

FLY LINES



JUNE 2025

Scott Xanthoulakis

Scott founded *Wilderness Fly Fishing* in 2016 because of his passion for fly fishing in wild places. He had learned to cast a fly at the age of 12, and has since learned his craft from some of Australia's finest fly fishers, guides and writers. The streams of North-East Victoria, the Snowy Mountains, and the lakes of Victoria's Goldfield regions are all part of what many called his "misspent youth". (We're not at all sure about that!)

Scott's passion saw him regularly venturing to New Zealand, Tasmania, Montana and many Pacific Islands. He also offers drift boat fishing and hosted fishing trips to New Zealand, Christmas Island and Montana.

At our June meeting Scott plans to talk about "Early Season River Fishing" and this will cover fish behaviour, best methods, set ups, where to fish, and fly selection.

It will be another fascinating and very informative presentation. Please record the date and time in your diary.

Thursday, June 19
12:30pm for Lunch at the Swiss
Club (89 Flinders Lane)

Then our Speaker:
Scott Xanthoulakis



Scott catches some superb fish

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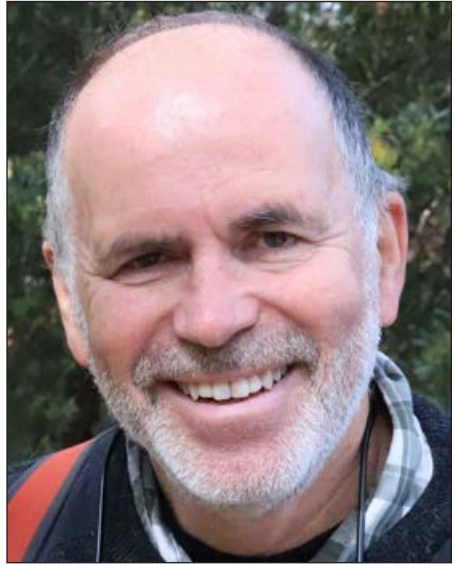
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President's Message

Winter is upon us and the trout season (for rivers) will close on June 9. While Melbourne and the west of the state endures drought conditions the east of the state is having average rainfall. This bodes well for a good natural spawning season in the east of the state to augment the relatively poor fishing season we have just been through. I suspect the cormorants have had a marvellous season due to low water levels throughout the state and high fish numbers at the start of the season following several good seasons!

Our new website is now up and running and will be integrated with an *eNewsletter* from next month. We will continue to produce a printed and PDF version of *Fly Lines* for those members who would still prefer to receive the older version. We will be encouraging members to move to the *eNewsletter* version of *Fly Lines* as the *eNewsletter* will interact with the website for members to register and pay for events and meetings, etc. The cost of the printed version of *Fly Lines* is considerable as we currently print and post out 140 copies of *Fly Lines* eleven times per year. A letter will be sent to all members regarding the new *eNewsletter*



Simon Joel

version of *Fly Lines* and the options for receiving *Fly Lines* will be outlined.

Our social media (Instagram) is now linked to our website. Members are encouraged to send photographs and short videos of fishing to our secretary Kevin Finn (VFFA1932@gmail.com) for uploading onto Instagram that will be linked with the website.

I have been up to Snobs Creek on several occasions to look at the area the ATF (Australian Trout Foundation) and the VFFA have been granted access to. We will be working closely with Paul Stolz (president of the ATF) to create a vision for this space and to implement the vision. To this end any members with fishing memorabilia or old equipment (cane rods, etc) are encouraged to contact me for inclusion of items in the display.



Our president won some flies as a prize at the recent Warrnambool fly fishers' Annual Dinner

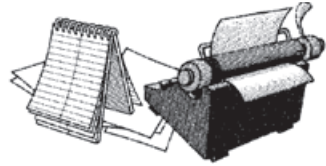
Many members will be aware that the Australian Fly Fishing Museum has reopened at Clarendon House in Northern Tasmania. VFFA member and recent guest speaker Mike Stevens and his team have worked tirelessly to move the exhibition to a new location at Clarendon House, and set up a truly world class display of the history of Fly Fishing in Australia. I would encourage all VFFA members going to Tasmania to make a small detour from Launceston to view this display.

Our last general meeting was at the Swiss Club, and Mike Stevens was our guest speaker. I was overseas at this time and my thanks go to Bill Jeans who chaired the meeting. My understanding is that it was a most successful event with over 30 members enjoying tasty food (and drink) in a contemporary venue with a memorable presentation by Mike Stevens after the meal. We will be using the Swiss Club as well as the Kelvin Club for events in the future.



