

JOHN PART CELEBRATES BEING 80 YEARS YOUNG AND 20 YEARS OF

FLY FISHING IN NEW ZEALAND

(The report below is written by John Part. For the past 20 years, John has been a twice-a-year visitor to New Zealand. He is an outstanding trout angler who has a passion for stalking brown trout in NZ. John has achieved a degree of notoriety by releasing 71 NZ brown trout that weighed in excess of ten pounds.)

April 2019: unseasonably fine weather, low water, but as completely usual, obstinate brown trout. Highlights: a sixteen fish day with six on dry flies right at the end of the season; a twelve fish day, only one below 5lbs and the best over 7lbs (where else in the world can you find this sort of fly fishing for wild brown trout on public water?). And, there was a last gasp 10lber (weighed before release) on an otherwise blank day in the beautiful high country. But please don't imagine it was all like this. It never is.

But this was a trip worthy of reflection. It was twenty years ago that I first fished with Scotty, and we've fished together every year since then, most years with two separate Spring and Autumn trips. In that time Scott has brought my fishing to another level. In return he's learnt a new level of good humoured tolerance, and an understanding of dry English humour. Twice I've thought I was going to die of cold, and three times that I would be swept away in high water. Along the way he's spotted, found the magic fly and then netted, seventy one browns of ten pounds and over, and many other fish besides. I'm profoundly grateful for both the companionship and the experience.

Also this year I turn 80, and for the first time have been diagnosed with a mildly less than perfect heart beat. Both significant milestones in an active fisherman's career. I can no longer kid anyone that I am anything but OLD. Not that Scotty will make concessions. Age is just a number, he mutters. From the perspective of an ultra fit 60 year old Kiwi, maybe. From mine, nah! But however much I ask, I know he won't mollycoddle me. He's done the compulsory first aid course anyway. He'll just walk on, looking for the next fish. And you know what, I wouldn't want it any other way.

One other thing was different on this trip. And not in a welcome way. The last day started well. In a familiar, wide farming valley, as typical South Island as you can get. Six lovely trout for the morning, all between four and five pounds. The last one particularly satisfying. Nearly eighteen feet of leader dumped in a heap on the far side of a fast current, and paying out quickly as the fly ambled gently towards the fish. The take the very second before it would drag and ruin everything. Then lunch enjoyed on a stream side log. After lunch, the gathering of skeins of geese, flying above us in wide circles as the numbers of birds grew and grew, and then on some unseen signal, migrating north to their warmer feeding grounds. And the fish? Absolutely nothing. They were there all right. Fish after fish ignored much of Scott's fly box. At first it was mildly irritating, but as a perfect afternoon drew to a close we sadly realised that we had been royally 'stuffed'.

The last day, on a river miles away and a couple of thousand feet higher, began and continued likewise. Fish after fish, some of them almost certainly double figure trophies, just ignored everything that floated past them. It was as though the jungle drums had magicked up a universal conspiracy of refusal. At last, as the sun went behind the mountains, a long, lean 10lber took a despairing worm imitation in the low, clear water. No. We hadn't found the answer. It was just one more example of the bloodymindedness of brown trout. And I'll keep going back to harry them while I can still put one foot in front of the other.