

Wairarapa Moana Angling Guide

How to Get There - Tips & Tactics



Photo: Hamish Carmachan



Wellington Region

Introduction:

While Lake Wairarapa is nationally regarded for its waterfowling, until recently it has barely been on the angling radar. The lake, at first glance, can appear to be quite daunting. It is a very large, exposed body of water, windswept with turgid brown water, attributes that make it great for hunting ducks but bad for trout fishing...

Time to think again.

Lake Wairarapa is very shallow – around 3m at its deepest point. Add some wave chop from wind whipping up the surface and the silty bottom gets stirred up creating that brown water most people incorrectly associate with the lake.

Get it on a good day though and the lake is incredibly scenic, it is an ecologically diverse environment and, as we are discovering, an excellent still-water trout and perch fishery. In a region that is rich in quality rivers and streams but isn't endowed with lake fisheries, this is a real bonus.

After a couple of days of calm weather, the sediment drops out and the water becomes clear again. Trout can be stalked in the shallows as they patrol for prey, and schools of perch can be sighted cruising in and out of structure waiting to pounce on a lure or passing baitfish.

We are excited about the angling potential of the area, including Lake Onoke (Ferry), and hope the guide we have produced here will help you explore the fishery and come to appreciate it as we do.

Cautionary Note:

- *Wairarapa Moana is very exposed – wind and wave action can come up quickly. As such it is not recommended for boating or personal watercraft.*
- *Even though the lake is shallow, there are holes that can present a danger when wading. Always take a wading staff and wear a buoyancy device.*
- *While the main lake is open year-round, some of the smaller feeder streams close for spawning. Please check you regs.*

1

📍 Lake Domain

Getting There -

Lake Domain is located at the northern end of the lake and is administered by South Wairarapa District Council as a recreational reserve. Just out of Featherston, heading east on SH53 to Martinborough, turn right onto Murphys Line. Drive all the way to the 'T' junction and turn right again onto Lake Domain Rd; turn left at the 'T' onto Soldiers Settlement Rd and you will arrive at Lake Domain. A gravel track to the right takes you to the public campsite; to the left the track runs for several hundred metres along the lake edge to a walking bridge over a small spring stream.

Tips and Tactics -

Perch can be found in schools anywhere along the lake edge. They tend to move around so you need to actively look for them, or cast and then move after each retrieve to cover water until you locate them. Once you have found a school, stay put because you can expect to catch numerous fish. Often when you are playing a perch, others will follow it right into your feet.

The mouth of the stream that runs beneath the walking bridge is a good spot for perch and trout. The lake level fluctuates quite a lot and the stream fishes better when the lake is high, and there is more of a drop off at the delta. This would likely be a good spot for night fishing as trout would feel safer coming in closer under the cover of darkness.

The Tauherenikau River delta can be reached by following the shoreline south-east from the walking bridge end of Lake Domain. It is a short 10-minute walk and it can be worthwhile casting along the lake edge as you go. There are many branches of the river at the delta, including numerous backwaters and oxbows. Carefully and quietly stalk your way around this area – trout can often be found cruising in the shallows.

West of Lake Domain an esplanade reserve extends all the way to the Otairua Stream. When the main lake is still a little stirred up, the clean water flowing from the stream creates a clear

plume out into the lake that trout and perch congregate in. Fish can sometimes also be found in the lower reaches of the stream but please respect private property.

2

📍 Bartons Lagoon

Getting There -

Follow the same driving directions for Lake Domain, heading to the walking bridge. Cross the bridge and after a short walk take the left branch of the track and you will soon notice a waterbody surrounded by willows and raupo to the north (on your left) – this is Bartons. From the macrocarpa trees you should notice a fence line along the south-eastern edge; follow this around to the eastern shoreline where the vegetation starts to thin, providing casting from the shore or place to launch a kayak or float tube.

Tips and Tactics -

Shoreline fishing is restricted to the eastern edge of the wetland. However, a stream entering here does attract fish in close, and trout are sometimes seen patrolling along this edge. It is also a good spot for bait fishing using the 'heave and leave' technique i.e. casting out and waiting for a bite.

The wetland to the east of Bartons is owned by Fish & Game and has better shoreline access, though not a lot is yet known about the sport fish population at time of writing. It is likely to hold perch.

Because Bartons is relatively sheltered, it is a great place to use a personal watercraft (wearing a lifejacket) and quietly cruise around the edge casting into likely looking structure or drop-offs. The outlet at the western end is a hotspot, as is the inlet.

Trout are generally in very good condition so be prepared for strong fights and certainly take a landing net as there are few places where you can land a fish.

