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THE VICTORIAN FLY-FISHERS' ASSOCIATION INC.

FEBRUARY 2013

Organisation No. A0024750J

P.O. Box 18423 Melbourne Bourke Street, Melbourne 3001

[www.vffa.org.au](http://www.vffa.org.au)

## **February General Meeting**

**Thursday, February 28, 8:00 pm at the Celtic Club -**

**Our Traditional Year Opener – “Liars’ Night”**

**Please note the change of night – Thursday 28 being the 4th Thursday of the month. We have moved our first meeting for the year back a week so that members involved in the traditional February trip to Tasmania will have returned. No doubt they’ll have countless tales to tell, and we want to hear them all.**

**At this year’s Liars’ Night the projector will be set up, and speakers are invited to submit 3 or 4 photos of their recent exploits. Photos are not essential, but will be a very welcome addition to the entertainment.**

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

All members are invited, but PLEASE make a Dinner booking by 12 pm (lunchtime) on Wednesday, February 27, by –

Phone: 0498 254 497, and leave a message,

Or Email – [secretary@vffa.org.au](mailto:secretary@vffa.org.au)



# THE VICTORIAN FLY-FISHERS' ASSOCIATION INC.

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## Advance Notice – the February 2013 “Liars’ and Slide Night”

Thursday, February 28, will be our first meeting of the year and, following long tradition, is our much-loved Liars’ Night. Note that this meeting is on the **fourth** Thursday of the month and not the usual third Thursday. Why? Because on Thursday February 21 lots of our members will still be in Tassie, enjoying Peter Hayes’s hospitality. And we all want to hear about their exploits, don’t we.

So it’s 8 pm on February 28, preceded of course by dinner at the Celtic Club for those who enjoy a good meal in the company of fellow members.

Another change – this year we are offering the opportunity for contributors and speakers to back up their stories with photographic evidence. In other words members who have riveting reports of their recent outings are invited to show three or four (note – three or four, not three or four hundred) recent photos to illustrate their experiences. How do we manage this? Those who have photos as digital files (i.e. taken on a digital camera – and that’s nearly all of them these days) should email their selection to the editor ([editor@vffa.org.au](mailto:editor@vffa.org.au)) who will bring all contributions to the meeting on one of those wonderful little USB memory sticks. Those who have printed photos they would like to show are welcome to post these to the editor, who will then scan them and then return them by return mail.

As always, this will be a great night with countless fabulous fishing stories, lots of top secret fishing spots revealed, and plenty of laughs and merriment.

Mark this event in your diary – Thursday, February 28.

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## An Expression of Appreciation

In April last year David Featherstone had the privilege of taking two Japanese fly-fishers, Dr Nobuyuki (Nobie) Kawana and his good friend Tatsuya Yamada, on a memorable day’s fishing. Dr Kawano is a neurosurgeon, and is Brain Tumor Pathologist and Guest Professor of Neurosurgery at Kitasato University School of Medicine in Japan. He is also a very keen fly-fisher, with a particular interest in the work of Alfred Ronalds. He translated the fifth edition of Ronald’s *The Fly-Fisher’s Entomology* from English to Japanese for publication, and also authored a substantial volume entitled “*Fly-Fishing Dictionary*” (684 Pages, 208 color pictures, 153 illustrations) - clearly a reference for the serious Japanese angler. Following his April trip Dr Kawano applied for and became a member of the VFFA.

Last April David Featherstone picked up his guests at their hotel at 4:00 am and took them for a day’s fishing at a lake near Ballarat. Both soon demonstrated that they were accomplished casters and experienced anglers, and landed and released a number of good-sized rainbows. On their way back to Melbourne they visited Alfred Ronald’s historic gravesite, which the VFFA had restored a few years earlier. They also enjoyed some stream fishing the next day as guests of Rick Dugina.

In December last year David received a magnificent arrangement of flowers from Nobie and Tatsuya as an expression of gratitude for their time here last April. They also wished to pass on their very best wishes to all VFFA members for Christmas and the New Year.

## **Advance Notice – the March Meeting - with Bill Thomas**

On Thursday, March 21, we will enjoy the company of our own Bill Thomas, Melbourne's 'Mr Sustainability'. Bill teaches at Bentleigh Secondary College where his official title is 'Head of Sustainable Practices'. In the past six years he has instituted a number of measures within the school to reduce its impact on the environment, and in the process has accumulated a very impressive collection of state, national and international awards.

His talk in March will be a 'fast moving' description, via a PowerPoint presentation, of the large range of initiatives he has introduced at Bentleigh Secondary College. Some of these include the installation of two very large water tanks to harvest rainwater which is then used for flushing toilets. They have also constructed a wetland area to capture excess storm-water that is used for irrigating playing fields.

They have planted out an area of some 2,000 square metres in the college grounds as an 'Urban Forest'. They use South East Water's 'HydroShare' program to monitor their water use, and through the measures they have introduced have reduced the college's total water usage by 91%. These savings, in conjunction with their water education programs, saw them awarded gold accreditation for the Victorian Government's "Water – Learn it! Live it!" program – the first secondary school in Victoria to achieve this recognition.

They also recently installed a 5.25 kilowatt photovoltaic solar system to meet some of their energy requirements and reduce greenhouse emissions. Another innovation was the installation of a state-of-the-art wind turbine on the roof of the college. This is a new type of turbine which is very suited to urban environments.

Through his efforts Bill was awarded the Public Service Medal for "outstanding public service and exceptional contribution as a leader in sustainability education" in the June 2011 Queens Birthday Honours list. This was followed by the United Nations of Australia Individual award and a Churchill Fellowship in 2012. He also received the 2013 United Nations of Australia Individual Award for Outstanding Service to the Environment.

The complete list of awards Bill has received is very long. Suffice to say his 2012 Winston Churchill Fellowship will see him travelling to Finland, Norway, Sweden, Denmark and Iceland in the first half of 2013 to investigate how sustainable practices have been developed, deployed and embedded into the school curricula of these countries with a view to disseminating these in Australian Education.

Bill is a lively and energetic speaker, and his March presentation will be very instructive and entertaining.

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## **The December Christmas Dinner**

The 2012 Christmas Dinner, on December 13 at the Celtic Club, was a wonderful occasion. More than 70 members attended and enjoyed a superb Christmas Dinner with an entree, a main course of roast turkey and ham, and of course the traditional Christmas plum pudding.

During the meal a number of those present with long years of membership were presented with special medals (commemorative badges) to mark their years of membership. In fact there were seven who had been members for 50 years, and another 53 whose membership exceeded 25 years.



*Richard Clark and Peter Campbell receiving their awards*

The Dinner provided a wonderful opportunity for acknowledging the loyal membership of these long-standing members, and those who were there to receive their medals and certificates (the 50 year members received both a medal and a special certificate to mark the occasion) stepped forward very proudly.

There were of course a number on the list of recipients were unable to attend, so in the past few weeks their medals have been posted out. Our speakers for the Christmas Dinner included Gerard Dridan, David Featherstone and Lyndon Webb, who each shared tales of their fly-fishing exploits and special memories of their years in the Association. The texts of their speeches are given in this newsletter.



*Some glimpses of a very pleasant evening*



## Gerard Dridan – a Member for 64 Years:

Firstly, good evening to you all, and my congratulations to all the medal recipients. Following comments from some of you sitting out there in the audience I must have been in nappies when I joined the VFFA 64 years ago. Now that's simply not so! I have decided to give you a ten-minute résumé of my 64 years, and how I became a fly-fisherman.

In 1946, just after World War 2 had ceased, I had my 18th birthday and could not wait to buy a second hand ex-army BSA motorbike. This opened a whole new world of opportunity for me to fish and hunt. A friend by the name of Len Jessop had considerable ability with rod and gun, so I wasted no time in getting to know him. At this stage

all his hunting was done on a pushbike. Now Len was having a new rod made by a local boot repairer called J.W. Benson, so he started me off with his old rod, along with an old wooden reel and a worn out line.

