

Issue 197

TROUT FISHER

Fly focused but totally transferable

Winter 2026



Bruno Kemball: An Englishman Downunder
Fully Ready ~ Planked Trout
The MICRO Leader System
Confessions of an Addicted Salmon Angler
Chasing Trout in the great Aussie outdoors

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Cover: 3.5kg/62cm 2024 Autumn Release Rainbow.. (PWS)



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By John Austin

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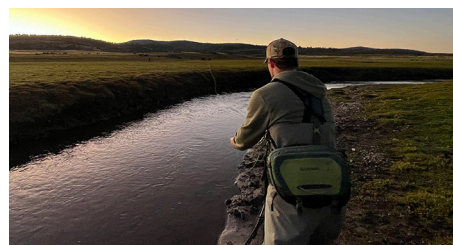
What at one time seemed strange to me about salmon fishing was the unpredictability of every new season. A good season does not mean the next one or the one after is going to be as good.



40 Chasing Trout in the great Aussie outdoors

By Matt Hoole

Fly fishing takes you into some extraordinary places, and in Aussie, some certainly test the pronunciation. In ACT and New South Wales, the Kosciuszko, Namadgi National Parks, Jugungal Wilderness and the Goodradigbee and Goobarragandra rivers give your mouth and brain a workout.



Thanks to Ross and Pippa at TRM, for their help with John Austin's article . . .



TONGARIRO
RIVER MOTEL





Bruno Kembball: An Englishman Downunder

By John Austin

As an angling historian, whose main interest is game fishing in the six old Northern Counties of England, a couple of years ago I was intrigued to see a packet of North Country spider or hackle flies for sale that had been retailed by 'The Red Spinner,' Hatepe, which definitely isn't in the North of England! Having bought the spider flies, I have recently acquired two more packets of scarce streamer flies. Printed on the inside of the fold-over packets was the name 'Mr & Mrs A.V. Kembball', a name I had never come across before, and so I decided to search for more information. First of all, I discovered that Hatepe was in New Zealand on the eastern shore of the famous Lake Taupo where the Hinemaiaia River enters the lake and A. V. Kembball was in fact Arnold Vero Shaw Gerard Kembball, but better known as Bruno because of his dark features. In August 1969 he was the subject of an article in New Zealand Weekly News, which was mainly about his prowess as a fly dresser, but this was only half the story.

Bruno was born on 3rd March 1906 in Rajputana, India. His father, Hugh Lester Kembball, a superintendent in the Punjab police, came from a long line of military officers stationed in India. When he was seven Bruno was sent to England to be educated at one of the best public schools in Britain, Charterhouse in Surrey, and then in 1925 he attended the Royal Military Academy at Woolwich, spending the next three years in the army. He then went to work for the Kailan Mining Company in China where, in 1934, he married Vera Flora MacDonald, who was working as a nurse for the company.

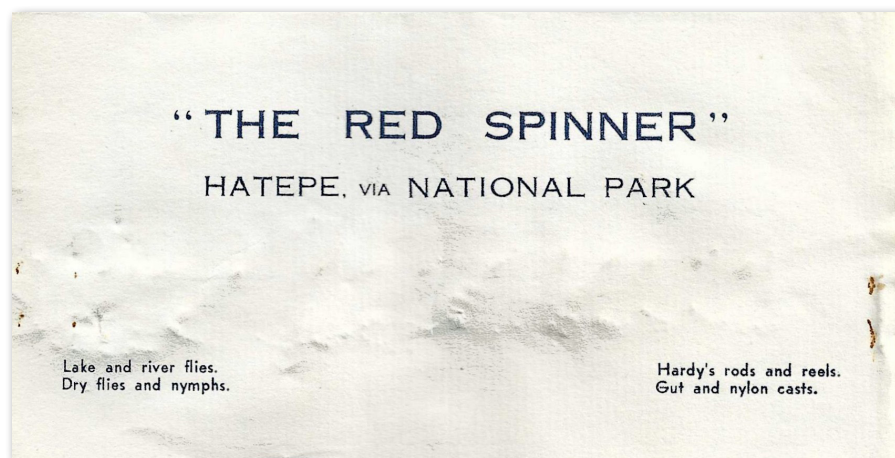
Two years after the Second World War began Bruno enlisted in the Royal Artillery, while his wife and daughter, who had remained in China, were captured by the Japanese and interned in Weihsien concentration camp. In December 1942 he was seconded into the Special Operations Executive (SOE) in Burma, whose operatives were in constant danger working behind enemy lines. He was involved in numerous operations in the north of Burma from February 1943 to August 1945. His first role was as an instructor, then liaison officer and finally staff officer, retiring with the rank of Major. Like all SOE operatives he was trained in unarmed combat, but apparently he never mastered the landing on parachute jumps as on each one of his four jumps he broke his ankle! A report by one of his commanding officers stated that Bruno was, 'A cheerful and popular officer who is conscientious and capable except for occasional lapses when he goes on a spree'. Bruno's granddaughter states that, like many veterans, Bruno never talked about his experiences in the war and may have had PTSD.

Left: Bruno Kembball outside the Red Spinner, courtesy Ross Baker of Tongariro River Motel, and, right, as a member of SOE in WWII, courtesy of Richard Duckett.





Another opponent was A.V. 'Bruno' Kemball, who sold beautifully tied flies . . . from his small shop . . . at Hatepe . . . To him, the Tongariro Development (Plan) was the brainchild of a boffin, created without any thought for the spawning beds in the river. 'The Tongariro is the finest fishing river in the world,' he said, 'and anyone who spoils it deserves to be horsewhipped'. (Fishing the Tongariro, Grant Henderson, page 214.)





After being demobbed Bruno lived in London for a short while before returning to China but when the communists took over the country in 1949 he emigrated to New Zealand where he opened the 'Red Spinner' fishing tackle shop by the lower Hinemaiaia River at Hatepe, because the area reminded him of the foothills of the Himalaya where he had once hunted and fished.

Bruno was quite a character and there are many anecdotal stories of Bruno's time in the tackle trade. The 1969 article described him as, 'A vaguely plump 5 foot ten inch, immaculately groomed grey hair, a florid complexion and a close-cropped moustache of such noble proportions that it could proclaim ex-army only.' His tackle shop has been described as 'bijou' and one customer remarked that the walls, as well as Bruno's fingers and moustache, were yellow from his chain smoking Benson and Hedges cigarettes. Another customer said that it did not have the usual smell of a tackle shop but smelt of tea. As well as selling flies the 'Red Spinner' also held a small stock of Hardy's fly rods and reels. One young angler, who was probably a bit short on cash, asked Bruno if he had any locally made reels and which engendered the swift retort 'I learned long ago never to compromise on English quality, I advise you to do the same'

The author's collection of Spiders and lures tied by the Kemballs.

Left: reverse side of the author's spider fly packaging; view of the lower Hinemaiaia River courtesy Tongariro River Motel.





A collection of lures tied by Bruno Kenball, courtesy Alan Lynn:-

Note the newer Red Setter, Fuzzy Wuzzy and cropped deer hair head patterns, suggesting these were tied later than those the author has.

Underset:

The appendix featuring Bruno Kenball-recommended flies and lures for Taupo fishing, from 'Freshwater Admiral', by Vice-Admiral Harold Hickling.

sum.

Once I saw a woman take the folder and without so much as a glance at the works of art inside, shove it in her pocket.

"For goodness sake," I burst out, "look at them, say so. Don't treat it like a packet of bird seed!"

Bruno reckons he can tie some six dozen flies a day.

This is Bruno Kenball's selection for the waters around Lake Taupo, Hatepe, midway up the eastern shore of Lake Taupo.

1. RIVER AND MOUTH

(a) Bright Day

	<i>Hooks</i>
Parson's Glory	4, 6
Tiger Ross	"
Partridge & Yellow	"
" " Orange	"
Widgeon & Yellow	"
Leslie's Lure, Yellow	"



(b) Overcast and at Dusk

Partridge & Claret	4
" " Red	"
Mrs Simpson Red	"
Leslie's Lure Red	"
Turkey & Red	"
Tamati	"

(c) Night

Hairy Dog	2, 4
Craig's Night-time	"
Any large dark fly	
The above are all wet flies (lures)	

2. SMELTING FLIES

Speckled Smelt	10
Owl "	8
White "	"
Grey Ghost	"
Parson's Glory	6
Tiger Ross	"

3. TROLLING FLIES

Parson's Glory	1	Extra long tails
Dorothy	"	
O'Reilly	"	
Mother Superior	"	
Old Nick	"	
Badger & Green	"	

4. DRY FLIES (RIVER)

Greenwell	12
Governor Red Tail	"
Cochybondhu	"
Claret Spinner	"
Dark Sedge	"
Large Brown Sedge	"

5. NYMPH

Green Beetle	10
Orange	"





The Red Spinner store building, relocated in Hatepe and renovated as a bach – note the extra door. The building was originally at the SH1 turn off into Hatepe. Courtesy Tongariro River Motel.

When Bruno met his wife he told her that he didn't like the name Vera and so he decided to call her Jo, which caused some confusion with my research! Jo was Bruno's co-worker and fly dresser at 'The Red Spinner' where they worked seven days a week. Bruno's flies had to be treated with reverence, customers were not allowed to pick them up with fingers but had to use tweezers. One unlucky chap who managed to pick up a fly was given a swift karate chop across his wrist and told, 'Next time use the bloody tweezers, that's what they're there for.' It has been said that Bruno's flies were not tied very well and came apart after catching one fish but others have said that the flies were exquisite and the samples that I have seem to bear this out. He also fulfilled orders for flies from many parts of the world, as far apart as Chile and Kashmir, and in 1969 Bruno estimated that since 1949 he and his wife had dressed 250,000 flies. Many anglers fishing in Lake Taupo and the surrounding rivers fished with streamers but Bruno preferred the dry fly and nymphs that he had fished with in his younger days in England. He tried to persuade the local anglers and visitors to follow his example but they mostly stuck with sunk lures. Bruno was acknowledged as an expert fly fisher but one source said he had never met anyone who had actually seen him fish!

Bruno's name crops up in a number of books on fishing in New Zealand, perhaps the one with the most information about him is Freshwater Admiral (1960) by Vice-Admiral Harold Hickling (1892-1969) another English ex pat who had emigrated to New Zealand in 1950. From the outset of his residence in New Zealand, Bruno involved himself with local community affairs, he was also a member of the Tongariro and Lake Taupo Anglers Club and Hickling describes a meeting of the club when Bruno and Jo arrived late as their car had broken down. A highly controversial issue was being discussed and, "At length Bruno got to his feet and gave his views on the





Bruno and Vera Kemball, courtesy of Rebecca Shanahan,

matter in no uncertain terms. In the middle of his impassioned peroration a member rather rudely interrupted him. 'We don't want any ratbags who only come over to fish for a day telling us what to do' Bruno drew himself up to his full height of 5ft 6 1/2 in., his moustache bristling to his eyebrows, 'Never in my life', he stormed, 'have I been so insulted'. Buttoning up his trench coat, he was about to stalk out of the meeting in high dudgeon. Jo gently pulled his coat tails and said, 'Don't forget dear', she whispered, 'we've got no car'. Bruno sat down; his moustaches stood at ease." In the appendix of his book Hickling gives a list of Bruno's flies for the Taupo fishery – smelting flies, trolling flies, dry flies and nymphs.

