VFFA NEWSLETTER

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www.vffa.org.au

April General Meeting:

Fly Tying with the Experts

Thursday, April 19, 8:00 pm
at the Kelvin Club

The Meeting will be preceded by Dinner at the Kelvin Club, commencing at 6:00 pm.

All members are invited, but PLEASE make a Dinner booking prior to the close of business on Tuesday, April 17, by –
Phone: 9654 5711 or
Email – bookings@kelvinclub.com

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April Meeting: Fly Tying With The Experts

Ted Leeson, in *The Habit of Rivers,* says:

"Fly-fishing begins with the fly, a fact often obscured in the seductive technomadness of modern tackle, where each new rod or line or gadget is unveiled to messianic trumpets, the redeemer of your miserable angling equipage. But the fly is always prior. In the whole lumbering, clanking warehouse of an onstream angler, the fly is the starting point, the single piece of gear we carry from which the entire sport can be reconstructed. If the principal problem is to catch a trout, the solution begins in selecting or tying a fly with the greatest likelihood of appealing to any individual fish.

But the fly is an end as well as a beginning. It forms the terminus of all our preparations, study, practice, and observation. Once it is freely drifting on the current, the matter is pretty much out of our hands. We've done all we can to make the fly and its behavior convincing, and now consolidate desire, anticipation, and hope into this bit of floating fluff. The rest is up to the trout."

The man has a point. If the bit of fur and feather and tinsel tied on the end of our fly line doesn't grab the attention of Mr Speckles, then all we're getting is exercise and casting practice. The fly on the end of our tippet simply must pass scrutiny. Whether we tie our own or buy them at the shop, it's always useful to know more about flies and the insects they represent. So the April meeting will be well worth attending. Hubert Reichelt, Andrew Mossman and Peter Campbell will be there again, demonstrating their considerable skills and answering all your questions on the design of flies and the best techniques for putting them together.

Hubert, Andrew and Peter are highly skilled at the craft, and to watch them gather a few simple materials and convert them into something that looks like it could fly or swim or hop is captivating entertainment. We look forward to seeing you at the April meeting – Thursday April 19 – at the Kelvin Club.

Advance Notice - May Meeting: "The Annual Auction"

Yes, there will be another VFFA Auction this year, and it is scheduled for the May meeting – Thursday, May 17.

Marty Rogers is organising the event, and he informs us that it will again include about 100 lots, with both books and fly-fishing equipment going under the hammer.

While a number of items have already be made available for the auction Marty is looking for more, so if you have items for sale then please ring him on 9481 1501.

March Meeting Report:

An Evening with Philip & Mark Weigall

There was a very keen sense of anticipation at the Kelvin Club on the evening of the March meeting, as some 48 members gathered to share the night with two of our celebrated and accomplished trout anglers, Mark and Philip Weigall.

Mark commenced proceedings with an account of his recent trip to New Zealand. Each year for the past 15 years he and some friends have travelled to the South Island of New Zealand, then loaded up backpacks and headed out into some of the more isolated wilderness areas to explore the sort of trout fishing that many of us can only dream about. A digital camera was part of the kit, so Mark illustrated his talk with a PowerPoint presentation of some 40 slides showing breathtaking scenery, monster trout and stunningly clear rivers.

The text of Mark's talk:

I thought it might be of interest to members the see what New Zealand backcountry is like and what it has to offer. It is probably the last true wilderness for fly-fishing anywhere in the world. Our passion for fly-fishing takes us to the rivers of New Zealand, the lakes of Australia, particularly Tasmania, and also to the saltwater fly-fishing of the Northern part of Australia, around Darwin and up through Weipa. So I thought I would take you quickly through this report on our New Zealand trip before we get on to the question and answer time.

The 10 pounder

We made this particular trip in January this year, flying to the North end of the South Island, then flying in from Nelson in a helicopter. The helicopter ride takes about 20 to 25 minutes, and we take everything we need with us in our backpacks, including our food for the week and some basic medical supplies. Because once we arrive there is no way out; if anything goes wrong then you basically have to fend for yourself. The ride in dumps us in one of the very remote parts of New Zealand, one of the so-called wilderness areas.

This year we fished the Karamea River and some of its tributaries and catchment streams. The fish we caught were all brown trout, and nearly all were sighted fish and were caught on dry flies. When we were there in January it was pretty spectacular on the cicadas. We did very little nymph fishing. We fished a lot of small streams, many of them no bigger than, say, the Nariel in north-east Victoria, the difference being that in New Zealand there were three or four large fish in every pool for as far as we could go.

Our group included a friend of ours called Nick King, who is a guide over there in New

A keen audience for Philip and Mark

Zealand. But we fish with him there as mates, and not as clients. You don't want to go to all the trouble of travelling there to then find that a river you fished the previous year has been blasted out by floods or has had massive fish kills. So Nick does all the preliminary research for us.

As I said, it was effectively all sight fishing and all dry fly in this very spectacular part of the world. Our biggest fish this year was a fraction over 10 lb, and we seldom find a fish under 4 lb. They all seem to be in the size range from 4 lb to 10 lb. They are faultless fish, too, in magnificent condition as the photos show. The rivers have incredible clarity, and until we started doing some underwater photography we had no idea how obvious our flies were in the water. And we found fish all the way up as far as we could go, even in the tiny little feeder streams that only flowed for say 8 months of the year.

We camped at a different place at the end of each day. When we are fishing up a river we will arrive at an area that we think will be a good camp site at the end of the day's fishing, then drop our stuff, fish a few more runs, and then come back to our camp. Often we simply walked into the beech forest until we found a flat area, and it then became our camping area for the night. We stay there the night, get up in the morning, and do it all again. Three of us sleep in a tiny tent which is fairly tight and cosy, but if we can get away from the sand flies for a while then it is well worth it.

We used to take in only freeze dried food, but we now take in fresh food as well for the first three or four days, though it does mean extra weight in the packs. It is amazing how long fresh meat lasts if it is packed correctly, and the freeze dried stuff does get a bit much. We also dong the odd fish to vary the diet - probably one every couple of days to supplement the diet.

The rivers over there are incredibly fertile, so you find all the aquatic insects there plus a large number of terrestrials too. That's why we go in late January - firstly because there are fewer people around than at the Christmas / New Year period, and secondly because the weather is then very stable. At this time of the year we find that there are cicadas, and other terrestrials as well. It's astounding how fast the fish grow and what condition they are in.

The pristine nature of the rivers is truly amazing. Our underwater photos show the clarity of the water. Previously we didn’t realise how easy it is for them (the fish) to see everything. Normally we’re carrying packs that are 30 to 40 kg, depending on what stage of the trip we’re at. It's not easy going; it's fairly hard yakka in fact, but it’s the only way you can do it if you go

by helicopter. You have to carry your supplies for the duration. Most of the time you walk up the river with your pack on, and when you spot a fish there is no time to muck around. You put your cast out, and sometimes you catch them and sometimes you don't. We carry our backpacks all the time, and when someone spots a fish the other backpacks come off and the boys sit down and watch the proceedings while the cast is made.

There was a question about the flies that we use. We find that at this time of the year cicada patterns and an Adams catch 90% of the fish. On some of the more fussy fish we might try a shaving brush or a midge. But as I said, it is nearly all dry fly. The cicada patterns we use have very high density foam bodies, so they are extremely buoyant. But when the fish are on it seems it doesn't really matter what you use. We use 9' 6-weight rods, and you need a 6-weight so that you can turn them and play them.

We now think that we have fished every river in this system, so next year we have decided to fish a different area. I must say that we have been very lucky with the weather, though as I said earlier, late January has very stable weather. In the last five years we have been most fortunate. If it rains then of course you have to wait until the rivers drop, and then you lose fishing time.

There are photos here of some of the very large eels that are found in these rivers. They are huge and very aggressive. So, between the sand flies and the eels, having a morning swim can be a worry.

There was a question about whether we saw any other people on the rivers. Well, this year we went into some of the more accessible rivers, and I have to say that the helicopters are becoming an increasing problem. The American visitors can to afford to fly in from some of the lodges on a daily basis. It is frustrating if you are fishing up a river and you hear a chopper in the morning, and they don't see you and they land around the next corner. So I think we are just going to have to go further afield to get away from the helicopters.

Nice water and a nice fish

When we are finished we have a pre-assigned pickup time and the helicopter pilot knows roughly where we are likely to be and he will fly up the river until he finds us. We then hop in and fly back to the cars. This time our trip was of five days duration, but we have done trips lasting eight days. It depends on where we are going and how much fishing is available when we get there. Three years ago we fished one particular river and caught over 150 fish, and they averaged 7 lb. So it is extraordinary fishing if you can get into some of these remote areas. One drawback is the sand flies, which are truly shocking. And you don't read anything about them in the tourist brochures! If the weather is overcast they are really bad.

