



David Lambroughton photo

# Two Islands

*An angler's travel guide to New Zealand trout fishing*

DAVE LAMBROUGHTON

FOR JUST ABOUT AS LONG as my deteriorating mind can recall, I've had New Zealand on the brain. This indelible condition probably first began with stories of my uncle, a well traveled fellow, and later with a picture of Joe Brooks holding up a sizeable Tongariro trout that solidified my visions of grandeur. I began to think that big fish, beautiful country, and ridiculously inexpensive wool sweaters were lying just 20 hours, by air, away.

So when my first chance at a New Zealand trip came I went through a major information-gathering period. I read the books—*Parson's Glory* and *A Taupo Season* by John Parson, *Freshwater Admiral* by Hinkley, *Trout Fishing in New*



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*Zealand* by Rex Forrester, *Angling in New Zealand* by Keith Draper, *Trout Fishing in Southland New Zealand* by the Southland Acclimatisation Society (Box 844, Invercargill) and others. Someone even turned me on to the out-of-print, *Freshwater Insects of New Zealand* by Pendergas, and after reading it I was pleased to find out that the underside of a rock or a handful of bottom sediment from a stillwater environment would contain trout food that a North American fisherman would recognize. *Editor's Note: For the latest on New Zealand aquatic insects and the patterns to match them see Trout Stream Insects of New Zealand by Norman Marsh, Millwood Press Ltd., 291b Tinakori Road, Thordon, Wellington, New Zealand, reviewed in this issue by Tom Meade in Bookshelf.*

Besides reading everything I could dig up, I also wrote letters to all the interesting leads that came with the information package from the New Zealand Ministry of Tourism. By the time we landed in Auckland my little black notebook was bulging with maps, charts and notes; and if you had asked me about farm cottages to rent, weather patterns, bus-train-ferry schedules, mileages or roads, I could have given you an accurate answer. But the real questions that can make or break a trip—the best way to get around, where to fish, and how much time to put into different areas—were the big gaping holes in my net of knowledge.

Three months, 5,000 miles of road, and one blown motor later, I had a much better idea.

## Getting Around

IF YOU'RE PART OF AN ORGANIZED TOUR like Mel Krieger's Club Pacific or Fishing International of Santa Rosa, Calif., your transportation to, from and around New Zealand (as well as all other aspects of your trip) are parts of the package in full or in part with many possible options. For anglers with limited time—two to four weeks—such tours are well worth looking into. But for do-it-yourselfers or extended-stay visitors, the choices and options are there and they're good ones, too.

By bus, train, or thumb you can go practically everywhere, and these modes of travel are both reliable and inexpen-

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sive. But having your own set of wheels is definitely the best way to go for most. There are three possible options: (1) You can rent a car from one of the major rental companies and you can get to your destinations for about \$35 to \$45 a day. This can be a good choice for much of the North Island where good trout waters often are near accommodations. (2) You can rent a recreational vehicle, a good idea especially for South Island travel where much of the better trout water often is in remote settings. RV's rent for about \$75 to \$90 a day and contain all the essentials—propane stove, refrigerator, storage space, beds, running water, table and more. Resembling a cross between a van and a camper, an RV sleeps three comfortably and will get about 20 miles on a gallon of gas. Of all the companies that rent them, Newman's is the largest, and with its well placed locations you can easily trade in a car for an RV or vice versa to suit your needs and itinerary. (3) Visitors who stay at least seven to eight weeks can just go to a used car lot and buy a car. For \$2,000 or \$2,500 you can spin the wheel of fortune and drive your own insured car. Later, when you're done with it, you can sell it back, at a loss of course, to the same fellow who sold it to you or wherever you get the best price. Pat Barnes of West Yellowstone bought a car in New Zealand and reduced his ground transportation costs to less than \$10 a day. Not bad.

### Where to Stay

OF ALL THE COUNTRIES THAT ATTRACT trout fishermen, few have more accommodations suited to anglers than New Zealand. Larger cities have fancy motels and hotels with decorous buffet tables and all the other trimmings that you may wish to pay for. But scattered over both islands are more than 500 members of the New Zealand Camp and Cabin Association. Practically every little town or village has at least one member, and for \$5 to \$15 a day you can rent a cabin or room for two or three occupants. They are excellent, either to pull in to every few days with an RV to regroup with a shower, launder clothes and restock or to rely upon nightly by car renters. Many are located within walking distance of quality trout water and I've yet to see one that was not kept absolutely clean.

