

Rakaia River

Introduction

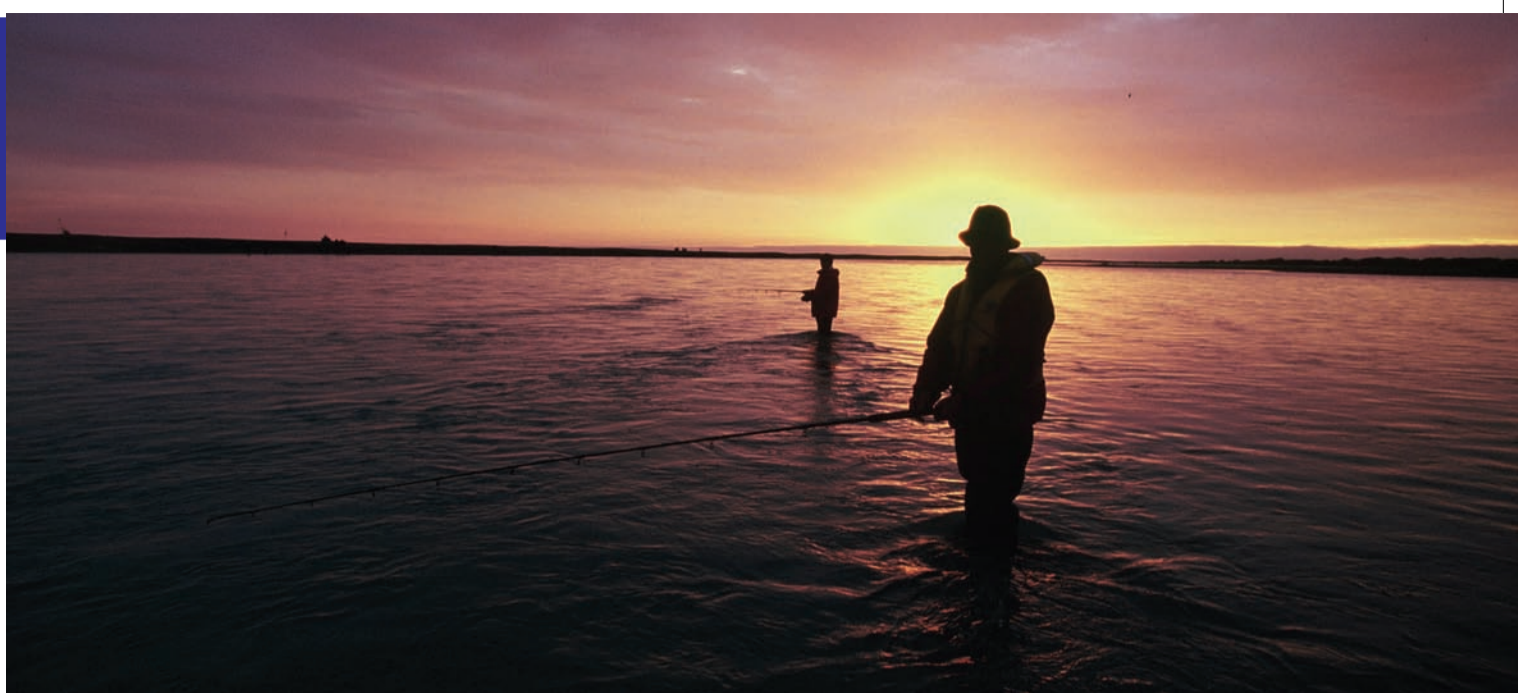
The Rakaia is a large braided river originating in the Southern Alps. It is susceptible to rain in the mountains and can flood quickly. The Rakaia is home to one of the best salmon fisheries in New Zealand with good runs from November to March each season. The Rakaia also supports very good populations of sea-run trout in the lower reaches, and river resident trout in the middle and upper reaches.

Getting There

The Rakaia River is located sixty kilometres southeast of Christchurch. The most popular access routes from Christchurch are via the North Rakaia Huts, the State Highway 1 Bridge and the State Highway 77 Bridge. Roads run up either side of the river from which smaller access tracks lead out to the water. Most legal access routes on the Rakaia are marked with Fish & Game Angler Access signs at the place where they lead off the formed road.

The Mouth & Lagoon

The Rakaia mouth and lagoon are popular with both salmon and trout anglers. The surf alongside the rivermouth, the gut where the river narrows prior to entering the sea and the tidal lagoon are all prime fishing areas. Surf fishing for salmon and trout is highly variable but is worth trying anytime the sea is calm and clear. At times the sea can be clear when the river is dirty. The rivermouth gut tends to fish best in the middle stages of the incoming tide when the current has slowed but not stopped altogether. Mid January through to mid March is the prime time to fish the rivermouth for salmon. Sea run trout fishing is best between November and February, especially when the river is discoloured after a fresh. Trout feed on native smelt in shallow fast flowing riffles and the fishing tends to be better towards low tide when there is more current flow. Access to the mouth and lagoon is through the hut settlements on either side of the river. The mouth is highly mobile and can be found anywhere from one to four kilometres



from the road ends. A boat or ATV are a great help for accessing this part of the river.