Despite the sand flies, if you ever get the chance to do some backcountry fishing in New Zealand, either in the North Island or the South Island, it is a truly unique experience.

A magnificent New Zealand wilderness river

And now for the questions.

Question: Are there any parts of Victoria that haven't come good in the last couple of years?

Philip replied that on reflection he would say no. The far west of the state has been a little drier than the rest, but it's still going strong on the basis of all the rain that fell over the previous two years. So places like the Grampians haven't got quite the surplus of water that central and eastern Victoria has, but it's still 1,000 times better than what it was five years ago. Perhaps the trick at the moment is to find somewhere that hasn't got too *much* water! But that is a far preferable alternative to what we had during the mid-noughties.

This was followed by a question on the state of the Monaro area in southern NSW.

Philip confessed to not having fished there for a while, but indicated that the area has had a huge amount of rain, and there is a sense that this time we might really see the return of the Monaro. In past years they have had the occasional break of the drought, but the fish have then died in the following hot dry summer. This time however, it really does seem there's enough water around for the trout to survive for a couple of years, and they will grow quickly.

Question: What are the predictions for the Eildon area in the next couple of years?

Philip's answer was an emphatic 'fabulous and back to what it used to be!' He couldn't see how the fishing could be any better, and the area should fish really well for the next three or four years. The lake itself is the wild card in all this - it will stay high for a long time because

there is no irrigation and no irrigation demand. The streams around Eildon are at capacity and the Delatite, Howqua and Jamieson Rivers are all full of fish. Fisheries research on trout in Lake Eildon during previous dry years suggested most seemed to grow to about 1½ lb and no bigger due to a productivity 'bottleneck' caused by persistent low water. Only a few fish grew big enough to begin to feed on the massive numbers of juvenile coarse fish like redfin and roach, and these went on to become trophies. Now, the very rich lake conditions are enabling lots of trout to grow to 'coarse fish feeder' size, and thus to grow bigger still.

Releasing another one

As a bonus, high river levels encourage lake trout that might otherwise quickly run up and down to spawn, to wander upstream well before spawning, and linger long after. This is frequently the situation in rivers like the Thredbo in NSW, where some outsized 6 - 8 lb lake fish remain in the river for many months. There are signs that a similar phenomenon is occurring on some Eildon feeders, with big lake residents becoming river residents, at least while the high flows persist.

Philip also added that in parts of north-east of Victoria, the average size of fish this year is up to one pound greater than in previous years.

In terms of other good waters, west central lakes like Tullaroop have been very stable for two years, and duns are now being seen there – something that has rarely happened in the past.

Rex Hunt asked a question about the dates of closed seasons. He pointed out that in Tasmania the season on the rivers closes at the end of April to protect the spawning fish, but here in Victoria the rivers are open until early June, and during this extra month the spawning fish are heavily targeted. Philip's response was that the current regulation is probably the best compromise, with Fisheries research showing that state-wide, June, July and August are indeed the peak months for brown trout spawning (tilted toward the earlier part of the period) and rainbows (towards the later part). In places such as Tasmania and New Zealand, there are 'brown or rainbow specific seasons' or 'catchment specific seasons', and no doubt certain Victorian waters would benefit from an earlier closure – or a later opening. The rationale for a 'one size fits all' season is that the alternative of more complex regulations is likely to result in less compliance by anglers. Philip says he is not convinced by this argument, with other jurisdictions having an expectation that anglers will adapt to varied seasons and regulations. However so long as we have one single closed season, he believes June to August is the right period.

Andrew Mossman made the point that in the 1950s when he fished the rivers in the north-east

The broad grins say it all!

these rivers were full of small fish because spawning was too successful. There were too many fish and the food supply in the streams was inadequate. Thus it made sense to remove size and bag limits to reduce overall fish populations. In response Philip suggested that recent research data questioned unregulated angling as a means of 'controlling' trout populations. While the great majority of small trout undoubtedly die from causes other than angling, in the 30 cm plus size that most anglers regard as 'keepers', there is good evidence from Victorian research that angling pressure can indeed have a substantial negative impact on the number of larger fish present.

Hamish Hughes reminded the meeting that in Victoria we do not have a dedicated freshwater fisheries department like the IFS in Tasmania. Instead we have only one department looking after all our fisheries, both freshwater and saltwater, whereas in Tasmania there are two separate government bodies. Was this better? Philip's response was that having two government departments means that they are both smaller bodies, and the hard reality is that larger government departments are more powerful and therefore tend to have more leverage in terms of resources, status and influence. Notwithstanding the many advantages of a small, dedicated freshwater department, size is important here, and so there are good arguments for having a single large department looking after our fishery.

Speaking of fisheries departments, Philip made the point that here in Victoria probably something like half the anglers (young people under 16, seniors and other exempt people) are not required to have a fishing licence. Moreover, a licence fee of $25 per year is 'a joke'. We

should pay more for our fishing if it gives us more money to manage our fishery, and all anglers should be required to hold a licence – even if they don't actually have to pay a fee for it. This not only makes them clear stakeholders in the fishery (hopefully with a sense of the rights and responsibilities associated with a regulated activity), but it also enables a comprehensive angler database to help manage advice and education.

Philip was asked about his leaders and tippets. He indicated that he buys good-quality 9' tapered leaders which taper down to 2X, and certainly no finer than 3X. He then ties 2 - 3 foot of fluorocarbon tippet to these, sometimes even while fishing dry flies: while fluorocarbon tends to sink, the buoyancy of the mono and the dry fly compensates. 4X is his limit for tippet size and he hardly ever uses anything finer/weaker. He prefers to avoid lots of knots in his leaders and the above leader only has one. While reluctant to recommend particular brands, he finds Rio Fluoroflex Plus and Rio Powerflex and Nitlon to be good, also Maxima mono. However he stressed that these are a few of many good brands – just seek reputable advice to avoid the many brands that are rubbish! He primarily uses only two knots - a 3-turn Surgeon's knot for leader/tippet, and an 8 to 10 turn half blood knot for the fly. As a confessed 'knot klutz' Philip believes in mastering a couple of simple knots, rather than trying to learn lots of complicated ones!

Time to leave

In response to a question about tactics for lake fishing, Mark emphasised the importance of always measuring the water temperature, especially during hot weather. In lakes the 'cooler side' with temperatures more comfortable for trout is the lee shore.

At the end of a very informative and thoroughly entertaining period of formal discussion President Dugina thanked our guests and presented them each with a small gift in appreciation. Mark and Philip then remained behind for another hour to speak with members and answer all the many questions that hadn't been raised during the meeting.

We thank them both for their preparation and willingness to share their knowledge.

A Letter to the Editor

(from John Philbrick)

Dear editor,

I with to clarify the reference by Gordon Baker in his account of the recent Tasmanian trip to Peter Hayes winding John Philbrick up at the Longford roundabout. The origin of this unfortunate event is as follows. On the Thursday I rose bright and early so that I could prepare for a day's guided fishing on the Meander River. Nine o'clock, then ten o'clock ticked by and there was little sign of an imminent departure. Although I have been noted over the years for my exemplary forbearance and patience, every man has his cracking point, and I must admit that I was becoming uncharacteristically impatient. In this unhappy frame of mind I may have asked Peter whether we were going to have lunch at the lodge before we left to go fishing or on the river. If I did make that comment I only did so in my capacity as a senior VFFA member protecting the interests of the other three anglers who were to be guided that day, or was it afternoon. I can say with absolute honesty that self-interest played no role at all.

In any event, as we were finally leaving Peter asked me to follow in my Landcruiser closely behind his vehicle. This I did and when he approached the roundabout at Longford instead of turning left he turned right and drove three or four times around the roundabout. As I was going around the bend for the third time, I went into a trance and whilst I was in this catatonic state I had a vision of a colleague many years ago at the Bar, who in his brief and inauspicious career, became known around the traps as Harpic, i.e. he was regarded by his peers as being around the bend. Life as a barrister can be very cruel. I snapped out of this as Peter finally headed off in the right direction. It was only at the end of the day that I learned that the manoeuvre had been prearranged by Peter as part of the day's entertainment. When, at last, we got on the stream we drifted by numerous promising runs but there were very few fish rising. One trout did finally rise and I covered it without success. Then fifty metres down the run another fish rose. Gordon Baker was fishing a run on the other side of the boat, and I was perfectly positioned to put a fly over the trout. I have had difficulty explaining what happened next, for I said "You had better cast at that fish". Our guide David Hemmings almost fell in the river when he heard this unexpected offer, but Gordon accepted this once in a lifetime opportunity with alacrity and cast at, rose, hooked and landed a hefty trout that was nudging up towards three pounds. Within half an hour Gordon had two more fish in the boat. At the end of the day I had a 'toom creel'.