3

📍 Oporua Spillway

Getting There -

Driving on SH53 from Featherston to Martinborough, turn right onto Kahutara Rd shortly after crossing the Tauherenikau River. Follow this through Kahutara Settlement and then proceed for

around another 4km until you cross the Oporua Spillway. Shortly after you cross the spillway, turn onto Parera Rd on your right.

Follow this until you see the Wairarapa Moana wetlands sign and parking area for the Matthews and Boggy Pond loop track. Across the road, on the northern side, there is a gate that leads along the stopbank.

You can drive to the end of the stopbank and park. From here it is a short walk out to the head of the Oporua Spillway and the lake shore.

Tips and Tactics –

When the lake has been calm for a few days the edge along the spillway and out to the main body of the lake itself becomes clear. It is very shallow here for some distance out to the lake (care is still needed when wading) and from spring to early summer trout can often be seen chasing whitebait that are in the shallows, or you will see an eruption of bait from the water and the bow-wave of a large predator behind. Get it on the right day and the action is super exciting! You need a very still day for this type of ‘flats fishing’, otherwise go when there is a light southerly so you can fish the lee shore on the south side of the spillway.

There is good fishing for trout and perch all down the spillway but a watercraft is required and only those who have experience with the Lake Wairarapa weather conditions should attempt this as the lake can cut up very rough, very quickly, even in sheltered arms like the spillway. Casting into gaps in the raupo and under the overhanging vegetation, or harling using a small streamer fly that imitates a whitebait, bully or juvenile perch will yield fish. Bait fishing in the deeper channels will also produce fish.

4

📍 Barrage Gates

Getting There –

From SH2 in Featherston take Western Lake Rd, drive all the way along, crossing Wairongomai River near the southern end of the lake, and then after another 5km or so take a left onto East-West Access Rd. After 3.5km you will come to the Barrage

Gates. There is ample parking either side of the bridge. The entire island is all open to public. Upstream of the bridge there is public access along both banks; downstream public access is along the true left south to the confluence with the Ruamahanga River.

Tips and Tactics -

The best fishing at the Barrage Gates is when they are open and water is able to flow out of Lake Wairapapa. Trout, perch and kahawai will congregate around the gates and the island, picking off bait fish from the outflow. Expect to see a few other anglers around targeting kahawai. Some anglers will bring a boat around from the nearby boat club on the banks of the Ruamahanga River and anchor in the deeper water just downstream of the gates.

Because the Barrage Gates platform is high above the river, landing a fish can be awkward, particularly when there are other lines out, and requires scrambling down the eastern side of the bridge to the water's edge. Given the height of the bridge, the deep water and strong current, this is not a safe place to take children but it can be a very productive area with the added bonus of a kahawai for the smoker.

The Barrage Gates can produce fish when they are closed, but the action is not quite as hot, though there are advantages in having fewer anglers around. When closed the fish won't congregate as much so it pays to move around, fishing your way along the island and the shore down to the confluence and back. It is much safer for kids when the gates are closed but please ensure they wear lifejackets and keep an eye on them at all times. Downstream of the gates, on either bank, throw out a bait (live or dead) with a good chance of getting the young ones into a fish or two.

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📍 Pounui Lagoon

Getting There -

From Featherston turn onto Western Lake Rd. Follow almost to the end, continuing past East-West Access Rd, crossing the Pounui Stream. About 0.6km after the tiny settlement of Kiriwai you will see a gate on the left-hand side. This leads onto a stop-

bank that runs between Lake Onoke (on your right) and Pounui (left). About 400m along this stopbank another track turns off to the left and runs out to the main waterbody of Pounui Lagoon, then further around the eastern and northern edge. The water can be accessed at points along this track and small personal watercraft can be launched at select sites. Take care when wading and launching as there are deep holes.

Tips and Tactics –

Pounui is a food-rich environment for sport fish so it holds trout and perch year-round. The best fishing, however, is when the whitebait are running, as these small baitfish move into Pounui in great schools. At the right time, showers of bait erupt from the water as they are pursued by trout, perch and kahawai, particularly near the inlet along the stop-bank at the southern end.

Throwing light lures or soft baits on spinning gear can be effective and provide fun sport. Fly anglers should use whitebait and herring imitations such as silicone smelt or Green Rabbit patterns.

On still days, with no disturbance on the surface, fish can be seen patrolling around the lake edge. Because there is quite a mass of raupo around the circumference, finding a spot to cast is not always easy for shore-based anglers. Wading is okay in some places but always use a staff to test for depth and a solid bottom, as well as a buoyancy device, and quietly work your way around keeping an eye out for fish cruising past. Alternatively, a kayak or float tube is a great advantage and allows the angler to cover much more water.

