

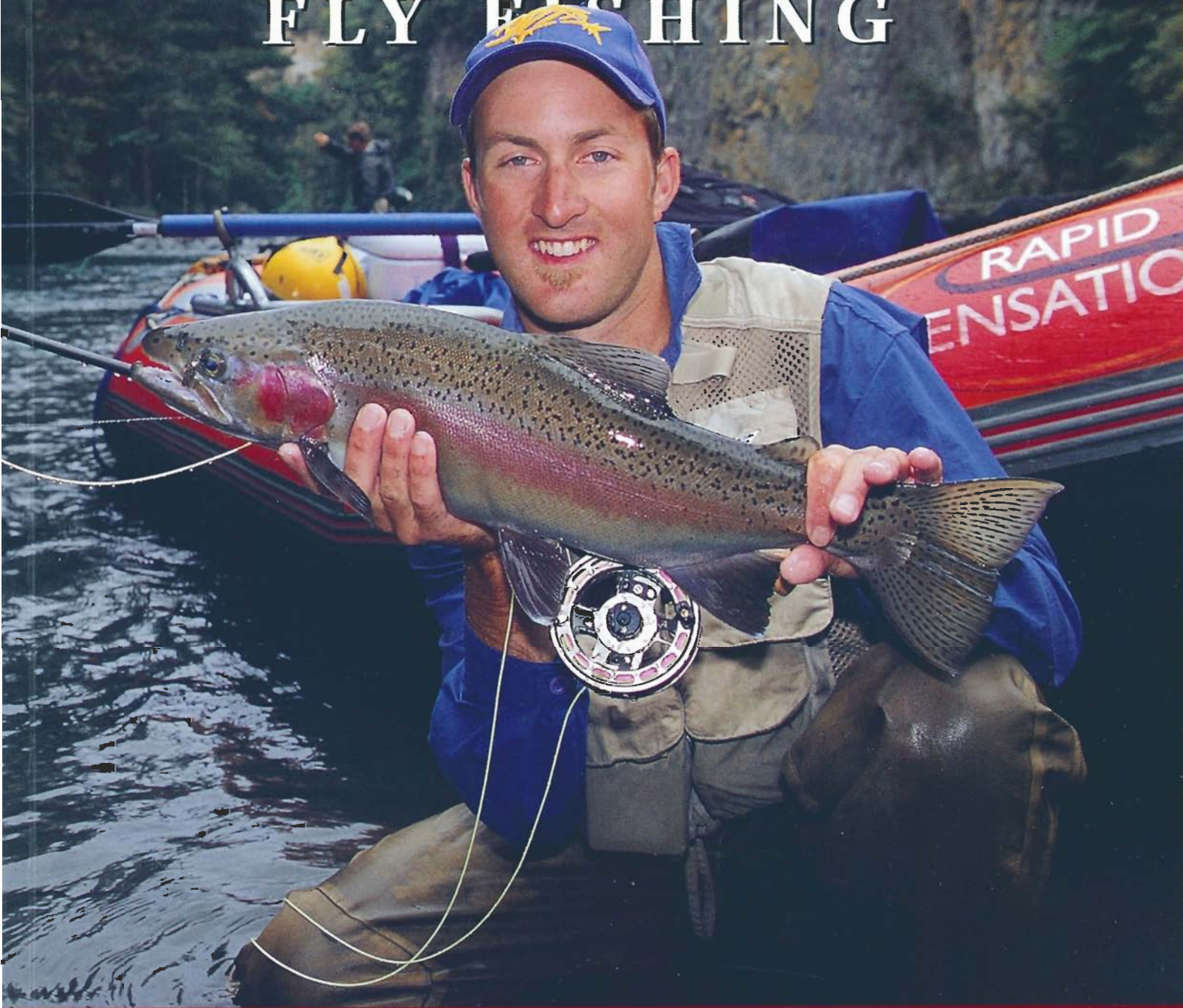
FlyLife

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AUSTRALIA & NEW ZEALAND

SALT & FRESHWATER FLY FISHING



- BLOODY MIDGES • BEND IT IN BRISBANE • FORGOTTEN BREAM •
- CLUMSY NYMPHS • WINTER SALMON • SHOOTING HEADS • TASSIE GEMS •
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Top of the South

Rob Sloane makes up for lost time in the far north of New Zealand's South Island.