Congratulations Team Australia at the 44th World Fly Fishing Championships

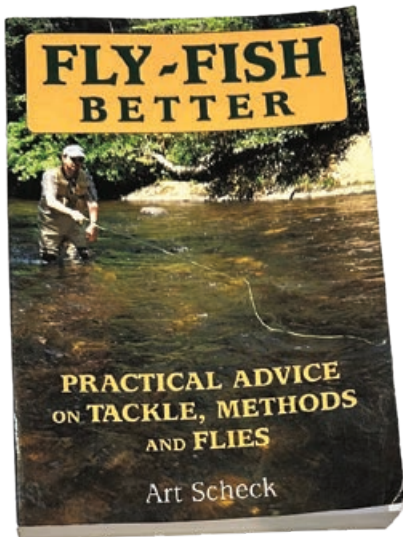
From the EDITOR'S DESK



... from Lyndon Webb

I confess to yet again adding to my collection of fly fishing books. This time

Fly-Fish Better - Practical Advice on tackle, methods and flies, by Art Scheck, has just joined the pile. And I can strongly recommend it.



A very instructive book

Art Scheck is the editor of *Saltwater Fly Fishing* (a US magazine) and a freelance writer and editor on lots of things to do with fly fishing. He's certainly a very thoughtful and highly experienced angler, and I found a truckload of fascinating insights and helpful suggestions.

Chapter 1 was his entry into casting suggestions, and is headed: "Cast 90 Feet – Whether or not you want to."

One of his ideas is something I sort of discovered for myself some years ago. A favourite stream of mine is the gorgeous little Stevenson River near Marysville. Lots of other people have found it too. I think it was just a few years ago in the Christmas holiday period I was told that there were 40 cars parked along the side of the road on the downstream section. Whether that's true or not, the trout in the Steavo have certainly seen a lot of flies, and no doubt can provide highly informed opinions on the quality of the fly tying.

Now the Steavenson is not particularly wide, so as you meander along the banks your casts into prospective fishy spots are mainly short - typically just 10 – 12 metres. So when I visit the Steavenson I often take a three weight rod and load it with a four weight line. If you're fishing is mainly just these short casts, then overloading the rod a bit makes for easier and more pleasant casting.

Art Scheck also comments on casting with lines lighter than the rating of the rod. In other words, try casting a five-weight line on a six-weight rod. I think the theory here is that you will need more line out of the rod tip to properly load the rod, so this might be a way of cribbing a few extra yards of distance. I hadn't actually tried this, so I grabbed a six weight rod and a couple of five weight lines and raced up to a nearby football oval a few streets from where I live to check it out. I'd figured that a double taper line would be better than a weight forward line for this investigation, and it sort of worked, though I need to

do a bit more serious experimenting (on days with not too much wind!) to see if it is a viable way of casting a bit further, particularly on stillwaters.

Another issue that my new friend Art Scheck addresses in his book are the leaders and tippets we use. Now this might be an abysmal confession on my part, but I have a number of fly reels in my fly fishing kit (purchased over many years), and all of them have the leaders permanently knotted and glued to the end of the fly lines. Nail knots and other types of recommended connecting knots have been used, and invariably a drop or two of superglue then added at the knot to make the connection very very secure. So if I needed to change the overall construction of my leader then a pair of nippers and a few spools of lines of varying thicknesses in my kit enabled me to shorten or lengthen leader sections as required. (All a bit slow of course, and a waste of good fishing time!)

But according to Art Scheck us fly fishers should head off up the river with a packet of made-up leaders in our kit, this collection having leaders of varying constructions to better accommodate whatever conditions we face on our arrival. In other words, we should carry with us a selection of leaders of differing lengths and constructions so that we can quickly and easily change leaders on the river bank or lake edge to better suit the conditions we encounter. The leader we might use for flogging weighted wets would not be the same as the one we would want to use to delicately present small dry flies. This is all very obvious. (What have I been doing all these years?)

We need to be able to quickly and easily change leaders (if we need to) when we arrive at our fishing venues, and the obvious necessity is to be using leaders

with loops at the end and fly lines similarly equipped.

I recently purchased a new fly line from a store in the UK. The store was having a sale and lines and leaders were selling at very cheap prices. So I emailed my order and when it arrived both the fly line and the leaders came with loops at the ends, making the connection, and the later swapping of leaders, quick and easy. So I made a phone call, and a very helpful person at the Aussie Angler Fly Fishing store informed that these days good quality fly lines all come with tiny loops at both ends.

So there you go – with a pocket full of leaders that you can quickly swap around at the end of your new modern fly lines. But my problem is that I have a number of fly reels (purchased over many years) loaded with lines that don't have neat little loops at the end because they're fairly old, even though they still work ok. Bother! (Or words to that effect.) These lines are mostly in good condition and work fine, so how can I install loops?? I'll think about over the next few weeks.

In the meantime, the rivers are closed so it's all about stillwaters for the next few months. They're very different to fishing rivers, but they're great fun and the fish are often much larger. Enjoy your fishing over the next few months, and I would wish all our many readers good fortune and lots of success. (Put them back though. Flathead taste better!)



Mike Stevens Speaking at our May General Meeting



Mike catching another rainbow trout

Bill Jeans welcomed Mike to the meeting and introduced him by telling us that Mike clearly remembers the first fish he caught on a fly. It was in December 1971 when Mike was 14 years old, and it was caught on a Red Spinner from Tasmania's Macquarie River. And Mike still has that fly.

