

Lake Dunstan

History

Lake Dunstan (Te Waiwere) was formed as a result of the Clyde Dam development on the Clutha River (Mata-au). Covering an area of 26 square kilometres, Lake Dunstan runs the length of the Cromwell gorge (Dunstan Arm), across the Lowburn flats (Clutha Arm) and extends up into the Kawarau gorge (Kawarau Arm). The initial lake fill began in April 1992, taking 18 months to reach its operating range of 193.5m to 194.5m above sea level.

The first few years following the flooding of the fertile farmlands, anglers experienced extraordinary fishing. Bag limits of large brown and rainbow trout, and landlocked Chinook (Quinnat) salmon being commonplace.

In 1994, 95 and 99, Otago experienced three "one hundred year" floods. The huge volumes of water associated with these events scoured the river systems and devastated our local fisheries. In the case of Lake Dunstan the ecology of the lake took a severe knock. It was several years before the health of the fishery returned and anglers could again enjoy the first class fishing experiences provided by Lake Dunstan.

Getting There

Nestled between Alexandra, Queenstown and Wanaka, Lake Dunstan is located alongside the township of Cromwell. From Dunedin, SH8 winds its way northwest, eventually sweeping along the eastern shoreline of Lake Dunstan, past the Cromwell turn-off, and onward north through the Lindis Pass and on to Christchurch. From Southland SH6 takes you on a superb journey that leads you along the Southern arm of Lake Wakatipu, through the Kawarau Gorge, past Cromwell, along the western shore of the Clutha Arm of Lake Dunstan to Hawea, Wanaka and the West Coast.



Access

Public access is available to most parts of the lake. The entire eastern shoreline of the Dunstan and Clutha Arms is easily accessed from SH8. The Clutha Arm is the most productive part of the Lake Dunstan fishery and can also be accessed directly off SH6 (Wanaka - Queenstown), and through Pisa Moorings, Smiths Way and Amisfield.

Main boat ramps (see map) can be found at Dairy Creek, Champagne Gully, Bannockburn Inlet, Old Cromwell, McNulty Inlet, Lowburn Harbour, Pisa Moorings and Bendigo. Several rest areas are provided around the lake, complete with barbecues and picnic tables.

Methods

Lake Dunstan has extensive aquatic weed beds which often reach the surface of the lake. While beneficial to fish and wildlife, anglers need to apply some thought to their angling techniques and equipment.

Spinning

When fishing around the weed beds lures such as Tobys, Veltics and other similar lures should generally be kept as small and light as possible.

Lures such as the Rapala CD range in Rainbow and Brown trout patterns are exceptional lures for deceiving trout, but don't over look floating lures which are very effective when fishing in weedy areas. These lures will dive to various depths allowing the angler to fish the gaps in the weed and then back off to allow the lure to float up and over the top. This is a deadly way to fish and can minimize snagging when done correctly. Your local sports store will be able to give you more information on this style of fishing.

Colour selection varies with conditions. As a rule Greens, Golds, Blacks (or a combination there of), work well. Bright Pink is a favourite in discoloured water. An alternative to standard lures is rigging a Killer pattern fly, such as a Woolly Buggler, on a short trace with a small amount of weight to facilitate casting.

Fish frequently cruise the weed edge only metres off the shoreline, so approach the shore carefully. A short delicate cast is often all that is required. Don't rush, as often the fish is on a beat and will return if not spooked.

From May to November try targeting the mouths of the inflowing streams such as John Bull and Devils Creek and the Clutha River inflow. Note the streams themselves are closed to fishing 1st May till 1st November.

Trotting

This is a popular method of angling on the lake. If using a leadline stay out in the more open water, targeting a depth of 3-6 metres. Run 2 to 4 colours of leadline with a trace approximately 10 metres in length. Favoured lures are the King Cobras and Tasmanian Devils in varying colours. For clear water try the King Cobra No 63 (Traffic Light), No 75 (Gold with a red stripe) and if fishing near the weed beds the No 52 (Frog Pattern). For fishing discoloured water try bright colours such as fluoro pinks, reds and greens. Rattling lures are also worth having in the tackle box. The sonic vibrations they emit will sometimes entice fish to strike when all else fails.

Harling

An excellent method for fishing in and around weed beds, harling is a successful method on Lake Dunstan all year round. A fly rod and reel is generally used but it can be adapted to any fishing rig. The reel is loaded with backing of dacron or braid (both non stretch lines) to which is attached 5 metres of leadline (1/2 colour) and a 10 metre trace. Feathered lures such as Mrs Simpson or a Hamills Killer work well, but Woolly Buggers are the pattern of choice for many successful anglers. The addition of a reflective or luminescent bed placed in front of the lure can increase the strike rate. Troll slowly and use your spare hand to draw and release the line to pulse the bait through the water, simulating a baitfish. The local tackle shops can provide more details on setting up a harling rig.

Note: The boat operator plays an important role when trotting and harling by keeping the boat in the required depth of water, varying the direction and speed and by keeping close to the weed beds when harling.



Fly Fishing

Fishing the shores of Lake Dunstan with fly rod in hand is an excellent way to spend the day, especially around the Clutha Arm.

A 5 to 7 weight rod with a floating or intermediate line, a selection of stillwater fly patterns and a good pair of Polaroid glasses will allow you to target cruising trout in most situations on the lake. Pattern selection should imitate the many aquatic insects that inhabit the weed beds. Try patterns such as Damselfly nymphs and small Woolly Buggers early in the season. Hare and Copper, Pheasant Tails and Snail patterns in sizes 12 to 16 work well throughout the year. Early summer sees the brown beetle take to flight in the evenings. Try a Cochybondhu or one of the many foam beetle patterns available. Through the summer and autumn months dry flies such as the Royal Wulff, Black Gnat, Humpy and Caddis patterns in sizes 12 to 14. If the fish are being fussy try a lightly tied size 16 Black Parachute pattern. When there is a ripple on the water and visibility is limited, try suspending a damsel pattern 5-10 cms under a floating snail pattern or a visible dry fly such as Royal Wulff.

Bait Fishing

As Lake Dunstan is a weed based fishery it requires a change in technique to increase your chances of taking a fish or two on a bait. By replacing the sinker with a float, the bait can be drifted along the edges of the weed beds and will not become buried deep in the weed. Also try a bait with little or no weight and drop it a mere rod length out from the shore just inside the weed edge. This is where fish cruise looking for food and provides the added exhilaration of witnessing the fish approach and take your offering.

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