

FLY LINES



APRIL 2024

April Meeting with John Spragg

At our April meeting John Spragg will tell us all about the trip by VFFA members to New Zealand in March. Be assured there will be lots of fabulous photos and countless tales of trout spotted, encountered, then caught or missed.



Just one of the many fish caught by John

Thursday, April 18,
7:30pm, at the
Kelvin Club

Tales of VFFA members fishing in New Zealand are always captivating and of great interest to those of us who weren't there.

Our April meeting will be a very entertaining event, full of interest and well worth attending.

We would encourage all members to attend what will be a great evening, and for those who would like to join us for a meal beforehand PLEASE make a booking for dinner by emailing Terry Rogers at terryrogers@bigpond.com before Tuesday, April 16.



Whats App Group "GRAB A MATE": Hook up with other members to join their personal fishing trips or to find a mate to share your next fishing adventure with. Text your email address or telephone number to Beth Hourigan on 0415 872 372

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President's Message

... from Simon Joel

Much has been happening over February and March. The Peter Hayes' event at Cressy was, as always, well attended, and according to members it was, again, a lot of fun with some very fine fish caught (despite the challenging conditions).

Another group ventured across the Tasman to fish New Zealand's North Island around Lake Taupo. Councillor and event co-ordinator John Spragg will be present to report on that particular fishing adventure at our meeting in April. I hear it was an amazing experience, so I am very much looking forward to hearing about the group's exploits over dinner on April 18.

Other upcoming members' events include the second trip (of four altogether) to Millbrook Lakes, the Owens River Challenge at Myrtleford, the annual Big River weekend at Enochs Point, and the Donger Weekend on the Mitta Mitta River held in conjunction with the Bairnsdale Fly Fishing Club. These all represent lots of opportunities for VFFA members, and friends, to get on the water and take advantage of some wonderful autumn fishing.

Disappointingly our endeavours to influence the New Zealand authorities about the imposition of extra fees to fish popular remote rivers in the South Island appears to have been unsuccessful (as the extra fees are now being charged by New Zealand authorities). All members planning to fish the South Island rivers in future will need to ensure they have the correct licences and permits, or risk losing their gear and having significant fines imposed.



Simon Joel

I have just returned from fishing New Zealand on the upper Rangitikei watershed, and can report that it was sensational, with trophy fish caught every day (bragging photos supplied). Our guide diligently checked our current licences and permits to ensure they were up-to-date and appropriate to the region. Although the extra fees have been introduced Council will continue to lobby for their abolition.

On another note, the VFFA Council is currently surveying members as part of our commitment to the ongoing review and improvement of member events and activities, so please be kind if you get a call, and please give your full and frank insights about how we're going and the sorts of things you'd like to attend in the future. As I promised at the beginning of my tenure, the Council want to ensure we are fulfilling members' expectations, and we are seeking to encourage new members to join at every opportunity.

And last, but not least, our website will be upgraded in the next few weeks, becoming a valuable tool for members to access VFFA news, activities and events. The upgrade will also include tuition for those members wanting to take full

advantage of the site and its applications and registration functions.

As always, I invite members to contact me directly with any information, feedback or suggestions you have

for improving our planning and implementation processes.

Tight Lines,
Simon Joel



A trophy for our President

June Meeting with Sam Fawke

(Senior Technical Officer – Conservation Hatchery)

Sam was scheduled to speak at our March meeting but unfortunately, due to the unavailability of the Kelvin Club, this meeting had to be postponed. Sam has agreed to speak at our June meeting, on Thursday June 20.

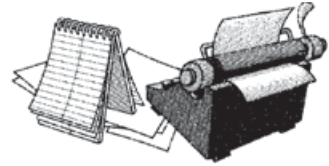
Sam has over 16 years of experience in the aquaculture industry, and water and animals are his passion. He has a new role at the Victorian Fisheries Authority focusing on the conservation of some of Victoria’s most threatened and endangered freshwater species.

So mark this date in your diary and come along to hear Sam speak about his work in our state’s fishing.



Conservation at work – Sam in action

From the EDITOR'S DESK



"Fishing is like dating; it's all catch and release until you find a keeper." - Unknown

"I spent a lot of money on fishing gear. The rest I just wasted." - Unknown

"If I fished only to capture fish, my fishing trips would have ended long ago." - Zane Grey

"If I can get my son to love fishing half as much as I do, then I will have done my job as a father." - Unknown

It's hardly a revealing insight to suggest that fly fishing has a number of associated skills and activities. Tying flies is clearly one of these.

Do all fly fishers tie their own flies? Many do; many don't. A VFFA member some years ago told me that he loved his fly fishing, but because of the heavy time demands of his job his fishing time was very limited. So all of it was spent out on a stream somewhere. He had no time for tying flies, and you could buy excellent flies in tackle shops anyway.

But many of us do tie our flies and find it a worthwhile exercise. In the winter months, when the weather is foul and the rivers are closed, putting a few flies together is a pleasant and relaxing and productive pastime.

When I moved to Warrnambool in the early 1970s and decided to try this fly fishing caper, Barry Quigley (one of the local fly club members) took me out to the Hopkins River at Allansford to show me some water that was ideal for fly fishing. Barry also took his young son Darryl, who was about eight years old then from memory. Darryl had tied up some personal flies for the event. They consisted of some shaggy black wool tied on a hook. That's all they were – a short length of black wool tied on a hook, fat in the middle so the fly was roughly

beetle-shaped. When we arrived Darryl found a pool upstream a short distance and cast his very simple fly into the pool - and proceeded to catch several fish on successive casts. The VFA had recently stocked fish into the river at this point (which of course was one reason why Barry had taken me there), and Darryl was hooking and landing them (then releasing them) one after another. I found this all very enlightening, as well as being



A nicely tied Red Spinner

very impressed with the fly tying and fish catching skills of a quite young lad. One obvious lesson was that affective flies do not need to be complicated.

Another member of the local Warrnambool fly fishing club built a hen house in his back yard and stocked it with birds whose feathers are traditionally used for fly tying. Thus some partridge, some peacock, a pheasant or two, and a few colourful roosters were all gathered



Fly tying is an absorbing and fascinating enterprise

and lovingly cared for. They were coming along nicely too, until a fox climbed under the fence and murdered the lot. Which was a huge pity as we were all watching keenly to see how it went and were hoping to scrounge a few feathers into the bargain.

