

**IN THE MATTER** of the Resource Management Act 1991

**AND**

**IN THE MATTER** of an application pursuant to Section 201 for a Water Conservation Order on the Hurunui River.

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**STATEMENT OF EVIDENCE ADRIAN BELL  
ON BEHALF OF  
NORTH CANTERBURY FISH AND GAME COUNCIL**

**Dated 6 March 2009**

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**1. INTRODUCTION**

**Qualifications and Experience**

- 1.1 My name is Leo Alan Adrian (Adrian) Bell.
- 1.2 I have fished since I was eleven years old – i.e. I have been an angler for 51 years. I have been a fly fisherman for forty years, and have fished for salmon for 38 years. I have fished the Hurunui for 22 years, concentrating mainly on the Mainstem above the confluence and more recently, the North Branch above Lake Sumner, the lower river in the vicinity of the rail bridge, and the surf at the river mouth (for salmon).
- 1.3 Having shifted to various places in New Zealand as a result of my teaching career, I have fished a variety of rivers and streams in the North Island, particularly in the Rangitikei watershed, the Tukituki watershed, the Manawatu watershed, and the Taupo district; and have a significant knowledge of streams in the Wanganui and Whataroa watersheds of South Westland.
- 1.4 In Canterbury, I have fished several of the waters of the Mackenzie district, and have latterly spent significant time getting to know several of the large freestone rivers and some of their tributaries. My knowledge of rivers in the Nelson / Marlborough district is a little more limited, but I have fished the Wairau, the Pelorus, the Alma, the Acheron, and the Clarence. I also have an extensive knowledge of some lakes in the Canterbury / Marlborough / Westland areas (also Lake Daniells in the Nelson district). I have briefly fished the delta in Lake Sumner with some success.

- 1.5 My fishing is driven to some extent by my writing career. I have authored one book (New Zealand Trout Frontiers), am a freshwater fishing column writer for Rod and Rifle magazine, and have had two hundred and ten articles published in outdoor magazines: Rod and Rifle, Flylife, New Zealand Outdoor, Flyfisher, New Zealand Trout and Salmon, New Zealand Fisherman, and New Zealand Fishing News.
- 1.6 I confirm that I have read and agree to comply with the Code of Conduct for Expert Witnesses. This evidence is within my area of expertise, except where I state that I am relying on facts or information provided by another person. I have not omitted to consider material facts known to me that might alter or detract from the opinions that I express.

## **Scope of Evidence**

- 1.7 My evidence will address the value of the North Branch Mainstem from Lake Sumner to the South Branch. It will also address the scenic and recreational value of the North Branch of the Hurunui above Lake Sumner. The quality of the fishery is such that I have written several articles about it. I provide reference details for these articles which, in part at least, involve the Hurunui in Appendix 1, and provide three articles in full in Appendices 2, 3 and 4. 'Once a Teacher' is an account of me inducting a friend into dry-fly fishing in the North Branch main stem. I took him there because I considered it an ideal place to find trout of reasonable size that he could test his abilities on. And so it transpired.

## **2. MAINSTEM**

- 2.1 The Mainstem, from Lake Sumner to the South Branch confluence, is a unique fishery, with a robust population of brown trout.
- 2.2 This easily accessible reach is characterised by a stable bed with an abundance of insect life. The variety of water is outstanding. From bankside pocket water (best described as mini pools behind or between large rocks that are in line with the current), to turbulent reaches and large, deep pools, this area provides an abundance of water types. The scenery is characterised by foothills covered with brown grasses, matagouri, and a variety of bankside shrubs and trees, including the kowhai. Beyond the foothills are the often snow-clad mountains of the Southern Alps.

- 2.3 I personally made the transition from thinking that pools are the primary resource area for targeting trout to an understanding that pocket water can be even better on one occasion when I had conceded the Jollybrook Pool (situated approximately three kilometres above the confluence) to my brother late one afternoon as he had not had the success that I experienced there during the morning. As a result of fishing the turbulent flow above that pool, as well as bankside pocket water above that again, I experienced so much success that I got him to continue fishing the pocket water upstream and he was soon hooked up to a fish there as well. It altered our whole approach to river trout fishing. This bankside pocket water is unique amongst North Canterbury rivers. I have detailed this discovery in Freshwater Fisherman article entitled 'Hurunui Pickpocket' (attached as Appendix 2) and in Chapter Eight (Wild and Scenic Rivers) of my book, 'New Zealand Trout Frontiers'. Subsequent experience has shown that these fish are not always abundant in this pocket water. It may be that migratory patterns between Lake Sumner and the sea, at present not fully understood, are responsible for the very good fishing often available in this section of the river (this opinion has been influenced by others).
- 2.4 Flows of between 15 and 45 cumecs are suitable for angling, but the flows can get considerably higher conditions of heavy nor'west rain in the dividing range.
- 2.5 The area is highly suited to spinning, nymphing and dry fly fishing, with the prolific evening caddis rise a phenomenon of considerable note.
- 2.6 The catch rates can vary somewhat (possibly because of an apparent tendency of trout to move about), with trout appearing to move into pocket water to feed in the late afternoon. There are some deep bankside pockets, viewable from the road, where the sighting of trout is almost guaranteed. Below the confluence, fishing is possible all year round. I have successfully fished this area in winter.
- 2.7 There is a freedom of access in this area. I have never had to ask permission to cross land. A fair bit of scrambling is required to access some areas (such as steep gorge pools), but those prepared for the hassle can be rewarded with excellent fishing opportunities.

