



NZFFA January 2023 Newsletter

{name} - Welcome to Your Newsletter

Frank Opinion

Ignore Politics at the Peril of Your Sport

by Charlie Baycroft

The people that hunt and fish for sport, food and recreation could oppose detrimental changes by becoming more politically active and involved but most are not willing to do so.

It's undeniable that government policies have a big effect on the health of rivers and streams. Yet people ignore the environmental changes which are the consequence.

The environmental changes that make survival of fish and game species more difficult, are unlikely to be reduced because they are also related to the generation of more income from the exploitation of our natural resources, directly or indirectly by the political policies of governments. For example the "unbridled" expansion of corporate dairying on the Canterbury Plains, MacKenzie Basin and elsewhere. As a result the environment that fish and game live in has changed greatly during the past few decades.

The members of species that have been able to adapt are still able to live and reproduce while those that did not have perished.

Among all species there are genetic variations that enable some

members of a species to survive and reproduce as their environment changes while other members with different characteristics will not survive.

The principles of natural selection and fitness for survival are real and still exist.

There are also environmental changes that members of a species cannot successfully adapt to and then they become extinct.

It seems inevitable that the access we once had to an abundance of fish and game will continue to deteriorate and become more difficult for the average person.

This is especially likely due to the current acceptance of the fish and game species as "noxious pests" that should be eradicated.

The bizarre and irrational Predator Free NZ ambition is definitely a serious threat to the survival of all fish and game species. Animals and fish that are more sensitive to indications of potential danger run away, hide and are not seen. Or they become nocturnal.

Nocturnal survived better. But technology narrows the gap. A prime example is deer and other game which now seem to be more easily seen at night by those who have thermal and night vision scopes.

Finding deer to shoot at night and on private property is now much easier than finding them on our public land where night hunting is difficult and prohibited and they are targeted for eradication by the public's employees in the DOC.

Technology has aided the angler's ability. I and others have been having more success catching trout with bait fish imitations than other types of flies. Trout spey is now my preferred method of fishing. Meanwhile other forces via government policy are at play.

As pollution with 1080, nitrates and other toxic chemicals reduces the abundance of aquatic insects, the fish eat smaller fish. They also consume their own young.

As the available numbers and places where we can access fish and game decline, the adaptation will sadly be most likely by the commercialisation of hunting and fishing and the necessity to pay for access to places where fish and game can still be found and harvested by those who can afford the luxury of hunting and fishing.

The wealthy people will enjoy the ability and exclusivity to hunt and fish for abundant and healthy fish and game in designated and commercialised public and private lands while the "common people" will be deprived of these privileges. It will be a return to the feudal society which New Zealand pioneers sought to escape from the Home country's ways, to the new colony by establishing egalitarian principles and laws.

Those who continue to ignore politics or seem oblivious and cannot see this coming - and do nothing to oppose it - will one day regret the loss of what they failed to appreciate and protect.

Oh a reminder! Later this year there's a general election.



Fish Stories – An Essay from Liar's Code

By Richard Chiappone

SEE Footnote re. author

With age, there comes a point at which you just don't care if others know that on any given day of fishing you caught nothing but little fish, or junk fish, or really little really junky fish. Or nothing at all.



My father did not fish. I had no older brothers to introduce me to the sport. And yet, somehow, by the time I was eight years old, I was already a fanatic. While on a family vacation in the Finger Lakes that summer, I harangued my folks into buying me a fiberglass casting rod and an Ocean City level-wind reel. Both are now long gone to wherever old fishing tackle ends up. But there is a photo of me

dated 1956 in which I'm holding that rig with one hand, and a rope stringer in the other. Dangling from it is what appears to be a mooneye, a small trash fish of the sort I spent the rest of my childhood pursuing. I've been fishing ever since.

I got up early and drove 120 miles to the confluence of the Kenai and Russian Rivers to meet my old fishing partner Will Rice. We marched for two miles uphill on a well-maintained trail, clambered down a near vertical, boulder-strewn obstacle course into the Russian River canyon, and fished our way downstream—a murderous jumble of slippery, pyramid-shaped rocks underfoot much of the way. Late in the afternoon, we dragged our sorry keisters back up to the parking lot.

When I arrived home after a three-hour drive through Alaska's endless road construction, I could barely swing my legs out of the truck cab. I considered sleeping out there in the driveway that night, but managed to make it to the house. This time, the post-fishing self-medication required not only the usual ibuprofen, but also a couple muscle relaxants and more vodka than I'd admit to my doctor. That night, feeling surprisingly well again, I made plans to meet another pal at the Anchor River the next morning.