Like fly fishing, fly tying is a skill that needs to be developed, and some of us are much better tyers than others. In the VFFA Hubert Reichelt is recognised as one of our best. It was my habit some years ago to call in on Hubert when he was doing some tying and just sit and enjoy watching a master at work. (Hubert's delightful wife Herta would keep me sustained with endless cups of coffee and lots of her magnificent German cuisine, so it was always a very enjoyable outing.)

Hubert is an engineer by training and occupation, so his fly tying is meticulous. If a fly called for 20 turns of thread, then exactly 20 turns would be tied in – every time. The wings on his Royal Wulffs were always exactly at 90° to each other

and each had the same number of fibres, and all were of the same length. The tails likewise were all exactly the right length with the correct number of fibres.

Each year towards the end of winter Hubert would tie several dozen nymphs for Trevor Stow's annual trip to New Zealand. But the first dozen tied by Hubert would go in his own fly box – as these were the ones where he was 'just getting his eye in' and getting them all exactly right. Trevor's flies, that followed, would all be identical and absolutely perfect.

I know that if I start identifying other top fly tyers in the VFFA I'll wind up in strife, because I'm certain to overlook many who deserves to be named. But I'll tentatively press on anyway. Currently Richard Kos is our resident VFFA fly tying expert, and he, too, is a brilliant tyer. He often supplies our Fly of the Month examples for our newsletters.

I must also mention Jim Blakeslee at Warrnambool. Jim is another superb tyer, and as well as tying great flies he is also very creative. He has designed and tied flies to represent the insects and other trout food in the rivers around Warrnambool, and his Green Bug, a copy of the shrimp common in the local rivers, is a highly effective fly which is described in the VFFA's fly tying book *Time Flies*. Jim told me once that he does a lot of his fly tying sitting in a beanbag watching television. It doesn't affect his flies – they still all look superb.

Andrew Mossman is another of our fine VFFA fly tyers. He has caught a lot of New Zealand trout on his patterns, many of which represent the insects in New Zealand's Mataura River. His dry flies and nymphs have undone countless hundreds of magnificent Mataura trout.

Mick Hall is a significant VFFA tyer. When he lived at Eildon he used to travel down on Friday afternoons and spend the evening at the Hookup Bait & Tackle store in Ferntree Gully where he demonstrated fly tying, often to quite large audiences.

And finally, as *Time Flies* reports, Philip Weigall (highly regarded Victorian guide and writer on fly fishing matters) is responsible for a fabulous little fly called the Milly Midge. Check page 145 of *Time Flies*. It's easy to tie and it catches a lot of fish (even for me).

So clearly, with all these highly skilled fly tyers that I have personally known and watched in action I should be proficient at it myself. I wish!

I get by – by tying the easy flies and not being too fussy about how good they look. They're my flies and they're in my fly box, and most of them do catch fish

for me. I cheat a bit – often by leaving tricky bits out when I can, and by approximating to the instructions. My Royal Wulffs don't ever get shown to anyone else.

How many flies do you need? One of our very special USA newsletter readers, who is now in his 80s, was telling me he recently counted all the flies he had tied in his many fly boxes. The number was over 2,500. He figured that perhaps he now had enough.

But it's good fun, and tying a few more is always a temptation, even if you don't need them. If you don't tie your own, then give it a go. The VFFA is again this year organising some fly tying nights. Novices are very welcome to come along and see it happening, then tie a few themselves under expert and very helpful tuition. But be warned - it can become very addictive!

The Retirement of John Diggle

John Diggle, Director of Inland Fisheries for Tasmania, is on leave now and this will extend until he retires later in the year.

John is highly regarded by his peers for his strategic and thoughtful management of Tasmania's freshwater fisheries. He has battled with maintaining a high standard of fisheries management whilst under ongoing budget pressure.

As a technical officer he caught the first European carp in Lake Crescent in 1995. It has been through his methodical and dogged approach that saw the eradication of this pest from lakes Crescent and Sorell some 28 years later.

John obtained important federal government funding that provided the

science to protect the environmental values of lakes Crescent and Sorell through the water management plan. The lakes became the best two studied waters in the State.

John has been passionate about fisheries monitoring and having a measured understanding that ensure sound decisions are made to provide the best results for anglers.

John's boots will be hard to fill but we are pleased to announce the appointment of Dr Ryan Wilkinson as Acting Director Inland Fisheries for the coming 12 months. We are excited to have Ryan onboard.

Best of luck and tight lines John.

The Australian Trout Foundation

The ATF is now a very important organisation doing fabulous work in promoting and developing our local trout fishing. The ATF President is Terry George, who is also a VFFA member.



Ovens River Restoration



Terry puts in countless hours organising events that benefit our Victorian trout fishery. So members are strongly encouraged to take a few moments to check the ATF's official website to see what is happening under the Australian Trout Foundation banner.

Check <https://australiantroutfoundation.com.au>. You will be surprised and impressed to see just how much this organisation is now doing to improve our local fishing.



Good looking habitat

An Article from the Weekly Times - Wednesday, March 20

... by Peter Hunt

Victoria's 300 angling clubs will be caught up in new animal welfare regulations, after the Allan government failed to exempt fishing events from its new Animal Care and Protection Bill.

VRFish has warned that any club that runs an event, whether organised to raise money or not, faces having to comply with new mandatory animal care regulation. The Bill states "a person must not organise or arrange an event that wholly or partly involves animals in contravention of the regulations", otherwise they face penalties of \$11,539 for an individual or \$57,693 for a body corporate.

Until now all recreational fishing, from children landing their first catch to club competitions and going fishing, were exempt from animal-welfare laws, as long as they complied with the Fisheries Act 1995.

VRFish chief executive Ben Scullin said the recreational fishing lobby "made it very clear (to government) that going fishing was not animal cruelty and that the current legislative exemption for recreational fishing under the Prevention of Cruelty to Animals Act was to be carried across into the new legislation."

"VRFish won't be supporting this Bill unless an exemption for recreational fishing is provided," he said.