### 3. NORTH BRANCH ABOVE LAKE SUMNER

- 3.1 The Upper Catchment is a unique trophy fishery of great scenic value. The North Branch is extremely different in nature from the Mainstem. Firstly, it is a freestone river with an unstable bed. However, this does not appear to detract from its fish holding characteristics. The river flows through a broad valley, contained within scrub and forest-lined foothills, with mountains beyond. The river in this section is highly accessible throughout. It is particularly clear, but unlike the big snow-fed freestone rivers which range in colour from cobalt blue to turquoise in colour where there is significant depth, this river is emerald green in colour. This is one section of the river that I am very happy to drink the water from.
- 3.2 It is protected from over-fishing by a Grade 3 4-wheel drive track and the fact that permission must be sought from the Department of Conversation in order to take a motor vehicle past Loch Katrine.
- 3.3 This section of the river provides opportunities for dry fly fishing, nymph fishing, and spinning with Rapala lures. This is the river par excellence for casting to spotted trout. Because of the open nature of much of the river (reflected bush close by makes spotting easier), cloudy days make spotting trout difficult. However, on a fine day, there is no better stretch of water to spot the trout in – largely because of their large size. Spotting is necessary because the brown trout inhabiting this section can be lying almost anywhere in the comparatively gentle flow.
- 3.4 I have lost a large fish in the catchment and have personally photographed two of my brother's fish that were in excess of nine pounds (see accompanying photographs). A combination of often difficult weather conditions and the sheer vagaries of trout fishing have ensured that these large fish can be challenging to catch, but the rewards are great when success is achieved, and visitors to the area are happy to put time into seeking that seemingly unattainable 'double-figure' trout.
- 3.5 The catch rates in this section are not particularly high, but the quality of fishing and the fish you are likely to catch is very high. The season starts in December and finishes at the end of April; however, an abundance of salmon in the river at this time can make fishing less productive (evidence gained from conversations with my brother, Malcolm).

3.6 Like most Canterbury rivers, the most suitable flows appear to be those where the river is just clearing or has just cleared after a fresh. This section of the river appears to clear quite quickly.

#### 4. **SALMON FISHING AT THE MOUTH**

4.1 The Hurunui mouth is the most scenic of the Canterbury salmon river mouths, with a backdrop of scrub-covered hills. The slope of the beach is steep, making it suitable for surf fishing in swell conditions that would be too high for shallower mouths such as the Rakaia and Rangitata. This also makes it suitable for beginner anglers or those with threadline reels who are unable to cast great distances. Catch rates vary considerably, and there is a considerable amount of uncertainty as to when the salmon are liable to turn up. However, the lower numbers of anglers who fish this mouth can be amply rewarded when the fish are there.

#### 5. **COMPARISON WITH OTHER TROUT FISHERIES**

5.1 The Hurunui is an excellent river to fish because of its proximity to Christchurch. Here, it is possible to 'get away from it all' relatively easily. The fish density of trout in the mainstem is higher than other Canterbury rivers of similar size. There can be very significant insect hatches early in spring. I have seen large numbers of terns hawking for these insects above the river, even in windy conditions. This is a sign of very healthy conditions for insect life in the substrate.

5.2 The other rivers with Water Conservation Orders that I have fished are the Mohaka, the Rangitikei, the Rakaia, the Rangitata and the Ahuriri. I have seen considerably bigger fish caught in the North Branch of the Hurunui than I have caught or seen caught in the Mohaka. The North Branch has grander scenery than what I have seen on the Upper Mohaka. The Upper Rangitikei is a scenic gem, comparable to the scenery of the North Branch of the Hurunui, but without the grand mountains. The Upper Rakaia and Rangitikei rivers possess a scenic vista without peer in their backdrop of the Great Dividing Range. The North Branch of the Hurunui might possess a scenic beauty on a slightly smaller scale than that of the latter but, unlike these two rivers, it possesses a lake plus mountain vista which is of exquisite scenic value. The middle Ahuriri is a magnificent waterway for its golden tussock and matagouri foreground backed by grand mountains on either side. The Hurunui is definitely in the same league as these rivers, but with unique scenery and fishing

potential. I have personally caught bigger trout in the North Branch of the Hurunui than I have caught in the other rivers mentioned above.