In 2017, according to Bill, Mike told his wife Jules (who is also a highly skilled fly fisher, having represented Australia in international competitions) that they had a problem. Mike said to Jules: "We've got too much money! What are we going to do?" So they purchased the Essential Fly Fisher store in Launceston!

Mike has fished in many places worldwide, and his talk at our meeting was about a month spent in Montana (USA), where he fished every day in August of 2024. He also visited rivers in Idaho and Wyoming.

Here is Mike's presentation:

The first thing you should do in fishing is find the right people to go fishing with. In this photo on the screen Peter Hayes is on the right, Nick Taransky is in the middle,

and David Hemmings is on the left. And these blokes are lunatics, because they all fish with wooden rods.

They fished the whole month in Montana last year using only cane rods. Now I own a fly fishing shop, but I can't fish with cane rods. But I did fish every day for the whole month of August with a nine foot, four weight Loomis Asquith, which I think is probably now the best fly rod in the world.

Yes, I had a month in Montana last year. We arrived on the first of August and left on the 31st of August. This photo is of the Henry's Fork, one of the most famous trout rivers in the world. We flew from Australia to San Francisco - about a 14 or 15 hour flight, and I confess I do not like flying. On arrival we stayed in Ennis in Montana, a town of about 1,000 people which also had four fly fishing shops despite its small population. One chap there owns two shops and employs 30 guides.

So Ennis is tiny, but it's absolutely fantastic. Everyone knows everyone. One of the good things about Ennis is that it has got a 25 mile an hour speed limit, so everyone slows down. And if you even look like you're about to step onto the street all the traffic stops.

Ennis is reasonably close to the Yellowstone River, and we fished there quite a lot, and in Idaho and Wyoming as well. We rented a house there for a month, and there were deer and moose dodging around the grounds. The Madison River was also close by, and this river is everything to places around Montana. We just walked a short distance across the grass to go fishing.

Each morning we walked to a place called the Shaw Shot Cafe, where they did



Rainbows are beautifully coloured

fantastic egg and bacon rolls and coffee. On about our fifth day we were sitting in this cafe, and Dulce came over and said: "Right, what are you blokes here for? How long are you staying, and where are you staying?" She continued, "I run the hairdressing place here and Jenny there is the real estate agent. If you need anything, just come and see us." So we told her where we were from, and she replied, "I know you're from Australia. We can tell by your accents."

They were beaut, and were just looking after their town. So that's the way it was, and it was a fantastic place.

The guy here in this photo is Bruce Richards, who had a lot to do with the development and production of Scientific Angler fly fishing lines. He's retired now, having worked at Scientific Anglers for 30 years.

This guy is Keith Brauneis, who is the CEO of the Madison River Foundation, which looks after angling access and the angling rights to the river. So in Ennis, and maybe other places, you go to the supermarket and buy something for say \$12.50, and they say: "Would you like to round up for the river?" So instead of \$12.50 you pay \$13 and the Foundation gets the 50 cents. And everyone in the

supermarket knows how important the river is, and Keith Brauneis looks after that.

The people there all tell you to beware of the moose, as they're dangerous and they're big, and they'll charge you. Well, these guys (in the photo here) were living on our back lawn. They'd come across the river, and we didn't know we were supposed to be frightened of them.

This is Ennis. And, you know, we had a lot of fun there in the town. Everyone there does everything. So these three dudes in the photo all work in the fly shop, and the fishing guides also work in the bar. On the Madison, and on all those other places there, everything is about the food for the trout. There are huge hatches, and they start and stop at different times in different months.

We were probably a bit late for the river fishing, but it didn't seem to matter. If you go into a fly shop there's a million different flies for sale, but we didn't much use any of them. We just used our flies from home.

This is day one. Nick Taransky is fishing the river just below where we were, and he caught five or six fish on the first day. We had hired a Chev suburban something

or other, a huge eight-seater, which had plenty of room for us.

One of the interesting things that we did over there was to go to a place called Camp Fire. We went there for breakfast and this bloke was cooking breakfast, and we saw this material about the Stimulator fly. His name is Jim Slattery, and he invented this fly, or so he claims. Anyway, we did an interview with him, which I recorded but it's too long to play tonight. But he was really dirty because while everyone copies his fly, he's never received any money for it.

He was in a band called The Stimulators, and he thought that would be a great name for a fly. Now everyone's used a Stimulator at some stage, and we had just met the dude who had invented it, and he gave us all sorts of details. This photo shows his little cafe with the Madison River running right outside the cafe.

The Gallatin River is a tributary of the Missouri River, and it was the first place that we fished. We got there early in the morning and the water was really cold, so there were no hatches, and nothing was happening. Our feet were freezing walking up the river. Then maybe two hours later it really took off, and we caught some 30 or 40 fish. We just walked off the side of the road into the river, then walked three or four kilometres up the river, then got out and walked back down the road - and didn't see another person.