The government was asked if it would amend the Bill, with a spokeswoman stating: "We encourage all Victorians, including anglers, to have their say as part of our comprehensive consultation process to ensure that this important Bill and its supporting regulations best reflect the expectations of Victorians."

It appears the government has succumbed to pressure from the RSPCA, the Greens and the Animal Justice Party, by failing to exempt fishing events, exposing angling clubs to a raft of new animal care standards that will be enshrined in regulations once the Bill is passed.

RSPCA Australia already has a policy of opposing blue water fishing for sport, "due to the inherent and significant risks of prolonged pain, injury, suffering and distress to the fish involved."

The RSPCA, whose Victorian officers will have the power under the new Bill to enforce its regulations, also supports "the compulsory regulation of a code of practice for the welfare of fish caught by angling, which is based on current evidence regarding the capacity of fish to experience pain and suffering."

Fishing Association of Victoria president Stephen Taranto said: "We're concerned because events are a big part of what we do," with 17 game clubs running events across the state.

VRFish chairman Rob Loats said imposing animal-welfare regulations and penalties would undermine fishing clubs that were already vulnerable after battling their way through Covid lockdowns.

Mr Loats said: "Fishing competitions hold clubs together", allowing members to get out and enjoy a bit of camaraderie.

Big River Weekend at Enoch's Point

... report from John Spragg

On the weekend of March 23 & 24 I left home at 8 am on the Friday morning and after a four hour journey ended up on 15 km of unsealed road before arriving at John Pilkington's wonderful place at Enoch's Point on the Big River.

Enoch's Point was a settlement that started around 1860 when alluvial gold was found in the area. With the gold rush in full swing Enoch's Point grew until it had three hotels, a school, post office and a couple of general stores/ miner suppliers.

The only way into Enoch's Point was originally by foot, and I have the greatest respect for these pioneers who cut their way through the bush. Can you imagine walking from Melbourne on a three-week trek with a heavy swag, tools, cooking gear and food through the Black Spur, making your own track to Enoch's Point.

Around 1910 the easy gold had run out, the war took a lot of men away, and the town at Enoch's Point died.

In the 1930s Ralph Pilkington built a bush hut for his father at Enoch's Point in a very special valley. In 1954 John Pilkington with his father visited Enoch's Point for the first time. They walked in the last 16 kms. John and his family have been attached to the area since then. John's book *Big River Days* tells how the area was raped and pillaged by miners prospecting for gold for 50 years without giving a thought to what they were doing to the area.

Today you would need John to point out where this happened. When I arrived I was presented with magnificent bush and a clear trout stream. We had a Lyrebird talking to us as I had my first cuppa. Blue wrens abounded, and yellow robins, rosellas, pigeons and a bower bird were all sighted. The bush was alive and healthy.

There were five VFFA members already at John's place when I arrived, and by Sunday morning the group included Mike Jarvis, James Carter, Hamish



Hamish well geared up to tackle a choice section of the river

Hughes, Peter Clayton, Bruce Clayton, Peter Whitelaw, Bill Jeans, Ray Goddard, Rick Dugina, Richard Kos, Brian Cooper Bruce Houghten, Corey Houghten, myself and our host John Pilkington.

On Friday I explored the area with Peter Whitelaw as my guide, and loved what I saw. By evening the fly fishers were back and most had tales of fish caught. We enjoyed a barbeque, and tall tales were told by those who had been fishing.

On Saturday most of us kitted up after breakfast and fished. At lunchtime we came back to the kitchen area to be confronted with the aroma of homemade Pilks sausage rolls and pizza. Then feeling well fed most of us headed back to the rivers.

On Saturday night Pilks had outdone himself. He had three legs of lamb in the oven along with roast spuds and pumpkin. Dinner was an amazing roast lamb, gravy, roast spuds, roast pumpkin, broccoli and mint sauce. Peter Whitelaw then cooked a magnificent sticky date pudding that was accompanied with butterscotch sauce and cream. The meal



Assessing flies for the morning expedition

and the talk at the table was a highlight. The fish caught through the day rapidly grew in size and numbers the later the night.

I need to mention the fishing as that was the excuse most of us used for being there. It was good, and for me fantastic. Most of us landed fish and everyone at least missed a take. The fishery was very healthy with both browns and rainbows plentiful. Fish were caught of small dries but I believe most fish were caught on a nymph under a dry. Hoppers as an indicator with a nymph under it seemed the preferred method. Kossy landed



The end of day fishing report and assessment



John Pilkington's place at Enoch's Point is surrounded by bush

seven fish in one session using this method.

The areas I fished were at the junction of the Big River and Enoch's Creek where I landed a beautiful rainbow and lost a couple. There was very good fishing within a very short walk on cleared walking tracks that gave reasonable accesses to the river along the tracks. Wading in the river for a bloke with two bionic hips was not too bad, although some of the polished boulders did present tricks and one put me on my backside.



A very comfortable bedroom

Next morning after breakfast some of the group headed home or to other areas of Victoria. I decided to fish downstream but didn't have much luck, though I enjoyed the river and surrounds.

This was my first trip to Enoch's Point, and the memory will be etched in my mind. Not only is the area mind blowing and the river a joy to see, but the patter, ribbing and camaraderie among the VFFA members made for a memorable weekend. John's hospitality and cooking were fabulous beyond belief. Everyone pitched in when there was something to be done. Any VFFA member who has not done the Big River Weekend is sadly missing an exceptional time and place. Just listening to John Pilkington telling the history of the place is worth the trip.

An Eildon Report

... from John Douglas

The fishing around Eildon remains great, and especially the Goulburn that is running clear with plenty of trout sipping in the bubble lines and cruising the backwaters. There are also lots of smaller fish in the runs and there are enough fish up and about for anglers to remove the nymph and just fish dry flies. Big hairy flies have worked well for me, but smaller spinners and caddis should be used on the evening rise—if you're lucky to be in an area where the fish come up.

I've found the smaller feeder streams a little bit tougher, but the fish are there. The late summer heat and the lack of rain have the streams getting lower and warmer (and I'll use that as an excuse and reason for my tougher fishing).

