

Find the fish first

Take your time when reading water and looking for trout. It is imperative that you find the fish first before it sees you. Another common mistake made by anglers new to river fishing is casting repeatedly at a trout that knows they are there. Fish that have detected danger will either bolt for cover or go 'stiff', that is, they stop feeding and reduce all possible movement. It is also important to adhere to the old adage: "Fish your feet first". You will notice a number of the trout icons in the illustrations are very close to the bank or shoreline. If trout feel secure enough, they will hold in such shallow water lies, but they spook easily. Always move slowly when you near 'fishy' water, and tread lightly – a dislodged rock will immediately alert trout to danger.

Pausing at the start of a pool to survey it and identify key features before moving upstream is a good practice. If you are able to do this from an elevated position it makes it that much easier to read the water ahead and spot fish in likely lies.

Reading pocket water

Pocket water is the term used for a fast flowing stretch of river broken up by exposed boulders scattered throughout the run. Miniature pools or 'pockets' of holding water are essentially created behind the boulders because they slow the flow and deeper bowls are scoured out by the action of the disturbed flow.

Although reading pocket water effectively is a more difficult skill to master than other sections of a river because of the disturbed nature of such reaches, often the larger trout will be found here. Working the pockets with a large, highly visible dry fly or a nymph-indicator rig, while avoiding drag, is the best technique.

Illustration 4 shows a classic pocket water reach. The fish are positioned out of the heavy flow (blue arrows) either hard up against the banks or in the pockets (often indicated by smoother water surface) behind boulders.

Fishing lakes and spring creeks

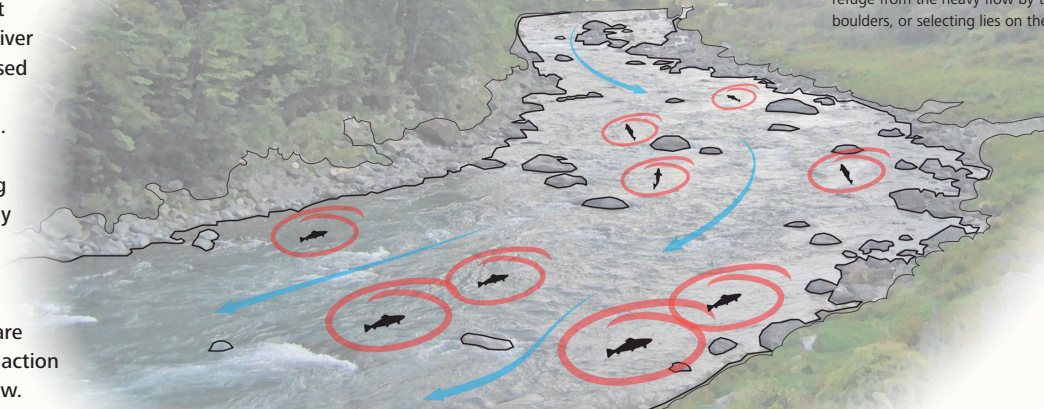
Despite rivers being, by nature, comparatively more complex to tackle when fishing, the different structural components are more readily defined than they are in lakes and spring creeks. However, apply the notion of trout requirements to the latter two and you'll also enjoy greater success on such waterways.

For example, identify defined drop-offs around lake edges, or rivers and streams entering the main body of water – these are prime places to target trout.

Spring creeks are more stable and placid than rivers and subsequently have less defined pools and rapids. Trout will often use bank extensions for shelter from the flow, and the more defined current lines that form off these protrusions effectively channel food into a concentrated area, meaning the fish don't have to expend too much energy moving around to feed. Overhanging vegetation and areas behind submerged logs or willow root balls are also likely lies to look for feeding fish.

Illustration 4

A classic section of pocket water in which fish seek refuge from the heavy flow by tucking in behind boulders, or selecting lies on the edge of the river.



Plenty more online

Visit the website www.fishandgame.org.nz for plenty more tips and advice to help improve your angling and catch more fish.



We've also uploaded a 'Reading Water' instructional video onto our YouTube channel, which can also be accessed through our webpages.



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READING THE WATER

...Finding the Fish!

A HOW-TO GUIDE



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From casting... to catching

The biggest step an angler can make in the transition from casting proficiently to regularly catching trout is understanding where the fish are likely to be.

