

knowles-murray-2018-10-22.mp4

Murray Knowles [00:00:10] Fishing it myself, was, started when I was probably about seven or eight.

James Thull [00:00:16] About what year would that have been?

Murray Knowles [00:00:17] Would be around about '46, '48. Somewhere around about then. '46 year. '45, '46. Following around with my father, and some of his friends, when they went out fishing. It was a few years before I managed to catch a fish. In those days, it was all fly fishing, it was, there was no, no threadline fishing, as we know it today. If you were lucky enough to get up to high country lakes you, the Navalall and Bakehouse was the reel in those days, which you'd spent half the day untangling.

James Thull [00:01:03] And this would have been for Rainbows and Browns?

Murray Knowles [00:01:05] Rainbows and Browns, but the fishing around Christchurch in those days, was all Brown Trout. If you were lucky enough to get into the high country, then you were on Rainbow or salmon.

Murray Knowles [00:01:23] Yes, we do have salmon. It is quite a different thing though. Our salmon start coming in, oh, can start coming into the rivers, about now. So, early December. November, December. Not few, just the odd ones. And they'll, they'll run right up until through the winter. But the salmon, the wild salmon, that go to sea, from, from our High Country rivers. They reckon it's less than zero point zero one, return. But the salmon that come from the salmon farms, they reckon it's a probably near a 10% return, which makes the salmon fishing lot a better.

Murray Knowles [00:02:23] Well, certainly, not better. Certainly, not better. On the East Coast, all our good fishing rivers virtually dried up. It's only the snow fed rivers, three or four of, which run any, any volume of water at all. The other rivers, which were sort of spring fed rivers from the lower holes, they go underground on the dry spells, and now the, there's so much irrigation in Canterbury and Otago, that those rivers have more or less ceased to exist, except at flood times.

Murray Knowles [00:03:14] We're lucky here in the south, though. We've got several big rivers that go right down, which always have plenty of water in them. The Waiwera the Makarora and the (unintelligible). They are not affected greatly by irrigation. And, of course, there is the Hawea here, which is dependent on the takeoff for the power station at Menapaurie. At the moment, it's running quite fast. The power station. We're doing alright. But, in a dry period, that river will drop to a pretty low level.

Murray Knowles [00:04:01] It was only, catch and release, more or less came in the High Country rivers, where just about every fish was regarded in those days, as a trophy, and it wasn't knocked on the head. It was returned. But it took a long time, before that was adapted by New Zealand fishermen. If you caught a fish in, back in the old days, it was a meal.

James Thull [00:04:36] Well, trout is good eating.

Murray Knowles [00:04:41] Yeah. What's happened over the years, though, is fish, most our rivers used to have a limit of 10 fish. Per day. The catch of the day. But that's dropped

to six now, and most cases, dropped to two fish. In some areas at all, it was only one fish. I can't think offhand of any rivers where you're not allowed to take any fish. Possibly there are but I can't think of it.

Murray Knowles [00:05:18] Well, most, most, or a lot of the early guiding, was, down here, was planes that come into Menapaurie. There would be a plane that would be at about eleven o'clock. There'd be another plane at two o'clock. And those people were, they came here so they could go to Milford Sound. Now. And back in those days, it was a gravel road. And pretty slow, and people didn't... Or could go from (unintelligible) to Milford and back easily. But coming from Queenstown, it was too far to go from Queenstown to Milford and back, and when the road was tile sealed, or before the road was tile sealed, there would be a lot of people coming, and looking for something to do. So having, having a boat on the lake, ready to go out for two or three hours fishing on the lake, and that were a lot of the guiding I did. But the people that wanted to go out and fly fish, well they were usually here for a few days. The Americans coming down here, even in those early years, knew all about what the fishing was available down here, and a lot of them had really read up about it. And they, they all wanted to go to rivers like the Clinton, on the Milford Track, or the Woseley, or the Glades, or some of those. But you needed a special day. It had to be a good day, before you go there, and then you had the decision of how you are going to get there, whether you went in by helicopter, helicopter, float plane or a jet boat. Invariably, the wind would cap up in the afternoon, and you knew you'd have a couple of hours rough trip in a jet boat coming home. Well, it was a lot cheaper than the float plane. But a lot of people were quite happy to pay for a float plane. Helicopters have never really been allowed in the valleys. They could take you to the shore, and you had to walk from there, but there were times there where you made an arrangement where helicopters weren't allowed to take you in fishing. They weren't very strict about coming in to pick you up at the end of the day, which happened quite a bit.