In 1947 we made our first trip to Melbourne on the motorbike, and there we somehow met Clive Staples at Alcock and Pierce. Clive set me up with an Edgar Sealy cane rod (a three-piece rod), a Streamcraft reel, and a Kingfisher Double Taper line. Now I was really in business! Len taught me to cast, to catch trout, to tie flies, and to become fairly proficient with a rifle and shotgun.

In 1948 we were discussing Kyneton Angling Club problems with Jack Benson, the local boot-maker mentioned earlier. He was a man of many parts. He was an Honorary Fisheries and Game Inspector in those days, and in this role he showed us he really meant business. He was also a very fine caster, and made excellent cane rods and tied great flies. In our discussion he informed us that he was a member of the VFFA, which at that stage we didn't know anything about. He indicated that if we were interested he would gladly nominate us to become members. And so it happened. In due course our badges arrived by mail and we really thought we were something now that we were members of the VFFA.

This same year I traded the old bike up for a Panther motorbike and sidecar. This gave us more capacity to carry our gear. We continued fishing the Campaspe River from its source at Ashbourne all the way to the original Eppalock wall, which I don't think many of you people would ever have seen. The hot summers often resulted in fish kills in the basalt rock areas of the river, but it always bounced back with good fish. We attributed this to the local hatchery that we had going in those days.



In 1951 I traded up to a 1928 A-Model Ford, the same vintage as myself. We were doing more shooting at this time because of the rabbit plague, though still fishing in season – up until 1953. I had carted my mate Len all over our region for seven years, fishing and shooting and enjoying every moment of it. But then a massive change in my circumstances took place. I married my sweetheart Elaine, so I sold the car and bought a block, and got serious about building a home. In 1955 we moved into our home. Then in late September of that year we had some wonderful news - the VFFA Number 1 newsletter arrived!

From then until 1990 I hardly picked up my fly rod. Our three girls arrived, and they had to be educated and later married. Lake Eppalock eventuated and took no time in becoming a redfin mecca. I bought a 12 foot car-top boat and motor, and now the whole family spent many years catching loads of those reddies. That might raise a few eyebrows here in this room, but I've yet to find a fly man who didn't enjoy a feed of the dreaded vermin.

In 1990 I got back into fly-fishing in earnest again, though our dear old Campaspe was but a shadow of its former self. In 1999 at the VFFA Annual Dinner our president Iven Affleck sprung a great surprise. Bert Tartakover, Don Gilmour and myself were all presented with 50 Year Membership Certificates. These certificates were beautifully prepared with special 50-Year Commemorative flies and then presented by Dr Tony Brothers. Sadly Bert and Don and Tony have all gone to fish the great lake upstairs. They were three very fine gentlemen.

Finally I owe my longevity, as a VFFA member, to my dear Elaine for her determination that I maintain my membership through our early days when money was scarce. Thank you all for listening. I wish you all a Merry and safe Christmas, a Happy New Year - and lots of fish.



Gerard with his Certificate and Medal

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## To Our Dear Friend Peter Boag

The President, Council and all VFFA Members would offer their sincere condolences to Peter Boag, a member of Council and a past president of the VFFA, on the death of his father on Wednesday, January 30, 2013.

# President's Message

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Well here we are in February 2013 already. It seems a little late to be wishing you all a Happy and Prosperous New Year, but with no January newsletter to convey the message, let me say: "Best wishes to all for 2013".

Recapping on the conclusion of 2013, the Christmas Dinner at the Celtic Club on Thursday, December 13, was a great success. The Dinner was attended by more than 70 Members, which I think was the most we have had at this event for a number of years. The highlight of the evening was the presentation of 50 Year Medals and Commemorative Certificates and 25 Year Medals to those members who had achieved such milestones. There were seven 50 Year recipients, five of whom were in attendance to personally receive their medals and certificates. The remaining two members, who were unable to be at the Christmas Dinner, will be personally presented with theirs at one of our General Meetings during the year. For the benefit of all members, the 50 Year Members, including the year they joined the Association are as follows:



Gerard Dridan, 1948.

Ron Dennis, 1960.

Peter Campbell, 1962.

David Featherstone, 1962.

Arthur A. Robertson, 1962.

Jim Allen, 1963.

Bruce Whitehead, 1963.

53 members had achieved 25 Year membership of the VFFA. Eleven of this select group were at the Dinner to receive their Medals and the remainder have since received theirs by post, with a letter of congratulations on their achievement.

As this issue of the newsletter goes to press, final arrangements are being made for the Annual Tasmanian Trip (February 16 - 22, fully booked) and the Bairnsdale Donger Weekend (February 15 - 17). Any members interested in attending the Bairnsdale Donger Weekend should let me know ASAP, as we would like to have a large VFFA Crew attending, as it is way overdue that this trophy be won back into the steady hands of the VFFA. The other trip to think about, and to act upon urgently if you are thinking of attending, is the Big River Weekend, April 11 - 14 at "Chateau Pilkington" at Enochs Point. Numbers for this adventure are limited and filling rapidly.

Our next General Meeting is scheduled for Thursday, February 28, which is "Liars' Night". Please come and tell us your stories, and where possible, provide supporting photography.

The March Meeting will be held on Thursday, March 21, commencing at 8:00pm. The Guest Speaker will be Bill Thomas. As outlined in my December Message, this will be a night you do not want to miss. Come and hear what Bill has to say in regard to environmental issues that impact upon all of us.

Whilst thinking about environmental issues, as people who value the pristine conditions of the waterways we like to fish, we should always be aware of the impact that we have on our surroundings. Be aware of the potential fire risk of driving a vehicle into long grass on extremely hot days. Do not litter, even in small ways. Don't just throw away unwanted pieces of tippet material - put them in your vest pocket or day pack along with any other unwanted items, such as leader packaging, lunch wrappings, drink containers, etc. How often do we see such items littering the banks of the streams and the shoreline of the lakes that we fish. Every little bit that one individual does to help keep our environment clean becomes a massive benefit when all of us are doing the same thing.

I have recently received some emails from members with suggestions for improving the workings of the VFFA and ideas on different activities that we might consider organising. These and any other issues members wish to raise with me will be discussed at our next Council meeting and I will report any developments in subsequent newsletters.

Finally, for members wishing to dine at the Celtic Club prior to any of our Meetings please remember to advise us of their intentions up to the day before, by phoning the VFFA Message Service on 0498 254 497 and leaving their name and the names of any others in their party.

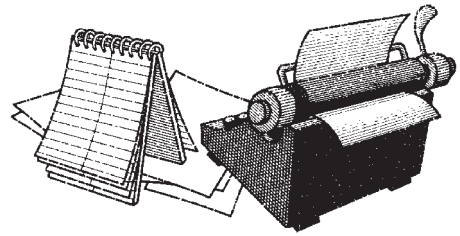
Best wishes,

*Terry Rogers (President)*



*Tichborne watercolour - La Fontaine stream*

# From the EDITOR'S DESK



‘Oh come all ye faithful, joyful and triumphant!’

No, that’s not intended as an invitation to our more successful members to appear at our February Liars’ Night with their sensational stories of big bags taken over the holidays. Yes, I know, it’s a familiar Christmas Carol.

Christmas is a favourite time of the year for me. While the weeks leading up to it can be frantic, once the big day arrives it’s all good. Aside from the theological connections that some of us hold dear, there’s invariably a great atmosphere around of goodwill and generosity.

It’s a time for family and friends. A time to relax and unwind. A time to give and receive gifts. A time to put away the old year and plan for a clean start in the new one. Perhaps even a time to wet a line.

VFFA member Richard Kos tells me he found a new Sage one-weight rod under the tree on Christmas morning. I feel very envious. And Rod Lee, a neighbour of mine and a very keen fly-fisher, reported finding a couple of items there with ‘Simms’ written on them. Mind you, he put them there himself, but that’s fine. After all, you wouldn’t dare risk letting a spouse or an offspring choose major fly-fishing items for you. As for myself, there were a couple of DVDs and some of those new Japanese flat butt leaders from Peter Hayes to try out. Oh, and I mustn’t forget the week in Tassie I enjoyed in early December that my darling wife insists was definitely part of my Christmas package.