Bruno retired in 1980 and went to live at a Salvation Army accommodation at Wharerangi to the north of Hatepe. He died five years later on 6th July 1985 in his eightieth year.



In my quest for information about Bruno my thanks are due to: Rebecca Shanahan, Bruno's granddaughter, Mike Kemball, Bruno's nephew, Alan Lynn of Christchurch, a fellow obsessive angling bibliophile, Ross Baker of the Tongariro River Motel, Turangi and Richard Duckett, author of Special Operations Executive (SOE) in Burma (2017).

NEW TACKLE

AIRFLO SUPERFLO MAX RIDGE 2.0 POWER TAPER

The Airflo Superflo Max Ridge 2.0 Power Taper line is purpose-built for anglers needing distance and control in demanding conditions. Its aggressive taper and forward-loaded design generate high line speed, making it particularly effective when casting into wind or turning over heavier indicator rigs. The Ridge 2.0 technology reduces friction through the guides, allowing for smooth, efficient shooting and consistently longer casts.

On the water, it excels in both river and lake scenarios. The powerful tip handles bulky flies and multi-fly nymph setups with ease, while the extended rear taper supports clean pick-ups and quick re-casts—ideal for covering water when fish are holding at range.

Durable, low-stretch, and easy to manage, this is a highly capable line for anglers looking to improve distance, maintain control in wind, and fish indicators or lakes with confidence. See more at manictackleproject.com



DEATH ROE COMMISSARY PACK SCENTED BEADS AND CONVICT CRAWLERS

Make sure to check local regulations before using these products . . .

The Death Roe lineup continues to build a strong reputation among anglers who want realistic presentation with minimal fuss, and the combination of their 6mm Soft Beads Commissary Pack alongside the Convict Crawler worms (Blood Worm and Natural) is a great example of that versatility done right.

The 6mm soft beads are all about subtlety and consistency. Their soft construction and natural colour options closely imitate real roe, making them particularly effective in clear water or pressured fisheries where fish can be selective.



The smaller 6mm size offers a refined profile that fishes well on lighter rigs, drifting naturally and producing a convincing presentation across a wide range of river conditions. With multiple colours in the Commissary Pack, it's easy to dial in what the fish want on the day without overthinking things.

When the bead bite slows, the Convict Crawler worms provide a seamless backup. At around 3 inches with a tapered profile, they produce plenty of movement in the water, creating a lifelike, subtle action that fish key in on. The Blood Worm colour stands out in slightly coloured water or when extra visibility is needed, while the Natural option offers a more understated approach for clear conditions or wary fish.

Together, this combination covers a wide range of scenarios—from technical bead fishing through to searching with more active presentations. It's a simple but highly effective system that gives anglers confidence to adapt quickly and keep catching, whether on rivers or Stillwater.

See more at manictackleproject.com



THE FLYLAB FLY BOX RANGE

The FlyLab fly box range delivers a straightforward, practical solution for anglers looking to keep their flies organised without unnecessary complication. Built with usability in mind, the range focuses on durability, smart storage, and ease of access—key features for time spent on the water.

The waterproof double-sided models stand out as the most versatile option. Offering generous storage without excessive bulk, they strike a good balance between capacity and portability. The watertight seal provides confidence in wet conditions, whether dealing with rain, river crossings, or the occasional dunked pack. Inside, high-density slotted foam holds flies securely while still allowing quick, easy access when it counts.

Slim single-sided foam boxes offer a more minimalist approach, ideal for anglers wanting to travel light or carry a more focused selection of patterns. Their low-profile design fits neatly into vests or packs, making them a strong option for short sessions or technical fishing where mobility matters.

For those who prefer a more traditional setup, the compartment-style boxes provide simple, effective organisation—particularly useful for larger flies or delicate dry patterns that benefit from a bit more separation.

Overall, the FlyLab range is built around practicality rather than gimmicks. Lightweight, reliable, and easy to use, these boxes suit the demands of New Zealand conditions and the way most anglers fish.

See more at manictackleproject.com



PRIMAL ZONE CCC FLY ROD RANGE.

The Primal Zone CCC Euro Nymph rod range represents a clear step forward in performance-focused euro nymphing gear, blending high-end materials with a design that's been tuned specifically for contact fishing.

At the core of the range is Primal's CCC (Compressed Carbon Chain) technology, which is all about sensitivity. In practical terms, that translates to exceptional feel through the blank—subtle takes, light ticks, and micro-movements during the drift come through clearly, giving anglers a real edge when fishing technical water.

The longer 10'3" configurations in both 3wt and 4wt are right in the sweet spot for New Zealand conditions. That added length gives better reach and line control, helping keep more leader off the water and improving drift quality—especially in complex currents or when fishing at distance. At the same time, the rods remain impressively light in hand, reducing fatigue over a full day of European style nymphing.

Power delivery is another highlight. While the tips are soft and responsive—ideal for protecting light tippet and maintaining contact—the lower sections have plenty of backbone. This creates a well-balanced rod that can handle heavier rigs and solid fish without feeling under-gunned.

Componentry is also well thought out, with quality reel seats, carbon handles, and a clean, stealthy matte black finish. It's a range that prioritises performance over flash, which suits the intended purpose perfectly.

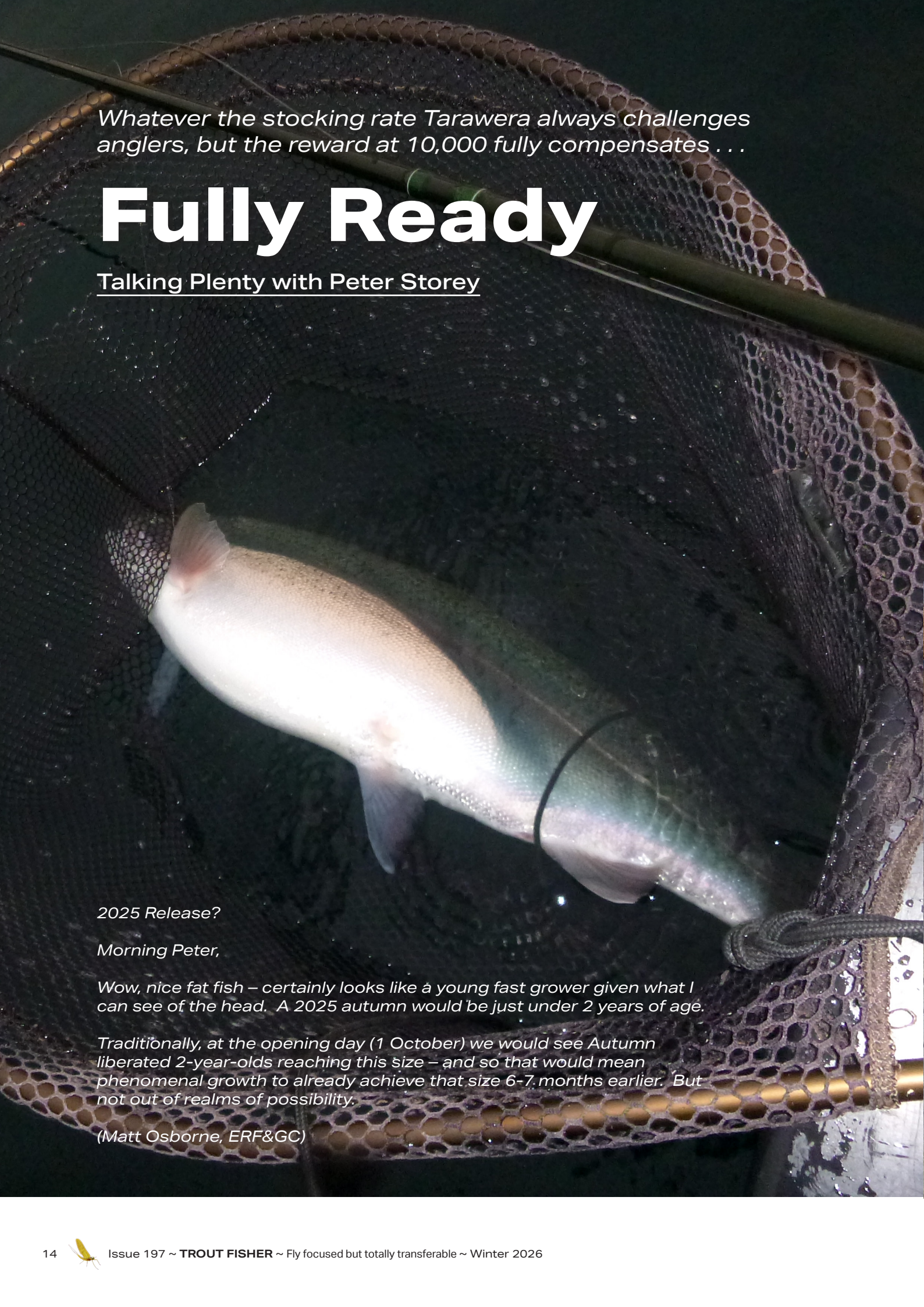
Overall, the Zone CCC series is a highly impressive euro nymphing platform. Sensitive, lightweight, and purpose-built, it covers everything from technical small-water fishing through to larger rivers where reach, control, and strike detection really matter.

Models Available: 9'6" #3, 9'6" #5, 10'3" #2, 10'3" #3 (below), 10'3" #4, 11' #3.

See more on all featured products at manictackleproject.com





A large rainbow trout is shown inside a fishing net, which is held up by a wooden frame. The fish is silvery with a pinkish-red stripe along its side. The net is dark and has a mesh pattern. The background is dark and out of focus.

Whatever the stocking rate Tarawera always challenges anglers, but the reward at 10,000 fully compensates . . .

Fully Ready

Talking Plenty with Peter Storey

2025 Release?

Morning Peter,

Wow, nice fat fish – certainly looks like a young fast grower given what I can see of the head. A 2025 autumn would be just under 2 years of age.

