

# FLY LINES



## Our 2023 Christmas Dinner with Tom Jarman

Many of us will have heard of Tom Jarman. He is a prominent and well-known fly fishing guide, fly fishing coach, and frequent contributor to *FlyLife* and other popular fly fishing magazines.

Friday, December 15,  
6:30pm, at the  
**Kelvin Club**

Tom is a passionate competition angler and has represented Australia internationally nine times. He is currently the Captain of the Australian Fly Fishing Team, and recently returned from the 2023 World Fly Fishing Championships in Slovakia where he was placed 4th individually.

Tom will be guest speaker at our December Dinner on Friday, December 15, where his topic will be *'A Year of Fly Fishing in Victoria'*.



*Tom – a highly skilled angler*

# THE VICTORIAN FLY FISHERS' ASSOCIATION INC.

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*Jason Platts does well on our Victorian streams*

# President's Message

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Dear Fellow Members

Firstly, let me congratulate everyone on the successful member's November meeting and Dinner when Dr John Morrongiello who illuminated attendees with his presentation on freshwater ecology. Thank you all for coming along. A big personal thank you to my Senior Vice President, John Spragg, for deputising in my absence.

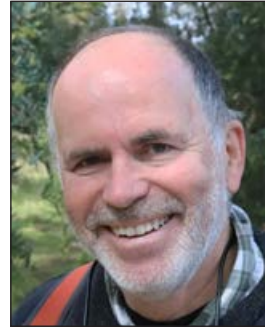
Secondly, I want to raise an issue I believe ought to be a high priority for the VFFA: how we can attract new members and grow our membership.

I'm hoping that membership will become a major focus over the next two years, and that all members become involved.

We all know that VFFA event attendance has steadily dropped over the past five years, with numbers at our monthly meetings hovering around 20, which is lower than ideal (and despite Terry Rogers' best endeavours to encourage and entice members along).

I know there are many valid reasons why members can't attend events, such as competing family and lifestyle commitments, affordability, access and mobility. Although we can address some of these issues for existing members, I firmly believe this needs to happen in conjunction with an active and conscious Membership Drive aimed at securing new members for the Association.

New members are the life blood of any club, and despite the increasing popularity of fly fishing the VFFA's inability to attract new members in significant numbers is an important and multifaceted issue in my opinion.



*Simon Joel*

I suspect that part of the problem is that fishing clubs in general may be losing their appeal with younger generations; with the internet and YouTube making it much easier for new fly fishers to learn the basics online, thus rendering the 'need' to join an association such as ours redundant.

Never-the-less I firmly believe that the VFFA provides all fly fishers with an important social hub and skills bank in which to flourish, so we just need to get better at promoting ourselves, and finding ways to actively bring new members into the Association.

We know that keeping our events relevant to both existing and new members is important, and I'm relying on your input and participation at our casting mornings, fly tying nights, river craft days, Euro-nymphing classes, etc, and asking you to bring along family members, friends and colleagues who might have an interest in joining the VFFA too.

And finally, and as always, please let me know if you have feedback about existing activities and suggestions for

new or improved events. Your input and involvement are vital.

Simon Joel

0419 368 391

I encourage all members to contact me, or any council member, with your ideas and suggestions.



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## February 2024 Meeting – Liars’ Night

Our February meeting, the first for 2024, will again be our traditional ‘Liar’s Night’, where some well chosen and well-prepared speakers will entertain us with their tales of their fabulous fishing successes over the Christmas/January period.

This event is totally unpredictable – you never know what you’re going to hear, and recent Liars’ Nights have yielded some magnificent and very entertaining surprises.

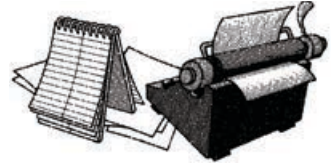
Those many members who plan to be out and about, or possibly even overseas

(including Tassie), in the December/January period and who are willing to share with us their excursion plans are asked to contact our president and let him know they are a possible candidate for Liars’ Night.

At the very least, the night provides a wonderful opportunity to catch up with friends and colleagues over dinner after the Christmas break.

So mark it in your diary – Thursday, February 22, 6:30 pm for a meal prior to the meeting, and 7:30 start, at the Kelvin Club.

# From the EDITOR'S DESK



*"What do you want to do this afternoon, old man?" he asked. "Fish," I said. "But you can't always fish," he said. I told him I could, and have proved it for thirty years and more. "Well, well," he said, "Please yourself. But isn't it dull not catching anything?" And I said, as I've said a thousand times since, "As if it could be." (Roland Pertwee, "The River God")*

*"I fished a little while ago with a man, not in his first youth, who had wasted the flower of his life on business and golf and gardening and motoring and marriage, and had in this way postponed his initiation to fly fishing far too long." (Arthur Ransome: "On Giving Advice to Beginners", Rod and Line, 1929)*

*"Fly fishing is to fishing as ballet is to walking." (Howell Raines: "Fly Fishing Through The Midlife Crisis")*

I was one of those who visited Millbrook last September, and early on in the day heard that Brad Wilson was doing particularly well down behind the cabin. So I grabbed a camera and hurried down to see how he was doing. On the way I stepped through some knee high grass and something black and skinny and about four foot long raced out from between my feet. A snake! How did I not stand on it?

Yes, fly fishing does indeed present a few perils, with snakes (at least in Australia) being one of them. Others that come to mind (or to my mind at least) are bulls, fences, and the condition of rivers. Let me explain.

There are two well-recorded VFFA snake stories. Written up in our *Geehi to Great Lake* is Bill Thomas's encounter some twenty years ago. Bill and his fishing companion Martyn had driven to the Delatite River on a 'glorious warm sunny morning' for some keenly anticipated trout. But when Bill walked to the back of the car to retrieve his waders he felt something hit his leg. He then spotted a large snake racing away. So it was back into the car for a speedy trip to the Mansfield hospital. Within 15 minutes

Bill had 'a blinder of a headache' and was sweating profusely.

At the hospital tests confirmed that he had been bitten by a tiger snake, so he was given heavy doses of antivenene. He was also suffering from clotting problems and some muscle breakdown, so the police helicopter was called in and he was flown to the Alfred Hospital in Melbourne, then later moved to the Intensive Care Unit at St Vincent's hospital. After a further ten days of serious treatment he was finally cleared and allowed to go home.

Just to add insult to the injury, while Bill was being flown to Melbourne for treatment Martyn took Bill's teenage son Sam back to the Delatite River, where they had a great day catching some fine fish.

The other memorable snake story (yes, told before) relates to the Bairnsdale Fly Fishing Club. The Bairnsdale Club now has a magnificent Lodge on the Mitta River which was built to replace their old lodge that had been destroyed in a bushfire. The old lodge was a large rectangular building with a wall down the middle. On one side of the wall

were the sleeping quarters – ten double bunks. The other side had a bathroom and toilets, a kitchen area, and a very comfortable lounge.



*Tassie tiger snakes are large and dangerous*

Many years ago a number of club members had driven up to the old lodge on the Friday night prior to the opening of the fishing season in order to get an early start the next morning. They settled in, organised their gear, swapped stories and flies, enjoyed a few sherbets, then retired to bed. They were up early the next morning, and the bacon and eggs were cooking nicely while they organised their gear for the new season's opening day.

But during the winter months a large brown snake had moved into the lodge and taken up residence in one of the bunks. He was woken early on that morning by all the noise and activity, and could smell the breakfast cooking, so cruised out into the kitchen to see what all the fuss was about.

Naturally his appearance generated a high level of excitement. With a great deal of leaping and square dancing, shovels and axes were frantically retrieved, and floorboards and a bewildered snake were rapidly chopped into bits. Fortunately, this time no-one was bitten.

A few years ago I was fishing in Tassie with Dermot O'Brien, and we visited Currawong Lakes. I was wandering around the bottom lake when I came across it - five foot of very much alive Tasmanian Tiger Snake. We both stopped. I decided to add a photo to my trip collection, so pulled out my camera. The flash on this camera is nearly always turned on because a bit of fill-in flash invariably improves my pictures. So when I took my photo the flash fired, and the snake instantly leapt into action. It raced around me on full throttle and climbed up into a tree.

Which I didn't approve of – I much prefer my snakes to stay on the ground. Warrnambool fly fisher Dr Bob Loch once told me how he was fishing a river in northern NSW many years ago when he arrived at a barbed wire fence with a tree growing around and over it. Bob was threading his way through the barbed wire when he suddenly confronted a snake curled up but very much awake on a branch in the tree. This prompted a rapid reversal on Bob's part. Yes, snakes belong on the ground.

My early fly fishing days were in Warrnambool, which I have mentioned on plenty of occasions. Warrnambool is a dairying area, so the paddocks are well stocked with cows, and bulls too. The cows are not usually a problem, but the bulls could be another issue. They were big and heavy and too often foul-tempered. I recall getting chased out of a paddock by a cantankerous bull and in trying to escape over a barbed wire fence ripped the backside out of a new pair of waders. The bull didn't offer to pay for repairs.

Yes, fences – both barbed wire and the electric variety - can be awkward. Out where the Mount Emu Creek connected with the Hopkins River just north of Warrnambool there was an electric fence

that I had to climb over to get to some good water. It wasn't a problem though because it was never turned on. Until one day I was straddling it – one leg on each side – when I discovered it was turned on. And I was wearing thigh waders, too.

