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back. Jason and Cory did the same with bait. It finally got too rough, and we headed for the shore. Cory then took us to Poplar Lake, located behind the Trail's End Lodge. This lake has numerous cuts and islands in it and it turned out to be the ticket, in spite of some wind and drizzling rain. Cory and Jason began to pick up eating-size walleye, and I struck gold with the fly rod. I managed to get a BWCA Slam, consisting of a walleye, pike, crappie, and smallmouth, all on the fly rod. My final tally for the day was six smallmouth bass, six northern pike, five crappies, and one walleye. Again, woolly buggers and a sinking line were used. Just before our shore lunch we heard a crash, and a mama moose and her two young went bounding from one island to another right beside our boat. That was really exciting.

Wednesday morning was the prelude to a big storm with steady rain. At Cory's house we discussed the prospects and decided to call it a trip. We picked up our fish, said good-bye, and headed for Grand Marais so we could call Delta and try to get out a day early. After paying to change our tickets and driving through the storm to Duluth, we learned that we would not be able to get out. The weather had shut down all flights into and out of Duluth. The Marriott at the Duluth Airport was our home for the night.

My notes from this trip all confirm that the BWCA makes for a great fishing trip. There are several lodges along the 57 miles of the Gunflint Trail. We didn't have a bad meal anywhere. The people are extremely nice and very accommodating, and Grand Marais is worthy of a day of exploring. As for fly fishing, I used a Sage 5 wt. TCX and Rio interchangeable tip line. Everything I caught was on a sink tip. Cory is an excellent guide who handles a boat exceptionally well in really rough weather. He says the surface action picks up when the water warms in mid-June. I would suggest making the trip then and bringing a larger rod for the big northern pike when it is warmer.

Would I take this trip again? You

bet. Just later in June. This can also be a great family vacation. There is great wildlife viewing. We saw red fox, coyotes, and moose almost every day, plus there are other activities such as canoeing and hiking.—Curtis Duffield

Postscript: Curtis gives the cost of five nights' lodging in a two-bedroom cabin at Hungry Jack Lodge, plus fishing licenses and guide fee, as \$2,580. Cory Christianson can be contacted at 218-388-0315.

DATELINE: NEW ZEALAND

Honor Roll Report **This 23-Day Trip Was** **a "Smashing Success"**



Editor Note: All the talk about self-booking of trips and agents disappearing is just that: talk. A majority of you are still booking most of your trips the old-fashioned way, by calling a trusted agent. The wisdom of doing that in areas of the world you are unfamiliar with is borne out by this report by subscriber Steve Lant on a 23-day extravaganza of a trip to New Zealand, booked for him by Mike McClelland of Best of New Zealand. We are putting Lant on our Subscriber Honor Roll for taking the time to file a well-crafted report that captures the special and sometimes exasperating experience that is New Zealand fishing.

As an avid fly fisher, I have long desired to go to New Zealand, but until I recently retired I could not free up a sufficient block of time. In early 2015, as I started to plan a trip, I was a bit daunted by the num-

ber of options. Having read about Mike McClelland's Best of New Zealand operation (www.bestofnzflyfishing.com), I decided to call him for advice. I'm glad I did. My goals were to sample the fishing in three widely separated areas: the central portion of the North Island; the northern portion of the South Island; and the southern portion of the South Island. Since my non-fishing spouse was accompanying me, I wanted very comfortable lodging and good food at the fishing lodges, as well as time to see some of the national parks that make New Zealand so special.

Mike put together an itinerary of 23 days, from November 14 to December 7. I was initially inclined to go later in the season, but Mike encouraged me to try the early season on my first trip, since the fish wouldn't have been fished too much yet and would be more catchable. Everything is relative, I guess, because I found the fish to be very wary and tough to fool. But I was not reduced to tears, as I've heard some other North American visitors have been.

My wife and I live in Poughkeepsie, New York, about two hours from the major New York airports, so our route was Newark to Los Angeles, then a five-hour layover before we boarded an overnight flight to Auckland. We then boarded a 45-minute flight to Taupo, where we were met by a driver for Poronui Lodge, our first stop. We found Poronui to be very well managed by Eve Reilly, with very comfortable cabins and excellent food. Each angler is assigned a guide for the duration of his or her stay, and the guides join the guests for dinner. I liked this policy, as it permitted more discussion of fishing options and allowed a first-timer like me to ask a lot of questions about the unique nature of New Zealand fishing. One question I asked all the guides was: why are the fish so few, so large, and larger in the headwaters than downstream? I can't say I understand this phenomenon very well even after hearing 10 different replies. And why are they so wary when there are no predators?

