

## GO NZ: Central Plateau »

# Reeling in the trout

The gin-clear reaches of the Mōhaka River are an abundant source of brown and rainbow trout. Jacqui Gibson goes fly fishing at Poronui Lodge.

It's no secret trout are tricky to catch. It's also no secret that of the dozen weekend guests at Poronui Lodge, a luxury sports lodge in the Central Plateau's back country, I'm probably the least likely to hook one.

It's not that I'm all fingers and thumbs all of the time.

It's just that, well, Antony, a retired ex-pat Brit based in Hong Kong and now living in Taupō, who travelled here by Porsche, is so well-practised in the sport that he can (and does) school me on the lifecycle of the nymph, one of the trout's favourite foods.

They're fussy feeders. Such knowledge will improve my chances, I'm told.

Meanwhile, Mike from Wellington is bummed he didn't bring his waders, so he could cast a line in between shucking and scoffing fresh Coromandel oysters and drinking Marlborough pinot gris.

Because these are near perfect conditions, he says before heading off for a massage.

### Meet Andrew Christmas

It's a warm, sunny morning when guide Andrew Christmas pulls up to Poronui Lodge with all the gear and experience I'm hoping I'll need.

He's dressed the part in waders, a Poronui Lodge cap and polaroid sunnies (apparently best for seeing trout in the water). A popped collar, vest pockets stuffed with handmade flies and a Japanese carp tattoo on his right forearm complete the outdoorsman look.

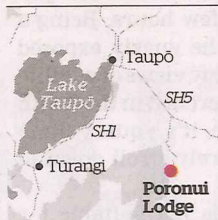
The part-time farmer and father of three tells me he's fished local waters since the age of 7. At 22, he took up guiding. Before Covid-19, the 39-year-old was flat out guiding five days a week — even coaching “a few Americans from the White House” who he can't possibly name.

As I wriggle into a set of supplied Poronui Lodge waders and boots, Andrew explains the property's unspoilt rivers are surprisingly easy to get to (by four-wheel drive, on foot and by helicopter), yet almost exclusively fished by guests, making them some of the best in the world.

Soon, we're driving along Poronui's rugged dirt tracks en route to the winding Mōhaka River, spotting wild sika deer dashing through scrubland as we go.



Skilful casting from the Poronui Lodge experts can help you hook a good-sized rainbow trout. Photos / Jacqui Gibson



## Checklist

### PORONUI

#### DETAILS

Poronui Lodge is 45-minutes' drive from Taupō. Open year round, rates at Poronui Lodge start from \$690pp including all meals and house beverages. This year's Poronui Table is scheduled for October 14-16. [poronui.com](http://poronui.com)

### The Poronui Table

My visit takes place in October 2021, coinciding with the 14th annual Poronui Table, the latest incarnation of the lodge's annual food and wine weekend.

Guests from Tauranga, Wellington and Taupō have travelled to the foothills of the Kaimanawa Mountain Ranges for three days of wining and dining led by Mahi winemaker Brian Bicknell and chefs Martin Bosley and Tom Loughlin.

In between eating, drinking and workshops on wine and Māori kai, Poronui guests hike, run and mountain bike the property's many tracks. They go bird watching (think: tūi, bellbirds, ruru, kereru, hawk, falcons and whio, New Zealand's rare blue duck). Some fly fish, eel, or simply enjoy the river and beech forest views from the private porch of their lodge accommodation.

### Fishing the Mōhaka

If you can't time your visit for this year's Poronui Table, there is still much to keep you occupied and the trout will — hopefully — still be biting.

Under patient instruction from Andrew, I learn to spy a trout (clue for newbies: by standing back a few metres, not by parading up and down the river's edge) and I learn to false cast by repeatedly flicking my line in a continuous forward and backwards motion.

Within minutes, Andrew's skilful casting hooks the first catch of the day, a good-sized rainbow trout. Taking the rod, it's over to me to bring it to the surface, alternating between reeling it in and giving it line.

I complete the task and Andrew wades in to scoop the fish out with a net.

Once the hook is removed and a “trophy” photo taken, I take the soft fish in wet hands and release it back to the river. Then, we dawdle off to try our luck in another pool.

### The Blake House

That afternoon, the Poronui guests regroup for a barbecue at The Blake House, a private hilltop villa with views over the Taharua River.

As the sun dissolves, we sip rosé, snack on pāua fritters and exchange details about our day's adventures.

Two of the group spent the day hiking with chef Tom to hear stories of the whenua (land) and Tom's Tūwharetoa ancestors, who would gather on the property centuries ago.

Others rode mountain bikes to Safari Camp, Poronui's riverside glamping site.

I'm quick to say I caught three rainbow trout (though obviously Andrew did most of the work). But the real highlight, I venture, was spending time in nature, listening to the splish and trickle of the river and taking in the colours of the high country. There was the radiant blue of the mid-morning sky and the lime green and browns of the riverside shrubs and trees.

And, of course, there were the rich bronze and orange hues of the wild trout caught and released back into the glassy waters of the Mōhaka.

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