

# FlyLife

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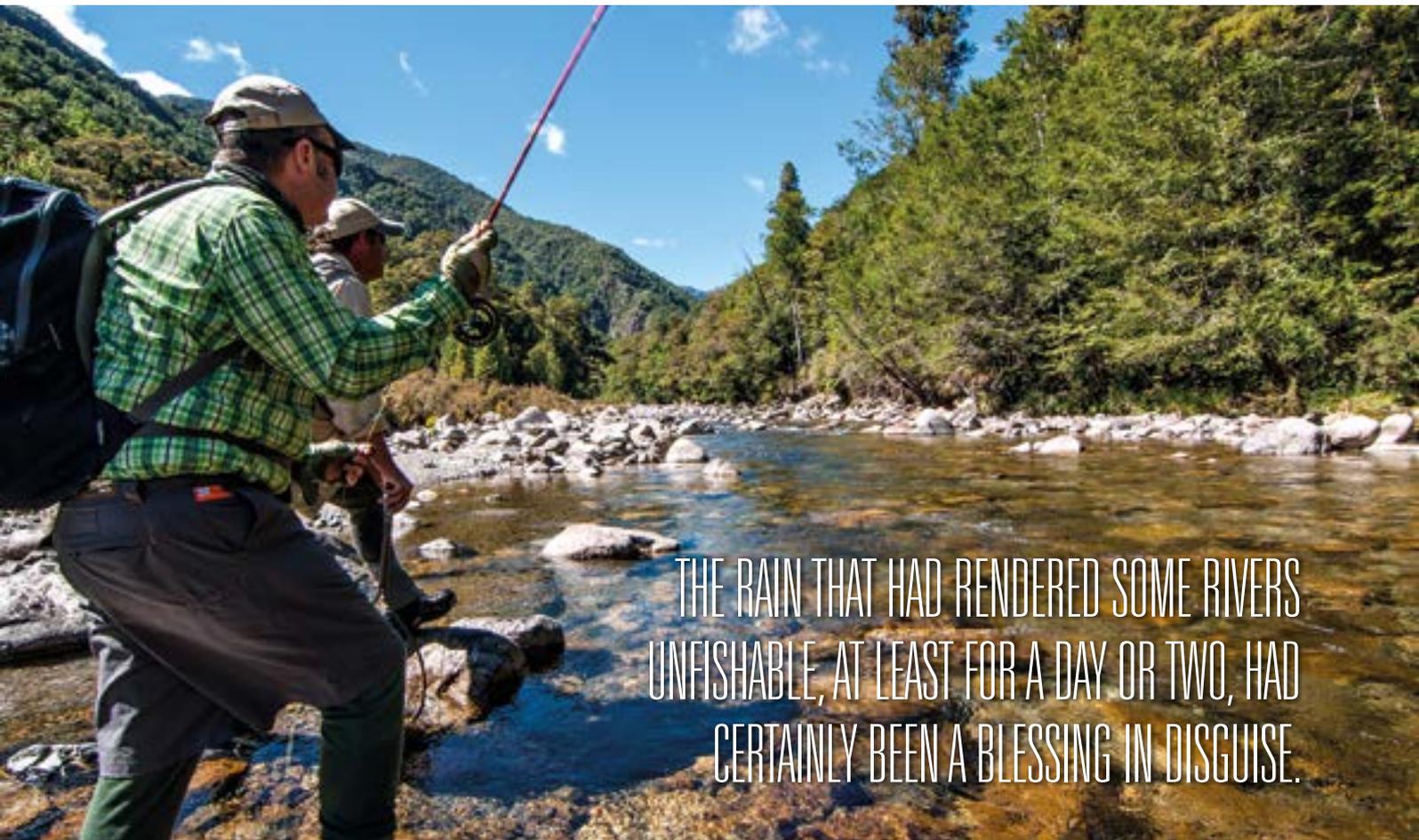
NUMBER 86 SUMMER 2016/17

AUSTRALIA & NEW ZEALAND

## SALT & FRESHWATER FLY FISHING



- BROOK TROUT QUEST • THE LONG ROD SAGA • SOUTHLAND FISHING •
- EXTREME STREAMS • AUSTRALIA'S BEST TROUT FLIES • THE KARAMEA •
- MULWALA COD • COCOS BONEFISH • TULLY RIVER • EXMOUTH COBIA •
- SUNSHINE COAST • LEFTOVER NYMPH • LONDON POSTCARD •



THE RAIN THAT HAD RENDERED SOME RIVERS UNFISHABLE, AT LEAST FOR A DAY OR TWO, HAD CERTAINLY BEEN A BLESSING IN DISGUISE.

