

NEWSLETTER #10 - MARCH 2003

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Leland Fly Fishing Travel Newsletter – March

TOPICS IN THIS ISSUE:

- * Trip report on New Zealand/French Polynesia, Feb '03

This is the tenth edition of our monthly newsletter with updates on great fly fishing venues and insights for our traveling fly fishers. We want to help you match the right location with your fly fishing goals and objectives and properly prepare you to fully enjoy the experience. We've been to most locations and pride ourselves on our ability to research new ones. Whatever unbiased information on timing and locations we can provide comes at the same cost to you as booking direct – i.e., no extra cost.

TRIP REPORT: NEW ZEALAND'S NORTH AND SOUTH ISLANDS AND French Polynesia

It's a giant leap from the cool, pristine streams of New Zealand to the shallow 80 degree saltwater bonefish flats of French Polynesia/Tahiti. Quite a contrast - releasing 4 to 7 pound brown trout caught on a #14 Parachute Adams dry fly in some secluded South Island Alps stream and two days later casting Gotcha's for trophy bonefish while in shorts and wading sandals.

In fact, it's such a great leap that I'm only going to cover the New Zealand portion of the trip in this newsletter and will follow-up in a week or two with the Polynesian portion.

For three and a half weeks in February and early March, Marte (my wife who accompanied me for all but one week in NZ) and I covered a lot of ground – and ocean.

SHORT VERSION – TRIP REPORT, NZ:

- Fishing: Simply the finest brown and rainbow trout fishing in the world
- Natural Environment: beautiful mountains, streams, rivers and country
- People: The warmest, most service conscious people you can imagine
- Guides: As a group, the finest freshwater guides in the world – a pleasure to spend a day on the water with
- Accommodations: Everything from "farm stays" for those with budget limitations to luxurious for those that demand the finest available (or a combination of both)
- Cuisine: Everywhere we've been, the food has ranged from great to truly exceptional at some locations
- Options: Outdoor activities abound – treks from one hour to four days, fine golf courses, rafting, helicopter trips, and many other adventure activities – trekking capital of the world.
- Non-fishing spouse: A great destination for a couple if one is not a passionate fly fisher – so many options on how to approach this type of trip
- Choices: Customizing an itinerary to meet your situation, budget, and interests is more critical in NZ than most anywhere else because of the many variables to consider
- Flight: about the same as Chile/Argentina – 12 hours out of LA. Two drinks, dinner, a movie, pop a natural relaxer pill and wake up refreshed and ready to go in Auckland
- Enough time: You could spend six weeks and leave feeling that there were still many things you wanted to experience. Would suggest a minimum of 12 to 14 days
- Bugs – I know mosquitoes must be there, but we never found them. Sand flies were an irritant in a few locations, but nothing major.
- It's a 100%er – there's nothing not to like about NZ. It's the only 100%er in the world of fly fishing destinations that I'm aware of providing your timing is right

THE FISHING: There were two aspects to our trip. A group from our shops was hosted by Josh Frazier at the world-renowned Poronui Ranch on the North Island for a week's stay. Regarding this portion of the trip, Damian Hedley had this report:

"As the days of sight fishing to trophy trout went by, it was clear that Poronui Ranch may be heaven on earth. The simple elegance of the main house and cabins, the splendor of the surrounding landscape, a waiting helicopter ready to take you off to the most perfect trout stream imaginable. We would arrive back for dinner and share our stories of the 6 and 8lb rainbows that had graced our nets, and the 10lb fish that had broken our hearts as the line went slack. The day we all left we simply looked at each other and smiled, knowing that our week at Poronui Ranch was nothing short of perfection."

Josh and I did considerable exploring on both the North and South Islands. Josh spent over a week on the South Island before arriving at Poronui to meet our group. Since I had been at Poronui Ranch the year before, I focused my time on new guides, rivers, and destinations. I fished six fully guided days (three on helicopter fly outs) from four different locations on the North and South Islands. Additionally, I did some poking around on my own with some short sessions, primarily in lakes, since almost all our lodgings were on water. My hard numbers were 29 fish released, 70% browns and the rest rainbows, and almost all taken on the surface. With the exception of five fish, all were over four pounds with the largest a rainbow in the 8 to 9 pound range taken on a Parachute Adams. This particular fish was a special thrill with an aggressive take that sent waves lapping up on the edges of the pool followed by a downstream run that included more than a quarter-mile of excitement before we were able to work him into a quiet backwater. Almost all the fish were caught sight casting to specific fish, which means that even failures (of which I have many) provided heart-stopping action.

We have researched the fishery and guides over the last few years and most of the fishing I did was on waters without footprints on the banks. Locating guides who have access to this kind of water is key – I'm not a big fan of the "famous rivers" with paths worn a few inches deep next to their banks. The numbers of productive rivers and streams is staggering, but it's the access to the "right ones" that is critical. "Right ones" means rivers that are basically inaccessible or on private land and destinations, like Poronui, which rest their beats to keep the water and the fish fresh.

ACCOMMODATIONS/OPTIONS: Excluding Poronui Ranch, the places we stayed were not the traditional fishing lodge-type of set-up. We did everything from "farm stays" to the finest resort-style/adventure lodges we've ever had the pleasure of visiting in all our travels. These "lodges/inns" would host 12 to 24 guests and only a few of them were there for the fly-fishing – the rest were travelers enjoying the various aspects of New Zealand.

Within the boundaries of budget considerations, I would recommend you try to experience all the various possibilities. "Farm stays" need to be explained to be appreciated, but it was a chance to spend some time with "real Kiwi's" in their living/working environment – a delightful experience and very comfortable.

AIR TRAVEL TO NEW ZEALAND: If you are going to try and get upgraded space (the recliner seats in Business or First Class make the trip very comfortable), you must go to work right away. United is canceling their flights to New Zealand after next month so space is going to be even harder to find next year. Some of United's partners are still available. American and other airlines also have partners that fly US-NZ.

TIMING & AVAILABILITY: The best lodges, inns, and guides book up very early. Our initial space for our hosted week at Poronui for next Feb is already fully booked. We are in the process of trying to get some additional prime time room at Poronui. Planning for '04 is best done soon to maximize choices and flexibility.

SLIDE PRESENTATIONS: I'm available for personal slide presentations for those interested in learning more. I'm going to be in the Lafayette shop this Monday (the 17th) and have some times still available.

Appointments are necessary so that when you come in I am ready to devote time to just your interests and discussions. I'll also be in the SF Bush St shop in the next few weeks. Let me know if you'd like to get together.

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