## **6. CONCLUSIONS**

6.1 The angling is outstanding in this wonderful river because of the variety of water available, because of the trout density, and because there is much to challenge an angler, from the beginner to the most passionate aficionado.

6.2 I consider that the Hurunui in its present, pristine state is a unique and remarkable fishery, because of the freedom of movement between the sea, the lake and the three main stems of the river. It would be a sin of the highest order for this delicately balanced ecosystem to be harmed because of the sectional interests of those who want to transfer more dollars to the bank from their pasturelands which should be feeding dry stock, anyway.

**A Bell**

**March 2009**

## Appendix 1

Bell Adrian, Wild and Scenic Rivers. In New Zealand Trout Frontiers; The Halcyon Press 2007 p91 (taken from 'Hurunui Pickpocket')

Bell Adrian, Hurunui Pickpocket. Flyfisher; October/November 1987 p8 (North Branch, main stem)

Bell Adrian, Wallies in the Wilderness. New Zealand Fisherman; December 1995, pp66 (South Branch)

Bell Adrian, Getting it Together. New Zealand Fishing News; January 2002, p66 (South Branch)

Bell Adrian, Once a Teacher. Rod and Rifle Magazine; January/February 2002, p33 (North Branch, main stem)

Bell Adrian, Wind – Liability or Asset, Rod and Rifle May/June 2008, p73 (North Branch, main stem)

Bell Adrian, Big Beautiful and Braided. New Zealand Trout Frontiers; The Halcyon Press, 2007 (Photograph of ten pound brown on p143)

Bell Adrian, The Tyranny of Size. Rod and Rifle Magazine; November/December p34

Bell Adrian, Emotion and Fishing; May/June 2007, p49

## Appendix 2

### Hurunui Pickpocket

WE WERE TIRED. A cold drizzle hung on the windscreen. Our world had shrunk to a patch of road before a vehicle that was becoming more cosy by the minute. After a night on the ground at Lake Mason and the fishing and tramping we'd done it was tempting to toddle off home a day early. To leave the river and all those trout undisturbed.

All those trout? Something beyond the reach of tiredness stirred. Here was just enough motivation to turn off the road, bounce across a paddock and put up the tent on a flat bit of terrace with the help of park lights. We would keep to our plan to fish the river in the morning.

But now it was time to crash. To find energy for the new day. With lights out the local kiwibear rubbed its paws in glee and ambled up for a closer look. The arrival of a tent brings gladness to the life of a scrub possum. Think of the fun you can have on canvas ski-slopes. And the goodies that reward a skillfully probing paw.

First a bit of a scramble on the canvas so the guests know you've arrived. Malcolm was the first to wake, "Mumble mumble . . . lousy possum ... get out (thump thump on walls of inner tent)!" Then later,

"That's not rain, that's the possum" (I didn't recognize the chipping sounds until next day I pulled out some biscuits with bite-sized pieces removed). To complete the act, the triumphant "Tchaa-ha-ha-ha! Tchaa-ha-ha-ha!" from the manuka. Translated: "No zip tent fly properly. Easy me get under. Snitch food. You suffer consequences. Ha ha ha!"

Our host had called it a night by the time we poked our heads out next morning, too late to check out any dawn action on the river. If I'd known what the day held in store I mightn't've been so reluctant to get up. I should've known. Brian Moyses had introduced me to the Hurunui the week before. I'd caught my first brown fishing with

a Tongariro rig. Compared with a rainbow the take was violent. I'd cast over a riffle just above a long pool. The resident 4<sup>1</sup>/<sub>2</sub>lb hen had charged upstream to take one of *Brian's Captain Hamilton* size 12s. I just had to lift the rod tip and the barbless hook did the rest.

We assembled the rods and targeted the nearby nymph water. Here the river eases over submerged boulders between grassy banks decorated with kowhai, manuka and leader-grabbing matagouri. About half-way up the pool I presented a size 12 Halfback for inspection. A pied oystercatcher bleated its way downstream. Fresh snow a few hundred feet up. A light southerly ushering clouds upstream. Sandflies. A bellbird ventured a single note. I answered.

Near the top I edged into the current. Now I could reach the prime lie without much trouble. This consisted of a blue gutter below a row of shallow boulders. Here a "mend" soon after casting enabled a dead drift into the swirling water. But there are hazards fishing with all this slack line. If a take comes early in the drift it can be tricky to get the hook in. My nymph was testing this lie when the indicator zapped out. Desperately I struck but failed to make contact, even with 9ft Gins of graphite II. Or had I? No. Slack line. Hey! Doubts vanished as a strong fish snatched the loose line then hoed into the reel supply. Not content with that it tore into the backing. "What a fish!" I yelled.