## Karamea Karma

Mark & Sharon Cloutier retreat to the headwaters of the Karamea River.

There had been scarcely a drop of rain in the north of the South Island over the past two months, the hills parched, the grass nothing but straw. When the rain fell it seemed to bead on the ground like it does on a newly polished bonnet. The drops were big and rolled around like mercury, each drop running wildly, grabbing dust and grime along the way as they gathered before running into culverts and then to the river. The Motueka looked like a double shot latte. By the time we hit Highway 6 the river appeared unfishable.

We caught up with Felix Borenstein at his lodge and he was pretty upbeat about the rain and fishing prospects. His view was simple: rain is good, particularly after such a dry spell. It was obvious that some rivers would dirty up, but in his experience the best fishing happens a few days after days of rain (once it stops raining that is) no

matter what the season. He suggested the Karamea fishery, and if the water was too high in the main river then one of the tributaries should be perfect. Time to book a chopper.



Wild and beautiful.

### THE PARK

From the tiny town of Tapawera the Kahurangi National Park is a wild ocean of peaks and crags that stretch to the horizon. Forests crowd the mountainsides, clinging together so tightly that it looks impenetrable to all but the hooved. Each fold in the landscape channels water like a bouldery sluice, and where the folds join there are streams and rivers of unimaginable beauty. These folds in the landscape are too numerous to count, the lost streams impossible to reach, but in the back of your mind there is the urge to explore and discover.

David Pike, our guide, was keen to bypass the main river and push further upstream into the forest and find one of his boyhood favourites. This tributary of the mighty Karamea River was essentially a smaller replica of the main river, a stream so beautiful and pure that you could not only

I PRETENDED TO SEE IT, BUT COULDN'T BE SURE;  
I MEAN THIS WAS A SHADOW AMONGST MANY SHADOWS...



## Karamea Karma . . . continued

see its beauty, but feel it; such was the impact of the surrounding wilderness. The rain, which had dirtied the Mot so badly, had no effect here as the forest filtered the water to a point where air and water melded into one, seeming to challenge the law of refraction.

The light was poor but David found a shape and froze instinctively, watching intently for movement. He didn't speak, just waved his hand in short sharp 'get here quick' type flicks, then, doing his best Flinders Street cop impersonation, flipped his palm into a definitive stop. He spoke softly, his voice barely discernible above the

chatter of the river as he pointed out the brown. I pretended to see it, but couldn't be sure; I mean this was a shadow amongst many shadows.

I slid into the water and made the cast, but nothing; then another cast and wondered if the fish was really just another shadow after all. Another flick and the indicator paused long enough for me to snap a strike as quickly as I could. This isn't the place for simply tightening up on a fish, you need to pull the trigger and set the hook as quickly as your reflexes allow.

I had a big brown rumbling on a 4-lb tip like it was TV ringside, circa

1975, and I was already against the ropes. I raced upstream following the brute, then down, then back up again. My arm ached and I was puffing like an old man climbing steps. I soon had the fish's head up, but it was too early, the trout made the reel sing again and I fumbled about trying not to do anything stupid. David pointed out that we had all day to land this fish, so I calmed down a tad, applied some serious side strain and kept the fish off balance for long enough to get the net under it. A good fish, and an even better start to the day.

### THE GUIDE

David is one of Owen River Lodge's guides. A Motueka boy, his formative years were spent walking and exploring the rivers and lakes of the region, including the Kahurangi National Park. From the moment we set foot in the forest his connection with the river was evident. This wasn't just another guiding gig; it was a homecoming that went back three decades. On one of his treks almost thirty years ago he and his mates left a blaze in an old beech tree – we looked for that tree but couldn't find it on the bend where it once stood. I suspect it's now cover for the resident browns.

The head of the next pool revealed a trout laying doggo, its head appearing to rest on a cream-coloured rock.