Recently some wiseacre asked me, "Would you rather fish or fornicate?" Okay, that wasn't the particular word used, but I answered as honestly as I could: "Well, at my age, I can still fish for hours without resting. In fact, I can still fish for hours, several times a day." All of which is to say that I'm not dead yet, but I am also not a boy anymore. Not that I'm complaining. Well, I am complaining about the physical aches and pains and the fact that I used to be able to do exciting and pleasurable things all day long—like cast into the wind, or fish the Russian River—without medication.

But there are also some benefits to being one of the greybeards on a river now. Don't get me wrong: I'm not claiming the legendary wisdom that's supposed to come with age—I'm still waiting for that to kick in—but, one of the blessings that actually does arrive is freedom from the slavery of deceit, or at least the option to choose a more factual telling of a day's fishing efforts at every opportunity. There comes a point at which you just don't care if others know that on any given day you caught nothing but little fish, or junk fish, or really little really junky fish. Or nothing at all.

It was not always this way. I'm the first to admit I may have reshaped the facts of a fishing trip or two into a form that presented my modest talents with rod and reel under generously favorable light. But I've seen a hell of a lot worse big fat liars over the years.

In 1982, when my wife Lin and I moved to Alaska, I took her fishing for the first time in her life. Somehow she had never sampled the joys of trying to outwit scaly, coldblooded creatures with marble-sized brains, had never even held a rod in her hand before the day we went fishing for cohos in a small river just south of Anchorage.

Lin's first fish ever was a silver salmon that must have weighed twelve pounds.

She also caught two others nearly as large. To put that in perspective, in the first ten years I fished, all the fish I caught, in total, would not have come close to the combined weight of the three salmon she landed her first day. Was she elated? Converted? “Hooked for life,” as the cliché goes? Not quite.

She fished exactly twice more after that: one lovely afternoon on a Kodiak Island stream catching small Dolly Varden on dry flies; and another catching grayling and lake trout in the foothills of the Alaska Range. And then she hung up the tackle and quit. Forever. The whole undertaking—selecting the perfect fly, making the best cast, fooling the fish—simply left her unmoved. Whatever it was that made me mad for the sport did not take root.

To this day she loves to go fishing with me, loves to be on the water, but has no desire to catch fish herself. None. Apparently, she does not in any way feel that her self worth is tied to her skill at catching fish. (Women are incomprehensible.) Which means, of course, she has no reason to lie about catching fish, and therefore cannot imagine why anyone else would blatantly massacre the truth in such matters.

Her first contact with what I’ve come to understand is normal angler bullshit (NAB), came as a shock to her. One autumn Friday afternoon in those early years we drove the 200 miles from Anchorage to the Anchor River, near the town of Homer, so I could fish for steelhead. Lin was in grad school, again, and she planned to study while I fished. It was steelhead season, so the weather was predictably gray, cold, and rainy. No problem for Lin; it would not be the first time she happily sat in a warm, dry truck reading while I stood in a river in a downpour getting soaked.

Every river we crossed was already high and muddy and still rising. And the Anchor was the longest of them, with the most tributaries. No one could fish it. No one would try. Not even me. I spent the weekend mostly in the bar of the Anchor River Inn pretending to watch football, but mostly eyeing the rain slashing at the windows—hoping, as only a fisherman might, that somehow it was going to abate and the river would drop enough to fish. It was still raining as we headed north for Anchorage on Sunday.

On Monday, Lin stopped by the job I was working on in a new office building. One of the new tenants, an insurance representative, was moving into his office. I heard him hammering on the walls and I peeked in to find him hanging framed photos of himself gripping trout and salmon. I struck up a conversation with him, and Lin stopped by just in time to hear him tell me he’d caught twenty steelhead over the weekend. In the Anchor River.

Lin’s chin dropped. She started sputtering. I rushed her out into the hallway before she could say it. “He’s lying! We were there. Nobody could fish in that mess, could they?”

I agreed that she was right on both counts: nobody could fish that mess, and yes, he was lying.

"But why would anybody do that?" she asked, astounded.

I tried to explain the concept of natural angler bullshit. But she would never understand that if you aren't catching anything, you crave just one fish. If you're catching some fish, you want to catch more, lots more. If you are catching lots of fish, you want to catch bigger fish. How could I explain to her that if you've had a great day of fishing, the only thing that makes it better is telling someone how good it was. And, more to the point, if the fishing has been abysmal, the same response is called for—telling someone how good it was.