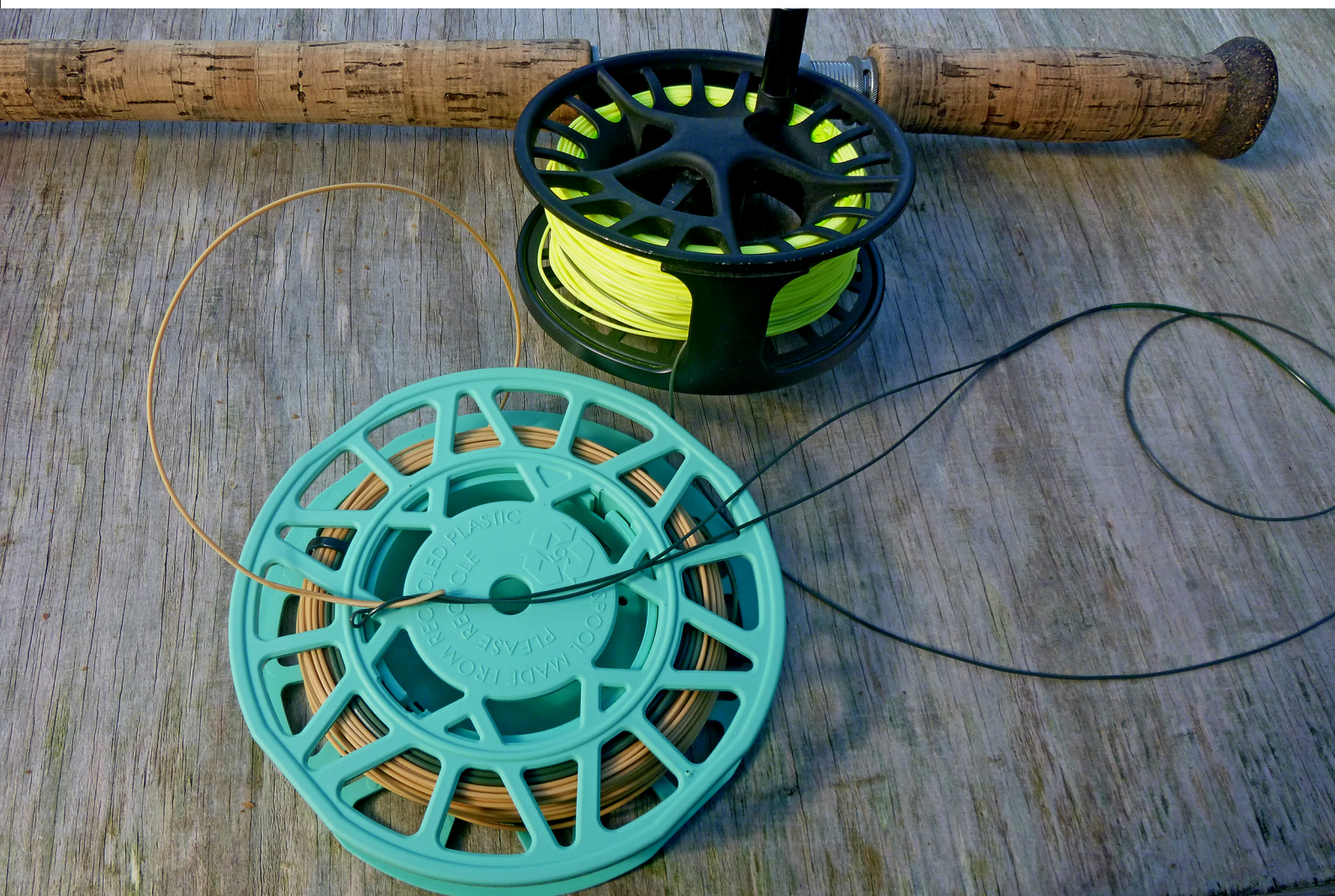
Traditionally, at the opening day (1 October) we would see Autumn liberated 2-year-olds reaching this size – and so that would mean phenomenal growth to already achieve that size 6-7 months earlier. But not out of realms of possibility.

(Matt Osborne, ERF&GC)



It's been another tough three months on the lake. The quality of fish caught has remained exceptionally high throughout, but getting onto them has proven as unpredictable as ever. That's nothing new but my records suggest the space between fish has increased markedly this season. There will be many reasons for this, of course, but the constant factor throughout the 40-odd years I've fished here is that trout in this lake feed primarily on smelt and whenever smelt are close to where you are fishing, so are trout. Since catching these two magnificent Autumn release fish mid-March there has been little sign of either around here, but the late April drop in temperature finally prompted fish to run Te Wairoa and that suggests things should improve here. So I am watching the local reef closely and randomly, throughout the day, because May is typically one of the best months for fishing there, settled weather and reducing surface temperature bringing both smelt and trout back. Meantime, with a few early-maturers close to the shoreline and nothing obvious over the reef, I've been getting ready for Winter fishing.

There's currently a lot of oxygen weed over and beyond the drop off here and with that in mind, I have got one of the Superflo Max Ridge 2.0 Power Taper floating lines for my #4 Run switch. This is loaded onto the second spool of the Remix, the other carrying an original model 5/6 Ridge Clear Intermediate, for open drop offs. This second Remix spool packs a running line for a Scout head. While probably old hat to most, it's only since using the spool full time on the lake this season that I have fully appreciated this running line's design. Besides heads and leaders, its significant head loop also enables direct loading of complete fly lines, new or stored. Thread the running line head through the end loop of the fly line, pass the head loop over the storage spool and carefully, wind away . . .



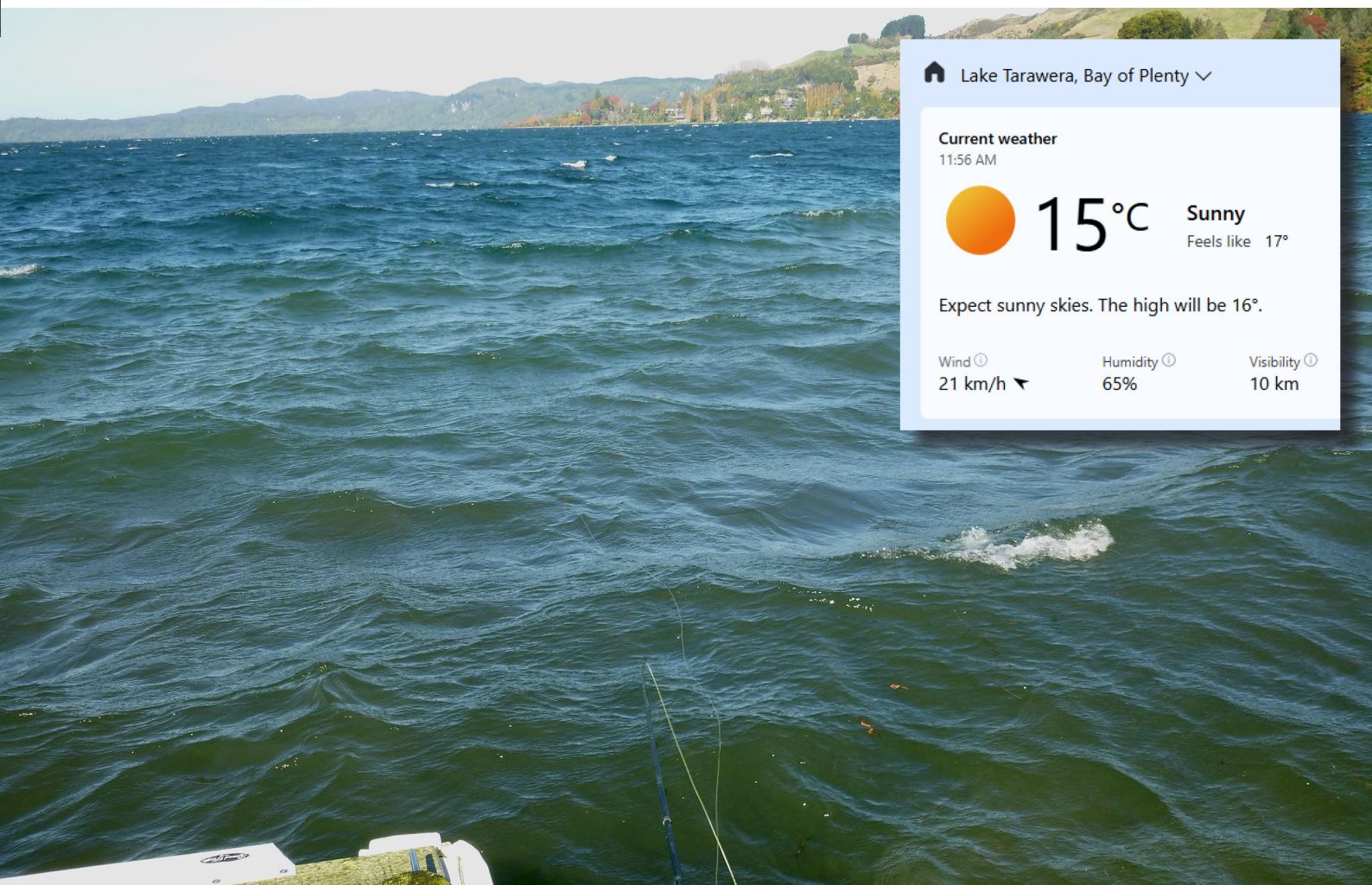


First impressions of the newly-loaded line, casting into a slight headwind, was that the back-of-pack description was fully accurate. This shoreline gets plenty of headwind and it's a frequent part of Winter shoreline fishing. Two days later it cast around 4m of intermediate leader and tippet loaded with my usual Ratropinna tied onto a #6 salmon iron beyond the dirty water into this southeasterly with ease and more to the point, without wind knots. So I now know that besides risking getting blown off a jetty, I can fish this line with confidence into head winds from dry land . . . over any inshore sandy area when smelt are spawning.

Since then I have been fishing from the canoe over a local reef, casting ahead with the drogue behind. This is one of my favourite ways to fish from the canoe, being so much like river fishing with a tail wind. I've been out there in a variety of wind conditions and changed from intermediate to slow and fast sink leader, according to wind speed and required fishing depth. Let this line do the work and it handles the lot like a dream when the wind is steady but check for wind knots whenever serious wind flukes on you – failing to do so cost me a fish!

After considerable use I remain very impressed. The line loads a wide variety of leader densities with minimum effort, turns them over with ease and in comparison to the original Ridge Clear Delta Tip floating lines, shows FAR less tendency to cling together, even knot – exactly what you need for repeated distance casting (and vice versa). Given those qualities it also strikes me the Superflo Max Ridge 2.0 Power Taper is ideal to teach and learn fly casting with.

Approaching upload, everything remains on hold until serious numbers of smelt come in and groups of feeding scaup are good indicator of when that's happened. From that point you can catch trout throughout the day but, meantime, it's back to searching the entire water column down to 20 metres according to light level.



🏠 Lake Tarawera, Bay of Plenty ▾

Current weather

11:56 AM



15°C

Sunny

Feels like 17°

Expect sunny skies. The high will be 16°.