Playing a solid fish from the pockets.

At first I thought it was using the rock as a sighter to pick up food, but the fish just lay there inert. I wanted to wake it up with a well-placed tungsten nymph but David knew better than to waste time on a 'sleeper'. We pushed on, looking for fish that were visibly feeding. In other words, we wanted a fish 'on station' but moving freely from side to side, taking naturals as it fed. Even some up and down-stream movement was okay, but nothing too adventurous. Trout that move too much, or are erratic feeders, can be a problem that only a Woolly Buzzer can sort!

The river tumbled down a series of steps, dropping into a long, skinny pool halfway down. Where the steps poured in, the water was a complex mix of bubbles and froth, creating a lot of 'in-stream noise' to help conceal clumsy wading. David found a trout swaying in the current like a swami, its head just protruding from under the froth and bubble. I could get as close as a rod length, and flipped the



I tried to 'tuck' the cast to get the fly to land first, wanting the nymph to sink fast.

There is a lot to think about when presenting to a fish. The combination of current, depth, drift, and fly colour,

### SCATTER GUN V SNIPER

After lunch, the sun drenched the valley in such a rich golden light that it turned the river into a string of golden beads and emerald plunge pools. I wasn't sure if I should be fishing or skinny-dipping, but I didn't want David to blush or Sharon to stone me. We stopped and watched the trout in one plunge pool, close to a dozen fish, many double-digit dream makers that were uncatchable, at least on that day.

The run into the pool was a beaut. Slow, clear and with two trout gently feeding, one either side of a huge boulder. I picked up the right-hand-side fish on a nymph. At four pounds it was no slouch, but the other trout looked double that and barely moved. Was it feeding, or sleeping? I studied the current: a small bubble line well to the right eventually brought food to the fish. The trout wasn't sleeping, it was feeding; it just didn't need to move!

There was no in-stream noise to allow me the luxury of umpteenth casts to get the drift right. This wasn't going



*The fish from the fifty-first cast!*

nymph out with only centimetres of fly line through the top guide. The indicator went under in a flash and I was huffing and puffing again as the fish went berserk.

### THE ONE SHOT MYTH

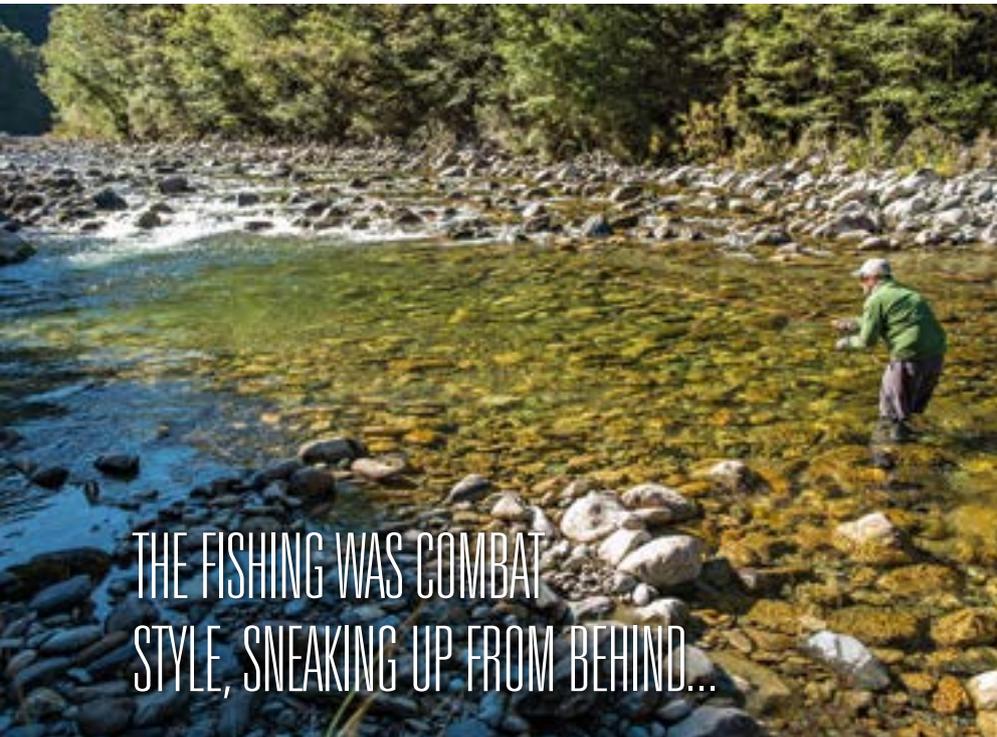
The next fish appeared as a dark smudge in the water, flickering in and out of a magician's cloak of shadow. There was nothing complex about the lie, but the current was fast with some volume to it. The fly would need some weight; the cast needed some thought.