I have thought long and hard as to why I broke the habits of a lifetime and made such an uncharacteristically generous gesture. The fact that I did disturbed me as I thought that I may have been losing my touch. It was only when I read Gordon's report of the trip that it hit me that my strange behaviour was almost certainly attributable to a short term cerebral malfunction which was triggered by vertigo that I suffered as a result of driving endlessly in circles around the roundabout. However, I wish to take this opportunity to assure anyone that I may share a boat with in the future that I have fully recovered and that it will never happen again.

Yours faithfully,

John Philbrick

President's Message

I have given this message quite a deal of thought before I started tapping on the keyboard. Your Council has been hard at work on a number of projects that will come to fruition in the near future.

One of these, which is about to be posted out to all members, is a major contribution from the Risk Management committee, headed by Hamish Hughes. Their very comprehensive and detailed VFFA Risk Management Guide will be distributed shortly in the form of a booklet. Please read it and note that it is intended to provide you with information and strategies for keeping you safe when undertaking your various outings.

Any member who did not attend the last meeting missed a very entertaining and informative evening, and should consider it a real pity to have missed the opportunity to question Mark and Philip Weigall in person. Your Council goes to great lengths to obtain the services of some of fly-fishing's heroes, and while some 48 members attended the March meeting (a very pleasing number), I personally think it is a shame that we haven't had a bigger turn out at other recent meetings.

When you check the calendar (on the back page of the newsletter) you will find that there are some splendid activities planned for members. Let's go through some of these.

Fly Tiers' Night will see three of our most proficient members in action. I have asked them to encourage other members to bring their fly tying kits along to be shown where they could improve their style or technique. We can all benefit from some 'one on one' instruction.

Auction Night. Members with tackle or books they are happy to part with should contact Marty Rogers with a view to disposing of these items to other members, and / or replacing them with other books or items of tackle. The main focus of this auction will be the sale of the R. A. (Tony) Brothers collection of books and other materials. I for one will be very interested in purchasing a few books to add to my personal collection. (Perhaps I'll be happy for you to not attend, as then I might not have to bid so high.)

Those of us who like to chat in a group on trips, or who are concerned about wanting to be found when we are laying injured and want a quick trip back to get mended, will be keen to attend the June meeting when we will get to hear about all the latest communication and safety gadgets and technology that is now available."

Peter Hayes will entertain and cajole us with his talk in July. I have not heard the details of his subject yet, but can assure you that you will definitely learn something helpful in your fishing regardless of the subject. Then on the Sunday following he will run a casting class near our Sunday Casting at Fairfield. This will be limited to about 10 members, so if you want or need some small group casting tuition send me an email to book your place by the

end of June. My son Michael Dugina is already booked in, in advance of next season (before I teach him any more of my bad habits).

We have several other annual events that are being finalised and these will lead us into the Annual Dinner. Mike Stevens has kindly accepted my invitation to be our Guest Speaker. He advises me that he has a new topic to unleash on us and I know he will provide the membership with a great night.

I have heard a few grumbles over the past few months about our direction and purpose, and particularly about the dining quality at our monthly meetings. I say to those members that your Council is working very hard on all these issues and you will see a revitalization occurring in the near future. Our number of members is climbing steadily and more quickly than ever in the past. I suspect that this may be tied in with the strong improvement in our Victorian trout fishing, due to the excellent work done by our fisheries people including VRFish, CVFFC and ATF, together with the behind the scenes work put in by your Council and other members. Well done to all those people, and keep it up.

On the other hand I am quite saddened and disappointed to hear and read of some of the things that are being perpetrated on us, the public and users of our own land and facilities. Item one on my list is the public funding of large tracts of land to organisations that are supposed to look after these areas for us, but when they gain control these areas are locked up away from our use.

Secondly, I would encourage you to read the article in the latest *Fishing Monthly* magazine by the Editor, Neil Grose. It is too complicated to explain in a few words but Neil outlines a somewhat ridiculous government proposal for calculating how to maintain our resources into the future. I suspect it may well have been designed by the same people who devised carbon pricing. Just when we think we are making progress some bureaucrat makes a mess of things. It seems that greed and ego are the prime urges for some people at the expense of all else.

On a more positive note, from what I am hearing our Victorian north-east is recovering well and our small streams are also performing exceptionally. Dare I say we currently have better fishing prospects that Tasmania!!

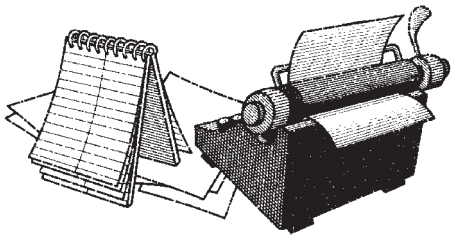
Tight lines,

Rick Dugina President

A New Member Welcomed …

It is with great pleasure that we welcome Alan Bond as a new member this month. We trust that Alan's membership of the Association brings many years of pleasurable involvement.

From the EDITOR'S DESK



In case you hadn't noticed, we're possibly on the brink of some major new developments in our fly-fishing. At least this is the perception of Jeremy Lucas, UK-based fishing writer and fishing guide, and until recently a regular member of the British International Fly-fishing team. Jeremy's article in our March newsletter described these developments, which had their origins in France a decade ago. The French were hosting the World Fly-Fishing Championships in the summer of 2002, and chose as the venue rivers in the Vosges region of north-east France. The weather was hot, the streams were low, the water was incredibly clear, and the trout were singularly skittish and spooky. So the fishing was difficult, in fact so difficult that some competitors resorted to plastering camouflage paint on their faces and crawling along the banks on their stomachs to get close to feeding fish. But the locals, the French, had the answers. They caught trout and won the Championships by fishing tiny nymphs on very long (30 foot) leaders. So began the modern style of French Nymphing.

News of this technique spread quickly, with interest growing in Europe, Britain, the USA, and even here in Australia. Issue 10 of our *Flyfisher* magazine carries an article by Australian international representative Craig Coltman which outlines the technique, and Philip Weigall mentions it briefly in his latest book, *Fishing Sense*, where he describes the spectacular success Tasmanian guide Chris Bassano had using French Leader methods on our State's north-east streams. VFFA member Ray Brown ruefully describes in a recent email how he fished his beloved dry flies up an attractive run in one of his Tasmanian streams for a nil return, then watched as a colleague fished the same run with the French Leader setup and took 9 or 10 fish. And late last year at an ATF committee meeting, Mark Fraser, treasurer of the ATF, told how he had purchased some gear (rod and line) for 'this new French Leader caper' and tried it out on the Nariel Creek. He fished for three or four hours and said that after he got to 40 fish landed he stopped counting. Now while Mark is a very fine angler, those sorts of stories are inclined to get your attention.

Lots of similar reports suggest the same - the method is extremely effective. Why so? We're all familiar with the usual method of fishing a nymph – we hang it under a floating indicator of some sort, perhaps a large dry fly or a lump of polypropylene yarn doped with floatant. But apparently this method, so popular and such good fun, is rather inefficient. It has two inherent and well-documented problems – avoiding drag on the nymph, and detecting the take. In a recent radio broadcast Gary Borger, well-known US fly-fishing writer and trout authority, suggested that on a scale of 1 to 10 in importance, the size, colour and shape of the fly scores about 5, and drag scored about 1,000. He was simply and forcefully making the point that in fishing either dry flies or nymphs, drag remains the number one enemy. And there is plenty of evidence from underwater photography telling us that a dragging nymph is ignored by feeding trout, or worse, it sends them fleeing.

The other problem is detecting the take. If we manage to get our nymph drifting past a fish without any drag and the fish takes the fly, we then rely on the indicator floating upstairs on the surface to register the take. But sadly there is ample evidence to suggest that in many cases (and some experts suggest the majority of cases) the fish will take the fly in, detect the fraud, and then spit it out without any discernable movement of the indicator. If the trout snatches the nymph

and turns away, thus hooking itself, then we've caught our fish. But in too many cases the trout tastes and then quickly expels the fly without the angler ever being aware that he has missed yet another fish.

