

RFS New Zealand - Stonefly Fishing Report

When eight good men and true set out in search of fish, where else would they head but for New Zealand; land of the long white cloud and big brown trout?



Andy Harris, Andrew McKenzie, Grant Ashby, Brian Quinn, Stuart Beal, John Garrett, Barry Cawthorn and Julian (aka Ian) Short chose Stonefly Lodge on the Motueka River to slum it, while we hammered the big fish only New Zealand can really offer. The ecologically sensitive lodge is situated in perfect surroundings; a broad river below the croquet court and mandatory helipad, snow dusted mountains surrounding and sweeping views of it all from deep leather arm chairs.



Andy and Brian organised a most memorable trip. Some of us flew Emirates and were well fed and watered on arrival, while those on Air New Zealand fared less well, immediately lifting the spirits of the Emirates fliers; schadenfreude is alive and well, even amongst the most companionable of fisherfolk. We hired cars and drove to Hamner Springs, where our normally tee-total president sampled every product of every local brewery and persuaded other reluctant drinkers into similar enterprise. Clear heads allowed us to enjoy the drive to the lodge next day through the Lewis Pass and quite wonderful countryside.

We knew we were in trouble on the evening of our arrival as we were greeted by our hosts, John and Kate Kerr. John had that extroverted good humour that made it clear we were here to enjoy ourselves and large amounts of beer

and wine would almost certainly be on the agenda. The food was quite extraordinary. Dean, the chef produced meals that were of a quality to shame some multi-hatted restaurants and the standard never wavered.



But what of the fishing? Well, I was getting to that. Separating into different pairs for each expedition, we had four days on the water, three of which were guided. The competence, helpfulness and sometimes sorely tested patience of our guides made a profound difference to our experience. We fished the Motueka, Whangapeka, Rolling and Baton Rivers over the course of our stay. On the second day, those with a head for heights and no control over their credit cards went helifishing on the Waingaro River, with gratifying returns.



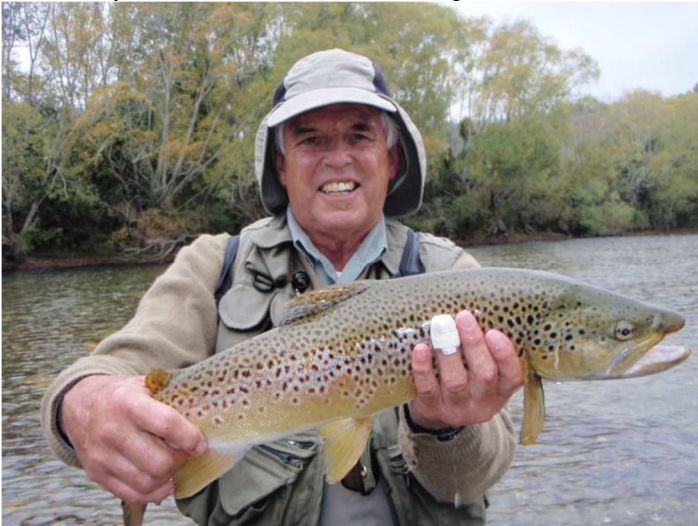
The fish were all big browns. The average weight was around four pounds but Barry top-scored with six and a half, for which he was awarded the trophy to prolonged and excited applause. We didn't all catch fish every day, but no one was disappointed. After Dean's dinners and John's wine the night before, feasting on Kate's beautiful buns for lunch, how splendid to walk on exquisite water, in amiable company with an excellent guide and genuine prospect of a decent catch!



The water was generally low, but its effect varied from one river to another. In some the fish were largely confined to the pools, in others the runs held most. There was little wind and patchy sunshine. On the third and unguided day, there was heavy rain, but overall falls were light and occasional.

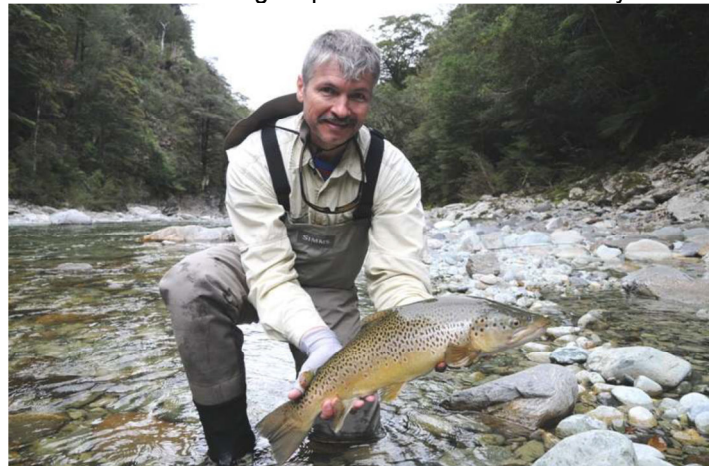


Most fish were taken on nymph and caddis variations on tiny hooks beneath exiguous indicators. A small number were taken on dries, including Barry's leviathan; spotted unguided and lured by a fly from his own collection. His satisfaction with his catch was such that more than once he felt obliged to provide us with a detailed description of his conquest.



After a day's fishing, we drank a compulsory beer or seven with the guides who kept us honest. Mercifully the standard of truthfulness was preserved while we sampled numerous whites and reds of the region, Dean's desserts being helped down with a little sticky.

Wading was sometimes awkward as we had to navigate river beds of large, water smoothed boulders. Higher waters earlier in the season could prove a hazard. For those who could cast, casting was relatively easy, as the banks were fairly clear and willows and blackberries few.



I have it on good authority that the Air New Zealand and Emirates pilots applied extra power on take-off from Christchurch; the aircraft struggling to heave eight bulging Rod Fishers into the air. This could easily be fishing at its finest. Good water, adequate fish numbers, satisfying catches, good company and good food. A return visit is far from unlikely.
Ian Short