Below Ennis on the Madison is Ennis Lake, and no one fishes it, yet it is the most extraordinary place with hatches like you wouldn't believe. But over there they just don't fish the lakes very much. They're river fishermen. They get in a drift boat and drift down the river chucking big bobbars sideways.

Now Randall Trethewie, our friend from Tasmania, has got a drift boat there. So



Some hefty local wildlife were part of the scene we all got into his drift boat, all five of us, and the hatches we saw there were just extraordinary. Can you catch the fish? Not really, but it was great fun trying. Then a guy at the boat ramp comes over and says, "Where are you blokes from - Australia? Oh, then you'll need some of these flies." So day one he brings down a few flies. For day two he goes back home and ties a whole bunch more and gives them to us, and then invites us for a barbecue. And it was all pretty cool!

This photo is of Ennis Lake and is pretty typical of the conditions. Early in the day there's just no wind, and it continues like that sometimes till 11 or 12 o'clock. And then you get a little bit of breeze. You are fishing to fish that you can see, and fish are everywhere. These conditions are very exciting, but the fish are really difficult to catch. This photo is of Randall's drift boat. He's got one there, and he's got another one back in Tasmania. I've just bought one in Tasmania, but haven't told my wife yet. But then she might never need to know?

Here is another lake further upstream called Hebgen, and a guy called Shelby Jarrell lives there. Shelby comes to Tasmania quite a lot, and he's got a daughter who lives in South Australia. He has some boats, so he loaned us a couple.



Only a small one, and like all the rest it was returned

Hebgen is an extraordinary fishery too, equally as difficult as the others. You can fish to rising fish for four or five hours and maybe catch none, or maybe one, or two.

Someone tonight asked about Chuck Rivera. There are a few people in this room who know Chuck. He's been to Tasmania, has guided in New Zealand, and he lives on Hebgen Lake (which is West Yellowstone). And he's one of the grumpiest people you would ever meet, especially grumpy if he's not playing golf.

Here is a photo of Indian Creek, which we fished quite a few times. One of the really important things was when Peter Hayes told us we should have really long leaders to get long drag free drifts.

These long leaders were particularly good on those cane rods. In this movie you can see how the angler is mending line a lot. He's trying to get his fly in that little bit of still water there at the top of the run. There's a fish in there, and he'd seen the dry fly three or four times.

We mostly only fished with dry flies. The fish were not very big – just 8 to 12 inches. We walked just two kilometres to get to the river, and I think we saw just three other people there during the entire trip.

We caught nice little fish like this rainbow. Now I've never really been a fan of rainbow trout, but when you're in rainbow trout water and these are the native fish, it does take on a significant difference. We fished pools like this. There was plenty of deep water along there, and you know where you want to cast your fly in these pools. Drifting dry flies down and seeing fish come up and take them was just heaven.

One of the other places we fished with Randall was Wade Lake. No-one else was fishing it as they're all down fishing on the Madison. This is an absolutely crystal clear lake. It doesn't have a river running into it, so it's all spring fed. It's about 12 to 15 feet deep there, and you could see the bottom really clearly. It was just the most beautiful, pristine water.

We also fished this place called Poindexter Slough, and it was really difficult fishing. We only caught one fish in the day. David Hemmings caught it, and it was quite a large fish. He sat on the bank for three quarters of an hour giving me instructions on what he was doing wrong, but eventually he caught this fish. Then we went to Winston Fly Rods, and then to Virginia City.

You know, everyone who goes to Yellowstone goes and sees Old Faithful. It erupts every 45 minutes or so, which must just be a godsend for the tourism industry. We also fished in Yellowstone Lake, and this is David fishing off the shore there. It's at 7,000 feet. We fished for about 20 minutes or so, then walked up the bank there. I climbed to the top and could hardly breathe. You're running out of oxygen at 7,000 feet.

Now Henry's Fork, which runs into the Snake River, is one of the greatest fisheries in the world, especially as a dry fly fishery. And there's just miles and miles and miles of it. So it comes out of the water at a place

called Big Springs. It looks like just a hole in the ground with a bit of water coming out, but 550 million litres of water come out of that hole in the ground every day. There's a little bridge there, and you stand on it you can see rainbow trout in there of 10, or 12, or even 15 pounds.

This photo is of Henry's Fork at Harriman Ranch. It may be 400 metres wide here, and it flows like this for miles and miles and miles. And it is thigh deep and wadable. No worries, no deep holes, so you can just cross back over just anywhere you want. It is the most extraordinary place. It's got miles and miles of this thigh deep water. You can wade all the way across, then all the way back. And there are huge hatches there. The best hatches are in July and we were there in August. But the real advantage of being there late is that there were no people there. So we walked miles and miles of this, and maybe saw just four or five other people. It was quite extraordinary.