Apparently these problems are caused largely because we're fly casting and hence using a fly line. Fly lines are relatively heavy, and thus contribute significantly to the drag on the fly, and their inertia also resists any subtle movement of the indicator, though often the major problem here arises from indicators that are too big and heavy. However in the French Leader technique the fly line stays on the reel – it's all leader being cast outside the rod tip: thin and light monofilament that cuts through the water without pulling on the fly. Drag is almost eliminated. If an indicator is used with this rig, it is often a length of coloured line incorporated in the leader, and bite detection is then extremely sensitive.

So that's the theory. How does it work in practice? Your editor's long-suffering spouse asked him prior to Christmas what sort of gift he'd like Santa to bring. He suggested a new rod – one of those designed for this French Leader business. There was much rolling of eyes and mutterings about "not another one", but in due course it arrived –11 foot long, 3-weight, and quite wobbly and soft in its action. Then of course it was off to the Yarra for the inaugural outing. I fished right in the middle of a major caravan park that had been bursting with holiday makers just a fortnight earlier, and once I got the hang of this thing, managed to extract 7 typical little river trout from about 200 metres of river. A week later I connected with 16 in a couple of hours on the Steavenson, then last week I fished the Ovens near Bright for an hour before dusk and landed 5, losing another 3. Now your editor needs to confess that he is a keen fly-fisher of very modest ability, and a total novice at this French Leader stuff. But it's fun to fish, and has certainly proved productive.

Is it time to sell all our old rods and lines? Hardly. Conventional fly-fishing remains a highly effective way of catching trout, and casting with a normal fly line is a far more pleasant business than lobbing 8 - 10 metres of monofilament upstream. And you can forget this French Nymphing stuff if there's a strong downstream breeze blowing, or if you need to roll cast. French Leader, or Leader-to-hand as Jeremy Lucas describes it, is great for fishing nymphs in smallish streams with rippley runs, but is not really suitable for stillwaters. Will it work with dry flies? Jeremy claims it will, provided you use the correct leader - this being 15 or so metres of 0.47 mm copolymer line with a commercial tapered leader tied on the end along with some thin tippet material. He suggests it feels much like casting a 1-weight line, and he also points out that the more line you have out beyond the rod tip the more you will load the rod and the better the rig will cast. Jeremy casts tiny dry flies 17 or 18 metres with this set-up and catches a heap of trout on some hard fished UK rivers.

Are we on the brink of some new developments? It's certainly taking off here – I recently heard that a major importer of fly-fishing tackle is selling rods for French Nymphing as fast as he can land them. Are the fly-line manufacturers feeling threatened? Apparently not. Cortland is already marketing a fly line especially designed for French Nymphing.

A final thought - British fly-fishing icon Oliver Edwards recently wrote this: "I've been using this French system now for two years. I like its delicacy, and it has a definite place in my armoury." Wise words – this French Leader technique is perhaps best seen as simply another very useful addition to our fly-fishing methods.

Tight lines (regardless of how you're fishing),

Lyndon Webb

A Significant Fly Creator Of Tasmania – R.H. (Dick) Wigram

(by Andrew Braithwaite)

If we take a moment to look back on the recent history of this country, we would see that the decade encompassing the 1970's was particularly notable for a number of significant events – such as the opening of the Sydney Opera House, Australia's withdrawal from the Vietnam conflict, Prime Minister Whitlam's dismissal from government, and the proposed flooding of the Franklin River …

Of less significance to the nation but of great interest to the fly-fishing community at large was the friendship that developed between two of our most revered fly-fishermen, the late R.H. (Dick) Wigram and David Scholes. Dick Wigram had already achieved significant status as Tasmania's, and Australia's, foremost writer on trout fishing and a major contributor to fly-tying in the country. His creations such as the Robin, the Brown Nymph, the Black Spinner, and the Riffle Beetle live on today as testament to his inventive mind and creative talents. David Scholes by this time had also had three major books on fly-fishing published, along with a multitude of magazine articles, and was seen by many as the heir-apparent to the Wigram mantle.

During the early seventies David Scholes was employed as the art director for the Examiner Newspaper in Launceston, where he worked fulltime. Dick was living at Norman Taylor's property 'Silverdale' in Longford, and as he grew older he found he had few close friends within the sport in whom he could confide and discuss in detail the many and varied nuances of his wide-ranging knowledge of flies and fly-fishing. (A somewhat similar predicament was to befall David as the years passed.) In response to this, on his regular shopping trips to Launceston Dick would pay David an almost weekly visit to his workplace to have a chat.

Their discussions invariably included reviews of their recent fishing trips to the many waters which were within easy reach of their homes, and they would talk about 'fish and fishers' and other similar mutually interesting matters.

During these visits, which continued over many years, Dick would give David an original fly, or occasionally two flies, which would be connected in some way to their discussions and was often the result of some interesting event that had happened on a recent fishing trip Dick (or David) had returned from. To a large degree these were experimental patterns which were handed to David with the comment "give these a try". Dick would also tie up some totally new patterns which had been foremost in his thinking and would say to David, "I have tied up a new fly; let me know how you go with this".

Now, as it happened these original Wigram flies, which numbered 32 in total and which were given to David Scholes all those years ago, were never used as intended but were consigned to a small medicine bottle on David's desk. It is only recently that they have resurfaced, and what an interesting collection of flies they are - beautifully tied, as one would expect from Dick's own hand, and so significant in the overall story of Tasmania's fly-tying history.

Firstly, it adds immensely to the already known credence that along with the significant contributions of the late Max Christensen to the list of fly patterns tied specifically for Tasmanian conditions, Dick Wigram was also, during this same period, continuously developing patterns for Northern Tasmanian fishing. And these flies were based on his own

experiences and therefore he must now be recognized as an important contributor to our wealth of fly patterns tied for Australian conditions. Indeed, along with Max and in later years Barry Lodge, Dick Woodard and Rob Sloane, Dick Wigram must be recognized as not only a fly-tier of great note but also a 'fly creator' as well.

The contents of David Scholes's bottle is shown in the accompanying photo and is really quite fascinating. We see immediately a number of different versions of the Major Powlett 'Cocky Spinner' (a fly which Dick helped design), an original 'Riffle Beetle' (surely one of the first he would have tied), then a 'Spent Black Riffle Beetle' (obviously Dick wasn't content with the original pattern), two 'Spent Red Tags' - large and small (and who among us has thought to tie this standard pattern 'spent'?), a Grasshopper tied using what must surely be some of the earliest deer hair ever used in this country, and a pattern which I have not seen before but no doubt some have tried to imitate since - a 'Ladybird'! Then there are a number of different nymphs, some of which are imitations of fly patterns brought from England by Dick and given to him by Frank Sawyer (including the celebrated Pheasant-tail Nymph), an interesting snail tie which has an orange throat hackle, and a number of variations of ants, beetles, a tadpole, and even a small brown shrimp-like crustacean pattern. And then finally, the Dick Wigram trademark fly - a very small Greenwell's Glory, but tied here with tiny white wings!

It is obvious that Dick had an open and practical mind when it came to fly patterns, and was deeply involved in creating local flies to suit our Tasmanian conditions and imitate local insect life. This small collection of experimental flies is quite significant in Tasmania's fly-fishing history, and their recent discovery fills a missing part in the history of the contribution made by such a highly skilled and thoughtful angler as Dick Wigram.

VFFA CANE DAY 2012

SUNDAY 18th JUNE 2012

Members are reminded that our annual Cane Day is fast approaching. Please mark it in your diary – Sunday, June 18. More details next month.

The Fly-fisher's Rod & Reel

Members will be interested to hear that Bernard Holbery has recently opened a Fly-fishing shop - *The Fly-fisher's Rod & Reel.* You will find it at 347 St Georges Road, North Fitzroy. He is selling cane rods, old and new gear, and specialty flies, and the shop is open for business on Thursdays, Fridays and Saturdays. Call in at some time - Bernard is a highly skilled angler always willing to offer helpful advice, and is selling some great gear.

Preservation Of Wild Fisheries In America

(by Greg French)

I will be visiting Yellowstone National Park this northern summer (July/August), mainly to satisfy a life-long desire to catch Yellowstone cutthroat trout in their native (and virtually pristine) habitat. I was going to visit other places first — Argentina, Iceland, Scotland — but Wyoming suddenly become a priority when I learned that the trout population in Yellowstone Lake had recently suffered a catastrophic collapse. The reasons for the crash are much, much more complex than you might be led to believe if you do a Google search, and there's more than one ripping yarn to be told in the near future.

