

Techniques for the Tongariro River



by John Pellew

WITH the new season upon us and the opening of all the local streams, it seems obvious where to fish. Most anglers will abandon the Mighty Tongas in search of summer action. But what many haven't experienced is how good the fishing still is on the Tongariro after October. Because the spawning runs are later and later each year now there are still plenty of opportunities to get into good fish on warm summer days in Turangi. Here are a few tips and techniques that might help.

Traditionally long leaders and heavy bombs

Like many of the famous sayings all over the world this one will probably rank among them "If you're not snagging your flies the bottom occasionally you're not fishing heavy enough" and like all great words of wisdom there is a lot of truth in these.

Certainly if all pools were 10ft down and

every run a deep and fast one then we would all have to fish with two rod lengths of leader and a ¼ oz bomb. But not all pools are formed alike and it's the differences between them that keep us changing rigs from short to long.

The traditional style Tongariro nyming setup consists of 8 or 10lb leader attached to the loop in the end of ones fly line, once three good arm lengths of leader have been stripped from the spool and snipped free, a budgie sized yarn indicator is attached on to the loop with an auto link clip.

Two metres down the leader one ties on an often tungsten beaded, epoxy shrouded bomb followed by lighter tippet on the bend of the hook to a lighter natural pattern or globug. Once the rig is assembled the focus turns to the question, will the budgie be able to hold up the heavy bomb or not? So it's off to the river to find out.

Where we should use long leaders and why

Along with the traditional rig comes the traditional pool and this is the main reason that the traditional rig seems to work so well. In the earlier days many anglers just fished the classic pools and runs like the Major Jones or the breakfast pool, the breakaway while it still existed and the bridge pool. These have earned their timeless names by being con-

sistent over the years at being fish holders.

There are a few contributing factors that make a pool or run attractive to the fish during their tiring journey to the ideal spawning grounds. One of these holding factors is the simply the depth. The depth of a pool has the most affect on our choice of leader length the other is the strength of the current. If the pool is simply deep then the leader can be adjusted to suit the flow of the current so it won't drag on the river bed.

However, if the current is swift and deep it is usual to lengthen the leader to give the fly as much chance of getting to the bottom as possible. On the other hand it can be unhelpful if the leader is too long because the extra leader will hinder the flies from reaching their target firstly by landing outside of the intended current line and secondly by giving a false sense of getting down when really the flies are being dragged into other current seams.

Often the best fish are right on the bottom in a deep pool situation. That's because they are the ones that haven't been in the river long, often referred to as fresh run fish. Getting your flies down deep can be the difference between catching dark trout and fresh silver bullets. The dark trout have been in the river longer and have begun to adapt to their surroundings and the standard river feeding pattern.

Disadvantages of using the traditional rig

The traditional rig as some innovative anglers will understand hold fisherman back from searching out unconventional waters where fish hold for shorter periods of time but are present in good numbers. A classic example of this is in the newly formed braids directly between the bridge pool and the swirl.

This shallow, often fast flowing water is the only way to the safety of the deeper pools. After a fish has battled up through the rough water it likes to take a break and chill out before moving on to the next rapid. This is an opportune time for the angler indeed however it is easy to overlook the likelihood that those fish are more concentrated in the shallow runs and more often than not easier to hook.

One deterring aspect of the heavy traditional rig is the problems most anglers encounter while trying to cast them. Sure there is the D roll cast and the water cast to overcome these issues but it just feels so meat and potato's and is difficult to make it look good. I'm an excellent caster and have little difficulty handling myself on the Tongariro but I do prefer to be fishing a lighter rig if I can get away with it.

Like the question, are breathable waders warm? There is the question in our minds, is fishing lighter and shorter an effective way of

fishing such big water? The answer is yes but you should learn where and when to apply it.

Let's look at the effectiveness of the shooting head or wet lining

I didn't do much wet lining or use sinking line techniques for river fishing until I began fishing competitively. I needed to become good at it because it opened up another world of fishing and was extremely effective in some cases like covering large amounts of river area in a short time.