In 1981 I taught in New Zealand for a year. One evening late in the year I went out to fish a river I had been told about. It looked good too, but to get to the water I had to get past a high and tightly strung barbed wire fence. After a lot of pondering and experimenting I finally decided that the smartest and least expensive thing to do was to take off my waders, drop them over the fence, then lie on the ground on my back and wriggle under the bottom wire strand. It worked and I subsequently enjoyed a very pleasant evening's fishing.

In that same year I was told about another river just north of where we were living 'that was worth a look!' I checked it out and it was indeed impressive. I spent a very pleasant evening there fishing attractive runs that were well stocked with hungry rainbows. So a week later I decided to visit it again. But in the intervening week we'd had some rain, and when I arrived the river was now

higher and running faster. But I thought I'd give it a go anyway. Silly decision. I was soon in trouble, getting washed downstream by the strong flow into some much deeper water. Fortunately I got carried under a tree with some low branches and with some strenuous reaching and grabbing I managed to pull myself over to the bank. Then, very wet but still alive, I had to walk down to a bridge so that I could cross back to the side where my car was parked.

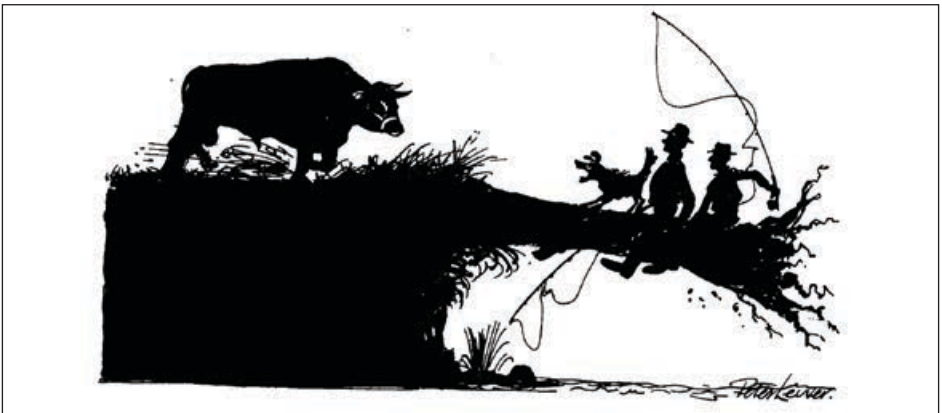
So yes, fly fishing does have some perils. Obvious and sensible strategies include fishing with a companion, taking a phone, taking some basic first aid bits in your backpack, taking a snake bandage, letting people know exactly where you will be fishing, and ...

Of course the list of sensible safety measures continues.

Summer is approaching, and holidays too, so many of our members will be out and about fishing our rivers and lakes. Enjoy it all. I hope you have lots of very successful days. But do take care.

Very best wishes, and have a great Christmas,

Lyndon



*A Peter Leuver sketch*

## John Morrongiello – Our guest on Thursday, November 16

Tonight I'm going to talk about some factors that account for the variation in fish growth in different places and different environments. Unfortunately, I'm not going to tell you how to catch them.

I'm a senior lecturer at Melbourne University in marine and freshwater biology and spend about 40% of my time doing research. In our research we learn how systems work and gain an understanding of what makes things tick. Then we use this in an applied science space to make informed decisions about how we manage natural resources and how changes might affect things.

Here's a photo of a barramundi, and this relates to some work we've recently finished in the Northern Territory. We were trying to determine how much water barramundi need to stay healthy. So we collected some data and found that the Australian monsoon index is a really good predictor of how many barramundi there will be in three years' time.

This is the sort of stuff I like doing. We take the biology and put it into a solution. That's the quantitative part of my job -



*Our guest speaker – Dr John Morrongiello*

doing some modelling and playing with numbers with fish at the core. We are trying to ensure we've got good rivers with healthy fish in them.

I love fly fishing. In my first year of university I sat next to Chris. We became good friends. Chris was a fly fisher and he wanted to teach me how to fly fish because he didn't have anyone to go fishing with. So I was taught how to fly fish. We then had some great trips to the South Island of New Zealand.



*Dr Morrongiello had an attentive audience*



## Mixture of fundamental and applied science

*Barramundi are a popular sport fish in our northern states*

I also do some saltwater fly fishing, and have had the opportunity to catch a few kingfish off Sydney. They're very lucky to have such a superb fishery there on their doorstep. But my favourite fishing venue is the Western Lakes in Tassie. We made annual pilgrimages to Tassie each December, staying at Liawenee and trying to be the first to get out to the Nineteen Lagoons.

Let's talk about 'big'. Why do some fish get really big? Here is a photo of a 44 pound trout caught near Twizel in New Zealand. Why did this fish get so big?

There are areas there that consistently produce large fish, and that really interests me.

One reason why we get so many big fish in that location is because there is some aquaculture occurring there. The trout there are chowing down on high protein, high fat content fish pellets, and there's obviously a whole lot more nutritional value in those fish pellets compared with sucking a tiny mayfly off the surface. Food variation can play a really important role in the body sizes of fish.



*The 44 lb Twizel trout*

Let's think how animals grow. They acquire resources by eating, and then energy from the food eaten flows into the animal. But before this energy can get anywhere near helping a fish grow we've got stimulus metabolism and behaviour - the energy expenses of just being alive. Think about yourself. Even if you're not doing anything you're still expending energy. If you sat still and did nothing you'd still die of starvation because you need energy to keep fuelling your body.

A fish needs to eat enough to keep itself alive, but then it will have some surplus energy too. When it's a juvenile fish it's going to put all that excess energy into growing. But when it reaches sexual maturity it will start producing eggs or sperm and get involved in the behaviours associated with spawning. It might be defending a redd or migrating upstream, and all this is energetically costly.

So there's always this trade-off with the amount of food available. A fish has to eat enough to deal with the necessary living expenses and look after reproduction. Then perhaps if it's got some surplus energy it will grow. That big fish from Twizel had enough surplus energy to do everything that it needed to do, and then it just kept getting bigger.

Likewise, fish in impoundments that don't have the opportunity to spawn are not putting as much energy into their eggs, or they're re-absorbing their eggs each year, so they can grow quite large compared to a fish in a nearby river. So the quality of the environment is really important.

The local habitat is also important. When you go fishing you pick the water to drift your fly through. You could just blind cast and you might get lucky, but there's an education to reading the water and



thinking about where the likely fish spots are. The fish will be where the food is. In some systems you will find just one big fish, and you can always pick where this big fish is going to be - in the prime lie.

And there's a dominance hierarchy. Trout are aggressive animals, and they'll chase away the little tiddlers into the shallower more marginal water. If you want to fish the riffles you've perhaps got that lovely seam where the water comes into the top of the pool at the prime feeding spot. That's where the larger fish are going to be.

We're currently going through a bit of a drought, and whenever I think about these conditions I think about that horrible millennium drought that occurred back in the mid-90s through into the 2000s. Many of you have had the experience of fishing through that time. It was a tough time to be fishing in Victoria.

I was working for the Victorian State Government then on a project trying to understand the impacts of the drought. We travelled around the state visiting 106 streams that had been sampled in the early 1990s. We revisited them to see how the fish communities were doing. In 1990 the upper Wannon River near the

Grampians was full of trout, but when we went back there in the mid 2000s we couldn't find a single trout anywhere. They had all died.

Our surveys found that across the state there was a 20% decline in brown trout abundance, and in the number of sites that they occurred in. In some catchments they had disappeared completely. They had completely disappeared from the Grampians catchments, though the Otways were a lot more buffered. The Yarra catchment wasn't too bad, but the Wombat State Forest in central Victoria, where I'm from, was badly hit.

When we visit sites we want to know how big the fish get. The easy way to do this is to catch a fish and measure it. You might then put a tag in a fish and hope you can come back later and catch it again. However, this is all fairly labour intensive, and the chance of recapturing the same fish is often very low.

So what we do is use this amazing structure in fish called the otolith. Otoliths are part of the fish's inner ear and they allow the fish to hear and sense vibrations in the water and they provide a sense of balance so the fish can navigate their surroundings. As a fish grows, these structures grow too. Unfortunately this is destructive sampling because to get these structures out you have to rip the fish's head open.

It's then just like tree rings. As a fish grows it lays out a band of materials each year, and we can count the rings and tell when it was born and how fast it has grown. If we know when it was caught, we can count the rings and tell when it was born, and how fast it has grown. We use this technique a lot because it allows us to catch a fish and then recreate that fish's whole lifetime.

Trish Koh is one of my PhD students. She is very interested in trying understand why fish grow differently across Victoria. She took fish from 20 rivers across Victoria and has examined their growth rates, trying to work out what makes them grow fast or grow slow.

Of course the general consensus is that trout need cool well-oxygenated well-flowing rivers. The literature tells us that 4°C is getting a bit too cold for them, while somewhere in the range 12 - 14 degrees is optimal for trout. They stop growing at about 19°C, and above 24°C you are probably going to kill them.

But trout have colonized Australia. They've been here for 150 years and live in places that are very different to the chalk streams in southern England where they come from. Here they live in some very marginal places. In the Grampians the Mackenzie River is not an English stream. The headwaters are cool, but if you go down lower there are still trout there, even though it's warmer. Some places in our state's north-east have good rainfall and are cool, but in other areas it's less so. So does this idea about temperature tolerances for trout hold true for the temperature numbers given, as this is all from European literature?