One of the most common mistakes made by anglers who are new to freshwater fishing is putting their flies or lures in the 'wrong' places. The prime focus should be locating feeding trout, and greatest success will be achieved in places where there is an abundant food supply, cover or deep water for shelter, and well-oxygenated water.

Finding a place where all of these requirements are met will result in the angler finding trout... and hopefully catching them too!

This guide covers only the very basics of how to 'read water' and find fish. For more in-depth knowledge, recommended reading is *Stalking and Catching Trout* by Les Hill and Graeme Marshall who we thank for their generous input into this resource.

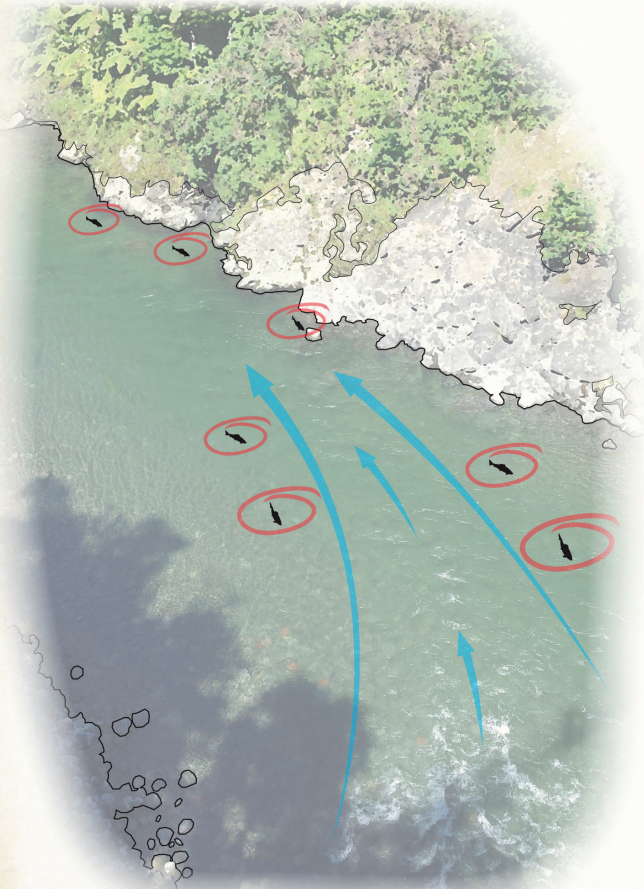


Illustration 1
Trout holding on the outside edge of the main current.

Illustration 2
Trout holding off underwater shelves and behind bank extensions.



Key river structure

While every river and stream is quite unique there are always general patterns and features (or 'structure') that are the same. Water moves from one pool to the next via a narrow rapid or 'riffle' section of faster flow. As the water continues past the 'head' (the top of the pool) it widens, deepens and slows. Beyond this section – referred to as the 'stomach' – the depth starts to decrease again and the flow velocity increases towards the 'tail' or end of the pool.

Trout are lazy

In Illustration 1 there are four fish icons closest to the head of the pool, holding outside the fastest flow (depicted by blue arrows). These are the prime trout 'lies', or holding water, in any pool. Fish use a lot of energy trying to keep station in fast water so they position themselves just outside the flow. Here they have ready access to well-oxygenated water and food items spilling out of the heavy current, as well as a fast escape route if disturbed. The trout towards the back of the pool are likely to be smaller specimens pushed out of the prime lies by the dominant fish.

Other prime trout 'lies'

Illustration 2 shows the current entering the pool after flowing over a shallow shingly section, then running hard up against the boulder bank on the right hand side. There is a defined shelf or drop-off into deeper water at the head of the pool. This is a prime lie for fish as it offers refuge from the fast flow, while also providing ready access to food items dislodged and/or channelled by the faster current.

The fish on the right of both illustration 2 and 3 are holding in areas of slower moving water created by bank extensions or protrusions. Again, these lies give respite from the fast flow but allow the trout to quickly dart into the current to pick up food items or seek shelter in deeper water.

Illustration 3
Slack water at the head of a pool is prime trout 'real estate'. Also look for fish holding out of the main flow or back-eddies created by bank protrusions.

