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Trout Fisher

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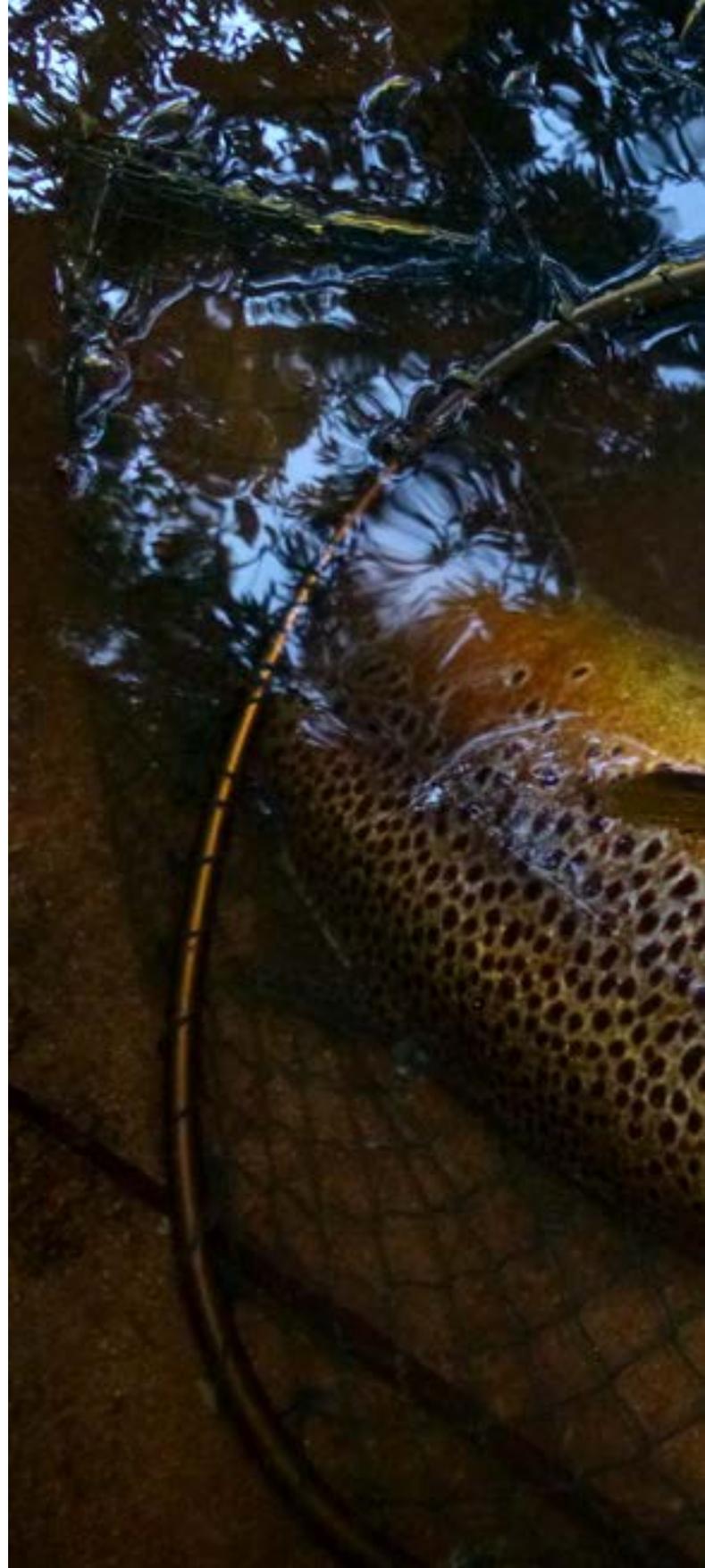
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COVER & HERE

October bush stream, rising and colouring (PWS)



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Big water on a grey, bleak day ...