One thing that really struck me was the fact that absolutely no one involved in the rehabilitation program — not the anglers, not the biologists, not the ecologists, not the conservationists — will countenance the resurrection of the local hatchery.

For goodness sake, given the scale of the disaster, why not?

Mixing of races within a single species

In *Trout and Salmon of North America*, Robert J. Behnke, the world's leading authority on salmonids, gives many sobering accounts of how fish were (and are) reared in hatcheries, and he explains why artificial propagation of trout and salmon has had such devastating effects on America's wild fisheries.

Genetic variation is essential for the long-term survival of most animals, and over millennia each modern-day species of trout and salmon has evolved into numerous races (even sub-species). This is true not just of fish living in different river systems, but also of discreet populations of the same species within a 'continuous environment' (a river without barrier falls, for example).

This was first observed centuries ago, especially in sea-migratory species like rainbow trout. Wasn't it strange that, within the same river, some fish went to the ocean whilst some lived all their lives in freshwater? By the early 1800s Americans were well aware that sea-run rainbow trout varied in the times of year they run from the oceans into freshwater, the length of time they spent in the river before spawning, the dates they spawned, the time smolts (juveniles) spent in the river before going to sea, and the number of years adult fish spent at sea.

We now know that quite apart from these migratory differences, some fish use different parts of a river to spawn, some are better adapted to fast water or slow water, some prefer cold water or slightly warmer water, and some do best in clear water or glacial water. Furthermore, some fish are specially adapted to feeding on food specific to certain parts of a river or lake.

In the earliest days of angling literature, most European Americans suspected that homing traits were mainly influenced by environmental conditions, or that they occurred randomly, but by the late 1800s some anglers and naturalists were wondering if such varied behaviours might be inherited. Unfortunately, the leading scientific authorities of the era pooh-poohed such notions, saying that the simplest explanation, and therefore the most plausible, was that sea-running fish didn't stray far from home and simply ran to spawn whenever they chanced to venture near a rivermouth. Put simply, they believed that individual fish mixed randomly on the spawning beds.

With the befit of hindsight, we now know that these scientists were mistaken. By the 1970s there was plenty of experimental evidence showing that, in the wild, resident rainbow trout give rise to predominantly resident fish, steelhead to steelhead, winter-run fish to winter-run fish, summer-run fish to summer-run fish. In some studies this was shown to be very close to 100 per cent. Often in such cases the search for the specific genes coding for homing behaviour have been elusive, but Behnke points out only a very small sample of genetic material is examined in any study, typically 500 to 2,000 out of several billion nucleotides. No one is suggesting that there is complete reproductive isolation between fish with differing life histories, but clearly it is profound, and certainly sufficient to maintain the integrity of the hereditary basis that separates one race from another. The truth is, the genetic coding for homing and other reproductive traits is much stronger, and much more specific, than anyone from the nineteenth century could possible have imagined. So too is the extent to which adaptive life history is related to the abundance of wild fish stocks.

Much worse than the nineteenth century scientists who thought about heredity and drew the wrong conclusions, were the people, including hatchery mangers, who didn't stop to think at all. (What is it, I wonder, that drives the zeal for fish farming? Is it the feeling of doing something to bolster a fishery? The fascination with equipment and gadgets? The idea of humanity improving upon nature?)

Rainbow trout were first used in artificial propagation in 1870, and came from streams running directly into San Francisco Bay. By 1877 eggs were also being collected from river-resident redband trout in the McCloud River, a distant headwater tributary of San Francisco Bay's mighty Sacramento River. From 1880 to 1888 hatchery staff were mixing these fish with steelhead, probably the Central Valley form of coastal rainbow trout. After 1888 the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service added steelhead from northern California and southern Oregon. (Although still perpetuated in world literature, the belief that the origin of all hatchery fish was the McCloud River is patently wrong).

According to Behnke, the forced mixing of various races of rainbow trout during artificial propagation 'acted to break down the reproductive isolation that is necessary for wild populations to maintain adaptive life history traits'. In short, it destroyed population diversity.

Behnke also notes that the genetic variability of the founding domestic stock allowed for 'rapid domestication, based on such factors as efficient utilisation of artificial diet, rapid growth, early sexual maturation and high fecundity. Domestication is also based on artificial selection for behavioural modifications, such as the ability to tolerate crowding and a willingness to come close to humans for feeding.' Furthermore, Behnke stresses that all hereditary changes in hatcheries run counter to natural selection, where the sole criterion is 'survival to reproduction in the wild'.

Does this matter? Well, yes.

Today in the huge Columbia River catchment, arguably America's most famous trout and salmon producer, 75 per cent of all steelhead returning to the river from the ocean are hatchery stock which were released as smolts, and Behnke says that pure populations of steelhead uncontaminated by hatchery rainbow trout are now rare. The domestics and the bastardised wild fish don't breed very successfully — they just don't know when to run, which tributary to run to, or where to spawn — so without ongoing production of fish numbers, already miniscule by historic standards, would crash even further.

Maintaining big runs of fish through hatchery releases is extremely expensive, and most anglers want wild fish anyway, so what can be done? One idea was to add fish ladders to the dams and mandate environmental flows so that any remaining wild stocks could find their way home. Unfortunately, this did little to improve the abundance of wild stocks: most of the original genetic strains — those programmed to make best use of each section of river — had already become extinct or were continuing to crossbreed with hatchery fish.

The next idea was to select hatchery brood fish from wild spawners in the parts of the river system where the offspring would be released (usually at smolt stage). Over the last couple of decades this been tried in various rivers on Vancouver Island (British Columbia), where the steelhead runs have been decimated as a result of shockingly bad logging practices. But the evidence from Vancouver is that, even when you rehabilitate the environment, it is depressingly difficult to re-establish steelhead runs by relying on hatchery stock of *any* source.

The burning question became, 'How quickly can domestication occur?'

Most researchers suspected that it would take multiple generations to see genetic evidence of the effects of domestication, but an explosive article published in the *Proceedings of the National Academy of Sciences* in December 2011 found that the impact of hatcheries is so profound that after a *single* generation, hatchery fish become *genetically* distinct from wild fish and have difficulty surviving in the wild. It is not yet known which genetic trait is being (unintentionally) selected for in hatcheries, but it is likely to be linked to the ability to withstand overcrowding.

In hindsight, these sorts of problems were probably inevitable. When eggs are taken from the wild to a hatchery and the hatchlings on-grown to smolt size, too many fish survive, including almost all of the ones that nature would rather weed out. If the eggs were left to hatch in the river, only a tiny percentage of the resulting fish would reach smolt stage, and these would be the ones best suited to life in the wild.

This evidence from rivers in the Columbia Basin, on Vancouver Island and in other places too numerous to document, has severely undermined our confidence in our ability to restore fisheries by rearing smolts from eggs collected in the wild. Domestication seems to occur no matter how careful we are, and domestic fish fare poorly in the wild.

Behnke also notes stunning examples of what happens to other salmonids when the hereditary basis of homing is ignored.

In 1870s and 1880s the U.S. Fish Commission realised that dams and pollution were affecting the abundance of salmon, and in 1909 the Central Hatchery was constructed on the Columbia River. The prime purpose of the hatchery was to produce chinook salmon (*Oncorhynchus tshawytscha*). Most of the brood stock was sourced from Columbia River, but from all parts of the basin; and some were sourced from eggs obtained from many other river systems. The managers of the hatchery began releasing huge numbers of hatchery-reared chinooks, but rather than improve fish stocks, numbers plummeted. This wasn't due to further industrial development (construction of the worst dams, like the Grand Coulee, did not commence until 1935): it was simply that hatchery stock had swamped the native gene pool.

Coho salmon (*O. kisutch*) proved to be the easiest of all America's Pacific salmonids to rear in hatcheries. Mass production of smolts took off in the 1970s, and appeared to foster

extraordinarily good runs of adult fish up the rivers. However, we now know that the returns were actually due to cyclic productivity of the ocean at the time. When the cycle reached its nadir, catches dropped to 10 per cent of previous highs, and all commercial salmon ranches went out of business. During the period of mass artificial production, however, domestic coho salmon were derived from mixed stock, and returning fish 'overwhelmed wild stocks, especially in small tributary streams, compromising long-evolved site-specific adaptive life histories.' In the long-suffering Columbia River, wild stocks virtually vanished.

Hatchery releases of pink salmon (*O. gorbuscha*) appear not to have substantially affected wild populations. This is probably because pink salmon spawn at the upper influence of tidal influence or in the lower stretches of freshwater tributaries, and do not have to grow to smolt size in rivers (where food availability is the main limiting factor on carrying capacity). You can hatch millions of eggs in hatchery, release the fish as fry before they start feeding, and they will immediately migrate into saltwater where food is virtually unlimited. When released at this age, the normal natural-selection pressures seem to hold sway, resulting in an increase in overall numbers without much evidence of domestication.