Christmas and the January holidays offer an opportunity to get out on the water too, though I have a couple of reservations about fishing at this time of the year. January is the middle of summer and the temperatures are often hot, so the water temperatures creep up too. So trout can be harder to find, especially in the stillwaters. David Featherstone’s solution is to rise at 3 am and get to the lakes at least an hour before dawn. There’ll be good fish in along the edges he assures me. I’m sure he’s right, and I must try it one of these days. I also have pleasant memories of grasshopper fishing in the rivers



*Summer in Tasmania's Highlands – 1°C and the editor's car covered in snow*

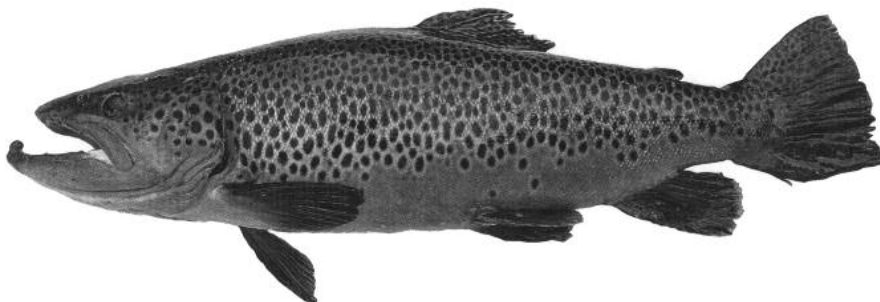
around Thornton in January, and if you hang around until dusk there is often a good evening rise, so I guess it's not a total loss. The other problem with fishing around the Christmas and New Year period is that lots of other fisher folk are out and about too, and any venue within a reasonable day's drive from home takes a heavy pounding at this time of the year. The fish that are left are likely to be suffering lead poisoning or concussion. They've certainly seen it all.

New Year is of course the time for 'New Year's resolutions'. I have a one - this year I must try to fish more thoughtfully. We all know the old yarn about the tradesman who boasted of his 20 years experience, which in reality was one year's experience repeated 20 times, and the persistent temptation for me when I get to the water is to mindlessly revert to old habits and practices. I would like to think that over the years I've picked up some new skills and understandings, and I hope I'm a more knowledgeable angler than I was 10 years ago, so I really must plan my fishing more carefully. John Gierich, in *Fly-fishing The High Country*, says: "The best fishermen I know try not to make the same mistakes over and over again; instead they strive to make new and interesting mistakes and to remember what they learned from them". I must keep that in mind.

Some years ago I was talking with Geoff Hall at Goulburn Valley Fly-Fishers. Geoff had just had his 60th birthday and he figured that he had just 10 more years of good fishing left. The underlying assumption was that beyond his 70th birthday the inevitable decline of physical strength and fitness would see a corresponding waning in his angling abilities and capacity. As it happens Geoff and I are of similar ages, and sadly that 'last decade' is now all too quickly running out. I recall some 25 years ago fishing the MacLaughlin River in New South Wales with Hubert Reichelt. We had parked the car at a bridge and then walked four hours downstream over some quite rough country to get to a bit of water that Hubert was very keen to fish. We fished for about three hours, and then walked out again. I know I'd struggle to manage that feat these days, at least without a respirator. And the passage of the years seems to have produced a dodgy left knee and a shoulder that rattles a bit, but I can put up with these. Nick Lyons says: "With rivers, as with good friends, you always feel better for a few hours in their presence; you always want to review your dialogue, years later, with a particular pool or riffle or bend, and to live back through layers of experience. We have been to this river before and together. We have much to relive." Yes, a couple of minor aches and pains are not going to stop me this year - I've got too many friendships with rivers I'm keen to renew.

Best wishes and tight lines to you all for 2013.

*Lyndon Webb.*



## David Featherstone – a Member for 50 Years:



Our president suggested that I speak for 45 minutes, but I won't be that long. When you look around this room tonight you realise that fly-fishing is something quite special. The VFFA has been my life; it's an incredible Association. This award and medal tonight finishes off my triple – President, Life Member, and now a 50-Year member, which is fantastic for me and something very special.

The VFFA has given so much to so many fly-fishermen. People don't always realise how important this Association is. It is a premier club, and there is no doubt about it. Right through the country people talk about the Victorian Fly-Fishers' Association. I gave a talk recently up in NSW and a fellow stood up and said: "Featherie (that's my nickname, by the way), what are your loves in life?" I replied: "It's pretty obvious isn't it - fly-fishing is my number one, the Hawthorn Football Club is my number two, and my wife comes in as number three." Now you wouldn't believe it, but somebody rang my wife Alison and told her what I'd said. It didn't go over too well!

Just think about the activities we've had in the VFFA, and the wonderful meetings we've had with guest speakers, many of whom have been very famous. Some of the guys that I have fished with from this Association have been great anglers – anglers of truly high note. There's one particular fellow I will refer to, along with a fishing story well worth listening to. This fellow was a broad Scot, a past president of this Association, and probably one of the greatest fly-fishermen I have fished with. His name - Fred Stewart. If you read David Scholes's books Fred is mentioned on many occasions, and Fred Stewart and David Scholes and I have fished together in lots of places – even the little Woori Yallock Creek that's mentioned so affectionately in David's *'The Way of an Angler'*. We've fished together in Tasmania, and what a wonderful place Tasmania is.

The trips that the VFFA organised for members in the past few years have all been absolutely incredible, but in the early days we didn't have such trips. The VFFA then was a get-together of fly-fishermen to talk about fly-fishing and tell lots of lies about all the big fish we'd caught. But in recent years the trips have been well organised and truly great, so we congratulate the hierarchy of the VFFA.

When I talk about Fred Stewart, he and I were great mates. I bought a property right next to Fred's out the other side of Ringwood. When I bought this property Fred said: "It's great to have you here Featherie. We ought to do something together. Do you want to buy some of my property?" And that's exactly what I did. Fred and I then built two lakes on these properties with the idea that we would only fish them with dry flies. And what a wonderful time we had.

For 15 years Fred and I used to go up to the Monaro in the Snowy Scheme each year. Fred used to drive his cream Chev utility (and he wasn't a young man at this stage) all the way up to the 15 mile post out of Kiandra. Our rendezvous was there. I had a motorbike in the back of

my 4 Wheel Drive and we used it to motorbike across the plains to the Murrumbidgee River.

The 'Bidgee', as we called it, was only half as wide as this room and we used to fish it together, one on either side of the river, fishing a section at a time. We had done really well on one particular morning, and it was getting close to mid-day when all of a sudden I yelled out: "Don't move Fred." "Where is he Featherie?" "About 25 yards ahead of you Fred." "Right," he said with his enchanting Scottish accent. He was a wonderful fisherman. He cast out along the bank – not on the water, along the bank. "How is it Featherie?" "Spot on", I said, "It's spot on Fred." He then had to lift that line hoping the fly didn't catch in the grass, and fortunately it didn't. He cast again, shooting line out along the bank so that just the leader curved to the left and fell on the water. It was absolutely perfect. It drifted back along the river and a huge head came up and ate the fly. And that fly was one of his favourites – the Nobby Hopper.

I'll never forget the fight that followed. Fred was incredible - probably one of the greatest fishermen I've ever fished with. He had learned all his fly-fishing in Scotland and he brought his craft with him, first to Swan Hill and then down to Warrenwood, near Ringwood, where he planted his citrus orchid. As I've suggested, he was an incredible fly-fisherman. That fish was a magnificent 7¼ lb from that small stream – what a wonderful feat.

Gentlemen, I wish you all a very healthy and safe Christmas and a wonderful New Year, and keep those lines tight. Don't forget what the VFFA has done for us all. Thank you.

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## Lyndon Webb – a Member for 37 Years:

My thanks to Terry for his very kind introduction.

Several weeks ago I was checking the text of the December issue of our newsletter and discovered that I was one of tonight's speakers. That took the edge off things. Since then I've been wondering what I might say. I feel a bit like the mosquito in the nudist colony – I think I know what I'm here to do, but I'm not sure where I should start.

