

HURUNUI & WAIAU RIVERS

Introduction

The Hurunui and Waiau Rivers offer a more relaxed fishing experience than the bigger braided rivers further south. They are home to North Canterbury's best populations of brown trout in addition to seasonal populations of sea run salmon. The Hurunui and Waiau Rivers flow through hills for most of their length and are Canterbury's most scenic braided rivers. In places, the presence of hills on the riverbanks make access challenging but anglers who put in the effort should be well rewarded.

Getting There

The Hurunui and Waiau Rivers lie around 90 and 130 kilometres north of Christchurch City respectively. The lower reaches are accessed from roads leading off State Highway 1. Both rivers benefit from a number of bridges which are the principle access points for anglers wishing to fish the middle reaches. In the upper reaches of the Hurunui, access is directly off the Lake Sumner Road. The upper reaches of the Waiaua are accessed off State Highway 7 (the Lewis Pass Highway).

The Hurunui River

The Hurunui Rivermouth is a popular spot for salmon anglers from the North Canterbury and Marlborough regions. The best fishing tends to be in the surf, especially when the river is low and salmon are congregating outside the mouth waiting for a flood before running the river. The south side of the surf usually fishes better than the north side, but this can change very quickly in response to wind and tide. Low tide and the early stages of the incoming tide are generally the best times to fish the surf, although the first hour of daylight is worth fishing at any tide.

The rivermouth gut is also a popular place to fish when the salmon are running into the river, which tends to happen immediately after a fresh. The top half of the incoming tide is the best time to fish the gut. The lower and middle reaches of the Hurunui are also productive places to fish for salmon, once again the best time being as soon as the river



clears after a fresh. The section of river on either side of the State Highway 7 (Balmoral) Bridge is the easiest to access. Mid January until mid March is the best time to fish for salmon in the Hurunui River.

Populations of brown trout can be found anywhere from the mouth up to the start of the gorge above the Mandamus confluence. Look for pools with large rocks which provide cover for feeding trout. The trout are present year round. The Hurunui is difficult to access in the Gorge section and few angling opportunities exist. However the river opens up above Maori Gully, near the place where the Lake Sumner Road first comes close to the river. The section of river from the top of the Gorge to Lake Sumner is one of the most productive reaches of trout fishing water in New Zealand. The presence of a lake in the upper catchment means that this section of the river is often clear when the lower river is dirty. The Lake Sumner Road runs close to the river for some distance before moving away at the Sisters Stream Footbridge. From here up to the lake outlet access is by foot only.

The North Branch of the Hurunui above Lake Sumner is also a popular spot for the fit angler. Unrestricted 4WD road access is available to Loch Katrine. From there access is by foot only to the head of Lake Sumner. The South Branch of the Hurunui offers good fishing upstream of the confluence with the North Branch but access through and above the gorge reaches are difficult. The upper Hurunui River and tributaries fish best when the river is low.

The Waiau River

The Waiau River runs through a series of gorges from the Alps to the sea. Access can be difficult in places but is more than made up for by the stunning scenery on offer. The Waiau Mouth is a popular spot for salmon fishing but can only be accessed by launching a jet boat at Spotswood and boating downstream for ten minutes.

The Waiau Mouth fishes best during the middle stages of the incoming tide. The Waiau surf is generally too shallow and too rough to fish. The middle reaches of the Waiau offer good salmon and trout fishing at any point where anglers can get at the water. The bridges at State Highway 1, Waiau township, Leslie Hills and the Hanmer River are the best access points in the middle reaches. The headwaters of the Waiau offer excellent brown trout fishing, especially above the Hope River confluence where the river splits into a number of small tributaries. The Hope, Boyle, Doubtful and Lewis Rivers can all be accessed off State Highway 7 but the angler will have to be prepared to walk to find the fish.

Methods Salmon

Spin fishing is the most effective salmon fishing technique for fishing the Hurunui and Waiau Rivers. River mouth anglers should use a medium-fast action rod of 2-2.5 metres in length coupled with a fixed or free spool reel capable of holding 200 metres of 8-10kg line. Upriver anglers should use lighter tackle as the Hurunui and Waiau

F&G Telephone River Reports

Reports on river fishing conditions are available on 03 366 2986. These are recorded each day the office is open between October 1 and April 30.

Email Fishing Reports

Free weekly email fishing reports are available throughout the summer season which advise on recent catches and make predictions of likely fishing conditions in coming days. Contact the F&G office to register for this service.

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This site is great for weather forecasts. Anglers use the high country forecasts to predict when the river is likely to come down in flood; -heavy north west rain in the Alps is likely to cause a flood the following day. The marine forecast is also useful for predicting the roughness of the sea. A swell of greater than one metre in height is likely to mean that the surf will be too dirty to fish.

www.wetservice.co.nz

Wetservice

This website service is very useful for showing the river flow at the gorge. The Hurunui generally becomes fishable once it drops below 35 cumecs, although trout anglers fishing in the upper reaches like to see it at 25 cumecs or less to allow better access along the banks. The Waiau generally becomes fishable once it drops below 60 cumecs.

