

Fishing Aotearoa

Rod

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Ahhh New Zealand! - a preposterously verdant land of pastures, pines and pests. Encumbered with no less than 2500 introduced plants and 65 pest animals, and with native forest cover reduced to <23% of original, Aotearoa remains blessed (unlike Australia) with outstandingly productive rivers and seas. Unsurprisingly it is a mecca for Australian fishers. Fortunately, for the most part, Australians fishers are more welcome than our possums. Our engaging ways, economic boosting power, a national promise to never bowl underarm again, a shared umbrage at the temerity of the French to sink the Rainbow Warrior, and our perennial habit of losing to the All-Blacks appears to have cemented our most-tolerated nation status. Given all this, some guided fishing trips with my older brother Kelvin (a long term NZ resident) were a natural addition to a family-oriented sojourn in NZ.

The Coromandel coast is renowned for saltwater fishing and October is a good time to catch snapper. After a short tour of the recently (re-arrived) *Endeavour* (accompanied this century by the grand three-masted *Spirit of New Zealand*), our charter boat Ika Nui dropped anchor near the Mercury Bay Islands some 10nm offshore from Whitianga. Drifting squid baits for a few hours in a berley trail yielded 4-5 large snapper (around 40cm, 5kg) each, plus a bunch of smaller non-keepers. Around us large schools of Kahawai (Australian Salmon) were slashing into baitfish. Occasionally they came in range but couldn't be enticed to take a bait or lure – although a dip net would probably have worked!

A few days later with bellies still full of snapper fillets, we headed to Lake Taupo to fish the post-spawning rainbow trout run. Recent high winds and heavy rain had felled trees across the public access road so on the other side of a locked gate upstream we had the Tongariro river to ourselves. Recent rain had caused the river to pulse, enlivening the rainbows plus the river had been undisturbed by other fishers for over a week. Post-spawning fish were everywhere, many dark and battered but with many cleaner looking silvers amongst them. Several were still finishing their redd construction and spawning. In one short stretch we saw over 15 fish in shallow water - and easily in casting distance even for amateurs. Fishing wet flies designed to mimic trout eggs and with a highly competent guide Chris Brennan we had a ball – a completely different experience to fly- fishing in Australia. We landed about 5 large fish apiece (50+cm, 1.5-2kg range) and several jack from last year's spawning that were making their way down to Lake Taupo. For second ever go at fly casting, Kel did fantastically well with 5 big fish plus casting, hooking and solo landing one of the largest fish of the day (61cm, 2.3kg). Many of the fish were tired after spawning but several of the clean looking silvers put on a great aerobatic show. All in all an awesome day with a great guide and a river of big responsive rainbows all to ourselves - it will be hard to be satisfied with trout fishing back home.



The mimetolithic Mercury Islands



A handful of snapper



Kel's first rainbow trout



Rod's first NZ trout



A lovely silver rainbow trout (fly visible near mouth)