Lin has spent 35 years with me, and still has not fully come to accept the concept of NAB. Probably never will. Not because she's a woman, but because she doesn't fish.

(Abridged)

Richard Chiappone is the author of Opening Days: A Fly Fisherman Writes (Barclay Creek Press, 2010) and Water of an Undetermined Depth (Stackpole Books, 2003). This essay is from his new book Liar's Code (Skyhorse Publishing, 2016)

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A Great Kahawai Season!

By Rex N. Gibson

This article is really a salmon fisher's lament; from someone who really doesn't want kahawai! It is mid-January and the salmon have still eluded me, and 99% of the Waimakariri anglers, so far this season. The Rakaia fired early again this season by the petrol bill deters most "Waimak" regulars.

Although I tackled the Rakaia mouth several times in recent seasons, most of my salmon hunting has been spent at the Waimakariri mouth. Since Christmas have "put in the time". In Ross Millichamp's book (Salmon Fever) he states that it takes the average fisher 30 trips per fish. I must have done close to my 30 already and come out with a

"below average" grade. I can almost hear the "must try harder" comment.

The excuse in the past, for low salmon totals, was that I was always working eight days a week and could not get out often enough. I do tend to blame my work-a-holic tendencies for a lot of things. These days I am officially "retired" and can work my hours around the tides, but it hasn't produced the desired results. It is a bit like being one of those young blokes who invests in the latest deodorant, as advertised on TV, which promises a bevy of fair maidens chasing after you – but then finds it doesn't deliver; just a few sniffs from a stray dog.

It's the old story. Last season, and the one before, it was always the guy that I was chatting with in the "picket fence", or sometimes the one next to him, that seemed to get the salmon.

The kahawai though, that is another story. They will not leave me alone. I do not wind in rapidly like the crew deliberately chasing them down in the surf, but I think the fish targeted me! I've rarely had a kahawai free day. It is like the "old days" in the 1990s when I fished the Rangitata mouth. On the north side, especially, the first line of breakers was often black with the backs of the fish as they swarmed in after silvers. On one occasion whilst fishing with two old mates we all lost count after 20 hook-ups each.

My first ever kahawai on salmon gear was at the Rakaia mouth thirty years ago. Its mouth and gut were so full of silvers that I could not understand how it had found room for the lure.

Six kahawai caught in an afternoon was my best this year. Once I have had to caution a young bloke about limits who already had fifteen in his chilly-bin. Everything you ever read about them being great sport is true; unless of course, like me, you only want a salmon. The words "it's another bloody kahawai" were uttered by many of us over the last year or so; much more often than the pre-Covid days.



Photo: The mouth on a quiet day. Holiday period numbers regularly exceeded 100.

The “kahawai sea gulls” are a regular feature at the Waimakariri. These people often wander up and down the line scavenging kahawai that are about to be returned. I am always amused by the regulars who have four or five fish, mostly caught by others, on a rope leash tide to their belt or ankle. Perhaps they have big families to feed, or perhaps they have never tasted salmon. I think that sometimes they are just “gatherers” who want to be seen as “hunters” – a topic I covered a couple of months ago.

“Blaming” kahawai has become a habit for many of us. Have you noticed that when most people lose a fish they try and convince themselves, and us, that it has to have been a kahawai; especially if the distinctive forked tail has not broken the surface?

A few days before writing this I watched some young blokes playing kahawai on six pound line. Yes, they were snapped off by a couple. They were using soft baits with a feather attached. Whilst it was “fun” for them, I am still a fan for getting a fish in as soon as possible to avoid the sometimes unsurvivable levels of stress that extended “playing the fish” can cause.

Misplaced excitement whilst salmon fishing, in the past, has been compounded a few times by hooking into barracuda, star gazers, flounders, mullet and even a shag, but none of them put up a fight quite like that of a kahawai. As one colleague commented recently,

"If they grew as large as a sea-run salmon, we would not be able to land them".

I did keep five this year. Two went to my fish-smoking brother in law and two to a family on the bread-line. Even although I have a smoker my natural lazy streak means that I would rather take a vacuum packed smoked trout fillet, via my butcher, from the freezer. Do not get me wrong, I love most sea fish, it is just that even properly bled kahawai are somewhat bland in taste; especially when compared with salmon and high country trout.

I think I really only kept a few to prove to the family that I could still actually catch something. Salmon fishing is probably a form of gambling addiction. The symptoms seem similar. We keep on doing it even when we are "losing". Just as a gambler rolls the dice, or spins the pokey tumbler, we cast out various colours of ticer, Z spinner, salamander or quicksilver and hope that our number comes up. Few of us ever see the salmon before we hook it.