Wind ⓘ

21 km/h ↙

Humidity ⓘ

65%

Visibility ⓘ

10 km



With the Iran war driving fuel prices way beyond casual use, for me at least, I have still only made a couple of river trips since last issue. One up the Ngongotaha while getting a warrant produced nothing but the usual frustration, with last issue's fly clearly spotted but ignored by mid-late morning browns. I was close enough to watch the eye of the +/-3kg one in the centre of the photo to the right move time after time, until the garage text came through. Nothing new there and this visit told me I still need to get my legs much stronger before heading there again. Had I hooked this fish, the silt directly below would have proved a real challenge, if nothing more. The fish, for the record, is sitting in front of the collection of debris, moving backwards and forwards along the foam line, in and out of the shadow, and mostly, centrally to the photo. I did not clearly see it feed at all during the half hour or so I tried to interest it and that's nothing new in my experience.

Two weeks later both chunky King Country rainbows and Whio were typically cooperative, the former chasing the Passion Fruit Hopper as readily as Clarke's Caddis. Such obliging fish when they have not seen you, river-resident rainbow trout; so different to their lake-resident cousins and lake or river-resident browns! That said, the main difference between all three is simply how much motivation to feed each has and then, how much time each has to make a decision to take or not.

From the angler's viewpoint what's most important is whether you can see how each reacts. Whenever that's impossible, and doubly so in stillwater, where each fish can take as much time as it wants in deciding, show all three what has caught the most fish in their environment, year-round and year after year. That's unquestionably Black Palmer on all local rivers. On Lake Tarawera it's Ratropinna and with a new line capable of throwing larger, coolest water versions of it into high wind with minimum effort, canoe and then shoreline only come July, I'm fully ready . . .



Ratropinna, tied on a #6 salmon iron, and a typical Lagoon stream mature wild jack caught with it, fishing blind, May 2026.







Planked Trout or Salmon

Wild to the Table with Tony Smith

The methods of cooking trout or salmon on or over wood is one of the oldest cooking techniques we know. Both our (New Zealand) rainbow trout and salmon were introduced from Northwestern United States in the mid-late 1800s. It is a fascinating story. The indigenous people from these major river areas, including Canada, have cooked their 'staked' salmonoids over fire for centuries and today's covered barbecued plank cooking is certainly a convenient version of this wonderful tradition.

Ready produced planks, usually cedar, are available at specialist barbecue outlets. Other woods used are alder, cherry, apple and others associated with smoking. These are all, of course, untreated woods.

It is important to soak your plank for at least two hours in water before use. One plank can be used two or three times.

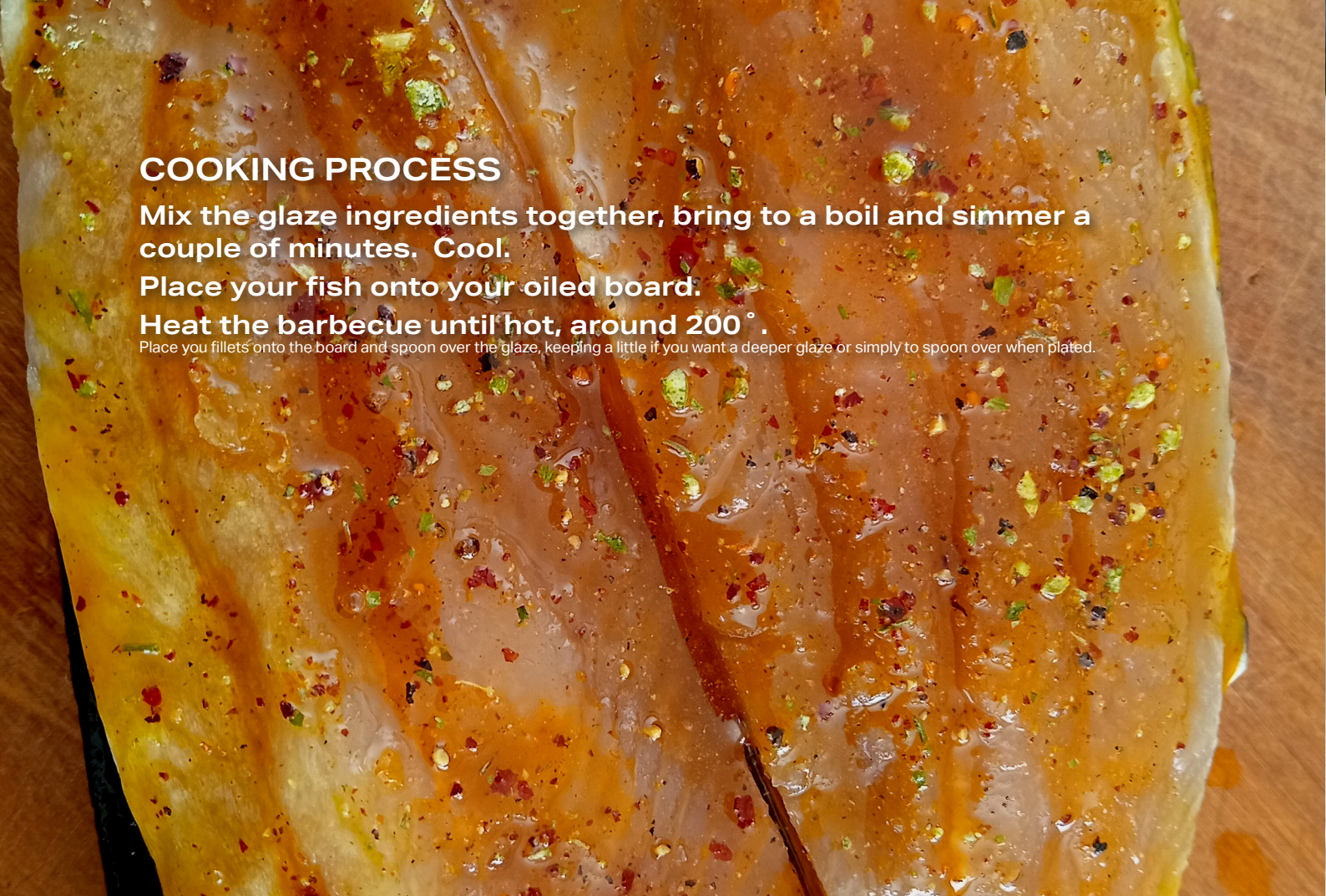
Most recipes call for a glaze type topping that will caramelise a little on cooking. There are so many versions of these. To follow the American /Canadian way this would be maple syrup along with some herbs and spices. A Japanese version with miso, brown sugar, etc. You can adapt so many other versions; Cajun, Chinese, Indian, they all work well. If you don't have Maple syrup, try a New Zealand version with golden syrup as a base.



INGREDIENTS

- 1 or two wild Trout skin on fillets or one purchased 600-800g skin on salmon fillet
- 1 cedar plank soaked in water, wiped and lightly oiled.
- 4 tablespoon maple or Chelsa golden syrup
- 2 tablespoons lemon juice
- 2 teaspoons mustard (your choice of type)
- 1 teaspoon chipotle (powder or sauce okay)
- 1 teaspoon mixed herbs (prepared spice and herb mixes are good)
- 1 teaspoon salt
- A generous grind of black pepper





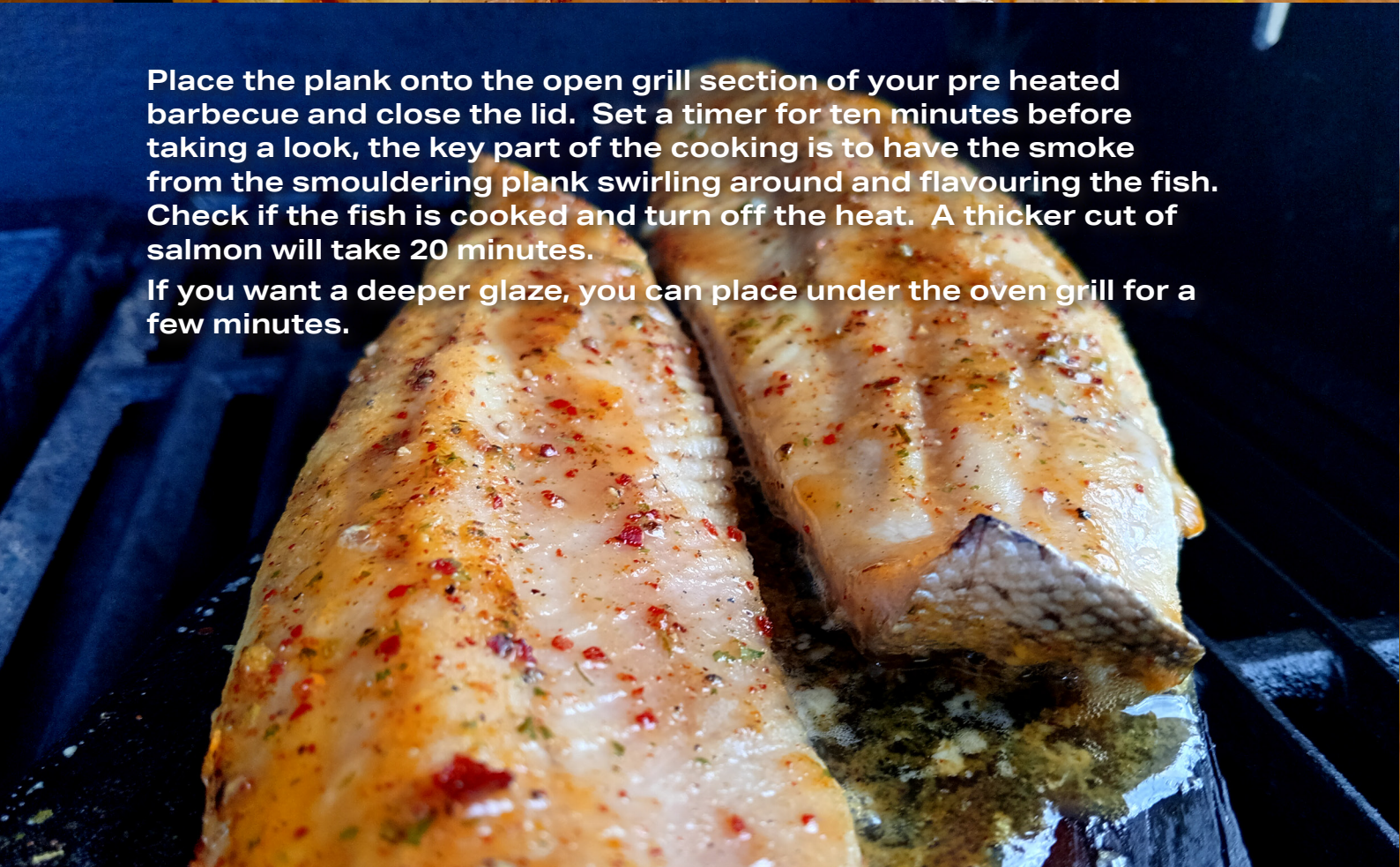
COOKING PROCESS

Mix the glaze ingredients together, bring to a boil and simmer a couple of minutes. Cool.