Occasionally a drift boat would come along. I was quite lucky to catch two good rainbows there. I think I was there for three days, and I caught maybe four fish, two of which were decent-sized rainbows. As I said earlier, I don't really rate rainbows all that highly, but when you're catching them in their native environment on a dry fly in a place that's really difficult to catch them in, it's pretty cool.

In West Yellowstone there's an old dude who has had a tackle store there for many years. He's 80 years old. His name is Bob Jacklin, and right in the middle of West Yellowstone there's a casting pool there called the Bob Jacklin pool. We knew Simon Gawesworth was going to be in West Yellowstone at one of the angler shops, so we organized a hook up with him. It ended in a casting competition, of course, using those cane rods. Eventually

Simon had a cast with my Asquith, and he thought it was very good.

I said, "You'd never see this anywhere in Australia", and someone said: "What about the Red Tag pool?" Okay, not in Tasmania then. And Bob Jacklin at 83 years of age was still teaching people how to cast at that pool when we were there. This is a photo of Simon Gawesworth, and as an advocate for fly fishing there's no better person in the world. And if you've ever heard him talk about fly lines he will keep you enraptured for hours just talking about fly fishing.

Simon is the most fantastic person. He's still with Rio though he's moved back to Scotland, and still does a few trips with them, travelling around the world. And the interesting thing to me is that he's a great advocate for Sage, which is Sage Rio Redington, but he'll have a cast with any rod. He just wants to broaden his whole experience and understanding of things fly fishing.

I've got a video here of my Loomis Asquith rod being cast. The bloke is Matt Klara who owns Big Sky anglers in West Yellowstone, which is a bit bigger than Ennis, and has five or six fly fishing shops. And they are all great shops.

They decided they were going to have a distance casting competition. Now I've been fishing this Loomis Asquith rod for the whole time and I can cast about 80 feet with it, with a lot of effort. These guys were casting 120 to 130 feet with it, and in the end they all decided that it was a draw because it had just thin backing line on it.

We went off to fish the Madison, and we were in Yellowstone National Park, and you need to buy a license to fish Yellowstone. But Yellowstone is in Montana, Idaho and Wyoming, so you just buy a license to fish Yellowstone.



The local stillwaters are very wadable

So we've got our licenses and we go to Yellowstone. No one's fishing in the car park, so we jump in the river. The road is right next to it. People are going past, yelling out of their cars and honking their horns and waving at us. And I think aren't they friendly? Isn't that cool? This is so exciting.

And then Officer Kleiner comes along and says: "Get out of the river! Get out of the river!" I thought he just wanted to check our licenses. Then he yells: "The river's closed! Ground your rods! Ground your rods!!" What's that mean I wonder? Anyway, he's telling us to put our rods on the ground. "Don't touch them!" We put our rods on the ground, and I think: "Oh dear – I think we're in trouble."

Officer Kleiner says: "Don't you realize the river's closed?" I said, "Well our mate in the tackle store said it was open." "What tackle store!" I replied, "I can't remember what it was called." David Hemmings points to my hat and says: "It's that one! He bought a hat there." Officer Kleiner says, "Well, we haven't got reception here, so we can't ring them." Anyway, he's getting really cranky, and he's got this mate there we called Coke Bottle, because he's got these big coke bottle glasses. Coke Bottle's got his pad out and he's writing on his pad. Then about five minutes in he puts his pad back in his pocket and he doesn't get another

pad out, so I think we're safe, as they confiscate everything and they fine you, and you end up in court. It's a real mess there if you're caught doing something wrong.

I said to Officer Kleiner: "Do you fish?" He said, "Why do you think I've got this job?" I said, "Okay, so where should we be fishing?" He said, "Well, you should be going to the Gibbons. That's open. And you need to drive 40 minutes up there. It's really good." I said, "Well, is that what we should do?" And he said, "Yes, you should! You should do it right now." So he let us off.

When we got back into town and were talking to the tackle store owner, he said, "Gosh, you're lucky. They don't ever let anyone off." I think that because we were from Australia it was probably a little bit complex. Over there most people into fly fishing think that fly fishing is sitting in a boat with a bobber. If you're even 400 metres away from where they're floating down the river, you can see their bobbers. They're huge things with a nymph hanging underneath it, and they are just drifting downstream. If you're anywhere near the river you can see four or five drift boats at the same time, all going down the river. And they all catch fish.

This photo is of a 30 mile riffle. So from the bottom of Quake Lake up to Ennis

is 30 miles and it's all exactly the same water. It just goes down there like this, and there's boats on it everywhere. This photo is a guy I was talking about earlier from the Madison River Foundation with Nick Taransky and Randall.

This photo is of Keith and Wendy Brauneis, who we were talking about earlier from the Madison River Foundation. They invited us around for some antelope stew. Earlier tonight I was talking about John Lanchester, who died while we were in Montana. He was a great mentor to Peter Hayes. So I said, "Why don't we tie a Tom Jones fly and on the day of his memorial service we'll fish with it." So we all tied some dries, and then we stood in Indian Creek in just one pool, and we caught 15 fish from one run, and all on these Tom Jones variants."