The Lower Reaches (Mouth to SH1)

This is the most popular reach of the river. Salmon fishing is best in the first days that the river is clear after a flood. Fish tend to move quickly through this section of the river and anglers are advised to find a good piece of water and wait for the fish to come to them. Access is best on the south side, from the various tracks leading off Acton Road. The most popular are Dobbins Ford, Griggs Road and Maginisses. This part of the river fishes particularly well in December and January although fish continue to run until the end of March.

The Middle Reaches (SH1 to SH 77)

Salmon slow down in this part of the river and anglers should spend more time on the move looking for fish. Fishing a pool through a couple of times before moving onto new water is the most successful technique. Jet boats, drift boats and ATV's are popular tools for finding places where salmon are resting. Good access is available from both sides of the river off the

Rakaia Terrace and Rakaia-Methven roads. Good water can usually be found from Lowes Cutting, Sleemans Road, Steels Road and Te Pirita Road.

The Upper Reaches (above SH77)

Salmon fishing above SH77 is best between January and March. The salmon may have lost some of their body condition by the time they reach this part of the river but this is more than offset by the spectacular scenery on offer. Access to the gorge section of the river is the preserve of boat anglers. However the riverbed opens up about ten kilometres above the gorge and good access is available, especially from Double Hill Run Road on the south side. Kowhai Flat is a popular access route and camping location in this section of the river. Please note that salmon fishing may be closed for some or all of the season above the Lake Coleridge Tailrace, so check the regulations before heading out. Trout fishing is also good in this section of the river, particularly in pools containing permanent water and large boulders. A number of spring fed tributaries enter the upper reaches of the Rakaia which provide excellent trout fishing, irrespective of the colour of the main river.

Rakaia River

Methods

Salmon

The fast flowing nature of the Rakaia means that spinning is the most effective salmon fishing technique. A medium-heavy actioned rod of 2-2.5metres in length coupled with a fixed or free spool reel capable of holding 200metres of 7-10kg line is ideal for most salmon fishing situations. "Zed spinners" and "Colorado spoons" are the lure of choice for rivermouth and upriver anglers. These must be fished as close to the bottom as possible in order to get a bite from these reluctant fish which do not feed during their freshwater migration. Selecting the right place to fish is the secret to successful salmon angling. A good salmon pool should offer slow water adjacent, or near to the main current flow. Fishing in the small side braids is seldom successful. Surf anglers use heavy lures such as the "ticer" or "slice" which are designed for long distance casting. These should be fished midway in the water column and so long rods and high speed reels are favoured.

Sea Run Brown Trout

Streamer flies which closely imitate native smelt are the lure of choice for sea-run trout. Parsons Glory, Hopes Silvery and Yellow Rabbit in sizes 2-6 are the most popular. These can either be fished with a heavy fly rod and fast sinking line, or with a "lure rod", monofilament line and lead sinker. The last hour of daylight is the best time to fish for sea run trout, especially after a warm day when the smelt have been running.

Upriver Trout

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 Black Toby and Tasmanian Devil are the lure of choice for spin anglers, while fly fishermen use streamer flies or weighted nymphs. Dry fly anglers are likely to be disappointed as there are few insect hatches and little surface activity in the main stem of the Rakaia. Although most river resident trout are brown trout, populations of rainbow trout are found in the upper reaches and tributary streams.

Regulations

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

Further Information

Fishing conditions in the Rakaia River and surf are highly variable with storms and 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 at the gorge. The Rakaia generally becomes fishable for trout once it drops below 240 cumecs, and fishable for salmon below 180 cumecs.

Metservice

www.metservice.co.nz

This site is great for weather forecasts. Surf anglers use the marine forecast to check the height of the sea swell (any swell greater than 1 metre means that the surf is likely to be unfishable), while river anglers use 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.