Place your fish onto your oiled board.

Heat the barbecue until hot, around 200 °.

Place your fillets onto the board and spoon over the glaze, keeping a little if you want a deeper glaze or simply to spoon over when plated.



Place the plank onto the open grill section of your pre heated barbecue and close the lid. Set a timer for ten minutes before taking a look, the key part of the cooking is to have the smoke from the smouldering plank swirling around and flavouring the fish. Check if the fish is cooked and turn off the heat. A thicker cut of salmon will take 20 minutes.

If you want a deeper glaze, you can place under the oven grill for a few minutes.





Simply place the whole board onto your table and lift the cooked fish off the skin.

Serve with any vegetable or salad you like. In this picture I put some braised onions and some rainbow silverbeet in a little butter (no water). Whatever is in season will work as a side dish.

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Reflections on Nymphing Part 2, Larger Streams

The MICRO Leader System

By Steve Griffith



Time certainly flies when I consider that it is 18 months since I wrote part one of this article, "Reflections on Nymphing Small Streams", in the Summer 2024 issue. There, I explained how and when I fish the modular leader with nymphs, dry flies, and streamers.

The modular leader is great for fishing short casts where the effect of drag is not so much of an issue, and rig adaptability is the objective. But when fishing nymphs at distance, where the effects of drag caused by both wind and line sag can become a significant issue, this is where the micro leader comes in. Like the modular leader, my introduction to using micro leaders has taken my previously average success level in nymph fishing to another level, when used under the right conditions.

Originally created for competition fishing, microleaders consist of a very thin section of monofilament (typically 6 - 8lb rated breaking strain) connected to a fly line, or some form of minimal diameter euro running line. There is plenty of resource online describing how best to configure and use microleaders. Forums such as Troutbitten, Tactical Flyfisher have excellent online videos which cover this.

The microleader is fished as a running line through the rod, and directly connected to the tippet via a short section of sighter material. This sighter material can be multicoloured, with a combination of shades that vary depending on lighting conditions, aiming to get the required background contrast to help with visible bite detection at all times. Usually, the running line is also some form of highly visible monofilament. I use a product called Pierre Sempre, which comes in a range of sizes and colours. This product was previously only available overseas, but can now be purchased locally at 'I Love Flyfishing'. I like this product, as it is relatively strong and limp, and this helps for bite detection, especially when fishing with a reasonable length of line out the rod tip (e.g. one rod length or more).

Just bear in mind here, that in the Taupo region, total leader and tippet length is restricted to less than 6 metres. So when fishing larger rivers, it isn't uncommon to fish with a section of flyline or euro running line between the rod guides.

Fishing with micro leaders is typically only used with nymphs and long, ultra sensitive euro nymphing rods between 10 and 11 feet (or more!) long. This is because during the cast, the angler is casting the weight of the flies themselves, rather than the weight of the fly line, or a heavier modular leader as described in Part 1. Do not expect this rig to be the best choice for fishing dry flies or streamers. The latter could be used if required, but typically would require some weight to allow the rod to load during the cast.

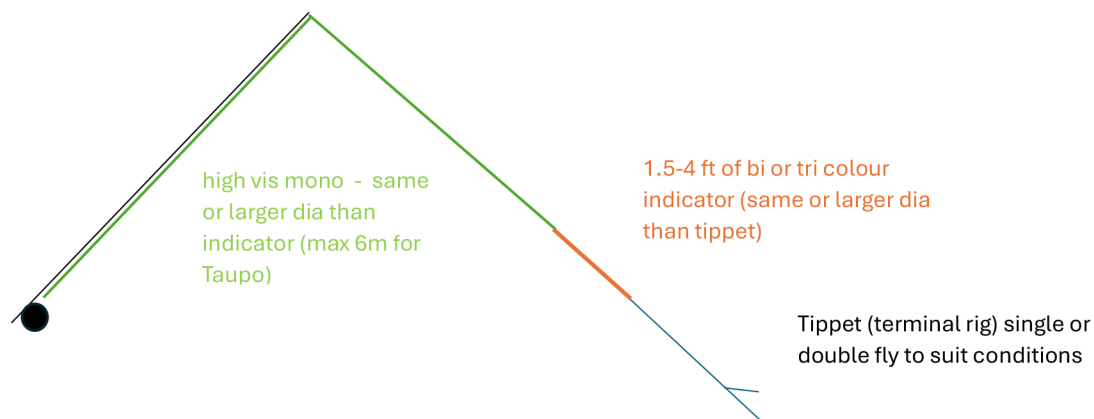
Depending on the weight of the flies being used, and also the size of fish expected to be encountered, these rods vary between 2 and 4 weight, although the tip action is generally the most important aspect. Butt sections on euro rods are generally upsized to put pressure on fish, which is required to overcome the leverage working against the angler due to the long rod length. I typically fish a 3 weight euro rod that is 10'10" long, and it has no problems dealing with winter run fish typically encountered in the central North Island.

The Pierre Sempre Jaune (yellow) I typically use is 0.203mm diameter and 3.520kg/7.7lb breaking strain, which while it might seem light, provides several things for me:

- a breaking strain and diameter that is typically heavier than my standard tippet size
- enough thickness to provide good visible bite detection when reaching out.
- light enough to not drag flies back towards me when reaching out, especially when using nymphs with bead sizes 3mm or larger

When fishing in the smaller diameters, in my experience, it becomes more of a challenge to ensure the breaking strain of the rig becomes increasingly higher towards the connection with the fly line or euro running line. This is because we are trying to take advantage of thin and limp micro running lines, whilst also stepping down in breaking strain to use tippet that is sufficiently strong enough to handle the relatively large trout often encountered in New Zealand. I suggest you experiment with what works best for you.





Above: an illustration of a typical microleader setup.

Below: the materials I have been using successfully.



Using this set up, to some extent, you can manage the position of breakages by experimenting with stronger or weaker knots at specific junctions. Having said that, we are dealing with fine margins/differences of breaking strains between the three sections, and each material's breaking strain can be thrown out completely by a small nick or abrasion. So check your running lines regularly for damage, and replace if necessary. Make sure you also re-tie knots regularly, especially after they get stressed through snags or landing several good sized fish.



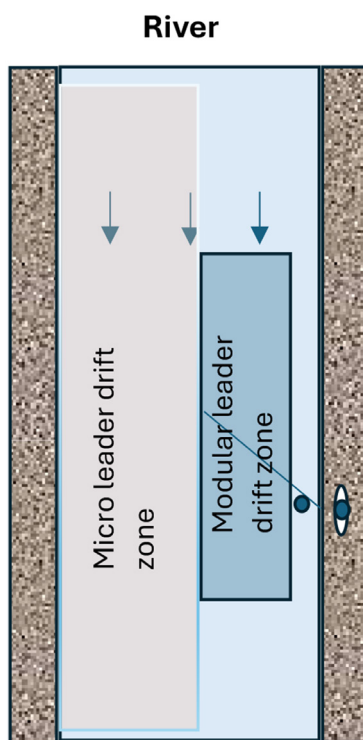
The technique itself involves casting the rig upstream and across, and maintaining just enough positive tension on the line to ensure the nymphs drift back naturally. Like any other style of nymphing, when the drift is complete, the rig is cast back upstream, and it is rinse and repeat, whilst making your way upstream.

When fishing with such thin running line, casting becomes much more of a challenge, especially for those relatively new to fly fishing who are learning the mechanics of fly casting. It is important here that the cast is made in a way that protects the thin, delicate rods from collisions with tungsten beaded flies that we are typically using, whilst ensuring maximum energy is transferred from the fly rod to the flies. In the following link, Devin Olsen explains the mechanics of the cast. Note the use of efficient casting and body placement which helps to minimise fatigue, and helps take pressure off common pressure points, such as the shoulders.

In addition, 'water loading' is often used to cast the rig upstream, by using the tension of the water against the tippet and flies (hanging in the current below), to load the rod for the cast. This cast is especially useful when using light flies in windy conditions (there are plenty of online resources that demonstrates how to do this).

What I find advantageous with this style of fishing is that I can fish across multiple seams of water without dragging the flies, whereas with the modular mono rig, a purely upstream fishing style is used, where I am typically fishing seams of water that don't extend beyond my rod tip.

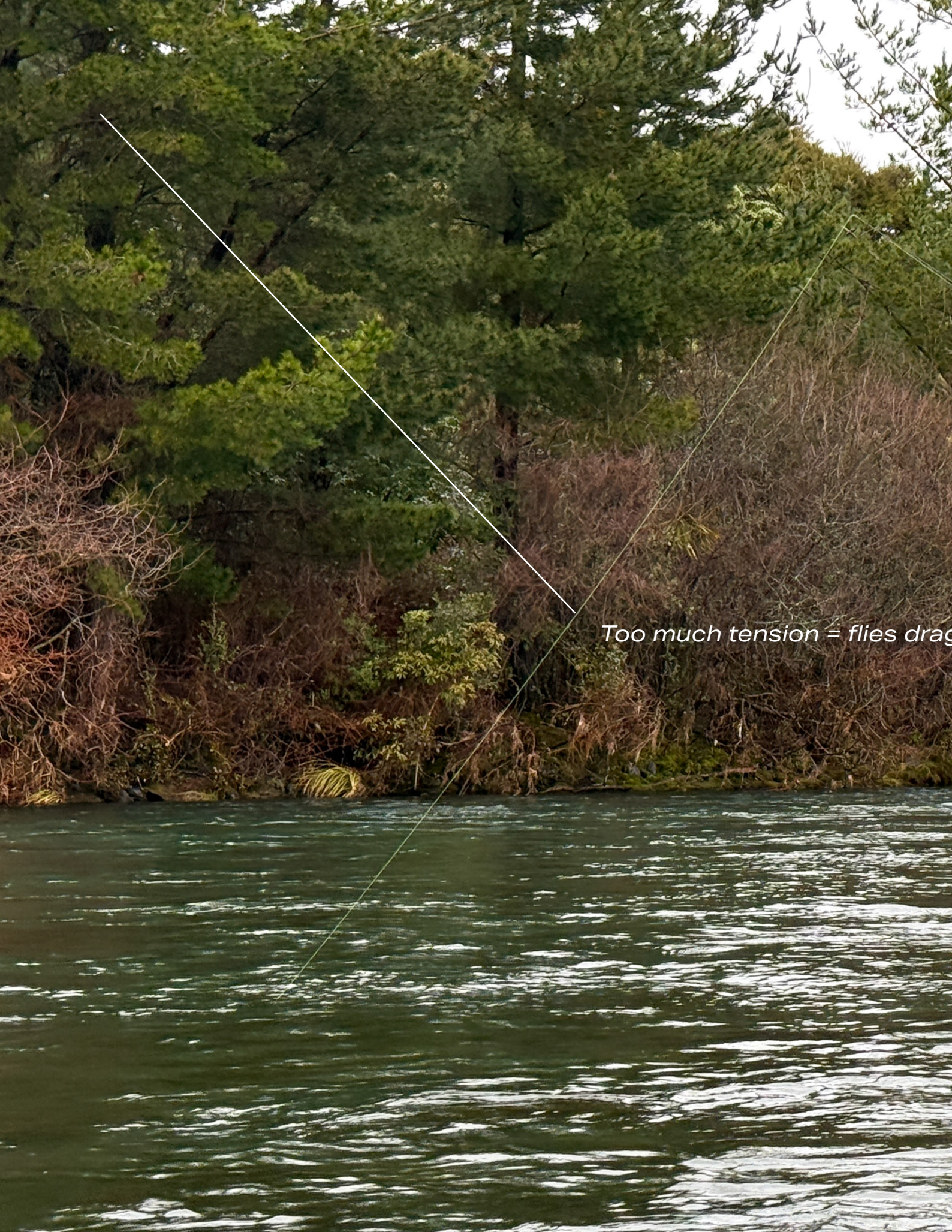
The illustration below shows typical drift zones that I use for the micro leader versus the modular leader:



When fishing at a significant distance across the river with the micro leader, there is often a fine line between fishing with too much tension in the line, and not enough. Too much tension, and the flies get pulled out of the intended drift line. Not enough tension, and the angler cannot maintain direct contact with the flies. The optimal drift is with a very minimal amount of sag in the subtle, limp line. It takes practice to get this right, and concentration while fishing. I don't expect to sit back and observe the surrounding wildlife if I am expecting to catch fish using this method!

The photos on the following pages show the subtle difference between too much tension, and 'just enough' to maintain contact . . .





Too much tension = flies drag







Optimal tension = good bite c



detection and flies drift naturally



Like any nymphing tactic, particularly in the cold winter months, getting the nymphs to depth quickly is key, and this rig provides a significant advantage in that there is no heavy or large diameter line to slow the rate of descent. This is particularly helpful when fishing tight behind structure or in 'pocket water' which can be difficult or impossible to fish using traditional indicator nymphing techniques. It does, however, take practice to get a good level of accuracy in terms of fly placement, due to the lack of taper in the rig, which would otherwise provide good accuracy during the cast.



While the micro leader rig is more specialised and targeted exclusively towards nymphing, a day on the water can be made more versatile by remembering to bring a second spool or reel with either a fly line, or a modular leader installed. That way, a more versatile approach can be taken if conditions allow, and you can work your way back downstream at the end of the day swinging a streamer through other likely looking water.

I hope that the above insights give you all another perspective to consider for your next adventure on the river. There is no end to learning something new, and there is a huge abundance of online information available from experienced anglers from all over the world.

So this Winter why not give something new a go. Who knows, you may find even more reason to enjoy being out there!

BOOKS

PETER STOREY REVIEWS JOHN AUSTIN'S BOOK

For the record, I got onto John via Ross Baker, at TRM, who had sent me an article which did not fit and then, John's. Being ex-Army myself, its description of Bruno matched so many acquaintances that it immediately pulled me in enough to contact John, which led to the article in this issue. In return, I asked if I could read and review this latest book.

GAME FISHING IN THE NORTH COUNTRY is an historical record of the various species present in northern UK, the methods used to catch them, the hatcheries established to maintain angling opportunity, noted local flies, tackle makers, anglers, angling clubs and authors, events, good and bad, and quoted titles for further reading. At close to 300 pages, it's one of the most complete I have come across.

Of the eight quoted species present, only Atlantic salmon and brown trout made it here; although some are closely related, all char species present have come from Northern America. I often wonder why grayling were not brought here, especially as the native species was already failing by the time salmonids were first imported. Grayling would fill the Winter river fishing gap in our angling calendar.

The first four sections are fascinating. That a very commonly used fly imitated a large moth was surprising, but then again, no more so than mice! Interestingly, like many parts of NZ, North Country flyfishing also has emphasis towards stoneflies rather than mayflies. In the fly section, the 19th Century Lee's Favourite pattern still looks transferable to any water holding our Black Stoneflies, as do some other material descriptions. It is also clear many of the methods we use are just repetitions



LETTERS

VIBERT BOXES, SALMON HATCHERIES & SEALS

I always enjoy Tony Orman's articles and would like to comment on a few of his subjects in the Autumn 2026 issue of the Trout Fisher magazine.

In 1963, I did a medical locum for 6 months in Stratford before starting in medical practice in Tauranga. I made friends with a number of anglers including 90 year old Jack Petrie, who taught me how to fish creepers. He and a number of other anglers were very scathing about Vibert boxes installed in a number of Taranaki streams being of any use, as many were found with eels stationed below simply sucking out their contents.

As a method to support a declining salmon fishery in Canterbury, a number of well-meaning salmon anglers installed hatcheries on some of the main salmon rivers. They were naturally very disappointed when the new CEO of North Canterbury Fish and Game discontinued their use.

I spent 5 years in the USA and fished a lot of water in Montana, Idaho, Washington State and Alaska. I spoke with many anglers over there and addressed the International Fly Fishing Conclaves in Montana and Michigan. In the process I learnt that many of their salmon and steelhead hatcheries had also been discontinued because the smolt produced had somehow altered their DNA, causing them not to thrive at sea. Another reason for the closures was that warming sea temperatures offshore of the mouths of rivers connected to these hatcheries had forced the main salmon food, krill, to migrate to cooler conditions.

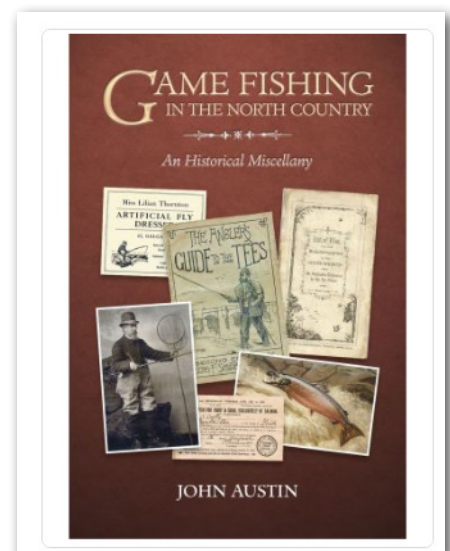
Lastly, I agree with Tony that commercial fishing close to shore has encouraged seals into fresh water in search of food. The most serious examples I have encountered are Martins and Big Bay, in Fiordland. Both Lakes McKerrow and Lake Alabaster, and the lower Hollyford River, were once superb trout fisheries. Now the seals have cleaned them out of trout. I have in the past witnessed a couple of dolphin enjoying a lunch of trout from Lake McKerrow but these were nothing to what has happened now.

John Kent.

of those used by other anglers for centuries before. That's not surprising. Tackle keeps changing as materials and manufacturing evolve but salmonids, and the problems faced in fishing for them, remain constant (so far). Talking to him about spiders, John also pointed out how W C Stewart's writing mirrors many previous northern authors. Writers, I believe, have an ongoing duty to ensure each generation understands that tactics and their implementation are the key to angling success.

The section on hatcheries was interesting, the first business mentioned being responsible for some of the transports of salmon here, those ova coming, surprisingly, from the River Severn. Acclimatisation was general practise back then, of course, some of these businesses transporting exotic ova into Africa and between the UK and North America as well.

An intriguing and informative book in so many ways, Game Fishing in the North Country is published by Coch-y-Bonddu Books. There's a link on this graphic. Contact is Paul Morgan: orders@anglebooks.com





Confessions of an Addicted Salmon Angler, Parts 14 & 15

More Problem Solving

By Larry Burke

What at one time seemed strange to me about salmon fishing was the unpredictability of every new season. A good season does not mean the next one or the one after is going to be as good. Salmon have normally a 3 year at sea life cycle, which means they can be four years old when starting their spawning run depending on how long they took reaching the sea as smolt. However, nature has contingencies. Some salmon will return after two years at sea and a small percentage will return at 4 and 5 years. All these variables the sea brings to the salmon lifecycle, have not been very well understood, nor researched, probably because in New Zealand, searun salmon mainly exist in just a few east coast rivers of the South Island and have not been of interest to other F&G regions. (Despite those rivers' licensing fees helping to subsidise North Island F&G regions.

The next 2 seasons, 2003-4 and 2004-5, would produce the lowest catch rates since 1993, excluding 1996-7 when I hardly fished because of new employment. While the numbers were low these fish were a lot heavier. Time spent fishing was about the same both seasons and my usual month of leave in March.

As usual, I tried out something new. I had, for several seasons, been becoming concerned about knots. The line I used then was Suffix Synergy, 14lb (6.4kg) breaking strain, and I was finding it seemed to weaken with repeated casting, with spinners snapping off when casting. I had trained myself to retie the knot after catching a fish or hooking a snag and it still kept happening.

One day, buying some spinner blanks at the Hooks, Lines & Nets shop, I found these strange bits of wire with details that said they could be used instead of tying knots when using Rapala lures. I wondered if these could both work with Zeds and solve the knotting problem, and brought 3 of them, at \$1 each. Soon decided I could maybe make my own, this sort of thing being nothing new to me, having done similar wire bending stuff doing fencing in forestry. First I would need some sort of jig to bend wire stiff and strong enough not to bend out under pressure. Single strand



copper wire shaped easily but was not rigid enough. Woven wire trace proved no good but I found a single strand shark trace that looked ideal. Single strand, pre-straightened stainless steel wire leader material from Mason Tackle company came in 25 foot/(7.60metre lengths at 60lb/27kg breaking strain, but it turned out too flexible. Tried 120/54kg and 140lb/63kg

120/54 to be the best and 4cm was need to make each 2.5cm clip. So I could get 130 out of the 25 feet/7.60metres at a cost of about \$0.10 each.

Next I made a few tests. Taking a couple of split rings, I attached one to the clip and the other to a length of the Synergy line, then attached clip split ring to a piece of #8 wire and that to the Synergy line onto my spring balance fish weighing scales. Pulling until the Synergy broke I found that never gave way below the 14 lb (6.3kg) breaking strain. I then wondered how much strain the clips would take and tested that up to 35lb (15.9), when the split rings gave way, with two or three clips embedded in my fingers along the way. I also tested braid to 15kg with none of the clips failing below that breaking strain. I had also used wire cutters to cut the wire and that left a sharp edge, which I solved with the mini grinder I have for roughing up spinners I painting them to give the paint a better hold. That made testing even better on my hands! Ended up making thousands of clips, enough not to make any more for several years, even giving packets of 20 clips away for other anglers to try.

