between us was a great start. We would feast again on pink salmon.

At the Adam and Eve River records would be met and broken once we perfected our fishing methods. We realized that an early start and weekday fishing, away from the crowds, were keys to success. Progressively later tides, combined with the cooler weather and rain also increased our chances of success. Rob targeted pinks at newfound riffles using the rainbow-coloured flies. He was routinely landing 10 to 15 fish each day on one fly, which I had, of course, tied for him – you're welcome. Days 3 and 4 were when the "reel" action took place as impressive schools of pinks began to swim upstream. Rob was having wonderful luck at the estuary so I decided to head upstream to the Kiddies Pool which I had entirely to myself. Since I landed 10 pink salmon in the first hour, I generously decided to stop fishing and walk 1.5 km to the river mouth to invite Rob upstream. He declined, as his record of 26 fish was clearly in sight.

I returned to the Kiddies Pool, and proceeded to land another 10 fish before being joined by Rob. There we noticed a few very large pink salmon moving through the pool. Both of us had seen a few of them each day estimating them to be 8 to 10 lbs plus. It turned out that our observations were incorrect. A routine cast was met with a strong tug. The fish was firmly hooked and it headed upstream at speed, flashed at the water's surface and then held position. Pinks will do this occasionally, but overall, it's unusual behaviour. Often, they run a few times, leap to the heavens, then engage in a tug of war and become more manageable after about ten minutes of play. This fish had obviously not read the memo. It just kept heading upstream and across the river to the far bank which held logs and large boulders that needed to be avoided at all costs. I was well into my backing; an unusual event, even with







Garry's Coho Salmon from the Kiddies Pool

big pinks. Pink salmon often launch themselves completely out of the water but this fish simply porpoised and flashed at the surface. The stunningly obvious conclusion was that this fish was not a pink salmon – it was a coho and a good one – likely 12 lbs. By this time, Rob too had realized that it was a coho and (surprise, surprise) offered ample advice on how to net it properly. This fish was beautifully coloured with silver sides and dark metallic blue/green back – likely fresh out of the ocean. I simply held on for about 10 minutes before it gave me the slightest inkling of being manageable. The runs became shorter and the frequent porpoising ceased. Another few minutes passed before the fish was just 10 m away. It eventually came to the net. Rob netted it on his first attempt (mostly because he was wearing waders) and we were delighted to see a beautiful wild run 14 lb coho. After carefully removing the



chartreuse fly, she was quickly photographed – my rule of only five second stints out of the water – and gently returned to the river. Another record for me.

Rob continued to land fish but I was done for the day and simply sat and watched him. By the late afternoon, it started to rain so we packed up and headed back to the cabin. It had been a great day: Rob had equalled his record of landing 26 fish, and I had landed a record coho. Our thoughts shifted to returning to the cabin where Rob was regaled with the exquisite story of my record coho. After the 3rd retelling Rob started to drink heavily for some reason. The beverages eased his anguish of not landing his coho (or so he said), as did the expectation of another fine meal of pink salmon in a densely creamy mushroom sauce.

In total, we had fished the Adam and Eve for five full days, each landing more than 80 pink salmon. Using barbless hooks, we had hooked more than twice that number. We had feasted on pink salmon and more was to come as we headed further south to the mighty Campbell River.

CAMPBELL RIVER – THE FINAL FRONTIER

Campbell River is an oceanside town that has been long been recognized as a world-class fishing destination and has been known as the Salmon Capital of the World since the late 1800's. It's probably true, in part because of the large runs of all five Pacific salmon species that move along the coast, but also due to the many lakes and rivers that support salmon. Campbell River (the river not the town) supports an impressive pink salmon run every August. One of the most popular reaches on the Campbell River extends 1 km downstream of the confluence with the Quinsam River. This area was our final destination.

