

# FLY LINES



FEBRUARY 2024

## February 2024 Meeting: Another Exciting 'Liars' Night'

Again our first meeting of the new year will be a review of the exploits and successes of members over recent months. Many of us managed some time on a river or lake at the end of last year or early this year, and there have been some exciting reports. Some members had fabulous days in New Zealand or Tasmania, and others have had success in our local Victorian streams. The Goulburn River and other streams around Thornton have fished well, and members are also reporting great results fishing the Ovens and other rivers in the state's north-east.

Thursday, February 22,  
7:30pm, at the  
**Kelvin Club**

President Simon Joel has been busy rounding up reports from our successful anglers, so Liars' Night again this year will be another fabulous opportunity to catch up with colleagues and hear tales of great days and great trout encountered both near and far.

However Simon is away during February, so Peter Clayton has agreed to coordinate the speakers and arrangements for Liars' Night. Peter can be contacted on 0423 053 932 or via email on [petergc@bigpond.net.au](mailto:petergc@bigpond.net.au)

Terry Rogers will coordinate arrangements with the Kelvin Club.

We would encourage all members to attend what will be a great evening, and for those who would like to join us for a meal beforehand PLEASE make a booking for dinner by emailing Terry Rogers at [terryrogers@bigpond.com](mailto:terryrogers@bigpond.com) before Tuesday, February 20, and leaving a message.



*Hubert Reichelt making a fly selection on his recent New Zealand trip*

# THE VICTORIAN FLY FISHERS' ASSOCIATION INC.

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*Bernard Holbery getting connected*

# President's Message

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Happy New Year to all.

Over the Christmas and New Year break I met with a group of past VFFA presidents and current council members to address the future direction of the VFFA.

It became clear that what we needed to do was conduct a survey of existing long-term and new members to get a picture of how the VFFA is currently meeting the needs of members, and to see what additional activities and services members are interested in. The aim is to have a good understanding of your needs and wants, so that we will be better equipped to prioritise our activities.

In the survey we will be looking for your feedback on our monthly meetings, on and off water activities, resources such as the library and the VFFA website, and how we continue to communicate with members (including via *Fly Lines*). This is your opportunity to share your own experiences of the Association and to influence its direction, so in addition to the randomly selected sample group we already have, I'd like to invite you to contact us directly if you wish to participate in the survey. Our Junior Vice President Rod Hirst will be happy to hear from you. His best contact is via email at [rodhirst@gmail.com](mailto:rodhirst@gmail.com)



*Simon Joel*

The survey's objectives are to determine:

- What were Members' original objectives/motivation for joining the VFFA;
- What do Members currently think of the VFFA as a membership group, its activities, and its offerings;
- Which activities are currently most relevant to Members, and which are not;
- What resources are Members currently accessing, and would likely access in the future;
- How would Members best like to communicate with VFFA Council and other Members;
- And finally - suggestions for improvements.



# The 2023 Annual Christmas Dinner

... report by President Simon Joel

Our annual Christmas Dinner was held at the Kelvin Club on Friday, December 15, with 37 members and partners in attendance. The event was a great success, not only for the Association, but also in raising money for the Casting for Recovery (CfR) charity. The evening commenced with drinks, finding name tabs, and sorting the seating arrangements. The room looked very festive with our secretary Beth Hourigan decorating tables with traditional Christmas decorations. Once again Terry Rogers had done a superb job publicising the event and arranging the allocation of tables. Terry was also our toast master, proposing toasts to The King and the VFFA. David Hooke was presented with his Past President's badge, and President



*David Hooke received his Past President's Badge*



*President Simon Joel welcomed guests*



*Our Christmas Dinner was a wonderful opportunity to catch up with friends*



*Terry Rogers - our toast master*

Simon Joel thanked the outgoing Council for their hard work.

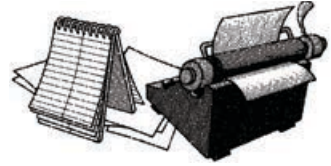
Our first guest was Charley May, a guide, casting instructor and artist who had produced three large and attractive drawings of a brown, a rainbow and a brook trout. Charley had donated these three works for a silent auction, with all proceeds going to the CfR charity. She spoke about the CfR program and the support it gives to women recovering from breast cancer. The auction was a great success, with \$1,560 being raised.

Dinner was the customary two courses - the traditional turkey with all the trimmings. The VFFA red and white wines were greatly enjoyed. After the dinner raffle tickets were sold for two magnificent hampers that had been

donated, and \$700 was raised for the Association.

Our guest speaker was Tom Jarman – a guide, instructor, and international fly fishing competitor who was placed fourth in the recent World Fly Fishing Championships. Tom gave a superb talk (illustrated with photos) on a year's fishing in Victoria. The text of Tom's talk is given in this newsletter. It made me think of the fabulous opportunities we have here in Victoria to fish all year round in some wonderful diverse waters. As President of the Victorian Fly Fishers' Association it struck me just how many areas in Victoria I hadn't ever fished. Tom's insightful talk has provided us all with numerous options for future fishing events.

# From the EDITOR'S DESK



The VFFA has produced and published a number of good books. One of my favourites is *Geehi to Great Lake – an Anthology of Victorian Fly Fishers' Association Newsletters*. And it is exactly that – a collection of significant and notable newsletter contributions from November 1959 to April 2006. Although it doesn't pretend to be, it is in fact an excellent record of our history as a fly fishing organisation.

I was poking around in my copy a few days ago looking for some inspiration for my contribution to our February issue when I came across John Philbrick's fascinating account of the fishing in Leakes' Lagoon. What or where is Leake's Lagoon?

Let's read some of John's account:

"Leake's Lagoon is located on the northern side of the Goulburn River about half a mile above Gilmour's Bridge. The lagoon is only about four or five acres in size. It is bounded on one side by a steep hill and the end of the lagoon is an inaccessible, swampy morass surrounded by trees and impenetrable scrub. The actual fishable shoreline would only total about one hundred yards in length.

Yet in the 1960s it was the spot in Victoria on which to learn to polaroid cruising trout. Jim Allen, Bob Roles, the late Brian Gordon, Greg Kelly, Tom Edwards, Brian Herd, Wally Brandtmann and many other fly fishers cut their polaroiding teeth on this demanding water.

The trout cruising the edges were large by Victorian standards and reasonably easy to see through the crystal clear water on a bright day. But they were very difficult to deceive. They brooked no error. We used to say that if you could regularly polaroid and trick the wily brown trout of Leake's Lagoon you would have no trouble polaroiding trout in Tasmania.

The lagoon was only accessible by wading, air-bedding, swimming the river, or via the back road through Mr Leake's property. However, Mr Leake was a formidable man. He did not grant permission to fish the lagoon lightly, and his fierce cross-examinations when asked for permission deterred many fly fishers. Thus, given that few anglers were mad enough to wade, air bed or swim the river, the lagoon was an almost pristine water in those days, and the trout were generally left unmolested by all but the most determined of anglers.

These were marvellous days. The trout would cruise the edges, particularly past a long line of huge tussocks which ran along the edge of the best bank. The surface of the water was almost invariably smooth, unruffled, and very clear, so it was hopeless to cast near the trout. The sight of the fly hitting the water near a fish was enough to send it fleeing into the centre of the lagoon, never to appear again that day. In order to deceive these sophisticated trout the fly had to be cast way ahead of the fish so that they 'discovered' it.

This was easier said than done as there were only a few gaps in the tussocks. Thus, there was often not enough space to cast ahead of the trout without disturbing it. Jim Allen hit upon the solution — when he saw a fish cruising along the edge of the tussocks he would run way ahead of the fish (yes, it was a

long time ago!), then cast a small black beetle into a convenient gap between the tussocks and then wait for the fish to arrive. By this and other 'ambush' methods we caught many sizeable fish over the years, including several in excess of four pounds in weight.

