

Lake Wanaka

History

Lake Wanaka is a large glacial lake of about 180 square kilometres in area. It is 45.5 kilometres long, about 11.6 kilometres wide at the widest point, and over 300 metres deep at its deepest. The Matukituki and Makarora rivers are the lake's major tributaries.

Maori had summer camps in the area for food gathering, but did not settle permanently. The Lake was first seen by a European in 1853 and was mapped by James McKerrow in 1862. Farming began in the Wanaka area in the late 1850s with the establishment of large pastoral runs, and the lake was used for transportation of timber from sawmills in West Wanaka and Makarora.

Brown trout were firmly established in the lake by 1885 and Rainbow by the turn of the century. Chinook salmon were released into the lake during 1918, but the population of all three species may have been self introduced from stocks established earlier in the Clutha River. Today the lake supports self-sustaining populations of brown trout, rainbow trout and Chinook salmon.

Getting There

Lake Wanaka has always been a special holiday destination for generations of families and tourists seeking sun, water and recreation. The main township is nicely situated at the Southern end of the lake three kilometres west of the junction between SH6 and SH89.

The main road tracks the Lake Wanaka town frontage for a short distance then travels around the southwestern shoreline to the scenically attractive Glendhu, Parkins and Paddock Bays. In the other direction heading north along SH 6 past Hawea towards the West Coast you will eventually reach the Neck and drop down to the eastern shore of Lake Wanaka. The road leads along the shoreline to the head of the Lake near Makarora.

Access

Access to the lake is mainly clustered around the Wanaka Township, with boat ramps positioned at the town marina, Waterfall Creek, Glendhu Bay and at the Outlet. Heading north, boats can be launched from the Dublin Bay and Camp Creek beaches with 4WD vehicles and at the head of the lake suitable 2WD launching facilities are available at Wharf Creek. Most of the western shoreline is only accessible by boat.

Shore anglers will appreciate reasonably good access to the bays near the boat launching facilities and if you feel adventurous there is potential for some rock hopping along the Eastern shoreline near the head of the Lake.

Methods

Lake Wanaka can be very challenging to the average angler, and consistently unpredictable, but when the fish are feeding the rewards speak for themselves. The lake holds three sports fish species: brown trout, rainbow trout and landlocked Chinook salmon. Trolling is very popular and accounts for about 60% of the total angling effort, giving an average catch rate of 1 fish for three hours fishing. This compares favourably with other lakes in the area. To be a successful troller there are a few basic principles that should be applied.

Harling

This is a method that is growing in popularity in the area and has already shown its effectiveness on Lakes Wakatipu and Dunstan. Refer to the brochure 'Successful Boat Fishing on Southern Lakes' for set up, lures and angling technique.

Spinning

Look for rocky and weedy areas where fish are likely to be feeding. Sighted fish can be ambushed by casting well in front of them then retrieving across their path. This also works particularly well in sandy areas, by allowing the lure to settle on the bottom and then retrieving erratically as the fish approaches. Articulated trout and small Rapalas are good lure selections for this technique. Small stream confluences should also be targeted. Often fish will rest in the cool flow during hot weather, taking advantage of food that has been dislodged upstream. Small finnies in green and gold/silver work well, or green/red and black veltacs. Small dark lures fished in the evening at the Clutha River Outlet can persuade even the most cunning of specimens to strike.

Flyfishing

Fly angling opportunities in Lake Wanaka abound due to the diverse nature of shoreline. The shallow water margins of Paddock and Parkins bays offer good stalking for cruising browns. Damsel fly, midge and snail patterns are favoured by many and if fish are seen over a rocky bottom, bullies are on the menu. Woolly Buggers, Hamills Killers and Mrs Simpson patterns should do the job. The large river mouth deltas of the Matukituki and Makarora



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The most important is being familiar with where the fish are during the different seasons.

Summer: Fish are very deep during the day but will tend to feed in shallower water early morning and evening.

Autumn: Browns and salmon will be congregating around river mouths and nearby shoreline areas. Winter/spring: A great time for Rainbow at river mouths, with Browns near the drop-offs and often feeding in close, Salmon can turn up at any time.

As a general rule on bright days use brightly coloured lures in red, yellow or orange and for dull days or night fishing use any combination of green, blue and black.

If the water is discoloured fluoro pinks and greens work well. If unsuccessful at first, change your colour combinations or try fishing at a different depth. Boat speed and lure presentation are important. Recommended lures include the numerous King Cobra and Tasmanian Devil patterns, especially the combinations of red/gold and green/yellow. Flat Fish and Rapalas work well. The black and gold toby is an ancient favourite for many and is especially suited for the evening.

Key Points

- Fish to the season/ know where the fish will be
- Correct lure selection to suit the day and water clarity
- Change your lure occasionally and experiment a little.

fish well year round, but especially in the autumn when trout and salmon congregate to feed on migrating native fish or Whitebait. A sinking line fished with a Grey Ghost, Jack Sprat or Rabbit lure should prove successful. Mid to late November sees the arrival of green manuka beetles. Often fish will feed frantically when swarms of these get thrust off shoreline vegetation onto the water by windgusts. Various beetle patterns including Cochybondhu and Humpys are recommended. And for the casual summer angler the seclusion of the many rocky outcrops can provide some satisfying relaxation. A nicely presented dry fly will often persuade fish to rise from a great depth.

Recommended flies include: Black Gnat, Loves Lure and Royal Wulff

Bait Fishing

Setting a bait is great way to spend some fishing time with the family. Numerous places around the shoreline are seldom fished because access is difficult, creating havens for large fish. If you are looking for an adventure the shoreline from the neck to the lake head is worth a look, otherwise there is plenty of scope elsewhere. Fish the steep drop-offs with weighted bait or if you are targeting cruising fish in shallower water try a small split-shot or even a bubble to present your bait.

