Snowy trout are calling

Darren Redman  |  April 2013  »  Feature Articles / New South Wales /

What is bringing anglers back to the Snowy Mountains? It’s simple: water and fish and there are plenty of both.

The Snowies feature diverse lakes, streams and pondages which arguably contain the best mainland trout fishery in Australia.

Sadly, during the Great Drought of the 2000s, the fishery suffered. However, over the past year or so drought-breaking rain, excellent snowfalls and fresh new stocks of trout have brought the fishery back to its very best.

When the Snowy Mountains Scheme was first established, the dams filled quickly and the trout grew big and fast as the waters flooded new ground and the fish feasted on the abundant food.

After dam levels were down for so many years during the drought, when they began to fill the fish began to feast again. The trout may not have achieved the same sizes that they did when the dams first filled, but they are of a good size and condition and have provided a second great season of sport for anglers.

Whether you choose lure, fly or bait or just like wandering down one of the many streams marvelling at the scenic beauty, there is a place for you to explore in the Snowy Mountains and you will enjoy so much.

THE BIG DAMS

The three big impoundments in the mountains are Eucumbene, Jindabyne and Tantangara, all of which have generous water levels over the past year. At the time of writing Eucumbene was over 50%, Jindabyne around 80% and Tantangara was 26%. For information on dam water levels go to www.snowyhydro.com.au.

Eucumbene and Jindabyne are popular boating dams, with anglers more often than not opting to troll.

A variety of lures will work, whether used on downriggers, lead-core line with or without attractors or flatlines. The deeper techniques work best over the hotter parts of the day and the season but as the water cools off, the fish come to the surface and into the shallows.

Local tackle stores and accommodation providers can often direct you to where the fish are concentrated at any part of the season.

A boat also allows anglers freedom to access areas where they may wish to fish from the shore with bait, lure or fly. However, there are plenty of public-access points for shore-based angling.

There are also plenty of maps and books available to show access points and Google Earth is a good way to zero in on the dams and streams, bearing in mind that it’s not real-time imagery, so there may be more or less water than depicted.

There are several good boat ramps at both dams, plenty of accommodation as well as some camping areas.

Tantangara, the smallest of the three major dams, is nestled in the national park and camping is permitted, but there is no structured boat ramp. Choose cautiously your shore launching spot, especially in Winter; the ground can be firm and frozen in the morning and a morass when the temp rises above zero.

All three dams fish well with the usual baits like worms and grubs, especially when the water is rising. Mudeyes (dragonfly lavae) are extremely effective as they emerge from the waters in mid to late Summer and into Autumn, while ‘bottle bait’ such as PowerBait is a good standby when fresh bait is hard to come by.

Fly-fishing has become even more popular lately as water levels rise and over the past two years there has seen some of the best fly action the country has to offer.

The time of year will determine what flies to use in the dams.

In early Spring nymphs or wets are effective. Dries are popular on a Summer evening when the insects get active, while muddler-style flies will work when the mudeyes are emerging through the night, with dusk the prime time.

Other dams worth exploring are Talbingo, Blowering and Khancoban to the west of the main range, along with some of the many pondages, natural or dammed for the Snowy Scheme.

RIVERS, STREAMS

There are numerous rivers and streams throughout the Snowy Mountains and the neighbouring Monaro country, most of which contain numbers of trout.
The Eucumbene and Thredbo rivers are very popular destinations especially in May/early June, when the brown trout are doing their spawn run.

When the new season opens in early October these same rivers are also popular for the rainbow trout that are nearing the end of their annual spawning.

This is when anglers often use a fly that imitates fish roe, in tandem with a trailing nymph, to target trophy fish.

Throughout most of the season there is good dry-fly and nymph fishing farther upstream on the Thredbo and Eucumbene rivers, as well as on the Murrumbidgee above Tantangara.

Other rivers and streams that will definitely be worth a look are the Murrumbidgee below Tantangara and around Adaminaby, the Mowambah or Moonbah River near Jindabyne, the Snowy and Bobundara Rivers near Dalgety, and the Bombala River and its tributaries at Bombala.

The streams of the eastern Monaro, including the Maclaughlin, Kydra and Kybeyan rivers that surround Nimmitabel, east of Cooma, produce fast-growing, wily trout.