Further afield on a recent road trip with a mate we found similar stream conditions and fish activity in the north-east streams in the Bright and Omeo areas. The fish were certainly there as many were sighted, though they were very spooky. Enough fish rose to our dry flies for us to



A recent photo of the Breakaway Bridge

have reasonable fishing, but you could go for some time and distance, with many casts covering good-looking water, between fish.

Hopefully we will get some cooler weather and a decent autumn break leading to stream conditions that are more conducive to fish.



Gently returning another Goulburn brown

Some News On Eucumbene

... from Trevor Stow

Over the past three years Lake Eucumbene has fished the best that I have seen it since I first went there in 1972. I have seen it rise from just below 30% in capacity in 2019 to 70% last year. Obviously this has been due to the wonderful seasons of rainfall that the area has received.

During its rise up and covering the banks the lake has reached sections that have not seen water for many years. You could almost say it is inundating "virgin country". As a result, the food chain has been remarkable. Midges at times have

covered the entire lake in huge numbers. Caddis have established in the grassy edges of the lake, and grasshoppers have very conveniently been just an arm's length from the water. The mudeyes have also been about in good numbers during the summer and autumn period.

To add to this, the lake has been stocked with lots of fish. Fish, I might add, that have a great food supply and very comfortable water temperatures due to the three mild years that we have recently experienced. Anglers have been catching lots of rainbows between 1 and 2 pounds,

and fat little rainbows they were. Every day some lucky angler would pick up a large brown, and these were typically between 5 and 8 pounds. Well folks, let me tell you, that's about as good as it gets in Lake Eucumbene.

I'm not sure that the party is over yet, but the lake dropped below its previous year level last November and has continued to fall steadily to its present level of 58%. The water is now a fair distance from the grass and the previous high water levels of last year. What is not helping at present is that the water temperature at the beginning of autumn is around 21°C. Three or four degrees less would be very welcome.

Recently 10,000 rainbows were stocked in the lake, and they are still producing good sport even though they are only about half a pound in weight. Mixed in with these are the rainbows that I spoke about earlier, which are in the 1 to 2 pound range. Also, there is still the odd large brown being taken, but not in



Another very pretty Eucumbene rainbow

the numbers of recent years. The other observation that I would make is that the fish are not in the same prime condition as previously. In fact, I would say they are a tad skinny.

I recently spent a few days at Eucumbene and found the fishing quite slow. In talking to other fishermen, including bait, lure and fly anglers, all were complaining about how hard the fishing was.

Perhaps not all is lost. There are grasshoppers in the grass around the lake, though they are mostly back about 20 metres from the water and the grass is quite green in places. But there is still time for them to put in an appearance. I looked for but didn't find any mudeye shucks on the dead wood or rocks, but there were a few mudeyes in the trout I caught. March and April are often the peak times for mudeyes to appear, so perhaps it is not too late. Midges are still around, but not in the same numbers they were in the last few years. If the conditions are right they may be helpful.

On a brighter note, the evenings were full of caddis. As normal they appeared right on dark, and in very big numbers. These caddis provided the best opportunity of the day to catch a fish.



Trevor's fly box – Eucumbene gold

We fished a lot of Loch Style fishing out of a boat. Our most successful fly was a size 12 brown nymph fished in a team of flies that included an English wet fly and

a Magoo. The Magoo took its share of fish in the team. A floating mudeye pattern, probably mistaken as a caddis by the trout just on dark, was also successful.

Another Perspective on Eucumbene

... from Rod Barford

I had a good trip to Eucumbene recently, fishing for nine days all up though I was hindered by a very painful shoulder. I could only fish a couple of sessions each day, and then only for a couple of hours maximum.

But I averaged six trout per day in spite of the handicap, with most around the 3 lb mark along with a few very nice bigger ones too. I caught most on a Cubits Mudeye pattern after 7 pm, but managed to attract a couple each morning from the depths fishing a deep-sunk cuta mudeye pattern.

The breezy days fished best for me. Whenever the wind backed off completely it became difficult to elicit a response from Mr Speckles; they didn't like the flat calm conditions.

I spent two nights on the Snowy River near Jindabyne but only caught a few because I was socializing most of the time. But I had a good look around. It's a

beautiful part of the river and has some very respectable trout, but realistically is the domain of the young and fit because of the amount of climbing and clambering involved.

The largest fish I polaroided looked about 5 lb. There were lots of fish half that size, and some good dun hatches. The few I caught were under 3 lb but full of energy.

It looks a very healthy system nowadays, and I left there just prior to Snowy Hydro increasing the riparian flow. I'm told that any such increases really spur some intense feeding by the trout, especially if the river exceeds its banks.

I'm scheduled for shoulder surgery in either late May or early June. Yes, it's my casting arm, which of course means no fishing for me until at least early summer. My arm will be in a sling for several weeks, so I will not even be able to tie flies while rehabilitating!



Beautifully marked rainbow

Snorkelling for Trout

... from Nick Taransky

Ed Zern famously once wrote that “Fishermen are born honest, but they get over it.” How many of us arrive at our chosen fishing location, familiar or new, with boundless enthusiasm, but quickly, after exhausting options in the fly box and all methods, start to wonder, “are there even any fish here at all? Have shags (feathered or otherwise) cleaned them out, or has the drought taken its toll, or have the fish just moved on to other stretches”...

Aside from personal trauma considerations for individual anglers, it is valuable information for fisheries managers to monitor fish stocks and to judge the health of the fishery and the environment. Catch rates can be of help, but that only tells part of the story. Despite our collective best efforts, is it possible that some fish are present but never get caught by anglers? An example in the affirmative was provided to me by my American friend, Jeff Wagner. Electrofishing of his beloved Penns Creek in Pennsylvania produced the survey’s largest brown trout right next to a large carpark and access point that saw at least a dozen cars and as many anglers nearly every day of the season. No one had ever seen this fish, or one like it, in this stretch despite it being regularly fished with everything from dry flies, to nymphs, to streamers in the dead of night.

While electrofishing – temporarily stunning fish and netting them - will give some idea of the existence and size variation of fish, isn’t always an effective way of accurately counting fish numbers, especially in certain types of waterways.

