



*Paula Hunker with an acrobatic South Island rainbow. At right, the Hunkers are on their way through some South Island high country to another stream. Photos by George and Paula Hunker.*

## TRAMPING FOR TROUT IN NEW ZEALAND

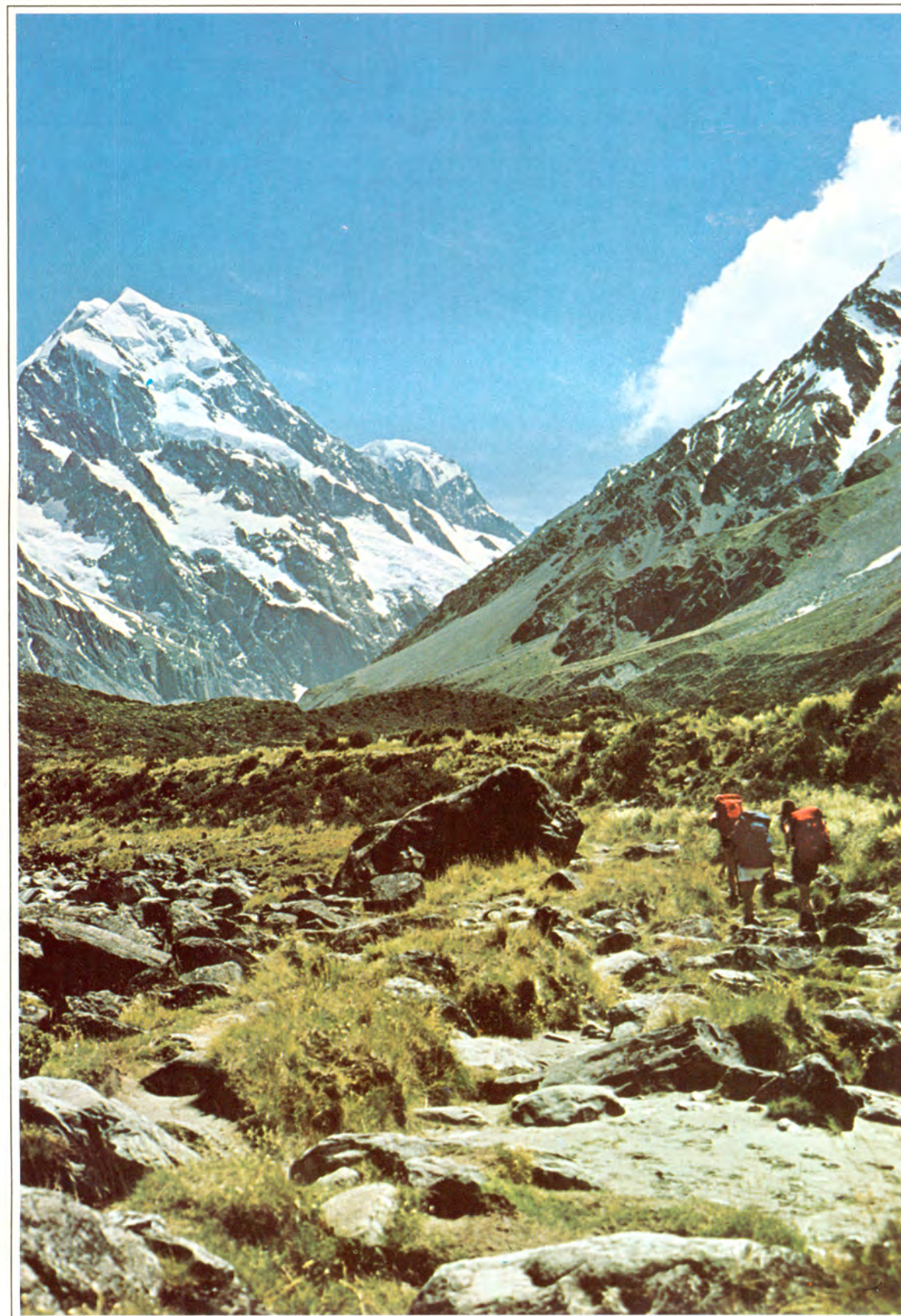
GEORGE HUNKER

**T**HERE'S A CERTAIN KNACK, my New Zealand friends had warned me, to spotting trout in the clear streams of their South Island. The water often takes on a jade-green tint where it deepens over a bottom of angular light-colored stones, offering near-perfect camouflage for resting trout. The hot February sun laid bare every inch of the pool before me as I watched from a shaded bank, wishing I had that knack. There were no fish in sight, only shadows on the bottom cast by pieces of shattered ledge-rock. One of the shadows moved slightly. It had to be a

*fish holding in mid-depth, but even by estimating the angle of the sun, I still couldn't see the fish itself. I took a few steps slowly backward and eased my backpack off out of the fish's view. The eight-foot glass packrod went together quickly, and I carefully approached the pool once more.*

I cast a small Dun Spider across stream and considerably above the shadow. The fly floated calmly down the run; the shadow didn't move. Now at the tail of the run, the dragging fly started to skitter across stream, bouncing frantically on long, stiff hackles. The shadow on the bottom became a downstream blur, then a violent splash, as a rainbow of about five pounds smashed the tippet as though none were there.