James Thull [00:08:25] That could get worrisome, I guess, yeah.

Murray Knowles [00:08:26] I'm sorry?

James Thull [00:08:27] That could get worrisome, I guess.

Murray Knowles [00:08:29] Oh, yeah, yeah. But there were pilots that would fly you in, because you had to fly at a time when you were pretty sure there was no one around, cause they get into a fair bit of trouble with the potted.

Murray Knowles [00:08:57] Well, having grown up with it, I always enjoy it. Now, I'm not guiding actively, I hope to do a lot more fishing this season. And, but where I'd walk for probably miles, like fishing the Greenstone, for instance. I mostly did with clients, and we flew in by the helicopter. But if I left here at four o'clock in the morning, and I drove up to the key summit, on the start of the route and trek, a three-hour walk would take me down to the good fishing and the Greenstone and I'd have, I'd walk into the into the base, hearts of Lake McKellar, have a spell there and have some breakfast, more breakfast. And then walk for an hour and a half, two hours down the Greenstone, get down there about eleven o'clock. And fish way back up to about five o'clock. And then I'd have, at the end of the day, I'd have an hour's walk back to the hut, pick up the rest of my gear, and a three hour walk, a three hour walk back to the road, an hour or so's drive home from there, get home about ten o'clock. The action, the walk in and out, it was over 40K. And, I stopped doing that a few years ago.

Murray Knowles [00:10:25] It's hard to say why you fish. It's, the sort of the fishing I do, it was always hunting. You got to find your fish first, you see which way he's going, and how you're going to catch him. And we're, Lake Mabora, which was about 60Ks from here, like about 10Ks long, about a K wide, at it's widest, I suppose, has beaches pretty much all the way around it. And the fish will cruise along the shore, and on a good day, where you've got a clear sky, and a bit of wind, it's a great day out.

James Thull [00:11:15] For you, is it just about, as much about being out there in nature, as anything else?

Murray Knowles [00:11:19] Exactly. Well, we're used to mostly go to Mabora just with clients, just for a day's fishing. Now, we take the caravan up there, and sit and relax, and go out on the good times, and sit and do nothing with it. Read a book.

James Thull [00:11:38] That's wonderful.

Murray Knowles [00:11:39] That's what I'll be doing this summer. I hope. There's two lakes on Mabora, there's a north lake and a south lake. In the south lake, you're not allowed a motor, of any sort, on your boat. So, there it's just the oars and, and paddle around. So. It was too rough, it was too rough to go up to the main lake. We'll just go down the sails like, leave the motor at the camp.

Murray Knowles [00:12:15] Our biggest problem in New Zealand, or not New Zealand, in the South Island. I don't think they have it in the North Island is Ditty Mo.

James Thull [00:12:26] What is Ditty Mo?

Murray Knowles [00:12:27] Ditty Mo is a virus, or something. That they reckon came from America, and they blame fishermen for bringing it in, and, felt sole boots, which were a popular thing, and infected flies. But in actual fact, how Ditty Mo got here, was without any doubt in my mind, was on kayaks. Some years ago, I met three young guys on the river, on the Marrarow River, which runs out of the Mabora Lakes, and they have three little kayaks. And they came to an old van, and they were throwing their stuff out all wet, sand shoes and T-shirts and things like that, they'd come all the way from America with their, their kayaks wrapped up in a cover, and they arrived like that. And. Anyway, I was having a talk to them about some of the hazards as they went down the river. Oh, yes. They knew all about that. They'd been here last year, and they were just filling in a few days before they were going to competitions up at Murchison, on the Bull River. And. Anyway, didn't think any more about that, until we were fishing down the Marrarow, few days later, and fishing with a weighted nymph, picked up the slime, round the hook at the bottom. So we bowled. And this slime, turned out, was identified as this ditty-mo. And ditty-mo was identified on the Marrarow River. The next place it was identified, was on the Bull River, at Murchison. Where they were having the kayaking comp. And the next place was the Howawee River: more kayaks. So, no, in my mind, there's been no doubt about it. It's come in on kayaks. Now this ditty-mo, if you reach in the water and you pick it up and you pull apart, it just feels like the same texture as wet cotton wool. Now, on our rivers down here like the Hawea, it grows in great big beds. And walking on it, under the water, is like walking on a mattress, sort of springy and it covers all the, all the nymph life, and the gravel underneath. And then it builds up over the summer months, and then it starts breaking away, and it looks like big chunks of wool, floating down the river, and it gets round your line, the fish. It's just really, really bad. That, there will be areas where there's none, and it's mostly in rivers of high quality water. Rivers like, when you get way down