*Tassie lakes produce great fish*

Trish studied some good sites, other sites with a bit less water, and even places where there was very little water. So she was sampling a diversity of habitats. What she found was that when you've got lots of water with lots of stream flow the trout grow well and really fast. Bigger rivers with more discharge and more flow are good for trout too. This was important for young fish that responded well in these places. They grew faster. In fact all the fish grew a bit faster, but proportionately nowhere near as much as for the small fish.

When Trish started looking at the effects of temperature she found that trout were actually growing fastest in warmer sites. Some of these had average temperatures around 18°C and these were the ones where the fish were growing the fastest, which is completely counter to what we read in the European literature.

The big old fish were the ones that were actually growing fastest. They really liked the hot conditions. So small fish like it when it's wet, and the old fish like it when it's warmer. And this 18°C is close to the 19°C that the literature says is when trout stopped growing. Now all species have what's called a 'thermal performance curve'. As it gets warmer their growth rate increases, eventually reaching a 'sweet spot' - an optimal temperature which is ideal for growth. Then if it gets too hot the growth rate drops off.

So trout have a 'sweet spot' for their growth. Traditionally we've thought that for trout this was somewhere in the low teens (Celsius). But what we're seeing here in Australia is that it has shifted. The sweet spot for our trout is a bit warmer than what it is in Europe. They've been here now for 150 years, and we are thinking that they might have adapted to our conditions. They've

lived through lots of droughts and tough periods, and maybe just the toughest ones have survived. These results show that potentially there's some evidence that our trout might be a little bit more warm-adapted than we thought.

Let's change tack now and go to the second part of my talk and think about 'catch and release' fishing. It's a good thing, right? Catch a fish, take a photo, then put it back. But what are the possible impacts of catch and release fishing? If we catch a fish and put it back, does that change the way that fishery operates?

We delved into some of the literature on how animals learn. Can fish actually learn from previous experiences? Can they become less catchable in the future? Now some people are risk takers and some people are risk averse. Do we find that in the natural realm? Are some fish more likely to get caught because they're up for taking a risk? Are they bolder?

We know there's personality. Dogs have different personalities, and fish do as well. So what does that mean? Are there differences and does that affect our capacity to catch a fish?

What does this mean for us recreational anglers, and for the management of our fisheries? We want to go and catch fish. But when we've got lots of people catching fish and repeatedly putting them back, does that actually change the experience?

We love the idea of a pristine wilderness fishery where you feel like you're the only person there, but there are very few places like that in the world now. In some rivers in the USA you are shoulder to shoulder with 40 other people, everyone casting a line. But this is not my view of what a fishing experience should be. I love walking a river by myself or with a



*The Mackenzie River in the Grampians is a fine stream*

friend, but with greater populations and more people getting involved what does that mean?

I like to think that trout are smart animals. Some of you might be familiar with work that was done in New Zealand in the early 1990s, then repeated by Hayes in the 2000s. They fished a lot of back country streams or spoke to guides in New Zealand to try to understand what the impact of fishing had on the catchability of trout. What they found was that fish in very remote rivers not having a lot of fishing pressure were really easy to catch. But in rivers where there was higher fishing pressure the fish were harder to catch. And when those fish in really remote rivers were caught and released it took them a long time to settle down and get back to their normal life. But in rivers experiencing greater fishing pressure when you caught and released a fish then within a couple of hours it was back on station again.

They also found that when they caught the same fish a second time, it started feeding again sooner. However, if you'd already caught that fish it was a lot harder to catch it second time. The authors suggested that the fish were

learning. They were learning to become more wary of angling pressure.

Some of you probably have a fish you've caught multiple times. I've got one on the Delatite. I've never actually caught it, but I've had some throws at it. And it gets me every time. It's a beautiful animal sitting there. You can build a relationship with a particular fish and come back and see it again, and this shows that the process of fishing to these animals changes their behaviour.

This is pretty cool work, but in terms of scientific design there's holes in it. You can't control all the factors, whereas us scientists like to keep things under control and play around with just one variable at a time to find out what it does.

Now I thought fish can learn, but how do they learn? There are different ways of learning. One of the ways of learning is what we call 'trial and error'. Through a process of iteratively doing something you work out for yourself how it works. That's 'trial and error'. Another way of learning is 'social learning', which is observational learning. You don't experience something yourself, but you watch someone else do it.

We also know that some individuals in a population of animals are risk takers, while others are much more shy and retiring. Bolder fish are more willing to bite a hook.

We know that with albatross, for example, the bold ones will dive on the hooks on the back of a longline boat and get caught, while the shy ones are too scared to go near a boat, so don't get caught. The problem here is that those bold albatross are actually the best breeders. So when all the bold ones die, you're left with the really shy ones who are not good breeders.

So behaviour and personality can have a really important role in determining the health of animal populations. Are our trout shy or bold? And does that affect their catchability? So how do I experimentally test for all these things? I had this dream of going to New Zealand and doing at least a year's fishing on multiple rivers. I could try different things at different times of the year and would probably take a crew of people with me. I'm sure many of you would put your hand up to make sure it's all done properly.

Unfortunately, the budget didn't go anywhere near that, so instead we were stuck in the basement of the Biosciences

parts of the USA and Japan, but hasn't quite hit Australia yet. So we used these tiny hooks with no reels - sort of Tenkara-type fishing.

We wanted to know about a fish's previous experience of angling? Did this affect its propensity to get caught? And if you're a bold fish, are you're more likely to bite the hook than if you're a shy fish?

We had a tank with a clear divider in the middle and we had a fish on each side so they could see each other. One fish was the 'focal fish' and the other one was the 'partner fish'. Nothing happened to the partner the fish, but things happened to that focal fish and the partner fish could



*An enormous fish – so of great interest to Dr Morrongiello*

Building playing around in some fish tanks. We were going to be playing with trout, but with trout in a fish tank. I like to think that the concepts are going to be same when we observe them in this very artificial environment.

Now keeping a big fish in the basement of our building was not really possible, so we stuck with using tiny little brown trout. How do you fish for trout that size? Well, you use a very tiny hook.

It's called 'single micro fishing', and there are people who are dedicated micro-fishers who try to catch the smallest fish they can on really tiny hooks. It's big in

see what his buddy was doing.

We had some fish that never saw a hook in this three week period. They were never caught. And we had other fish that were presented with a hook with bait, and they would come and bite the hook and we'd catch them. They had experienced what are called 'adverse experiences'. They had seen a hook and been caught, and that's not necessarily pleasant. We had other fish that saw a hook, and we tried to catch them, but they were too smart. They had seen a hook, but knew not to bite it.

We had some fish that were on the other side of the tank and they could watch their buddy get caught and hooked up. They could see the fish thrashing around and perhaps got a bit of a chemical cue coming off too. And we had other fish that watched their buddy look at a hook but not bite. So we've got fish that had experienced being hooked, as well as fish that had observed other fish that had been caught. So we had both 'social' and 'trial and error' learning going on.

At the end of all this, we then tested all the fish for their catchability. Our results showed that there are fish that are more likely to be caught than others. But what was really interesting was how these different treatments affected their probability of being caught. The control fish had never seen a hook in the whole experiment. When we tried to catch them about 75% of them jumped on the end of a hook first time. In contrast, of the fish that had been previously caught in the trial period, only about 15% of those would be fooled again. Fish that had seen a hook didn't bite it because they knew the hook was there and they didn't like it. They had really low probability of being caught. 'Trial and error learning'. So fish can learn.

Fish that saw their partner get caught had not experienced it themselves. But they saw their neighbouring fish hooked up and pulled out of the water. These fish had observed their buddies. They did some social learning.

When you go fishing and you pull a fish out of a run and put it back our study suggests that fish can learn. So what does that mean for us in 'catch and release' fisheries? If we're going to catch fish and put them back, that's good for the fish. But that will also have some impact on the quality of the fishery. That's a trade-off that we as anglers need to



*Dr Morrongiello's team visited all sorts of places*

make. If you want to catch fish time and time again, and easily, then you need to knock them on the head. Catch and release fishing does impact on the angling experience. Fish learn not to get caught again.

What about heavily fished waters? I don't know whether the level of fishing pressure in Victoria will get as high as it does overseas, but I do know that in some places in the USA it's nigh on impossible to catch fish, because the huge numbers of anglers on those waters means that the fish will learn, and they will learn through trial and error and also through social learning. So all these factors come into play, and these humble fish are actually quite well educated. And that learning capacity they've got, and the smarts they've got, is what makes them such a great species to target.

Thank you all very much for listening.

# The VFFA trip to Warrnambool - a host member's perspective.

... from David Coutts, Warrnambool Fly Fishers



*Jim Blakeslee does really well on the Warrnambool trout streams*

On the Friday night the VFFA team arrived, and some of our members were invited to join them for the traditional pizza night at Bojangles. I jumped at the opportunity. Old friendships were reacquainted, and new ones made over pizza and a red or two.

I was selling tickets for our fly raffle in aid of our club team participating in Movember – which this year was addressing male mental health issues and various male cancer challenges. Hughie had made my job easy by pre-warning his crew, so thanks to all who purchased

tickets, and to our club members who tied and donated flies in aid of a great cause.