Malcolm, fishing downstream, be-came alarmed at seeing so much tackle ripping past him. "You'll lose control of him!" he warned.

For some reason the designer of my borrowed chest waders had seen fit to position the crutch marginally above the knees. This made wading the boulders more hazardous than usual. but options were limited with scrub on the bank and the fish so far down the pool. I waddled over the big stones, grabbing a manuka for support as I followed an alarming length of white backing down the river, re-gaining line as I could.

At last I was next to a clear section of the bank. I climbed out and put the rest of the backing where it belonged. then worked the fish I now saw for the first time closer to the edge.

“Four, four-and-a-half, maybe five,” we enthused. Delight was tempered by anxiety. I tried to hurry Malc with the net but the trout made for deeper water. However, more pressure brought it near and Malc soon lifted out a well-proportioned hen of 5<sup>1</sup>/<sub>4</sub> pounds. Time to rub my paws in glee. What a start to the day! I invited him into the hotspot while I took up a position downstream.

After hooking and losing a “scrappy pan-sized fish” Malc crossed the river. We hoped the sun now asserting itself would make a difference to what had become a quiet period of fishing. It did. First I caught a scrapper and put it back. Then after fishing the top lie or some time I called across the river,

“I’ve been thrashing this spot for too I...” No chance to finish the sentence though for the indicator had shot across the current. Up went the rod. Contact. Soon a 21ber lay on the bank. But Malc remained fishless. I hooked and lost another before returning to the tent for a brew and tinned stew that had somehow escaped the quality control man. Then we packed and motored upstream to different water. But here, despite lovely scenery and much walking, we didn’t touch a fish so returned to the scene of action.

We discussed tactics from a terrace high above the river. I would try what appeared a promising pool below a stretch of “unproductive” white water while Malc would check out the site of the morning’s success downriver. Shades of Abraham offering the plain to Lot perhaps but I’d already caught fish and could afford to check out something new.

Breaking through scrub isn’t too bad with sheep around as their tracks all lead to water.

But the pool didn’t look too good close up. Not much room for casting either. Not with a cliff behind me. Never fear, a good steeple cast would do the trick. It did. It impaled

my nymph in a briar on the cliff. I tied on another which at least got a bathe before lodging irretrievably on a rock. Undaunted I attached one more and managed to fish without further mis-hap to the beginning of the white water. Here there was more room for casting. And more besides.

But for the moment I failed to see the potential of the long parallel reaches I was fishing. Out went the size 12 olive nymph. Down the turbulence between the two. Zap. Strike. A brown in water that quick? I worked a fish of about 21bs across the current and into slower water but the hook came out. I dropped back and fished the stretch again. Almost at the throat of the bankside reach I was retrieving the nymph when it was snatched by a tiddler. I cast again contemplating what had happened. But little time for that 'cause the indicator had gone again. Strike! Up solid on a fish same size as the first but it, too, would see its own dentist thank you.

Rather dazed I dropped back and fished the reaches yet again. The little red sphere bobbed down the far one. Hesitation—Whack. This two pounder was hooked solid and came all the way home.

Time to move on. In a bath-sized pocket just above the reaches a trout came up to have a squiz at the indicator. Excitement mounted. How many more fish in how many pockets upstream? I headed toward a set of staircase rapids. According to my preconceptions the water was getting less promising all the time. But I was learning. Fish the pockets.

On the way up I spooked a big green fish sitting in an ambush-zone of quiet water. Hadn't expected to see me. He went deeper but was loath to leave his vantage point. Almost at the top of the rapids I spied a small "spa" pocket close in. Full of air bubbles and turbulence. What fisherman in his right mind would fish this?

I flicked out the nymph. The indicator floated down then stopped. I love the action of a good 9ft 6in rod. So decisive. So was the trout. It knew this pocket well, exploring it with the smoothness and confidence of a big fish. Then it shot out the tail and started running the rapids.

The brain is super attentive. Is the line to the reel clear? Slap, slap. Loose line lifts off the water and the reel screams. How is it possible to play a fish this size in water like this? Hold it, he's slowing. Scramble downstream, rod up. Take the initiative. Move him toward you. There he is, in a pocket a few feet out. A long, mean-looking jack. He must feel the same about me as he cruises toward the tail of the pocket, up in the air and the reel screams again. There is only the fish, me, the line between us. And the formidable environment. But he's slowing again. He's found another pocket. Confidence mounts. Might be able to pull this one off. But he's off again then up in the air. And the reel turns into a jet turbine once more. Then the line goes slack.