Fish and Game in New Zealand use “drift dives” to provide a reliable method for surveying their rivers and streams, which are often a mix of riffles and turbulent

rapids, and seemingly bottomless large pools. Drift diving involves a number of wet-suited volunteers, with masks and snorkels, spanning the river and drifting downstream in parallel formation, counting the trout that pass under them as they go.

To avoid double (or triple) counting of fish, the fish are only counted as they pass from downstream to upstream with respect to the diver and their “portion” in the river. Species (brown and rainbow) and size (large – over 40 cm, and medium – under 40 cm) are also memorised by each diver, so there are four categories to account for. At the end of the drift the numbers are tallied and recorded, along with water temperature and clarity, in order to compare the results with previous and future years. The existence (or absence) of very small fish (fry / fingerling size), is also noted, though they are not individually tallied. A small stream may only require a couple of divers to cover the breadth of the river, while a larger river might need a larger team.

I recently had the pleasure of “assisting” (doing my best to not get in the way while not dying) at a recent drift dive of the middle-upper reaches of the Rangitikei River, not far from my home in Taihape. The invitation came from Matt Kavermann and Hamish Carnachan of Fish and Game New Zealand, after I’d shown some interest in how drift dives worked at a presentation that they had given on the Moawhango River.

While it all seemed like a wonderful idea in theory, the day before the drift I must admit to a little trepidation. I managed to find and even fit into my old surfing wetsuit (without a shoe horn), and located my once-used snorkel and mask (from a trip snorkelling in the tropics).

When Matt told me that I would probably want a neoprene kidney belt and extra neoprene layers, as the river might be a “bit cold”, I started to wonder if there might be somewhere else that I need to be that day (like in front of a warm fire). Not wanting to be the soft Aussie, I mentally noted to reread my Wim Hoff ice-bath meditation book, and gave Matt a confident “she’ll be right” to be picked up the following morning. Anyway, the worst that could happen was death from hypothermia... Or so I thought.

Matt and Pete arrived the next morning on a beautiful blue sky day. Hamish and Davey were to join us on the river later to make a team of five to cover the width of the river. The downside of the blue sky was that the clear night had provided a morning frost and a river temperature of 11°C. Matt had thankfully found a spare kidney belt and neoprene vest, which I accepted reluctantly in the name of politeness. The only thing missing was a neoprene hood, but my response was another reasonably confident “she’ll be right”.

At the river’s edge Hamish did expand on the ‘slight chance’ of hypothermia, along with a few other minor hazards, as part of his OH&S briefing. I was told to

watch out for star-pickets and steel mesh reinforced concrete in the fast water, as they could do some damage. And to not get an arm or leg caught under a rock in the rapids, as that could result in a snapped limb or getting “stuck”. Oh, and not to get sideways in the fast water as that could mean a hard blow to the body or legs from an instream rock. And to watch that my face and teeth didn’t get ‘smashed in’.

Importantly, if I was knocked around through rocks in a rapid, I should “relax” and be soft like a jellyfish. “Yes, yes, relax”, I dryly mouthed, and my lips formed the words “she’ll be right”, though I’m not sure if any sound came out this time. Seriously, the briefing did get my full attention and it did make me realise that it was important to follow these instructions. The guys did put me at ease and made sure that I would be located between two experienced divers, and that I could bale out and walk the bank any time I felt unsure or uncomfortable.

So, it was with a balance of genuine excitement and mortal fear, over-toned with a thumbs up “she’ll be right”, as I plunged into my first drift dive in the mighty Rangitikei River...



The mighty Rangitikei looks harmless from a distance



Matt from Fish and Game recording the tally. Nearly 200 fish in 2 km, and 90 of them over 40cm...

With my very limited snorkelling experience was the feeling of “flying” as I drifted down the first ocean-blue pool. This was quickly overtaken by the piercing cold attacking my non-hooded scone. A spoon of ice cream in the mouth is wonderful, but having your head plummeted into a bucket of it is something that you only need to feel once. I immediately thought that my drift might end pretty quickly, but within a minute I acclimatised and started to feel really comfortable.

I did my best to keep pace and in line with Matt on my left and Pete on my right, slowly paddling through the first pool. At the shallow tail we stood up, and Pete asked me if I’d seen those three large rainbows that went under me. “Ah, no I responded.” “No worries,” he said, “I’ll put them on my tally”.

When gliding down the next riffle and gentle rapid all of Hamish’s advice came into play, and I realised that personal safety was paramount as well as counting fish. It was an incredible experience to go

bobbing headfirst down a rapid, dodging around the odd rock, that I would have struggled to wade through due to the heavy water pressure. And yes, relaxing as much as possible over shallow rocks minimised the impact of one or two boulders. It was fun. But I had deep respect for the river, even in these low Autumn levels.

The rapid opened out into a deep pool, and wow - here were the fish! A few large rainbows, maybe 4 - 5 pounds, were zig-zagging left and right in front of me, and maybe ten more were in the 30 - 40 cm range. At some point they would make a break for it and run the gauntlet past us upstream, as we “herded” them to the shallow tail out. The trick was to ascertain if they were “my fish” to tally, or the diver on my left or right. The key was to point if you wanted to “claim them” and look across at your partner. If only fishing was that easy!

After a few more pools and glides my rainbow tally started to mount, but I hadn’t seen a brown. At various points

in ankle deep water we would stand and walk down to the next drift-able water. Matt, who had the river's edge covered, had seen some browns in the eight pound class down deep or hugging close to the bank. Even Pete, on my other side, had seen some big browns hiding on the bottom under rocks midstream, with only their tails visible. The river was as clear as the ocean, so I was slightly frustrated that I hadn't seen at least some of these browns while scanning out in front of me. There was obviously a skill to this, and I was doing my best while making sure that I didn't drown. Only once did I swing sideways in a rapid, and the knock from a rock on my thigh felt like being hit by a hammer. (Four days later I'm still feeling it a bit.)

As our drift went on I gained confidence. Then all of a sudden I saw a brown of 5 - 6 pounds lying doggo on the bottom as I drifted straight over it. And then another, and another. It was fascinating to see the difference between browns and rainbows, reinforcing the experience of an above water angler. Rainbows would zoom away looking for immediate escape, while browns would stay dead still and only move if they felt that a threat was imminent. Matt even dived down to a couple of thumper browns and got a

hand on them before they bolted. Hamish apparently has the knack of free catching fish by hand.