There were other styles of fly fishing at the lagoon from time to time. Occasionally the trout would become fixated on feeding on airborne dragonflies. If a breeze was blowing a small green Matuka would account for some of these fish. There were also occasional hatches of lambda duns — the dun of the Red Spinner. When these insects hatched the trout would readily take them from the surface. And in times of low water the trout would feed on water snails. These fish were infuriatingly difficult, but would occasionally take a small nymph or wet black beetle. And on dark a small black or conventional muddler minnow was deadly.

By Victorian standards the fishing was outstanding. I have wonderful memories of Bob Roles landing three magnificent fish over three pounds one morning, and of the four browns that I landed in the rain one late afternoon - and the subsequent terrifying walk back to my car with lightning bolts all around me, culminating in me being knocked off my feet by a bolt of lightning that struck the earth near me.

Alas, the lagoon is not the water it was. It was Mr Leake himself who told me about the boats that were motoring down the river to his lagoon. This was the beginning of the end. In the early days Leake's Lagoon was something of a sanctuary for fish, but it became obvious that the lagoon was coming under severe fishing pressure. There were signs of camps and campfires presumably lit by bait fishermen, and tracks even developed along the best banks.

The water clarity deteriorated, and the number of fish cruising around the edge dropped off markedly. I find it sad that it is likely that those fly fishers who do now fish the lagoon have no inkling of how the hand of man had reduced it from a magnificent to a mediocre water in the space of thirty years."

So there it is – John's account of the wonderful fishing that used to be in Mr Leake's Lagoon.

Two thoughts. First, John Philbrick was a superbly fit athlete with some serious mountain-climbing experiences in his accomplishments. He was a strong swimmer and frequently swam across the Goulburn to gain access to the Lagoon. I have been told he would park his car on the Victorian side of the river opposite the Lagoon, then strip down to his underwear, pack his clothes and fishing gear into a large plastic bag, then swim across the river to reach the Lagoon on the other side. The Goulburn River at this point was perhaps 30 – 40 metres wide, and often carried a quite strong current. John's determination to fish the Lagoon was extraordinarily impressive.



*John Philbrick was a popular speaker at VFFA meetings*



*John Philbrick fishing the North Esk in Tasmania*

Another story I was told relating to Mr Leake's Lagoon concerns two VFFA members who decided to drive to the Lagoon on a Friday night in order to make an early start the next morning. They duly arrived at Mr Leake's house at about 10 pm, and after a brief debate one of them decided it would save some fishing time the next morning if they knocked on Mr Leake's front door on the Friday night and asked for permission to fish the Lagoon early the next day.

But the house was in darkness. Mr Leake and his wife had retired for the night. They were in bed. Undeterred, one of our champion anglers went to the house and knocked on the front door. Nothing happened, so he knocked louder and longer. Still nothing happened, so he decided to walk around to the back of the house and try knocking there. While he was heading around to the back door a front bedroom light came on, and Mr Leake opened the front door to find who the lunatic was who was banging on his door in the middle of the night. But by now our intrepid angler had started banging loudly on the back door. So Mr Leake, replete in his best pyjamas, headed there to see what the fuss was all about.

The other VFFA member, the one who had remained in the car, could hear the conversation between his fishing companion and Mr Leake. He reported that it was indeed rather fruity, and no, they weren't invited to fish the Lagoon the next morning, or ever.

So there you are - just a few of the many glorious memories in our VFFA history. It is rich indeed.

*Lyndon Webb*



*Some of our Victorian streams are rather challenging*

# Tom Jarman – at our December 2023 Christmas Dinner

(President Simon Joel's introduction:

Tom Jarman started fly fishing as a young boy with his father in the UK, fishing local still waters as he describes them. After moving to Australia he spent his school years fishing in Victoria and in Tasmania's lakes. At age 16 Tom started competitive fly fishing, and by 18 was selected to represent Australia internationally. Over his competitive career he has won numerous competitions in Australia and was recently placed fourth in the 2023 World Fly Fishing Championships in Slovakia.

At university Tom studied a Bachelor of Environmental Science degree, which gave him an understanding of just how interconnected Australia's river systems and ecology are. Tom guides in Tasmania and Victoria, and runs regular clinics and seminars.

Please welcome Tom.)

Thank you Simon. And thank you very much for having me here tonight. I haven't ever been to a VFFA meeting before, so it's fantastic to be here. I can see lots of familiar faces as I've seen many of you around on interstate rivers.

The talk I would like to give tonight is: 'A Year of Fly Fishing in Victoria'. The premise of this is that every month there's so much fly fishing available in Victoria, and it is pretty much everywhere. So tonight I will dedicate one month to twelve different regions in our state, and talk about the fishing there – why I enjoy it, and what you can do and see there.

I thought it only fitting to start with the start of our trout season here in September. I live in Winchelsea in south-west Victoria, so naturally the Otways area is very close to my heart, which is why I chose the Otways for September.

**September** is the opening of the trout season here in Victoria and the Otways is my pick of places to fly fish. The main reason for this choice is that it is probably the one place that regardless of the temperatures and the amount of rainfall you can always get some dry fly fishing there on the very first day of the season.

The reason for that is the rivers there are super unique. They all flow from the Otways and they all flow to the sea. There are sea trout there along with plenty of wild brown trout, yet these rivers haven't been stocked since the 1970s.

There's an amazing photo in the Wye River Pub. It shows a bunch of young 14 year old lads in the 1940s decked out in their board shorts, and two young guys are standing there holding a string of brown trout that were caught in the Wye River that year. So these rivers are an amazing series of fisheries.

There are too many to name, but the Barham, the Cumberland, the Erskine



*Tom Jarman speaking at our Christmas Dinner*

and the Aire are some of my favourites. There's something like 30 streams in the Otways that hold trout, so it's a very underrated fishery. It also has the highest number of precipitation days in Australia. On average there are about 240 days each year when there is some rain, so even though the water levels are low, especially in summer, the streams are constantly topped up by trickles of rain throughout the season.

Here is a photo of the Barham River two days ago, so there's a lot of water there if anyone is thinking of heading down there to fish.

For **October** I had to choose the Central Highland lakes, because in Victoria, particularly in the last few years, we've had some sensational mayfly fishing in lakes such as Newlyn Reservoir, Lake Wendouree, Hepburn Lagoon, Moorabool, and Wurdibuloc down near where I live. They all have great populations of mayfly, and as someone who grew up fishing Tasmania's lakes and can remember the great dun hatches on Penstock Lagoon, Little Pine, and Bronte at times, the Victorian lakes of Wendouree and Newlyn have had hatches in the past few years that would rival anywhere in Australia.

So yes, if you are fishing anywhere in October and would like to fish in just one place, it would have to be the Central Highlands, as the brown trout there are absolutely fantastic. And there are so many different ways of fishing for them. You can catch them on streamers or dries or a nymph under a dry. Or you can fish using traditional wet flies, or a team of nymphs on a floating line. It's a very diverse and fun fishery.

So into **November**. There are very few people here tonight who haven't fished in the Goulburn Valley. November is one

of the best times to fish in Victoria. It's a time when the water temperatures are optimal and there's usually not too much rain. So the rivers are clear and you can have a mix of dry fly fishing or nymph fishing. If you are fishing the Goulburn River the water levels can sometimes be down, so you can wade it. If I was fishing anywhere in November, it would have to be in the Goulburn Valley. I think a couple of the anglers here tonight were on the Steavenson today, and it was sensational.

Now for **December**. If I could only fish one place in December it would be Bright. It is just a beautiful place to stay. You have the Ovens River there. It is one of the prettiest rivers and is one of my favourite rivers in Australia. The very cool and unique thing about the Ovens is that from Porpunkah up it's an amazing trout fishery all the way up to Harrierville and above. But if you drop down below Porpunkah you start to be in cod territory. You're then in an area where there are lots of trout cod and Murray cod. December is the opening of the cod season, so the Ovens is one of the very few places in Australia where you can be on the same river and catch Murray cod and a brown or rainbow trout on the same day. So it's a very cool place to fish. There are heaps of other good rivers there too, including the Buckland, the Buffalo, and Morses Creek. For an angler Bright is probably one of the best destination towns in Victoria.