Skinner's rats and Pavlov's dogs all proved that intermittent reinforcement is all that a conditioned response needs. I am conditioned to enjoy catching salmon. "The most fun you can have with your waders on" a female fisher once told me. The odd kahawai provides "Claytons" reinforcement but I guess it keeps me, and plenty of others, going. It is a bit like getting a bonus ticket on your lotto strike. These tickets never seem to produce a prize but it seems like you are being "rewarded".

Those of you who have had a good season will be gloating about your tallies, (the "you should have been here on Tuesday" brigade included) and saying "that is fishing".

All I can do is draw solace in my good trout tally and prepare myself for a real start to the salmon fishing next month. The reels have been serviced, the hooks checked and the line replaced. Hopefully the 2023 season's fish will be larger than the bulk of last season's average of about ten pounds. As one colleague said to me then "You need to get at least two together to make bottling worthwhile this year".



Kahawai fishing has had an added attraction over the last three years; *Arctocephalus fosteri*. These (there are often two or three at a time) adult fur seals weighing about 150 kg patrol both sides of the river mouth as far up as Mackintosh's hole and delight in stealing fish that are already on somebody's line. They colourfully celebrate success by tossing the fish in the air several times, playing with it, whilst lying on their backs. Not so entertaining is seeing distraught salmon anglers using more variations of the F word than I knew existed when a seal takes their salmon. Last season I witnessed an angler who was physically smaller than the seal run up and attempt to punch the seal on the nose to get it to drop the salmon. Heart-breaking as it may be it is an offence and hardly worth getting a criminal conviction for. The seal is also quite capable of inflicting fairly nasty wounds and he is exempt from the law if he does.

Then again, I guess there is always the possibility of a winter salmon from the canals. No seals to bother you there. Somehow fish that have grown large on partly digested faeces from the cages and pellets made of sheep offal don't have the same culinary attraction.

A Tip: take off all your treble hooks and replace them with singles. My anecdotal survey suggests that trebles lose over 50% of all hook-ups while for singles that is under 20%. The same goes for salmon.



Thanks for the fish mate!

NZFFA secretary David Haynes with a trophy back country brownie



After 35 years of marriage, a husband and wife came to see a therapist.

When asked what the problem was, the wife went into a tirade listing every problem they had ever had in the years they had been married.

On and on and on: neglect, lack of intimacy, emptiness, loneliness, feeling unloved and unlovable, an entire laundry list of unmet needs she had endured.

Finally, after allowing this for a sufficient length of time, the therapist got up, walked around the desk and after asking the wife to stand, he embraced and kissed her long and passionately as her husband watched - with a raised eyebrow. The woman shut up and quietly sat down as though in a daze.

The therapist turned to the husband and said, "This is what your wife needs at least 3 times a week. Can you do this?"

"Well, I can drop her off here on Mondays and Wednesdays, but on Fridays, I go fishing."



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David Coggins Makes a Case for the Angler's Lifestyle (abridged)

Moving water thrills me. I can't drive over a bridge without looking down at the river and wondering whether trout live there. I speculate about where they might be hiding and how I'd try to catch them. If I've decided the river's promising, I privately plot a return. It's like discovering a secret hidden in plain sight.

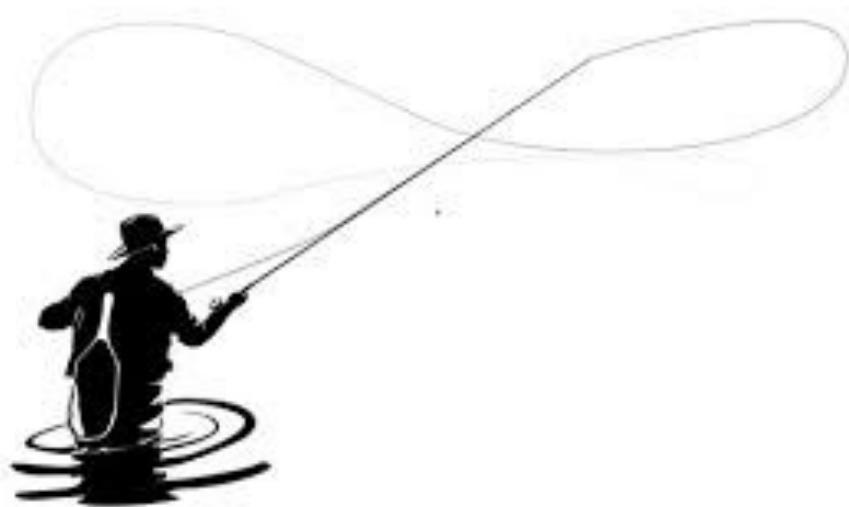
I'm still trying to understand the rivers in my life beyond the most basic familiarity. Beneath the surface are mysteries we can barely make out, so we study and speculate and remember every detail we can. This is fishing.