ECAN River Flow Service

<http://www.ecan.govt.nz>

Fishing conditions in the Hurunui and Waiau Rivers are highly variable with floods taking place at regular intervals throughout the fishing season. In order to avoid disappointment and possible danger, anglers are strongly advised to check conditions before leaving home. The following information sources should be of help:

Further Information

Regulations

A current sports fishing licence is required for trout and salmon fishing in the Hurunui and Waiau Rivers, and within 500 metres of where they flow into the sea. Please consult a current South Island Sportsfishing Regulation Guide before you commence fishing.

Trout

Traditional fly and spin/soft bait fishing techniques work well for trout in the Hurunui and Waiau Rivers. Spinning is favoured when the river is discoloured while flyfishing comes into its own when the river is clear. Spinners such as the Tasmanian Devil or Toby which sink well are a good choice if cast into the calm water at the top of pools. Fly anglers should be able to sight their fish before casting to them when the river is low and clear. Weighted nymphs or dry flies fished upstream on a floating line is the most popular technique. Anglers fishing for trout in the headwater reaches or tributaries will find the fish wary but they should respond to a careful approach. Stand well back from the bank and spot the fish before casting to them. Small fast sinking nymphs like tungsten beadheads are the most popular. Blind fishing can also be effective in the big pocket water, particularly in the North Branch of the Hurunui River below Lake Sumner.

Anglers who wish to catch a salmon on a fly will find the flows of these rivers easier to manage than the bigger rivers further south. Streamer flies fished on sinking lines through the tails of pools or through slow flowing reaches should be effective. Please note that salmon fishing may be closed for some or all of the season above the South Branch confluence, so check the regulations before heading out.

Rivers are prone to becoming low and clear. A rod and reel rigged with 6-7kg line is ideal. Upriver anglers should look for places where the current is slow and the water is deep. These are often found where the river flows into rocky outcrops or bluffs. Zed spinners weighing between 10 and 22 grams are the most popular lures for salmon fishing in the Hurunui and Waiau Rivers. These must be fished right on the bottom in order to get a bite.

North Canterbury Region
NEW ZEALAND
Fish & Game
TM
(03) 366 9191
northcanterbury@fishandgame.org.nz
www.fishandgame.org.nz



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THE WAIIAU RIVER

1 St James Conservation Area

The upper Waiau can be accessed by 4WD vehicle either by Maling Pass or Edwards Valley. Both these access points are off the Clarence Valley and are managed by the Department of Conservation. Access can be arranged during the fishing season by contacting the Waimakariri Area DOC Office at Rangiora.

2 The Hope River

The Hope can be accessed from the SH7 Bridge. Access above this point is by foot or by negotiation with the Poplars Station.

3 The Boyle

Access is directly off SH7 anywhere the road and river converge.

4 Waiau Ferry Bridge

There is no access off the Waiau Ferry bridge. Continue towards Hamner and take the track on the left just after crossing the Hamner River bridge. This 4WD track leads down to the Waiau River.

5 Leslie Hills Bridge

Turn off SH7 onto Leslie Hills Road. Access to the river is via a track between the two bridges. Access is also available directly off SH7 a short distance above the Leslie Hills turn-off.

6 Mouse Point

Travel west out of Culverden on SH7 and take the second road on the right after crossing the main Waiau irrigation race. This leads out to the Waiau riverbed.

7 Waiau Township

A track off SH70 leads to the river on the south side of the Waiau township bridge. Access on the north side of the bridge is available by taking the first right hand turn over the bridge.

8 Leamington Road

Turn west over the railway line in Spotswood, travel 200 metres south and turn onto the West Waiau Road. Turn right into Leamington Road which leads out to the riverbed.

9 SH1

A track leads off SH1 75 metres south of the Waiau Bridge and out onto the riverbed. Foot access and boat launching (4WD) are available here. Another track leads out to the river on the north side of the bridge.

