

CANAL ETIQUETTE

There are a few things to keep in mind when fishing the canals to keep your visit enjoyable and ensure that the opportunity to fish around the hydro stations and canals, which are privately owned and operated, is maintained for future generations of anglers. The Tekapo Canal is owned by Genesis Energy while the Pukaki and Ōhau canal chain is owned by Meridian Energy.



If taking home a salmon for dinner is your goal - focus your efforts near the salmon farm pens

Be considerate of others – You will encounter other anglers, and often in closer proximity than traditionally experienced on lakes and rivers. Anglers use a range of fishing methods and styles at the canals, and they are not always compatible with how you intend to fish. Be courteous when approaching anglers who were there before you and ask if it is ok to fish close to them, if not please move and find your own spot.

Roads – Drive to the conditions and stick to the speed limits. Speed limits vary throughout the canal system and many of the roads are narrow, unlit and offer no berm parking. Please park off the roads and where parking is designated and walk to your fishing spot if necessary.

Camping – no camping is permitted on the canals. Camping includes camper vans, motor homes, and sleeping in your car. This rule is enforced, and campers will be required to move-on based on the assessment: “if it looks like camping, it is camping”. Accommodation and camping is available throughout the Mackenzie, especially in the townships of Tekapo and Twizel.



Barriers and signage are erected to keep you out dangerous places like this emergency discharge area pictured

Signage and fencing – Signage and fencing is erected throughout the power scheme and around the salmon farms to advise anglers of health and safety issues. Please obey all signage, do not climb over fences or barriers, and keep out of dangerous areas. Failure to do so may result in a reduction in access.

Rubbish – Your rubbish and fish waste are your responsibility, pack-in and pack-out. If you are fishing near the Ōhau power stations, large skip bins are provided by Meridian for your use. Do not leave fish frames and guts in the margins of the water, wrap them in paper and a plastic bag and dispose of them in the skip bins. Please also be careful not to snag your line in the power station intakes, fishing nylon is causing blockages to the intake screens which then causes issues for hydro generation.

Toilets – Toilets are provided on the canals and in the Tekapo and Twizel townships. On the Tekapo Canal portaloos are provided while toilets are available and signposted at the power station buildings of the Ōhau A, B and C power stations.

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THE HYDRO CANALS

The Tekapo, Pūkaki and Ōhau canals were constructed in the 1970s and 1980s and now form an essential part of Aotearoa's/New Zealand's Renewable energy fleet. Meridian Energy and Genesis Energy now own and operate their respective power stations across the Mackenzie and Waitaki. Access to the canals for fishing has been made possible by them and all users should ensure they respect the rules and fishing etiquette.



A rainbow trout caught from the Ōhau A Canal

Set in a spectacular high-country landscape with easy access and productive fishing, the canals are one of the most popular freshwater sports fisheries in New Zealand. Brown trout, rainbow trout and Chinook salmon fishing is on offer year-round. Canal flows are changeable and are based on the generation demands of their associated powers stations.

The canals provide anglers with the chance to catch a fish of a lifetime. Trout more than 4.5kg are commonly caught, trout between 10-13kg get caught occasionally and in recent years several have tipped the scales at over 15kg! Salmon are usually 1-4kg, but they do get much bigger.

Prior to the establishment of the salmon farms within the canals, angling effort at the canals was minimal and the resident trout were abundant and usually in poor condition. The salmon farms provide a unique fishery dynamic whereby the trout and salmon benefit greatly from the additional food sources they provide. For this reason, the size and condition of the canal fish is unmatched by any other freshwater sports fishery in New Zealand.

Although some fish spawn in the canals the contribution they make to the population is considered insignificant. Most trout present in the canals migrate into the canals from the headwater lakes through the control gates and power stations. Spawning also occurs in the Upper Ōhau River which provides fish stocks to the Ōhau B and C canals via Lake Ruataniwha. The presence of Chinook salmon in the canals is solely attributed to the salmon farms. On occasions sockeye salmon make their way downstream into the canals from Lake Ōhau or Lake Pūkaki.

ANGLER INFORMATION

The Mackenzie Basin is a hotspot for tourists and local holiday makers and accordingly most angling activity occurs at the canals over the summer months and on public holidays. Wintertime fishing has gained in popularity over recent years with anglers targeting spawning run trout.

Trout and salmon are found throughout the canals, although their numbers and size can be higher in certain locations. This includes near the salmon farms, and at the top and bottom of each canal by the control gates and power station intakes. The salmon farms attract anglers year-round, but the top ends of the canals are more favoured from late autumn through winter and into spring while spawning trout migrate upstream and congregate near the impassable structures.

The water clarity in the canals varies from crystal clear to a silty glacial blue-green or grey. Sight fishing is possible during the clear times. In clear water, fishing with as light



SH8 crosses the Ōhau B Canal, salmon farms can be seen on the canal and Lake Ruataniwha is in the background

