

Wetlining

'WETLINING' is a description given to fishing for trout using a sinking line, as opposed to using a floating line. The technique is a traditional method that came to this country along with the introduction of trout as sports fish to Australasia.

At that time the recognised styles of fly fishing were dry fly fishing using floating flies and a greased line and wet fly fishing where sunken flies were fished. The fly lines were made of braided silk and the dressing on the line required regular replenishment to ensure that it floated for as long as possible.

In the case of wetlining or wet fly fishing the line was a heavy one that sank rapidly in the water and took the fly close to the bottom of the river. Nymph fishing with a floating line had not been developed at that time and it would be more than seventy years before it became the dominant fishing style for trout in New Zealand.

Nowadays with the scientific advances in plastic coated fly lines we see a tremendously wide range of lines for every application. These have become highly specialised particularly for lake fishing where sink rates can be critical. To simplify matters, sink lines can be classed as slow sinking, intermediate sinking or fast sinking. Line manufacturers give a rating in sink rate of feet per second so that anglers can select the most suitable line for any situation.

Fishing for trout with a sinking line has a lot in common with fly fishing for salmon. The main difference would be that lighter tackle and one handed rods are used for trout as a rule.

Flies that are used with the wetline technique are usually described as lures rather than flies because they are intended to imitate small fish rather than insects. Some typical flies are Woolly Buzzer, Rabbit, Red Setter, Scotch Poacher, Mrs Simpson, Hairy Dog. The list seems endless but most anglers have a few favourite flies that work for them. Some of these flies are said to represent Koura the freshwater crayfish as well as small fish.

Woolly Buzzer



Red Setter



Orange Rabbit



Most novices spend their money on a floating fly line and it may not please them to buy a further sinking line for a style of fishing that may be seldom used. Those anglers can purchase a sink tip to attach to their floating line. This is not as satisfactory as a sinking line but may be a partial solution to getting the fly down to the zone near the riverbed where trout will be lying.

The usual approach for wetlining is to commence at the head of a pool, cast directly across or slightly downstream and allow the fly to swing around behind as it is pulled by the current. Most anglers throw an upstream mend into the line immediately after making the cast and this is done to reduce drag and allow the fly to sink deeper.

The rod is moved in an arc following the line so that it points roughly to where the fly is. In deeper or faster parts of the river some anglers may cast slightly upstream to allow the fly to sink rapidly as it drifts freely before the current drags on the flyline. When the line has swung across the main current and is directly downstream of the angler it will usually be necessary to retrieve some line before casting again. Lifting the entire line from deep in the water is quite a struggle, particularly for inexperienced fishers, and the line retrieve is a time when a take is often felt from a fish that has followed the lure.

Having completed the first cast the angler will take several steps downstream and cast again. In this way a large part of the river can be covered. If the angler's back cast is hampered by riverside trees or vegetation it may be necessary to employ a roll cast rather than an overhead cast.

The key to successful wetline fishing is getting the fly deep enough to reach the fish that are usually lying very close to the bottom of the river where they can hold position with minimal effort. As Tony Bishop points out on his website, if you are not losing some flies on the bottom you are not in the zone where you will catch fish!

This style of fishing doesn't suit all situations but can be very successful in the larger rivers, especially where migratory fish are making their spawning runs. Usually in these strongly flowing rivers the fish will 'hook themselves' as they take the fly so there will be no need to strike, just tighten up by lifting the rod slightly.

Tight lines.