Tips for trout fishing rivers in flooded conditions

When rivers flood the trout are in danger of being battered on sunken logs, stones etc, so they'll stay out of the main current wherever possible and quickly adapt to the changing environment. They will seek out backwaters and small pockets of slack water behind obstructions where they can ambush food. They will try to avoid the high sediment flows (which irritate gills) where possible, but shelter is the top priority.

If you have dependable fishing spots in normal flows, the fish will probably still be there, just in different locations. It's up to you to prospect and find these fish.

When the banks overflow onto grassland and low lying areas the first 3 days or so are prime fishing as the trout seek out fresh worms and grubs- in many cases the trout are "tailing" or showing tail and fins in the shallows.

They will also be found where the dirty water meets a cleaner flow, this could be at tidal areas, upper sections of rivers, or maybe even at the bottom of the water column in the current.

Avoid entering the water if possible, never enter the main current and use a wading stick to feel your way. The cloudy water means the fish will feel quite safe and enter shallower than normal water, so fish the top layer of your water first. Look for shallow runs and foamy backwaters, and try large dark flies, black, copper or even flashy lures in 10 or 12g weights.

As the trout will be quite close to the edge, be very cautious in your approach, as even though they can't see you, they will be very attuned to vibration.

Typical lies-
1) Behind greenery partially or totally submerged-this filters the sediment and can provide food & shelter all in one.
2) Behind obstructions close to the edge such as large rocks, tree trunks, natural ground formations- Creates a back eddy where food will sink, often the fish will be facing apparently downstream, but they are facing into the eddy current.
3) Small pockets of shallow slack water close to the edge- Usually with overhead cover, the lack of current means the sediment clears, and the fish has no current to fight.

Fly & Lure Suggestions; Big foam or terrestrial flies on floating fly line or spinning with bubble float, also the mouse flies. Or use a large weighted dark woolly bugger or rabbit and allow to drift through the lie, then twitch back. Worm imitations are available, also small tokoroa chickens in dark colours are useful.

Scented softbaits are well worth trying, use the bigger Storm softbaits with paddle tails, or Gulp Minnows in a smelt colour or watermelon (or 5" jerk shad). Don't be afraid to use quite large sizes in these conditions-(eg. 6" grub in colour "new penny"). The scent is a big advantage in this scenario, you can also hook a Mepps type lure to the head of the gulp bait and fish the whole combination. This gives you sight, scent and vibration all in one.

Tackle & playing technique- Use plenty of side- strain on a hooked fish to keep it out of the main current, and go up in nylon breaking strain to help this.

Live bait- Worms are top bait at this time, suspend from a bubble float with split-shot and drift through backwaters, or have weighted on the bottom in quieter pools and eddies.

A popular method on the Selwyn river in Christchurch is to lip-hook bullies or baitfish (catch these in a baitcatcher) and cast upstream on floating line or with a float with spinning gear, no weight used. It drifts naturally down with the current to be retrieved after coming into the bank.

Don't spend too long in one spot, cover the area reasonably quickly with a few casts. Work your lure deeper and slower than usual if in a good depth.

Trolling- In high water flows, trolling downstream is the only way to get your lure or fly down to the fish. You may need a slightly heavier ball sinker than the normal 1oz weight used. Trolling the edges of the channels close to the bank edge will probably be a good bet, a depth finder will be even more useful than normal. If you are fishing where a tributary stream enters, try the colour line separating the two downstream.

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