My role these days is as your honorary editor. How did that come about? As many of you know, I spent my working life teaching in secondary schools, and about 18 years ago the boss at the school where I worked was dishing out jobs and I somehow wound up having to produce the school's newsletter. And that was my fate for the next 13 years – publishing a fortnightly school newsletter.

In 2007 my teaching career was in its death throes and I was wondering what I might do in retirement. About this time my VFFA newsletter turned up in the mail, and it struck me that perhaps I could help out there in some small way. So I emailed the editor, John Philbrick, and very hesitantly and tentatively offered my services. Perhaps I could help with some proof reading, or with processing photos. I heard nothing for a few days, then received an email from the great man – and here I paraphrase: he'd done it for 13 years and was sick of it, so the job was mine. Congratulations!

This wasn't quite what I had in mind. But, ok, let's press on and see where it all goes. So I emailed John back and suggested that we get together – his place or mine? He said, "No, we'll meet in the city". I asked, "Where?" He replied, "My Chambers of course."

Then the penny dropped. Now I'd lived a very sheltered life and had no idea who John Philbrick was, or what he did for a living. The next morning I saw my boss at school and asked, "Is it ok if I leave early on Thursday afternoon?" He raised an eyebrow, so I continued: "I've got an appointment in the city with a prominent barrister." My boss went deathly white, and finally croaked as best he could: "What on earth have you done?" I said, "I'm not sure, but I could be in real strife."

So I duly appeared at Seabrook Chambers and John invited me into his office and asked me to sit down in the client's chair. I was rather hesitant, appreciating that lingering too long in that chair could be very expensive. But the die was cast. During 2008 John remained officially as editor, while I took on an increasing amount of the process, and at the AGM that year I became it – your editor. I must add that during the transition, and since then, John has remained enormously supportive and encouraging.

And now for the second part of my contribution tonight - how did I wind up a fly-fisher?

I grew up in Mildura in the State's north-east, and in my high school years sat beside a mate whose father was a very keen angler. So I was constantly peppered with tales of fabulous fishing trips and big bags of fish. Finally at age 13 I weakened and went to the local sports store and purchased 50 yards of 20 lb line, and some sinkers and hooks. I couldn't afford a rod, so did what most of my mates did and wound the line round the neck of an old soft drink bottle. Bait? Well my music teacher at the time had a property just out of town, and his septic tank leaked. The area behind his old country dunny was wet and smelly and supported a magnificent population of worms. The local fish loved them, so I was now an angler.

In 1958 the family moved to Melbourne. The footy in Melbourne was heaps better, but the fishing was hopeless – at least from the perspective of a teenage boy without transport. So I had to settle for just reading about it – books, magazines, even the catalogues from the tackle stores were avidly devoured. The school library got some new books, and among these was David Scholes's *The Way of An Angler*. I borrowed, and read it, and re-read it, and then extended my loan, and read it again. The librarian threatened to ring my skinny neck if I didn't bring it back. So I reluctantly did, but the damage was done - I was sold. One day, somehow, I was going to fly-fish for trout.

By 1966 I'd completed my degree and teacher training, and had married the delightful young lass I'd been courting for three years. My first teaching appointment was to the Senior School of Caulfield Technical College, where I was allocated a Wednesday night physics practical class to supervise – and where I soon discovered there were two very serious trout fishermen in the room. One of these guys told riveting tales of wading up some of our high country rivers in a wet suit with his pack above his head. He and his mates thus got into some fairly inaccessible areas and caught lots of fish.

The other angler in my class was the real deal – a dinky-die fly-fisher. And a very organised and clever one too. During the trout season he drove up to Porepunkah every Friday night after work and camped on the Buckland River. He then fished the Buckland all Saturday and Sunday, then drove home late Sunday night for work on Monday. He also very cunningly married a young lady from Tasmania, so every Christmas he took his bride home to visit her family. He would then leave her in their loving care while he nicked off and fished every river in sight. Now how smart is that?

At the end of the year he told me he was acquiring a new fly rod. “Would I like to buy his old one?” “How much?” “\$15”. How could I resist? (Mind you, \$15 in the 1960s was a lot of money to an impoverished young teacher.) So I made the big purchase and went home to my wife that night with, “Dearest spouse and wonderful partner of mine, here’s \$15 to spend on anything you like.” “What on earth have you done?” she said. “Well, I’ve just spent \$15 on a second-hand fly rod”. “Whatever will you do with that?”

Good question! It was actually a dog of a thing - 8’6” long, for a 7-weight line, and it was sloppy and tired and weighed about 10 kg – or at least it felt like it. Five minutes casting with this thing and you had an aggravated hernia and a serious bout of tennis elbow. But I didn’t know any better, and it was a treasured possession.

In 1968 Caulfield Tech changed its status and became a degree-granting tertiary institution. Staff were required to have had five year’s experience and as I only had three I was out of a job. So on the advice of a mate I applied for a two-year contract to teach in Papua New Guinea. We ended up staying there for 5 years, and the fishing was stunning, but that’s another story.

1973 the riots in the streets of Port Moresby were getting a little tedious, so we returned to Victoria, where I was appointed to Warrnambool High School – a very fortuitous appointment. I soon came across Barry Quigley, long-time member of the Warrnambool Fly-fishers and a VFFA Honorary Life Member. Barry introduced me to the Warrnambool Fly-fishing club, and also took me out to the Hopkins River near Allansford one evening to show me how to fly-fish. His 14 year old son came with us. The son had tied up some ‘nymphs’ for the occasion - they were simply some rough black wool tied around a hook shank.

Barry’s son cast these nymphs into a pool surrounded by thick reeds and caught 8 fish in 8 casts. “My gosh,” I thought, “this fly-fishing is absolutely dead easy.” So I sold all my other fishing gear and spent the takings on a fly rod, a reel, a fly line, and some flies. I was finally a fly-fisher.

In 1976 I joined the VFFA. In the same year an American teacher called Jim Blakeslee joined the school staff. Jim was already a master angler and a talented fly tier. My part in the deal was to introduce him the local Club and show him some local waters. He soon settled in.

In April 1977 Jim and I and my son (then about 11 or 12) drove across to Port Fairy to fish the Moyne. We walked in along the old railway line until we got to the river, then Jim went upstream and my son and I headed off downstream. About 20 minutes later I looked up and saw Jim about 150 yards up the river with his rod bent double. The silly cow – obviously hooked on a log.

Another 5 minutes went by and then I glanced up again and this time Jim was pacing up and down the bank with his rod still bent over. He was obviously connected to a very large fish. We raced up the bank and got there in time to see him netting out a truly magnificent brown – just over 7½ lb.

Now it just so happened that this particular night was the Warrnambool club’s annual dinner, and several Melbourne VFFA members had come down to join in. Jim’s fish was put on a large tray and placed at the entrance to the dining room. The message was loud and clear to our visitors – you Melbourne guys can cart your fancy rods out to the Red Tag pools and cast

till your arms drop. But we've got fish down, and just look at the size of them.

1981 – and I'll draw the line here. I was part of a teacher exchange program, and I swapped jobs with a teacher in a school near Hamilton in New Zealand's North Island. We swapped houses, cars, cats, and teaching positions.

As soon as I arrived there I joined the Hamilton Angling Club, and their vice-president, a wonderful angler called Peter Scott, saw this bewildered soul from across the ditch and took me under his wing. Peter worked for a major dairy company, and spent lots of time visiting local farmers. In return, they allowed him to fish the rivers and streams that ran through their farms. And Peter took me with him. So from a fishing perspective it was a brilliant year. Anglers heading to New Zealand invariably go to the South Island, but the North Island is just as good. It seemed to me that every little town and hamlet had a river or two flowing past filled with trout that hardly ever saw an angler.

Peter and I have remained friends since that time, and about five years ago he and his wife were in Melbourne and spent an evening with us. During the night Peter told me a fascinating story.

The Dairy Company that he worked for had gone into partnership with a US-based firm specialising in automation, and soon after the deal was settled one of the senior vice-presidents from the US company was despatched to New Zealand to check things out. Prior to his arrival he made it clear he wanted to do some fishing. What sort of fishing? Trout fishing of course – for some of those big back country monsters.

