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 makes access challenging but anglers who put in the effort should be well rewarded.

Getting There

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 congregateing 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.

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.

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 2.5-2.8 metres in length coupled with a fixed or float reel capable of holding 200 metres of 8-10kg line. Upriver anglers should use lighter tackle as the Hurunui and Waiau Rivers are prone to becoming low and clear. A rod and reel rigged with flies fished on sinking lines through the tails of pools or through slow flowing reaches should be effective. Please note that salmon fishing is closed for some or all of the season above the South Branch confluence, so check the regulations before heading out.

Trout

Traditional fly and spin/soft bait fishing techniques work well for trout in the Hurunui and Waiau Rivers, and within 500 metres of where they interconnect. From mid March is the best time to fish for salmon in the Hurunui River.

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 Hamner River are the best access points in the middle reaches. The headwater 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, Ilyd, Doubtful and Lewis Rivers can all be accessed off State Highway 7 but the angler will have to be prepared to walk and find the fish.

Regulations

On entering and fishing the Hurunui and Waiau Rivers, the fishing regulations of the particular region apply. A full reglementation is available on our website, www.fishandgame.org.nz.

Further Information

To find out more about fishing in the Hurunui and Waiau River regions, please contact your nearest Fish & Game Office or the ECan River Flow Service.

ECan River Flow Service

- Visit: www.ecan.govt.nz
- Phone: 0800 555 868
- Email: riverflowservice@ecan.govt.nz
- Hours: Monday to Friday, 9am to 5pm

Further Information

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