Let's think about **January**. I had to include north-east Victoria as probably the peak of the places to fish in January. The main reason for this is you've got mountains there, so the water in the mountains is a lot cooler than anywhere else. Areas like the Goulburn Valley and the Otways can get quite hot through January, so the fishing can be slow. But in north-east Victoria you don't have that problem. You have huge elevation and

cold waters. You also have tailwaters there, such as the Kiewa River.

One benefit of tailwaters is that because they come from a dam and the water releases from the dam are typically from the bottom, the water temperatures are a lot cooler. So the fish in those areas are a lot more happy to feed. Rivers like the Rubicon and Steavenson go up and down in temperature throughout the year, but tailwaters maintain much the same temperature the whole year round. And we've got the Kiewa, the West Kiewa, the Upper Kiewa, the Mitta Mitta and the Swampy, so there's just so much to do up that way. There's some sensational fishing there, and some great nymphing. The benefit of Bright and the north-east is that you can fish just about anywhere you like and it's productive.

**February** is always a pickle of a month for me. It feels like a hard month to fish because often the water levels are low and the water can be at its warmest. Water flow is often slow too, and the rivers are crystal clear. So it's a fantastic opportunity to do something completely different. I wrote an article in *FlyLife* magazine last year about Rocky Valley Reservoir. Those alpine lakes are absolutely amazing in Victoria. Here is a photo of Rocky Valley Reservoir at the top of Falls Creek. Pretty Valley Reservoir is also up there, though it's not technically Alpine as it's not high enough. Lake William Hovell on the King River is sensational as well. So I thought to beat the heat and have a nice break the alpine lakes are perfect to be included in there.

Now I'm kind of a lake fishing tragic and a traditional lifestyle fishing tragic, so fishing lakes like this one (in the photo) in Tasmania, which has some truly wild brown trout is something we don't have here in Victoria. Our Victorian lakes don't have the truly wild fish they have in

Tasmania. If you've ever fished in Ireland or in Scotland, the fish here in Tasmania are about as close to that as you can get. And they're absolutely beautiful stunning fish, and just so much fun to fish for.

We've come to **March**, and I thought that Mansfield has to be on the cards. So for those who haven't fished up there, all the rivers that flow into Lake Eildon are absolutely sensational. There's the Howqua, the Delatite, the Jamieson and the Big Rivers. There's also some other small creeks that run in there that can be fished, too. Now March is the time when the fishing starts to get a lot better. Again, I reaffirm that February is probably one of the hardest months in which to catch trout, though these last few years have been different because we've had so much rain.

But March is when we turn the corner. Water temperatures start cooling down and the fishing gets really good. I enjoy this time of year because the fishing gets quite technical. You get a good mix of cooler water temperatures and lower water, and the dry fly fishing can be amazing. The nymph fishing is also very good. I don't much enjoy our early season river nymphing because it's very heavy and very clunky. But when you start nymphing at this time of year (in March) it is far more tactical and enjoyable. So I thought Mansfield had to be the pick for March.

**April.** This was a hard month for me to pick, so I included the Gippsland area because I thought it deserved a mention to be fitted in somewhere. For those who haven't fished this area, the Latrobe Valley has got some absolutely beautiful rivers. They're far more sandy than other rivers in Victoria and they're not overly rocky. There's a lot of sand and there's lots of sticks in the rivers. So you get some great sight fishing because

the browns like to sit really shallow over the sand bars and the gravel bars. Just a sensational place to fish.

The good thing is there's just so many rivers there. You've got the Upper Tanjil and the lower one below Blue Rock, and the Toorong. You've also got the Loch River, the La Trobe River and the Thompson, so as you can tell there's just so much fishing to do down that way.

**May** is our last month of the river season, so what I suggest here is 'find a tailwater'. A tailwater is a river that is released from a dam, and as I suggested earlier, one benefit of a tailwater is you get consistent water temperature throughout the whole time. May starts to get a lot cooler, the daylight gets shorter, the mountain streams get really cold, and the trout sometimes become a bit more sluggish in the mornings and evenings when the water is colder.

Tailwaters are the opposite. Water temperature remains the same throughout the whole day and you get some sensational fishing, typically because the water levels are often low. Rivers like the Mitta Mitta and the Goulburn River are high throughout summer because water is being released to meet the irrigation demands of farmers downstream. But once you get to May there's more rainfall and everything's cooler. No-one needs the water, so the rivers are dropped to an optimal fishing level. So we have some of the most enjoyable dry fly fishing of the whole season. Very small mayflies (sizes 18 and 20) are hatching on a lot of rivers and the fishing is so much fun.

**June.** The trout season on rivers is actually closed by this time of the year, except in south-west Victoria. And this is one of my favourite times of the year. I'm very lucky because I live in Winchelsea.

Rivers such as the Merri, the Hopkins, the Moyne and the Mount Emu Creek are all trout rivers that are open all year round. Why? Because these rivers have no natural recruitment. All the trout in these rivers are stocked. The Mount Emu Creek, for example, is stocked with 10,000 browns either once or twice a year, depending on the year, and that's because there's no natural recruitment in it. Hence there's no reason to close the season for the trout to spawn.

These rivers can become incredibly low in the summer. The flowing water happens during winter, so this is the best time to fish the larger rivers like the Merri and the Hopkins downstream closer to the sea where you get bigger fish that are feeding on baitfish. There are heaps of Galaxia in these rivers. Here's a photo of a brown trout from the lower Merri, where you can hop in a boat and tick along on the electric motor, or just stand on the bank and cast to fish that are charging around and essentially herding bait fish in the river. It's like tuna fishing. It's incredible.

I had to include these rivers because I think south-west Victoria in June, July and August is probably the most underrated area because there are such large fish there. There's good river fishing in winter. I should point out that one reason why the fish grow so big is because it's in the volcanic plains. So the rocks that you can see here in my photo are all basalt and they're very dark. As a result the rivers are super nutrient rich, so naturally the trout are really big down there. I should also point out that the Mount Emu Creek is the longest creek in Victoria at 271 kilometres, so there's a lot of trout in there.

In **July** we're back to the Central Highlands somewhere around the Ballarat area, the Daylesford-Trentham area where I used to live. The reason

why we're back there is that at this time of the year all the baitfish, the common galaxiids, tend to be in shallow areas to spawn. They spawn on the reeds and the rocks. They're a unique species, and they spawn wherever they can. What happens then is the brown trout move into the shallow water in winter and they herd these bait fish and feed on them. So you get some sensational fishing on all of those lakes in the depths of winter when it's very, very cold. You can also get some brilliant sight-fishing at this time.

Which brings us to **August**, which is the last month of our year. What is very special about the Cradle Lakes is the reason why I've chosen them for August. These are my favourite winter fisheries because they fish so well. May, June, July, August and September are the months you can fish them. Why are they so cool? As you can see from the photo, the fish there grow incredibly big. And they grow so incredibly big because there's so many galaxiids in these lakes. And what is amazing about the common galaxiids here is that Lake Bullen Merri has virtually no weed beds, but the galaxiids in this lake have the ability to spawn on rocks and lay their eggs on rocks. But then Lake Purrumbete has very little rock, and all the galaxiids there lay their eggs in the weedbeds.

So these two lakes that are only about 20 kilometres apart have these baitfish that have evolved and adapted to reproduce in completely different ways. If any of you haven't been there and fished Lake Bullen Merri or Lake Purrumbete then get a boat. You can fish Elingamite as well. These are sensational lakes because you're literally fishing in a Volcanic Maar.

Finally, Honourable Mention has to go to the Grampians. I love the Grampians. They're not really known as a river area, but they do have some very fine river

fisheries. Fyans Creek, for example, has some fantastic brown and rainbow trout fishing early in the season. There is also the Mckenzie River, which flows out of Lake Wartook. It has some very cool brown trout. And you've also got some sensational lake fishing there – in Lake Bellfield, Lake Fyans, and Wartook, which all grow some massive fish. So I couldn't leave them out.

But the Grampians is not usually a place that I head to fish. It's a place I take my partner Greta to for a weekend away. But I also pack the rods and manage to fit in a bit of fishing while I'm there.