So arrangements were made with a local guide to look after the visitor. However, two days before the Senior Vice-President arrived the guide found he was double-booked and wasn't available. The New Zealand Company managers were panic-stricken, and begged Peter to help out. He was, after all, the resident trout expert.

Peter agreed, but indicated that he would need a helicopter for the day to get into some good water in the limited time available. Ok, but the instructions were clear - the visiting brass had to catch some fish and had to have a good time. So at 5 am on the big day Peter picked up his guest and they headed for Rotorua. It was immediately obvious that the visitor was both elderly and generously overweight. He also revealed on the drive to Rotorua that he suffered from a heart problem, diabetes, high blood pressure, and various other ailments.

When they arrived at Rotorua the helicopter flew them into one of Peter's favourite back-country streams. They were dropped off at the downstream end of a section that offered an easy day's fishing, with the helicopter returning for them in the late afternoon.

Conditions were perfect - the water was low and clear, the breeze was gentle, and the bright sun made fish easy to spot. Peter then discovered that his client's casting skills were somewhat rusty – dreadful in fact. Moreover he was also seriously out of condition. Twenty minutes up the first run and he collapsed onto a stump, puffing and sweating and popping pills for his ailments.

Progress was slow, and by lunchtime they were a long way short of the half-way point. So after lunch Peter began to hustle his guest along, walking past stretches of good water and picking out the best of what remained. But despite countless opportunities, the fish tally remained zero. Peter had no trouble spotting fish, but his visitor's blundering casts and

inability to react to the subtle dips of the indicator meant that he continually failed to connect. Time was running out and the helicopter was due when they arrived at the last section. Peter walked up ahead to check the possibilities and saw the flash of a feeding fish at the top of a run. They crept into position, and on Peter's instruction, the vice-president tossed his weighted nymph up into the current well ahead of the feeding fish. And for once he got it reasonably right.

The cast landed in some white water and the fly was swept down past the feeding trout. There was a flash of silver, and the hook connected. Peter said the trout leapt several times and then bolted downstream at a huge rate of knots. So he grabbed the vice-president by the shirt collar and the belt to keep him upright, and together they stumbled and tripped and fox-trotted their way down the pool chasing the fish. By some miracle the hook held, and despite several more leaps and lunges the trout – a magnificent 5 lb rainbow hen – was netted.

Peter then had to retrieve the digital camera from the bowels of the vice-president's gigantic backpack and take endless photos of the great white hunter with his trophy. The trout was soon totally sick of the whole business, and very grateful to be finally released back into the water. Then, with exquisite timing, the helicopter landed.

On their way back to the hotel the vice-president sat silent for quite some time. Peter became a little concerned about his guest's welfare, and kept glancing across to confirm that he was still breathing. Finally the Vice-President spoke. "Peter", he said, "Thank you. Even without that wonderful fish, today has simply been the best day in my life."

And that sums it up. It can be tough – just ask those who have recently returned from Tassie. But there's nothing better than being out in the bush beside a lake or a stream with a fly-rod in your hand. And if the fish co-operate the memories are treasures.

Thank you for listening.



*Tichborne watercolour - Te Wairoa Stream Mouth*

# Happy Endings – Philip Weigall

(Philip Weigall is pre-eminent in Victorian fly-fishing, holding a very high public profile in our recreational fishing scene. Aside from a significant involvement these days in trout politics and management, he's a top guide, the author of several very popular fly-fishing books, the editor of the superb *Flyfisher* magazine, and the writer of countless magazine articles. And he's also a VFFA member who contributes regularly to our newsletter. Here he offers some wise thoughts on how we can land more of those big fish we occasionally connect with.)

## **Philip Weigall likes to see good fish landed.**

Ever observed one of those conversations – in person or in print – where a fly-fisher insists he doesn't really care if the big one gets away? So let me get this straight, I think quietly to myself, you invested a lot of travel time to get there and quite possibly a fair bit of folding too. You probably read up on the water in question and/or likely techniques, perhaps did some work on your cast (with or without professional help) and quite possibly spent a few hours tying some flies for the trip.

Then eventually you hook the best trout of the whole week, and it breaks you off. Well at least you fooled it into eating the fly / know where it lives / no one could land a fish like that from a spot like this / I was going to let it go anyway/ etc, etc. But are you really trying to tell me you wouldn't rather have actually caught it? Really?

Personally, I can't quite get how you can be passionate about fly-fishing, and not want to land the big one. The ecstasy of success surely has to be counterbalanced by the disappointment of failure. That's not to say you can't also be a gracious loser – I'm not proud of some of my McEnroe-esque dummy spits after big fish losses! But even if you didn't hurl your rod down and yell expletives at the river, surely you revisit the moment occasionally and wonder if it could have played out differently.

There are some fish you just aren't going to land no matter how well prepared you are. It still hurts when you lose them, but the haunting conversation with yourself afterwards is likely to be mercifully short. Things like hooks that pull or unseen snags are pretty hard to avoid and recriminations, if any, can be directed at Lady Luck.

However it's another matter when you can trace the loss of a beauty back to something you could have done differently. I still find myself mulling over such losses years later, which is one reason (along with seeing friends and guided guests lose nice fish unnecessarily) that I'm so obsessed with the subject.

## **Preparation**

The mindset we all should have (well, those of us who would like to land the big one) is to be prepared for the exceptional. Most really big trout are, by definition, unexpected. Depending on where we're fishing, we have some idea of what we might reasonably expect to catch; it's the trout well beyond these parameters that break people off. If you're fishing the Steavenson, that might be as 'small' as a 3 pounder; on Lake Eucumbene it might be an 8 pounder; on a trophy New Zealand river or a remote lake in the Tasmanian Highlands, it might be a 15 pounder.

There's no way of foretelling the year, the day or the hour when you are going to hook one of these beauties; they're too rare for that. So if you're serious about giving yourself a fighting chance when the monster does turn up, you need to head out onto the water each and every time as if today is going to be the day.

Start with a decent tippet. Fine (read 'weak') tippet gets far too much credit for fooling fish. I have a theory that we've caught the fine tippet disease from the Americans, where it might actually be necessary sometimes due to the tiny (sizes 18 or less) flies they often use over there, particularly on the 'bug factory' western streams. I only use the best tippet I can find (a subject in itself) and I don't carry tippet less than 7 lb (4X in my chosen brands) and usually fish 8 lb (3X). Often I'll fish 10 – 12 lb (2X). The logic of 'it's only the King Parrot / Howqua so I'll only fish 4 lb' makes no sense to me. If the fly is any size, say size 14 or bigger, why not fish 7 or 8 lb (4X/3X)? There is no fish catching penalty, and if you hook a once a year beauty, you're in with a chance. Oh, and test your knots hard before fishing: the time to break a weak knot is when you tug it in your hands, not when the first decent fish of the day comes up tight. After every fish do a quick leader/tippet check, and after every big fish, change the tippet anyway.

Please carry a decent net, one big (as in wide and deep) enough to accommodate the largest fish you're ever likely to catch anywhere. You don't need to carry a big net? Tell that to each and every New Zealand guide who would rather cut his arm off than be on the water without his monster net. By the way, tea strainer nets are worse than useless, so unless you like them as a fashion accessory, leave them to decorate the study wall.

### **Fight**

Bend the rod. Forget the point and pull tactics saltwater anglers sometimes use. It's very hard to break a decent tippet with a bent rod, as you can observe every time you get hopelessly snagged. Keep the rod bent hard, pulling away from the direction the trout is swimming. Side strain is fine, so long as there isn't too much weed or too many snags between you and the fish: then, an upright rod with a high line angle is best.

In open water such as big gravelly rivers or weed and snag free lakes, you can take your time and let a big fish run, taking a fair bit of line if necessary. Of the fish I've hooked that ran more than 50 metres in open water, I can't actually recall the last one I subsequently lost. And yes, big trout can run hard, fast and long and a good drag helps when they do. 'You don't need a drag for trout, mate,' makes about as much sense as 'You don't need a net, mate.'