Nowadays, in most American rivers with sea-running salmonids, fish populations are divided into geographical parts, usually called Evolutionarily Specific Units (ESUs) or Distinct Population Segment (DPSs), each of which have legal standing under the USA's Endangered Species Act. If fish in one or other part of a river system are in decline, conservation measures (such as inclusion on the Endangered Species List) can be implemented even if the rest of the population is doing relatively well.

So how does all this affect management strategies for the landlocked cutthroats in Yellowstone Lake? Well, the reason that managers are so reluctant to bolster the greatly depleted stocks with hatchery-reared fish is that, based on the experience elsewhere, it would run the risk of reducing genetic diversity and also of domesticating the stock, either of which could result in extinction.

The genetic diversity in Yellowstone Lake's cutthroat trout is not well understood, but we do know that each adult fish spawns in its natal river and that the homing instinct is genetically ingrained. For example, one of the main spawning tributaries, Pelican Creek, historically had typical runs of around 55,000 fish, but over the last decade the number of spawners has fallen to less than 500 fish. The quantity of spawners in most other tributaries has not dropped this dramatically, yet fish born in these waters are not migrating into Pelican Creek to take up the shortfall.

One of the problems with the Pelican Creek cutthroats is that the fry have lately been decimated by whirling disease. This problem is less evident in other tributaries. Is the Pelican Creek race more susceptible to the parasite than other fish in the lake? We simply don't know. But there is a chance that a disease-resistant race exists somewhere in the Yellowstone Lake, and if large numbers of hatchery fish were released into the system, any such strain would likely be overwhelmed. Were it possible, some people might be tempted to rear and release a strain of disease-resistant fish, but it can be incredibly hard to identify the genetic markers that distinguish one attribute from another, and you never know whether the attribute you hope to select is linked to another attribute that makes the fish vulnerable to other threats like climate change (perhaps in ways not yet imagined).

Hybridisation between species

It is not just interbreeding between various races of the same species that bothers American fisheries biologists and anglers. Over the last few decades, hybridisation between different species has become rampant, and as a consequence many fish populations are now threatened with extinction.

In nature, hybridisation between salmonid species has always happened from time to time, even in pristine and unaltered environments. The most common naturally occurring hybrid is the cross between pink salmon (*O. gorbuscha*) and chum salmon (*O. keta*). Surprisingly, considering the genetic disparity between the parent stock (pink salmon have 52 chromosomes, chum salmon 74) the hybrids (with 63 chromosomes) are fertile.

Cutthroat trout and rainbow trout can also interbreed. The earliest reports of 'cuttbows' that I've seen were written by anglers who were fishing coastal rivers in the 1800s, long before the hatchery era had begun. With cuttbows, the chromosome difference between the parent stock is 68 for coastal cutthroat and 58 to 60 for rainbow trout, and once again the hybrids are fertile.

Despite the fact that many salmonid hybrids are fertile, in all cases historically, strong natural selection kept them from spawning successfully — no self-sustaining populations of naturally occurring wild stocks have ever been documented. This is the main reason that pink salmon and chum salmon, and cutthroat trout and rainbows, are universally considered to be separate species.

Hatcheries have turned this paradigm on its head. Behnke notes that 'the widespread stocking of millions of hatchery rainbow trout and steelhead and of hatchery sea-run coastal cutthroat trout over many years has resulted in great increases in the incidence of hybridization between rainbow trout and steelhead and coastal cutthroat trout.' This, he points out, threatens integrity of stocks, and leaves them in a weak position in the case of environmental change.

Although the mechanisms which trigger the breakdown of barriers to hybridisation are not well understood, climatic and other environmental changes may play a part. Since late 1970s, the reality of adaptive races and distinct populations of trout and salmon has become widely accepted. In America this knowledge is applied to Endangered Species Act, and hatcheries are seen as public enemy number one. Attempting to restore declining populations of native fish through the release of hatchery-reared stock is widely acknowledged as the least responsible solution, and is not attempted unless every other option has been exhausted.

Domestic fish are not simply considered inferior, but are recognised as a major threat to wild fisheries. It is also widely acknowledged that domesticity occurs at a *genetic* level in all hatchery-reared stock, even if the eggs have been sourced from the wild, and especially if the fry are fed and on-grown to fingerling or smolt stage.

What does this mean for Australian anglers?

Atlantic salmon (*Salmo salar*) and brown trout (*Salmo trutta*) can also interbreed and produce fertile offspring. In pristine native environments where the two species have co-evolved, this is a rare event, and as with the American salmonids, no self-sustaining populations of naturally occurring wild hybrids have ever been documented.

The first evidence that the species barrier could be irreparably broken occurred when brown

trout were first introduced to the east coast of North America from Germany in 1883 and began interbreeding with America's wild native Atlantic salmon. Hybridisation increased following subsequent shipments of brown trout (which were sourced from numerous localities in Europe).

The solace here was that American Atlantic salmon are America's only representative of the genus *Salmo* — they did not co-evolve with brown trout as did European Atlantic salmon, and this would conceivably make them more susceptible to hybridisation. Moreover, we now know that American Atlantic salmon are also genetically distinct from European Atlantic salmon, possessing 56 chromosomes as opposed to 58. (Brown trout, by way of contrast, have 80 chromosomes.)

Things took a turn for the worse on the Kerguélen Islands (in the Indian Ocean, just north of Australia's Heard Island). The streams on Kerguélen Islands originally contained no fish of any sort. In 1955 Atlantic salmon sourced from a hatchery in Denmark were stocked into Korrigans River, and a small but viable population of river-resident fish established. Shortly after, wild Atlantic salmon from Scotland were released into the Armour system, which was isolated from the ocean by virtue of a waterfall at its mouth, and they too established a small self-supporting population.

At the end of the 1950s, a hatchery was established on the small River Ferme. Domestic brown trout, sourced from a commercial hatchery on River Nive in France, were reared here, and they soon escaped and migrated around the coast to Korrigans, where they hybridised with the Atlantic salmon. Within three generations, there were no pure Atlantic salmon left in the system, and nowadays there are no hybrids either, just brown trout.

Domestic brown trout and wild Polish brown trout were introduced into the Armour system in 1991 and 1992. Again there was rampant hybridisation. Pure Atlantic salmon still exist in the Armour today, even if they account for only 15 per cent of the total population and may become extinct with time. They have fared better than the Korrigans salmon simply because they were sourced from wild Scottish stock.

In Europe, where native brown trout and Atlantic salmon occur in the same river, there has recently been a major increase in hybridisation. This usually occurs when the relative abundance of one or other species plummets, often as a result of dam building (which might block sea runs of salmon, for instance) or pollution (which might wipe out one or other species in a spawning tributary, thereby affecting relative abundance of that species in the rest of the system). In such situations, female spawners of the less populous species have difficulty finding mates and end up having their eggs fertilised by males of the more populous species.

Usually, brown trout eventually end up gaining the upper hand, but not always. In Spain's River Sella, a hydro-electric dam built in the 1950s resulted in the extinction of sea-migratory Atlantic salmon in the headwaters. A fish ladder was installed in 1995, and 13 years later, after a period of rampant hybridisation, salmon were found to be more common than browns.

Sometimes neither one species nor the other emerges dominant. A highly altered river in Sweden was stocked with hatchery-reared Atlantic salmon and brown trout, and here the reproductive isolation of the species has completely broken down — hybrids have become common and it is likely that pure strains of either species will eventually disappear altogether.

The question Tasmanian anglers should ask themselves is, 'Should we be stocking robust wild fisheries with hatchery-reared fish?' If we want to maintain our cherished wild fishery, the evidence from around the globe suggests that we should abandon stocking self-supporting fisheries with any hatchery-reared stock whatsoever.

VFFA Casting with Peter Hayes

Sunday July 22, 2012

Commencing at 10 am and finishing at 4 pm

BBQ Lunch & Drinks provided.

Cost – still to be finalised but probably about $140 per member,

Venue - the Fairfield Casting Pool

Come along and learn the techniques that Peter has perfected from over 20 years of competing in casting and fishing competitions.

If you are attending, please bring your favourite casting rod, matched with a bright coloured easy to see fly line, a chair, and some eye protection (i.e. sunglasses).

