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**DIFFERENT PATHS TO A NEW ZEALAND ADVENTURE**



“The cordiality of its citizens, the natural beauty of the countryside, the mountains and the rivers and the free flowing streams, so crystal pure and clean, where you can gaze into the water and target trout like you see in no other place in the world, that is what makes New Zealand a great destination and one that keeps drawing me back.” With this one sentence, Bernie Alper (who is in the process of planning his 12<sup>th</sup> trip) captures the attraction of NZ. (At left, Bernie with one of the two 10+ pound browns he released this year)

New Zealand may be the top destination on the globe for combining a couples trip with a truly “world class” fly fishing experience. There are so many different ways to visit New Zealand. The best approach will vary depending on the individual situation. In reviewing itineraries for this years NZ travelers, it occurred to me that represented among those itineraries were examples of the basic approaches to visiting and fishing NZ.

**COUPLES WITH ONE NON-FISHING SPOUSE – TOURING WITH SOME FISHING BLENDED IN**

Laura and William Owens, on their second NZ trip, and two couples traveling together (the Sikes/Otterson party) both had similar itineraries which involved about two weeks touring NZ with 5 – 6 days of scheduled guided fishing. Both took “trout of a lifetime” (Walt Sikes at right and see below for William’s ten pounder) and both had some occasional weather issues to contend with. Both used a combination of accommodations which ranged from some of NZ’s finest top end eco tour lodges to a farm stay and “do it yourself” cottage. However, there were distinct differences in the two itineraries. The Owens’ itinerary had some very high end wine country experiences included with their agenda while the Sikes/Otterson foursome made a stop in Fiji on their way home (see below).



Taylor (at left below) used the challenging fishing environment of NZ to get her first exposure to fly fishing – indeed, fishing of any kind – and, with the assistance of some super guides, was successful in releasing her first ever fly caught trout. She commented: “I had a lot of fun and will do it again.” ( below, l to r – they had a special copter day in Fiordland National Park that included walking on a glacier, being dropped for a day of fishing a secluded, pristine Fiordland river, and circling Milford sound)



## COUPLES WHO BOTH FISH – FISHING WITH SOME TOURING BLENDED IN

Terry and Gary Butts both are passionate fly fishers and fishing is the centerpiece of their NZ adventure; however, they also work in some touring activities and enjoy time away from the water. Gary commented on their second NZ trip, “We had a fabulous trip - better than our first trip.” Building on previous NZ exposure can’t help but be a good thing. The general approach for second trips is to repeat what you enjoyed most from the first trip while adding in selected new experiences, waters, and/or guides and lodges.



On a 20 day itinerary, they had three stops where they fished for three consecutive days with a select guide, nine total guided fishing days. Also included were wine country visits, a stay at a spa, and general R & R.

Above right, Gary and Terry also earn the “Cute NZ Couple” recognition for the second time with this shot. They must practice these poses!! Below, l to r, small streams in NZ often hold big surprises; lake side vineyard, yes – there are rainbows in certain waters; Gary with a nice brown.



## COUPLES WHO BOTH FISH – WHAT’S THE MOST FISHING I CAN WORK INTO MY ITINERARY?

“What’s this touring stuff – we’re here to fish. We have one goal – to get the most possible fishing with the best guides during our time in NZ.” This statement could have been made by veteran NZ travelers, Barbara and Charlie Renfrew. I’ve been amazed over the years at this globe hopping, fly fishing couple’s endurance in their pursuit of NZ’s unique fishery. While Barbara is in her mid 70’s and Charlie in his early 80’s (with a replacement hip), they would approach their fishing in the most extreme way possible, distaining a day off the water. Even on travel days when they changed locations, they would fish a full day and then travel in the evening to be on the water the next morning in their new location.

In planning their 2012 trip, Barbara recently wrote me, “You will not believe this, but it is true!. We are going to take a couple of days off here and there!!! Have decided that 15 straight days of fishing is a little too much. See, we are growing old!!!” Gotta love it!!!

Itinerary planning for the real veterans.....over the years, the Renfrew’s have decided which guides they enjoy the most. That has been the deciding factor in their itinerary. They split their two and a half weeks into three general areas and fishing with four different guides in those areas. It doesn’t vary much from year to year.



## THE ONE WEEK LODGE EXPERIENCE – AN OPTION



If you only had one week to fish and didn't want to spend time moving around a lot, a good option can be to plant yourself at one of New Zealand's world class fly fishing lodges. Some itineraries will include 3 or 4 night stays at these lodges, but with fishing time limited to one week, a lodge can be a good choice for the entire time.

Our January newsletter carried a story about a December week that Jim Nix spent at one such lodge in NZ. Vicki and Jim got married near Arthur's Pass in the South Island Alps on a NZ trip a few years ago (to warm a fly fishers heart, this story is worth reviewing if you haven't seen it). Vicki had professional duties in NZ and Jim flew over to join her for a week of fishing and a little touring. Vicki can always create her own activities, but the top lodges do provide lots of different non-fishing activities to keep a non-fishing spouse from getting bored.