When you fish competition your aim is to catch numbers not necessarily size so you want to cover the water as effectively and efficiently as possible. Wet lining allows one to do this and it appeals to the trout's aggressive feeding nature during the morning and evening when they turn to feeding on larger food items such as Kuara and smelt/bullies during inactivity or low activity of the nymphal life.

One issue with older sinking lines is that they are often too fat and slow sinking. This is due to the amount of air trapped in the Dacron core of the line and the lighter weight materials they had access to. Now days we have the advantage of technology and high tech materials that allow us to take full advantage of gravity.

Airflo and Sierra lines are really the only ones that have the all important mono core and tungsten impregnated coating that allow

the lines to remain slim and maintain their weight and low stretch core for high sensitivity.

Wet lining the Tongariro River can be done at any time, on any stretch of water however there are parts of the river that are more conducive to this technique.

I look for water that is moving slow enough to create a particular undulation on the surface. It's a bit like joggle and is quite mild flowing at a moderate rate.

This type of water is often found just to the side of a wide pool or in a wide waist depth run. The Hydro pool is a classic example of this. There are many great pools for wet lining and these are ones that have produced year after year in all kinds of conditions.

Another good time to wet line is during rising or dropping water levels or when there is a fresh. The coloured water can help make the larger wet flies more effective realistic when the trout begin looking for larger food items that are easier to see.

Rainbows are more visual feeders and take advantage of large food items during times of coloured water, where as the brownie is a nocturnal feeder mostly and can feed almost blind. He uses his sensory lateral line down each side to detect the movement of his prey and then pounces on them unawares.

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The large moving wet fly is attractive to the feeding trout often causing the fish to follow it for good distances before either turning it down or ingesting it. I often describe it like a cat on the living room floor playing with a feather. If one wags the feather side to side the cat crouches and then pounces on it but if you stop the movement the cat soon loses interest and begins to wander off. Wiggle it again and out of his peripheral vision he will see it and come after it.

As I mentioned earlier, you can cover plenty of water with this rig and it can be particularly useful when the conditions are right, reaching water that is normally out of bounds may become easier and targeting areas where its too hard to get a decent drift with the nymph also become possible so lets look at how to use the technique to good effect.

Most anglers simply cast the fly line out at a 45 degree angle to the river, let it sink and then start retrieving. This very basic method always has and will continue to entice and hook fish but it is only 50% effective. You see, when the line hits the moving water it has little time to reach its target because the swing begins almost right away.

A more effective way to get the line to the bottom is to wade almost to the spot you want your line and while you cast down stream you reach your rod out extending it to the place you want your line. By pulling back up stream then lowering the rod you allow for the excess line to sink while feeding in as much as you think you need to reach the bottom.

As the line tightens the swing will begin and your flies will remain in the strike zone for longer because the swing is slower and more constant. This is the action the fish will be looking for. The take will be sudden and aggressive so make sure you have your rod placed off to the side so the strike is taken up by the flex in the rod or you might get bust off. The only down side to wet lining in the river is that it's not as visual as nymphing but that is made up for when the strike comes hard and fast and then it's all on.

However in my opinion the most effective rig for this time of the year is the sensitive rig which consists of a standard medium river rig that has an indicator tied in about 1-1.5m down from the fly line and another rod length of 6lb tippet to a reasonably heavy first natural fly and then a short 500mm tippet to the much smaller 14# or 12# natural such as a Cadillac pheasant tail or gold ribbed Hares ear.

This is fished in the shallower water out of the super fast runs and will pick up fish that haven't been targeted yet.

The golden rule

Always remember to change your rigs to suit the conditions as you go whether it's raining sunny, flooding or clear water conditions. It only takes a little time and can bring great success while you fish, it can turn a good day into a great day and you will wonder why you didn't do it more often. All the best this summer.

