Waimakariri River

Introduction
Although the Waimakariri is one of New Zealand’s most heavily fished rivers, it is a mistake to believe that this is due entirely to the river’s close proximity to Christchurch. In fact the river is home to one of the best salmon fisheries in New Zealand in addition to excellent populations of brown and rainbow trout. Like all of the snow-fed braided rivers, the Waimakariri is characterised by highly variable flows and floods can occur at any time of year.

Getting There
At its closest point, the Waimakariri literally flows through the outskirts of Christchurch. Rather than the typical long shingle spit, large lagoon and deep, narrow gut, the Waimakariri flows into a big tidal bay. The point where it enters the sea can be more than 100metres wide. The top half of the outgoing tide is the most productive in the tidal reaches, especially when it coincides with the first few hours of daylight. The Waimakariri salmon run is later and occurs over a shorter period of time than runs in other rivers. The best salmon fishing in the tidal reaches is during February and March. Boat owners can launch into the Kaiapoi River at the ramp near the BMX track in Kaiapoi. It is then a short distance down the Kaiapoi to the Waimakariri. Boats can also be launched at Kaiariki or just above the Motorway bridge. Please note that boat drivers are required to keep their speed below five knots in the Kaiapoi and below the Motorway Bridge. McIntosh’s Rocks are located a kilometre above the mouth on the north side of the river and are the most popular fishing location on the river. This is a great place for young or novice anglers as no wading is required and other anglers are always nearby to lend a hand if needed.

The Mouth & Lagoon
The Waimakariri Mouth is unlike any other in Canterbury. Rather than the typical long shingle spit, large lagoon and deep, narrow gut, the Waimakariri flows into a big tidal bay. The point where it enters the sea can be more than 100metres wide. The top half of the outgoing tide is the most productive in the tidal reaches, especially when it coincides with the first few hours of daylight. The Waimakariri salmon run is later and occurs over a shorter period of time than runs in other rivers. The best salmon fishing in the tidal reaches is during February and March. Boat owners can launch into the Kaiapoi River at the ramp near the BMX track in Kaiapoi. It is then a short distance down the Kaiapoi to the Waimakariri. Boats can also be launched at Kaiariki or just above the Motorway bridge. Please note that boat drivers are required to keep their speed below five knots in the Kaiapoi and below the Motorway Bridge. McIntosh’s Rocks are located a kilometre above the mouth on the north side of the river and are the most popular fishing location on the river. This is a great place for young or novice anglers as no wading is required and other anglers are always nearby to lend a hand if needed.

The Middle Reaches
(SH1 to Gorge Bridge)
Salmon fishing in the middle reaches is unpredictable. The fish tend to wait in the tidal reaches for a fresh before racing through the middle reaches in a mad rush, trying to reach the safety of the gorge before water levels drop. Anglers who fish on the river at this time do very well, but their success rate drops dramatically once the run is past. The first day the river is clear after a fresh between mid February and the end of March is the best time to fish the middle reaches. Access to this section of the river is excellent. In fact it is one of the few pieces of salmon real estate where having access to a jet boat, 4WD or ATV is not a great advantage. Salmon pools are easy to locate on this river. Any slow flowing, deep water is worth a cast or two. This sort of water is often found around river protection groynes or clumps of willow trees. The middle reaches of the Waimakariri are also home to good populations of rainbow and brown trout, which are most common during autumn and winter.

The Gorge
The Waimakariri Gorge is one of the most New Zealand’s most scenic river settings. Unfortunately most of it is inaccessible to shore-bound anglers, who can only get at the river at the Gorge Bridge, Woodstock and the Kowai River confluence. The gorge reaches offer more consistent salmon fishing than further down, especially in March and early April. Please note that salmon fishing may be closed for some or all of the season above the confluence of Staircase Stream which is located a few kilometres upstream of Woodstock. Check the current regulations before contemplating a salmon fishing trip in this part of the river.

The Upper Reaches & Tributaries
Limited trout fishing opportunities exist in the main stem of the Waimakariri above the Mt White Bridge. The river tends to get very low in this section during the summer and trout are often forced to move down into the gorge to find permanent flows. However excellent trout fishing is available in tributary streams such as Broken River, Winding Creek and the Porter River. These streams are less prone to flooding than the main river and offer consistent fishing throughout the open season. These rivers are best accessed off State Highway 73 between Lake Lyndon and Lake Pearson.

