Rivers Open for Bumper season

It’s hard to believe that September is here already. The wattle trees are all bright yellow, the grass is green and there is usually plenty of water flowing down the thousands of rivers and creeks in north east Victoria.

Average conditions for September usually present high water levels. Hopefully we don’t get a repeat of the 2010 major floods. The first real flooding in the area for close to 10 years, and they just happened to rock up on trout opening weekend!

Following is a list of the major rivers that I fish often, and how I expect them to fish over the opening weeks of the new trout season.

**King River**

Of the rivers mentioned, the King River is closest to home for me, and one I fish most frequently: almost on a weekly basis, and I love the place.

The King River flows from the mountains in the Mt Stirling/Mt Buller area, and flows north towards Wangaratta, passing lake William Hovell. The King River is a fantastic trout fishery, containing both brown and rainbow trout above Lake William Hovell, and mainly brown trout below the lake, with just the odd rainbow.

With Lake William Hovell being at full capacity, I would expect the King River to be flowing high and fast above, and below the lake. Above the lake access is more difficult, and requires a four-wheel drive to get there, and the fishable area of river may be limited by high water in September making river crossings too dangerous.

I recommend anglers head to the lower reaches of the river, downstream of Lake William Hovell. The best area will be anywhere between the Gentle Annie caravan park just downstream of Whitfield, and Lake William Hovell, where there are numerous access points, camping spots and the banks are not too overgrown.

The river can be accessed at Gentle Annie lane, at the caravan park, although it would be courteous to call into the caravan park and let the owner know you’re there because you do need to park on his land.

Upstream there is a bridge with a roadside park on the river at Cheshunt with easy access to the river. From Cheshunt if you follow the upper King River Road, it crosses the river again, and runs beside it further upstream before the lake, and there are numerous access points.

On opening weekend, I would start by using worms, just drifting them through the pools, weighted with a light split shot sinker or two to help get the worms down closer to the bottom.

If the water is clear, pull out the spinners after a while if the worms are not doing any good.

**Ovens River**

The Ovens River drains the Mt Hotham/Mt Feathertop area behind Harrietville and flows in a north westerly direction to Wangaratta, before joining up with the King River and flowing north to Lake Mulwala.

The Ovens River has a very good mix of brown and rainbow trout upstream of Bright, and downstream of Bright the rainbows tend to thin out and the river becomes more dominated by brown trout.

Due to the fact that the Ovens River drains some of Victoria’s highest mountains, it usually carries quite a lot of water, especially during spring time when it is fed by snowmelt.

I have found floating worms lightly weighted with small split shot sinkers to be a dynamite technique in the Ovens River early in the season, and as the snow melts, and the water levels drop I tend to lure fish more often. During the summer months, the Ovens River can turn on some terrific flyfishing action also.

There are trout in the river all the way down to Myrtleford, however I recommend anywhere from Porepunkah upstream, as this area holds better numbers of trout, and is also a little bit smaller and has easier access than the downstream area. There are numerous bridges, and roadside rest areas along the river, and finding access should not be a problem.

Between Bright and Harrietville, the Great Alpine Road runs right beside the river in a few spots; this area would be my first pick, as it always tends to fish well.

**Kiewa River**
The Kiewa River drains Victoria’s highest mountains, Mt Bogong and also Mt Feathertop. Above Mt Beauty the river has been diverted and altered heavily to make the water run through power stations and generate hydro electricity, so I won’t go into detail with that area.

It is the section of river from Mt Beauty downstream that the best fishing is found. All of the diverted water in the Kiewa catchment finds it’s way to Mt Beauty, and ends up in the Mt Beauty pondage where it spills into the Kiewa River and flows in a north westerly direction down to join the Murray River near Albury.

From the pondage in Mt Beauty down to the bridge at Tawonga the river has a good mix of brown and rainbow trout, with browns being a little more prolific. Downstream of Tawonga the rainbow trout numbers begin to drop away and the river becomes more dominated by brown trout.

The Kiewa River is a large river and carries quite a lot of water, especially during the springtime when the snow is melting. In most years, even after the other rivers in the area have settled right down to there summer levels, the Kiewa river can still run high for a while.