While I continued to prioritise safety, the day became more and more enjoyable. I learned a lot about where fish hold, and want to do more dives in different types of water. (I now have a neoprene hood on my shopping list though.)

Interestingly, though we obviously spooked the fish, my feeling was that the rainbows, as agitated as they were, were less traumatised by our presence than the browns. This was confirmed when we drifted past two visiting Californian anglers. We apologised for going past them like a team of Navy Seal divers, yet ten minutes later when we were walking back to the car, they were hooked up on rainbows in water that we had just drifted through.

My day also had me thinking how much fun it would be to drift some Australian streams, even small creeks, in this commando style. ... until I recalled my many experiences of encountering snakes in Australian streams.

Hmmm. For the time being I'll look forward to my next Kiwi adventure.



The clarity of the water was sensational

OFFICIAL INVITATION TO THE 2024 WARRNAMBOOL FLY FISHERS CLUB INC. 55th ANNUAL FISH AND GAME DINNER

Dear Fellow Fly Fishers and Guests,

Here is the official invitation to you and your guests to join us at our 55th Annual Fish and Game Dinner. It will be held much earlier than in recent years. In 2024 we will be dining together on Saturday, May 25th, at the Warrnambool Racing Club Pavilion, on Grafton Road, Warrnambool. This year, the cost for WFFC members it will be set at \$80. Also, if you can't make the AGM in August, we urge you to pay your WFFC Membership on the night of the Dinner. For any other person who wishes to join us on the night as a paying guest the cost will be \$100.

It will be a BYO wine and beer night. Before dinner drinks with deep-fried crumbed abalone and whitebait will begin at 6:00 pm. We will sit down for the first course at approximately 7:00 pm for the start of what should be another night of fine food and cheerful company.

I urge you and others who you invite as your guests to contact me at my e-mail address jtblakeslee@westvic.com.au or by calling me at 0437 983 421 before April 25th to book a seat if you/they will be attending. After that date, for bookings please contact our President, Adrian Jacobs. His email is



E-mail: jtblakeslee@westvic.com.au
Phone: 0355 625168
P.O. Box 1380 Warrnambool 3280

adrianj6@bigpond.com and his phone number is 0437 620 972. Since this is our one and only fund raiser for the Club we want to fill every available seat and trust that people who book a seat and say they are coming will show up on the night. If you need to cancel your booking, please let us know ASAP so your place can be offered to others. There is a capacity limit of 70 persons who can fit into the venue at the Warrnambool Racing Club Pavilion and places will start filling up fast, so a prompt response is recommended.

Jim Blakeslee
Social Committee Member
Warrnambool Fly Fishers' Club Inc.
112 Bridge Road
Woodford, Victoria 3281
Mob – 0437 983 421
e-mail – adrianj6@bigpond.com

Fly Tying - Winter 2024

... from David Hooke

Despite changing the venue to a more central location last year, there still seemed to be only limited interest in our winter fly tying activities. However, Council, in their wisdom, feel that no self-respecting fly fishing association can

drop fly tying altogether; particularly as we have some of the giants of the fly tying world in our midst and happy, indeed eager, to share their expertise with beginners and seasoned tyers alike.

Sessions this year will be on the first Tuesday night of the month at the Botanical Art School on the corner of Shipley Street and Punt Road in South Yarra. Dates therefore will be June 4, July 2, and August 6. There is an ample car park opposite the entrance.

The classroom is set up for botanical art students, so everyone will have their own desk. Rudimentary materials and tools will be available but experienced members are encouraged to bring any spares they may have to share on the night.

We aim to start at 7 pm; the exact format is yet to be decided and indeed may be influenced by the wishes of those on the night. A glass of red and some biscuits and cheese will help to provide sustenance and focus!



Hairwing Coachman – an old but still effective dry fly

If you have the slightest interest, I do urge you to venture out. One of our more successful evenings last year was watching Kossy helping one of our member’s young lad. Great to see such enthusiasm.



Kossy sorting out a hackle with David Hooke watching

Casting for Recovery report: March 2024

... from Chris Gray

Casting For Recovery retreat programs are run for women dealing with cancer. The retreats are organised by Mending Casts Inc, whose members volunteer their time to hold free retreats for people with or who have had cancer. Participants are taught the basics of fly fishing, including casting and fly tying, to introduce them to the calming and relaxing nature of this sport. An afternoon of pampering is included to allow participants to relax and enjoy the beautiful, peaceful, and natural environment where our retreats are held.

The structured program saw us commencing with some trout being stocked into the Delatite River, courtesy of Victorian Fisheries Authority. We



Helping hands – David Grisold and Chris Gray dressed up to go

were fortunate to receive 54 rainbow and brown trout ranging in size from 2 – 5 lb.



Healing hands



Watch the reeds!

The volunteers and participants arrived throughout the afternoon at the Sebel Hotel, Pinnacle Valley. We commenced with a casual 'meet & greet afternoon tea', then wader fitting and program outline, followed by a hearty dinner, after which we taught our lady participants to tie flies which we hoped would land them some fish. The participants are also allocated a 'buddy' who will look after them during the retreat.

Tuesday morning started with breakfast, and then we headed off to teach our ladies how to cast a fly rod. The afternoon provided a break for the volunteers, as the ladies then participated in "Look Good Feel Better" - a pampering and educational session focusing on how to look after yourself when going through the various cancer treatments. We then re-grouped for a fly fishing session on the dam at the Sebel hotel, which was a challenge on a hot afternoon!

Wednesday commenced with a relocation of people and gear to the Delatite River in anticipation of catching some of the



Hey – my first fish!

trout cruising the river. Beats had been set up for the twelve ladies to maximise their opportunities. Both local and stocked trout were caught, offering photo opportunities and lots of success stories.

Our team members - Louise Christison, James Norney, David Grisold, Jim Higgs, Joanne Dobson, Charley May and I have volunteered at a few of the women's and men's retreats, and found them a wonderful way to share our passion whilst supporting people with cancer. While the retreats are structured, there is an enormous amount of fun over the three days. There are also a number of specialist medical people on the retreats to run the serious participant sessions.