By fishing, I mean fly fishing. Angling is about anticipation and planning trips far in the future, but it also has a storied history. Fly fishing has been practiced since Izaak Walton's *Compleat Angler* was published in 1653. Fishing in the modern world, I've come to realise, is a contrary act. While it might improve one's moral character (a possibly dubious theory), to fish with purpose and intensity, to seek sporting opportunities in far-flung places, strikes many as decadent.

Decadent?

Perhaps fishing is decadent, but it didn't always seem that way. I began fishing as a boy not because I thought it was morally redeeming, but because I loved it. If anything, it felt natural. I still do it for the sheer joy of being outside, of concentrating, of the doubts and rewards of being connected to a fish,

of landing and releasing it. Fishing offers an internal reward, and that personal satisfaction is enough.



Waiting

Fishing is waiting. When I'm on the water, I'm out of time and the world recedes. Even when nothing seems to be happening, something is happening. And yet even waiting on the water I'm more engaged than I am anywhere else. An angler is sensitive to changes in the weather, to shade and sun, to any movement on the stream. There are clues everywhere lightly hidden: which insects are appearing that a trout might eat, the speed of the current, shadows faintly moving under the water. When this knowledge converges with enough skill and conspires with luck, I might catch a fish.

Invisible Success

But more often I don't catch a fish. That's why fishing requires coming to terms with the fact that you can do everything exactly the way you want to and still fail. Are you comfortable with that? I hope so. Fishing measures success in an invisible way.

When people ask me about the attraction to fishing, which they often do because they genuinely want to know or are mildly exasperated that I do it, I tell them that it's an outdoor sport. This is obvious of course, but it's the basic truth. You're in the natural world, usually in a beautiful place.

Snobs

There are codes which exist in any intense pursuit. There are outright snobs, reverse snobs, and people so isolated they can't be considered either.

That's why anglers are like spies. We keep our motives to ourselves, the details and schemes can't be shared with anybody who's not a fellow traveler in this world of secret obsession.

I admit my fishing desire can be so intense I don't like to describe it to the unafflicted. I don't want other people to know, and perhaps I don't want to admit to myself, just how much I think about fishing. There's something slightly suspicious about this devotion, like a weakness for absinthe, an eccentric habit that should be tempered before it turns into a depraved addiction.

Innocence

One thing that always surprises me whenever I arrive at streams is how harmless they feel, innocent of my intentions. Tall grasses and low willow trees blow sleepily along the bank. It's just another day, with only slight variations of countless other days here.

What's different is that on this day I'm here, I want to intersect with everything that's unfolding on its own. The seeming sense of peace on the water gives way, under observation, to furious activity that's nearly invisible to those not attuned to it.

Looking closely reveals signs of life, trout coming up and feeding near the surface. Tactically, that means fishing a dry fly—one that floats—which remains the platonic ideal of the sport. If all goes well, you see the fish break the water and take your fly, an eternal thrill. This makes me excited and a little nervous, now I have to make decisions. The fish are doing their part, I have to do mine.



Everything

The drift is the goal. The drift is everything. When the fly floats seamlessly in the current over a feeding fish, the anticipation is real. I'm waiting, praying, it will come up and take the fly. These moments when the fly passes above the head of a trout are wonderful and excruciating.

This is the same rush of excitement gamblers feel when they scratch off a lottery ticket. They don't really think they're going to win—they know better—it's the chance of winning they're addicted to. That's the same when you fish. The possibility keeps you making one more cast.

Then suddenly it's not at all possible. The fly was rejected, ignored. Was it the drift, was it the fly? The fish are still out there, they're still feeding. The water is clear—they definitely saw it. They just didn't like it. I take stock, get technical and tie on an emerger pattern. This imitates an insect evolving from a larva to an adult; it sits in the film of

water and is harder to see. I take my time, which is difficult when the fish are feeding right in front of me.