This is a photo of Peter Hayes and Nick Taransky crossing the Madison. It is pretty much the same depth all the way across. It is running fast, and is it a low level, and they're on Struggle Street, trying to get across there. There's so much of this water, and when I was talking about that 30 mile riffle, it's just like that for 30 miles. It is the most extraordinary river. And I think there's 5,000 fish per kilometre.

This photo is of the same spot. Nick Taransky missed that fish, but I had a rod a bit longer, so I'm casting just over the current into the backwater using a 25 foot leader. Peter Hayes was on the camera, but he missed the take. I'm trying to net the fish, but I'm not very good at netting fish. This is on the last day we were fishing. We were going to try to catch this fish at Indian Creek and you'll see me eventually net it.

So there's quite a few lessons here, and one of them is the long leader thing so you've got this really long drag free drift. And Peter was absolutely the best at demonstrating it, so he could land it

behind a rock in some really fast water on the Madison, and the fly would just sit there, and every so often the fish would come up and eat it, whereas if you were fishing a 12 or 15 foot leader, there's no way you could get the necessary drag free drift for as long as we could. So that was important.

The other really important thing is to pick your friends. Don't go away with people you don't know because it's not going to end well at some stage. If you go away to a place like this then you spend a lot of money getting there, so stay as long as you possibly can. You get to meet more people, and they'll tell you the places to go. They know you're probably not coming back, so they'll tell you more things than they'll ever tell the locals.

Don't be cheap. If you need to spend some money to do something, remember you're never going to get back there. Maybe it's cost you \$4,000 just to get there, so spend the money while you're there. Don't wait till you retire, because it's too late to do anything much by that stage. Talk to locals like the real estate agent and the hairdresser and people like that. They will tell you all sorts of things. Go to the sports stores and spend money. If someone suggests you do something, then do it

So embrace the whole thing, and have some fun while you're there. Luck is a really important thing when you're away. I was sitting in the airport on the way back and I'd put in a request for an upgrade using points. And my phone dinged, and I got put in business class for the trip home where I could stretch out completely and go to sleep. So I was really lucky at the end of the trip, for someone who really hates flying, to get an upgrade. If you can afford to do that, well, you know, it's fantastic.

Thank you all for your time.

Warrnambool Fly Fishers' Club Dinner Report (WFFC)

... by President Simon Joel



The VFFA was well represented at the Warrnambool Annual Dinner



Simon Joel and Hugh Maltby in serious discussion

On May 24 the Warrnambool Fly Fishers held their 56th Annual Game Dinner at the Warrnambool Racing Club Pavilion. The WFFC started life as a branch of the VFFA and now is a fully automatic fly fishing club, with its annual Game Dinner being one of the culinary and social highlights of their fly fishing year. This year was no exception with just over 90 attending. The Warrnambool club always invites the VFFA President as a guest, so this was my second event.

A total of six VFFA members attended on the night, these being Lyndon Webb (our Editor), Hugh Maltby, Bruce Houghton, John Permewan and Gordon Baker. We were all seated on the same table, which was soon known as the 'party table'!

The dinner is a culinary feast with dishes sourced locally from the sea, land



Jim Blakeslee speaking at the Dinner



The President presenting the award to the two joint winners – Trevor Roberts and Graeme Hays. Trevor and Graeme each caught fish with the same weight.



Warrnambool Club President Adrian Jacobs with the Club's Annual Award for the largest fish caught locally

and rivers. Local whitebait, abalone, duck, rabbit, gummy shark, brown trout, kangaroo and cheese were all on the menu. The game and sea food was prepared by Robert King, who has been

the chef for this event for many years. The produce was sensationally prepared, but the highlight for me was the kangaroo. Best I've ever eaten!

The VFFA table supported the fund-raising raffle with gusto and we were rewarded with each of us visiting the prize table. I chose a selection of locally tied flies (see page 3) that I can't wait to try out next season.

My thanks to WFFC President Adrian Jacobs and local club stalwart Jim Blakeslee for making us so welcome. Jim will be the guest speaker at July's general meeting, which will be a lunchtime meeting at the Swiss Club.

A wonderful night was had by all, reminding us of the friendships and social events we benefit from the broader fly-fishing community in Victoria.

An Argument for Trout – Wild and Stocked

Trevor Hawkins contemplates a state trout fishery for rivers that includes both wild and stocked fish.

The bleached river rocks, the colour and texture of weathered bones belonging to long deceased animals from parched Monaro farmlands, is all that remains of many free-flowing trout streams. These once hallowed rivers have given up their very existence in part or whole for the mighty hydro schemes that gave with one hand and took away with the other.

Of course, few could deny the piscatorial wonders created with the damming of many once famous trout rivers. The trade-off for lakes such as Eucumbene and Jindabyne in New South Wales was probably worth it in many anglers' eyes, while other dams, such as Lake William Hovell in Victoria, have created mediocre trout fisheries at best, and destroyed previously outstanding wild rivers in the process.