Broken . . . The outrage of it! Primeval emotions rise up. I look down the rapids and yell. Not a normal, civilized yell like at a cricket match, but a primitive, body-vibrating yell that echoes all the anguish men have felt at losing fish since time began: "No ...!!"

The therapy of that yell. Then the awful reality. I wound in the broken line. Fought the desire to rush down-stream and report the loss to my brother.

I tied on a pale green nymph. Cast into another pocket just below the top of the rapid. Another take but managed only to lift the fish before the hook came out.

Above the rapids I cast upstream into a gliding bankside pocket. Yet another take. A good fish. I took firm control, leading the fish upstream away from the rapids and soon landed a 41b hen.

It was now past my rendezvous time with Malc so I steamed back to the main pool catching his attention with pathological raving from the terrace. He should have seen the size

of the fish I'd lost! I'd discovered pocket fishing etc. Mad was subdued. Hadn't touched a fish. Had fallen victim to the slippery boulders and had to empty out his waders. But he was looking better with each rave.

We looked at the time. My car was advertised in the “Star”. I only had a few days to sell it before leaving for a teaching appointment in Pakistan. Responsibility suggested an immediate return home. But boyish irresponsibility pictured those yet un-plundered pockets.

Go for it! We bumped over the terrace in the Suzi. Then pounded through the scrub towards the rapids. Echoes of other quests in 19 years fishing together.

Arriving where I’d left off I offered Malc a few pockets to pick while I sized up the potential upstream. Soon a shout and bucking rod signaled that Malc had returned to form and he soon returned a rather thin three pounder. Then I caught a profusely spotted 3.25 pound jack.

At this stage we could round off the story like we did in primary school: “... and then we went home.” But the river had one more spectacle for us. Malc, now revving nicely, was checking out a pocket upstream. Suddenly he was all action with he rod doubled over. A big fish shot into the air then across the other side of the river racing downstream. Malc followed, reel screaming, high-stepping the rocks with the agility of a deer. Past the gliding pocket water towards the staircase rapids. Fish still on the other side. Lifting the line over impossible boulders. Running. Still in contact. Down the chute. Past the narrow reaches . . .

It was 5.25 pounds but foul-hooked. He released it close to where I’d started my journey of discovery.

Now we did go home. After taking a couple of photos in the purpling light.

I sold the car next day so figured I could spend one last evening on the river, which I did with yet another five pounder.

Then a ... and . . . But. This story has to end somewhere.

## Appendix 3

### Once a Teacher

How does an experienced angler introduce a beginner to river fishing? In Lindsay the Optician's case he'd caught a handful of fish in lakes. How would he cope with challenges at the next level? And what are those challenges? They're best divided into pre-and post-take.

The pre-take challenges:

1. **Casting without hooking your back cast on bankside scrub.** This is a constant threat in the North Canterbury waterway I was taking my student to. Casting two nymphs can prove especially difficult, particularly if casting into a wind with an indicator that retards line speed.

2. **Casting into the right place.** If you can see a fish you should cast from a shallow angle behind it, so that neither you nor the line alarms it. Nymphs must be presented upstream enough to allow the nymphs time to sink to the fish's level. If fishing blind you need to know where a fish is likely to be lying.

3. **Managing the drift effectively.** Drag must be minimised. To do this the belly of the line must be flicked up or down current according to the pace of differential flows over the length of the line.

4. **Retrieving line so that a lift of the rod will set the hook.** The retrieve shouldn't be so efficient as to cause drag, nor so slack that the line won't tighten within the arc of the rod tip's rotation.

A November frost had just departed the scene. The slanting sun warmed as we put our gear together. Is there anything like the prospect of an early season fish?

I relinquished a nearby pool in favour of pocket water above. Optimism mingled with the scent of wet grass as we avoided matagouri bushes en route to our starting point. Lindsay had difficulty casting with two nymphs, so changed to one. That would reduce his chances in the heavy water. I wanted him to fish a likely-looking run, but he was busy retying his leader.

Temptation. I told myself I would fish the water to the outside of the run, but my fly was soon drifting over the hot spot. When the indicator stopped I struck. A frisky 3lb 2oz brown was soon in the net, and hanging on a tree. Just the right size for the table.

Later, I put Lindsay onto some water below a set of rapids while I made my way upstream, investigating pocket water on the way. Because of overhanging scrub it's difficult to keep out of sight, and I spooked a close-lying fish on the way up.

Above the rapids the water slowed to a series of longer pockets. One of these looked ideal. An inner voice told me that Lindsay could cope with that. Despite that I started casting towards the right side, then saw a fish on the left. Just right for Lindsay. I yelled, and motioned him to come upstream.