To book your spot please contact: Rick Dugina on - Phone: 0401 963 601or email on edugina@bigpond.com

An Active ATF President

(The following report is from Rod Barford, ATF President, and well-known Victorian Fishing Guide. He's been out and about, and his exploits are always interesting to hear about.)

I fished the Goulburn a few weeks ago and did well, with 11 browns and 3 rainbows, the two largest fish 15" each, and two more only a tad smaller. They were rising steadily in the bridge pool at the Breakaway, and I was the only rod on the water (pun intended!). The caddis brought them up, both Snowflake and the tiny dark brown ones I fish to with a #18 pattern I tie myself, with obvious success. Last night was another episode in the continuing saga on "How To Catch Trout Feeding On Snowflake Caddis". The answer is as simple as it is mysterious - fish a #18 dark caddis! I have found over the years that, more often than not, when you see fish apparently rising to Snowflake Caddis, if you tie on the small dark one, you will most probably have a much greater success, as they are usually almost impossible to see at that time of night and go undetected by the angler who believes he is fishing to

Snowflake feeders only. Those little dark blighters are so small they disappear in the dusk light, but boy do the fish know they're there!

During the day, and on the following day, I guided a young chap on the Rubicon, which was running crystal clear and fishing well. He managed 33 fish for the two days, all taken on either a #16 Copper John (copper colour) or the strike (indicator) fly, a #14 Gum Beetle. The gale force winds loosened any amount of the latter from the tall eucalypts surrounding the river, and the one fish we kept to eat was chock full of them, along with a goodly number of Baetis nymphs, and a few caddis larvae. His best fish was 16" long - a good fish for that water which gets heavily flogged.

Before he left for home, I showed him something I learned from a US client up on the Mitta about 8 years ago. This client used a radically shortened leader and two heavily weighted large stonefly nymphs, separated by 60 cm of dropper, to which he clamped 6 large split shot. The whole affair was heavy enough to knock you senseless should it come into contact with your scone. His method was to literally stand over a heavily broken section of water, usually vorticing around a large midstream boulder, and thus ideal refuge for bigger fish. You toss the rig upstream and let it bounce along the bottom, raising the rod as it comes back to and then past you, dropping it on the exit. When you see the line hesitate, strike! Incredibly effective. This US gent humiliated me into the next century when he demonstrated this technique on a stretch of the Ovens I'd fished only the day before. I'd bragged about releasing a 2lb brown from the section we fished, but he took four fish between 2½ and 4 lbs from the same pool. He repeated this scenario multiple times over the next few days, showing me just how many fish we don't see, and they're nearly always the bigger ones too!

I called in to see Mick Hall yesterday. He had just arrived back from an interstate family visit and was in a very cheery mood, appearing in good health at last. We spent a couple of hours playing with my new camera, a Canon SK40HS, with its handy 35X optical zoom. We were taking fly and bug shots for my next article for that new hunting magazine, “Secrets of the Sambar”, for which I'm the fishing editor. Issue #1 is on the newsagent shelves at the present time, so have a peek next time you're in the newsagent’s having a free read of all the fly-fishing magazines.

I fished the Nariel Creek a couple of weeks back. Neal Bennetts and I had a cracker session on Rohan Surtee’s place, just before a thunderstorm hit. The fish went berserk, jumping for black spinners, with one fish landing on the bank and flip-flopping back into the drink. We caught several good fish each in the hour before the storm hit. It was wild fishing with some big fish on the surface. We capped it off with a lovely cooked lunch by Neal's wife, and then back up to 'Flytrek Lodge' for a nap, only to sight a massive tiger snake exiting the front door, which was ajar. A real heart starter that saw me hoisting my swag up onto the kitchen table for the night! It was the biggest tiger snake I've ever seen, and I've seen a few. Next morning, sans snakebite, I was enjoying an early morning coffee on the front verandah whilst admiring the start of a beautiful day, only to look down to see a big fat black snake only a foot from my bare toes. His head was up and sniffing the air before he darted back under the house. Needless to say the boots went on very quickly, and the 12 gauge was leaning on the front verandah soon after.

Cheers, Rod

This Month's Yarn

(from July 1963)

"I read somewhere that young Philip Weigall has been catching some big trout recently", said Alf, as he picked up his change. "Mind you, monster trout can be a darned nuisance in a river," he added, "They either eat or scare off all the smaller trout, and are almost impossible to catch - by legal means anyway."

"They can be a nuisance in other ways, too," suggested McTaggart, as he picked up his refilled glass. He went on, "I remember going to stay with a friend of mine some years ago on the Dingodad River. This bloke bred ducks for the market, and he had a big pool near his house where the ducks used to swim. Now, just before I arrived there he noticed that his young ducklings were mysteriously disappearing. At first he thought the bush rats might be responsible, but then one day he discovered the real reason - this huge trout was taking them. After a while even the half-grown ducks started to disappear. So he waited on this trout with his shotgun, but only managed to kill half a dozen of his prime ducks."

"Then I arrived, and he told me all about it. He told me he had even tried to catch this trout on a nightline with frogs, but the fish wouldn't come at them – probably too keen on his poultry diet, I suppose. "

"I gave the matter some thought after watching the trout at work," McTaggart continued, "Then I borrowed a feather duster from my friend, cut the handle off, and fixed a snapper hook in among the feathers. Then just on dusk I crept down to the pool with a strong rod and line, and started working my lure carefully across the surface. It wasn't long before there was a huge splash and I had him on. I'd never seen such massive jaws on a trout before. He fought strongly, but I finally got him in. He was 35 inches long and weighed just on 3 lb."

"Just on 3 lb!" exclaimed Alf, "A trout that long should have weighed 15 lb at least !" "Well, that's true," said McTaggart, "but this one was so full of feathers it made him extraordinarily light."

From our archives, this cartoon from the Age newspaper of October 1957 shows some very significant VFFA personalities from that era.

Warrnambool Report – the Fishing Out West

(… from our regular correspondent Jim Blakeslee)

The fish around Warrnambool have started to move now that the weather has cooled down a bit. The rivers are all low and clear. Until recently the water has been very warm on the surface, and that has kept the fish down near the bottom. But things are now a'changin'. On the Merri, the river has risen a foot after we had two lots of 15 mm of rain - not because of any runoff, but rather because the farmers think we've had the "autumn break" in the weather and have stopped pumping to irrigate their cow paddocks. Result: the browns are cruising around the pools sucking down any hoppers, ants, caddis, etc, that are in the surface film. I've been polaroiding browns, casting a floating Latex Hopper into their path (with a green "shrimp" suspended a couple of feet below the surface, of course). Half the time the fish take the shrimp, and the rest of the time they have been charging the hopper and taking it with gusto. The last time I looked at the Mount Emu and Upper Hopkins the water was too warm, and I had to resort to dredging the depths of the deepest pools to find a fish. It's time I had another look. The Hopkins mouth is still blocked by a sand bar and the estuary is full-up. This has made it harder to find the estuary perch and bream, as they tend to spread out during periods of high water. We've still been catching a few at night casting a matuka along the edges, but it's hard work finding them.

Jim in action in Tasmania earlier this year

When the VFFA crew were in Warrnambool last November, I suggested that you give Lake Pertobe a try. Yes, it's an urban fishery, and thus easy to ignore, BUT ... on a sunny, cloudless day you can walk the grassy banks and polaroid the silty, light-coloured bottom of the lake - kind of like the Western Lakes in Tassie - except you have lads kicking a footy, families having a BBQ, and children squealing at the playground while you go about the business of stalking a fish. Still, for those who can ignore the distractions and concentrate on the fishing, the rewards are there to be had, as Adrian Jacobs and I found out when we spent a couple hours down there yesterday, spotting and casting to cruising rainbows. If you prefer a bit more solitude and want to put a bit more distance between yourself and the public, you can easily launch a kayak, float tube or pontoon boat, and hide out behind the tree-covered islands or explore the larger, western-most part of the lake. Anyway, for Jake and I, the result was that we each caught three fine rainbows. Most were last year's release - about 2 lb, but I did catch one that weighed in at 4 lb that was probably from the 2010 stocking. All were in great condition, with

Some of those rainbows from Lake Pertobe

lovely orange flesh. Right now I'm smoking two of them for guests to snack on this coming weekend.

And what was in their stomachs? A fist full of water boatmen. A good match for these is a #14 Tellico Nymph. Something to think about next time you come down and stay at the Surfside Caravan Park across the road from the lake. For your interest, I've attached a photo of some of the Pertobe rainbows.