Few could argue that the damming of the King River with Lake William Hovell, or the Buffalo, Rose, Catherine and Dandongadale Rivers with Lake Buffalo, or the upper Kiewa Rivers with the Falls Creeks dams have to a greater or lesser degree had a harmful effect on the rivers that flow into or out of those lakes.

But as already acknowledged, there have been trade-offs, and if I was to put my hand on my heart, in many cases the created lakes have given better, or at least more consistent fishing than some of the rivers.

And it could well be argued, by me and no doubt many others, that in many cases the dams have actually improved the trout fishing downstream in numerous instances. The Swampy Plains River

below Khancoban Pondage, the Goulburn River below Lake Eildon, and the Tumut River below Blowering Dam quickly come to mind as examples of quality tailrace fisheries that have been created via the damming of rivers.

But I'd like to think we owe the 'river spirits' that gave up often staggeringly wild gorge areas of their existence for our water security were at the very least respected and given the protection they deserve. The bleached bones of often dried river courses that once flowed uninterrupted into larger waterways have now in many cases fallen to the ravages of droughts and bushfires. And to the science that says to stock trout streams is to waste money.

And while I agree with the notion that 'wild means wild' and should as a general rule be left to regenerate at its own pace, I also believe there is a case for intervention to step in and help 'just hanging in there' wild streams recover more quickly than they might, if left to their own devices. A case in point is the huge and decades long destruction that has been wrought on many Victorian trout stream headwaters due to back to back wildfires followed, as often as not, by scouring floods. The notion that the ecology of whole catchments or specific rivers will recover over time is very noble, and as they say, mother nature will win out and rebound, right?

But in reality, sitting back and hoping that this is the case is to a certain extent putting a lot of our faith in the 'science' that also used to tell us that the stocking of trout did actually work, that planting willows was good, that clear fell tree harvesting in upper headwater catchments could be managed without any detriment to those very lifeblood streams we all rely on, or

that scouring floods gave river systems a good 'flush out' and didn't adversely affect the whole ecology of the river.

Selective use of such science and the dismissal of any intervention is negligence and a dereliction of our duty to future generations, and more so the respect and duty we owe as 'users' of our natural resources.

The notion that feeder or breeder trout streams flowing cold into less than cold native fish catchments will rebound naturally, or even within decades after bushfires that have subsequently not only destroyed the tree cover, but have also burnt the undergrowth and the top soil, and pushed everything in its path downstream - including terrestrial and aquatic insects, native fish and trout, and the very river stones that create the habitat under which many of these fastwater animals lived, and then left behind a silty sludge of ash and choking soil wash off from the mountain areas, which are often 'recovering' regrowth areas.

The resultant silt not only chokes the aquatic residents that may have survived, but changes the river, often irreparably, or at least within a human lifespan. If you think I'm being a little over dramatic, then perhaps some before and after photographs or discussions with a few 'old timers' might focus your attention.

The notion that streams such as the Dandongadale River, Traralgon Creek, Jacksons Creek, Rose River, Nariel Creek, Thowgla River, Aberfeldy River, Barkly River, Cobungra River, Wellington and Macalister Rivers can all simply keep rebounding naturally and quickly after season on season of devastation when there is no or little downstream recruitment potential due to warm water storages is a true leap of faith that the science, at least this time, is correct.

At best a trout stream that has been hit hard with hot fires and scouring floods emanating in its very headwaters must take at the very least three years I would think to bring back some semblance of a trout fishery and the ecology that can support it. Or maybe never in our lifetimes.

The Macalister and Wellington Rivers in Victoria (both once iconic trout fisheries in their own rights) are now decades past major fires and floods and have not recovered to this day, and I seriously doubt they will in my lifetime. Both have been choked, and their silted shallower waters have meant the water temperatures have increased. Carp have moved in and can be seen systematically working the mud and small pebbles for any insects trying to re-establish. There are kilometres of water that can be inspected around Licola and up into the Wellington River without the semblance of an aquatic nymph showing up. Of course, there are still trout there, though mainly higher up in the headwaters, but for the old-timers who knew these rivers in their heydays they are both now simply shadows of their former selves.

It's easy for people who aren't local or familiar with an area to look at a stream a few seasons after a major fire and think that it looks as beautiful as ever. But if the aquatic insects haven't re-established, or the trout numbers were decimated and there is little upstream recruitment due to dams or downstream warm water native fisheries, then that idyllic visual of everything being normal is just as likely an illusion.

Another example may be found in crossing the completely bone-dry and once beautiful Dandongadale River at Benny's during ongoing droughts, and revisiting it again after some decent rain, for non-regulars to swear it was as good

as it ever was. But a river can be dead but still look alive when the riparian regrowth has come back and the river is flowing clear again. But often as not that is simply just window dressing.