During the 2006 drought, when other nearby rivers were really struggling for water, the Kiewa maintained a healthy flow right through the summer.

The area I recommend to target trout is from Mongans Bridge upstream to Mt Beauty. Mongans Bridge is on Bay Creek Lane, which runs off the Kiewa Valley Highway about 10 minutes past Dederang.

From Mongans Bridge, you can follow the Mongans bridge-Redbank road on the opposite side of the river for quite a while, which offers several great access points, and a couple of camping spots near the deer farm, before crossing the river again at Redbank, where once again there is some great access.

This whole area has some great trout fishing, especially the day visiting areas near Redbank bridge.

Further upstream there is excellent access at the bridge on Mountain Creek road (Take the Ryders Lane turnoff at Tawonga), and the next access point is immediately below the spillway in Mt Beauty, which is a very popular fishing spot that always produces fish.

As with the Ovens and King rivers, it will be all about drifting worms on trout opening weekend, however the water is usually quite clear in the Kiewa River, even when it is high, so if worms are not working, try using a bladed spinner with a metallic blade to reflect the sunlight and attract the trout’s attention.

Lower Mitta Mitta River

Downstream of Lake Dartmouth, the Mitta Mitta river is a very large river, flowing in a westerly, and then northerly direction before entering Lake Hume near Tallangatta.

This section of river is dominated by brown trout, and rainbow trout captures are not very common. There are rainbow trout in the system in this area, just not a lot in the main Mitta Mitta River.

From Dartmouth to Mitta Mitta township, the river is highly regulated by Lake Dartmouth, and if we get a very wet spring like last season, this area will be a great place to head, as Lake Dartmouth is currently only at 65% capacity and can still hold back a lot of flood water. This section of river should be pretty low regardless of how much rainfall we get. If we do get a big flood, it will drain away very quickly from this area.

There are numerous access points between Mitta Mitta township and Lake Dartmouth, and there are also some good numbers of brown trout.

Between Mitta Mitta township and Eskdale is a great stretch of water. The river is very large and open right through this area. Access is limited to a couple of areas on each side of the river, with the back road (Mitta North Road) offering the best access.

You may wish to cross private property to access the river in areas not fished as often, and doing do is easy, just knock on the farmers door and ask permission. They can only say yes or no; 9 times out of 10 they will say yes, provided you close the gates and don’t leave rubbish.

The area I recommend is anywhere from Eskdale upstream. Just out of Eskdale, there is a lane that heads left called Swasbricks Road. If you follow this road it becomes Mitta north road and continues through all the way to Mitta Mitta township, and there is river access at a couple of spots.

The pools are very long and deep in this area, and also contain carp and redfin. On opening weekend, the lower Mitta Mitta river may not be high like most other rivers. If the river is not high, try starting with bladed spinners or small hardbodied lures. If lures are not working, then perhaps try using worms.

This section of river has some quite large fish hiding in it. The numbers of trout in the lower Mitta Mitta River are not as high as other nearby rivers, but the lack of numbers is replaced by the size of some of the fish.

If the fishing in the lower Mitta Mitta river is slow, or you’re having trouble finding somewhere to camp because the camping spots have already been taken, jump in your car, and head up to the Mitta Mitta township, and from there continue to follow the Omeo Highway towards Omeo.
The next 30km or so follows Snowy Creek, which has excellent numbers of both brown and rainbow trout, and the area is littered with streamside camping sites. Snowy Creek will be flowing quite high and fast, and most likely very clear, and both worms and spinners should work on opening weekend.

Wading will be difficult, so take your time, or stick to the banks. Snowy Creek is an amazing part of the state, and I doubt that any visiting anglers to the Mitta Mitta area would leave disappointed.

Images

The author with a nice King River brown trout.

Early morning on the Mitta Mitta river at Eskdale.
Redfin are a common by-catch on the Mitta Mitta River.

Kiewa River brown trout taken on a Damiki Armour Shad during high water levels.

The Kiewa River near Tawonga
An excellent brown trout from the Mitta Mitta river near Eskdale.

High water levels in Snowy Creek above Mitta Mitta township.

King River brown trout the author caught while testing his mate Brett Dennis’s new rod!
A typical Ovens River brown trout taken on a Stimulator dry fly.