stream, bit of farm pollution, and things like that. The ditty-mo disappears, doesn't survive in dirty water. It's only in the freshest of water. Now, they reckon it would only be in rivers where there's a constant current, but I've found it in Lake (unintelligible). Where the Von River, which gets very bad with ditty-mo, it's only a little river. And as the prevailing winds, they're blowing down, it's right along the shoreline, downstream, downwind of the, downwind of the mouth of the Von River. And it's growing on, well it was the last time I was there, anyway. Growing all on the biggest stones down there. It's not bad in rivers which has frequent floods, and where the shingle bottom and the shingle bits, churned up. It seems to shake the stuff loose, or it doesn't take root in there. But it's on solid bits of the river, where the stones don't get shifted a lot. But that would be one of the worst factors of fishing.

James Thull [00:17:41] Yeah.

Murray Knowles [00:17:41] Doesn't affect a fly fisherman, so much, as a spin fisherman. Spin fisherman, casting hardware, and stuff like that, touches the bottom and picks up a lot, you pull it up every time.

James Thull [00:17:58] Yeah.

Murray Knowles [00:17:58] When it's on the, when they drop the river levels, and it's out on the beach, it dries up to virtually nothing. Like old parchment, or something like that. When you, when, when the river drops right down, towards the end of summer, you'll see it hanging on all the logs and sticks in the river, and it's just wrapped around like a bit of dry stuff, but when it's in the river, it's like a great big wad of wet cotton wool. Yeah.

James Thull [00:18:36] Wow.

Murray Knowles [00:18:39] That's the worst factor, but. You were saying about, things that affect the fishing. There's more and more boats coming to Taieri, now. More people with boats. There's more fishing competitions, and every fishing competition, there's a hang of a lot of fish taken out of the lake. And we're used about, to walk up the shoreline, and maybe in an hour, maybe see 8 or 10 fish. If you see a couple of fish near you, you're doing all right. And back in, back in the '70s, we'd go out on a Sunday trolling, and we used to average about a fish a mile, on the log on the boat. And you might, you might catch four or five fish in a particular area, and then nothing either side of it, but used to average out about a fish a mile. We'd travel eight or, eight or ten miles, for a full day out, and maybe catch 8 or 10 fish. But today if you go out, and you catch two or three fish, you've had a good day. But I know those friends here the other night, there were four or five of them fishing in the boat, and they were out all day, and they caught four or five fish. I think if you talk to the average person who's been out for this fishing competition, they'll probably all of caught some fish, but not the numbers we caught back in the '70s.

Murray Knowles [00:20:41] Well, I think it is. I was going through the guides association pages there. And there was about, I think 23 guides, guiding in the Nelson area. And they're all starting, showing big fish they catch. And there's about, I think there's about, eleven or twelve, guiding in this area. No, I think, I think the guiding is still quite healthy, as far as numbers of people coming over here.

Murray Knowles [00:21:29] Enjoy it. [laughs].

James Thull [00:21:32] It's probably best advice you can get.

Murray Knowles [00:21:33] Just enjoy it, yeah. Because we always reckoned, a days fishing was better than a day at work, and if you catch a fish, that's a bonus. Now, my father, he was a keen fisherman but not a great fisherman. And he would come to Taieri, stay with me or my brother. And if he caught two or three fish, in maybe ten days, down here roughly, he reckoned it was a great holiday. He got, you know, two or three fish, and this and that and the other. But so many people, Australians in particular, "How many fish a day will I catch?" "Well, I don't know." When I was fishing, on holiday, before I was guiding, you know, if I caught a fish every day or so, because you were going to eat it anyway. That's all you're worried about. Some places we could go to, like the Hunter, where you would catch your, your limit bag every day, and we used to carefully dry them, and, and bring them back, and smoke them and one thing or another. But the, uh, the.... Numbers. You, you didn't worry about it. You know, you're out for a day's fishing, if you caught a fish, oh, good. And in those days, we used to catch quite a few, you know, but the, I don't know. Fishing was, you made object of a good holiday. But you didn't have to catch a lot of fish. And all the photos in the paper, the other day. Of a fishing contest, down on, I think it was Wyndham, down country, you see. And they had all these fish hanging up there, ungutted. Well, if you don't gut a fish, pretty quickly, after your catch it, it's going to turn bad. And have it hanging up in the sun it's going to be. So you can just about be sure, most those fish will finish up in the rubbish, you know. Buried in the garden or something.