Because the lake is very shallow, it can get warm in summer and trout become lethargic. Subsequently, another good time to target Pounui is towards the end of the season when trout will move in from Lake Onoke in numbers to spawn. Fish have been known to congregate around the mouth of Pounui Stream, though care needs to be taken if wading around to the mouth. Similarly, when the water gets warm trout will move into the cool plume coming from the stream.

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📍 Turanganui Delta

Getting There -

A watercraft is required for access. Following the direction to the gate at the start of the stopbank for point 5, Pounui Lagoon, instead of turning left along the stop-bank continue all the way to the end. Directly across the Ruamahanga River to the east is the Turanganui River mouth. A kayak, dinghy or power boat is required to cross the Ruamahanga inlet into Lake Onoke to reach the Turanganui mouth alternatively, follow the signpost to Lake Ferry from SH53 (around 40 minutes' drive from Featherston).

As you come through the settlement a road branches off to the right just before the public playground. Turn down this road and follow to the end where you can get access to launch a small boat. (Great care must be taken boating on this stretch of water as it is very exposed and prone to strong winds and chop coming up without warning, as well as strong current).

Tips and Tactics -

This is a spot for the annual whitebait run as the river and delta regularly dry up over summer. There are many branches to the delta and fish can be found cruising in and out of these searching for schools of bait. A good place for a kahawai with a chance of picking up a great-eating sea-run trout. Although generally shallow, care should be taken when wading as there are holes. Also, best targeted after a settled spell so the sediment has dropped out and you can sight fish to cruising predators.

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📍 Lake Onoke Inlet

Getting There -

There are two ways to access the Lake Onoke Inlet, these are detailed for point 6, Turanganui Delta.

Tips and Tactics -

There is reasonable shoreline fishing along both sides of the inlet, though best covered using spinning gear with either traditional lures or soft baits. The key to success here is covering lots of

water so move after each retrieve.

The best way to fish this area of water is via trolling. It pays to target it after several days of calm weather so sediment has settled out and you can keep an eye out for snags. (Caution: there are some big logs that come down the main river and settle in the delta here, creating a hazard for watercraft as well as snagging lures.)

The inlet fishes best when the mouth of Lake Onoke to the sea is open, and the water is moving downstream, otherwise the water backflows up the valley and confuses fish movement and migration. The mouth being open also lets the whitebait in when they are running. Expect to get hard fighting kahawai here and sea-run trout.

Take extreme care when boating.

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📍 Lake Onoke West Shore

Getting There -

From Featherston, take Western Lake Rd almost to its end, continuing past East-West Access, crossing the Pounui Stream and past the access to Pounui Lagoon, until you come to an intersection. The right branch continues on Western Lake Access Rd, the left branch onto Beach Rd – take Beach Rd. After 400m Beach Rd runs in a southerly direction paralleling the western side of Lake Onoke.

Tips and Tactics -

This part of the lake is almost exclusively fished when the whitebait are running, as the bait work their way from the mouth of Onoke westward along the shoreline. Kahawai and the occasional sea-run trout will chase the schools of bait.

The headland to the west of Beach Rd creates a reasonable shelter during a nor-westerly, meaning you have a clean and clear lee shore to fish right alongside the road. Often it remains clear enough to see the shadows of marauding predatory fish cruising, looking for whitebait. Often the whitebait run in schools

through the narrow stream into the wetland/lagoon to the west of the carpark at the very end of Beach Rd. Kahawai will come right into the shallows in pursuit. On very still days, kahawai, mullet and the occasional sea-run trout can be seen patrolling around the lagoon on the shore of Ocean Beach.

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📍 Lake Onoke Outlet

Getting There -

Follow the signpost to Lake Ferry from SH53 (around 40 minutes from Featherston). Drive to the very end of the formed road where you'll see the Lake Ferry Pub, and continue along the gravel track for another 200m. Park and walk a short distance to the mouth. Care must be taken as the sandy banks along the outlet are unstable and the current is very swift when the mouth is open and the outlet flowing.

Tips and Tactics -

After a big southerly, the mouth will close from the waves pushing sand up the beach. It can remain closed for some time so it pays to check with Greater Wellington Regional Council which monitors the closure and periodically manually opens it. Following heavy rain, the mouth often opens itself.

Fishing here is only worthwhile when the mouth is open. Kahawai and, to a lesser extent sea-run trout, can be caught year-round but the hottest action is when the whitebait are running in spring and early summer.

Most fishing is done in and around the outlet channel, however the slacker water on the lake side shoulder of the outlet is well worth probing with a spinner or, on a calm day, a whitebait/smelt fly.

The Ruamahunga River

The Ruamahunga River, an integral part of the Lake Wairarapa and Lake Onoke catchment, also offers excellent angling, including in the lower reaches neighbouring Wairarapa Moana. To find out more about these angling opportunities, [click here](#).

Wairarapa Moana



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