Jim's partial report: "It was a fabulous get away tucked in the hills just south of Taupo, New Zealand on the North Island. I caught all rainbows, although some of the other fishermen caught 24+ inch browns. It just depended on the water you fished. New Zealand fishing is all sight fishing and described by the Kiwi as being a 'bit of a trek'! Fished for 6 days, netted over 60 rainbows in the 3 to 5 pound range with the biggest tipping the scales a bit over 7 pounds."



## THE EVOLUTION FROM A COUPLES TOURING AND FISHING TRIP TO A HARD CORE FISHING ADVENTURE

Bernie Alper gives a rendition of an evolution that often occurs with long time NZ fly fishers....."This coming year will be my 12th year of travel to New Zealand. My first 5 years I was accompanied by my wife and while we fished, we also toured for approximately 50% of the time mixing lodges when fishing with hotels when touring. After my wife decided that she enjoyed the predictable warmth and sunshine of Tucson, Arizona during the winter months, I was left with the most difficult task of having to spend 3 weeks each year fishing New Zealand on my own. During the past 6 years I've pretty much fished with independent guides. Outside of travel days and giving myself a day to rest when I arrive in New Zealand, I devote my days exclusively to fishing."

## KEYSTONE COPS VISIT NEW ZEALAND



All of us who travel with our fly rods have had first day preparation issues. You're in a new location, far from home, and have just unpacked your clothing and fishing gear. You're rushing to get prepared to meet your guide and it always takes longer than you expected to get everything sorted out and ready to go. Well, Gary Butts relayed a very funny story about their first day in NZ this year....."The first day was like the keystone cops – in the rush to get ready to meet our guide, I rigged her 3 wt instead of her 4 wt and equipped it with a 5 wt line. I mistakenly put on one of her boots and she had one of mine."

Their fishing day turned out to be a very special, classic NZ day, but with some unexpected situations....."Terry hooked and landed a 8.5# brown (at left) on her 3 wt rod. My notes indicated we landed 11 fish, most were over 6#. About half were on dries. Terry's 8 1/2 lb was taken on a dry. We had a wonderful day, but due to the wrong boots, both of us had terrible leg cramps at the end of the day."

## THE 10+ POUND BROWN WAS ALIVE AND WELL THIS YEAR!



A brown or rainbow of over ten pounds taken while sight fishing NZ's crystalline waters is one of fly fishing's most memorable accomplishments. Each year, we have one or two taken by clients, but this year was special. And it wasn't because of some special once in a lifetime "mouse year."





William Owens (at right) took his 10+ pound brown trout from a relatively small stream, a river you wouldn't hear about if you read every book about where to fish in NZ. In fact, all three of the 10+ pound fish pictured in this article (that's Bernie Alper with his second 10+ pound fish at left above) were taken while fishing with the same guide in that same piece of water. This particular guide has always had a knack for finding big fish in small waters.....and getting them to eat. This year was exceptional, even by his standards.

There was a time when the ten pound plus fish was more common in NZ, but the possibility to take one of these "fish of a lifetime" still exists.

## PLANNING FOR 2011/2012 – MANY DIFFERENT “SEASONS” IN ONE

Generally, it is accepted that mid January til the end of March produces the most settled weather in NZ. However, that was not true this year. There are very few things about NZ weather that are "settled." It can change dramatically and very quickly, even during the course of a single day. On our recent trip, I became familiar with a gentleman from London who has been fishing NZ for many years. He has taken over 35 fish that weighed in excess of 10 pounds. His favorite time to fish was very interesting – he visits in the very early and very late season....two weeks in October and the last two weeks in April.....and always fishes with the same guide for that entire timeframe.

## THE FIJI CONNECTION

This year, as in the past, we had clients who enjoyed a visit to our favorite Fijian hideaway on their way home from New Zealand. 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 plug 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 reefs 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 my popper, it couldn't be more perfect! From Walt Sikes on their stay this year, ".....And, talk about value, you were right on 'five star accommodations and service, three to four star price'."

**PHOTO CREDITS:** (top to bottom) top 10+ pound brown – Bernie Alper; Couples w/non-fishing.....Walt Sikes and Taylor Bennett; Fishing with some touring.....Terry and Gary Butts; Couples....most fishing...Barbara and Charlie Renfrew; ....one week lodge.....Jim Nix; Keystone Cops – Terry Butts; 10+ Pound Column – Bernie Alper, William Owens, Kevin Payne.

Either phone or drop us an e-mail if you have questions or would like more information about any of our destinations.

An enthusiastic traveling fly fisherman,  
Don Muelrath  
Fly Fishing Adventures  
[www.flyfishingadventures.org](http://www.flyfishingadventures.org)

888-347-4896  
[flyfish@napanet.net](mailto:flyfish@napanet.net)

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