



In 2017, I read some articles about fly fishing for king fish (photo – left) in New Zealand. It sounded like fun - similar to stalking tropical salt water flats in search of bones, permit, and tarpon. So, when we began making plans for a trip to New Zealand in 2018, we decided to tack on a few days to sample the king fishing in Golden Bay near Collingwood, in the NW corner of the South Island.

We engaged the services of Anton Donaldson of New Zealand Trout Adventures, a trout guide as well as a pioneer in developing this unique salt water fishery. The key to finding king fish in the large expanse of Golden Bay is to find a sting ray and not just any ole sting ray will do. The king fish cruise just above or

very near large, *black* rays - using the ray as “cover” to ambush baitfish hanging out in the shallows. They often show their tails for a brief time while pouncing on their prey.

At high tide, the rays are located by scanning the water from an elevated vantage point on the bank and then wading out to get within casting distance of the ray and the hitchhiking king fish. This “wading” is often a physically demanding chase in thigh to waist deep water. At other phases of the tide, you wade in thigh to waist deep water looking for the dark shape of the ray. This also requires some endurance because the tides in this area will move 10-15 feet of water. I soon found out, this is No Country for Old Men, unless you are very fit. It is also not the place for a beginning saltwater fly fisher person.

I packed an 8 and a 9 weight rod but ended up using Anton’s 10 weight most of the time. Fly lines should be for cold saltwater (my RIO Tropical did not do well!). The flies were mostly large baitfish imitations but we also used a variety of poppers. The king fish would approach the poppers like a curious dog but we could not entice a strike. Wet wading was the most common uniform although conventional waders felt good on a couple of days.



On my first day of fishing, we did not see a ray or a king fish but that day was plagued with rain, overcast skies, and murky water. On my second day of fishing, I had a solid hookup (photo – right). The take was explosive and the run reminded me of a 20 pound bonefish on steroids. In an instant, the fish peeled off my fly line and 100+ yards of backing. However, the line broke as I was retrieving the fish. The other 3 days we did a lot of chasing but had no takes.

We did spend a few hours one day fishing from a small boat but the king fish would disappear when the motorized dingy approached. Efforts to tease a king fish from the local mussel farm were also unsuccessful using the boat. A flats type skiff and pole *might* add a different dimension to the fishing. Emphasis on the word *might*.

We stayed at “Adrift in Golden Bay” which consists of 4 “self accommodations” facing Golden Bay. The 3 room cabins are spacious, nicely appointed, and very comfortable. The people at Adrift provided the ingredients for our breakfast every morning – your choice of continental or full New Zealand. I highly recommend Adrift but motels are available in Collingwood (10 km further west of Adrift) and Takaka (20 km east of Adrift). Options for dinner are limited. The Mussel Inn, a local pub, is within 5 minutes of Adrift. There is another pub in Collingwood and a greater variety of restaurants are available in Takaka

This is not a destination fishery nor is it a numbers game. However, I would not hesitate to spend a few days chasing king fish with Anton on my next fishing trip to New Zealand. Just watching these aggressive fish in action is worth the time. The weather was also a factor during our visit. We arrived in Golden Bay just a few days after a cyclone had passed through the area. The storm resulted in severe flooding of many of the rivers and washed out roads/bridges. Perhaps the cyclone had an impact on the salt environs as well.

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