So thank you so much for having me here tonight. If anyone has any questions on technique or anything I'll be very happy to field them.



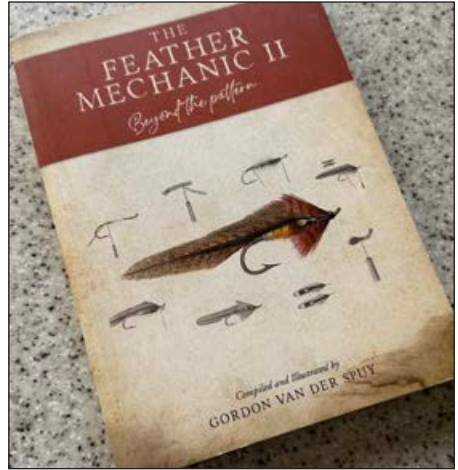
*Well shaded water*

## A New Book

The VFFA has some great friends, and our VFFA newsletters are read by interested fly fishers in other countries including South Africa. One of our very keen South African readers and supporters is Ed Herbst. Ed has been very prominent in South African fly fishing for many years. Sadly, now in his 80s, health issues prevent him from getting out to fish his favourite South African streams. But he is still very active – tying and writing about flies, and writing articles and books on fly fishing. His latest book, *The Delicate Fly Fisher*, can be read online at this site - <https://www.piscator.co.za/CPS2/articles/the-delicate-fly-fisher/>

As Ed suggests, “I am writing an online book on small stream fly fishing which is being posted on the CPS website chapter by chapter so that anyone with access to the internet can read it. News of the new chapter being posted is conveyed through my Instagram page (where I post every second day) @ed\_herbst 346.”

The reason for mentioning Ed’s name is that he recently posted to us, at his cost,



a copy of Gordon Van Der Spuy’s second book on fly tying called “*The Feather Mechanic II – Beyond the Pattern*”. Gordon Van Der Spuy is one of South Africa’s top fly tyers and his two books provide superb reading. His second book is now in our VFFA library, and the fly tyers in our ranks will find it easy reading and very instructive.



*South African streams*

## Memory and Perspective

... by Philip Weigall. Philip is the editor of *FlyStream* magazine [www.flystream.com](http://www.flystream.com), which is a regular source of accurate information about current fishing conditions. Philip, a VFFA member, is also one of our best known and highly regarded Australian fly fishing guides, and is the author of several significant books on Australian fly fishing for trout.

Here's an interesting statistic: in the first half of my time at our place in Victoria's central highlands (1997-2009) the annual rainfall averaged 685mm. For the last half (2010-2023) it's averaged 840mm. Now, we all know that a good statistician can find just about any trend or pattern you want! But dig a bit deeper, and the argument that our first half here was considerably drier than the last half becomes harder to ignore. For example, our driest year was in the first period: just 543.5mm in 2006, while the top four wettest years were in the second period, including the highest total of 1132.5mm in 2022.



*Newlyn full again and fishing well less than two years later - April 2011*

I could go on with the numbers and really send you to sleep! But the key point is that the Millennium Drought was very real, peaking between 2006 and 2007. Eildon got down to 5.4%, Eucumbene fell below 9%, Wendouree dried up and Hepburn Lagoon virtually did.



*Newlyn Reservoir in drought, May 2009. Note the willows in the southwest corner (circled) for reference*

Numerous other storages were at less than 10%. The stream situation was, of course, even worse.

By comparison, Victorian anglers are currently living through a generous period for rainfall, which roughly corresponds to abundant surface water, which in turn is a key ingredient for good freshwater fishing. Other factors like water quality, habitat, stocking, and fish predation (including by anglers!) are very important too. But none of these matter much if there is little or no water for the fish to live in in the first place.

With age comes the opportunity to get some perspective on fishing and related climate cycles. However, surprisingly few long-time anglers I know take advantage of this. Instead, memory is relied upon, and as I've written many times before, memory alone is notoriously sketchy

– mine included! Without access to real time notes or carefully collected numbers from years gone by, it's easy to lose perspective and forget how things really were. No doubt many Monaro anglers during the late 1980s to mid-1990s assumed those halcyon years would last forever. Subsequently, I was told by a number of people during the late 'noughties' that the Monaro was gone forever as a trout fishery.

The important thing to simply be aware of is the transient nature of our fisheries. When I was a teenager, I assumed – without really thinking it through – that the lakes and streams I visited would be that way (more or less) forever. Then came the droughts or wet years, and new fishing was given ... and sometimes taken away.

As a writer of fly fishing guidebooks, it's always been a challenge to balance present conditions with the past... and therefore what the future might hold. Twenty years ago my first guidebook effort, 'Victorian Fly Water' (AFN 2003) was written while Lake Modewarre was an exciting option and Lake Murdeduke was at least worthy of inclusion. Within a few years though the Millenium Drought bit, and their water quality and quantity became intolerable for trout. Those two lakes never recovered.

Conversely, waters like Upper Stony Creek Reservoir and Devilbend weren't options at all back then, but are significant fisheries now. Meanwhile, lakes like Toolondo came and went: always included in my books as possibilities, but never a sure thing.

With streams, it's usually fires and drought that have left some waters devastated one year, yet with rain and kind summers, back to their best in a remarkably short time.



*The Eucumbene River in May 2020, just a few months after the Black Summer fires. Despite the desolation, it was already fishing well again*

All the while it's been interesting to read guidebooks or articles written by authors, or compiled by editors, who were evidently relying on second-hand information rather than personal experience to populate their pages, thereby ending up with some content which was either horribly outdated, or plain wrong. The variability of fisheries is never more apparent than when new words are written based on old information.

As we move in to 2024 the temptation is to assume that conditions right now are the new normal: plenty of water in the streams and lakes. And although there are some examples of both flowing and stillwater which can fish surprisingly well in drought, I would always prefer the current regime. Yet I have to remind myself that in trout-land, there really is no such thing as normal, and despite the best efforts of science, as ever, we don't really know what our fishing future holds. All we can do is adapt in real time to whatever Nature throws our way, assisted somewhat by looking back at what happened last time we had similar conditions.

# Notice of Major Event (NOE) for Big River, March 2024

**VFFA Major Event:** Weekend trip to Enochs Point on the Big River.

**Event Co-ordinator (EC):** John Pilkington, phone: 0407 356 676;

**Email:** jpilks@vicbar.com.au

**Event date:** Friday March 22 to Sunday March 24, 2024. Arrive in the afternoon or earlier for some fishing. Huts will be open from around midday. Leave Sunday afternoon or stay on by arrangement.

**Cost/s:** \$50 for the weekend to cover food and extras.

**Event location & address:** At Enochs Country Club, Enochs Point on the Big River.

**Travel directions:** Maroondah Highway, turn off just before Eildon on Jamieson Road to Big River Bridge, then 14 km upstream to Enochs Point. Detailed directions available. Approximate travel time from Melbourne is 3 hours. About 180 kilometres.

**Transport requirements:** Four wheel drive vehicle is not necessary.

**Accommodation:** In huts, basic but comfortable. Bring sleeping bag, pillow slip, torch.

Bring own food for BBQ on Friday night and breakfasts. Lunch and evening

meals supplied. Cooking on open fire, oven. Bring esky for food, drinks. All cutlery, crockery, cooking equipment, etc, supplied.

**Travel insurance:** NA

**Description of fishing areas:** Fishing is in the Big River, a medium-sized fast flowing mountain stream with rapids, runs and pools. The river is easily accessible around Enoch's Point but more demanding (and productive) fishing is available by driving and walking down long spurs to the stream.

Dry and wet fly fishing. Wading is essential. Maps are available. It is a remote area.

**Weather:** Usually settled at this time of year, with lowish river flow. But it can vary if recent rain. Forecasts will be obtained closer to the event.