As for the Shearers' Cabins and the Acclimitization Society's fishing huts, they're there all right if you stumble upon them, especially on the South Island. What they may lack in charm, a little broom work can easily restore and for \$10 to \$20 a week they suit my financial resources just fine. They are also prime examples of how inexpensive a fishing trip to New Zealand can be. For the cost of one first-class week

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at an Alaskan fishing lodge, a friend and I sharing transportation and lodging costs, could fly to and from New Zealand and fish our brains out for three months.

But with its obvious attributes, New Zealand trout fishing does have some serious drawbacks and the best way to begin a trip there is with realistic expectations.

### Weather: The Limiting Factor

On both islands, volatile weather systems can quickly turn a pleasant trout stream into a chocolate milkshake. In the north, New Zealand's second largest industry, timber harvesting, has compounded erosion of the mudstone strata found in many of the South Island drainages. Because of unreliable rivers and streams, it is essential to know where to go in poor weather—stillwaters, rivers with lakes as their headwaters, spring-fed streams or dammed waters with controlled levels. Not only do such waters save trips; they can make excellent primary destinations.

### North Island

EVEN WITH ALL THE HYPE it has received, the Lake Taupo area is an outstanding base for North Island activities. With the towns of Taupo on the north side of the lake and Turangi at the south end, this is the geographic center of the island. Like our own West Yellowstone area, a 50-mile drive in any direction in this, the world's second largest geothermal area, can bring a full variety of water types in which to wet a line.

Most visiting anglers who arrive in the Lake Taupo area

New Zealand offers a variety of trout waters, from gentle springs, left to exciting big-water fishing for Pomobaka browns, below.

have come to fish the lake or its main tributary, the Tongariro River. On the lake, most anglers, especially old-timers, fish mornings and evenings. They'll work the rips—where riffles of tributaries fade into the lake. With sinking lines and a wide variety of streamer patterns they will let their offerings swim the currents. One fish per outing is a typical catch. The chance for a big day, especially in April, May or June, when the runs are building, is also there. But this is fishing without favoritism between the expensively outfitted visitor and a native *Maori* boy.

As for the famed Tongariro, it can be fun to walk down the woody trails and fish a famous pool like Major Jones, Admiral's or Cattle Rustlers' Pool, but there are actually few fish in the river during the summer trout season of January, February and March. A bad storm or two in April often brings in the first runs and swinging a fly through the pools raises expectations and a few jolts. May is a better month though and the runs peak during June, July and August, months that travel agents call the "off months," and they price their tickets accordingly.

But with all the big-fish madness and tradition that goes with the Taupo area, there's a lot of good trout water that goes relatively unnoticed. Quiet little freestone streams drain the heart of the island and many have good populations of browns and rainbows in the 14- to 18-inch range, plus the occasional surprise. These little gems often flow through lush tropical settings and working your way up one of these streams, casting your dries or nymphs under overhanging vegetation or towards the heads of pools, can make for magical days. To the southwest of the Taupo area they'll run into the Wanganui River system, to the southeast the Mohaka River takes them to Hawke Bay, and to the northeast they're part of the Rangitaiki drainage. I've watched my friend, Harry Macshane, a retired banker, work his way up some of these little streams with impressive results. He'll usually use a #10 or #12 weighted Hair and Copper—a simple two-element pattern that, according to Harry, "illustrates how unnecessary it is to imitate wing-cases, legs and tails." I've also learned that if you ever fish behind Harry, don't expect to catch much.

For big-fish water on the North Island, Lake Tarawera would head most lists. As for rivers, the upper reaches of the Ruakituri, the Ngaruroro, and the Rangitikei, are considered the best and helicopter service (\$1,000 roundtrip) for the latter two is available from Taupo. You can also walk into some of the better sections or fish the water near some of the access roads. But when it starts to rain and your dreams get a bit muddy, it's time to move to more reliable water.

On the east coast of the North Island, Lake Waikaremoana, the farm ponds around the town of Tiniroto, or the spring-fed Maharakeke which flows into the Tukituki River, are all good choices during poor weather and water conditions. On the northern end of the island, the lakes and rivers



Chris Fong photo

## New Zealand . . .

around Rotorua are worth a look, especially the spring-fed Ngongotaha. And if you're in central/Taupo area when things turn a bit dour, you should try a place local fishermen call the "Big O."

Lake Otamangakau, which lies just a little southwest of the town of Turangi, is part of a hydro-electric scheme and it can produce large rainbow and browns at a rate that can compare with mother nature's best efforts. Here, water that has been passed for a number of miles underground, emerges cool and consistent and passes through a slow canal channel and on into the lake. Dark, weighted nymphs in size #10 or #12 seem to work about as well as anything and the trout can easily average a clean five pounds.

If you happen to be found on the south end of the North Island when a major deluge hits, then just keep heading south.

