

# 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. The popular tidal reaches can be accessed directly off the Old Main North Road or through the township of Kaiapoi. Upstream of SH1 a series of roads and tracks run up each side of the river. Access is more limited in the Gorge section but improves where State Highway 73 comes close to the river just west of Cass. A number of the Waimakariri's tributaries, which are home to excellent trout fisheries can be accessed directly off SH73.

## 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 Kairaki 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 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. There is also a wheelchair platform for mobility impaired anglers at McIntosh's Rocks.

Populations of sea run trout move into the Waimakariri tidal reaches throughout the spring and early summer. The most popular place to fish for these are in the riffles at the top of the tidal zone, close to the Old Highway Bridge. The best time to fish is when a discoloured river coincides with low tide during the last hour of daylight. A wheelchair fishing platform has been installed at McIntosh's Rocks. Anglers confined to a wheelchair can get a key to the gate from Blackwell's Department Store in Kaiapoi.

## 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 are 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 is not permitted above the white post situated at Staircase Stream which is located a few kilometers 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

## 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>

This website service is very useful for showing the river flow. The Waimakariri generally becomes fishable for trout once it drops below 120 cumecs, and fishable for salmon below 80 cumecs.

**Metservice**  
[www.metservice.co.nz](http://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



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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 which 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 and soft baits imitating 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 sight 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 sports fishing licence is required for trout and salmon fishing in the Waimakariri River, and within 500 metres of where it flows into the sea. Please consult a current South Island Sports fishing Regulation Guide before you commence fishing.

# WAIMAKARIRI RIVER

## Waimakariri Mouth - North Side (See Inset)

- 1 The Mouth - North Side**  
The mouth can be accessed on the north side through the Kairaki township.
- 2 McIntosh's Rocks**  
Take the shingle road (Ferry Road) on the right hand side which departs from the Kairaki to Kairaki 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 highway 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.
- 4 Waimakariri Mouth - South Side (See Inset)**
- 5 Waimakariri Mouth - South Side**  
The south side of the mouth can be accessed on motorbike or four wheel drive vehicle through the locked gate at Spencer Park. Keys for this gate and beach permits are available (at a cost) from the Spencer Park Ranger.
- 6 Stewarts Gully**  
This foot access only track starts by the gate which leads to the yacht club at Stewarts Gully.
- 7 Old Main North Road - South Side**  
Heading North on the Old Main North road towards the Old Highway bridge, turn right at Bridge end on to Kaianga Road. Just over the railway line turn left onto the Waimakariri River Regional Park. Access to the river is both left and right at the end of this road. The left access turn also leads out to Otukaikino River and it's confluence with the Waimakariri River.

- 8 Waimakariri River - North**
- 9 North Side (SH1 to Browns Rock)**  
A system of riverside roads and stopbanks run along the north side of the river between SH1 and Browns Rock which provide excellent access to the river. This track starts underneath the old highway bridge and runs to Browns Rock, just a few kilometres short of the Gorge.
- 10 Woodstock**  
Take the Harman Gorge Road, turn left into the shingle track at the bottom of the cutting near the Woodstock Homestead and follow the signs out to the river. This is a popular boat launching spot which also provides access for foot anglers.
- 11 Waimakariri River - South**
- 12 SH1 to McLeans Island**  
Good 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 Dickeys Road at the bottom.
- 13 McLeans Island to the Gorge**  
A number of roads running from Old West Coast Road lead to the river. The most commonly used are:
- 14 Weedons Ross Road**  
Runs off the Old West Coast Road
- 15 Thompsons Road**  
Runs off the Old West Coast Road
- 16 Intake Road**  
Runs off the Old West Coast Road
- 17 Courtenay Road**  
Runs off the Old West Coast Road
- 18 Cooks Road**  
Runs off the Old West Coast Road
- 19 Kimberley Road**  
Runs off the Old West Coast Road

- 20 Gorge Bridge; - South Side**  
The Waimakariri Gorge Bridge is on SH72 (Waddington to Oxford). A shingle track leads down the terrace and out onto the riverbed. This is a popular boat launching spot.
- 21 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.
- 22 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

- 23 The Porter 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.
- 24 Broken River**  
Access to the upper reaches can be obtained from SH73, with permission of Castle Hill Station. The lower reaches can be accessed by following the Lake Sarah/Hawdon/Marymere Road (off SH73) beyond those lakes to its end.
- 25 Winding Creek**  
Foot access is available from the Flock Hill Station Lodge. Anglers should ring the Lodge for details (03 318 8196).