**Mobile phone coverage:** Mobile phone coverage is now available at Enoch's Point (but only for Telstra customers).

**How physically challenging:** Varies from location to location - from easy to difficult.

**Fishing license required:** Victorian inland fishing licence required.



*The Saturday night dinner out under the stars is one of the truly great features of the Big River weekend*



*The Big River is indeed a very attractive trout stream ...*



*... as it holds a lot of fine fish*

**Strongly recommended personal**

**equipment:** Waders, wading boots, wading staff, gaiters if wet wading; brimmed hat; glasses/sunglasses, sunscreen; wet weather gear, warm clothing; UHF/VHF radio; torch; water and lunch food. PLB - especially in Remote Locations.

**Essential equipment for Remote**

**Locations:** Compression bandage, UHF radio, any necessary prescribed medicines.

**Event Registration Form (ERF):** To

be completed and returned to John Pilkington by March 1.

**Date of issue of this NOE:** January 10, 2024 (mandatory for quoting in ERF)

**Event Registration closing date:** March 18, 2024

The event is limited to 16 participants and applications will be accepted on a first come, first in basis.

[Please note – the Event Registration Form (ERF) can be downloaded from the VFFA website or obtained at the next VFFA general meeting]



*VFFA members gathering for another fine weekend*

# Forgotten Flies: The Brindabella Buster

... from Adrian Maroya

Between Mount Morgan and Mount Murray, to the North-East of Currango, Murray's Creek rises. This little alpine stream, flowing swift and clear through tunnels of tea-tree and past gnarled snow-gums, courses away to the North-West, eventually taking in Cave Creek below the falls under Clarke's Gorge at the Blue Waterholes. A little further down Rolling Grounds Creek comes in, and the stream by then is properly the Goodradigbee River.

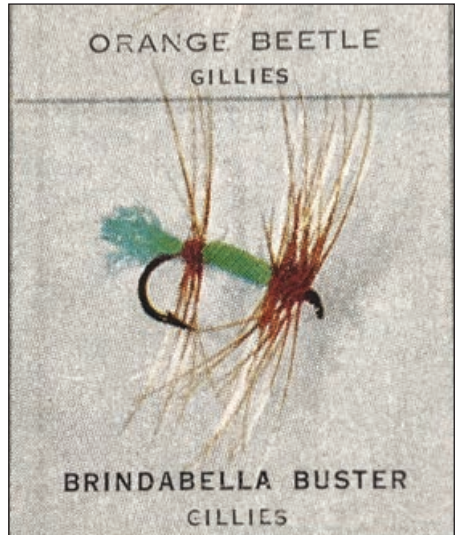
From that point the Goodradigbee flows generally North, parallel to Mounts Gingera, Ginini and Franklin, before its descent into the lovely Brindabella Valley.



*Mr W. P. Bluett at Koorabri*

## The Brindabella Valley

In the Valley is 'Koorabri', and Brindabella Station, which for a while was the childhood home of Miles Franklin. 'Koorabri' was owned for many years by Mr W. P. Bluett (1871–1968) a famous identity of the mountains and a pioneer of the Brindabella Valley. He had been, amongst other things, a staff journalist on the *Sydney Morning Herald* and the *Australian Star*, and an assiduous correspondent of Dame Mary Gilmore's.



*The Brindabella Buster as sold by J.M. Gillies*

## William Philip Bluett at 'Koorabri'

Douglas Stewart recalls Bluett in the Brindabella chapter of *The Seven Rivers* as "a small, spare old man, with a Roman nose and an air to him ... who in the midst of this wilderness ... let a couple of shacks to trout fishermen, maintain[ing] a curious oasis of civilization."

Stewart was not the only writer to have enjoyed Mr Bluett's 'chalets'. David Campbell was another, and Gwen

Meredith had the use of a log cabin built for her in the early 1950s by Mr Bluett and his family, where she scripted many of the episodes for the ABC's *Blue Hills* radio serial.

As for the Goodradigbee itself, Stewart's words are hard to better:

"The stream itself was a wild little creature, the loveliest and wildest of them all; crystal and silver in the sunlight, dark under the granite in the gorges, green and yellow in the pools with the reflections of the wattles and the ribbony-gums; fierce as a snake in its sharp and frequent floods. In the valley it ran sparkling under willows. Bubbling over rocks and shingle, moving in that ever-enticing progression of rapid and run and pool, rapid and run and pool, sinuous lithe and musical as it hurried down out of the mountains, it was the very model of a trout stream."

It is for this pretty valley that our (truly) forgotten fly – the Brindabella Buster – is named. The only reference to the fly that I have been able to find consists of its inclusion in the colour plates of J. M. Gillies' flies that illustrated every edition (1955–1967) of M. E. McCausland's *Fly Fishing in Australia and New Zealand*. The dressing is not given in any of the editions of that book, and the dressing that I have set out below is my own interpretation from the colour plate. Nor does the pattern appear in the listing of flies offered by J. M. Gillies that is recorded in John Brookes' *Lifelong Pleasure: Seventy Years of Fly-fishing* (2004).

### **The Brindabella Buster (J. M. Gillies)**

The interesting thing about the Brindabella Buster is that it is an Australian example of the 'fore-and-aft fly'; that is, a fly hackled at both ends.

The origins of the fore-and-aft style are a little obscure, but it seems that the pattern was perfected in about 1918 by Dr Jean Juge.

Dr Juge (1901–1965) was a medical doctor who spent a lifetime fishing in and around Corrèze in South-Western France; particularly on the Rivers Vézère and Corrèze. In 1959 he published a book entitled *Pêcheur de truites*, in which he set out his theories on trout fishing and fly tying. Described in the book is a series of fore-and-aft flies that Juge named 'les mouches exquisés', giving illustrated instructions for their tying.

Jean-Paul Pequegnot, in his *L'art de la pêche à la mouche sèche* (1969) records that a similar construction had been in use in England "par Brown, un pêcheur de la Kennet qui l'appelle Fore and Aft." Indeed, the name of Horace Brown (who was the President of the Piscatorial Society from 1904–1922) is still today chiefly associated with the pattern known as the Fore-and-Aft Mayfly, and with the River Kennet (a tributary of the Thames in Southern England).

In *What the Trout Said* (1982) Datus Proper remarked that "it is hard to believe that a dry-fly design so useful and obvious did not get a chance earlier." This observation was limited to the English context; Pequegnot writes that in France, the double-hackled pattern had long been known in Corrèze as a 'diable' or 'diabolo', suggesting that the pattern antedated Dr Juge's *mouches exquisés*.

In the United States a relatively well-known pattern is the Renegade: a fore-and-aft pattern developed before the Second World War and consisting of a white collar hackle, a light brown tail hackle and a peacock herl body; Ernest Hemingway was one of its adepts.

Unlike Dr Juge's tail-less *mouches exquisés*, Brown's Fore-and-Aft Mayfly has a tail; a trait it shares with the Brindabella Buster, which has a longish tag of wool or floss. Sean McSharry has drawn my attention to an article entitled "Janus – Its Birth" by Hal Thirlaway in the Autumn 2019 number of the Journal of the Piscatorial



*Two fine examples of the Brindabella Buster, as tied by Dr Eunan Hendron*

Society, which describes a fore-and-aft fly called the Janus, with cree cock whisks as wings.

All these variations suggest much potential for anatomical differentiation, but point, equally, to the versatility of the fore-and-aft style. Datus Proper singles out the fore-and-aft pattern as useful in the imitation of “skittering sedges and for those returning to oviposit” – which may well be a clue as to what the Brindabella Buster’s green tag is intended to represent: an egg sac.

It is probable that the Brindabella Buster has an English parentage, but J. M. Gillies was for his time an innovative and cosmopolitan thinker in fishing trends, and it is intriguing nonetheless to imagine that Dr Juge’s theories somehow made their way to the Brindabella Valley, via Gillies’ Melbourne establishment.

Here is my interpretation of the dressing:

**Hook:** 10 - 16

**Tail:** pale green tag (wool or floss silk)

**Body:** pale green fine wool or floss silk (wool lends a little more durability); tied slimly

**Hackle:** Coachman or light brown cock hackle, ‘spider’ length

#### **The Brindabella Buster, tied by Eunan Hendron**

The example in the photograph above was kindly tied by Dr Eunan Hendron of Pennsylvania (who tied the Australian fly patterns in the 2016 edition of the *Journal*). The photograph was also taken by Dr Hendron.