10 Connemara Road

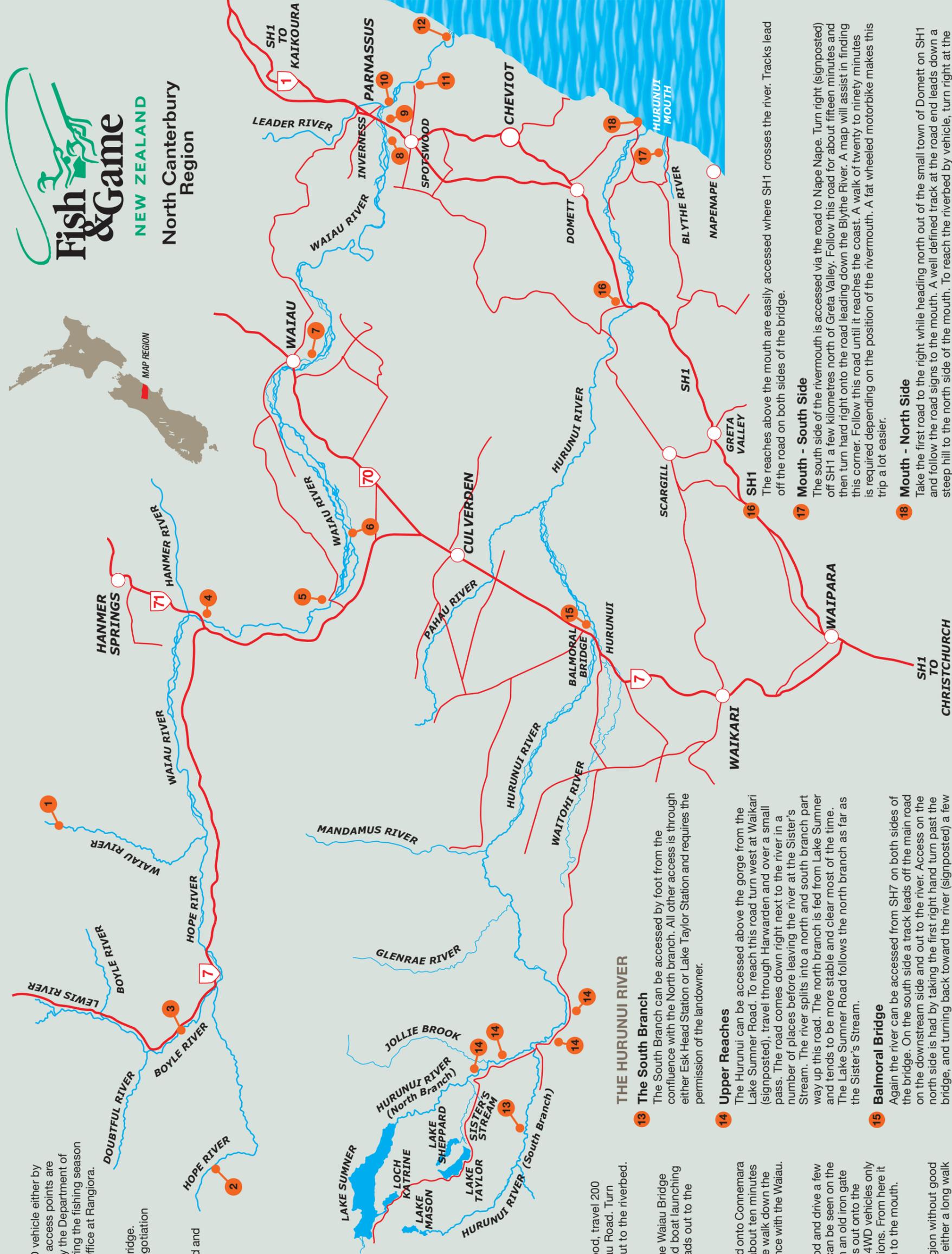
Take the first turn east of the SH1 bridge and onto Connemara Road. Travel down Connemara Road for about ten minutes to the end at the Leader River. A ten minute walk down the Leader River is required to reach the confluence with the Waiau.

11 Spotswood

Turn onto the East Waiau Road in Spotswood and drive a few kilometres east until a disused lime quarry can be seen on the right hand side of the road. Turn left through an old iron gate opposite the quarry onto a track which leads out onto the riverbed. Boat launching here is suitable for 4WD vehicles only and is dependant on favourable river conditions. From here it is a very pleasant ten minute boat trip down to the mouth.

12 Mouth

The Waiau is the only major river in the region without good access to the river mouth. Access involves either a long walk or a ten minute jet boat ride.



North Canterbury Region

THE HURUNUI RIVER

13 The South Branch

The South Branch can be accessed by foot from the confluence with the North branch. All other access is through either Esk Head Station or Lake Taylor Station and requires the permission of the landowner.

14 Upper Reaches

The Hurunui can be accessed above the gorge from the Lake Sumner Road. To reach this road turn west at Waikari (signposted), travel through Harwarden and over a small pass. The road comes down right next to the river in a number of places before leaving the river at the Sister's Stream. The river splits into a north and south branch part way up this road. The north branch is fed from Lake Sumner and tends to be more stable and clear most of the time. The Lake Sumner Road follows the north branch as far as the Sister's Stream.

15 Balmoral Bridge

Again the river can be accessed from SH7 on both sides of the bridge. On the south side a track leads off the main road on the downstream side and out to the river. Access on the north side is had by taking the first right hand turn past the bridge, and turning back toward the river (signposted) a few hundred metres up the road.

The reaches above the mouth are easily accessed where SH1 crosses the river. Tracks lead off the road on both sides of the bridge.

17 Mouth - South Side

The south side of the rivermouth is accessed via the road to Nape Nape. Turn right (signposted) off SH1 a few kilometres north of Greta Valley. Follow this road for about fifteen minutes and then turn hard right onto the road leading down the Blythe River. A map will assist in finding this corner. Follow this road until it reaches the coast. A walk of twenty to ninety minutes is required depending on the position of the rivermouth. A fat wheeled motorbike makes this trip a lot easier.

18 Mouth - North Side

Take the first road to the right while heading north out of the small town of Domett on SH1 and follow the road signs to the mouth. A well defined track at the road end leads down a steep hill to the north side of the mouth. To reach the riverbed by vehicle, turn right at the end of the road and drive through the camping area and out onto the river.