

Dean Bell's

## Blue Ribbon Wilderness Guides

### Season Report 2011/2012

Another season is drawing to a close, though it feels as if it is coming all too soon with only today suggesting winter is knocking on the door. I cannot recall a milder fall and just last week was fishing with a couple of fellow guides on the Mataura under a calm sky and an afternoon hatch to warm the heart of any fly fisher. The river was alive with rising trout and many were robbed of their naivety when falling victim to emergers tied with Col du Canard wings. With this weekend being opening of Duck Shooting I'll be taking advantage of the CDC feathers on offer from those unfortunate enough to "white flag it" in front of my shotgun. I can reflect on another stellar season where anglers tackled, fought, chased, fumbled, laughed and cried all in the pursuit of New Zealand's wild Brown and Rainbow trout. It was a season that promised a lot and delivered in spades to those I was fortunate to guide. One wilderness area in particular did have the mice plague that was forecast even though it was not as widespread as suggested. Most rivers and streams fished consistently throughout the season which is all I, as a guide, can wish for. Providing and facilitating angling opportunity is one of the key elements when guiding, so it becomes paramount when deciding on where to fish on any given day.



Dr Bernie Alper having a wild time in the Fiordland Wilderness



Ellen Kirch showing the boys how it's done

### **Spring**

Fishing is always at its most abundant early season where trout are not wary and are happy to accept anything within reason. Throughout October and November the weather was at times beautiful while at other times challenging. Catch rates were again (a common theme year in year out) the highest throughout the season despite having to fish high (but clear) water for a few days. It is noticeable in high water that trout do adapt to the change in habitat and move to the quieter edges to feed and as we found out are very susceptible to what is offered by an eager angler.

### **Summer**

Come December and the weather really started to settle. Fantastic sunny days one after another ensued and we were able to venture into a newly opened fishery where to our delight the trout had been feasting on mice throughout the Spring. What were normally trout of 4 and 5 pounds were now rippling slabs of muscle at 7 and 8 pounds. Initially they were super aggressive to the fly with their newly found appetite for gluttony.

Post Christmas and into the New Year the weather showed no signs of breaking from the tradition of bright sunny days we were becoming accustomed to and in mid January long time client Peter Chung landed the

*largest fish of the season. Over the years Pete has had to endure his fishing companion landing an 11 pound fish, friends of his doing the same either just prior to or post his visit while all the time being the one who seemed to always miss out. This was the year of Peter Chung and though always reluctant to smile for the camera he couldn't but help sneak out a grin when posing with his first 10 pound Brown. For myself as a guide these are the memories that really stick with me. Not for the size of the trout but for the total experience and satisfaction gained by someone who has invested a great amount of time and effort to achieve a personal benchmark. To be a part of that is very satisfying.*



Peter Chung with his season largest 10 pound Brown

*By late January the great spell of weather was taking its toll on river levels and timely rains arrived to refresh and reinvigorate the trout. Extended periods of dry tend to load the memory banks of the trout on every angling confrontation they experience resulting in them becoming more and more wary the longer the dry continues. But the arrival of a timely and decent rain flushed the river and provided the catalyst to erase all things bad from the trout's minds and had them all back in a user friendly mode. Intermittent rains ensued for the remainder of the summer and river levels stayed optimal for dry fly and terrestrial fishing.*



Caroline Heppell with one of her three 7 pound browns in a day in the wilderness

## **Autumn**

*As I've stated, we've just gone through the best fall weather I can recall and perhaps contributed to the late return of trout to stage out of the lakes and up into the tributaries prior to spawning. On inspection the past few days the Browns have finally shown up albeit about a month late for the purposes of guiding. In a place where hatches are at best infrequent, Fall hatches are the most consistent of the season and affords the best match the hatch mayfly fishing the area offers.*

## **Fathers and Sons**

Some anglers prefer to fish with a mate, some with a spouse and some on their own. Increasingly in a world where generations seemingly are ideologically distancing themselves further and further apart I have seen when guiding father and sons that those distances evaporate when together on a river with a rod in hand. Collectively they share the same goals, same joys and even the same frustrations. From personal experience I know the time I spent with my father streamside was the only time we were not poles apart in our views,

opinions and outlook on life. We shared a bond that only came about when fly fishing and perhaps to a lesser degree I am seeing that same bond evident when guiding sons and their fathers. With young sons there is a will by the father to have their child succeed and catch a fish in the hope they will be captivated by the angling bug that has enamoured him for years. As the relationship matures that will evaporates and a healthy rivalry surfaces where the "Old Man" feels a need to prove to the young buck he still has it and the young Buck wants to prove his worth as an angler. Interestingly, when one is fishing the other is extolling me on the virtues of how good the other is in a display of proud reverence and vice versa.



David Gemmell proudly snapped this pic of 11 yr old son Nathan



Carson Williams, 11, with his first NZ Brownie. Dad, Ben did the honours with the camera

It is a great dynamic but underlying it all is a shared experience and for many the only really shared one on one experience they may continue to have with each other. I still cherish those times I used to spend with my father and look forward to the day I can get my son away from Facebook and electric guitar and start acting like someone other than the devils child!!! We actually did get out for a day before Christmas. We got through some testing times in the day and he managed to land a couple of feisty 3 pound rainbows at which time the smile beamed and all seemed to be perfect in his and my world.

### ***Next Season***

*With another season in the rear view it is time to turn the focus towards next season. For those with an interest in a trip back to Fiordland my diary is showing availability for all months though limited in January and February.*

*Thank you to those I got to spend time with this season and I do hope some of those memories stand the test of time.*

*I look forward to the next time we stride side by side up a river with only the elements and few trout to concern us for the day.*

*Always be kind to the planet,  
Warmest Regards*

*Dean*



Brady Johnstone signing off with the last fish of the season