In *L’art de la pêche à la mouche sèche*, Pequegnot thus praises the qualities of the *mouche exquisite*: “the floatability and visibility [of these flies] are even better than those of the palmer style fly, with a less heavy, less opaque silhouette.”

He went on to say that “for fifteen years I have caught more than a fair number of trout and grayling with the *mouches exquis*, only forsaking them in the case of good hatches of mayflies, caddis or stoneflies; insects whose size or silhouette are so distinct that the imitation thereof gives its own particular pleasure and amusement.”

For my part, I have for a few years been trying out the Brindabella Buster in sizes

from 10-16, and in a number of shades of hackle – maintaining, however, the general characteristic of the green tag and body. The spools of merino wool ‘dubbing’ sold by Pêche à Soie (<www.pecheasoie.com>) are very suited to the task. I have found the fly to be a good general pattern, and also one that is suggestive - in its larger sizes - of mating insects and little damselflies, and in its smaller sizes of sedges and segmented terrestrials.

In tying the fly, general lightness of dressing should be the ideal - in line with Pequegot’s aim of “a less heavy, less opaque silhouette”. The hackle should be shiny and stiff.

Ironically, though, I have never tried the Brindabella Buster on the Goodradigbee at Brindabella, I look forward one day to casting one upon that river’s “ever-enticing progression of rapid and run and pool, rapid and run and pool, sinuous lithe and musical.”

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## Report from John Douglas

(... a report written in early January)

The fishing around Eildon has been very, very, good! Did I say very good? In amongst all the rain events all the streams in the district that I’ve visited are fishing well, and all appear to be holding solid populations of quality fish on the back of the last few good seasons. The rains around Christmas and early January have further recharged the streams and summer-proofed them for another year, so the fishing future is also looking good.

The Goulburn has fish in all the usual places. Careful walking along the banks sees plenty of quality fish along the edges and bubble lines. I’m very good at spooking them, but for those with better vision and patience this is a challenging way to fish and could be very rewarding if you get it right. I wish I could!

I’ve been fishing the runs with sinking nymphs and soft hackles, and this has been very rewarding. I’ve not been out in the evenings much, so can’t comment on whether there has been much of an evening rise.

The smaller streams are all in the ‘typical summer fishing mode’ with fish looking up. A combination of dry fly and nymph has been working well, with enough fish looking up to “almost” take off the nymph dropper! Hoppers and large

hairy-legged flies have also been good, particularly on those streams that are out in the paddocks.

The hoppers and cicadas were just starting in early January so should be in full swing come February. Some willow grubs are present too, so a few should be in your fly boxes just in case you come across a patch (fingers crossed). Hopefully we have a good willow grub season this summer.

The Bottom Line: the fishing around Eildon is very good.



*Past VFFA President Chris Gray fishes with John Douglas, and has a habit of catching lots of fish*

# Native Fish Populations are Flourishing

... from Taylor Hunt, VFA Fisheries Manager at [taylor.hunt@vfa.vic.gov.au](mailto:taylor.hunt@vfa.vic.gov.au)

(This note provides encouraging information on our Victorian native fish populations. While VFFA members traditionally target trout, native fish can also be caught on flies, thus providing new opportunities for adventurous members.)

Native fish abundance has continued to increase across Victoria, despite flooding and blackwater impacts in some mid-Murray systems in late 2022.

The 2023 monitoring results come from the Native Fish Report Card Program, which is a collaboration between recreational anglers, Victorian Fisheries Authority (VFA) and DEECA to annually survey and produce health report cards for nine of our most popular native fish species across ten priority Victorian rivers.

Highlights from the 2023 monitoring results include:

- Goulburn River – record high golden perch and trout cod numbers, and Murray cod caught to 123 cm and 36 kg.
- Gunbower Creek - golden perch and Murray cod appear relatively unaffected by blackwater impacts in 2022.
- Ovens River - still supports the best population of Murray cod in Victoria. Record high golden perch numbers and excellent Macquarie perch numbers.
- Wimmera river – record high golden perch numbers.
- Yarra River – record high Macquarie perch and Murray cod numbers. Good numbers of grayling.
- Glenelg River – record high estuary perch numbers.



*A Murray Cod*

- Mitchell River – record high Australian bass numbers. Good numbers of grayling.
- Thomson-Macalister – record high Australian bass numbers.

These report card results suggest that fish stocking, regulations, habitat restoration and anglers releasing fish with care, combined with good environmental conditions, have contributed to flourishing and resilient fish populations.

To further assist flood recovery, the VFA is planning to stock over 1.26 million native fish into nine of the most flood affected systems this summer, tripling the number of native fish usually stocked into these systems.

By working in partnership, recreational fishers and government are rebuilding native fish populations and creating great fishing benefits for the community to

enjoy (including excellent fly fishing for VFFA members!!).

For more information, please feel free to call Taylor Hunt, VFA Fisheries Manager on 0418 478 028 or [taylor.hunt@vfa.vic.gov.au](mailto:taylor.hunt@vfa.vic.gov.au)



*A small Estuary Perch*



*Very small Murray Cod – these will grow very large*

# Tasmanian Western Lakes trip – 2024

... from Chris Wisniewski, Tasmania Inland Fisheries Service

The sun was shining as we started the trip out to the Julian Lakes on Saturday, January 13. This year, to fit in with other commitments, we were going a week earlier than usual on our annual seven-day trip into the back country. Perhaps in going earlier than normal we might get better weather and miss the deluges of the past few years?

There were six of us on the trip this year, with three high range 4WD vehicles (and a mountain bike). The track, as rough and hard as usual, was just starting to dry out after the good rain of a few weeks earlier. The trip in was uneventful with nothing broken, and camp was set up on the flat ground at the Julian's Crossing. The lakes were brim full, with water flowing steadily through the Crossing.

With the sun still out, a large fish (perhaps 3 – 4 kilogram) was polaroided from a high bank on a nearby tarn. In watching the fish for a while we saw



*A chunky Western Lakes brown*

that it was cruising a corner beat, hard on the bottom in about a metre of water. There was a light NW breeze putting just enough ripple on the water to help hide the floating line and leader.

Using a high Ritz back cast to avoid the copious bushes, a size 8 black Foam Bug was cast out waiting for the fish to return. We kept an eye on the fish as it turned and headed back from the far end of its beat. It changed direction slightly, heading in the direction of the floating fly,



*Mayfly nymph cases from a previous hatch*

thus acknowledging that it had seen it. As it cruised closer there is always that sharp feeling of anticipation, wondering what the fish will do.

On this occasion it stayed on the bottom and swam very slowly under the fly while continuing its beat. After it was well past I quickly retrieved the fly and fired it out to the other end of the beat. Here it received the same treatment when the fish passed underneath a few minutes later.

While changing flies to a smaller black spinner we lost sight of the fish, and despite waiting some time it didn't return. Another good fish was spotted on the back of the tarn, but it didn't want a dun pattern that was set out in front of it. These big fish are not easily fooled!

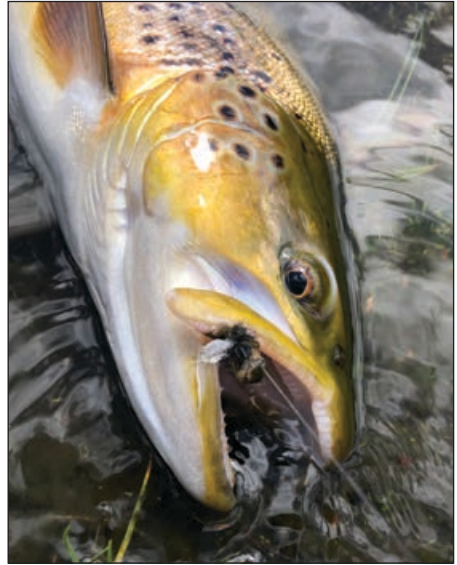
Sunday was forecast to be partly cloudy and as warm as it was predicted to be from the forecast, with a top of 20°C. So a hike out into the tarns west of Pillans Lake was undertaken. During the two-hour walk to the first tarn the cloud was burnt off, thus providing excellent polaroiding conditions. A good fish of about 2 kg was soon spotted, and it rose eagerly, taking the parachute black spinner with gusto. As the fish turned its head down the strike resulted in the fly flying back and the fish bolting away without being felt.