I also kept busy during the winter painting spinners to try out new patterns. Martin kept bringing me bags of his to do, as he also was looking at different colours. Along with buying antique reels and old spinners, any books on salmon I could find, and other old angling stuff on TradeMe, I was learning more about the fishy object of my addiction.

The wire

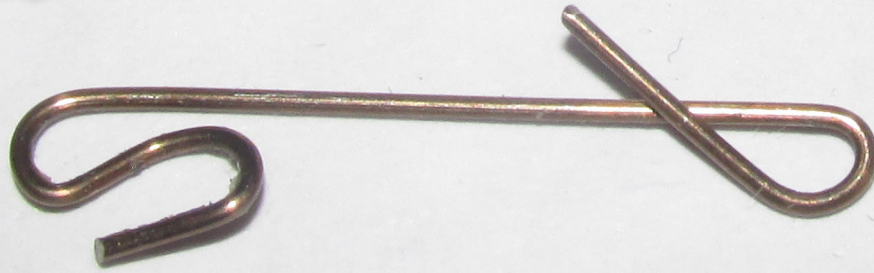
The clip-making process

Ready for testing and

(Left) Testing



Finished clip . . .



Started concentrating on the fishing towards the end of 2003 and was lucky enough to land my first of the season on New Years Eve – a great way to end the year. That was caught late afternoon (6.15pm) in the Kaiapoi using one of the clips – which made for a very nervous angler trying something new. Was very tentative – even more so when I realised the salmon was heavier than the line breaking strain – but everything worked. A bright silver jack salmon 17lb/7.73kg, 32.5"/82.5cm long, girth 19"/48cm, on the black and white Zeddie. In exceptional condition, it was a relief that the clips I had made were doing what I hoped they would.

It was at this time we decided to sell our old place that we had been renting out, as it was starting to be a liability. Spent some time tidying it up and that cut into my days off and fishing time for the next 4 months or so. But it sold without advertising to the real estate person we brought our new place from and provided enough after the mortgage was paid to put in a new kitchen and some other renovations.

Nonetheless I did however manage one afternoon out on the river 27th January, fishing the Kaiapoi mouth, and landed a small precocious jack at 5.15pm. 3lb/1.36kg, 18.5"/47cm long, 11"/28cm girth. A lot of salmon anglers think small jacks like this should be wiped out as they will affect the size of the salmon. However, as I written before, nature knows better and they are a form of insurance in getting as many eggs as possible fertilised and science has shown that their early maturing does not affect the size of future generations. They are however very tasty!

After that I had my usual month off but the fishing was slow, for me anyway, with just a couple of salmon hooked briefly. It wasn't until the 11th of March that I latched onto a good take. By then I had been trying every spinner in my bag and believe me, I carry more than a few. Years later, after I stopped carrying a pack and used a buggy, I counted them and the total was 350! Finally hooked up on a dulled silver Zed in the Kaiapoi, to a scrappy 13lb/5.90kg, 29"/73.5cm, with a 17.5"/44.5cm girth. It was like playing the first fish of the season again, the same nervousness and weak knees.

. . . on a dulled silver with cemented glitter 12g Zeddie





Exceptional condition . . .

After this for me there was nothing. Spent time netting for the rest of the crew, what few fish came our way. It is the way some seasons are – others catch fish you don't, but it is just good to be fishing. The number of anglers thinned out as the fish numbers dropped. By the 31st of March I decided to do something different, go up river looking for fish – trout or salmon. I had not fished up river for years, mainly because of my neck injury and the thought that if I slipped and fell again, I could possibly end up in a wheelchair or something.

Headed up the stop bank on the north side of the Waimakairi, late morning, driving along, looking at the close braid to that side, about 2 km above the state highway bridge I found a likely spot, where two leads merged back into one braid again, There was softer tumbly water in the middle and a bit further down, an obstruction caused the water to flow around a small shingle island. In this overall fairly shallow reach, the softest water was where the two leads merged and in front and behind the obstruction. I had my Fenwick 7 foot/2.13m salmon rod but put my heavy trout reel on it, a Shimano Symetre 4000FI, that I used lake fishing. The spinner was what I call a 'special' – like a Toby without the fins and painted black and white. I started where the leads met, concentrated on putting the spinner across and letting it swing down through where I thought the softest water was and so, the best resting place for a fish. Working my way downriver a couple paces before casting again, the cast I put in front of the obstruction was where I felt a strong take, struck, and was into a strong fish. Trout or salmon? Whichever, it took off downriver and I had to follow (carefully), hoping I could turn it back into the current. After about 100 metres it did and I caught a glimpse – a salmon! Gained some control. Next problem where to land it? The edge had a clean drop to the water and nowhere to beach a fish. Looked around and further down the edge sloped into the water, I slowly eased down to it and beached a surprisingly fresh run salmon, 10lb/4.55kg, 27"/68.5cm long, with a 15"/38cm girth. Took me a while to calm down afterwards, sitting there catching my breath. Only the second up-river salmon I had ever caught.

That was the season. 4 salmon, average weight 10.75lb/4.89kg. The clips had worked and ahead was time to make more, paint more spinners, etc, before the next season starts.



PART 15

The 2004-5 start was very disappointing. Down at The Point, we found the hole had disappeared again and up to more than halfway across the river was a sand bar that was exposed around some low tides. The Kaiapoi still had a narrow channel at a reasonable depth, but it was about 100 metres down from The Point before there was any holding water. The main channel of the Waimakariri was over the Stewart Gully side and not very wide. This was the result of a fairly dry winter and no clearout of silt, coupled with shingle removal by concrete construction companies, meaning that more sand came down the river and settled at the top of the main McIntosh Hole. With little happening over the Gully side, we were wondering throughout January if we needed move down to the Waimakariri mouth or head up river. Eventually the weather gave us a helping hand in the form of medium sized flood late in the month. Though it didn't remove the sand bar in front of The Point, it created a deeper and wider channel on The Gully.

An early morning visit to our usual spot over there found none of the usual locals there, who usually fished in daylight until they decided breakfast was a better option. Just after 7.30 am, not really concentrating, I just about had the rod pulled out of my hands from a savage strike. This fish hooked itself and tried not to stay that way and, as always, being the first fish the nerves were there. Repeatedly running under an over hanging tree on lengthy upstream runs along the edge, every time it ran I saw flashes of silver in the clear water but got no idea of the size. Finally, after what seemed an age, the fish rolled on to its side and I was able to bring it close enough for Martin to net. A 15.5 lb/7kg, 31"/78.5cm long, 18.25"/46cm girth, a perfect silver fresh run jack salmon, the best-conditioned salmon of that length I had caught. Martin got a similar salmon a little later on that good morning.

The next few visits produced nothing. Sometimes, when salmon fishing, your mind plays tricks and you have these negative internal thoughts – maybe there is not going to be a run, maybe we missed it. These lead to conversations that are not good for your mental health when you are a salmon addict and you just have to keep at it. As an aside, I have known one or two salmon anglers who went 10 years without landing a fish, being out there every day. Their mates made sure they got to take at least one fish a season home. Personally I don't think I could go that long without a fish. (Didn't know in recent times that could become a possibility.)

My wait was only 17 days, out again at The Gully, by myself, on a day off. It was a good morning weather-wise and I was just about into automatic casting when my line just stopped. The strike too was automatic and what broke the surface looked a good fish. This fight was just dogged resistance, which makes things hard if you think the salmon is heavier than your breaking strain. Had to beach it too as my net was out of reach. To my surprise, this salmon was in better condition than my first fish, even though the weight was the same: 15.5lb/7 kg, 30.5"/77.5cm long, 19"/48.3cm girth. Both these fish were taken on my black and white Zeds and clips; I was getting more confident with them, even if the crew were still sceptical.

Three weeks into my months annual leave without landing a fish, I decided to find another spot. I had noticed from The Gully that the McIntosh side of the Kaiapoi confluence had been fishing okay, so Martin and I decided to head there. This caused a few comments from the anglers there having us on about coming over their side, all in good fun.

17 March, 4.30pm, I hooked into a good fish. There was limited water where I was fishing as it was near lowtide and sand bar was becoming exposed, so there were only two ways it could go, up the Kaiapoi or down the Waimakariri. The fish chose down and that was a problem as there were overhanging trees, some of which were close to the surface at the deepest part of the river. I was standing on a small beach which helped and was able to turn it back upstream, winding flatout to keep up. This seemed to take some steam out of it and the action changed into another dogged fight, slowly pumping in and on to the beach. Turned out that this my biggest salmon of the season: 18lb/8.18kg, 31"/79cm long, 21"/53.5cm girth jack

The strange thing about fishing McIntosh was that most of the regulars at that time went home at low tide. We had learnt that sometimes, you get another shot



at the fish on the incoming tide. It may just be salmon that have come in on the low tide turn back into the current and head back down the Kaiapoi or the Wamakariri. We discovered this fishing The Point. So I was able to play this fish as there was no chance of tangling other anglers' lines as they had gone. Surprisingly the same thing happened the next day at 4.15pm. Had a strong take and another battle with a strong fish which tried to go up the Kaiapoi, so I could follow it more easily. A good fish, 15lb/6.8kg, 30"/78cm long, 18.5"/47cm girth.

That was the last fish of the season fish. We found it hard to understand the low numbers. The condition of these salmon was excellent at an average of 16lb/7.27kg, with an average length of 30.63"/78cm, so there had obviously plenty of food at sea. (We did not consider poor spawning 3 years before back then.) This had me thinking that maybe I should get more involved in the salmon enhancement and volunteer work that I was hearing about. So I made the decision to become a member of the New Zealand Salmon Anglers Association.

18 pound fish are hard to handle at the best of times, let alone when running under overhanging trees . . .



*Snakes, Brumbies, Platypi, Pigs, Wombats, Cookaburras –
you name it you'll likely meet it . . .*

Chasing Trout in the great Aussie outdoors

By Matt Hoole



Fly fishing takes you into some extraordinary places, and in Aussie, some certainly test the pronunciation. In ACT and New South Wales, the Kosciuszko, Namadgi National Parks, Jugungal Wilderness and the Goodradigbee and Goobarragandra rivers give your mouth and brain a workout. Thankfully, they offer a bounty of superb waterways with ample opportunities to explore far and beyond the next bend.

Generally speaking, access points are good, roads and tracks sufficient and trails plentiful. Historic huts and homesteads are scattered like marbles throughout the high country, all a joy to visit and soak in their history. Unlike NZ, the huts are there for use or emergency only, rather than a first come, first served place of comfortable refuge.

Aside from these huts, campgrounds are stationed throughout most regions, with small towns or settlements generally close by for supplies. Some campgrounds offer BBQ's and toilet blocks to provide some luxury, while more basic campgrounds offer flexibility to choose your campsite, with long drop toilets typically available as a minimum.