Mending Casts is always looking for volunteers to help at the retreats. Volunteers' accommodation, meals and fly fishing gear is all supplied free of charge. All you need do is get yourself there, bring some tippet and flies, and when it's over get yourself home. It's a truly rewarding opportunity.



Inspired group

Fishing New Zealand

... from Rob Lennon

In early February of this year a few other anglers and I had a full week's fishing in New Zealand. We were based in Lumsden in Southland, and were led each day by some exceptional local guides. The weather was almost perfect for sight fishing, but occasionally we had some challenging wind. The worst weather seemed to happen overnight, but we set off each morning with promising sunshine and calm conditions. Only on the last day it rained heavily, but this didn't daunt our desire to be fishing.

Our regular destinations were sheltered parts of the Raikaia and Mataura Rivers. The area had some unseasonable cold and wet weather earlier in the year, and this had delayed the onset of the willow grub feeding fiasco in February. Nevertheless, fish still fed and we had to



Rob Lennon with a 3lb brown beauty from the stunning Waikaia River

rig accordingly with appropriate nymphs below dries. Nothing was too much trouble for the guides, who regularly changed nymphs to fool these wary suckers, but ultimately a reasonably accurate cast nailed a fish.

We all caught quality specimens, most from 3 lb to 6 lb, and consistently brought them to the net. A few released themselves during the fight, and others in their bid to escape stole valuable flies and left them hooked up in amongst the woody willowed banks. But we landed most of the fish we hooked.

I landed 30 fish over six days fishing, as did a few of the others. Everyone caught significant numbers and the results overall were outstanding. Our accommodation was exceptional, the ferrying to and from the airport and the individual days searches were all well-coordinated, and all with a great sense of goodwill. Tangles were graciously untangled - a thankless task!

Then there were the three-course home cooked gourmet meals expertly prepared and presented each evening, to be devoured by some very hungry anglers

over a few beers and some red wine. Exceptional!!



Catch and release of course!



Rob with a stunning 5 lb trophy brown from the Mataura near Lumsden, NZ (all photos taken by Eddie Fraker and Scotty Slater)



Yet another. Those New Zealand browns are stunning.

Tasmanian Fishing Report

... from Chris Wisniewski

Because of the exceptionally warm nights during March there have been lots of terrestrials in the wind lanes on the highland lakes. This has been particularly evident on yingina /Great Lake with the addition of good midge hatches bringing the trout to the surface. A boat is needed for this type of fishing, but windward shores where the food is being blown in have also been productive. If the fish 'weren't up' then floating a big bug pattern has been effective in drawing them from the depths. Anglers are also seeing the benefits of the work being done in Liawenee Canal to promote wild rainbow trout recruitment from the spring spawning with a strong pulse of fish around the 800 gram mark being caught.

The warm weather has brought other benefits. To power the air conditioners in Melbourne the Bass Link cable must have been bulging, and Brumbies Creek has had a strong clear cool flow of highland water. There has been some good damselfly action, and a recent big ant fall also had the fish up and about. The Macquarie River downstream has also fished well.

Clear water is also being released through Shannon Lagoon for downstream use. Along with the agreed water level management for the lagoon between the IFS and Hydro Tasmania the clear water and sunny days have made wade polaroiding possible. The brown trout have been cruising and were readily taking a dry fly. They don't appear to have become too educated yet, so any dun or beetle pattern seems to work.



A magnificent Lake Crescent brown

Look for the direction that the wind is blowing the clear water on any given day, and fish that area and the edge where it meets the cloudy water.

There have been some beetles on Dee Lagoon, but no jassids yet! There have also been bushfires in that area and this might affect these terrestrials. The fish have been willing to rise to a beetle pattern drifted in likely spots. The solid browns and rainbows that the Dee is known for are being caught.

March/ April is a good time to target rainbows in the wind lanes on the West Coast lakes. Lake Burbury has been fishing well to these midge feeders. Those who have fished from a boat in these wind lanes know that it can be quite frantic when you find a patch of fish. They tend to zig zag with their nibs breaking the surface as they sip the small flies from the surface. They come in schools. Sometimes you see dorsals and tails as they feed sub-surface. The successful fishing styles can change from

day to day, and even from fish to fish. A small dry fly (size 18 - 20) cast to arrive just where you think they will rise next will sometime work, and a large foam bug is worth a try, but best of all is to lead them with a sunken beetle or nymph. Give a steady draw on the line when you think the fish can see the imitation. They will often almost pull the line from your hand and hook themselves.

Fish have been active in taking mudeyes at Talbots Lagoon in low light periods. This compliments the mayfly feeders during the day. Static nymph fishing has also been catching fish, with the nymphs fished under an indicator or a large dry fly.

There were some magnificent brown trout caught in the recent survey at Lake Crescent. Fish up to 4.8 kg were caught, but more interestingly small fish were also caught, showing that there has been some natural recruitment from the inflowing Agnews Creek and from Lake Sorell, now that the fine mesh carp

containment screens have been removed. This return to the natural regime supplying a constant trickle of wild fish from Lake Sorell means that no stocking will be needed in Lake Crescent in the future. The water level is a little low for good fly fishing just now, but with average rainfall the water should sneak back into the marshes in spring, thus providing exciting fishing to trophy-size trout.

There are reports of solid brown trout being caught at Lake Sorell. Despite the dry summer the level remained high, and it is expected that fishing in this water will continue to build to its former glory in the coming season.

At Little Pine Lagoon the concrete boat ramp has been poured and the landing will be completed in coming weeks, thus providing better access for boat anglers.

The level is being held low to allow this work to be completed. This low water level offers good low light fishing for shore based anglers fishing to tailing fish.

This will be my last report representing the IFS after 35 years on the job, starting as an inspector based at Tarraleah in 1989. I finish on March 22. I have fly fished since the mid 1970s and seen many changes in the Tasmanian trout fishery, some good and some not so. But having fished many places around the world I am always glad to come home, as I know how good we have got it here and how lucky we are. It is important as anglers that we fight for our wonderful fisheries in these challenging times.

I hope to see you on the water in the future.