The Nelson–Marlborough region, at the top of New Zealand's spectacular South Island has a worldwide reputation as the best of New Zealand's summertime river fishing. Lake Rotoroa Lodge holds pride of place as the region's premier fly fishing destination and one of the best fishing lodges in New Zealand. Sitch and Gleisner crossed Lake Rotoroa to wander up the D'Urville River in their acclaimed television series *A River Somewhere*. Terry Duval's annual 'One Fly' event is Nelson based, obviously for good reason, and names like Tony Entwistle and Craig Simpson hark back to the pioneering days of professional guiding in the South Island.

Yet despite all this, and possibly because of it, in all my visits to the South Island I had never fished the district, drawn instead by lesser known waters in the west and south of the island. Why follow the American led path to Nelson and write

stories about rivers and guides, lodges and helicopter trips that have been done to death in so many overseas publications?

Eventually it was an Australian connection, an offer from new lodge owner Felix Borenstein and a trip organised by Millbrook based guide Mark Weigall, that tempted me to Murchison and to Felix's impressive new establishment on the banks of the Owen River. Mark's trips are legendary, and this one was no exception, but as you all know, there is an unwritten code of ethics which strictly confines my account to the fishing!

RAIN DELAY

Ably led by local guide Craig Simpson, we scoured the district for fishable water after heavy rain put a dent in our schedule. Mark and I muddled on essentially unguided although Craig directed us to suitable water each day. The others in our group took it turn about to fish with Craig with one

drawing the short straw each day to fish with Mark and me.

Even with famous rivers like the Buller running high and dirty we were able to find some marvellous side-streams and smaller waters where 1 to 2 kg trout responded generously to various combinations of dry fly and nymph, even to the sloppy mends and presentations sent down by those who have spent too much time on dopey stillwater trout.

At higher river levels deeper runs required an indicator and weighted nymph to hit the spot, something that Nelson guides are sometimes criticised for in purist circles. Whilst I have an attention span of an hour at best when it comes to blind indicator nymphing, others in our group blooded on this style of fishing on Victorian tail-race fisheries invariably caught fish and were more than happy doing it for as long as it took.

Although the rivers around Murchison are relatively popular, we man-



The Buller River holds trout aplenty and is easily accessed from the main roads.

aged to spread out and find water for five of us to fish without getting in the way of others. The selection narrows when the main rivers become unfishable after a heavy downpour, but even then, with dozens of rivers nearby, the options seemed endless.

When the rain did stop and the waters began to clear and settle we headed into the mountains led by our Hobbit of a guide, to seek out those rivers (all too common in NZ) where, although there are less trout per kilo-

metre there are more kilograms per trout! Browns of around 2–3 kg are described as 'average' in such places with the bigger fish of ten pounds and over being the real draw card. Whilst we didn't land anything much over 3 kilos we saw and hooked bigger fish but fell short of gaining photographic evidence. To land a fish of this size on 2 kg tippet in heavy water amongst big rocks and snags demands an element of good fortune—everything has to go just right.



Sight fishing to large browns in clear, stony streams is the ultimate attraction.



Mark Weigall prospecting a likely run on one of the 'smaller' sidestreams swollen by rain.

Top of the South... continued



The combination of light tippets and large fish in fast, cool water keeps you on your toes.

FINDING FISH

Although hatches can be expected in favourable weather our mid January week coincided with very few rising fish. This throws the emphasis on reading the water and fishing the likely places, or actually spotting the fish. When sight-fishing, knowing where to look is of immeasurable benefit as it allows fast progress with only scant

attention to the unproductive 90% of water, and painstaking scrutiny of the remaining productive water. This is where a guide can be of truly great assistance.