I guess, it really is upon you to break free from the temptations and comforts of modern day life and society – those weekend Netflix series on cozy L-shaped sofas, to sitting behind a glowing device scrolling fishy posts to get out and experience the great outdoors.

Once there, the native wildlife inhabiting these lands is largely active, often loud, gregarious and at times, overbearing. Waking up to a bunch of cockatoos cackling in a nearby snow gum, you'd honestly think you were in Southeast Asia surrounded by a troop of monkeys. In saying that, it's what commonly brings these trips to life. When I reminisce back to previous camping and fly fishing journeys with both family or friends, the wildlife has nearly always pitched in, enhancing the experience, giving a few great stories I'd like to share from our travels.



It was early spring. Myself and mate Andrew were on the road at the crack of dawn heading for the Snowy Mountains, the sun peaking behind Namadgi's cragged mountainous outcrops on our way out of Canberra. Picking up speed quickly on the Monaro Highway, Andrew accidentally nutmegged a snake between the tyres, leaving it to the crows. It was that time of year when snakes were beginning to come out after the long brumation period, when the weather warms. I'd been fortunate on my journeys not to come into too close contact with snakes, being careful not to go bush-bashing through thick scrub on my way down to the river; however, that's exactly what I did this time!

By late morning, we'd made good progress up river on the Thredbo, becoming distanced after Andrew stopped to take a break. Luckily, we had cell phone coverage and when a call came through from Andrew saying he'd taken a good animal trail down to the river and the water looked unreal, he advised that I retreat, find the trail and meet him down on the riverbank to begin fishing. Well, I must have calculated the wrong corner or the wrong tree, because the animal trail I took narrowed in so quickly I might have well started hopping down it on one leg. Feeling committed, I began pushing my way through thick tea trees and scrub with abandonment, for a moment, reverting back to my native kiwi mindset in a pair of gatorless wading boots, eventually stumbling out on the riverbank where there was no sign of Andrew. I'll admit, sweat poured from my forehead when common sense dawned upon me, with the realization of how many slithering friends I may have bashed past set in. If I'm ever to do this again in spring, I'll pack a spare change of underpants.

Gathering my wits, I drifted a nice pool with a current that diverted the tail out into two sections. It was the type of water that promised fish, and before long, I was battling a nice rainbow that held firmly in the strong current, before slipping away when the net beckoned. Sliding a few small rainbows into the net and with still no sign of Andrew, it was time to head back up to the track, searching for the best way through. As I stepped over a big log in my path, I accidentally stood on it, snapping it clean. There was an almighty crack like a gunshot going off, before 'Copperhead John,' stuck his head up on the other side. My heartbeat stopping momentarily, while my foot was on its way down to meet him. Luckily for me, 'old mate' with the scales decided he'd make a break for it first, shooting off into the undergrowth – his body the size of a large black eel and housing a suit of armour that looked primed for a Minecraft shoot out.

Once back on the main track, recovering, Andrew came joyfully bounding up the track, "We must have taken different trails, Matt." "Yeah, you could say that." "What's wrong with you mate? You look like you've seen a ghost," he said. "I think I just did mate, one of your long slithery Aussie ones aye," I replied sarcastically with a grimace.



Andrew, on the Thredbo River, one of the iconic rivers in the Snowy Mountains . . .





Tantangara - home to the brumbies

Sunset on Mosquito Creek

Snakes, although intimidating, aren't the only threat while fishing out here in Australia. Sometimes it's the random things that occur when travelling on remote trails and roads, like what happened to us in the Tantangara area.

My older brother Simon was over from NZ, joining us on a few outdoor excursions. We'd left Canberra early and were travelling up into the high country to investigate Oldfields Hut for the day. Myself and Simon were also keen to explore the headwaters of the Goodradigbee river, unknown if it would be unfishable twig water or completely inaccessible. We were cruising down a loosely sealed road when a wild jet black stallion was suddenly running parallel to the car, like a scene shot from 'The Man from the Snowy River' film. With our mouths hanging open, the brumby then decided to change course, turning and bolting straight across the road directly in front of the bonnet. I can't tell you how close it was, but an animal of that size, running at that speed, you shudder to think of the consequences. Our mouths hung open at the edgy but impressive sight.

The Goodradigbee river towards its origins was tight water alright, wrestled in head high reeds and scraggly vegetation. Perhaps fishable with three weight rods, light tackle and unfathomable patience getting to the river through the snakey reeds. Unfortunately, we didn't have that option being a family affair for the day. We had a big cook-up over an open fire pit outside Oldfields Hut, before hiking back to the car. We then spent late afternoon into the evening drinking cold beer from the Esky on the back of the Ute, before fishing Mosquito Creek, a small, but beautiful winding tributary of Tantangara Reservoir.

In the classic vein of fly fishers, we often spent countless hours casting to spotted fish, and sometimes to fish that probably weren't even there at all. That stick with a tail of weed weaving about in the current or that rock that's submerged on the bottom in the shape of a big brown. A classic day's exploring and idyllic evening fishing putting the memory of 'Black Beauty' in our rear vision mirrors.







There is always plenty to surprise in the great Aussie outdoors: thieving kookooburras, wild pigs - you name it crossing the roads, but avoid any snakes you come across, like this large Tiger.

These sticks and stones from the last trip did not lead to quite the embarrassment of the next trip I'll allude to while fishing a stunning river in the southern part of the Kosciuszko N.P. Working my way upriver, I turned a bend to see a huge nose porpoising the surface of the water, before turning back down. Adrenaline pumping, I stalked up to the pool like an elk hunter in the peak of the rut, afraid to break the smallest shred of foliage in their wake. I cast endlessly for the best part of an hour, desperate to get a take, to no avail – trying various combinations and methods to lure this giant to my fly, but still not a response. Not even another rise. Arriving back at camp, we ran into two fishermen who were setting up about to head out. When they asked how I went, I couldn't help but describe in great detail, the rise, the nose I saw, the pool - the mighty brown? With a completely straight face, not even a wry smile, one of the fishermen replied, "Oh yeah, there's a platypus that resides in that hole." I can only wonder how much humour they found in that one, after leaving us to go fishing for the afternoon.

Camping out in the wild in Australia is fun, but like the old expression goes, 'the wild often reveals itself.' It's an uncomfortable feeling when you're a long way from your vehicle, tucked up nice and cozy in your tent sleeping, when nature starts calling. There've been several occasions that have sent shivers down my spine, one, an unforgettable moment that's been engrained in my mind forever... Therefore I have to ask the question, "Have you ever heard a wombat scream?" If you haven't, let me best describe it. It begins with a warm up noise that sounds like a horse puffing, before progressing to a frightening shriek that ends up sounding like a poltergeist screaming into the night. One night out in the wild, I was suddenly awoken, and completely and utterly startled! For a second I thought I'd entered one of Freddy Kruger's worst nightmares, I couldn't figure out for the life of me what this animal on 'Elm Street' was. Had the possums in the area suddenly mutated, or even worse, interbred with the local bat colony?

After morning coffee, I was on my way down to the river for a wash when I came across multiple scrapings, before almost treading on a pile of fresh wombat dung.





You can't mistake wombat dung. It's thick, black, usually consisting of multiple square stools and if you were to accidentally stand on it, you'd likely gain an inch or two. Also, good luck cleaning it off your boots! Tracing the marks back to camp, I knew I'd identified our culprit and could let the shivers of 'The Conjuring' that night slide off my back.

Traveling Australian country roads during dusk and dawn is like weaving your way through a National Wildlife Centre, hoping not to collide with an animal. Kangaroos, wallabies, foxes, wombats, snakes, hares, rabbits, and various other rodents are the main road kill, but on this particular drive home, we experienced something completely new.

After spending a day fishing in the Snowy Mountains, myself and Andrew once more, were cruising the Monaro Highway back to Canberra when a vehicle coming the other way flashed us, as a warning sign. Unfortunately, the bright lights temporarily blinded Andrew's vision before he could see clearly what stood in our path. With an overtaking lane beside us sharing multiple vehicles and traffic coming the other way, there was nowhere to go. Traveling at 100km, we ploughed straight into a wild pig, a big one! To be honest, I thought we'd been in a car accident. The pig was shunted under my tyre, seat, and spat out of the side of the Amarok. It was a heavy collision, the sound of hard metal being smashed in.

Andrew and I stopped to ensure there was no debris on the road and in the process, checked on the pig. We needed to ensure it was off the road, which it was, and at least it had been a quick death. The front passenger side of Andrew's Volkswagen Amarok also looked like it just had a quick death!

Yes, animals are a large danger on our roads, especially Kangaroos. They present a significant object to avoid, while their large carcasses left on the road after 'strikes' create equally significant hazards to navigate. Hence, why its important vehicles are equipped with the right outer body protection and safety features. This, however, may come down to a matter of personal preference.



To sum it all up, after a great session of late nymph fishing the Goobarragandra's fast flowing runs and pools, I arrived back at our tent at Rock Flat Campground to find Maïke cooking up a pan full of chicken. Cracking open a beer, I turned around to see a kookaburra sitting on the edge of our frying pan, eyeing up his next meal. He didn't seem at all concerned when I glared back at him in a stare off to see who would blink first. Quite frankly, he had that look in his eye he'd just accepted the earlier dinner invitation.

Looking into those confident eyes, I questioned what drives us to get away from our everyday lives to spend time in nature. The fishing, of course, but there's more to it; it's the whole package. Is it relaxation, recreation, outdoor meditation, exercise or that spiritual deep connection to nature? I'm sure for most fly fishers, fishing is the driving force, but is it really just the larger reason to be out there?

One thing I'm adamant about is that these animal encounters add to the experience. Australia's native flora and fauna is a big part of its culture, one that people travel far and wide for, even across the globe to experience. What's so exciting to me is, in a country where the land expanses seem never ending, we've only just begun to climb the mountain and there is still so much exploration to reach the summit, with much higher precipices to tackle.

Australia's biodiversity makes it a haven for fly fishers and adventurers alike. So if you're over this way, get out of the cities, theme parks and shopping malls and come and explore the great Aussie outdoors.



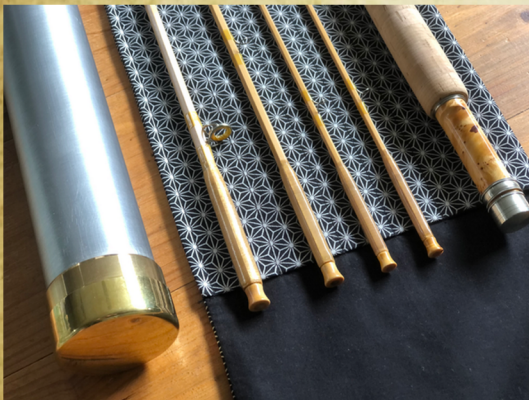


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