A Tiny Triumph

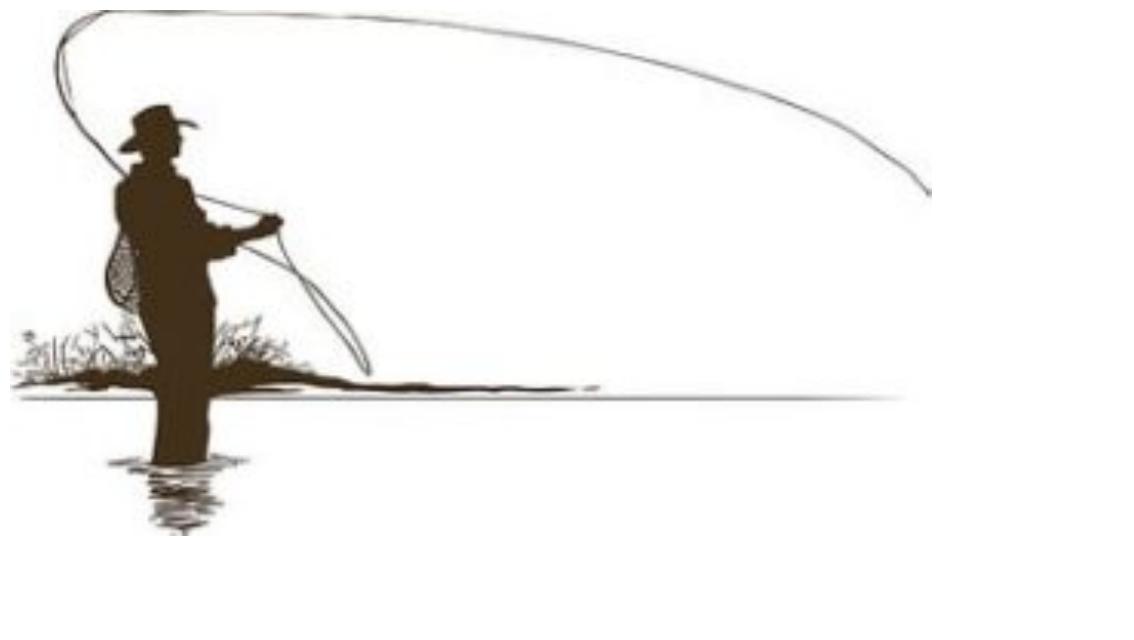
I make the cast where I want to, a small triumph, and the fly floats over the trout's head. Or at least where it was a few seconds ago. Then - a minor hiccup in the surface, like a small pebble fell into the water. The trout.

No matter how many times this happens the action still feels abrupt. The fish took the fly, but until I raise my rod it's impossible to know if the trout's hooked. When the line tightens and I feel the pressure, that steady weight, a sideways movement of its head, only then do I know for sure. That's the vital moment. The fish is on.avoiding mistakes or bad luck.

Catching a fish brings the simple satisfaction and absolute fact of everything unfolding as planned. The presentation of a fly, managing the drift, the physical action of fighting a fish and successfully landing it. This never feels like I'm taming nature, more like being in alignment, and understanding it better, at least for a short time.

Fishing is a search for the fleeting connection to something alive that can never be fully known. Once the fish is gone, it's just me on the bank. There are mountains in the distance.

Nobody knows where I am. Sometimes you get lucky.



Stop Press

All Gisborne / Wairoa rivers in high flood (again). bugger.

Happy N / Year Sandy

More

Stop Press

I know that the fishing was sh@#t on the 'Tong last week!

Two big floods before Xmas seemingly flushed all the fish back down into the lake: even right up past the winter limit Upper Reaches which I rafted with...

More

Fly Pattern or Presentation?

by Ben Hope

The other day I came across an article from the US where the author said that trout brains are small, they're not very bright and as a result they can eat sticks, leaves and tiny stones. It doesn't say much for us anglers trying to catch them! Ha! Ha!

But seriously have a look in a trout's stomach next time you chance to take one for the dining table.

It raises the question for discussion about pattern versus presentation. Of course there's just no hard and fast rules in trout fishing. Just as soon as we reckon we've found the complete answer, the trout throw us a curve ball. The experts have long believed the way you fish a fly is far more important than the way it looks.

All trout will from time to time sample things in the drift, trying to determine if what they've taken is edible. If they decide it's not food they spit it out in a fraction of a second. Detecting the take and timing the strike is probably more important than pattern. If you can get a trout to take your fly, you have to set the hook before they drop it. The way I present flies to the trout is what matters most.