North Canterbury Region
3 Horatio St, Christchurch 1
(03) 366 9191

RAKAIA RIVER



- 1 Manuka Point**
The top of the Double Hill Run Road just past the turn-off to Glenfalloch Station.
- 2 Glenariffe**
Take the gate on the downstream side of the Glenariffe Hatchery gate and out to the river.
- 3 Black Hill**
A signposted camping area off Double Hill Run Road through which access is possible.
- 4 Kowhai Flat**
A signposted camping area off Double Hill Run Road through which access is possible.
- 5 Whisky Stream**
This is the first access track to the river above the gorge on the south side off Double Hill Run Road. The easiest way to find it is by looking out for the big Acheron slip, which is on the far side of the river opposite the track.
- 6 Gorge Bridge - South Side**
Take the first track to the left after crossing The Gorge bridge.
- 7 Lowes Cutting**
Take the shingle track to the right which leaves the Rakaia-Methven road on a sharp right hand bend, about 26.5km from Rakaia.
- 8 Barrhill**
Turn left down Oak Avenue in the Barrhill township, about 17km along Rakaia-Methven Road from Rakaia. Access to the river is via a very steep foot track.
- 9 Somerton Road**
Continuation of Somerton Road, about 7 km from along Rakaia-Methven Road from Rakaia.
- 10 McKays Road**
Continuation of McKays Road, about 5 km along Rakaia-Methven Road from Rakaia.
- 11 Wolseley Road**
Continuation of Wolseley Road, about 3.5km along Rakaia-Methven Road from Rakaia.
- 12 Main Road Bridge**
This road is a continuation of the Old Main South Road, about 1 km east of Rakaia. This is a popular area for launching jet boats (4WD only) and for foot angler access.
- 13 Golf Course**
This track runs along the eastern boundary of the golf course on Acton Road, about 5.6km from Rakaia.
- 14 Maginisses**
This track is marked Maginisses on the gate, about 8.8km down Acton Road from Rakaia.
- 15 Griggs Road**
Access is via an unformed shingle road directly opposite Griggs Road, about 11km from Rakaia. There are two gates here, take the one nearest Rakaia Township. The track ends inside the paddock and foot access only is available to the riverbed.
- 16 Dobbins Ford**
This access road runs off Acton Road approximately 16.2 km from Rakaia.
- 17 Deer Fence Track**
This runs off the road to the huts, right on a 90 degree bend. This track is suitable for four wheel drive vehicles only.
- 18 Rivermouth - South Side**
Turn left onto the sealed road at the end of Acton Road, down the terrace, around the 90 degree right hand bend, down to the road end and over the small stopbank to the hut settlement. The quickest way to reach the river or mouth is to drive around the road on top of the stopbank which surrounds the huts.



- 19 Lake Coleridge Power Station**
Drive through the Lake Coleridge village and turn left in front of the power station, cross the bridge over the tailrace, turn left at the first opportunity and head out to the river.
- 20 Gorge Bridge - North Side**
A track leads out to river a short distance below the gorge bridge. This is a popular place for both fishing and launching boats (4WD only).
- 21 Camping Gully**
This leads out to the riverbed a short distance below the gorge bridge. This is a private road but access is kindly provided by the landowner.
- 22 Sleemans Road**
Turn hard left at the end of Rakaia Terrace Road, about 28.7km from Rakaia. The shingle road turns into a grass track which goes down two terraces and out to the riverbed.
- 23 Steeles Road**
Continuation of Steeles Road, about 22.3 km up Rakaia Terrace Road from Rakaia.
- 24 Te Pirita Road**
Formed shingle road about 14km up Rakaia Terrace Road from Rakaia
- 25 Darrochs Road**
Formed shingle road signposted about 8.7km up Rakaia Terrace Road from Rakaia
- 26 Gun Club**
This is an extension of (Burns Road) and leads off to the left at the base of a cutting about 6.2km up Rakaia Terrace Road from Rakaia, veers past the Mead Gun Club and then out to the river.
- 27 Breadings Road**
Take the last right hand turn before the SH1 bridge onto Rakaia Terrace Road. A few kilometres upstream you will reach the Rakaia Road/Breadings Road corner. Park at the road side and walk through the gate and a short distance across the paddock to the riverbed.
- 28 SH1**
This leads out of the picnic area on the north side of the SH1 bridge. This track is often rough and only suited to off-road vehicles.
- 29 Rakaia Irrigation**
This runs off North Rakaia Road a short distance below SH1. Turn left at the end of the track and follow it down and out to the river, crossing two fords on the way. The fords are maintained to a standard suitable for wading, four wheel drive vehicles and motorbikes, as part of an irrigation scheme consent.
- 30 Mouth - North Side**
The North Rakaia Huts are reached by following the AA signs while traveling south out of Southbridge. Good boat launching is available at the North Rakaia Huts boat ramp (a \$2 fee is payable into the honesty box) although access down the lagoon to the main river can be influenced by river and tide conditions. Land access to the river mouth is by following a track to the left of the boat ramp, around the head of the lagoon and back down to the mouth. Another option is to turn left at the No Exit sign just before the huts, drive to the road end and out onto the beach. The best way to travel along the shingle spit and down to the mouth is on an ATV.