For the unfamiliar visitor it may take a few days to recognise where the fish, nearly all browns in this part of the country, are most likely to be holding. For the most part the bigger

ivers are open and shingly and in places split into several braids. The best holding water invariably seems to be along the more stable banks with fixed boulders, logs and/or bankside vegetation, which together with depth provide the cover and stability that trout need to survive the inevitable scouring floods. The shallower, more braided, less stable, shingly water can be passed without too much delay, but not always! So still keep a sharp eye out.

As stated, using a guide can be a tremendous benefit. They spot fish well, but more importantly they know the water and can predict exactly where the next fish is likely to be. This saves a lot of tired eyed and aimless wandering (Mark and me).

Expect to cover several kilometres of water in a day if you are seeking those sparsely populated, larger trout. But be aware that those stable banks and deeper runs are often home to more than one fish—find one and there may be others close by.

SPOOK LOGIC

Generally the trout were reasonably accommodating although a few demanded repeated presentations and fly changes down to much smaller nymphs. Weight and size, to suit water and fish, seem more critical than the exact pattern of nymph used. As anywhere that first presentation is critical

WEIGHT AND SIZE,
TO SUIT WATER AND FISH,
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THAN THE EXACT PATTERN
OF NYMPH USED.



Weighted nymphs and indicators, ready for action.

—if the fly lands upstream by just the right measure and drifts down right in the slot, there is every chance a take will result.

Nigel Birt's spooked fish article (*FL* #33) is well worth a second look as the trout do seem to be 'spooked' by degrees. After disturbing a fish and its nearby companion with a missed strike, I was able to sit out and wait for about 20 minutes (absolute limit of sandfly tolerance in any one spot), by which time they had settled back down and the fish I had missed readily accepted a different nymph.

Be aware that double-figure fish are a bit of a preoccupation amongst the local guiding fraternity with the ten-pound trout worn like a badge of honour, and fish of half that size dismissed as small. If you just want to



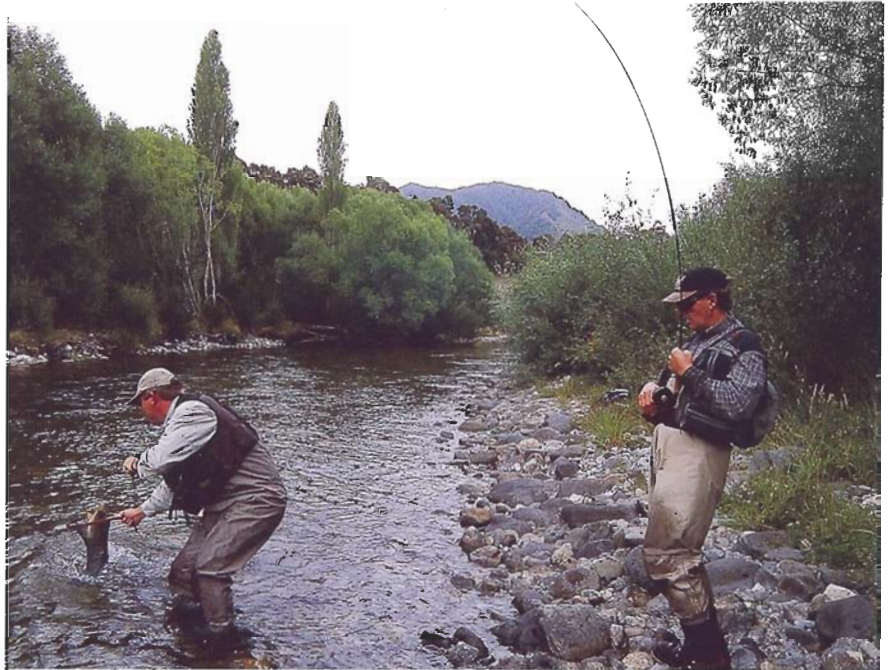
After heavy rain the smaller tributaries offer the only clear water.

enjoy a day out on a South Island river and are happy to get stuck into a bunch of 1–2 kg trout then say so before you end up on a futile ten-pound mission. If size isn't everything, then nobody has told the local guides.