After two days of heavy rain, my

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guide, Duncan, advised that “choppering out” to the headwaters, which drop and clear earlier than downstream sections accessible by road, was our only chance of seeing fish. Since the river I could see from my window was a raging torrent, this advice made sense, and I ended up choppering out all four days at Poronui. This doubled my bill, but I think it was worth it. I found both the fishing and scenery to be better on my fly-out days at each place I fished. But the bill will cross your eyes: it ranged from an extra \$1,200 to \$2,400 (NZ) per day (\$1 US equals \$1.44 New Zealand at this writing).

Day one, we flew into the headwaters of the Mangamaire River. Apparently, Duncan had sized me up as pretty fit, at least for my age, but this river was all I could handle physically. A couple of scrambles, or “up-and-overs,” as Duncan called them, were as close to mountaineering in waders as I ever want to do. It didn’t help that I was wearing size 12 wading boots when I usually wear 13s. My fault, as 13s were available at the lodge for guests to use at no extra charge. The reward for my exertions was three nice rainbows averaging about five pounds, along with several others sighted but not caught due to some combination of lockjaw and operator error. I even caught a fish on a fly I had tied! Most days, my guide felt his flies gave me a better chance. I didn’t argue. Duncan’s Rubber-Leg Prince was deadly.

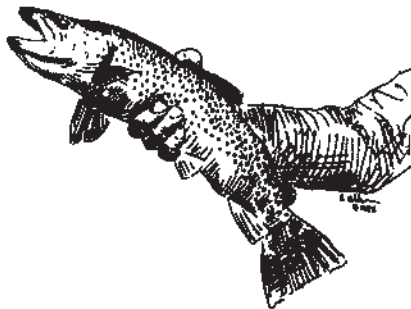
Day two, we flew into the Rangitikei River, justly revered as one of the most beautiful rivers on the planet. I thought it was about as perfect a trout stream as one could imagine. I caught five rainbows, the largest a 26-inch fish with a 16-inch girth, which the “formula” says equals 8.32 pounds. While I was thrilled to catch him, I considered it a bit lucky, because my cast missed his feeding lane by six feet, but he still came in a rush to take the Prince.

Day three, we flew into the Ngaruroro River, another gorgeous, clear stream in the beech forest. It fished very well early. I caught five rainbows up to six pounds before lunch. At that point,

another rainstorm came in, dropping the temperature 20 degrees F. and the fish just shut down.

Day four continued rainy and cold, so Duncan chose a small stream at a lower elevation, the Mangatainoka. It was in a deep valley in a lush rain forest. Primeval! Here, I caught five browns and a rainbow, all of them in the three- to four-pound range. Overall, I was very pleased by the lodge, Duncan, and the fishing at Poronui, and my wife enjoyed herself as well.

My wife and I flew back to Auckland at that point, then to Nelson on the South Island, where we picked up



the rental car Mike McClelland had arranged. It was a Toyota RAV4, which was just large enough to hold our luggage and just small enough to comfortably handle the narrow winding roads. I had never driven on the left side of the road before, but it was no problem, thanks in part to excellent signage with arrows at the many roundabouts and frequent reminders to keep left. We stayed at the Bronte Country estate for two nights. We loved it there and found it a great base from which to explore Abel Tasman National Park. There are numerous wineries nearby to visit. I can personally attest to the quality of the Sauvignon Blanc the region produces.

The next leg of the trip was a stay at Stonefly Lodge. Stonefly is a newer lodge, in operation for about six years, run by John and Kate Kerr. It is very nice, but we found it a bit stuffy and not as comfortable or relaxing as Poronui. As at Poronui, a guide is assigned to each fisher for the duration of his or her

stay. My guide, Aaron, was a great fish spotter and very hardworking. I found his instructions a bit less than clear sometimes, but I can’t blame him for my blowing as many shots as I did. I found casting a 16-foot leader, with indicator and double-nymph rig challenging, and my all-important first cast to each fish was often off the mark. While I caught fish, and some beauties at that, I felt that I didn’t come close to maximizing my opportunities while fishing for the browns of the South Island. Here is a rundown on what happened each day.

Day one at Stonefly, Aaron drove me to the Wangapeka. The section we fished flowed through a pleasant pastoral landscape, with a dairy farm on one bank and sheep farm on the other. Some of the stream bed was slippery marble bedrock, which I found scary to wade on. The fish were very wary, and the first few I cast to either quietly disappeared or just refused to take. I didn’t hook a fish until 3:00 PM, when I took a beautiful seven-pound brown on a small Parachute Adams, and then another nice brown on a nymph.

