

DESTINATIONS

GLOBAL FLY-FISHING ADVENTURES



ALASKA'S SECLUDED SMALL STREAMS
MONSTER **KAMCHATKA** RAINBOWS
NEW ZEALAND SOUTH ISLAND BROWNS
THE SHINING RIVER OF **THE ANDES**

S O U T H I S L A N D

THE MOUNT EVEREST OF TROUT FISHING

BARRY BECK
PHOTOGRAPHY & TEXT



For someone like me, who lives in a cabin in the woods, New Zealand seems like the other side of the Earth. In reality it's not a bad flight to the West Coast, then an overnight flight to Auckland, followed by a quick transfer to the domestic terminal and a final flight to Nelson on the South Island.

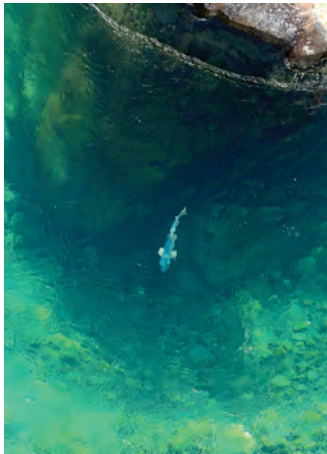
To most fly fishers, this is the Mount Everest of trout fishing. It requires finely honed skills, an incredible amount of dedication, and there's no higher pinnacle than catching a wild, wary, 10-pound+ brown trout on a dry fly.

This is trout hunting at its best. If you ask a Kiwi guide to describe their water, they will tell you that it is as clear as air, and that's a pretty good description. Sight fishing is the norm, and fishing with a guide, you'll spend your day moving slowly upstream, sneaking behind big boulders, scouting from high banks, inspecting glassy pools from a distance . . . your guide may even climb a tree to see trout and avoid being seen.

Once he spots a fish, your guide won't rush into action. Good guides almost always take the time to watch the fish and see what can be learned. Is it feeding? Does it prefer to feed to one side or the other? What is the range of the fish? Does it stay in a single position or does it wander? Does it show any patterns in terms of where it feeds or how often it comes to the surface? Knowledge is power, and with these browns, you need every bit you can muster.

If the fish is feeding aggressively, it's a "happy" fish, and you have a chance of success. On the other hand if it's stationary and sitting on the bottom, the guide may say the fish has "gone off" and that means it may be uncatchable. Kiwi guides don't just know where the trout are, they can read their behavior and can plan strategies to match. They are, in my opinion, some of the best guides in the world, and they take their jobs very seriously.





TREASURED POSSESSIONS

The South Island is the world’s twelfth-largest island with a population of just barely a million people. The name comes from the Dutch explorer Abel Tasman, who in Dutch called it Zeeland. The Maoris called it Aotearoa, land of the long white cloud. For sports fans it’s known for the world-famous All Blacks rugby team, for hikers it’s the countless miles of well-maintained trails, for fly fishers it is paradise found.

Kahurangi National Park is the second-largest park in New Zealand, located in the northwest corner of the South Island. Kahurangi means “treasured possession” and indeed it is, with the most diverse flora of any national park. The park is home to an amazing population of rare birds. Walk into Kahurangi and you enter Tolkien’s world of *The Lord Of The Rings* where, in its amazing lush vegetation, you could expect to see a hobbit show up at any time.

More important to me, Kahurangi is home to two of my favorite brown trout rivers, the Karamea and the Crow. The Karamea is well known for its beauty, and the wild browns for their color and size. These fish make you spellbound as you watch a 5-pound brown slowly rise, and quietly inhale your dry fly. Here you must wait to strike. React too soon and you’ll miss the fish. It’s truly a matter of discipline, and the old Kiwi guides used to recommend saying “God save the queen” before striking. One of my favorite guides, Aaron Ford, laughs every time I strike too soon. “Wait, wait, wait,” he says, and you’d think after all these years I would get the idea, but I am often still too quick to strike.

Ford first introduced me to the Crow, a river that holds many honest double-digit browns. That was so long ago now that I can’t remember not fishing it. Its magnetic quality brings me back year after year. The Crow can be a very challenging fishery, but it’s more than worth the effort, especially when you hold a 10-pound brown in the net.

