

NOVICE FLY FISHING SELECTS NZ TO LEARN! - RHONDA CALDEWEY

Sometimes it is better not to know how difficult something is before you try it. It was this naivete that lead my husband Jeffrey and I to try fly fishing for the first time while in New Zealand--despite warnings that it is one of the toughest places in the world to catch fish.

We started on the South Island, staying at the Lake Rotoroa Lodge near Nelson. With a grand lake view at the front door, a chorus of songbirds, and dancing black swans gracing the waters, we were able to ignore the teddy bear and lace décor of the rooms. Brent, the lodge's world class host, spent time with us stargazing at billions of lights in the sky, where there are more shimmering than a Manhattan skyline. When was the last time you saw a shooting star? We saw three.

I should have reserved one of those shooting star wishes for the next day. The weather was rainy, cloudy, windy, and the water was murky. My attitude was this: I'm a beginner deserving big points for just showing up. Being tested by the worst conditions ought to bring me way up the learning curve...right? Casting on the river proved to be a bit different than when I practiced it in my backyard. Even more frustrating was the fact that when I was able to land my fly repeatedly right on target at the head of this great big beautiful brown trout, he didn't bite! He must have been dead, because he wasn't going to move one millimeter.

Next day we went to Abel Tasman park, a national park set on the edge of the Tasman Sea. Funny thing...as beautiful as it was, I found myself thinking back to that elusive brown trout. What kind of fish doesn't want to eat?

Next we were off to the Fiordlands near Queenstown in the southern end of the island. That one-hour plane ride brought us into country where the sun sets at 10:30 p.m., and we watched the moon sink over the horizon moments later. It is a magical place with fresh glacial carvings and regal mountains that rise dramatically up to 10,000 feet from the sea. After touring Milford Sound I found myself nicely exhausted at the end of the day from non-stop awe at its wonder.

Fly fishing on day two started out with 40-50 mile per hour winds. New Zealand appears to have more sheep than humans and I was sure we would find them rolling along like tumbleweeds on the road. But we didn't. Roy, the wirey owner of the stunning Fiordlands Lodge, was confident we'd find a good fishing spot. We drove for an hour, and after a very civilized break for biscuits and tea, we trekked several miles along the river, traversing through the rapids and over boulders, to a sheltered riverfront where the wind stilled and the sun shined. I listened and absorbed Roy's rapid-fire delivery of instructions and technical knowledge. After getting into a zen-like, non-thinking place, I caught my first fish! Jeffrey, Ron and I threw our heads back, hands up with joy, and laughed out loud like children on a playground. What a thrill! It was a perfectly magical day.

I'm proud to say that on recounting my adventures back at the lodge, I recruited several ladies to give fly fishing a try...even in New Zealand.

Rhonda Caldewey

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