I thought this trout might take a dry, so tied on a Peacock Humpy. Dry flies are ideal for beginners because they can see the fly plucked from the surface. I told Lindsay to cast to the right to get his distance. And not to strike too hard when the fish took. The first presentation was too far to the right. The next landed closer - close enough for the trout to saunter across and wolf down the fly. Lindsay struck - too hard - and broke the fish off. Oh well. There's nothing like direct experience to drive a point home. As we continued upstream he revised the strike in his mind. If only ... If only ... I was comforting.

Nothing was seen in the next straight or the pool above. Around a couple of corners we came to an area festooned with big rocks. I was combing the area with two nymphs when a fish hit, swimming away from me. After a good fight, I put the fat 5lb 2oz brownie in the net.

After releasing it we came to another area of white water. I told Lindsay to check out quieter water above while I investigated turbulent water at the edge. I'd joined him upstream and was yarning when I noticed a trout opposite us, in the belly of the pocket. Then I saw something blue, some distance behind the fish. This I recognised as a tail, which meant it had to be the tail of the trout I'd seen. How huge was that? I got him to sneak around to the base of the pocket and start casting with a nymph.

Then I saw the big fish sitting on the true left of the pocket, or thought I did - until I realised that this was a second trout. The first was larger, hence the better lie. But how large? Fifteen pounds? Maybe. Not only was it long, but broad across the back. The second fish wasn't that much smaller.

Lindsay was having no success, so I tied on a size 12 Royal Wulff. Soon after I positioned him in a more side-on position, in order to minimise drag. A drag-free presentation to the outermost fish caused it to surface like a submarine, plucking his fly from the surface. Bingo. But Lindsay did nothing. "Strike!" I insisted, but he was too late. He hadn't seen it. So much for deliberately choosing under powered lenses to preserve close-up vision.

Later - another good drift. The Royal Wulff waddled seductively down the outer edge of the pocket. No. 2 can't have been fished for. Once again he rose, scoffing the fly with abandon. Lindsay saw it, struck, and didn't break it off. So far, so good.

The trout lunged upstream, water flaking from its flanks like a marlin. His rod was high. That was good. And his left hand was low, grasping the line. That was good too. If his hand wasn't locked on the line, which it was. As a result the rod straightened. The fish had gone. Broken off.

"I thought you had to hold the rod high,' he said when I asked him why he hadn't let the line go. "That *is* going to take some getting over," I grumbled. "Right, I'm going to have a go at the other one." But I relented and tied on another dry fly.

It was one of Feather Merchants Stimulator dries. The massive brown slid into the left of the pocket, almost under our feet. Lindsay cast in line with the fish, but too far upstream, burying the dry in the turbulence at the top of the lie. I couldn't see the fly, but saw the monster wave its head, and thought I saw its jaw working. "Strike" I yelled, but it was too late.

We made our way down river, grieving as we went. A big black eel menaced me. Given the lost opportunities plus pain from toenails pile-driving the toes of my wading shoes, I was in no mood for Nature Study. There was no room for, "Here we have a short-finned eel, and it is now approaching my boot," in hushed Attenborough tones. As it neared my boot, I stomped it. With anger. It fled, with renewed empathy for the story of Chicken-Licken (who thought the sky had fallen on his head).

The grief continued after I got home, “You gave him the fish, didn’t you?” my wife reasoned, at the end of one harangue.

“Yes.”

“Well, let it go.”

So much for the cautionary tale. Now for the post-take lesson:

1. **Don’t strike too hard.** Just lift the rod tip.
2. **Let the line go when the fish wants to go somewhere.**
3. **Run backwards, strip line, or reel to keep tension on the fish.**
4. **Lift the rod high when the fish goes anywhere near rocks.**
5. **Do all you can to get below or at least opposite your fish.**
6. **If the fish decides to sit and rest, apply low-angle side pressure - upstream if it’s above you, downstream if it’s below you.**
7. **When you’ve worked the fish close, keep a low angle with the rod, just in case the hook is lodged in a hard part of the mouth.** A steep angle can work the hook out.
8. **If using two flies, be careful not to snag the trailing fly in the net or on your leggings.**
9. **Net the fish head first unless scooping it towards the safety of the bank.**

One day after school Lindsay and I headed out to the same waterway. When he started fishing, I could see that his skills had improved. He was casting two nymphs quite handily into a light headwind.

We were heading toward the pocket where he’d broken off his first trout, when I suggested he cast into a pocket which was just deep enough to hold a trout. I was in shock when his rod lifted, and a handsome brown exploded from the pocket. Always the teacher I yelled, “Let it go. Let it go!” meaning the line.