A little further down the shore there was a similar response and the same outcome from another good fish. Over the next hour a number of fish were covered, including a much larger fish cruising out over the silt, and all either rose to the fly and were missed on the strike, or refused the fly. Despite being in a remote area we got the feeling that these fish were a little gun shy. But maybe it was just the day.

Moving on to the next tarn up the system a nice fish of around 1 kg rose eagerly to the dry, and after a strong fight was released. Over the next few hours we

wandered up into Lake Lexie and then down into Lake Gwendy. A few fish were seen, and a couple were missed on the strike. This is beautiful country to wander in, even when the fish are not so cooperative.

The conditions on the Monday were



*There are lots of large browns in those Tasmanian Western Lakes that are in superb condition and eager to take a fly*

similar to the previous day, though with a deteriorating forecast for the rest of the week. So a walk into the upper reaches of the Julian Lakes was undertaken. Early on, before the cloud was burnt off, sight fishing was difficult, but it improved as the day wore on. The breeze became quite stiff, and more fish were spotted as we moved up through the maze of tarns. There were lots of black spinner in the air on the lee shores, and fish cruised in the windward corners looking for anything that was floating. The fish responded differently from the previous day and quite a few were hooked. A well-placed black spinner or buoyant scruffy dun was all that was required.

On Tuesday we woke to low cloud and the deteriorating weather that had been forecast. We decided to walk up to the nearest Pillans catchment in the hope that the cloud might burn off and we might find some visual fishing. But the weather didn't improve, and the wind stiffened from the north. Few fish were seen, so a fly was floated in all the likely spots but with little interest. In the afternoon the rain set in.

Overnight 43 mm of rain fell, flooding the already saturated ground from previous rain events in the last month. Water lay in pools around the campsite and continued to fall steadily through the day. On the walk up to Lake Field we found water running in all directions and pooled up in the low spots on the track. The rain continued and the wind blew from the north and north-west.

On reaching the shore of Lake Field we fished wet flies around the inflows that were pluming in from the surrounding hills. A large fish was rolled but failed to get hooked on a small Shrek. Fish then began rising out in the bay. Head, dorsal and tail rises. Good fish, too. A steady stream of duns was hatching in the rain. Like often happens at Lake Field the fish stayed just out of reach, and with the high water levels it was too deep to wade.

On to Lake Furgage where the water was running in sheets and the lake had broken into a series of backwaters. Over the next few hours we had some success fishing likely inflows, drains and backwaters with the Shrek. There were numerous takes, boils and swirls, and some fat fish were landed.

We woke on Thursday to find it was still windy, though the rain had eased to showers. A few duns were popping on the Julian Lakes, but few fish were seen. There was some limited success in floating a dun off rocky points and over the drop offs, but the fishing was slow.

On Friday morning the rain stopped in time to allow us to pack our gear for the trip out. Although we dream of and hope for days of sunshine, the weather conditions encountered this year are common. It is important to follow the forecast and plan each day's fishing around it.

Of note, the condition of fish caught this year was superb. There is a strong cohort of fish in the 800 gram to 1 kg size range coming through because of some good wet winters. The larger fish are also in great condition, and lots of young fish were also seen.

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## New Zealand in early 2024

... from Trevor Stow and Hubert Reichelt

New Zealand's South Island is a popular destination for Australian fly fishermen. A short three-hour flight from Melbourne and you are in a world class fishery. Many of the rivers are almost household names: the Mataura, the Oreti, the Tekapo, the Boyle, the Buller ... These rivers are often targeted by international fly fishers, including Australians. And



*Another fine New Zealand South Island brown.  
They grow quite large over there.*

there is nothing wrong with that, as they are all fabulous trout streams.

However, New Zealand has a lot more to offer than these famous large well-known rivers. There are many small, little-known waters that offer great fishing, and often they experience very little fishing pressure. I am not talking here about spring creeks, but rather just ordinary small waters. The type that you would see back home. Hubert and I often sample some of this fishing. When we drive around we are always on the lookout for small streams that run into the larger rivers.

During our recent summer fishing trip we encountered cold, wet and windy conditions. As a result the major rivers were all unfishable. So we decided to target a small creek that flowed into a well-known river. We drove along the creek to the farmer's residence, but when we approached the farmer at the door of his house he told us not to come any

closer. He was suffering from Covid! So we stood a good distance away while asking permission to drive over his property to the creek. He immediately smiled and said: 'Yes!' (We find that this attitude is still quite common in New Zealand!)

We rigged up with a small size 16 parachute Red Spinner with one of Hubert's famous Bismarck nymphs trailing behind it. As there was no sign of fish rising and no obvious insect activity, we thought that this would be a good prospecting outfit.

Pretty soon we were having success on the Bismarck. The water ranged from quite shallow to deep in some spots. Hubert discovered a deep section when he slipped on the wet bank and ended up wet to his waist in the creek.

Although the fish were not rising, they were more than happy to accept the nymph. We spent the day fishing this creek and ended up with six browns in



*This one was caught on Hubert Reichelt's deadly Bismarck Nymph (still caught in the fish's jaw)*



*Hubert tied a lot of flies for this trip*

the 3 – 4 pound mark. This turned what could have been a blank day into a very nice day's fishing.

We find that these smaller streams are good spring and early summer waters. Depending on the year they can get hot, low and weedy after Christmas. However this year the weather has been quite mild, and consequently the small waters were in good shape.

On your next trip to New Zealand keep your eyes open for likely looking small waters as you head to your favourite "known" river. You may be delightfully surprised at the results.



*Not the Mataura or the Oreti - just a small South Island creek, but it yielded some superb fish*

# Australian Trout Foundation Report

... from Terry George, Australian Trout Foundation President

Happy New Year to all VFFA fly fishers and supporters. We at the ATF hope that you have a peaceful and pleasant trout fishing 2024, with success on all your favourite trout waters.

Speaking of waters, the ATF had another busy year in 2023, which included laying the groundwork for a number of new projects in 2024. Our dedicated volunteers planted more than 25,000 trees, sedges and grasses in the riparian zones of the following streams - the Macalister, Ovens, Nariel, Upper Goulburn, Wonnangatta, Cobungra, Delatite and Howqua.

## May Fly Rise project – on the Upper Ovens River

On the Ovens River a fantastic new in-stream habitat installation was completed, with woody habitat pinned in and the river seeded with large boulders. The fishing at this point has already improved noticeably after this installation.

The project management group included NECMA, ATF, Alpine Fly Fishers and the Wangaratta Fly Fishers, with Brian Eddy liaising directly with NECMA's Scott McDonald and the contractors. Brian, as you are aware, is a life member of the VFFA and has been an ATF delegate for years. He is now an ATF Committee Member.

We are pleased to advise that the same project group, including four committee members from each of Alpine Fly Fishers and Wangaratta Fly Fishers, inspected a proposed extension stretch following on from May Fly Rise Project 1 and decided to proceed with May Fly Rise 2.

May Fly Rise 2 will involve similar treatment as for May Fly Rise 1, with large trees pinned to provide refuge for trout, and several large boulders installed. It will also involve some riparian planting and the poisoning of hundreds of young willows in the location. Quotes are already to hand, and the grant submission will be our first to be submitted to the new VFA Fish Habit Improvement Fund. See the attached map of the location and a photo of the river needing this attention.

Huge thanks to the VFFA volunteers who helped with the riparian planting; we hope to see you again soon at our next event.

A special mention also to those who assisted with casting tuition and fly tying at Eildon, the Vic Fish Expo, and the Bendigo events. I would especially mention the significant contributions of Chris Gray, David Grisold and Richard Kos.