On the flip side, in tight water – amid logs, boulders, weedbeds etc – letting a big trout run any distance won't work. Now is the time to be glad you went for the heaviest tippet you thought you could get away with. There are two possible approaches here. For regular big fish, say under 8 pounds, bully them from the moment the hook is set, not allowing them to gain any momentum. It's a fine line, but it's amazing what you can achieve with a relatively powerful upright rod, decent tippet, and a nothing-to-lose attitude.

The other strategy for true giants in tight paces is what a very good New Zealand guide once described to me as 'walking the dog', or something like that. It works on the theory that really huge trout are apex predators that have long forgotten what it's like to be threatened: for years they have been the threat. The idea is that when first hooked, these fish won't panic in the way



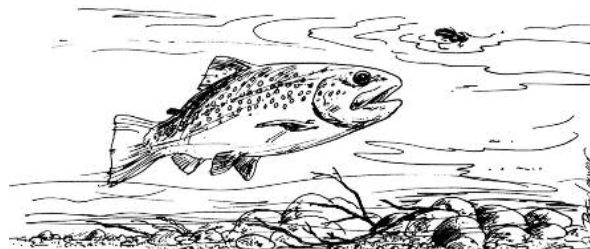
*A large leaper – and this one was landed*

the other 99.9% of trout will, so use that to your advantage. Apply steady pressure, but the moment the trout starts to look like it's alarmed and beats its tail harder, back off the pressure a little. This is counterintuitive, but the longer you can maintain this balance, the better. The plan is that you gradually tire the trout out, so that by the time either the trout panics or you really must apply pressure to bring it to the net, it's operating on less than full power. This strategy has worked twice for me, and in hindsight I'm pretty sure it would have helped on a third monster that I ultimately lost.

### **Each to their Own**

There is of course a whole branch of sport fishing where the objective is basically to land the biggest fish on the lightest line. Obviously, for fly-fishers who seek that challenge, much of the above will be irrelevant, and fair enough! For others, the detail mightn't be quite that prescriptive, but they still like the idea of a trout having a chance to get away against lighter tackle. Fair enough too. As much as I struggle to relate to those lines of thinking, there is no right or wrong here. But if you are one of those who would really like to convert as many big trout hook-ups as possible into captures, then I hope the ideas above help.

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## New Zealand in Spring 2012

(Trevor Stow and Hubert Reichelt fished the South Island in late November / early December last year. Here is a brief report from Trevor.)

On Thursday we had lunch with three Bairnsdale Fly Fishing Club members. They had been in New Zealand for 9 days and had only caught a handful of trout. I suggested they fish the Waiau River. One of the members who had not caught a fish at that stage caught a nice rainbow. He landed the fish and then released it. He then threw his hands up in joy and fell over, breaking two bones in his leg. Emergency was called and a helicopter arrived and flew him into Invercargill hospital, where he was likely to stay until Christmas.

Trout numbers were down a little this year (mainly due to the high water and weather). However we caught fish up to 7 pounds, and on the last day I caught 18 browns in the Mataura and Andrew Mossman, who we had caught up with at Gore, caught 15, so we did have some good fishing at times. Hubert and I also ran into VFFA secretary Richard Garvey whilst we were at Te Anau. He had caught a 3½ pound brown in the Eglington River earlier in the day.



*Oh dear Hubert – how did this happen?*

Hubert and I fished one river for 8 kilometres (and 8 kilometres back!) for five fish from 2½ to 5 pounds. We thought that was a pretty poor return for the day's fishing but I guess it is all relative, with perhaps others seeing it as a reasonable result.

I have provided one photo of Hubert. If you look carefully at it you will see that Hubert has his right ankle firmly caught between two strands of fencing wire. He can neither get down nor get over. The reason that he is smiling is that he is pleading with me to help. He has offered me as a bribe six of his best nymphs. Not likely! One whole box of flies and dish-washing duties for the rest of the fortnight was the starting price for me to free the great man!

*Trevor*

## Agua Boa Lodge

(Our good friend Harry Robertson, based in Virginia, USA, manages to fish some fabulous places, and often fisheries that would not feature high on our lists. Here he reports on a week in the Amazon Rainforest.)

I have just returned from a week in the Amazon Rainforest, having arranged a trip through Sweetwater Travel, who are long time friends in the trade, after securing eight spaces in a fly-fishing lodge located 300 miles north of Manaus, deep in the jungle.

The owner has accomplished quite a feat, using barges (when the river levels allowed) to transport in the materials needed to build six air-conditioned guest houses, complete with private baths, each housing two guests. Covered porches invite private afternoon cocktail hours with views of the river and surrounding foliage from the comfort of a surrounding manicured lawn. There is also a freshwater filtered swimming pool, with bar at the poolside, for guests to cool off at the end of the day.



Meals are served buffet style on a banquet-sized table. The food is excellent, with two entrees and a varied selection of side dishes for the evening meal. Fresh fruits from the jungle were a mainstay as well as available at all three meals. Most anglers voted to take lunches with them and not return to the lodge, but instead selected a shaded spot at midday to rest in a hammock strung between trees. The guides have an imposed daily brief siesta break in their boats, using life vests and cushions for comfort.

My biggest shock came when I found we would be landing our charter from Manaus on a paved, 3,000 foot runway just 200 yards from the lodge! The weather was hot when the wind died, as we were very close to the equator. I had visited this area on other rivers but on this occasion was in the only 'fly-fishing only' AC equipped facility within hundreds of miles. There were no bugs!! The acidity of the dark but clear river would not support the larval growth necessary for the normal annoying and dangerous insect bites associated with most swampy areas. I saw (or heard) less than half a dozen mosquitoes in the entire week! There were some small 'no seeums' that waited for the rare drop in the wind to swarm about, but applications of repellent kept them at bay.

Now, what about the fishing? We fished two to a boat guided by Portuguese-speaking guides who poled from a raised platform. They spotted fish and pointed excitedly with their 'fishing English': "CAS! CAS! CAS! .... MORE! ... GONE!!" Great fun and they all seemed to like their job of making the day pleasant and successful. The language barrier was sometimes a

problem and slightly annoying, but did not ruin one hour during my stay. We rotated through a prearranged schedule but the guides used the same areas each week and knew them well. There were three patterns of Peacock Bass in this region, though some say they are all the same species in different phases of development. The most widespread is called a Butterfly - rich dappled green background with three distinct spots of bright yellow bordered in black spaced down each side. They can weigh up to 15 pounds but never before had I witnessed one over 6 pounds. There is also the Paca, gunmetal grey with ivory-coloured dots in a distinct pattern with rows of stripes running vertically down the fish's side. This one is supposed to be the best fighter of the lot but that is a very fine line judgment! 12 pounds would be a large specimen. Last is the brash, gaudily coloured Royal. This fish has a splash like spilled Indian ink behind the red-orange eye, wide black bar stripes vertically, and a black dot near the tail. A lovely fish and the one that reaches the largest size, weighing 25 pound.



*Harry with a superb Royal Bass*

There were twenty-five other species available, and we caught many. On previous trips I had enjoyed decent catch numbers each day, but 8 pounds was my largest. This trip we used 8 to 10 weight single-handed rods, and large wide arbor reels with copious amounts of backing. The leaders were forty pound test of straight or tapered material. I chose fluorocarbon and was satisfied with the results, but did take extra care with the knots - which is necessary with that material.

I was most comfortable with an 8-weight Intermediate line. I fished primarily with a Temple Fork Outfitters 8-weight, 4 piece Axiom rod. It handled the casting and battles with the fish beautifully. The flies were large in some cases - 9 inches long with flat prisms eyes glued on. Some were tied with gaudily-coloured chartreuse, red and yellow feathers, and sparkle strips added to their appeal. Some anglers used poppers with success, but I didn't explore this. These ambush predators were found near dense cover in packs rather than schools. They chased baitfish relentlessly into shore, surrounded them and slashed back and forth, scattering their poor intended victims. This activity could be seen and heard at great distances and drew Caimans (alligator cousins) as well as fishermen.