We all met at Jim's magnificent Nappa Merri property on Saturday morning at 9:00 am to plan the day. The fly raffles were drawn, with winners being evenly spread between the two clubs. We were then divided up into groups with one local guiding two VFFA members. The six groups then headed off to four different locations.

One group headed to the Hopkins estuary to chase bream and estuary perch, while the rest of us pursued trout. Tony and Bruce drew the short straw and ended up with me. We headed off to the Moyne River via Koroit for bakery items and coffee, so we would eat and drink well, even if we had a bad day.

We rigged up at the car then headed off to the deeper water upstream due to the cloudy conditions. Tony soon had a sizeable trout come up to look at his flies, but a refusal was all that resulted. Not long after this he hooked a solid brown that put a decent bend in his rod, though



*The upper Hopkins River*



*Saturday evening at the Blakeslee's property on the upper Merri River. Jim and Trish are superb hosts*

after a short battle it wrapped him around a branch in the depths and all he landed was a little twig that had snapped off.

Lunchtime arrived with no further action, so we hatched a different plan over lunch. As the sun was now shining we headed downstream to shallower waters, hoping to polaroid one of the big browns that inhabit the Moyne. A fish rose on the other side of some ribbon weed, so Bruce

cast to within a metre of the rise. I yelled, "Leave it - the trout will find it". Sure enough the trout rushed to the fly and Bruce set the hook. The ensuing battle was fraught with hazards due to the ribbon weed and logs in the water. I was keen to net the fish for Bruce so slid down into the pool on my backside with Tony holding the neck of my shirt so I didn't totally disappear. Bruce finally got the brown to the net and I weighed it at 2¼ lb before we released it. It was a great team effort to land that fish, and it epitomized the whole trip for me.

We all arrived back at Nappa Merri that evening to share a magnificent barbecue prepared by some of our members and to enjoy some of Jim and Trish's wine from their vineyard. Lots of stories were shared about the day's fishing successes and failures. Adrian and Hughie spoke about the bond that has been formed and strengthened over the years between the two clubs. I for one hope it continues well into the future.



*The Warrnambool fly fishers have access to some great water*



*Our past president Dr David Hook had a great day on the Warrnambool streams*

## The VFFA Warrnambool Trip – November 2023

(Another perspective – this one from Jon Kenfield)

A dozen men, bold and true, crossed into the West for the VFFA's annual pilgrimage to Warrnambool. The weather gods were relatively kind, giving us warm days that were intermittently sunny and raining - seemingly to remind us of our connections to Melbourne.

Companionship commenced with excellent pizzas on Friday night. We were joined by a number of our Warrnambool mates to fill a baronial-sized table.

I can happily report that the food, conversation, and information about local fishing were all of the highest standard.

Accommodation was at the Surfside Caravan Park, as in previous years. Our cabins were clean and comfortable, and the outdoor setting entirely appropriate to the consumption of more wine and whisky than was strictly necessary in preparation for a hard day's fishing on the morrow.

Most of us pitched up the following morning walking in relatively straight lines to Jim Blakeslee's delightful home just outside Warrnambool in the small hamlet of Woodford, which is, coincidentally, the name of the London suburb in which I grew up.

We met with our assigned guides for the day and Woody and I were a little suspicious of the fact we had been confidently paired with an enthusiastic young Argentinian vet called Augustina (Gus), who is one of the newest members of the Warrnambool club. Gus took us to some of his favourite spots on the Mount Emu Creek, and rapidly proved himself to be an excellent guide, delightful fishing companion, and all-round good guy.

The creek was picturesque, but rather challenging to fish. We found good water levels and less than good weed and algae growths. It was hard to find fish, and even harder to cast to the few we detected in amongst the enormous lengths of trailing vegetation in the water. The water was mercifully crystal clear, and sound under foot.

Woody and I pricked a couple of fish early on, but failed to land anything other than gooey algae which, we were advised didn't count towards the score.

Gus hooked and landed a beautifully coloured 2 pounder, which gave us plenty of ammunition to work with for the rest of the day – you know how it goes when the guide catches fish, but fails to put the sports onto fish of their own. Never mind



*The weekend began on a high note at Bojangles' Pizza Restaurant*



*Our guide Gus, the Argentinian vet: "You should have been here last week before the algae bloom." yah, yah, yah.*

that his skill levels were probably vastly superior to our own!

Anyway, we had fun and he took it all in good grace.

Saturday evening was the traditional bash at Jim Blakeslee's place with the Warrnambool boys (and a few partners). They laid on the most spectacular spread of barbecued and home-made food, all contributed by the Warrnambool club. The camaraderie was as warm as the hospitality, and both almost approached the energy with which everyone described their fabulous day of fishing. That's "fishing", rather than "catching".

With the intervention of Covid, this is the first time I've been back to Warrnambool in a number of years. It did an excellent job of reminding me why the VFFA exists – to bring together a tribe of people bonded in body and soul by their shared love of fishing. This is deep anthropological stuff about man's need for social interaction at a meaningful level because, as John Gierach says: "Golf and catch and release fishing are equally meaningless, but when you're fly fishing



*Woody looking serious, getting skunked.*

you can at least feel like you're doing something important." I like that.

Many thanks to Hughie for organising another trip. I confess to some guilt that the burden falls on so few people to make arrangements from which we all benefit. I promised myself that I will become a better person, but that remains to be seen.

In closing I almost forgot that one of the huge benefits of getting together with a group of people in this sort of environment lies in the swapping of tales and the sharing of knowledge.



*Herr Doktor Professor Gordon in his element (he can fish too).*

You may recall that Woody and I offered a good bottle of whisky for anybody who could provide us with an effective squid fly (that is, a fly that will catch squid) many months ago. We received no responses, much to our disappointment.

Over this weekend Herr Professor Doktor Gordon somehow intuited (or maybe Alf was digging?) that we wanted a squid fly.

Without a moment's hesitation he pointed us towards one of the mainstream Australian fly tying books. If that lead generates flies that work, the good doctor will become the proud recipient of a bottle of good tippie.

Gadget (aka Jon Kenfield)



*Dinner at Jim's place*

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## The Tassie Report

... from Chris Wisniewski (IFS)

Inland Fisheries Officers were on patrol over the Northern Recreation Day long weekend. Weather conditions were ideal, with light winds and a mix of sunny and overcast conditions throughout the weekend.

The fish were biting, with the following waters standing out:



*Tassie's very clear lakes and rivers enable great polaroid fishing*



*Caption*

yingina/ Great Lake – All angling methods were productive. Fly anglers caught fish on wet flies, particularly concentrating on rocky drop offs. Woods Lake – fly anglers using wet flies around the southwestern corner of the lake did well.

Arthurs Lake – again fly anglers using wet flies did well.

Brady’s Chain of Lakes – plenty of rainbow trout are being caught, with all methods productive. Hot spots were Tungatinah Lagoon and the mouth of the Whitewater area at Brady’s Lake.

Four Springs – fly anglers are reporting large dun hatches at the moment.

Tyenna River – water levels are currently very good as has the fishing around the National Park / Maydena.

Penstock – There were plenty of duns starting to hatch, but the fish aren’t yet taking them. This should change over the next few weeks.

Western lakes – fly anglers during the sunny conditions polaroided plenty of fish, with small wet flies successful.

### **Roadworks at Fisheries Lane, Brumbys Creek**

The IFS has completed maintenance to Fisheries Lane, the access road to Weir 1 at Brumbys Creek. Fisheries Lane is not a public road so access is provided by agreement with the Cressy Research

Station. Anglers are indebted to the farm lessees, Upper Murray Seeds and Hydro Tasmania for their assistance in maintaining access and the public facilities including the toilets and boat ramp.



*Netting another Lake Kay brown*

With good flows in Brumbys Creek and warm overcast weather, fly anglers are enjoying excellent sport to fish rising to damsels and red spinners. The size and condition of fish has improved on recent seasons.

(Please ensure access is maintained by respecting the facilities provided and following the access rules.)



*Jim Blakeslee and Bob Loch enjoying lunch at Penstock Lagoon*

# Art, Angling and Altruism: a trout series for a cause

... from Charley May

My mum said I produced my first serious artwork at age six. It was a charming rendition of the famous Jaws scene where Robert Shaw gets devoured by the big fish as the boat sinks. It split the critics, with half congratulating the gory realism and the balance questioning whether a good psychologist was in order. I was just creatively exploring the horror and fascination I felt watching that scene.

Today, I still use art as a medium to express the feelings I have when I'm moved by something. Like fly fishing, for example, because I never fail to be inspired by the places it takes me, the people I meet and things I see on the water.



*Brook Trout in progress*

I started learning to fly fish when I was about nine years old. In the early days, I spent a lot of time on lakes in northern England and particularly enjoyed the evening rise. The hope of some good surface action was exciting, but it was the diving house martins I especially loved. I was dazzled by their aerial agility as they skimmed hatching insects, and I would go home and madly try to capture my memories on canvas or paper. When I finally caught my first trout, a hard-fighting rainbow trout that I knocked on

the head and smoked, I immortalised it in one of my first watercolours.



*Charley May and daughter Stella working on their art projects*

My childhood bedroom became littered with my work. A sculpture of a barn owl I'd sneaked a look at when scoping water at dusk, an energetic acrylic painting of a diving kingfisher I saw on a little stream, sketches of my favourite horses I'd pat on route to destinations. I just loved the outdoors and fishing simply fed my passion for the natural world and helped me develop my talent for expressing it. It culminated in winning a prestigious county art prize for an African savanna scene of lions hunting zebras I'd watched on David Attenborough's *Life on Earth* series.