He did, and stayed connected. So far, so good. The fish ran downstream, then sat and staged. This became the pattern, with Lindsay hurrying along the edge, sometimes negotiating slippery rocks, sometimes on the bank. Once it took off for the centre of the river at the top of the rapids. When it appeared to be stuck over a rock I took the rod from Lindsay, held it high and the fish moved downstream.

As the trout negotiated the rapids, it eased to our side, then sped downstream, well ahead of Lindsay. It must have panicked when it reached the shallow water, because it did a left turn, wrapped the line around a rock, and broke off. Not again.

Later in the evening we made a hair-raising descent down a cliff into a seldom-visited gorge, where Lindsay hooked a rising fish, but the hook ripped out. Then we returned home, fishless.

Maybe he does better without a fire-breathing pedagogue hovering over him, because since then he's managed to hook, play, and land a 2 ½ pound brown on a Humphrey Blowfly - without my interference. Or maybe he's heeded some lessons. I prefer that interpretation.

## Appendix 4

### The Tyranny of Size

*(Fishing the Upper Catchment)*

“You’ve got me in a French restaurant, and you’re talking about fishing?”

I thought fast: “OK, what’s your wildest fantasy?”

Fortunately, Vivienne has a sense of humour. “Here?” she quipped.

That got me off the hook, but the question remains: what could be so remarkable about a fishing trip that I’d put an Akaroa weekend at risk by bringing up the subject during our meal at *C’est la Vie*?

A week or so earlier, my brother had arranged a sortie on a remote river. There had been a decision to make. Should we fish the bottom part then angle our way to the more productive top section, risking the possibility that a helicopter would disgorge its cashed up personnel and plunder the top; or should we go directly to the hot water, and risk the bottom being pillaged?

We decided on the first option, risking the assignment of healthy fish to the wrong hands. However, if enemy vehicles didn’t turn up we could have our cake and eat it as well.

The day was all you could ask for. Clear skies, light wind, and a river blue-clear after a recent fresh. At the Forest Pool, Malcolm crossed to fish the true left while I prospected the right bank. Upon spotting a trout a metre from the edge, I dropped a size 12 Humphrey Blowfly onto the slow current to the left of the fish, which sauntered over and nibbled the fly off the surface. I should have adopted lake tactics and counted to three. Instead I struck too soon, the fly came out, and the fish chuffed off to deeper water. It was time for two nymphs and an indicator.

Repeated casts with the nymph rig resulted in a snag. My spirits rose when the snag whipped across to the other side of the river, then fell again when I saw the plus seven pound fish was foul-hooked in two places.

Malcolm had takes from three trout on his side, eventually hooking up and getting rocked by a big fish. It wasn't until he was waist deep trying to navigate the rock that he gave up. I saw another large trout about a metre from shore. Not that again. It took a brief look at the dry, then moved out. It wouldn't look at anything else.

In the run above, Malc nailed a 5.25 pound jack on his Humphrey Blowfly, then continued down the left. When you take sides, it's a bit like the choice between the high road and low road in 'Loch Lomond'. You hope you'll arrive at the 'bonny bonny banks' with a similar tally.

There was a deep run on my side. I laid up a Blowfly / beadhead combo which was tracked by a fish which wolfed down the dry fly. It ran upstream onto backing with such power that I was keen to see that it wasn't foul-hooked too. When it was close you could see that the dry was floating free, but the nymph was in its mouth. Either my eyes had deceived me, or it had taken both flies. It weighed 5.5 pounds but, like Malcolm's trout, it had all the hallmarks of a fish yet to recover.

After failing to interest a fish or two in the run above, I came to a long pool which had depth on Malcolm's side. After moving up the shallow centre, I dropped a single dry above a trout occupying an angled lead at the top. It took the fly without hesitation and scuffled its way down the pool before slipping into a gut at the tail. Meanwhile my brother had arrived and was swapping blows with a well-conditioned fish. Mine weighed 6 pounds: Malcolm's was a pound and a quarter heavier.

I checked out the rest of the pool on my side, but drew a blank. Malcolm, however, had plenty of fishable water ahead of him. "If you want to catch fish," he declared, "you'll need to be on this side."

Sometimes a single event can have far-reaching consequences. In this case it was the appearance of a Pajero on the road above my side of the river just as I was about to cross to the hot side.

Over the decades we've fished together, I've found my brother to be a fair man. But on this occasion he ordered me upstream to establish our presence on the river, hoping that the occupants of the vehicle would decide to fish elsewhere, as we'd almost reached the upper section.

As I left, Malcolm's rod bent over. As he fought his fish, I continued up the desolate left bank. Right then a set of walkie talkies would have come in handy to tell him that because our vehicle was parked opposite the pool he was fishing, the occupants of the Pajero would avoid that pool. He could join me, leaving the rest of the pool's occupants for us (meaning me) to fish for later. But my attempts to convey that with shouts and gesticulations over the roar of the river failed to elicit a response.