At times we fished the edges of sand bars with deep dark drop offs. The fish could be seen as we had been promised. Each boat would land 20 – 30 fish a day, with sizes from 2 to 19 pounds (which was the largest for the week). 10 to 15 pound fish were common. Their street fighter frantic runs and jumps were a thrill and many backing knots connecting fly-line to backing saw the light of day for the first time ever.

While out fishing three different and very lucky guests glimpsed jaguars. We all saw many Giant Macaws and the smaller birds were a joy to see and hear. Butterflies with gorgeous coloured patterns on their wings were everywhere. A Tapir came almost nightly and had little fear of humans, as the chef had tamed him with treats.

I look forward to my return next year in mid-January when the waters of the Agua Boa will be at low levels that will drive the bait fish into lagoons and main river from the surrounding jungle, and the Peacock Bass will be right behind them. Hit this timing right, take a stout rod, a reel with lots of backing and a smooth drag (and a rabbit's foot) and you will experience some incredible sport in a magnificent exotic location.

Harry Robertson  
(And check Harry's great site at [www.hanoverfly.com](http://www.hanoverfly.com))

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## Country Life

(Mike Jarvis came across these snippets in recent articles in the UK magazine *Country Life*. In reference to the bailiffs, your editor can recall that when he lived in New Zealand in 1981 much of the policing of the local trout fishery was carried out by volunteer honorary rangers. They had legal powers to confiscate gear and issue penalty notices. How would this work in the Victorian environment? Any volunteers?)

### ***Bailiffs Patrol The Riverbank***

The first volunteer river bailiffs are patrolling the South-East, keeping an eye out for skullduggery, such as poaching, on the riverbank. The scheme is the initiative of the Angling Trust, working with the Environment Agency (EA). Trust chairman Mike Heylin explains: 'We know anglers are on waters more than anyone else and can see what is happening. If they join this scheme, we can look forward to more and better enforcement and protection of fish and fisheries. We hope to roll the scheme out nationwide.' Adrian Saunders of the EA adds: 'We can achieve so much more when we work with enthusiastic partners like this. With so many miles of rivers and thousands of fisheries, ensuring they're regularly patrolled can be difficult.' The trust is now recruiting a second intake of volunteers in the South-East. Anyone interested should email [bailiffs@anglingtrust.net](mailto:bailiffs@anglingtrust.net)

### ***Completely Hooked On Fishing***

A rare first edition of the world's most famous piscatorial book comes under the hammer when the library of passionate fisherman Alan Jarvis is sold by Bonhams at Knightsbridge, London, on May 22 ([www.bonhams.com](http://www.bonhams.com)). Izaak Walton's *The Compleat Angler*, a celebration of the art and spirit of fishing in prose and poetry that was written in 1653, is estimated at £40,000 - £50,000. There is also a copy of the first edition of Markus-Eliezer Bloch's *Ichtyologie*, described as the most beautiful book ever produced on fish. The drawings, published in six volumes between 1785 and 1797, are taken from Bloch's collection of some 1,500 specimens, which was the largest of its time; contributors to it included Sir William Hamilton, husband of Nelson's mistress Emma, who brought back specimens from Naples. The late Mr Jarvis, who enjoyed fishing in Scotland, New Zealand and Alaska, emigrated to Australia in 1965, later owning a large trout lake in Tasmania. In 1983, he acquired the significant library of antiquarian angling books collected by Sydney publisher C. W. Bushell, which comprises the bulk of this sale.

(NB: Alan Jarvis is not related to Mike Jarvis!)

## Report from Out West

(... or this time from a fair way east. Jim Blakeslee and his wife Tricia enjoyed some time in New Zealand last December. Here is Jim's account of their rather adventurous travels.)

Tricia and I recently arrived home after nine days of hiking, fishing, and sampling great wine and food in New Zealand. We flew into Christchurch on November 29 and then drove to Blenheim, where we stocked up and packed our rucksacks for a six-day hike in the Nelson Lakes National Park. The plan was to finish the walk we had started in the previous January, which had been cut short when I hurt my hand in a fall.

We drove to Lake Rotoroa and caught the water taxi from Rotoroa township on the north end of the lake to the jetty at Sabine Hut at the south end. The weather was warm and fine with scattered cloud as we tramped seven hours to West Sabine Hut - a big first day. We were the first trampers to officially cross the new swing bridge over the West Sabine that replaced the one washed out in the floods last year. That night we enjoyed a steak served with dehy potatoes and peas and a cup of Shiraz, before finishing with a coffee and chocolate and then bed.

The next morning we fished around the junction of the east and west branches of the Sabine River. I caught a nice 5 lb rainbow on a nymph, which I filleted, and then we packed up and tramped four hours up the west branch to Blue Lake hut. Here we shared the fillets with a Kiwi family from near Nelson. The father, Shane, was giving his four kids a taste of the New Zealand wilderness experience, so we gave them a taste of the local trout, which is what I like to do with people who happen to be sharing a hut with us.

The following morning Shane and his kids headed off to Lake Constance, about an hour south, and Tricia and I prepared for a very challenging eight hour hike to the west - up to Moss Pass and down to Ella Hut on the D'Urville River. We enjoyed a leisurely breakfast of pancakes and coffee and made a late start - 11 am - to give the clouds time to clear so we could see the pass,



*Tricia Blakeslee well loaded up to cross the Moss Pass*

and for the ice on the pass time to melt before we got up there. The climb was very rugged and steep. On reaching the pass we had to rug up in cold weather gear, then kick a path through five snowfields over the pass and down the western side. Luckily the snow was fairly soft; if it had been icy we would have been in trouble - no crampons.

There were no other footprints to follow; no one else had been over in a long time. Once below the snow line we took a lunch break beside a little tarn, breathed a sigh of relief, and enjoyed the view before taking the steep decent to the D' Urville River. There was a lot of loose scree above the tree line, but things got steeper and really slippery as we descended through wet, mossy beech forest. We had to pick each step carefully on the slimy tree roots and rocks. At times it was hand over hand, clinging to tree roots and lowering ourselves down. There was a knotted rope in one chute that, rather interestingly, had its end half way down, leaving us to search around for hand holds on rocks and tree roots before finally reaching safer ground below. We had a few falls, but luckily no serious injuries.

Once we reached the river the last hour to Ella Hut was relatively straight forward, but we were sore and thoroughly knackered when we got there. The next morning, December 3, we packed up for the supposedly four-hour hike down to Morgan Hut. The trail was washed away in many areas as a result of flooding earlier in September-October, so we had to rock-hop on the river side, or go bush at times before re-joining the track. We actually took six hours in total, including stops several times to boil the billy and have lunch, as well as to fish a few interesting pools. I caught and released one 5 lb brown on a #16 Parachute Adams that Tricia spotted rising at the tail of a pool.

The afternoon was still warm when we got to Morgan Hut, and there was no-one else around. So Tricia and I heated up enough water on the potbelly stove in the hut for a hot shower on the deck outside. Then we cleaned up, settled in, cooked up some pasta, drank the last of our wine, relaxed and spent a few hours reading and admiring the views before hitting the sack.

In the morning we made coffee, fried up some eggs and bacon, toasted a couple of English muffins, and spread them with butter and manuka honey for our breakfast. (It's tough surviving away from the comforts of home.) Then with the batteries recharged we hiked downstream a short distance before fishing our way back upstream to the hut. I spent a couple hours showing Tricia how to spot fish



*Jim never fails to catch a fish or three*



*Another magnificent South Island river*

and how to cast a brace of weighted nymphs into a head wind. Frustrating, and not much fun for her I think. I managed to catch a couple of browns, 5 and 6 lbs, on a #16 Pheasant Tail Nymph trailed behind a #14 gold beadhead Hare's Ear Nymph. Then it was back to the hut for lunch.