Cheers, JB

The Eildon Report

(provided by Mick Hall)

Mick tells us that the Goulburn is currently running high – 8,000 mL/day. He also mentioned that the hills around his property at Thornton were on fire - there were controlled burns taking place and these were restricting access to some of the better local fishing spots.

The Pondage has been fishing well for the bait danglers, particularly along Riverside Drive on the north side. But it is not in a good state for fly-fishing. It can't be waded and the level is changing continually to supply the high flows down the Goulburn. Lake Eildon is currently at 94% and the local feeling is that this high lake level will need to be lowered over winter, as otherwise heavy winter and spring rains might well create serious flooding in the area. Thus the Goulburn is running high and flowing strongly, and there is a suggestion that these high flow rates may be maintained over the winter to reduce the lake level.

The lake itself has been yielding some good fish to the trollers, but with more cod and yellowbelly being caught than trout. But Mick did indicate that there is now some good midge fishing available for the trout fishers, particularly in the wind lanes. He added that fishing the wind lanes was a style of fishing not all that well exploited on Lake Eildon.

The Rubicon has been fishing well recently. Mick has a friend from Ballarat who fished the Rubicon with his son. They used this new French Nymphing technique, and hooked (and released!) 56 fish between them. The Acheron is still quite dirty, but Mick suggested that if it clears a bit there are a lot of fish in this river for those fishing upstream from the Taggerty area. From all reports the Steavenson is also fishing well, and so too is the Big River.

Mick tells us that a new shipment of his flies is arriving soon, and will be available in the tackle stores. This new shipment includes his recently developed ‘Rubi Bug’, a beetle pattern that friends have trialled for him and found to be particularly productive.

Mick finished with a reminder that Easter is traditionally a great time to fish a Royal Wulff on the Steavenson River, and his Rubi Bug will be well worth a run there too.

FLY OF THE MONTH

The Peeping Stick Caddis

by Mick Hall

(Mick Hall is a VFFA member. He is also one of our most prominent fly tiers. His notes on the history and development of flies and fly tying materials, along with his patterns, are regularly published in some of our best–known fishing magazines. He has produced videos and DVDs on fly tying, has appeared on television and had regular radio broadcasts talking about fly tying, and has been invited to demonstrate his skills at Fly Fishing and Fly Tying Shows and Expos in Britain, Europe and the USA. For many years he has run fly tying classes and demonstrations at tackle shops and fishing clubs, and even now, in retirement, he remains willing to respond to the invitation to pull out his vise and show interested fly flickers his latest patterns and creations.

Recently Mick developed a whole series of exciting new flies, and these are now on sale in tackle shops around the state. One of these is his Peeping Stick Caddis, which he describes in the following notes.)

When claiming a fly pattern is justifiable I feel one can only do so if it is truly a new innovation, and in today's world that can only be achieved by using new materials that have just been developed for whatever use. "Adaptation of an existing pattern" I feel is a more acceptable term and should be used more frequently than it is, simply as a sign of respect to the original tier, whether known or not.

So it is with the Peeping Caddis. It was first shown to me many years ago by a chap who called into the Hook Up tackle shop in Ferntree Gully and, naturally, it caught my eye. You know, I can see this gentleman's face but I fear his name is lost to me, and for that I do apologise.

The Pattern Details:

Hook: Mustad R72, sizes 8 and 10

Body: Stripped peacock stem wound over dubbing of any colour and finally dyed with a dark green marking pen followed by a dark brown marking pen.

Head/legs: Peacock Herl

Grub: Chartreuse synthetic knitting yarn, burnt at the end to create the grub's head.

NOTE: On the original shown to me, the peacock stem had been dyed to a similar colour as shown. It was the use of this material that caught my attention. The peeping head had been around for some time but this was new and very creative.

Small Peeping Stick Caddis

As adapted by Mick Hall

The Pattern Details:

Hook: Mustad R72, sizes 14 & 16

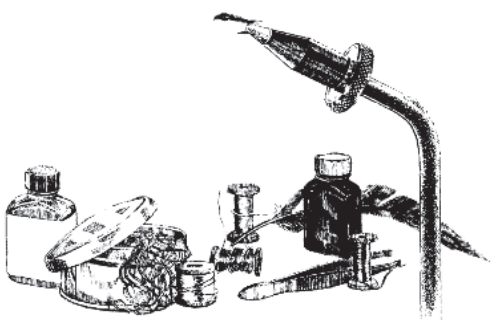
Body: Uni-Flex White and treated with marking pens as described above.

Head/legs: Peacock Herl

Grub: Chartreuse synthetic knitting yarn, burnt at the end to create the grub's head.

NOTE: Uni-Flex is also known as Flex Floss and by a heap of other names.

Stick Caddis is in all our waterways but this pattern is highly effective in still water. They tend to come in a number of sizes depending on the dominant species in that water, hence the small version of this pattern which matches a species that is abundant in my home water, the Pondage at Eildon.



LIBRARY NEWS

All members should remember that the Mick Martin Memorial Library is one of the most extensive collections of fly-fishing literature in Australia. It is valuable in its own right but is a great asset to members wishing to expand their knowledge or who simply enjoy sitting by the fireside and vicariously enjoying the exploits of others. In addition, the library boasts a number of videos on trout fishing. Our librarian Marty Rogers will be available prior to each general meeting to assist members wishing to borrow books or videos.

The library is divided into three parts.

Part 1 Books available for loaning to members.
Part 2 Books available for reference only and not to be taken from the library.
Part 3 Books bequeathed to the Association and not to be taken from the cabinet.

OVERDUE BOOKS

Our librarian reports that a number of members have failed to return library books on time. Could all those book loving members who have failed to return books promptly do so.

V.F.F.A. ITEMS FOR SALE

The Association has the following quality items for sale:

Book "The Country For An Angler" (the History of the VFFA).....$70.00 each
Book "Geehi to Great Lake" .....$45.00 each
Columbia Shirts .....$70.00 each
Polarfleece jacket with VFFA logo.....$40.00 each
Association ties (blue or maroon).....$35.00 each
Cloth badges.....$7.00 each
Diaries $2.00 each
***The Australian Trout* by Jack Ritchie.....$20.00**
(Special offer – buy one, get one free!)
V.F.F.A. car stickers.....$2.00 each

Members wishing to purchase any of these items should contact Hugh Maltby prior to the monthly General Meeting on telephone 9455 9017.

VALUED DONORS

The following made donations for the raffle at the 2011 Annual Dinner:

• Armadale Angler • Aussie Angler • Australian Fishing Network • Bernard Holbery • Compleat Angler, Box Hill • Fly Life Publications • Hookup Bait & Tackle, Ferntree Gully • J M Gillies • Lowes Furniture • Mayfly Tackle • Mick Hall • Michael Steven's Publishing • Millbrook Lakes Lodge • Nick Taransky - Bamboo Rod Maker • Peter Hayes, Cressy • Pro Angler Fishing Tackle • Ray Brown, Onkaparinga Flies & Cane Rods • The Flyfisher, Melbourne • Vision Fly Fishing

VFFA Meetings & Activities

April 2012

19 **General Meeting - 8:00 pm at the Kelvin: Fly Tier's Night**

20 – 22 Big River Trip to Enoch's Point
(Convenor: John Pilkington, phone 0407 356 676 or A/H 9489 2186)

26 Council Meeting – Thursday 7:00 pm – note the change of day. Wednesday April 25 is Anzac Day (meeting TBC)

May 2012

17 **General Meeting - 8:00 pm: VFFA Auction**

23 Council Meeting – 7:00 pm

June 2012

3 Sunday Casting Commences – at the Red Tag Casting Pools

7 **Dinner With Partners** (Details to be advised soon)

10 Sunday Casting

17 **Annual Cane Day**

21 **General Meeting - 8:00 pm: C&G communications – 'Communications and Safety'**

24 Sunday Casting

27 Council Meeting – 7:00 pm

July 2012

1 Sunday Casting

8 Sunday Casting

15 Sunday Casting

19 **General Meeting - 8:00 pm: Speaker – Peter Hayes**

22 Sunday Casting and Casting with Peter Hayes (see advertisement in this issue)

25 Council Meeting – 7:00 pm

29 Sunday Casting

August 2012

5 Sunday Casting

10/11 Annual Bullen Merri trip (TBC)

12 Sunday Casting

15 Council Meeting – 7:00 pm

19 Sunday Casting

24 **Annual Dinner: Speaker – Mike Stevens – Publisher of Fly-fishing books and magazines**

25 President's Casting Day

September 2012

12 Council Meeting – preparation for AGM

20 **General Meeting - 8:00 pm: AGM**

26 First Council Meeting for the new Council – 7:00 pm