That kind of thing had happened relatively often to my wife, Paula, and me as we backpacked around the





southern end of New Zealand's South Island, but I still wasn't used to it. I stood watching the morning sun blazing against the island's jagged Southern Alps, and then, gradually, my heartbeat slowed to near-normal. Paula and I shouldered our packs and continued slowly along the stream toward the mountains, moving carefully and looking for fish.

CONTRARY TO THE LEGEND that's been prospering ever since the late 19th century, New Zealand trout of monstrous dimensions don't attack your fly from all sides like a school of half-starved sunfish. The average size of the fish we encountered during our four-month trek was certainly much higher than that in our native Wyoming, but the fishing was often just as tough, if not more so.

Our Wyoming trout fishing had been helped greatly by our love affair with backpacking, which takes us often to infrequently fished areas and better fishing. In deciding to go to New Zealand, we applied the same thinking, since we'd heard that backcountry fishing there was better than at roadside, even in that mecca for fly fishers.

We had several pieces of information that led us to head for the South Island. The most famous New Zealand fishing area is the Lake Taupo-Rotorua region on the North Island. This area is also the most populous and heavily fished. We knew that the South Island was mountainous with miles of remote country, including one of the world's largest national parks. We wanted to fish where we'd see few others, so we headed for the South Island, particularly the southern end.

New Zealand's Southern Alps form a spine down the length of the South Island, ranging in height up to the 12,349-foot Mt. Cook. Warm, moist air from the Tasman Sea to the west is forced upward by the mountain range, producing an annual rainfall on much of the island's western side of 50-300 inches and, consequently, a thick, rain forest.

On the eastern side of the mountains, there's considerably less rainfall, some areas getting as little as ten inches annually. This close proximity of wet and dry areas, coupled with large numbers of glacially carved fiord like lakes in the southwest, offers lots of productive fishing possibilities.

When backpacking this region, you can expect to ford a number of rivers and streams, sometimes on a hanging footbridge, sometimes by wading. You should remember that even a moderate rain can cause a dramatic rise in stream level in this country of steep and

*A typical South Island mountain stream where periods of high water create banks of washed boulders and gravel, from which Paula fights yet another trout.*







rapid runoff. Rather than cross a swollen river, wait until it goes down. Most will go down quite rapidly, becoming passable overnight. This will also influence where you pitch a tent, if you're using one. Make sure to put it above any obvious high-water marks. Many streams are bordered by broad gravel bars that look like good tent sites, but which are covered with water after a good rain.

We didn't encounter any requirements for camping permits in the national parks we visited, but it was necessary to register your itinerary with the local Park Board office where you could also pay a \$2 (N.Z.) fee for nightly use of their backcountry huts. Their offices are usually located at each park. The office for the immense Fiordland National Park, for example, is at nearby Te Anau.

The trails we followed were not generally marked or blazed. They were, however, usually well defined and the thick bush made it almost impossible to stray very far from them. We fished both the wet and dry sides of the Southern Alps and had fine fishing in both areas. Most standard American patterns worked well to imitate the mayflies and caddis of the South Island rivers, insects which were generally comparable to those we'd encountered in Wyoming. The single most productive pattern was the Adams, in a variety of sizes, and we're now busy tying the dozens of them we promised to anglers we met in New Zealand.

Although we had the most fun stalking fish with dries in low, clear water, it was often necessary to use either nymphs or streamers on a sinking line to cover larger, deeper pools when no fish were visibly feeding. Once again, most of the standard American patterns we carried were successful.

We're in the middle of a Wyoming winter now, but I still often think about the seven-pound brown that came from beneath a waterfall in a South Island tributary stream to take a small Spruce Streamer. And of one of our New Zealand friends who urged us to recite "God Save the Queen"—our friend's device to avoid striking too early—when we saw a big rainbow come to a dry fly in clear water. And I think the most, I suppose, about how we can get back there again. ↪



*We backpacked around the South Island for four months, stopping to eat, fish or sleep wherever we wished—an inviting spot often found me rigging a rod while Paula fixed lunch nearby. The hanging footbridge at far left was a rarity; we forded streams far more often, occasionally having to wait for them to drop after a rain.*

### Sources of Information

THERE ARE SOME, we suppose, who will view George Hunker's article as cruel and unusual punishment inflicted on snowbound fly rodders in January. Right now, and for the next couple of months, trout fishing on New Zealand's South Island is peaking as the season hits mid-summer and beyond. While the snow swirls in Massachusetts and Montana, the trout are rising thousands of miles away. We'll cast to them from our armchair this winter, the craft from which we've taken our heaviest fish. For fellow armchair anglers, and the fortunate few who'll actually be going, there are several places where additional information on New Zealand angling can be obtained.

The New Zealand Tourist and Publicity Department offers a "sportsman's kit" which describes fly-fishing there in complete and entertaining detail. It can be obtained by writing that department at Suite 970, One Maritime Plaza, San Francisco, Calif. 94111.

Among the better-known books available on New Zealand fishing are those by George Ferris, including *Fly-Fishing in New Zealand*, distributed in this country by the International Publications Service, 114 E. 32nd St., New York, N.Y. 10016. We'd also recommend *Trout Flies of New Zealand* by Keith Draper, available from several mail-order distributors of angling books in this country. This book has a short section on New Zealand trout-stream insects, an extensive series of patterns and a bibliography covering additional information on fishing in the region. THE EDITORS



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