The sky was beginning to cloud over, hinting that the weather was about to deteriorate. So Tricia stayed at the hut to do some needlepoint while I made tracks downstream - much further this time. Despite the overcast sky the crystal-clear water of the D'Urville meant I was still able to polaroid easily. I found some great pools and felt confident. Sure enough, they held magnificent fish. What followed was one of my best ever afternoon's fishing in New Zealand. Straight away I spotted a big brownie rising to dries. I covered him with a #16 Adams, he gulped it down, and the battle was on. After 10 minutes he charged to the other side of the river and broke me off in a log jam. In the next pool, after a long battle, another big one did the same. The other fish I encountered weren't so lucky. I landed four in a row, all between 6 and 7 lbs, as I fished my way back upstream toward Morgan Hut. A misty rain had begun to fall and was getting heavier, and I was about to give it away when I spotted another hefty brown. I cast, he took, then leapt several times, fought for another five minutes, then ended up in the bag for our dinner. I arrived back at the hut, a kilometre away, a soggy but very happy fisherman.

After fried trout that night, Tricia and I sipped our coffee and listened as the sound of the rain grew louder. We slept fitfully that night as it pelted down. We knew the river would be coming up. It was still raining heavily in the morning so we rose at 5:30, had a quick breakfast, packed up, put on our wet weather gear and hit the trail at 7:00 am. The river had risen dramatically and was raging. We force-marched for four hours, watching as the brown water of the river began to break its banks, waded half a dozen flooded side streams, bashed up into the bush to skirt around sections of trail that had fallen into the river, and were very relieved indeed to finally reach the D'Urville Hut on the shores of Lake Rotoroa by 11:00 am. We called the water taxi on the radio-phone in the hut, were picked up 20 minutes later, and were back at our car at the north end of the lake by noon. An hour and a half later we were in our motel in Blenheim, drying our gear, having a hot shower, and discussing which wineries and restaurants we would visit in the next few days before returning to Oz.

Cheers, Jimbo

# FLY OF THE MONTH

## *Bruce Smith's 'Creel Caddis'*



This month's fly was suggested by Richard Kos. It was originally devised by Bruce Smith in the late 1990s. Bruce had been fishing the evening rise on the Goulburn, and had offered the usual stock standard caddis patterns to trout that were clearly taking natural caddis off the surface. But on this occasion the trout persistently ignored Bruce's Elk Hair Caddis and all other caddis alternatives, so he sat for a while and watched the naturals in action. The females were laying eggs and in the process were doing lots of fluttering and jiggling about, and it was this that particularly attracted the attention of the trout. So, as a first attempt, Bruce tried skating his Elk Hair Caddis patterns across the surface, but that didn't work either.

So the next day he set about devising a caddis pattern that would actually imitate the fluttering females. Whilst rummaging through his fly tying materials he came across some quail feathers, and these had the virtue of being very small. Bruce continued to rummage, to ponder, and to fiddle around, and the end result was the pattern shown above – Bruce Smith's Creel Caddis. He tied some up, tried them out a week later when he found some more fluttering caddis, and the attendant trout gave the new fly an emphatic tick of approval. It worked, and worked well. An intriguing aspect of this was that Bruce fished his new pattern dead drift, but somehow the outward positioning of the quail feathers creates an impression of movement. Regardless, the pattern was a huge success.

Some weeks ago Richard Kos tied up some of these flies and whilst visiting John Pilkington's wonderful Enoch's Point establishment Kossy tried the pattern out on the Big River trout during an evening rise. And six casts produced six fish. John promptly appropriated some of Kossy's supply and subsequently reported similar success. So the cat is out of the bag (so to speak).

### *Tying materials:*

- Hook: Daiichi 1180 sizes 14 - 18. (Alternatives are Gamakatsu S10 hooks or Kamasan B401 hooks).
- Thread: Black 8/0.
- Rib: Fine copper wire.
- Body: Grey superfine dubbing. (Kossy uses very fine grey possum dubbing, but the synthetic alternatives are ok.)
- Body Hackle: Small Cree feather (tied palmer). (Quality Cree hackle feathers are hard to obtain these days, so Kossy uses a light ginger and that seems a satisfactory substitute.)
- Wings: Small quail feathers tied back to back.
- Hackle: Cree feather (and again a ginger hackle is a good substitute).

### *Tying the Fly:*

- 1 Tie in the black thread at a point about a third of the way along the hook shank from the eye, then wrap down to just before the bend. Tie in a short length of very fine copper wire and spin on some fine grey dubbing.
- 2 Wind on the dubbing to form the body, tapered as shown. (Fig 1).



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- 3 Tie in a small Cree (or Ginger) hackle feather at this point and wind it as a palmer hackle over the dubbed body down towards the hook bend. Trap it under the copper wire rib, and then wind the copper wire through the hackle to hold it in place, using four turns only of the wire. (Fig 2).



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- 4 Select two small matching quail feathers, and tie them in back to back (curving away from each other) at this point.
- 5 Then tie in the main Cree (or Ginger) hackle feather at the front as a normal collar hackle. (Fig 3)



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- 6 Whip finish and cement the head. The top view of the fly should look like this:





## LIBRARY NEWS

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

The library is divided into three parts.

Part 1 Books available for loaning to members.

Part 2 Books available for reference only and not to be taken from the library.

Part 3 Books bequeathed to the Association and not to be taken from the cabinet.

## V.F.F.A. ITEMS FOR SALE

The Association has the following quality items for sale:

Book "The Country For An Angler" (the History of the VFFA).....	\$70.00 each
Book "Geehi to Great Lake" .....	\$45.00 each
Columbia Shirts .....	\$70.00 each
Polarfleece jacket with VFFA logo.....	\$40.00 each
Association ties (blue or maroon).....	\$35.00 each
Wine glasses and whisky glasses inscribed with VFFA logo, set of 6.....	\$45.00 per set
Cloth badges .....	\$7.00 each
<b><i>The Australian Trout</i> by Jack Ritchie.....</b>	<b>\$20.00</b>
V.F.F.A. car stickers.....	\$2.00 each

Members wishing to purchase any of these items should contact Hugh Maltby prior to the monthly General Meeting on telephone 0423 283 079.

### VALUED DONORS

#### The following made donations for the raffle at the 2012 Annual Dinner:

Aussie Angler Pty Ltd • Armadale Angling • Australian Fishing Network • Flyfisher Magazine • FlyLife Magazine • Hayes on Brumbys • Hookup Bait and Tackle • J. M. Gillies Pty Ltd • Mayfly Tackle, Mick Hall Flies • Millbrook Lakes Lodge • Nick Taransky Bamboo Rod Maker • Pro-Angler Tackle • Ray Brown Onkaparinga Flies • Stevens Publishing Pty Ltd • The Compleat Angler Box Hill • The Flyfisher Tackle Store • The Fly Fishers Rod and Creel in Thornbury • Vision and Pisces Fly-Fishing Tackle

## VFFA Meetings & Activities

### February 2013

- 13 Council Meeting – 7:30 pm at the Celtic Club
- 15 - 17 Bairnsdale Dudley Lee Donger Weekend and Bairnsdale Fly-fishers' Annual Dinner
- 16 – 22 Annual Trip to Tasmania – staying at Hayes on Brumby's
- 28 General Meeting 'Liars' Night' - 8:00 pm at the Celtic Club**

### March 2013

- 21 General Meeting - 8:00 pm at the Celtic Club - Speaker Bill Thomas**
- 27 Council Meeting – 7:30 pm at the Celtic Club
- (29 Good Friday)

### April 2013

- 11 – 14 Big River trip – staying at Enoch's Point
- 18 General Meeting - 8:00 pm at the Celtic Club (Speaker TBC)**
- 24 Council Meeting – 7:30 pm at the Celtic Club

### May 2013

- 16 General Meeting - 8:00 pm at the Celtic Club - Annual Auction (TBC)**
- 22 Council Meeting – 7:30 pm at the Celtic Club

### June 2013

- 2 Sunday Casting commences – at the Red Tag Casting Pools
- 6 Dinner with Partners – at the Celtic Club (Date to be confirmed).
- 9 Sunday Casting - at the Red Tag Casting Pools
- 16 Annual Cane Day – at the Red Tag Casting Pools
- 20 General Meeting - 8:00 pm at the Celtic Club**
- 23 Sunday Casting - at the Red Tag Casting Pools
- 26 Council Meeting – 7:30 pm at the Celtic Club