Chris



A young brown trout from Lake Sorell

FLY OF THE MONTH

The Claret Hatch Breaker



(From Neil Grose: March 2024)

(Our thanks to Neil for generously providing this fly for our Fly of the Month.)

There are as many mayfly imitations as there are angels dancing on the head of a pin. That is, we know there are lots, but that's as close as we get. Mayfly imitations are as diverse as the conditions in which mayflies hatch or fall, none more so than on rivers.

Which is why I probably do better on stillwater hatches than those on the broad reaches of our meadow streams. I am simple by nature and habit; these days I find that getting too intense with perfect imitation is just not me.

Much of the overseas literature focuses on an exact correlation of size, colour and position in the water column, but thankfully our Tasmanian trout are far more forgiving. It's a little like fronting up at the local pub for a feed when you're hungry – as long as it resembles food and comes in a vaguely recognisable format, you'll take it.

Of all the esteemed fly dressers who have developed reliable fly patterns, there are two who have had the most impact on me and the style of flies I prefer to tie and fish. First of these is Barry Lodge, a man I have never met. But I have always loved his patterns, predominantly the Barry Lodge Emerger, a wonderful pattern that will take fish in most circumstances.

Second is Muz Wilson, a great friend and godfather to my daughter Stephanie. Sadly Muz, like Barry Lodge, departed this realm far too early.

Of all the fly patterns Muz created, my favourite is the Possum Emerger, who Muz always credited Andrew Scott as being the true originator.

I, on the other hand, can't claim to have invented any original patterns. I have, however, amalgamated a few to suit the way I like to fish and the places I like to be. One of these is the Red Tag Royal, an accommodation of both the Royal Wulff and the Red Tag.

The other is the Claret Hatch Breaker, which blends the best part of the Possum Emerger with the practical advantages of the Barry Lodge Emerger. It has a tail of possum tail, a claret seals fur body, a tightly looped possum tail wing, and a thorax of dark possum with a hackle palmered through the thorax as Barry Lodge did with his emerger.

Claret is a wonderful colour and one that trout the world over favour – perhaps second only to black in its ubiquitousness. It is no secret that the trout in Arthurs Lake love claret, especially in patterns that echo a mayfly. Instantly coming to mind are the Mallard and Claret, (or Claret and Mallard if you are from Ballarat) and the Claret Dabbler.

The dressing for the Claret Hatch Breaker:

Hook: Tiemco 102Y size 11. (These are perhaps no longer available, so maybe use your favourite size 12 dry fly hook, but it needs to be black)

Tail: Dark possum tail – tied sparse-ish and not too short

Rib: Fine copper wire to suit

Body: Claret seals fur – half the hook length

Wing: Very tightly looped and twisted grey possum tail

Thorax: Dark possum tail

Hackle: Claret saddle hackle tied palmered fashion through the thorax only.

For the fishing:

This pattern works well on those days where cloud and sun are in conflict, with neither holding sway. One moment it's cloudy and the next the sun breaks through. When it's cloudy this fly works well with a decent twitch every now and again in front of rising trout – just enough to make a scratch on the surface. When the sun shines just put it out in front of them and they will soon take it.

I love using this fly as a single fly when polaroiding the edges of Arthurs Lake, and I've never had a trout hesitate to take it. In fact the fly in the photo above is the last one I have, the survivor of an intense session in Jones Bay in late January this year. So please excuse its rather dishevelled nature.

Far from being just an Arthurs Lake pattern (and let's face it, some days there anything will suffice) it has taken many trout for me in the Nineteen Lagoons and its near neighbours to the west - Lake St Clair, some odd ponds in the north-east, Little Pine Lagoon, and of all places, Canal Bay on Great Lake where I stumbled on a sparse hatch last season.

In short, it floats well, survives being taken by many trout, can be seen on the surface, and is reasonably easy to tie. Don't spare the Gink and count to three before setting the hook – then rarely will you miss.

VFFA 2023 meetings & other activities

April 2024

- 12 Fri – 14 Sun Donger Weekend at the Mitta Lodge, Omeo
Convenor – Peter Clayton 0438 219 538
- 18 Thursday General Meeting – 7:30 pm at the Kelvin Club:
(Speaker – John Spragg – reporting on the New Zealand trip in March)
- 24 Wednesday VFFA members visit Millbrook Lakes
Event Co-ordinator - Lyndon Webb (0488 555 724)
- 24 Wednesday Council Meeting – 7:00 pm, Zoom meeting.

May 2024

- 11 Sat & 12 Sun Murray cod fly fishing at Myrtleford (details of arrangements to be emailed soon by Terry Rogers)
- 16 Thursday General Meeting – 7:30 pm at the Kelvin Club:
Speaker – Andrew Fuller from The Flyfisher Store
His topic will be – “Fly fishing luck: the fine line between triumph and tribulation.”
- 25 Saturday Warrnambool Fly Fishers’ Annual Dinner – contact Jim Blakeslee on 0437 983 421 or jtblakeslee@westvic.com if wishing to attend.
- 29 Wednesday Council Meeting – 6:00 pm at the Kelvin Club.

June

- 4 Tuesday Fly Tying at the Botanical Art School of Melbourne – 7:00 pm
- 5 Wednesday VFFA members visit Millbrook Lakes
Event Co-ordinator - Lyndon Webb (0488 555 724)
- 7 Friday The trout fishing season in Victorian rivers officially closes at midnight on Friday, June 7, this year.
- 16 Sunday Casting at the Red Tag Casting Pool, commencing at 10:30 am
- 20 Thursday General Meeting – 7:30 pm at the Kelvin Club:
Speaker – Sam Fawke (in place of the cancelled March meeting)
- 26 Wednesday Council Meeting – 7:00 pm on Zoom

July

- 2 Tuesday Fly Tying at the Botanical Art School of Melbourne – 7:00 pm
- 18 Thursday Lunchtime General Meeting – 12 noon at the Kelvin Club:
(Speaker – TBC)
- 21 Sunday Casting at the Red Tag Casting Pool, commencing at 10:30 am
(Certified Casting Instructors will be present)
- 31 Wednesday Council Meeting – 6:00 pm at the Kelvin Club

(Remaining Millbrook visits for 2024 will be on April 24, June 5 and September 25)