



Personal Trip Report NEW ZEALAND - FIJI



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New Zealand Report



The 10th anniversary of our first New Zealand trip was made extra special by having our son, Scott, join his mother, Marte, and I for his first visit to NZ (in case you were wondering, Scott is the one on the left in the family photo below ☺). He had just 9 days to work with so we tried to pack in 12 days of fishing - not much touring on this trip. We fished with four of NZ's finest independent guides (non-lodge associated) between Fiordland in the south and ending with Scotty Murray in Murchison. We were on spectacular waters almost the entire time – literally many of the finest in NZ, although waters, for the most part, that would not be found in any book or article on “where to fish in NZ.” By time Scott left, we were happy, exhausted, and ready for a break.

Our lodgings covered a wide range, from a comfortable farm stay to some of NZ's world class accommodations, with a few stops in the middle. No wine country visits on this trip.

The fishing portion of our trip was fairly typical of a NZ experience. Most of the fish we took were in the 3.5 – 4.5 pound class (20-22 inch), the average “cookie cutter” NZ size rainbows and browns expected while fishing with the right guides in the right places. About 80% were taken on the surface with dry flies and almost all stalked and sight cast to. We didn't get any of the real trophy fish.....the largest fish was a stocky 6.75# brown.....but we hooked three fish that were in the 8 to 9 pound monster range that didn't make the net for one reason or another.



We also experienced the toughest day of fishing I've had in NZ. A severe low pressure system sat on top of us all this day. While we were on the edge of a heavy rainstorm the entire day, we only had light sprinkles reach us.....but the fish refused to take our presentations. We did stalk and make repeated casts (most fish saw a dozen or more different flies) to 11 fish, all actively feeding, but wouldn't eat our offerings. We only had one fish eat all day, a dry fly take that pulled loose quickly.



Our three best days represented what a “good” NZ day is like.....no double digit “great” days, but solid days with lots of action and exciting visual experiences. Those three days consisted of :

- 19 fish presented to, 11 eats, 7 released.
- 13 – 10 – 6
- 24 – 6 – 6

The other days were of the 2 to 4 fish variety.

As is typical of walking the NZ streams and rivers for the purpose of stalking fish, there was lots of hiking involved, both fishing upstream and backtracking to the car. A solid night’s sleep is one of my rewards for making these treks with fly rod in hand. The only way to reduce this aspect is to use a copter – this eliminates the walk back to the starting point. We had one copter day scheduled on our trip, but it got bushwhacked by a foggy morning. My old knees get more and more challenged by this physical aspect each year, but I can’t imagine giving up this most unique trout fly fishing challenge in the foreseeable future.



FIJI REPORT

Fiji, being just a 3½ hour flight from Auckland, makes for an easily accessible place to relax and recover from the rigors of searching out the trophy trout of New Zealand. For longtime readers of our newsletter, you’re already familiar with our favorite Fijian hideaway on the out-island of Qamea (below left). This is certainly not a fly fishing destination, even though I have spent a lot of time on our past trips training one of their scuba instructors/”fishing guides” how to pursue Giant Trevally in the crashing surf on the many reefs (right). The real reason for this visit is R & R – good food and drink, time at the spa, reading, snorkeling, and just plain laying around. On most days of our visit, I used a four hour session searching for GT’s as a break in the casual, laidback atmosphere of the resort.



My guide, Eric, has become fairly skillful over the last few years at casting a giant ten inch attractor plug into the surf with the objective of luring a GT close enough to reach with a fly rod

popper. The short version of this year's GT pursuits follow (if you would like to see the detailed report of the GT sessions, just ask and I'll forward).



While we attracted the attention of several fish, only five continued to chase the attractor plug to the skiff, close enough for a shot with the fly rod. The first one was a fish in the 20-25 pound range that inhaled my popper about ten feet from the skiff on our first day. The combination of the rocking boat and the excitement of watching that fish come from over 100 yards away must have overwhelmed me because as the hooked fish rocketed off, I neglected to pay attention to the fly line jumping off the floor of the skiff (rookie mistake!!). The last bit of fly line wrapped around my foot and, in an instant, the GT was free with my popper still in his mouth.

We had two large fish in excess of 30 pounds chase to the boat – on one of them, my cast, made before the fish showed, found the spinning line and wrapped around it. Bad timing for a bad cast! Frustrated, I watched that fish as it chased all the way with the attitude of an enraged elephant. The other giant chased the attractor with the same enthusiasm and was so glued in on the attractor plug, we failed to convert it to my popper. Its focus was so intense, it almost crashed into the skiff, diving below it at the last second. (below left, Eric loads the skiff in preparation for visiting the reels in the area)



My GT pursuit was saved on the last day when a smallish fish in the 10-12# range ate my popper about a dozen feet from the skiff. When I first met Eric eight years ago, fishing was done for one reason – to provide food for the family. I'm proud to say he has become, as it relates to the GT's, a "catch and release" convert. This fish was deeply hooked and he used a very gentle approach in unhooking and reviving it (above, middle).

This resort and spa remains a perfect "second honeymoon" type stop in conjunction with a New Zealand visit – the limited GT potential is just an added bonus, and if we get one to eat, it couldn't be more perfect!