Methods
Salmon
Spin fishing is the most effective salmon fishing technique for fishing the Waimakariri. A medium action rod of 2-2.5 metres in length, coupled with a fixed or free spool reel capable of holding 200metres of 7-10kg line is ideal. Tidal reach anglers use lures that cast well but still have action. 42gram tigers and 28gram zed spinners are the most popular. Anglers fishing above the State Highway 1 Bridge use lighter lures as casting distance is not important. Zed spinners weighing between 17 and 22 grams are the most popular. These must be fished right on the bottom in order to get a bite.

Trout
Sea run trout are most easily caught on streamer flies which imitate native smelt, particularly in fast flowing water. Spin fishing techniques can also be effective but tend to work better in slower flowing water. Traditional fly and spin fishing techniques work well for upriver trout. The silt content of the water makes light fishing difficult and so anglers tend to use blind fishing techniques. The tributary streams offer a more typical back country experience. Sight fishing for brown and rainbow trout using lightweight flyfishing tackle is likely to be the most successful technique. These tributaries are highly sensitive to over harvest and anglers are encouraged to limit the number of fish they take.

Regulations
A current sportfishing licence is required for trout and salmon fishing in the Waimakariri River, and within 500metres of where it flows into the sea. Please consult a current South Island Sportfishing Regulation Guide before you commence fishing.

Further Information
Fishing conditions in the Waimakariri river 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.

ECan River Flow Service
http://www.ecan.govt.nz. or 083 225522
This website/recorded telephone message service is very useful for showing the river flow. The Waimakariri generally becomes fishable for trout once it drops below 120 cunums, and fishable for salmon below 80 cunums.

NIWA Webcam
www.niwa.massey.ac.nz/services/cam-era/sites/waimaka
At the time of writing this brochure, NIWA had two web cameras installed in the middle reaches of the Waimakariri River. These can be used to determine whether the river is in flood. In certain light conditions the clarity of the river can be seen. A blue-green colour is considered ideal for salmon fishing.

Metservice
www.metservice.co.nz
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.

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.

F&G Telephone Fishing 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.
**Waimakariri River**

**Waimakariri Mouth - North Side (See Inset)**
1. The Mouth - North Side
   - The mouth can be accessed on the north side through the Kaiapoi township.

2. McIntosh’s Rocks
   - Take the shingle road (Fairy Road) on the right hand side which departs from the Kaiapoi to Kaiapoi Road as it sweeps to the left, two kilometres short of the mouth. Park at the end of this track and walk over the stop bank to the rocks.

3. The Banana Hole
   - The Banana Hole is on the north bank of the Waimakariri a few hundred metres below the Old West Coast Road bridge. Turn left just over the bridge onto the shingle track which leads out to the river. Follow the track downstream and fish off the rocks at the end.

**Waimakariri Mouth - South Side (See Inset)**
4. A number of roads running from Old West Coast Road lead to the river. Good access is available from the stopbank running along this stretch of river.
5. SH1 to McLeans Island
   - Foot access is available from the stopbank running along this stretch of river. The stopbank can be accessed from the top at McLeans Island or from Disyeva Road at the bottom.

6. McLeans Island to the Gorge
   - A number of roads running from Old West Coast Road lead to the river. The most commonly used are:
   - Weeds Ross Road
     - Runs off the Old West Coast Road
   - Thompsons Road
     - Runs off the Old West Coast Road
   - Intake Road
     - Runs off the Old West Coast Road
   - Courtenay Road
     - Runs off the Old West Coast Road
   - Cooks Road
     - Runs off the Old West Coast Road
   - Kimberley Road
     - Runs off the Old West Coast Road

7. Gorge Bridge - South Side
   - The Waimakariri Gorge Bridge is on SH73 (Waddington to Oxford). A shingle track leads down the terrace and out onto the river bed. This is a popular boat launching spot.

8. Keens Road
   - Keens Road (near Springfield) leads to Kowai River which can be followed downstream to the confluence with the Waimakariri. This area is known locally as Cabbage Tree Flat.

9. Mt White Bridge
   - Turn right into a shingle track just before SH73 reaches the Waimakariri. This track leads down the terrace to the Mt White Bridge.

**Waimakariri Streams and Rivers**

- Porters River
  - The Porter River is crossed just prior to the Castle Hill Village on SH73. It runs through private property (Castle Hill Station) and permission to fish should be gained. A phone call is all that is required. The Porter can be fished both upstream and downstream of SH73.

- Winding Creek
  - Foot access is available from the Rock Hill Station Lodge. Anglers should ring the Lodge for details (03 318 8196).