The Hydro Canals



The Ōhau A Power Station



Central South Island Region

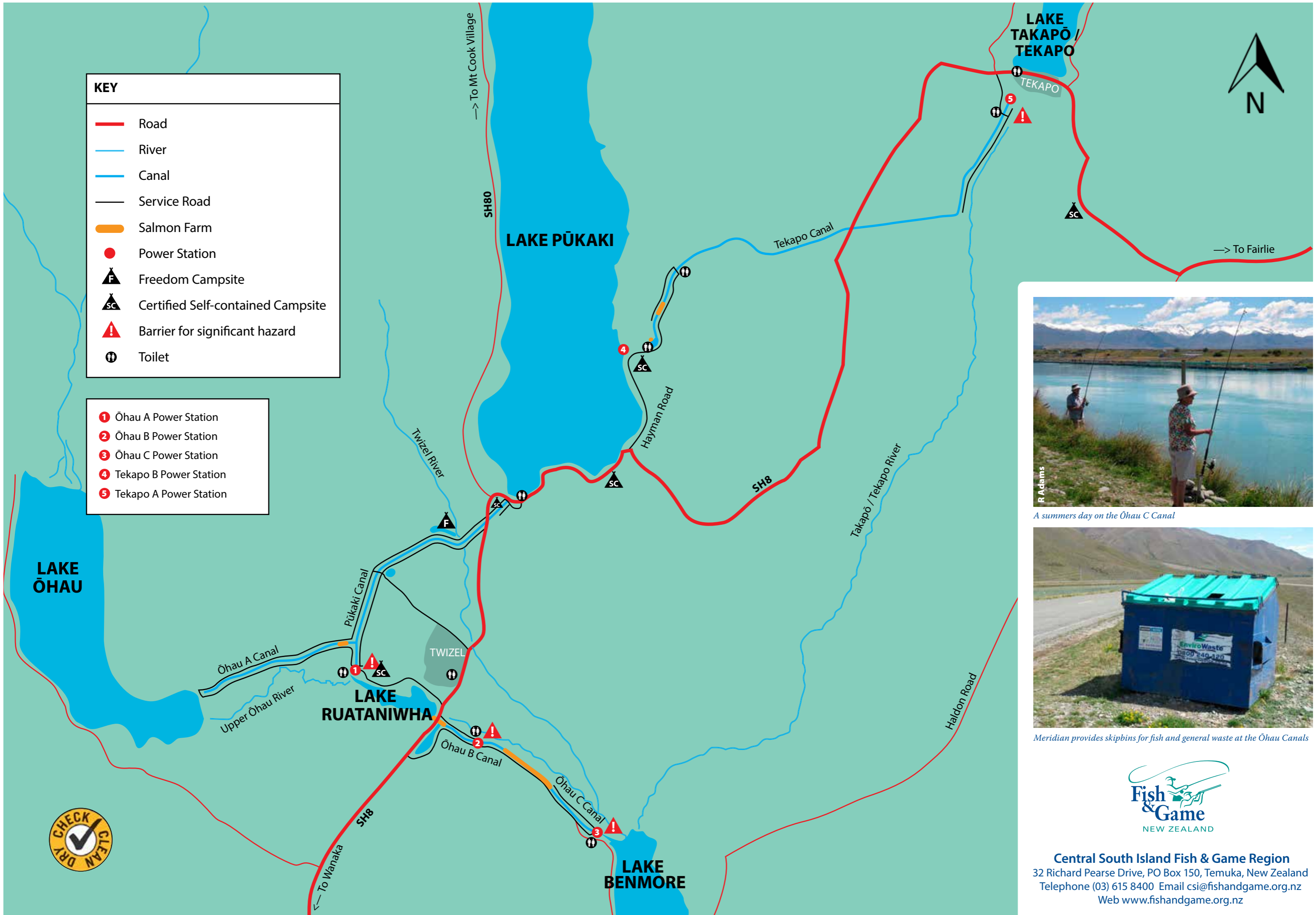
line as possible will be an advantage as will fishing during low light times like dawn, dusk, or night. When the water clarity is heavily affected by glacial silt, bait fishing is the most reliable method.

Bait fishing is the most popular method at the canals. Anglers that fish statically will often use a heavy sinker and a float that hovers their bait above the weed beds. The other popular way to fish bait is to walk along the canal bank at the same speed as the water flow and bounce and drift the bait and a small weight along the canal bottom. Popular baits include crustaceans like shrimp or prawn, insects like huhu grubs and fish that are fully intact. Scented soft baits are classified as bait. Soft baits are best fished on a jig head just heavy enough to make a suitable cast and reach the canal bottom and with a very slow retrieve.

Spin anglers should take a variety of traditional and modern lures and change often if they are not inducing a bite. Try fishing at different depths although near the bottom is a usually the best option. Egg drifting is a popular form of spin fishing using a light sinker and an artificial egg fly or lure to bounce along the canal bottom in the current. The angler must walk along the canal bank at the speed of the current. The key to getting a natural drift is matching the sinker weight to the flow level.

Fly fishing along the canal edges can be productive. Trout can be spotted on station or cruising around the shallow canal-edge weed beds. Night fishing with a luminescent doll fly or large Woolly bugger can be worthwhile as large brown trout patrol the edges under the cover of darkness.

Trout and salmon from the canals are highly regarded for their eating qualities. Naturally, taking home a fish is a goal for many canal anglers. However, there is a growing trend for canal anglers to practise catch and release. The way a fish is handled before release is critical to its wellbeing and survival. Be sure to wet your hands and net before touching the fish, keep the fish in the water while removing the hook, never touch the gills, photograph the fish in or over the water – a maximum time of 5 seconds out of the water at any one time, and finally, revive the fish facing upstream long enough for it to regain its swimming strength.



R Adams
 A summers day on the Ōhau C Canal



Meridian provides skipbins for fish and general waste at the Ōhau Canals



Central South Island Fish & Game Region
 32 Richard Pearse Drive, PO Box 150, Temuka, New Zealand
 Telephone (03) 615 8400 Email csi@fishandgame.org.nz
 Web www.fishandgame.org.nz