The teenage years and early adulthood saw my creative and fishing career dwindle, thanks to a few wholesome and

not so wholesome distractions. Things changed when I immigrated to Australia in 2010. In a new wave of optimism, I decided to rekindle the two things from my old life that have brought me such joy in my new one. I joined Fitzroy Painting art school, and began learning some of Victoria's best fly waters before training and qualifying as a Certified Casting Instructor in 2019. Today I'm working on a creative project that brings the best of these worlds together for a good cause.

I'm creating an exclusive, hand-drawn, trout series to raise money for a charity close to all our hearts - Casting for Recovery. I've been volunteering with them for several years and took part in their inaugural retreat and their most recent one in March. It was my favourite fishing experience this year because the courage, kindness and camaraderie among everyone was life affirming. In May 2023, CfR became an official Australian Charities and Not-for-profits Commission (ACNC) registered charity and Deductible Gift Recipient. To

encourage donations, I have produced pencil sketches of a brown, brook and rainbow trout with all proceeds going to Casting for Recovery.

Right now I'm busily finishing the final piece before I unveil the whole project in all its glory at the VFFA Christmas dinner. I am very excited to share my work with club members first and would thank President Simon Joel for his enthusiasm and support of my endeavours. I look forward to seeing you in December. But in the meantime ... Here's a sneaky peak of what I've been up to.



*Charley visits the Mitta Mitta River*

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## Montana 2023

... from Joe Kahler

Joe Kahler is one of our newsletter readers in the USA, and he contributes occasional articles. Here he tells us about his stream fishing in the past few year

With one thing and another, my once regular September trips to Montana have been spotty over the past four years. Fly fishing with my good friend Richard Evans has become far too rare an event.

Our 2019 trip had been okay, but our usual week of daily combat fly fishing had taken a back seat to some of the touristy things you're obliged to do when you bring your paramour with you on such an excursion - like visiting the Old West ghost town, sight-seeing car travel around Yellowstone National Park (YNP), shopping trips to the town of West

Yellowstone, and walking through the Winston Fly Rod factory in Twin Bridges.

These were all fun in their own way, but they were time away from standing in a river waving a stick, which I'd rather be doing with my time there. Then there's the time spent trying to put your novice loved one on a spot where she can actually make a cast and catch a fish. You're not really fishing then - you're guiding. So I'd left Montana in 2019 feeling like I hadn't had anywhere near enough time on the water.

Due to “an abundance of caution” (and since the advent of COVID-19 these words are never followed by anything good) we had foregone the 2020 trip. Oh, Richard was there in his summer home in Montana and fishing as usual, but this was before the vaccines were available, and taking a chance on infecting him or his wife with some lethal crud I’d picked up on the flight over was not something any of us were up for. I’d had to content myself with his reports, which were like reviews of Michelin 3-Star restaurant meals delivered to a starving man.

Then in July 2021 Montana fly fishing began suffering the effects of global warming. Snowfalls had been below average that winter, so water levels were running low and record high temperatures were playing havoc with the trout populations. “Hoot Owl Restrictions” (waters closed to fishing from 2 pm to midnight) were in place for many rivers for much of the summer to reduce the stress on the fish. “Hoot Owl” is an old lumberjack term for suspending logging activity during the hot and dry times of a day to reduce fire risk.

Frankly, I don’t remember much of the details of my 2021 trip aside from getting “skunked” at Deputy Spring Creek. Richard and I never catch nothing, but we did that day, maybe because we refused to fish subsurface flies and the trout weren’t interested in our dries. I did see some young guys catching a rare few, but they said they were using nymphs and streamers.

But I do remember one afternoon on Soda Butte Creek in “the park” when we wore the Yellowstone Cutthroats out, or they wore us out, hitting dry flies in a feeding frenzy triggered by an epic Grey Drake (*Siphonurus occidentalis*) hatch. The bugs were floating downstream with their wings upright and looking like gleaming sails in the sun, and the trout

were methodically picking them off like fat patrons at a smorgasbord. Our #16 and #14 Parachute Adams dries looked just enough like the naturals that we hooked up on almost every cast.

2022 was literally a washout. In a rare series of events, Montana got three days of very heavy rains, coupled with warm temperatures that caused an accelerated “spring melt” of unusually late and heavy snows in the mountains around The Park. The Yellowstone River gauge at Corwin Springs reached almost 14 feet (about 2½ feet higher than the previous record set in 1918), and communities adjacent to the park were completely isolated by flood waters and damaged roads. The North and North-East entrance roads were shut down, so our beloved Lamar Valley was essentially inaccessible. It was just as well, I imagine, since the trout would need a while to recuperate and the water itself would be muddied up for who knows how long.

So by the summer of 2023 I was deep in the throes of fly fishing withdrawals. For various reasons, some of which I understood and others I didn’t, Richard told me he couldn’t be with me for the 2023 YNP trip. But I know perfectly well how to catch trout in YNP without any help, so I planned to go it alone. Flights were booked and hotel reservations made.

Fishing alone is not as much fun as with a friend, but it has its advantages. I was looking forward to getting on the water a little earlier than I would with Richard, and maybe fishing certain stretches a little longer than I otherwise would. Richard seemed to get impatient with a spot quicker than I did and wanted to move around, which I sometimes felt was a bit of a waste of time.

In any case, I found myself alone in Yellowstone National Park on a pristine



*Joe occasionally fishes with one of these guys watching*

September morning, surveying the Lamar Valley - the place that immediately comes to mind when I think of YNP. For me that valley is the heart of it. Yellowstone - The Great Cathedral where God lives.

Surveying the river valley from the road I could see that, indeed, the river had been rearranged by the 2022 floods. One of the deep, clear, bend pools that I had fished so often in the past was more turbid, murky, and shallow than it used to be. The river's course had shifted. I used to watch as trout rose from the deep, came into view, and displayed their amazing ability to perfectly time a hit on a drifted offering. But it was obvious I wouldn't be repeating that scene this year. I was going to have to explore this stretch of the river anew; a prospect that I actually looked forward to as a good thing.

I remembered the lessons learned from the great fly fishers who've shared their knowledge with me over the years.

Don't let the excitement of being there overwhelm you and send you scurrying headlong into a premature cast, thus fouling the water you want to fish. Stop, take a breath, and watch. Watch the flow for likely trout lies. Watch the surface for signs of feeding trout. Look for rings on the water denoting fish sipping subsurface flies in the film. Look for more aggressive pops and gulps - signs of duns or spinners being taken. Watch the water and even the air to see what bugs are floating around, and let them inform your choice of pattern to tie on.

In the Lamar Valley watch the bison for where they're going, so you don't wind up walking or wading unintentionally into their midst. Now, I don't mind fishing in proximity to buffalo, and I've done it fairly often, though not on purpose. They never seem to see me as anything other than another part of their ecosystem while I've been fly fishing, but that's usually been while I was down in

the river and they were above me on the bank. Buffalo are near-sighted, big (males can weigh up to 2,000 lbs and stand 6 feet tall. Powerful, and fast, they can run at 35 miles an hour). And in early to mid-September, the big bulls are still at the tail end of their mating season, so hormone levels are high. They bellow and growl and rumble like a cement mixer with gravel in it. And they can get downright mean with one another. I wouldn't want to get caught up in any of that and wind up as "collateral damage."

One day a few years ago I was carefully watching the Lamar River while I put up my rod for the morning activities. A group of photographers were shooting pictures of the buffalo herd from the road beside me and I heard a couple say something about me being a real, live fly fisher and they were speculating that they might be able to get an action shot of me casting when I got down to the river. I took my time, selected a fly, tied it on, hiked down to the spot I'd figured was likely to hold fish, and cast. The water exploded on the first cast, and I brought a nice cutthroat to hand.

I released it of course - you can't keep cutthroat trout from the Lamar, but you're supposed to keep rainbow trout and cuttbows (hybrids), or throw them up on the bank for scavengers, because the Park Service is trying to restore the trout population to native cutts only.

At about the time I released the fish a Bald Eagle, resplendent in full adult male plumage and perched in the top of one of the tall trees next to the water, called out several times. I couldn't tell if he was congratulating me, or scolding me for throwing away a perfectly good breakfast, or fussing at me for even thinking about fishing his water. Later, as I stood at the boot of my vehicle making a sandwich, that Bald Eagle flew over and hung in the air above me. I guess he

was just curious, but whatever the case it was one of those mornings that make you thank God you're still sitting up and taking nourishment.

So in 2023 I finally stood in the great Lamar River and, in a moment of epiphany, found myself facing upstream - the Future, the Unknown, the Yet-To-Be. I turned to face downstream - the Past - where all my mistakes, failures born of selfishness and lack of wisdom, and all my missed opportunities for kindness flowed down and away from me. And just for a moment I felt myself grounded, rooted in the eternal Now. In that moment I felt washed clean by the river, and forgiven. I felt renewed, refreshed, inspired, and energized to make amends. It had been a while.

On a misty, overcast and chilly morning later that week on Soda Butte Creek I had the place to myself. There were other folk in the area, but they were hiking or taking photos or just milling around at the parking lot taking in the panorama. In any case, not fishing. As I walked down to the water numbers of small brown grasshoppers scattered from the grass, so I attached one of my imitations of these bugs to my 5X tippet. The water was clear and scooting along at a good clip.