Day two, we flew into the Aorere, an absolutely gorgeous river with the clearest water I’ve ever seen. It had fast sections with large rocks. One crossing in particular was very difficult. The weather was nice, and spotting conditions were favorable, but most spotted fish were cruising very deep pools and not easily caught. After a fruitless morning, I caught three browns in the afternoon. The first, a typical five-pounder, jumped six times. I then lost a seven- to eight-pound fish after surviving several crises as he took me 100 yards downstream through a rock garden. My disappointment was short lived, as I took a fish almost as large on a small Purple Haze in a heavy run a few minutes later. Then, as the chopper approached, I got a couple of casts to a giant fish, perhaps 12 pounds. He was unimpressed with my presentations. My wife came along for the return flight, and we landed on Mt. Olympus, where the “crebain” scene in the Fellowship of the Ring was filmed. A very cool spot. Unfortunately,

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on the return flight, the tip of my new 6 wt. Scott Radian was broken. Fortunately, I still had a 5 wt. Sage ZXL with me. It served me well the rest of the trip.

Day four, we flew into the Crow, another gorgeous stream in a national park. This was the only spot where I found sand flies to be troublesome, but they were a small distraction. This day started off with a bang, as I landed a seven-pounder and my personal best fish, an 8.5-pound brown in the first hour. Both fish fought tenaciously. Unfortunately, under warm and sunny skies the fishing slowed down after that, and I blew my only two shots in the afternoon before taking a four-pounder as the chopper arrived.

On my last day at Stonefly, flying was out of the question because of an approaching front, so Aaron drove me to the upper Motueka, where we fished a short distance before reaching an impassable gorge. I caught only one fish, a 5.5-pound brown. This fish was lying at the bottom of a deep run, and finally took after about 50 casts with a variety of heavy nymphs. Sometimes, it pays to keep trying. Most times, it doesn't. I found the advice about making your first cast count to be true with most fish.

After leaving Stonefly, we spent a few days sightseeing on the west coast. This is a very beautiful part of New Zealand, and we especially enjoyed the Pancake Rocks and the glaciers.

We then drove over the moun-

tains to Queenstown. We enjoyed the jet boating there and a trip to Doubtful Sound and especially our stay at Blanket Bay Lodge, which is the most beautiful place we've ever stayed. While there, I had four days of fishing arranged with guide Ed Halson.

I found Ed to be a most knowledgeable and engaging fellow. Unfortunately, our fishing was hampered by very heavy rain. My first day was a



complete washout. On the second day, to get away from high water, we drove nearly three hours to the Manuherikia, a low-gradient stream in farm country. The fish were skittish, but I was able to land one nice brown. On my third day, we tried the Routeburn, but the water was still quite high. We saw only three fish and I caught none. On my last day, Ed arranged a flight to the upper Greenstone, a fishery deemed to be of "special

significance" and requiring a special permit. This river is in a beautiful glacial valley, and the river snakes its way across a tussocky valley floor. Its trout population was different than all of the other rivers I fished in that there were many medium-sized fish rather than a few big ones. I landed 11 fish in all, eight rainbows of 1.5 to four pounds, and three browns between four and five pounds. Most took a Royal Wulff or Parachute Adams, which really made my day, since up to that point most of my fish had come on nymphs.

It was painful, but the following day we flew home, from Queenstown to Auckland, then to Los Angeles, and then to Newark. The trip was smooth, but the jet lag that followed was a bear. All in all, I have to rate this trip a smashing success. We loved experiencing the long days and blossoming flowers of early summer when, back home, it was getting dark at 4:30. The landscape was magnificent. The food was good in most cases, and exceptional in a few. The people were very nice. And the fishing, which is the main thing after all, met my lofty expectations. I can't wait to go back. When I do, I'll probably go later in the season, when the dry fly fishing is better and the weather is a bit more stable. I'll train like I'm going to the Olympics. And I'll practice casting a double-nymph rig on a long leader, backhanded 50 feet into the wind!—
Steve Lant

Briefly Noted

Things to Do . . . Places to Go . . . New Developments

■ Remember the uproar last year in the Bahamas about Do-It-Yourself flats fishing? Independent guides, you'll recall, began to harass on-your-own flats anglers, resorting even to slashing the tires of anglers' parked cars. Angry confrontations erupted on various flats. The movement, at one point, threatened to turn into a wave of economic nationalism that had foreign lodge owners worried about their future in the Bahamas.

The conflict died down when the government promised to create a new

set of regulations that would clarify who could do what and under what circumstances on flats in the Bahamas. Well, a draft of those regulations has just been released as this is written. You can read them for yourself on our website at: https://anglingreport.com/wp-content/uploads/bsk-pdf-manager/DRAFT-REGULATIONS_19.pdf

Just be prepared to be puzzled. That's what we were as we read through them. The big question that arises is this: What problem was the government

trying to address anyway? Independent guides' complaints about competition on the flats from DIY anglers? That's where the real friction was. The draft regulations fully legalize DIY fishing, pretty much collapsing (and ignoring) the independent guides' protest movement, and it does so without really placating DIY anglers. It's probably safe to say that the regulations do little more than raise money for the government and leave everyone disgruntled. If you are looking for something good to say