My very best wishes to all VFFA members, Terry George



*One of the rivers in the state's north-east that the Australian Trout Foundation plans to work on*

# Mayfly Rise Extension Project - ATF

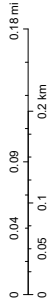


19/01/2024, 10:29:36 am

On\_Ground\_Works\_Layers\_V3\_3803 On\_Ground\_Works\_Layers\_V3\_2231

- Large wood D
- Rock Seeding
- Rockbank
- Woody
- NECMA Boundary

1:4,514



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Caption

# FLY OF THE MONTH

... *L'Ombre Style by Philip Bailey*

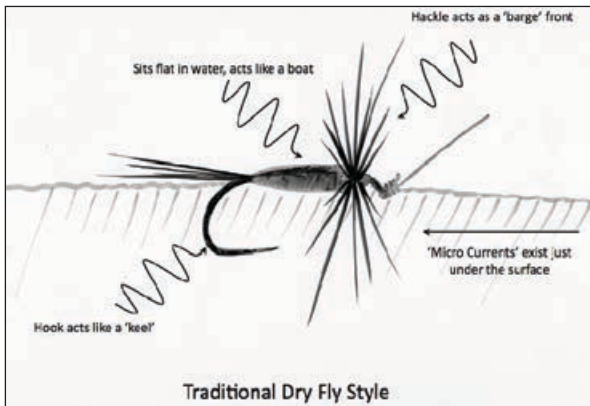
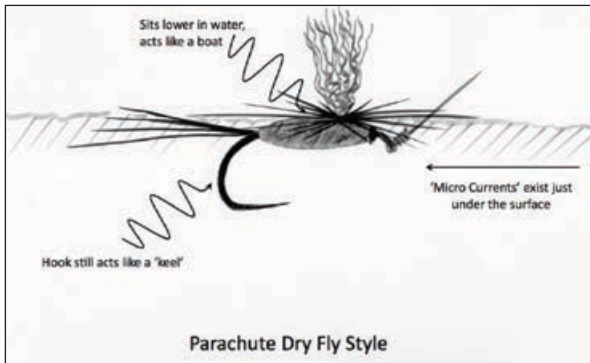


Years ago, when I was doing a little guiding, I held the view that my job was to help my clients improve their technique, understand and address varying fishing situations and, with some luck, catch a few fish. I am happy to say that most clients achieved a bit of all three.

One aspect I was pedantic about when fishing rivers was addressing drag. Especially when using a dry fly. I would watch the drift of the fly very closely, and if there was any indication that 'drag' had set in I would have my companion immediately lift off and represent the fly. At times this may have meant multiple short drifts. I wonder today if those people are still haunted by my instruction: "No, lift it off and do it again!" But it did pay dividends on numerous occasions.

As a result, a few years later when I was fishing dry flies almost exclusively, I started thinking about those times and the observations I made whilst standing next to someone, peering closely at their fly and waiting for any indication of drag, however small it might be. I suspected that in some way the manner in which we were tying flies actually attributed to their being subjected to drag.

Take the traditional way in which we tied flies. Tail, body, and a hackle wound around the hook, all tethered to a tippet. I would dare to say that 99% of casts did not result in the fly sitting up off the water, supported by the tips of the tail and points of the hackle. It doesn't happen very often. Instead we end up with the fly sitting flat on the water, tail and body in or on the surface, and hackle sitting below and above the water surface. The body acts as the bottom of a boat being subjected to the pressure of the current. The hackle sitting under the surface is acting as the front of a barge, and the portion above is being subjected to the wind. (It always seems to be windy when I get



out fishing). Lots of conflicting things are happening to that poor little fly while we think that it is drifting satisfactorily. Is it?

Over the years we seem to have moved away from the traditional tying procedure towards tying dry flies in the 'parachute' style. This procedure offered better presentation (if the flies are tied correctly) as they sat correctly on the water, erroneously thought of as much like a natural.

But I could not help thinking that we had exacerbated the problem. The body sat further in the water, subjecting the fly to even more current impact. Yes, we had eliminated the problem associated with a traditionally tied hackle, but we had added a sail in the form of a longer wing for visibility. This larger wing, generally much denser than the old traditional feather wings, would create

more impact on the fly by the wind. The only saving grace of this design was the true 'Klinkhamer-style' flies, which were designed for the body to create an 'emerger' trigger point. Even these still suffer from the wind, but there is not much you can do other than shorten the wing significantly. I can live with Klinkhamers and their design because they are so successful. My focus was on patterns that represented upwing flies.

I consider myself a thinking fly fisher, even innovative at times. So I headed down to my river, sat on the bank on a stretch that I knew had consistent hatches, and watched. I was intrigued at how light the naturals looked sailing on the surface. How dainty they were as they were subjected to the wind or even a gentle breeze. How they twisted and turned at the whim of micro-currents and the wind without any visible indication of that dreaded 'drag'. We are nowhere near close to imitating how they behaved, only how they looked. My thinking then turned to the question: "could I create a tying style that minimized the impact of the current but still looked like and behaved like the natural"?

In 2009 I was fortunate to watch Terenzio Zandi fishing on a beautiful Italian stream. Terenzio produces high-quality silk fly lines and is also known for his method of weaving dry flies using a special look. Terenzio's flies have the hook hanging vertically below the fly itself. His flies seemed to flutter on the surface and he seemed to get a better drag-free drift. Or at least until his tippet caused the fly to move unnaturally. But his flies are an art that have always been one step too far for me. My thinking then turned to the question: "Could I create a tying style that minimised the impact of current but still looked like the natural"?

Below is one of Terenzio's exquisite flies. The hook is a size 16.

It was from the notion of trying to keep the pattern on the surface that the L'Ombra (Italian for 'shadow') pattern was developed.

I started by adding a single natural CDC feather tied forward over the eye of the hook. This created the illusion of lifelike replication of the natural. I then attacked the body. The body had to stand away from the hook so that when it was sitting on the surface it did not go below the surface. To do this I used a natural CDC feather tied in like a wonder wing but with the stem removed where it was tied to the hook. Simply nip the tip out to create tails. This enabled the body to be pushed at right angles to the hook. Then I added a hackled tied backwards behind the body. I only need 3 - 4 turns as the weight was contained mainly in the hook. Tied off it created a different style of dry fly.

This is a picture of the fly as it sits in the vice while being tied.

And a picture of the completed fly sitting in water:

That was in 2008/2009 and this pattern always seems to produce when small olives are hatching. I have also adapted the approach to other patterns such as caddis and larger mayflies using foam bodies.

So if you want to have a try you will need:

**Materials:**

**Hook** - size 16. I have used a Partridge BN Nymph Hook to get the gape and point a little deeper.

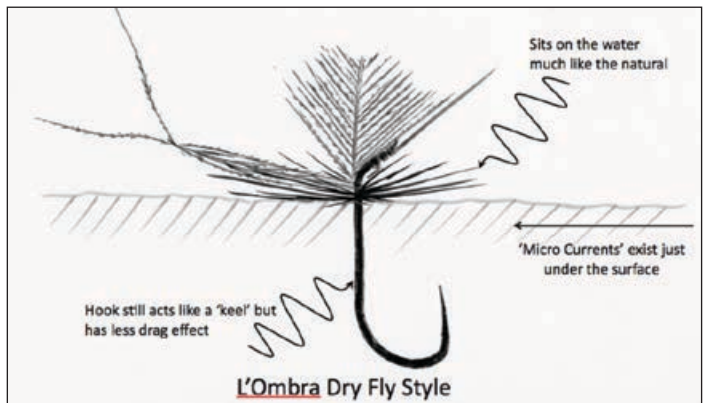
**Thead** - Uni Trico. This is fine and does not add bulk.

**Wing and Body** – two natural CDC feathers.

**Hackle** - Dun coloured saddle hackle of the right size.



*One of Terenzio Zandi's exquisite tyings*



## VFFA 2023 meetings & other activities

### 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 recent 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)  
6 Wednesday 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  
22 Fri – 24 Sun Big River Weekend at Enoch’s Point –  
Convenor John Pilkington – 0407 356 676  
23 Sat – 25 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 Sat – 14 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.