### South Island

AS THE OLD TIMBERS of the Picton Wharf groan and creak and the ship's lines are being secured, you have arrived in a land of extremes. With the Southern Alps catching most of the weather systems, annual precipitation on the South Island can vary from over 300 inches on the west coast to as little as 15 inches per annum in the interior. With this comes a variety of landscapes ranging from large, dry sheep stations to little coastal villages clinging to wet sidehills between jungle and ocean.

Shortly after you leave the town of Picton, heading south, it's decision time as the road signs point to Blenheim in one direction and Nelson in the other. Both are fisherman's roads and if you head toward and beyond Nelson, the Pelorus and Takaka Rivers are both wise places to stop. This same road, before it ends at the village of Puponga, crosses several rivers of interest in the South Island's forgotten corner.

Back at the original junction though, the road to Blenheim is the one to take, especially if you like spring creeks and big fish. Between the Wairau River and the town of Blenheim lie 20 miles of road that can take a full week to cover as it crosses two world-class spring creeks. Both are capable of producing large fish. You can carefully work your way up their weedbeds like a gentleman with a small Adams or Pheasant Tail nymph and when the day is ending fish your way back down like a Kiwi (a New Zealander)—swinging a black marabou leech through the deeper holes with a tippet large enough to wrap packages with.

The South Island has other spring creeks as well and if you take the west coast road south, the ones found flowing in the Lake Brunner system as well as near the town of Hokitika, can make good places to rely on. The spring-fed La Fontaine near the town of Harihari is another good bet in all but the very worst of weather.

Following this same weather-beaten road south, it suddenly turns inland near the brown of Haast and climbs over Haast Pass, an adventure in itself, and on into the island's drier interior. This area is called the Southern Lakes Region and it is a prime example of how fast glaciation often leaves behind moraine dams across valley entrances and elevated, sizeable bodies of water. Between Haast Pass in the north to the town of TeAnau in the south, lie a string of big lakes—Wanaka, Hawea, Wakatipu, TeAnau and Manapouri. Into these systems flow such famous rivers as the Hunter,



Chris Fong photo

Dingle, Clutha, Makarora, Greenstone, Caples, Worley, Clinton, Waiau, and dozens more, plus many little burns that can produce some surprisingly large fish. Much of these waters are best reached by trail or helicopter service which can be chartered out of TeAnau or Queenstown. Others are accessible by car or rented boat and it's also possible to hitch rides with some of the larger boats that service some of the remote sheep stations found on the far shores of large lakes.

As you travel east from TeAnau toward the town of Lumsden, the road crosses three very accessible trout rivers of note—the Whitestone, Mararoa and the Oreti. Like many of the South Island's rivers, these also flow between high rocky banks that tell of much high water scouring. This is good stonefly water and home of New Zealand's largest, *Stenoperla prasina*. It's also land requiring long walks, and if it doesn't appeal to you, or the water conditions become unfavorable, try South Mavora Lake which is located in the Mararoa drainage. This is an outstanding stillwater setting with weedy food-producing shallows and plump, small-headed browns that will average better than four pounds.

Continuing east toward the city of Gore, you come into the drainage of a very different kind of river. Even by North American standards the fertile Mataura River carries a surprisingly heavy bio-mass. With good mayfly and caddis hatches throughout much of the season and lots of one- to three-pound browns that can, at times, be semireckless feeders, the Mataura is probably the country's most reliable and consistent river. From above the town of Garston where the river is joined by a beautiful spring creek, appropriately called the Brightwater, to well below the town of Mataura, the Mataura is well worth a lengthy stop. But even the Mataura, with the aid of several temperamental tributaries, can become unfishable at times and for a backup plan try the Mimihaui or Wyndham or the weedy little Waimatuku found near Taramoa.

This is an area of little rain and immense sheep stations that run up through high mountain valleys and into the Southern Alps. It also holds some outstanding trout habitat.

It was in the town of Omarama, in a grocery store, where my wife, Ginny, introduced me to her new-found friend, the late D.M. Hunter of Dunedin. He was a fellow whose zest for life, especially for angling related activities, was uncommon for a man of 80 years. With little to do he advised us to buy an extra week's worth of groceries and to follow him.

After 40 miles of gravel roads, the opening and closing of numerous gates, and the rising of the moon, we arrived

at a group of old shearers' huts and rolled out our sleeping bags. In the morning I stumbled out the front door to find a strikingly beautiful mountain valley where a river and series of spring-fed ponds and abandoned horseshoe turns stretched away toward snow capped peaks.