Like Kahurangi, Nelson Lakes National Park is a must-do for any fly fisher. The tip of the Southern Alps, its forests and rivers are some of the most beautiful in the world. Two of the most popular rivers here are the Travers and Sabine rivers, which flow into Lakes Rotoiti and Rotoroa.

Nelson-based guide Zane Mirfin knows what trout hunting is all about. Cathy and I have explored many of the rivers in the Nelson Lakes National Park with Zane, who I sometimes think has eyes in the back of his head. He never fails to come up with a huge fish for us.

LODGING & LOGISTICS

There are many lodging options in the region, from backpacking in to do-it-yourself rental campers, to B&Bs, and of course a variety of superb fishing lodges strategically located across the island. Felix Borenstein owns and operates Owen River Lodge, conveniently located just outside of Murchison. Cathy and I make Owen River Lodge our base when we’re in the area. Near the lodge are more than 30 blue ribbon streams and rivers to fish. Borenstein is a passionate fly fisher who runs a first-class operation and understands the needs of traveling trout fishermen. He is often accompanied by his trusting yellow Lab Keeley.

Most rivers in New Zealand are in the public domain, and there are well-marked fishing access signs to show fly fishers where they can enter the river. Once you’re in the riverbed you can walk as far upstream or downstream as you want. Given the nature of the sight fishing here, there is a practical politeness on these streams that you don’t see in the U.S. It’s common practice to leave a note on your truck at these access points revealing your time of departure, which direction you’ve traveled (upstream or downstream), and your expected time of return. This way, fellow fly fishers can decide to move to another river or move in the opposite direction. New Zealand brown trout have great memories. Cast over one or walk by one, and it will probably be done feeding for the day. The last thing you want is to follow another angler upstream, so communication is essential.

There is also an incredible amount of private land, and the best guides know or have personal relationships with local landowners, which is huge advantage. With waters behind locked gates, the guides know exactly when the river was last fished—often they are the only ones fishing it.

In New Zealand the best fishing is often in headwater streams far from the road—and your feet can only get you so far. There is no question that if you’re really looking for the fish of a lifetime, a fly-out is often the answer. A good helicopter pilot can put you down in places you wouldn’t believe.

We have flown for years with Alan Rosanowski (Airwest Helicopters) who somehow manages to squeeze his chopper into the tiniest holes in the forest and drop us on the smallest gravel bars. You land hot (the helicopter continues to run), keep your head down, and get out of the way. At the end of the day, you get picked up hot as well. It’s a thrilling way to end the day, and in all the years of flying in New Zealand helicopters, I have never had a bad flight. New Zealand pilots are some of the best in the world.

While there is nothing more thrilling and dependable than

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Be warned, if you go once you will want to return. It’s a land of beautiful rivers, friendly people, and like a magnet it will draw you back.





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heli-fishing, you can catch big fish by walking. Cathy caught her best brown ever on a dry fly in view of a major highway. We actually had to wait until the cars stopped going by to shoot a photo of the 12-pound monster. Just remember, if you encounter fresh bootprints, leave and go somewhere else.

You'll find that most Kiwi guides wear clothing to blend in with the environment, and insist that you wear earth-colored or even camo-patterned clothing and use olive or camo fly lines. On my very first trip to New Zealand, my reels were filled with bright yellow fly lines. The guide took one look at the lines and said, "We're not fishing with those, mate. You came all this way, and spent all

Facing page: Kiwi guide Aaron Ford and Cathy Beck work their way through Karamea River pocketwater, looking for South Island brown trout.

This page: New Zealand is home to 60 million sheep and only 2 million people.

this money, so don't waste my time or yours. Those yellow lines will spook every trout from here to Australia."

We went to his house, where he dyed my lines with olive Rit dye. That afternoon I landed my first 8-pound New Zealand brown. These days, fly lines come in many different colors, and you can purchase lines in olive, moss, or sage.

Because the fish in New Zealand are often far apart, a day on the stream involves a lot of walking, and not a lot of standing around in the water. As a result, throughout most of the summer, Kiwi guides love to wade wet. The normal guide attire is long synthetic tights under a pair of shorts, or quick-dry lightweight pants. Because of thorns, brambles, and insects, bare legs are not advisable. Sandflies in particular are everywhere, and they can be ferocious, so include insect repellent in your packing list.

