



The Walsh family in New Zealand.....Christie (below, left) and Michael (right) are Mom and Dad; Brianna (11) is surrounded by NZ's most numerous farm creatures while Austin (12 - with NZ guide) and Michael (13) do some Kiwi research on the flight over.



When Michael first contacted us regarding his dream of taking the entire family to New Zealand with a stop in Australia for the Christmas holidays, we were both excited and challenged. This was something new for us – generally, our NZ itinerary planning is for either hard core fly fishing experiences or “couples trips” which combine touring NZ while blending in some of its best fly fishing opportunities. Michael explained that the kids were outdoors oriented and, while he wanted them to have some exposure to fly fishing “New Zealand style,” they were going to need supervised activities they would enjoy while he and the family CEO, Christie, spent some time on the water stalking the famous NZ trophy browns and rainbows.

The following photo essay captures the essence of their trip using excerpts from Michael’s well written and detailed report (if you are interested in the details, a link to his entire unedited report is included at the bottom).

Accommodations ranged from a farm stay (left, below) where the family was able to “take over” and have exclusively a very comfortable and welcoming environment in one of our favorite rural areas to a famous eco tour lodge tucked into the Alps. Also included were stays at a new combo fly fishing/eco tour lodge and, during Christmas (below left), at one of NZ’s renowned fly fishing lodges. Always paramount in the process were activities to keep the kids entertained and occupied in interesting ways, while at the same time experiencing the best of NZ fly fishing.



From Michael's report: "The third day of fishing was the most spectacular in terms of scenery, and between Christie and I we landed 10 fish.....with insufficient humility I hereby report that I bagged 7 to Christie's 3, and landed a nice 7 pound hen in a large pool. Awesome.....the clear water allowing us to take in the entire experience as it happened.....Kevin directed our casts to cross their cruising paths, and Christie and I both landed very nice fish, hers about 6 pounds.



Late in the afternoon, Kevin asked if I wanted to keep fishing.....he informed me that we were at 9 fish for the day at that point. So, THE HUNT was on for number 10! Well, we landed the 10th fish.....and Christie got a picture of Kevin and I shaking hands over our victory. Note the huge smile on his face – I think he really enjoyed that!"



Day two started with Kevin giving some great casting lessons to Michael and Austin.....As we walked up the river, Kevin sighted a brown across from us. Austin was up first. A few well-placed casts, and bang! Hook set, and the fight was on! Austin landed a beautiful 3.5 pound brown (below).....



Kevin has a particularly uncanny talent for sighting fish, which rewarded us with opportunities all day. After I had landed a couple, it was Michael's turn in a particularly beautiful stretch of water. Michael laid a New Zealand blowfly out in front of another nice brown, and as Kevin yelled, "STRIKE!" he set the hook beautifully and then landed a beautiful 3.5 pound brown, same as Austin.....We spent the last 30 minutes of the day with me trying to entice a nice fish in a beautiful aqua blue pool with a sandy bottom. Unfortunately, we never got that one, but as the rain began to fall, we headed home and left him for another day.



Jodi was an incredible hostess. She took our three kids, and her two kids, and led the kids on all kind of adventures over the two days Christie and I fished. They swam in the community pool and in the local river,

toured a couple of museums to learn about the Maori culture, played mini-golf, went on a horseback ride, including crossing a river, and even played cricket and rugby in their backyard with her kids. The coup de gras was at the end of the second day, Jodi presented us with a CD of the photos she had taken over the two days.



We then headed out the next morning and enjoyed our night in the Wilderness Lodge. Thank you for ensuring that we would see the sheep shearing exhibition, this was phenomenal. And, in addition to getting a full course on Merino wool (the boys helping with the shearing – at right), we also learned a new level of respect for the fantastic job that the dogs do in terms of controlling the herd with just a few whistle commands.



Then, on to the coast and up to the Lake Rotoroa Lodge.....The Christmas tree in the corner of the beautiful dining room made it a wonderful place for a Christmas celebration away from home. Santa Claus somehow found the Lake Rotoroa Lodge, and we all woke up with smiles and opened our presents. The manager, Bill, was an incredible host, and he took the three Walsh kids off to a great day of adventures, including riding in a jet boat, crossing a stream on a swing bridge suspended 100 feet above the river (the longest in New Zealand they say), flying across the river on a zip line, and an ATV tour of the surrounding ranch property. They had a great time.....back to the fishing. It was a drizzly, cloudy day and so we expected difficult conditions. I was humbled by hooking up three very large browns over a couple of hours, each of which leapt from the water, and each time I failed to “bow to the queen” fast enough. Two spit the fly out, and one cleaned me off completely. I did manage to land a nice 5 pound brown. Christie was just getting warmed up, as she landed a beautiful 6 pound brown, which she finessed to the net after about 20 minutes of navigating among wet, slippery bowling ball-sized rocks at the river’s edge.



.....Christie had a beautiful drift over a sighted fish.....she shouted, “I’ve got a fish!” Our guide, Pete, spun around and, observing the deep bend in her rod, said, “Yes, you sure do have a fish.” And the fight was on. We were using 5-pound tippet, so Pete had told us that trying to horse one of these big browns in was going to be a losing proposition. We spent about 30 minutes, and probably covered a half-mile of the river, because this one was not about to give up easily. And throughout the fight, as we got better and better looks at it, Pete went from “nice fish” to “really nice fish” to “this one’s a beauty.” But even he was surprised when he netted the fish.



.....scale take the measure of this beauty, we were shocked to see the “12” flash up before our eyes, and the scale settled in between 12.25 and 12.5 pounds. Happiness and high-fives all around!.....we measured 28” in



length, and 18" in girth..... the New Zealand fishing experience of a lifetime! We celebrated with champagne at the Lake Rotoroa Lodge, with Christie enjoying her newfound celebrity as the pictures circulated and we all told stories over another fantastic dinner.

The last day I got to spend fishing with my daughter Brianna. She had not yet gotten to go fishing, but now that both brothers had caught fish on fly rods in New Zealand, she was not going to be denied. Unfortunately, it rained most of that night and was still raining as we headed out the next morning. Rivers were up and muddy, but Pete found us a spot and we gave it a go. He was incredibly patient and really taught her a lot about the sport, from casting techniques to setting the fly and landing the fish. She

had a couple hook-ups, but alas no fish. I tried to console her in the fact that the entire day, I only caught one fish, and that was the only one I hooked. Sometimes the conditions make it especially tough, but she and I had a great time spending the day together in beautiful country.



The family capped off their trip by celebrating New Years Eve and New Years in Australia before heading home.



This link will take you to a detailed, unedited rendition of their trip written by Michael.....
http://www.flyfishingadventures.org/Newsletter/tr_NZ_Walsh.htm

Thanks to the Walsh's for sharing their wonderful family adventure in New Zealand.

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