Fishing the Campbell River was out of this world. We routinely landed 15 to 20 pink salmon each day – and they were relatively short days of 6 to 8 hours. The weather, tides, and fishing spots were good to us. On Day 3 we arrived at the river early (about 5:45 am) and found good fishing spots. Although we were joined soon after by other anglers, the fishing pressure was light to moderate. The occasional fish was landed but the big run didn't really start until about 6:15 am, about an hour of the incoming tide. By 6:45 am the river fringes were simply a mass of fish moving steadily upstream. Heads of most pools were not fishable as fish density was so high that fish couldn't even see the fly let alone snap at them. Any cast into the head of the pools would result in foul hooking fish. The fishing was best after the initial wave of fish passed and the run slowed. Plus, the fish were big – most exceeded 5 lbs and some fish were easily in the 8 lb range. In two hours, Rob landed a dozen. It was still only mid-morning and the incoming tide was going to be with us for another few hours. The epic fishing would continue. Departure of an angler provides an opportunity to jump into the newly vacated spot. Rob had been watching an area upstream of the bridge and noticed an angler packing-up. For a big chap, Rob is surprisingly agile and he quickly secured the new spot located downstream of large boulders which created a small, yet deep, pocket of water where pinks were resting. The spot also provided a good gravel landing beach where he would eventually beat his one-day record of landing 26 pink salmon.

I ended my morning fishing session early as the rental car had tyre pressure issues. In hindsight, driving the forestry trunk roads to the Adam and Eve Rivers, or the pothole that I supposedly hit, had damaged it. Heck, it was a rental – no worries there. When I got back to the river late morning, Rob's tally was 22 pinks. The fishing had however slowed appreciably as the day wore on. Fishing the Campbell River can be finicky. It literally turns off within 15 minutes. Despite this, Rob's record was still within reach, if he was able to land 50% of fish that he hooked. The big challenge would be to land a fish if it broke out of the pocket and into the deeper fast water. The combination of fierce fighting fish and the strong current resulted in our observation of at least five snapped fly rods. Slowly but surely, Rob landed more fish but his landing efficiency was declining. Let me reiterate that I had waders on. Over the next hour his tally of 22 fish landed increased to 23 and then to 24 and then to 25 and then to 26. By the time he had landed his 26th fish the sun was at its zenith, bright sunshine was beating down on the water and the upriver push of pinks had





Commando Salmon Fishing on the Campbell River

ended with the outgoing tide. Rob is stubborn – oops, also persistent – and fished for another 30 minutes in his pursuit of the record. Thirty minutes later, record or no record, I suggested it was beer time. Suddenly, he hooked a 6 lb pink that raged out into deepwater.

As a side note, Rob likes to use 8 to 10 lb tippetts when fishing the Campbell River for pinks. These are considered very light, especially given the rivers' speed and the fact that fresh run pinks are ferocious fighters. I typically use 12 lb leader which is still considered light.

I digress – Rob had hooked, what could be, the record-breaking fish. To say that he was being cautious while playing it was an understatement. Using his inside voice, I am sure that he was talking to it – coaxing it towards shore. It reminded me of a lullaby. Watching the entire experience was putting me to sleep and the possibility of beer in the near future wasn't helping maintain my enthusiasm. Nevertheless, Rob held that fish and kept it from going further out into the deep, fast water and slowly, but surely, brought it to shore. Ten minutes and several runs later, the fish was in the net. A record has been broken. Time for celebration.

As a final note, if you choose to fish the reach of the Campbell River upstream of the Duncan Bay Main bridge, towards the Quinsam River, please keep your head on a swivel and try to pay attention – do not linger in deep thoughts. High numbers of anglers in this reach requires that you time your casts with that of your upstream neighbour, and you will be expected to land fish efficiently. It can be commando-style fishing.

FLY FISHING TECHNIQUES AND MISHAPS

Wet fly fishing is a very productive method to catch pink salmon. It involves casting across the current, or possibly a little upstream, throwing in a mend, and then allowing the fly to sink and swing across the current. If the fish hooks itself, the angler simply needs to tighten the line. The takes can be gentle but they can also be aggressive. The difficulty in the wet fly method however, is that fish are hooked downstream facing the angler and should they jump and spit out the hook while the rod has a bend, the fly comes back at the angler at warp speed. In some cases, the fly simply bounces off your head, shoulder, or collar, or worse still, off the angler located immediately adjacent to you (i.e., your fishing neighbour). Theoretically, hitting your fishing neighbour with a fly, who is often a total stranger and who doesn't realize that the fly is "incoming", evokes different responses. The four most common responses, in the order of frequency are: i) a child-like scream or squeal, often demonstrating their ability to still hit those high soprano notes; ii) cursing and on occasion expletives; iii) an accusatory glare; and iv) humorous comments. Responses by the angler who was the source of the tungsten bead-head fly projectile are different. They, in the order in which they appear, are: i) cursing



at losing the fish; ii) an initial overestimate of the weight of the fish that had just been lost; iii) an effusive verbal apology to the fishing neighbour, often accompanied with an apologetic nod of the head and aversion of the eyes; iv) a disingenuous commitment that it would never happen again; and v) an attempt at return humour.