The top fishermen I know all have a handful of favoured patterns that they use most times. Many of those patterns are simple, e.g Hare and Copper Nymph. I try to follow their thinking and my own handful of flies is basic. Don't necessarily believe me. Instead you can read of the "experts".

Frenchman Charles Ritz (“A Flyfisher’s Life” author) emphasised the way the fly is presented to the trout is the most important thing. So did UK expert Frank Sawyer (originator of the Pheasant tail Nymph) – he fished with just five or so patterns and they were ridiculously simple. Captain Hamilton in NZ fished with just five wet fly soft hackle spider patterns. The flamboyant UK Oliver Kite even caught trout on an almost bare hook.

Settle on just a few patterns. Time with the patterns- and success of course – has given me confidence in my “few patterns”. If they fooled trout, they will do so again. Sometimes an individual pattern really does matter. But then the trout’s throwing of a “curve ball” means it doesn’t matter most times.

I remember catching trout as a teenager on little wet flies and they got so chewed up by the trout and bedraggled, but still caught trout. Often they were more effective than when new which suggests shop-bought trout flies are often over-dressed. After all trout stream insects are tiny in most cases.

But beware of hard and fast rules. Most days are somewhere in the middle and changing the approach instead of changing the pattern usually gets better results, because a trout will eat anything — well most times if not always.



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Hunters or Gatherers?

By Rex N. Gibson

I wrote the original draft of this story a few years ago. I had just

returned from a mid-winter trip to Twizel. The canals do not excite me, or even attract me, in summer. In winter it is a different story. Many clubs are now organising winter canal trips; institutionalised masochism perhaps.

Canal fishing has always had its fans, but Malcolm Bell of the Complete Angler has developed a cult following for it by organising canal fishing clinics and posting fascinating video clips on his website and You Tube. Even if you are a fair weather fisherperson they are worth checking out as you snuggle up next to the cat on the couch. The videos may even convert you?

I did a trip was with some old "fishing mates". I arrived down at Twizel with my better half, the only non-fisher, on Friday evening. The others had spent most of the day up on the Tekapo canal with some success.

Saturday began with breakfast at 7 a.m., and topping up the flask. As usual I probably ate it far too quickly for my health. The lure of a big one seems to do that to most anglers. The night's light dusting of snow was scraped off the car windows with a strip of cardboard. Five layers of clothes went on, gloves pulled on, and the journey to the Tekapo canal followed. That day's temperature never reached 5 degrees; thank goodness for thermal singlets.

The fish there seemed to have a built in GPS style angler detection system. Wherever we went they ended up against the opposite bank. The clear water in that canal that day probably had something to do with that.

Sunday's fleeting glimpse of the mountains from below Ohau B.



Throughout the weekend we observed numerous others braving the temperatures to try and entice the canal fish into their nets. A large net is essential; something like the rock-perching inhabitants of Macintoshes' hole on the Waimakariri use to land their sea-run salmon. The usual squads were positioned just below the salmon cages and there were scattered groups along the canal as far as the dam above Pukaki. Here another fishing army lined many of the vantage points around the pool above the dam. This is where this article's heading comes in. I saw each group of those intrepid fishers as either hunters or gatherers.

The “**gatherers**” were planted in their deck chairs, cars, caravans, or campervans, gazing zombie-like into the distance, telling lies to their mates, having a smoke or vape, or just snoozing. A forlorn fish wife sat on the steps of a campervan quietly knitting. The temperatures certainly favoured knitted woollen socks. These anglers often had an ingenious system of a bell hooked to the rod tip to alert them to underwater activity on their terminal bait. A few had floats, but most were using rigs involving a sinker. The bulk of the gatherers use shrimps as their terminal bait, but worms, glo-bugs, and huhu grubs are not unknown. On a weekend like the one we experienced (maximum temperature about 4 degrees), the gatherers were definitely dedicated to “chilling out”.

A recent gaggle of “gatherers”



I define the “**hunters**” are those who cast, retrieve and cast again and, if you are hyperactive like me, move around from spot to spot searching for prey. Largely thanks to Malcolm Bell there has emerged a new breed of hunter; the egg rollers. They cover several kilometres as they fish down their chosen stretch, walk back up, and repeat it over and over again with the blind hope of a gambler who spends the whole night on the same pokey machine. Check egg-rolling out on You-Tube. During our weekend, there was room to move along the banks, but sometimes the key locations on the canals have a “picket fence” line-up of anglers.

Some hunters cannot help themselves. If fish are rising 100 metres away, and they are not currently catching anything, then they will move to where they predict those fish will be. If their terminal tackle does not bring results the hunter will try plan B, or even plans C, D, E, and F.