For the next week we fished the river and the surrounding ponds, three of which Mr. Hunter had under current attack. It was a week I will never forget, not because we

caught some nice fish but because it was the classic New Zealand experience we were looking for—challenging water surrounded by breathtaking scenery and a feeling of remoteness where our shouts of joy were heard by no one else. It reminded me of something a friend had once told me about these two islands, "don't expect to find heaven, but don't be surprised if you get some pretty good glimpses of it."

## Angler's El Dorado

ZANE GREY LONG AGO called New Zealand the "angler's El Dorado." And since his journeys to the green Pacific islands (North and South) fly fishermen of the world have considered "Kiwi land" a world-class dream trip. This past spring we visited New Zealand for the first time and, thanks to the New Zealand government, were given as thorough a fishing tour of the North Island as could be arranged in a 10-day period.

What we found in New Zealand's North Island is a trout paradise. Clean waters, unspoiled rivers and spring creeks, rainbow trout (brought from Sonoma Creek, Calif. just a century ago this year) and browns (imported from Europe) have preserved the El Dorado Grey described early in this century. We learned on this trip, for instance, that New Zealand anglers take an estimated 1200 metric tons of trout from the fabulous Lake Taupo rainbow- and brown-trout fishery. Furthermore, we learned that while the North Island is noted among anglers as the "rainbow-trout island" and the "wet-fly island," the South Island is called "the brown-trout island" and "the dry-fly island." In some measure these descriptions are accurate, but they are simplifications. The North Island *does* have extraordinary rainbow fishing—primarily on nymphs and wet flies. It also has superb dry fly fishing on both accessible and relatively inaccessible streams. On a recent trip to New Zealand, Editor-at-Large Ernest Schwiebert, for instance, caught many small-stream trout in excess of eight pounds, all taken on dry flies in the North Island's wilderness regions.

We fished spring creeks in which crystalline water runs over white volcanic pumice. In such streams five-pound rainbow appear like jet-black silhouettes suspended between green watercress beds.

Dreams are made of such fishing, but New Zealand is not easy. Complications include the unpredictable and ever-present New Zealand weather. Rain and wind (especially on the South Island) can blow you out. Fly presentations must be drag free whether you are fishing a nymph for spawning-run rainbow on the Tongariro or fishing a dry upstream or down to those spring-creek rainbow. You must know your fly fishing to catch trout in New Zealand, but if you do and if you work at it, and if the weather cooperates . . . then you can have that El Dorado Zane Grey talked about.

We have felt for years that a no-romance report on how to find New Zealand fly fishing is necessary. Thus we asked Dave Lambroughton to write it, after he spent three months

there on a U.S. fishing guide's do-it-yourself trip. He has written such a story. In addition to his information there are other aspects of a New Zealand fishing trip that you should know. For instance, 1983, Air fares were as follows (15 hours flight from Los Angeles, Calif. to Auckland, New Zealand)

First Class . . . . .	\$4,242.
Business . . . . .	\$2,534.
Economy . . . . .	\$2,112.
Super saver . . . . .	\$1,250.
Monday, Tuesday, Wednesday	
Super saver . . . . .	\$1,326.
Thursday, Friday, Saturday	
(ticket 30 days in advance).	

### Guiding and Lodging

ON OUR TRIP WE WERE HOSTED by Tony Hayes at Tongariro Lodge on the river just above Lake Taupo. A new lodge that caters to fishermen, it accommodates up to 16 people in newly built, clean, comfortable cabins. Experienced fly-fishing guides service the lodge, and the dining menu is extraordinary. During our Rotorua-area fishing we were excellently guided by Geoff Thomas of Trout Safaris, Box 1387, Rotorua, New Zealand and Hugh McDowell, also of Rotorua.

For total New Zealand guiding and lodging information write Rex Forrester, New Zealand Hunting and Fishing Officer, Private Bag, Rotorua, New Zealand (no postal code). Booking for all North and South Island services can be made through him. Forrester recommends that do-it-yourselfers planning a trip to either island join the New Zealand Automobile Association (free if you belong in the U.S.) which supplies the best island maps plus booklets on hotels, motels, motor camps with cabins, trailer parks and tent grounds. (A six-month membership costs \$12.50 by writing 33 Wyndham Street, Auckland, New Zealand or by phoning 774-660.) Forrester can be reached by phoning 87-179 in Rotorua, and his fishing information is available in his book *Trout Fishing in New Zealand*, \$14.95, Madrona Publishers, 2116 Western Ave., Seattle, Wash. 98121, an excellent where-to, when-to on the New Zealand resource.

New Zealand fly fishing *is* world class, a dream trip for anyone bitten by our sport. The information we have supplied here tells how, when and where to find it. The rest is skill and luck.

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