Etiquette dictates that you should not laugh out loud when your aberrant fly hammers your unsuspecting fishing neighbour. Sometimes etiquette can be difficult to follow. As Rob can attest, I've hit myself, and many an adjacent angler with projectile flies. My fishing jacket and hat are riddled with holes. In fact, I've even been confronted by airport security who found a fly firmly anchored in the collar of my fishing jacket. A seasoned, yet unsuspecting, adjacent angler who has been bonked with a rocketing fly will often join in the laughter. Rob tends to fish downstream of me – again attesting to his crafty, age-earned cunning.

I lost count of how many times my fly hit Rob, myself, and innocent bystanders. At some point, I was considering a new career in acupuncture. I must admit in full disclosure, for some dark reason I find hitting your fishing neighbour hilarious (mostly when Rob is the victim).

FLIES FOR PINK SALMON

A diversity of flies can be successful for pinks but sometimes a pattern works and then suddenly does not garner any interest. In the vast majority of instances, choosing a smaller fly, one with a different colour, or changing its weight will rectify the issue. Rob and I can attest to the success of changing a fly pattern during a slow period of fishing resulting in a sudden hot fishing streak often with a strike on the very first cast. During our fall trip, small (10 or smaller) flies worked very well. We had success using a diversity of colours including pink, blue, chartreuse, yellow and green, purple and those with rainbow-coloured woven bodies.



Pink Salmon flies



ADVICE FOR ANGLERS

We have written several articles about chasing salmon on the fly in British Columbia. It can produce the very best of fishing, the feasts, but the fishing can also be painfully slow – the famines and the fear issues remain. Despite this, fly fishing for salmon, especially the pink salmon runs, continues to be an experience that generates wonderful memories and stories. We all remember the old-timer tales of massive whitebait runs and the high abundance years of trout in Taupo. Vancouver Island provides a rare opportunity to experience stellar runs of salmon. It is a sight to behold and is a testament to a well managed fishery.

Some suggestions from our personal experience, would be to fish the Adam and Eve or Campbell Rivers in the first or second weeks of August when you have the greatest chance of engaging pink salmon, and possibly coho. More specifically, we recommend avoiding the Campbell River upstream, or immediately adjacent, to where the Duncan Bay Main bridge crosses the Campbell River on Highway 28. This reach can be extremely busy (commando fishing like at the mouth of the Rakaia in the old days) and is dominated by large and incredibly slippery boulders. Many anglers take nasty falls, breaking rods (and occasionally spirits) and we have even seen ambulances on site to deal with the injuries. A better place to fish is downstream, or adjacent, to where the Main Inland Highway (Highway 19) crosses the Campbell River. This broad and open reach attracts fewer anglers, the riverbed is stable and less slippery, and all of the migrating fish must pass by as they head upstream. We have caught many a salmon in this stretch.

A visit to the River Sportsmen fishing store, located next to the Inland Highways, is a smart move as they are well informed and more than happy to provide sound fishing updates and advice. They will also share access points to the river. Remember, the best fishing spots are like good jokes – timing is everything and you just have to wait for the punchline.

If you do visit the Adam and Eve or the Campbell River, keep an eye out for two old guys, one who wears a hat that makes him look like he is in the French Foreign Legion and the other who will be wearing either a tan-coloured hat, resembling that worn by Crocodile Dundee (Crickey) or a blue, red and yellow propeller cap.

Tight lines.



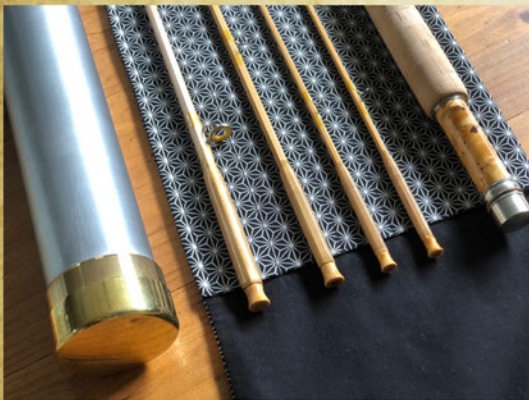


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