I cast my 5-weight Winston and my offering flew toward an undercut bank below a riffle where shrubs hung thickly over the water and roots could be seen below the surface - promising complications after a hook-up. My cast, I have to say, took a measure of skill to thread the needle between the limbs and provide a drag free drift.

A fat cutthroat rose to intercept my parachute hopper, came tight to the line, then swam directly to the centre of the stream where the flow was to her advantage, and did her best to free herself. She throbbed on the end of the

line, then rose from the depths, turned sideways to the current, dived, then turned and ran downstream, turned again, and eventually came to hand - a brightly coloured hen that I admired briefly and then released.

After fishing elsewhere for half an hour to rest the water, I came back to the same stretch and cast again. There was another hook-up, seemingly by the twin of my first fish there. She fought as valiantly as her sister, then came to hand. My fly was where we want them to be - embedded in the corner of her mouth. But I also found that she had a big, black, wiggly rubber-legged contraption (I won't call it a fly - it had no feather or fur) embedded in her left pectoral fin. A length of tippet wrapped around the base of the fin looked like a ligature dangerously close to breaking skin. Whoever was at the other end of that line didn't deserve to catch her, and she surely didn't deserve to

carry such an unflattering accoutrement with her into the Yellowstone winter.

It took me a while to unwind the tippet and dislodge the hook. Having freed her from her bracelet, I dislodged my hook from her mouth, held her gently in the flow of the stream, and felt her revive. I was feeling quite noble about my role in this little episode and said to her: "Now, aren't you grateful that you were caught by a human being with opposable thumbs who could get you out of that nasty bit of trouble?"

She gave me the fish-eye and replied: "How do you think I got into that mess to begin with?"

"Consider it amends then," and I set her free.

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## The Taupo Trip - March 2024

Here is a brief summary of the VFFA Taupo Trip in March 2024.

**The Event:** A week at Waitahanui Lodge, Waitahanui on the shores of Lake Taupo, New Zealand, at the height of the Brown Trout season. 12 positions are available.

**Dates:** Arrive Sunday, March 3, 2024 and depart Sunday 10 March 10, 2024

**Travel:** You will need to make your own travel arrangements to and from Waitahanui, and arrange any travel insurance cover you feel necessary. Taupo Airport is 5 kms north of Waitahnui Lodge.

**Cost:** \$1,100 per person for share accommodation, linen including towel and face washer, breakfast and dinner. A deposit of 50% (\$550.00) is to be paid by

12 January 2024 and the balance (\$550.00) by 16 February, 2024.

Direct debit to; VFFA bank account: BSB 182 512, account number 9605 47289

Include your name and "NZ2024" or post cheque to Tony Mitchem, VFFA Honorary Treasurer, PO Box 18423, Bourke Street, Melbourne, 3001.

**Accommodation:** Five 'Kiwi Bach' cabins at Waitahanui Lodge are available for accommodation, each with several bedrooms and 3 or 4 separate beds. You will be expected to share a cabin with several other members for the week, and depending on numbers, you may be required to share a room. All cabin facilities are shared for the week.



*A very peaceful view of Lake Taupo*

**Fishing locations:** Waitahanui Lodge is located on the lakefront of Lake Taupo, and is 120 meters from the mouth of the Waitahanui River ('the Rip'). Upstream of the river mouth this river offers some 5 to 6 kms of fishable waters, all readily accessible on well-defined tracks, with few sections of terrain more than 'moderate' in difficulty.

Other well-known trout waters within a 30-minute drive include, the Hinemaiaia River (12 Km south), the Tauranga-Taupo River (25 Km south), the Tongariro River (40 Km south). For those wishing to travel a little further, Lake Rotorua (and associated waters) are 75 Km north, Lake Otamangakau is 65 Km south, the headwater of the Whanganui River (100Kms south west), and the Rangitikei River (135 Km south).

**Fishing license:** A current Taupo District fishing license is required. Before departure to Taupo, you may purchase one via the Internet on Buy a Taupō fishing licence online (doc.govt.nz). Those wishing to fish outside of the Taupo district will need to acquire a separate fishing license for adjoining

fishing districts - see Fish & Game website General Fishing Licence Info (fishandgame.org.nz). Note - there is a separate category of licence for non-residents of New Zealand.

**Mobile phone:** Coverage is good in most townships and on major highways. However, it may poor / non-existent in more remote angling areas.

**Guiding:** There are numerous experienced fishing guides available. If you are wishing to be guided for a day (or days) over the time at Waitahanui, please indicate this by email to Rodger at rodger-muir@bigpond.com. Depending upon demand, Rodger will arrange / facilitate guide / guides for pairs of anglers on a daily basis. Pricing to be established, and is in addition to and independent of the costs set out above.

**Event Co-ordinator:**

Rodger Muir, Mobile 0414 253 890, Email: rodger-muir@bigpond.com

Postal address: 71 Kent Street, Millers Point, NSW 2000

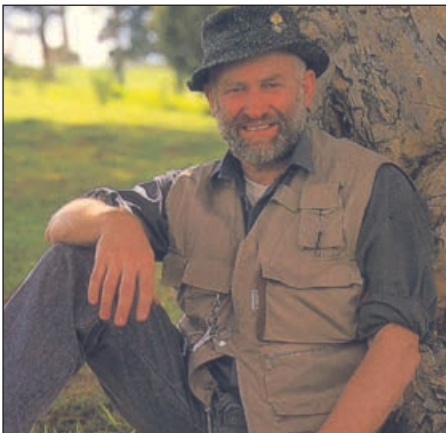
# An Oberon Outing with Peter Leuver

... from Adrian Maroya

Older members will warmly remember Peter Leuver as a graphic artist extraordinaire, a regular contributor to *FlyLife* magazine on fly tying, as our (NSW) *Journal* Editor over many years, and as the author of that now scarce angler's fishing record *Fur & Feather – Fly Tying for Trout* (1991).

Over time a small, informal editorial panel formed itself consisting of Peter Leuver, Geoff King, and myself. Later this was enlarged to four, with Andy Harris joining. We dined lightly in some of Sydney's low spots (read: inexpensive) including the (in)famous APIA Club at Leichhardt. Many ideas were discussed, chewed-over, spat-out or digested. A golden era, in my view.

These four people later became the main researchers into the Society's files, but principally in the State Library where most early Rod Fishers' data resides – for a Centenary Book. The fruits of that research were ably edited by Peter Gibson under the title of *The Flowing Stream* (2004).



*Peter Leuver – a top graphic artist*

As a relative newcomer to fly fishing in New South Wales, I found the Rod Fishers' Society through Andrew Brzoz, the original proprietor of The Australian Fly-Fisherman at Rushcutters Bay. Now Patron – then President – Lofty Tottenham invited me to join the group at Oberon for the Landowners' Dinner (I think, in 1987). Anyway, he fixed me up with the late Stan Jeffrey and Mal Riley, who showed me the gentle practices of relating with landholders, and some initial waters including the Dam, with a fly of Lofty's suggestion that caught a nice rainbow!

Then followed the lunches and growing acquaintances; later friendship: among which the splendid foursome above.

It was at least some twenty years ago when I invited Peter Leuver for a ride in my painstakingly restored Bristol model 405, dating from 1955. These are hand-made cars and this one had a 2-litre engine capable of quite some performance: 100 mph, although I never got it over 95 mph.

So, one bright Saturday morning, I drove up to Turrumurra to the old home of the Leuvers and their four famous daughters. Our destination was Oberon via a coffee stop at Springwood. The definitive destination was the upper Duckmaloi, through the pine plantations and on to farmland. This was achieved in 'tout confort' in the 405. Then, down a farm road where unfolded a series of nice, bucolic bends on the Duckmaloi, a large gum tree next to a farm bridge and on the opposite side, a small – by then, weekender – cottage.

The panorama proved familiar and with a certain dismay I recalled an awkward visit there a few years earlier with a member who had fished there often. But something had gone wrong with the relationship and on that earlier occasion we were invited to leave immediately! So, this time I remained on one side of the bridge while Peter chatted-up the affable parents of the current owner. Eventually, hat and sunglasses on, I joined the cheerful couple and Peter, and passed the time of day.

Next, I remember going back to the car, from which Peter, a teetotaler, produced a thermos flask with excellent coffee, and we got into sandwiches while surveying the water. No movement; nor any discernible fly life.

Being on the riverbank is always entertaining with Peter. There were always quite a few chuckles, maybe discussing post-war Holland and the small drains and canals in which as a boy he caught eels and other fish. Then the transition to Australia and (to me) unknown people who introduced him to fly fishing. Then, at a relatively young age, stories of getting to know the people who taught him fly tying and the varied possibilities of fishing in Eastern Australia.

With time, he came to know many of the outstanding personalities in Australian fly fishing, which led to Malcolm Fraser writing the introduction to *Fur & Feather*. Talking about the traditional flies and his addiction to the Bredbo fly, which thanks to Peter's efforts, is still used as our Society's badge. Then concentrating on the water, and this observation: Peter was just a top mentor and companion.

So, as it was mid-season, we mounted some dry beetle patterns, and to my surprise, on my second cast searching the

runs a trout swam up in deeper water and slowly sucked in the fly. It was a typical Duckmaloi trout at around 2½ lb. I believe we gave it to the residents of the cottage.