LAKE FIX

Despite everyone dismissing the fly fishing merits of Lake Rotoroa itself in favour of the much bigger trout found in many of the district's rivers (the opposite of most Australian situations) I did manage to escape for half an hour and get my fix of lake fishing while the others were playing around in a discoloured river mouth. As in most NZ lakes I've fished, good trout cruise the crystal clear shallows adjacent to the deep drop-offs.

Several cruising browns I encountered readily accepted a weighted nymph fished in combination with an



Grey skies and drizzle did not deter us—here Mark nets a nice fish for Steve Voce.

indicator dry (rigged to fish the inflowing rivers). And yes, the fish were 'small', only 1.5 kilos or so! Imagine spending a day on that lake, fishing from a decent fly fishing platform, just sneaking along the edges on the electric motor . . .

FLY FIX

There are few real secrets about fly selection. Mark's standbys from north-eastern Victoria performed as well as any. Just make sure you include a selection of small tungsten nymphs, plenty of 2 kg tippet, and some dries

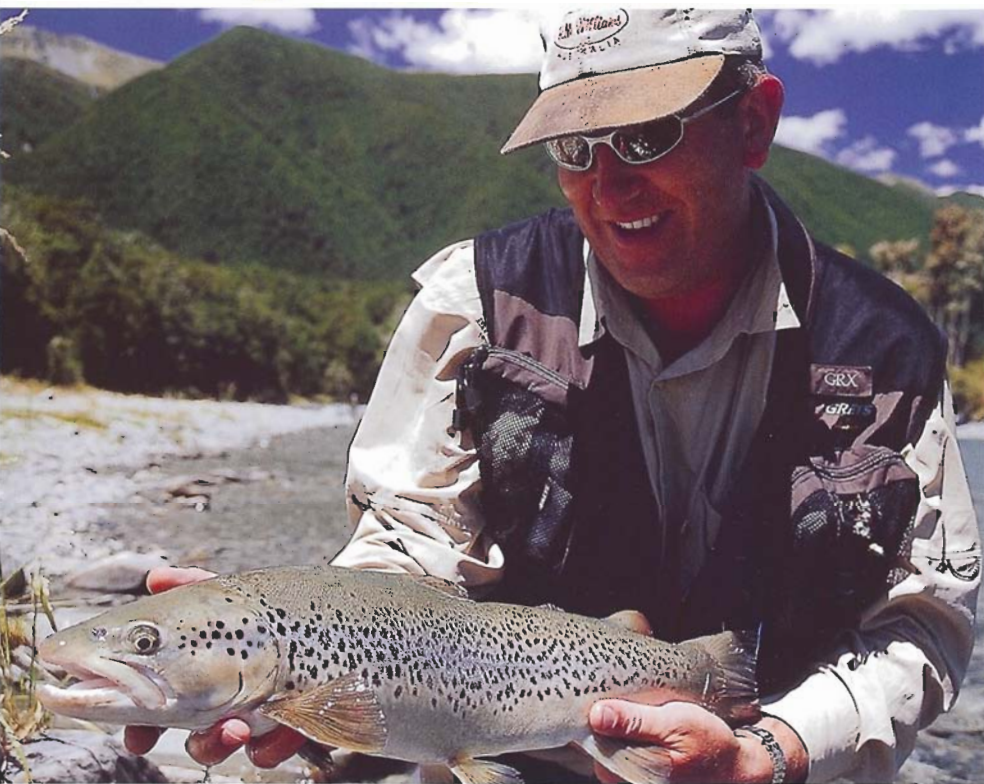
OWEN RIVER LODGE

Felix Borenstein recently sold up his Australian IT business to buy a riverside property in NZ and establish a 'boutique' fishing lodge on the banks of the Owen River. In its first season, Owen River Lodge is a departure from the 'established' NZ fishing lodges which have mainly been driven by the American market, and it is certainly a major leap up from the bach or home-stay style operations run by many guides. A more affordable and contemporary middle ground is what Felix is aiming for, and the Australian market is firmly in his sights. A regular lodge visitor himself in recent years, Felix has used his experiences to design the necessary comfort in the relaxed surrounds of a modern lodge. The guest rooms (chalets) are brand new, roomy and tastefully decorated and furnished—no angling art, no stuffed fish, no stags heads peering down from the walls. Felix has adopted a more contemporary approach. Staff and service are faultless and the meals are locally flavoured and diverse. Competitively priced at the upper-middle end of the market, a visit to Owen River Lodge includes private room with en suite, all meals including