Spring Fishing Fever

By Zane Mirfin



KIWI CRISIS

An open letter from Howard West

This

is a letter which I could never have imagined writing only a few years ago. You see, since coming to NZ in the 1970's to sample the world renowned trout fishing, I was captivated by the abundant high quality trout water, the natural beauty, and the friendly people. But the first visit of ten days was only the beginning, soon I was going three months a season. No, the compulsion didn't stop there, I had evolved into the rarest prize of marketing and promotion; an unabashed, full-on, advocate for anything Kiwi. I bought into the NZ shares market (six figures plus), opened three bank accounts, purchased a section in Twizel, bought a car, furnished my home in Hawaii with Fisher Paykel kitchen and laundry appliances, drank only NZ wines, and the list goes on. As you can guess, the tab for all this devotion over the years has been an infusion of hundreds of thousands of US dollars into the NZ economy. Furthermore, as the head of Scientific Anglers/3M for fifteen years, no opportunity to promote the wonders of NZ was passed by in our marketing materials and publications. My friends, family, and business associates grew weary of hearing about how enlightened and environmentally pure your country was.

Now, fast-forward to only two years ago, when I took a hard look behind the NZ "marketing curtain" and was horrified to learn how misguided I had been. What started my new realization was first-hand encounters with the destructive impact that the rapidly expanded dairy industry was having on my favourite Southland streams, which I had been fishing for decades. Each year the streams took longer to clear after what seemed to be minor storms. Since it was sight fishing which kept me coming back to this area, wasting precious days waiting on the water to clear were very discouraging. Secondly, many miles of the once open-banked streams, such as the Hamilton Burn, became so overgrown with willows that they were all but impossible to fly fish, except in the bigger pools. Once world class enjoyment was now reduced to frustration and the nagging question of how could this have happened.

A shame I thought. Yet, there were other options. So, no problem, I would just move on to another section of the S. Island where the streams didn't colour after minor rains or go totally brown for many days after the increasingly frequent "100 Year Storms." Also, I had had enough of the disquieting feeling of seeing E.coli warning signs at the access points of my favourite streams. Clearly I like to fish, but not at the expense of my personal health. After all, I am not simply walking about these streams in knee-high rubber boots, I am in the dairy contaminated water up to my waist, where contact with it on your hands is unavoidable.

So, nearly ten years ago, I said goodbye to the beloved Southland and moved on to the less intensely dairy farmed bush country of the West Coast. For the first few years it did not disappoint ... rarely off colour and quickly-clearing streams, and good mayfly hatches made for top quality sight-fishing in the gorgeous gravel streams. Then, things began to change over the next few years... the fly hatches grew weaker or disappeared altogether, the weed growth in the streams dramatically increased and the rumours of the toxic impact of 1080 and dirty-dairy practices ramped-up. Where is the "green and pristine" NZ of my earlier years? Are those days gone forever? Sacrificed for what? Just as with the Hamilton Burn, many of the once prime, even world-class West Coast streams, such as the La Fontaine, which has a big reputation, are being tunnelled by willows in many areas and often choked with weed.

High quality sight-fishing is the dominant reason that well over two hundred thousand dollars(US) to date have left my wallet and found their way into those of deserving Kiwis and of course, a proportionate amount has fattened your government's coffers. Hopefully with ten or so seasons left in me, I will likely be spending an even greater total amount of both money and days there...if the fishing warrants it. Yes, that is a lot of money, but not significant by itself, yet, when you multiply it by the hordes of avid anglers, who unlike the typical tourist angler don't measure their visits in days, but rather months, it adds up to a big chunk. Your top tier guides will confirm this, as many of their clients make my expenditures pale in comparison.

All the NZ government had to do was to live up to their "green and pristine" marketing promise. But they have not. Instead it seems that greed has gone wild, as it also has in the US. How can any rational government official expect that anglers successful enough to afford long NZ trips will be foolish enough to pay to be poisoned by E.coli and 1080 while watching the fishing quality of their favourite streams rapidly decline. Slower fishing is one thing, but wondering if the water and food is safe is an ultimate level of concern. There is a tried and true axiom of investing, "money goes where it is treated best" and that applies