

ABOUT THE CLUTHA / MATA-AU



The upper Clutha / Mata-Au River from its outlet at Lake Wanaka to the head of Lake Dunstan is a nationally important brown and rainbow trout fishery. It contains the “world famous” Deans Bank section once “thought to have held more fish per square metre than any water in New Zealand”.

In 2004 the invasive algae *Didymo* became established in the upper river and impacted on fishery values. The good news is that in recent seasons anglers have reported improvements in insect life and fish numbers. In the 2014-2015 National Angling Survey the Clutha / Mata-Au was ranked as the 4th most fished river in New Zealand.

The upper Clutha / Mata-Au River fishery as we know it today was impacted by the construction of the Roxburgh Dam in 1962 which separated the lower 127km of river from the mid and upper sections. The fishery in the mid and upper reaches was further impacted with the construction and commissioning of the Clyde Dam in 1992.

At times the Clutha / Mata-Au River has a formidable flow and it can be a challenge to access and fish. Healthy populations of both brown and rainbow trout inhabit the upper river and at last count (2012) there were over 300 fish/km in the river between the Lake Wanaka outlet and Albert Town. Some very good fishing can be had by anglers who get to understand the river and know when the flow conditions are favourable.

ANGLER ACCESS

The Lake Wanaka outlet to Albert Town area offers anglers easy walking access to fishing spots. This includes the fly only “Deans Bank” section which is most easily accessed from the True Right side of the river. Downstream from Albert Town most of the access points are marked from the State Highways with a blue angler access cap mounted on a post. Access is generally for the more adventurous angler who doesn't mind doing a bit of walking to find some fishing water. A 4WD vehicle can be handy to get closer to the river as some of these access points have the occasional section of track which has become impassable to 2WD vehicles.

Boat access is best gained from boat ramps at the Outlet, Albert Town and Bendigo. Queenstown Lakes District Council have some boating restrictions between the Outlet and Albert Town which can be found on the following link and clicking on the Boating Guide - Lake Wanaka PDF <https://www.qldc.govt.nz/recreation/lakes-and-boating>. Anglers who access the river by jet boat or raft have a major advantage over shore-based



anglers as they can access kilometres of water that is not easily accessed by foot. The Clutha / Mata-Au is willow lined for much of its length. Willow and other dense infestations of vegetation can limit access to the waters edge. Anglers should be prepared to do some walking to locate fishable water. The Clutha / Mata-Au River is very stable through this entire section and therefore good fishing water doesn't tend to change to much from one year to the next.

Three access points (Identified as 1, 18 & 23 in the map) cross private land to access the Clutha / Mata-Au River and these have been negotiated with the co-operation of landowner(s). Access to these locations is a privilege and is at the discretion of the landowner(s) so please respect private property and leave gates as you find them.

KNOW THE FLOW

The Clutha / Mata-Au River is New Zealand's largest river in terms of catchment size and water volume. The influence of water demands for hydro-electricity production means that the flow is the biggest factor that influences fishing success. A flow recorder on the river just downstream of the Cardrona

River confluence allows anglers to look up the “fishability” of the river on any given day. The flow information can be found on the Otago Regional Council website at: <https://www.orc.govt.nz/managing-our-environment/water/water-monitoring-and-alerts/upper-clutha/clutha-below-cardrona-river-confluence> Lake Hawea which feeds the Hawea River is controlled for hydro-electric purposes. Increases in flows can occur frequently which affects the flow of the Clutha / Mata-Au River and the fishing conditions particularly downstream of the Hawea River confluence. As a guide, fishing is best when flows are below 300 cumecs but some good opportunities still exist between 300-350 cumecs. The river downstream from the Hawea River confluence could be considered

"unfishable" from the bank when flows exceed 350+ cumecs. The flows in the Clutha / Mata-Au River from Lake Wanaka outlet to Albert Town are more constant as they are determined by the natural inflows and level of Lake Wanaka.

FISHING ADVICE

The upper Clutha / Mata-Au River has a variety of water for anglers of all abilities. The river holds a mixture of rainbow and brown trout of varying age classes with fish in the size range of 0.5 to 4 pound common. Land-locked chinook salmon are caught in Lakes Wanaka, Hawea and Dunstan however it is rare to catch them in the upper sections of the Clutha / Mata-Au River.

While the sheer size and fast current of the Clutha / Mata-Au can be daunting to fish it offers a wide variety of fishing water and opportunities. Trout can be caught using a variety of original spinners through to the modern soft baits. The traditional spinners like the Black & Gold Toby or Black & Gold Veltic spinners are used to great success. Anglers with spinning equipment have the advantage of being able to fish from places that are difficult for fly anglers. As with all angling the critical factor influencing the success of spin fishing is the ability of anglers to recognise where fish will be residing and then presenting the appropriate spinner or soft bait in the right way. The presence of Didymo particularly when the Hawea River is running high can be enough to deter some anglers due to its ability to repetitively catch on your lure or hook.

In early summer the upper Clutha / Mata-Au is famous for its caddis hatches, especially in the Deans Bank section which is favoured by fly anglers.



Here anglers can experience a great evening-rise and anglers commonly fish late evening and into the night with dry flies such as Elk Hair Caddis and Deer Hair Sedge. When the brown beetles are around fly anglers should try a Cochybondhu or Humphy dryfly. Nymphing and swinging wet flies or streamers can also be very productive with the latter getting attention during the winter months when browns and rainbows are moving up the river to spawn.

While the fishing in the upper Clutha / Mata-Au is not what it once was pre Didymo it is still a magnificent, stable and productive fishery. Angling pressure is not high and there are plenty of trout. Success will be increased with knowledge around flows, seasonal variations and getting to the know the different sections of the river.

ANGLER SAFETY

The sheer size of the Clutha / Mata-Au River and its everchanging flows can present hazards to shore based and boat anglers alike. The river is swift for much of its length so anglers must always assess the flows and be aware before entering the water. Contact Energy owns and operates the Lake Hawea and Clyde Dams and it controls the flows in the Hawea River. Flows released from the Hawea Dam can fluctuate relatively quickly throughout the day and night in response to the need for hydro-generation and to manage high inflows occurring in the catchments above both Lakes Wanaka and Lake Hawea. Boat anglers need to be particularly careful as the fast current and willow-lined reaches can be a trap should your boat suffer mechanical issues. The message to boaties is to be prepared and carry all necessary safety equipment. During high rainfall events the Cardrona and Lindis Rivers can add significant colour to the

Clutha / Mata-Au River which can affect visibility and angling opportunities.

CONTACT

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RULES AND REGULATIONS

All anglers are required to hold a valid sports fishing licence and must adhere to regulations which are contained within the South Island Sports Fishing Regulation Guide. The regulation guide is available in digital or pamphlet form when you purchase your licence and can be found on the Fish & Game NZ website www.fishandgame.org.nz. Be aware that there are two different season lengths and three different authorised fishing methods for the sections covered in this access pamphlet. Importantly is the "fly fishing only" area which exists throughout the area known as Deans Bank and that anglers cannot fish from a boat between the Outlet and Albert Town. Regulations are subject to change annually. If you need any clarification on the regulations then please contact the Otago Region Fish & Game Office.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

The Clutha Fisheries Trust (formed in 1992) established a lot of the existing access in the Clutha / Mata-Au River catchment. The Trust is supportive and committed to maintaining access and it will continue to be a priority of the Trust's work.