Although some spells of seriously hot weather and bushfires limited the fishing opportunities at times this season, the rivers and streams continue to bounce back after the Great Drought and the alpine lakes have rarely fished so well. And for many anglers, the best fishing of the season is about to occur.

**Facts**

**THE DAMS**

**Lake Eucumbene:** Providence Portal, Anglers Reach, Yens Cove, Springwood Bay, Seven Gates, Frying Pan, Rushy Plains, Middlingbank, Buckenderra, Braemar and Eucumbene Dam Wall.

**Jindabyne:** Waste Point, Cooley Bay, Hatchery Bay, Wollondibby Inlet, Rushes Bay, Taylors Bay and Kalkite.

**Tantangara:** The smallest of the three dams but has vehicle access around most of the foreshore.

**RIVERS AND STREAMS**

**Jindabyne area:** Thredbo River, Mowambah River. Alpine streams inside the Snowy Mountains National Park. Gungarlin River, Eucumbene River below Lake Eucumbene.

**Eucumbene area:** Eucumbene River above Lake Eucumbene, Murrumbidgee above Tantangara and down to Adaminaby.

**Dalgety area:** Snowy, Bobundara and Bombala rivers.

**The Monaro:** Cooma-Nimmitabel area: Maclaughlin, Kydra, Kybeyan rivers.

**Khankoban area:** Khancoban, Geehi, Indi, Swampy Plains rivers.

**TACKLE**

**Trolling:** Light to medium rod with a fast tip. Mono, braid or lead-core line, optional downrigger or cowbells. Use winged lures, bibbed minnow styles or blades.
Fly: 4wt-8wt combinations, floating, sinking or sink-tip lines to suit the style of fishing. Flies from small nymphs, wets, dries, muddlers, large wets or roe imitation for the spawn runs.

Spinning: Light spin sticks suitable for braid, similar lures to trolling, along with a variety of small soft plastics.

Bait: Light-medium rods with mono are best. Small hooks, floats and sinkers. Worms all year round, mudeyes when they emerge, ‘bottle baits’ like PowerBait.

Facts

ACCOMMODATION


Jindabyne area: Snowline Caravan Park, Lake Jindabyne Caravan Park and many cabins, apartments and cottages.

Tantangara: Camping permitted on the foreshore in the national park – no facilities.

Khancoban area: Khancoban Lakeside Caravan Resort, Khancoban Alpine Inn, cabins and cottages.

Cooma-Nimmitabel area: Caravan parks, hotels, motels, cottage and unit rentals.

Facts

RULES AND REGULATIONS

• NSW fishing licence must be carried at all times.

• Stream trout season from Saturday of October long weekend to midnight Monday of Queen’s Birthday weekend. Lakes and dams open all year round.

• Check bag and size limits, which vary in streams to lakes. Streams mostly closed to bait fishers.

• See NSW Freshwater Fishing Guide or www.fisheries.nsw.gov.au.

Facts

GUIDES, CHARTERS

• Steve Williamson’s Lake Jindabyne Trout Fishing Adventures, excellent charter and guiding service. Email --e-mail address hidden-- or call 0408 024 436

• Col Sinclair at Adaminaby Angler provides great guiding on rivers and lakes, specialising in fly-fishing. Email --e-mail address hidden-- or call 0427 541 180

• DJ’s Xstream Fishing Charters for trolling, bait, lure or fly, novices or experienced. Email --e-mail address hidden-- , phone 0427 934 688.
Images

Trolling is popular on the Snowy Mountains lakes and is among the most effective ways to take brown and rainbow trout.

Winged lures are popular for casting and trolling. Sink and orange are aggression colours for pre-spawn browns.
It’s not overflowing any more, like it was in early 2012, but Lake Jindabyne is usually around 80% and packed with trout.

Nymph fishing is a popular way to fly-fish in the rivers and the dams.

Fly-fishing in the alpine rivers and streams can be as rewarding as it is scenic.
Rob Rintoul with a magnificent 6.3kg buck brown trout taken from the Thredbo River last June.

Hooked up on fly in the shallow margins of Eucumbene Dam where rising water covers fresh ground.