These hunters leave their “chilling out” until they are supping their mulled wine in front of a log fire back at the Inn or huddled over a heater back at the camp ground.

I guess that I am a compulsive hunter. On my annual winter trips to

the canals, I have swapped between a fly rod and spinning gear; sinking and floating lines, veltec-style lures soft baits and even a Colorado. The amazing thing is that most methods have worked, even the Colorado (at least once anyway). I have to admit though, that soft baits have been the most successful for me. Their action in the water is hard to beat for realism; especially since the paddle tails came in.

The hope is that they imitate small salmon that have escaped from the canal cages. Salmon see nothing wrong with cannibalism. Rainbow and brown trout share our human craving for fresh salmon also. The soft baits hopefully fool their fingernail sized brains.

On this trip I was surprised by the large numbers of drink bottles littering the canal banks. There was little other rubbish. Beer bottles, energy drinks, alcopops, fruit juice, water bottles, numerous cans, and even a milk shake container, were nestled amongst the rocks and grass. The next question is "Who is to blame?" Is it the hunters or the gatherers; the sedentary or the mobile? In the absence of real evidence I'll leave it to you to decide. Either way it is poor image for anglers.

Discarded sunken bottles and cans are common in the shallows of lakes populated by boats. I once even cast with great stealth, several times, to a submerged beer bottle near the top of Lake Sheppard, but that is another topic! For several years I joined the annual clean-up of the canals organised by the locals but the message is sadly still widely ignored.

Enough gripes; we fished the whole range of local canal sites. Almost everywhere there were very few successful anglers though on that weekend. The biggest catch observed was just north of the bridge upstream of the Tekapo canal cages. Another friend had arrived and he experienced some small fish 'action' near the Ruataniwha outlet fish farm.

Fortunately the evening was "kinder" to me. A ten pound salmon below Ohau B, on a soft bait, made my weekend. Like Skinner's rats we fishermen only need intermittent reinforcement to maintain an interest.

It took softly, fought well and then conveniently turned on its side within netting range. My autopsy revealed a stomach full of insects

and snails. Not a fish pellet or fry to be seen! Good info for another series of theories on what will work best in the Mackenzie hydro canals.

The Hunter and his Prey



Postings From the Website

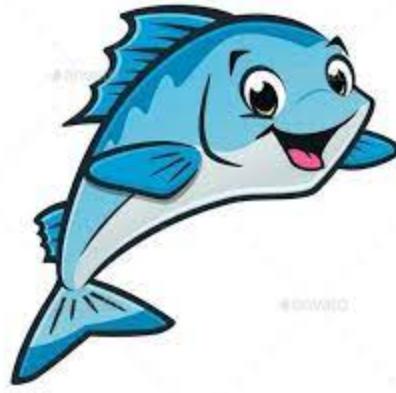
**Some of our more recent posts from the website (see
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or perhaps Nothing Gained Without Effort It had been a week of rain at home – every day! It did not really matter I thought as I drove toward Black...

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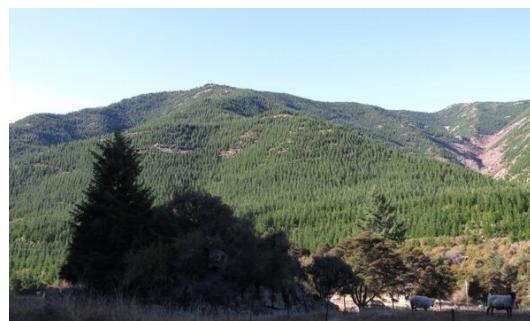
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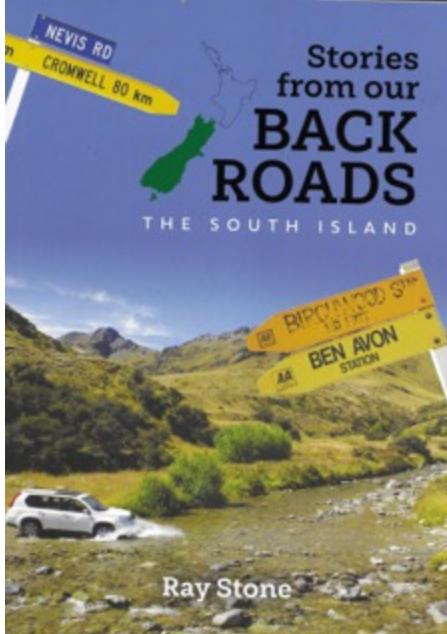
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