cooked breakfast, lunch and evening snacks ahead of a three course dinner. Visitors also have the use of fishing tackle and accessories, and use of the main lodge facilities including lounge, library and bar. The Owen River is only a stone's throw away at the bottom of the garden and there are dozens of rivers within half an hours drive in any direction. For those wanting the fully guided fishing service, Felix will arrange for a local guide to take you fishing. For do-it-yourselfers this is an ideal base that non-fishing partners will love, and Felix will help suggest day fishing options and convenient access points. The relaxed style and value for money here will readily be appreciated. Phone 64 3 523 9075 www.owenriverlodge.co.nz

Top of the South... continued



Browns of this calibre are par for the course when the back-country rivers are fishable.

including the locally popular Adams, Royal Wulff and a few of your favourite caddis, grasshopper and cicada patterns just in case.

Reserve the double nymph and indicator rig for dirty days and bigger rivers. Shallower runs can be fished with a single weighted nymph, or follow the modern trend of a small bead-head nymph under a buoyant dry fly—a parachute Adams proved easy to see and was sometimes taken in preference to the nymph. Local guides seem to frown on the Royal Wulff—popular elsewhere in the South Island—preferring the Adams as an indicator fly.

With sunny conditions and lower, clearer rivers a small dry can be fished alone to sighted fish. We only had a brief taste of this, but enough to get

me back to the region a month later to have another go. Imagine drifting a #14 Adams over a visibly feeding trophy brown and watching it rise to the surface to snatch the fly with that peculiar beak-like South Island take, simultaneously poking out both top

and bottom jaws in the fast moving current. Then it's hang on and go with the fish as it spears off downstream with the heavy flow and flings itself awkwardly into the air.

Maybe this river fishing isn't so bad after all?

ACCESS

Fish and Game pamphlets provide detailed maps and access points for various catchments including the Buller and Motueka. Most are marked by obvious signs and have convenient fence stiles. Access rights are well respected in New Zealand and although these paths may seem well trodden the fishing can still be first class.

Guides generally have better access through private tracks on rural properties and, if you have a deep pocket, will use helicopters to fly in to the remote back country. However, a reasonable level of fitness will get you far enough off the beaten track to feel that real sense of undisturbed South Island fishing.

The season on most waters runs from October to April and the better streams have a 2 fish bag limit (with only one of more than 50 cm).

Camouflage fly lines are recommended, along with felt sole boots—(preferably with studs—for slippery rocks. Oh, and don't forget the repellent in case those pesky sandflies get you. RJ



LAKE ROTOROA LODGE

For those who demand and can afford the very best, Lake Rotoroa Lodge is the ultimate fly fishing destination. It is a traditional, up-market fishing lodge with gourmet food and all the trimmings. The lodge is located on the shores of Lake Rotoroa (not to be confused with the North Island's Rotorua) near the Gowan River outflow with inspiring views across the lake. Built in the 1920s the impressive lodge building houses ten opulent, fully serviced, ensuite guest rooms. Operated as a dedicated fishing lodge since the 1980s it has been extensively refurbished in recent times and is one of the few luxury lodges in New Zealand which is still fully focussed on fly fishing with a team of experienced guides, some having worked out of the lodge for ten years or more. Inside the lodge, guests can simply



enjoy the warm surrounds, open fire, and relaxed bar, or lounge about on plush sofas, admire the antiques, explore the library and take time to choose a dinner wine from the well-stocked cellar. This is a traditional fishing lodge to rival the best in the world. For a more comprehensive review refer to FL#33 or go to the reviews section on the FlyLife website. Phone 64 3 523 9121 www.shackletoninternational.com

Prospecting with nymph and indicator accounted for the majority of fish until water levels fell back to normal.