size and weight, can be quite complex and in the end you need most of these things right to get a take. Getting this perfect on the first shot takes some doing. Sometimes it happens, but often it doesn't in my case.

The fly landed with a plip, sank like a pebble and the fish moved left ten centimetres and ate the fly. All this on the first cast, the fifty-first cast actually! When fish are focused on feeding they may not be as easy to catch as you first think, but they can be rather tolerant (thankfully).



*David knows what he's talking about when it comes to flies.*



THE FISHING WAS COMBAT  
STYLE, SNEAKING UP FROM BEHIND...

## Karamea Karma . . . continued

to be a scattergun approach, I needed to snipe this fish. I might get two or three shots at best, maybe just the one.

The first cast was good, a metre up from the fish to give the tiny nymph time to sink, but the current took it away from the trout. Simply casting at the fish was the wrong approach. I needed to get the fly into the current and let the flow do all the work.

Next cast was up and well to the right but, importantly, in the bubble line. The fish had barely moved a fin, the indicator came over it and just when I thought the fly should have

been on the fish's nose, the trout seemed to stiffen, the tuft of wool skidded, and I hit the button. I didn't land that trout; the last I saw of it was a big dark shape tearing up the pool, the line wrapping around several boulders along the way until, ping, but it was great trouting nonetheless.

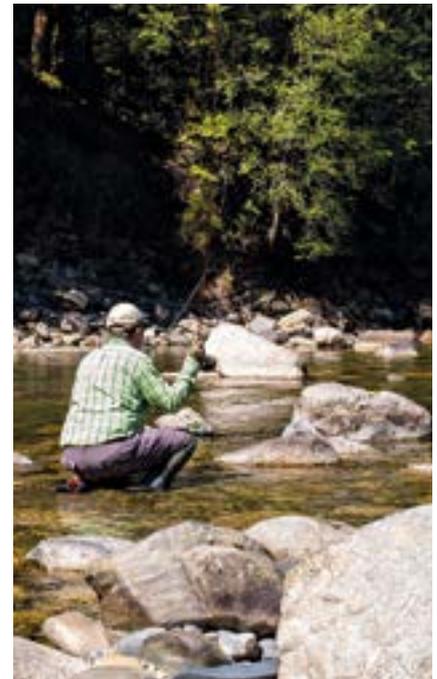
### THE POCKETS

When trout are described as lazy and opportunistic it's not really a negative, it's just a fact of life (theirs). If the angler knows this inherent lethargy is part of trout growing big and

fat (again not a negative if you're a trout) then it can be used to great advantage.

In a half-kilometre stretch of pocket water that for the most part was a confused mix of turbulent current, there were trout finning if you knew where to look. Staring at the bubbles was somewhat hypnotic, the fish materialising like shapes in one of those 3D puzzles. The trout were suspended in invisible cushions of water, mostly in front of big flat rocks, just hanging and waiting for a morsel to come by. In the end they became easier to see, but a lot harder to catch.

The fishing was combat style, sneaking up from behind, reaching a cast over the boulders and watching the fish for the take. Hook-ups were crazy, the fish typically charging for cover in a mad panic that was total pandemonium – it was lock up, hang on, and good luck.



Using the rocks for cover.

With each passing minute the day got better. Not that we caught that many more, but the entire wilderness experience was seeping into our souls. Good karma was happening because we hadn't let something we couldn't control dampen our spirits. And as it turned out, the rain that had rendered some rivers unfishable, at least for a day or two, had certainly been a blessing in disguise. **FI**

Mark & Sharon Cloutier fished the Karamea as guests of Owen River Lodge. [www.owenriverlodge.com.au](http://www.owenriverlodge.com.au)



They're not all double-digit dream makers.