

Don,

This was a rainy, high water October trip to the Northern third of New Zealand's South Island. On some days the rivers were so high that it was hard to find anywhere to fish at all, but apart from one rest day we had no blanks. In line with a recent trend we saw remarkably few small fish; even three pounders were rare. They must be somewhere, and my experience is too narrow to draw conclusions, but Scott, my brilliant guide, says he sees fewer small fish than in the past. At the other end of the scale, the 'piggy' score ticked up with a couple of double figure browns, best 11 1/2 lbs, making a personal total of 73 in the last twenty years. I'm targeting 75, but I can't see myself wanting to stop there. There was also a nice sprinkling of browns in the 7 to 9lbs range.

In the area I fish bigger browns are rather rare. Most I reach by helicopter. Have you ever tried justifying the cost of helicopter trips to your other half? You're on a loser. I remember one lovely wife visiting New Zealand with her fisherman husband. He was bent on flying to far off rivers. She simply said 'It's okay. I'm into art'. He barely flinched.

This trip's big boys came from the River of Long Faces, a rather mysterious and notoriously fickle home of fat trout, in a narrow valley with 'oh no, you're not going to try to land there' landing places.

But most days it's hunting browns in the 4 to 6lbs range. Wonderful, and challenging days in most beautiful scenery. We had 79 trout in 13 days' fishing, most of the action at this time of year focussed on four hours around lunchtime.

The big excitement for this season is that it will almost certainly be a 'mouse' year. The beech trees have already flowered in overdrive, and the mouse and rat population should explode as the forest floors fill with beechnuts. As the nuts are gobbled up, the mice become more desperate for food, and begin to swim the rivers. A number don't make the other bank, becoming a nighttime food fest for the trout. In these conditions a trout that's already reached 7 to 8 lbs will soon become a magic 'double', and those few that are doubles already will likely reach real lifetime 'bragging rights' proportions.

Not that mouse year trout are easy to catch. First, every mother's son with a rod is after them, and they (the fish) wise up fast. Second, they get their fill at night, and tend to be prepared to pass on the usual fare of nymphs and fry during the day. And conditions may not be favourable. But every so often a real piggy will feel like a small ice cream bite even after a full midnight feast, so it just may be your nymph that gets gloved.

The publicity possibilities will not have escaped the agents and lodge owners. In recent years, some have predicted five or six of the last two 'mouse' years. So they are now being a little more cautious. But this year looks like being the real McCoy. Watch the reports from January onwards.

The other talking point is the New Zealand government upping the efforts to control and eradicate introduced wild species. Helicopters are dropping loads of 1080 poison, a cruel death for any animal that eats it. It's highly controversial and feelings run high on both sides of the argument. Google 1080 and follow the links to find out more. New Zealand is either way ahead of the curve in controlling the natural environment, or on course to risking the ecological balance of one of the world's most beautiful countries.

So if you're headed to New Zealand, good luck. You could get the trout of a lifetime. Remember, long leaders, accurate casting and always take your guide's advice. And if you're wet wading leave the cotton underpants behind. They stay cold and clammy long after your polyprops have dried.

John Part