Good wading boots are essential. Felt soles are banned in New Zealand, so rubber treads are the most common. Aluminum or carbide cleats are helpful, but some guides believe that the studs make too much noise and scare the trout.

New Zealand has had enormous trouble with invasive species,

and as a result takes more precautions than any other country in the world. When you enter New Zealand, you will be asked if you have any fishing gear, especially waders and wading shoes. Be truthful, otherwise you may be fined. If your wading gear is new with the tags attached, you'll breeze right through New Zealand Customs. If your boots show signs of use, they will probably disinfect them for you. *Didymo* is a problem in New Zealand, and the Kiwis take every precaution to protect the rivers against this and other biohazards.

There was a time when Kiwi guides often suggested 7-weight fast-action rods for the South Island, reasoning that you would be casting long leaders from 12 to 16 feet, and fishing larger dry flies like foam cicadas. If you fish subsurface, you have to turn over a strike indicator (almost always white to blend in with the foam line) and a tungsten beadhead nymph (black tungsten, not gold), and often cast into a headwind. With the rod technology that we have today, my personal choice for New Zealand is a pair of 9'6" Sage X rods, a 5-weight and a 6-weight. The 5-weight handles most of the dry-fly work and the 6-weight takes care of the nymphing. My fly lines are RIO Perception with olive-colored tips. For my nymph fishing, I use RIO Salmon Steelhead leaders for the heavier butts and longer length to give me better turnover.

In New Zealand, the first cast to a fish is almost always your most important cast. If your guide thinks you made a good first presentation, but the fish refused the fly, he will probably make a fly change. Kiwis change flies more often than any other guides. Aaron Ford once put me on a Karamea brown that was super happy. We watched as it swung from left to right with its mouth open, apparently taking any morsel that floated past. My first cast looked perfect, but there was no response from the fish. Eleven fly changes later, we walked away from that fish shaking our heads in frustration. It can and will happen. But often if you make a perfect presentation, the trout will eat it on the first cast.

Polarized sunglasses are a must. I rely on Smith Low Light Ignitor lenses for cloudy days, and copper lenses for sunny days. Speaking of the sun, you should take extra care in New Zealand to have proper UV protection, as the sun in this region can be especially damaging. You should wear a 50 UPF long-sleeve shirt (preferably with a hood), neck gaiter, sun gloves, and a hat in addition to sunscreen. Most people who have been to New Zealand agree the sun is much more intense than in the Rockies, or even on the flats of the Florida Keys.

The rivers in Kahurangi and Nelson Lake parks are a great place to start, but keep in mind, it's just a small portion of the South Island and there's a lot more to explore. Cathy and I have fished the South Island annually for more than 25 years, and we are far from having seen it all. Be warned, if you go once you will want to return. It's a land of beautiful rivers, friendly people, and like a magnet it will draw you back. —

Barry and Cathy Beck have been FLY FISHERMAN contributors for more than 30 years and are also travel hosts for Frontiers Travel.

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Cathy and Barry Beck have hosted trips to New Zealand and around the world for more than 25 years. To join one of their upcoming adventures in Slovenia, Africa, or Argentina, visit frontierstravel.com.



RECOMMENDED GEAR

The sun can be savage in New Zealand, so adequate sun protection—gloves, neck gaiter, hat, and hoody—are mandatory. All your outerwear and your fly line should be tan, olive, or camo. Remember, this isn't trout fishing, this is trout hunting. Sturdy, lightweight boots are also essential. You'll pass quickly through New Zealand Customs if your boots are new. Owen River Lodge has loaner boots and waders of all sizes available to make your packing even easier.

SAGE X 9'6" 6-WEIGHT ROD, \$900

RIO INTOUCH PERCEPTION FLY LINE GREEN/CAMO/TAN, \$100

SIMMS FLYWEIGHT WADING BOOT, \$200

PATAGONIA TROPIC COMFORT HOODY MYRTLE BARK CAMO, \$60

SIMMS WADERWICK CORE BOTTOMS, \$50

SIMMS SUPERLIGHT SHORTS, \$60

SMITH GUIDE'S CHOICE POLARIZED LOW LIGHT IGNITOR, \$220

ORVIS SAFE PASSAGE GUIDE SLING PACK BROWN CAMO, \$130