We explored the half-mile or so of tussocky banks, and trout were there! Sometimes spooked, but we enjoyed some good sport. Then, as this was a mid-day outing and we wanted to be home in Sydney for respective late dinners, we farewelled the nice couple and got back on the road in the Bristol.

Travelling past the pines in the direction of Hampton on the road heading toward the turnoff to Jenolan Caves, I pointed out a very substantial thunderhead just to our right. You can put your foot down only to a limited extent on that pitted, winding road, so this large storm slowly began to engulf us. While the Bristol cars were built to aircraft standards, they were until 1958 furnished with (English) Joseph Lucas & Sons electricals. Lucas is known in the classic car world as the Prince of Darkness!

So, in the growing gloom, the headlights were throwing a low, candle-type yellow light, while the 9-inch, flicking, pencil-like windscreen wipers were not quite up to removing the deluge. Until we finally got down to the flat land closer to Hartley I think Peter retained a tight grip on the passenger handle! After that, all good, and home safely.

Peter and Joan are now happy apartment dwellers a little further South at St Ives. Peter is not up to a lot these days, but we do have occasional get-togethers, including the Four Horsemen of the Apocalypse named above, and other Rod Fishers' friends.

*O'Beron*

## Jim Allen is always on the lookout for nervous water

(This article is another fine example of Jim Allen's thoughts on lake fishing, and was provided to us by Philip Weigall. The article was originally published in Philip's online magazine *FlyStream*)

On my first visit to the Yucatan Peninsula in Mexico many years ago to catch a permit, I shared a fishing guide called Alphonse with my mate John Heine. Alphonse enjoyed our stay, saying in his broken English he relished the fact that we could cast after our first outing with him. I have never considered myself to be a good caster, particularly by comparison to many of my fishing friends. But Alphonse had to take many tourists out and at times it was evidently hard for them to get the fly in front of a sighted fish, particularly with a coastal breeze. Having spent many years casting to sighted fish at Christmas Island, Tasmania and elsewhere, John and I were having reasonable success with the bonefish, so Alphonse was happy.

Two things I learned in Mexico over the next few days was to look for nervous water, as Alphonse called it, and to beware of a tequila-based drink called a margarita – but that's another story! After sighting and catching a few small bonefish we then cruised the flats for tarpon. We caught some smallish ones to about 20 lb, which was good fun as they jump and I'd never caught them before. We looked for snook as well but failed.

However, the real reason for me to go to the Yucatan was to fish for permit, so John and I pressured Alphonse to spend more time chasing these legendary fish. He was somewhat reluctant, but agreed. I found out later that permit are much harder than I knew, and success was limited.

We had travelled some miles southward in the lodge's skiff for the day to chase

these permit. We pulled up on some mudflats and it wasn't long before Alphonse was screaming like a banshee: "Nervous water! Nervous water! Cast, cast, cast!"

I couldn't see anything, and had no idea what to cast to. The water all looked the same to me. However, I love the passion and intensity of a guide when they get excited, and I was staring my eyes out. Eventually, after Alphonse pointed my rod at the nervous water, I sort of got the idea. The permit were tailing just underwater, creating the smallest disturbance on the surface. You could hardly see it, but as imperceptible as it was, it wasn't long before we got the hang of it.

I can't remember for sure, but I don't think John and I caught a permit that day after casting our arms off. Back at the lodge we both agreed that we'd had a serious education about nervous water. Later that week I remember I had Alphonse on my own for a day when John had to fly back to California to run his lens-making company in Silicon Valley. I had the day of my life and caught five permit chasing the nervous water. The trick was to set a trap with the small crab fly ahead of the fish. They weren't big permit, but my memory of that day will last until I'm in a coffin. Alphonse was over the moon!

Coming back to fish the usual summer sojourn in Tasmania, I had the opportunity to reintroduce myself to nervous water on Arthurs Lake in Tasmania. A light ripple and high cloud made fishing conditions difficult on



*Jim Allen hunting through his fly box*

this late summer day. I was in the boat travelling at high speed when I noticed a couple of trout boil nearby as we raced past. I pulled up and watched and waited. In a few minutes I noted the first sign of nervous water as trout cruised just subsurface like the permit in Mexico. I couldn't see any rising fish, but I soon discovered every trout in the lake was up and at it. All over the lake, the ripples and tiny oddities in the water gave away feeding trout. I thought at the time some small nymph or midge pupae just under the surface were causing the activity.

However, on cleaning a few trout later we discovered they were full of minute cinnamon jassids. I was certain at the time they were not rising. I was wrong ... they were. It was just that they were sneaking the insects off the water so subtly it was impossible to see the rise. We didn't have a pattern to represent these tiny insects but an emerger worked every time and we all bagged plenty of fish once the information was shared with mates on a nearby boat.

In later years I have often discovered nervous water in wind lanes, and many times I've pulled up the boat in the middle of a lake just to take a

look – particularly in lightly rippled water. I always take a closer look if there is a thunderstorm about or a bushfire or burn-off nearby. Smoke and thunderstorms seem to make ants travel and fall into the lake, or persuade midges to hatch. Often, out in the middle of the lake, the tiniest movement of water betrays a feeding trout.

On the Great Lake in Tasmania many times I've discovered feeding rainbows hunting floating beetles in a light ripple. Nervous water indeed, and highly visible! You can notice the water movement push before the rise of the trout. Rainbows travel at high speed at times whilst feeding and are a wonderful and demanding challenge, requiring fast accurate casts before they have moved on. Noticing the nervous water before the rise buys you a second or two of casting time.

So keep your eyes wide open and you will find feeding trout creating the tiniest of disturbance – no more than nervous water, but enough to give them away.



*Some great water*

## April Vokey has some thoughts on Getting Snagged!

We've all been there. Your line pulls taut, pulse quickens, and you set the hook fiercely into a solid, unmoving object. You fire off a string of expletives, pulling and jerking the rod—more an attempt to vent frustration than an actual effort to free the line.

A snag can infuriate even the calmest angler. I've seen rods snapped in fits of anger and watched friends humiliate themselves, splashing and flailing with Elaine Benis-style dance moves - "like a full-body dry heave," only angrier. It's as painful to watch as it is entertaining.

A tantrum never yields positive results and usually ends in the re-rigging penalty box. A calm and calculated approach offers the only hope for freeing a stuck line. Over the years, I've developed a stable of tricks to improve my chances of successful removal. The next time you find yourself stuck, start by answering the following three questions, then make

an extraction plan based on what you know.

### What am I snagged on?

Not all snags are created equal. I'll take a rock of any size over a log or piece of wood. A sharp hook, especially when barbed, can embed in wood, digging deeper when yanked or pulled by current. Rock snags have a higher potential for salvation because the hook, line or weight is usually wedged but not buried. Aquatic vegetation is usually a good thing to hang up on because fishing line is generally stronger than weeds and therefore can be pulled free. If you're not sure what you're caught on, gently pull (without yanking). If you feel a little stiff movement, it's probably wood. If you feel a lot of pliable movement, it's likely weeds. If it's stuck fast, it might be a rock.

### What line am I using?

Different lines have different properties. Braided line, for example, is thinner than monofilament, has less stretch, less



*Bother – or words to that effect*

abrasion resistance and doesn't hold knots as well. It can also cast farther than monofilament and fly line, often making snags inaccessible due to their distance from the angler. Fly lines, on the other hand, are weighted and tapered, with the majority of the weight in the first 35 feet of the line. This weight can work for or against an angler when dealing with snags (more on this later).

### **Where am I snagged?**

A snag's location is probably the most significant factor when deciding if it's salvageable or cause for the point-and-pull. How deep is the water? How heavy is the current? Are you in a boat, or wading? How far away is the obstruction? How close can you safely get to the snag location? The answers to these questions all help determine your chances and options for extracting the hook.

### **The Basics**

No matter the water, line type or object snagged, there are two basic elements of freeing a hook: change angles and introduce slack. More often than not, your presentation remains snagged on an object because of the tension you're applying to it. Often, it will come free if you release that tension and allow the line to go slack. If that doesn't work, the hook point has likely entered the object. A hook point that has poked into something can only be removed by applying pressure in the opposite direction it entered. Here are specific strategies I use to accomplish that.

### **The Sag (fly line):**

This trick only works with fly line in moving water. In those situations, the fly line can drag your leader and fly into obstructions. That same drag, however, can be leveraged to your advantage. If hung up generally downstream of your position, give slack and allow the current to drift the weighted fly line past the

snag. When you come tight again, the drag created by the belly of line will pull at the hook from the opposite direction, often pulling it free.

### **The Roll Cast (fly line):**

Walk slowly towards the snag while lifting the rod tip. Continue to step closer, raising the rod until it points almost straight up, or 1:00 on the clock. From there, raise your arms and rod tip high in the air before roll casting the line directly at the snag. This extra momentum transfers energy down the line until it hits the fly, jolting it backward and sometimes freeing it. In stillwater, roll cast a loop of fly line to the far side of the obstruction. Allow that loop to settle on the surface, then try a series of light strips or wiggles.

### **The Bow and Arrow (all line types):**

This trick is most effective with braided line because it has very little stretch, but it can work for fly line or even mono (though it's far less effective). With this method, you "twang" the line like a bowstring. To accomplish this, you first need to get the rod out of the way. I tuck it under my armpit, but I've seen other people pinch it between their knees or set it down on the bank or in the boat.