Later, when asked why he hadn't followed me, he said it was too complicated. He saw a fish there and couldn't go past it. Meanwhile the vehicle had parked a short distance ahead.

Upstream there was just enough space between a high bank and the river to walk on. At the top end I spotted a trout in a pocket close to my side. It rose and took my dry fly before slipping across to the other side and taking to the air. The line sang as the fish tested its strength against the current before staging downstream. Glances towards my brother showed he was still on the same pool, probably plundering it. Never mind, I had my consolation prize. At the tail end of the bank where there was enough room to land the fish. It didn't look all that long, but it was thick and strong.

The current was fast with rocks tall enough for the leader to hang on, so I kept close with rod up and got the net ready. But I needn't have bothered, for the fly came out. Just like that. It was time to gnash my teeth and move on.

When the vehicle came into view, I could see a guy in a brightly coloured shirt and others similarly dressed. After all that, they weren't even fishermen! By the time I'd passed them, they'd forded the river a couple of times. Then they drove off.

Before me lay the magnificent pool that marks the beginning of the upper section. I offered the dry to a fish lying close to the edge. When there was no response I changed to a nymph, then a dry-nymph combo.

Now Malcolm arrived, and as he spoke, it became clear that the high road had 'got him to Scotland before me'. After landing a 5.25 pounder, he'd caught a fish of nine pounds. I winced as he told me how long it had taken to land. After that he'd plucked a 6.25 pounder from water above the pool. Then a tiddler, and now he was at the

top. But hey! Being the brother he was, he'd help me get onto a big fish. Wouldn't he?

Not seeing any targets to aim at, I plied the combo on the blind, hooking a sub three pounder on the dry. But the nine pound trout I hadn't caught was infecting my mind too much to appreciate a fish like that. After all, isn't size more important than numbers?

Another trout grabbed my Blowfly. This one also got the jaundiced eye but it would've weighed five to six pounds. As the scrap continued close to shore, Malcolm took my net. I assumed he was going to land the trout, but he was just lining up a photo. When the net didn't appear on the scene I applied side pressure with the thought of sliding the fish onto the stones, and promptly broke the line.

Meanwhile, Malcolm, upon whom the burden of giving his brother a fair go had gathered some weight, couldn't help wondering what else might be ghosting the depths of the pool. So when he saw me sitting down for a couple of bites before fixing my line, the mantle of brotherly altruism released its hold on him. Thus freed from obligation, he took a firm grip on the handle of his TCR and began prospecting the rest of the pool.

Sandwiches thrown together early in the morning don't have the gourmet appeal that elicit euphoria at the best of times, but my salivary glands stopped then went into reverse cycle when I heard:

"That's a big fish!"

A big fish? Oh no. There are times in a man's life, and this was one of them, when he is assailed by complex, almost feminoid emotions. There is admiration, a "Good on ya!"- forced out through gritted teeth. There is envy - perhaps a little resentment - lurking just beyond the mask of the forced smile. But when the 'big fish' jumped a couple of times, I cast that aside and reached for my Canon.

The first jump would have rated a score of 9.5 from the Olympic judges; the second, a ten. To capture that on film was compensation for not having caught the ten pound trophy myself. How often do opportunities like that present themselves? And in the

end, did it *really* matter who'd caught the fish? Well - at least we'd both derived pleasure from the experience.

It was perhaps the most beautiful trout I've ever laid eyes on. Its colours ranged from blue to indigo. The smile on Malcolm's face says it all.

That was the last fish of the day – apart from the 5.75 pound hen which took my dry fly shortly after. Like the other ten, it was returned to the river.

*C'est la Vie* in Akaroa has all sorts of messages scribbled on its walls. One of them close to where my wife and I were sitting reads something like:

“Last night I held perfection in my arms  
We danced on moonbeams  
And loved among the stars.”

Wo-oo! While the first line might allude to Malcolm's relationship with the big fish in the photo, that's hardly an excuse for talking about trout in a French restaurant. As the wise man said, 'there's a time for every purpose under heaven'.

If I err again I might end up like Paul Quinnett, who writes in 'Darwin's Bass': "When I get up at five in the morning to go fishing, I wake my wife up and ask, 'What'll it be, dear, sex or fishing?' And she says, 'Don't forget your waders.'<sup>1</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> Paul Quinnett, "Darwin's Bass, in "The Wit and Wisdom of Fishing" by Steve Bignami et al

**Appendix 5 - Photographs**

**Beauty of the North Branch above the Lake**



**Hurunui Salmon**



**Hurunui Surf Salmon**



**North Branch above Lake Sumner – Trophy**



**North Branch Mainstem**



**Playing Fish – North Branch above Lake**



**North Branch above Lake Sumner**