Once the rod is clear, pull the line tight to the snag with one hand. Make sure you have several feet of slack between the hand that's holding the line and the rod tip. With your other hand, pick or twang the taut line and then release it completely. This sends a wave of energy down the line, kicking the lure backward and, if you're lucky, setting it free. When attempting this method in bushes and trees, be mindful that the slack can wrap around other leaves, branches or thorns, leaving you with a free hook but a tangled leader. At that point, you might get to practice your climbing skills.

**The Yo-Yo** (all line types):

This is for those times when you get a bit overzealous trying to cast under an overhanging tree. Your line loops over a branch, and your lure sways above the water like a pendulum. Don't rip it back. That often winds the lure around the branch multiple times, making it nearly impossible to retrieve. Instead, slowly draw the lure up until it's just under the obstruction and give it one short, swift pull. More often than not, your lure will hurdle the branch and drop almost where you wanted to cast it in the first place.

**The Hike** (all line types):

When you've tried all the pertinent tricks above and you're still stuck fast, it's time to move. Remember, you're ultimately hoping to back the hook, line or weight out of whatever it's caught on. Try to get on the far side of your snag and apply reverse pressure. Attempt many different angles, and wiggle rather than yanking.

**The Bad Idea** (all line types):

This approach is not recommended, as it can result in a broken or lost rod tip, and only works on snags that are shallower than the length of your fishing rod. That said, it can be effective. Get tight to the snag by either walking up to it or positioning the boat above it. Slowly lower the rod tip down to the snag, and gently prod the lure until the rod tip pushes the hook free. Keep in mind the risks; your tiptop could snap or get stuck in the snag as well.

**The Point-and-Pull** (all line types):

Sometimes you have to know when you're beat. In these scenarios, it's best to point the rod at the snag, secure the line tightly by either holding it in one hand or cranking down the drag, then walk back in a straight line until the snag either pulls free or breaks off. It's critical that your rod remain perfectly straight and pointed directly at the snag when doing

this. Make sure to look away because if the lure comes free, it will come flying straight at you—likely very fast.

**Other Considerations**

Too many anglers rush to recast once they're free. Make sure, however, to acknowledge the problem you encountered on your last cast and try not to hit the same snag again. Cast shorter, reduce the weight or retrieve faster. Check the hook after every successful retrieval to make sure it's not bent out or damaged. Also test your line for nicks or abrasions.

Snags are part of fishing. But, like most challenges in the outdoors, they are best addressed with a calm mind and knowledge of tactics to resolve the situation. Oftentimes though, you simply need to know when to admit defeat and break the line. When you do, try to remember the maxim, "If you ain't losing gear, you ain't fishing hard enough."

Sincerely, April

(Here are two videos illustrating April's advice:

What about this one <https://www.themateater.com/fish/freshwater/snag-solutions-how-to-get-yourself-unstuck> and you can link it with the video I made?

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=SPWVFngUx6o&t=29s> )

# FLY OF THE MONTH

*The Blob Fly – a Richard Kos favourite*



UK writer Rob Edmunds says this:

The Blob and Blob Booby are patterns that have now been around for over 30 years, yet they still evoke strong feelings and emotions in almost every fly fisherman. They are flies that you either love or hate. There is really no middle ground. However one thing that cannot be disputed is their effectiveness at catching trout on any water from small still waters to the largest reservoirs. They are a “must have” pattern for all anglers and cannot be ignored.

The origins of the Blob date back to the early 1990's. Since then patterns and materials have changed significantly and attitudes towards the flies have mellowed. They are now mainstream and accepted by the vast majority. Even those old school traditional anglers who once frowned upon the early patterns now have a few Blobs and Blob Boobies tucked away in their fly boxes for when no one else is around!

I was first introduced to the pattern in the spring of 1996 at Rutland Water. Dave Docherty and I were fishing at the top of the North Arm with six other boats. Everyone else appeared to be fishing nymphs and catching the occasional fish. Dave declared that he was going to fish a new pattern that he had acquired from an unknown angler.

I have honestly never witnessed a fly make such a difference. It was amazing. There were often two or three fish trying to take his fly on every cast. I asked about the tying and was told it's basically just "*a big Blob of fritz on a hook.*" Just like that, the common name was spawned.

I began using the pattern in matches along with my teammates, and it changed the way we fished and how we were perceived by an older generation of competition anglers. In 1998, with four of our team still teenagers, we went on to win the House of Hardy English Final and the International Final by pulling a Coral Blob at high speed. Never had such a young team won a major international fly fishing event. It was unprecedented. The term "Yobs with Blobs" was coined by a national newspaper. Many of the older competition anglers wanted the pattern banned.

Blobs work because they are like no other pattern. They provided an intense hit of colour. Additionally, the bulky profile in the water creates disturbance and pulls fish to the cast as vibrations are felt along their lateral line. It's also worth highlighting that when pulling flies the anglers "work rate" is increased as you are covering more water with your casts and retrieve (compared to when fishing slowly). You are not waiting for the fish to come to you. It's a method better suited to young, fit anglers as it is physically demanding over long periods of time.

**VFFA fly tying instructor Richard Kos writes this:**

### **The Blob – by a Convert.**

Why this style of fly, which I initially despised and swore that I would never use let alone tie, is the *Fly of the Month* can be put down to one important reason – it really works!

These flies originated from the stillwater competition fly fishers in the United Kingdom, who target stocked rainbow trout in reservoirs. Some say that the Blob was tied to imitate a bloom of *Daphnia*, others think it is tied as a behavioural trigger, making fish curious enough to mouth it. I have observed this myself while using it when fishing for carp.

There are many variants of this fly, but the three main examples are the Blob, the FAB, and the Booby. A Google search of the Blob Fly will give you a plethora of options on tying and fishing this fly and its variants.

The material used for tying the Blob is Fritz. It has many names, e.g. Jelly Fritz, depending on the brand of product. Basically there are two types of Fritz – boosted and unboosted. The boosted type incorporates a thicker fibre on the core to give it a more opaque look, compared to the unboosted's open, almost see-through look.

Fishing the Blob is usually done using the 'washing line' method, with three or four flies on a floating or intermediate line. However, with my limited experience fishing this method I stick to a two-fly setup with a Blob on the point and a Diawl Bach nymph three to four feet back from the point.

**Materials:****Hook:** Kamasan B160, size 8

Non-barbed option: Hanak H250 BL size 8 or Hanak H270 BL size 8

(The Hanak H250 has a 1 millimetre wider gape than the H270.)

**Body:** Fritz material**Thread:** UTC 70 Denier, colour to suit the Fritz.**Tying Procedure:**

1. Wind thread along the hook from the eye down to the bend then back again to just behind the eye of the hook to create a smooth and even base for subsequent components. Take the thread in even turns back to the bend.
2. Tie in some golden pheasant crest tips at the bend for the tail, then cut away any excess feather. Then tie in the gold rib firmly at the bend.
3. Dub some black seals fur on the thread and wind forward, finishing a little back from the eye.
4. Take a black hen hackle and tie it in just behind the eye so the curve of the feather is back towards the bend. Wind the hackle along the shank to the bend and then wind the gold rib forward through the hackle to just behind the eye to pin the hackle firmly to the shank.
5. Bind the rib in just behind the eye with thread. Then cut away the tip of the hen hackle at the bend.
6. Take the brown head hackle feather and tie in closely in front of the body hackle, then wind forward to the eye and then back again to where the thread is hanging. Bring the thread through the hackle to the eye, then cut away excess hackle.
7. With your fingers pull the hackle back and hold it so you can form a nice head that pushes the hackle backwards. Whip finish and varnish.

## VFFA 2023 and 2024 meetings & other activities

### December 2023

- 15 Friday Christmas Dinner at the Kelvin Club  
Speaker: Tom Jarman  
(Topic: "A Year of Fly Fishing in Victoria")

### January 2024

- 31 Wednesday First Council Meeting for 2024 – 6:00 pm at the Kelvin Club.

### February 2024

- 3 Sat - 11 Sun Tasmanian trip to Hayes on Brumby's.  
Event Co-ordinator – Chris Gray (chris@graysmail.com.au.)
- 22 Thursday General Meeting – 7:30 pm at the Kelvin Club:  
"Liars' Night" – reports from members on their summer fishing.
- 28 Wednesday Council Meeting – 7:00 pm on Zoom.

### March 2024

- March 3 – 10 VFFA trip to Taupo in the North Island of New Zealand  
Event Co-ordinator – John Spragg (John@bellingham-marine.com.au)
- March 6 VFFA members visit Millbrook Lakes, our first for the year,  
Event Co-ordinator - Lyndon Webb (0488 555 724)
- 21 Thursday General Meeting – 7:30 pm at the Kelvin Club:  
Speaker – Sam Fawke, Senior Technical officer –  
Conservation Hatchery, Victorian Fisheries Authority
- 23 – 25 Sat - Mon Murray cod fly fishing at Myrtleford
- 27 Wednesday Council Meeting – 6:00 pm at the Kelvin Club.
- 29 Friday Easter - Good Friday
- 31 Sunday Easter Sunday

### April 2024

- 12 – 14 Sat - Mon Murray cod fly fishing at Myrtleford
- 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.

(Millbrook visits for 2024 will be on March 6, April 24, June 5 and September 25)