To stock or not to stock

The notion that it's ok to stock native species into waters where they have never existed, or at the most were only ever there in small enclaves and presumably didn't survive predation or environmental changes going forward, but despite anything being changed to help their self-sustaining recovery, will now do so if enough fish are stocked, is hard to fathom when the argument is proposed that you cannot stock trout in self-recruiting streams because it doesn't enhance the fish numbers.

But if a stream has been devastated by fires and floods, is that still the case? Is it legitimate to just let it hopefully recover naturally and while it is doing so still encourage anglers to fish it?

What of the natural insects that have also taken a beating? Is there any science as to their recovery rates?

I should make it clear here that I'm not talking about streams that simply become too warm to support trout. No, not at all. I'm talking about streams that prior to any catastrophic events were well populated and self-recruiting trout streams.

Is it legitimate to artificially stock fish such as bass into rivers where they can't breed? I would argue that we shouldn't do this, especially when the cost per fish is high and the angler demand is miniscule.

Surely we can walk and chew gum at the same time when it comes to managing our dwindling wild trout streams? The notion that we can just encourage people to revisit areas six or twelve months after

catastrophic events and have them target rivers with few or no recovering fish, is a recipe to keep that stream as a mediocre water if there is no regulatory precautions or processes put in place to facilitate a strong recovery.

Fishermen won't keep returning if the fishing is mediocre at best! A huge amount of effort and money is put into stocking trout in the Goulburn River that does have natural recruitment, yet protecting spawn run fish in tailrace fisheries where for most of the season there is no 'normal' trout fishery and anglers stay away in droves just doesn't make sense. The Macalister River below Glenmaggie Weir and the Tanjil River below Blue Rock Dam are just two examples of wasted opportunities that could do far more to encourage anglers out into regional areas instead of promoting small nursery streams.

We can justify stocking trout into the 'South West Streams' to cater for a few closed season trout anglers, but we can't for the most part individually identify wild trout streams that need our help to re-establish a viable breeding population of wild fish to give those struggling waterways a head start. This seems odd to me! Surely if we can promote them as viable fishing destinations, we should give them some love to help them come back online quicker, if at all possible?

You can promote a river and an area as a fishing tourist destination as much as you like, but if the fishing isn't up to scratch you'll be losing the true anglers as return visitors. Heavily stocking and opening up rivers such as the two mentioned with trout would create the type of angler appeal that used to be the case in the Goulburn below the pondage back in the day. I'm not suggesting opening up rivers or sections that are now viable trout waters, I'm suggesting that there ARE

opportunities I believe to heavily stock trout where there isn't a serious trout fishery now.

Surely it's time to start protecting and enhancing those wild streams we rely on for the long term viability of our wild trout fishery when the science is proclaiming we may be headed towards a decline of around 50% of our viable trout fishing habitat over the next two decades to warming waters.

So let's start protecting what we know will be good trout waters while we can, before many of them turn into 'dead rivers' that may never come back naturally on their own, and in the meantime open up areas

that will appeal to those that just want to 'catch trout'. I think the stocking of big ex-brood fish into metro waterways and the Goulburn River has shown there is a huge demand for people to simply catch trout, and big ones at that, within a day's drive from Melbourne, so let's take advantage of that demand by metropolitan anglers for trout instead of stocking fish species that just don't have the drawing power that our salmonids have.



Fly fishing for trout is usually a tad speculative

Millbrook This Year

... from your editor



John Spragg investigating a very attractive and Millbrook lake

Again this year we had four days listed in our calendar when members could fish Millbrook Lakes. In past years these have been very popular events, with some members visiting on every listed occasion. The venue is very attractive, and the four lakes available to us to fish are fabulous.

But tragically the recent hot summer with very little rain has not helped the Millbrook fishery. Mark Weigall, the owner we all know so well, tells us that the lakes we fish each visit have almost dried out totally, or are so low they are unfishable. Mark suggests that we need a lot of rain over the coming winter months if the lakes we fish on our Millbrook visits are to recover. This is really disappointing for our members who love Millbrook, and of course is devastating for Mark.

We have two more dates listed in our calendar for possible future visits, and I guess that if it rains really heavily over the next few months then perhaps a couple of visits to Millbrook might be possible later on. Who knows. Keep your fingers

crossed for Wednesday September 3 and Thursday October 2.

“(Incidentally, I visited Warrnambool recently to attend the annual fly fishing club’s dinner there, and Jim Blakeslee was telling me that some lakes I visited and fished regularly in the years I lived in Warrnambool had totally dried up this summer. Sadly our fly fishing is, as we all know, so very weather-dependent.)”



The clubhouse on the main lake – always well-supplied with coffee and sustenance

Bad Days

... from Trout Quest by David Scholes, used with permission



Two popular photos of David Scholes

There is little worse in all this world that anybody could ever wish upon a fisherman than a bad day. These are the most woeful of times, when quite often nothing goes right from the very outset, when you come home thoroughly dissatisfied and completely disgusted, feeling, in point of fact, rather more disgruntled than angry, and probably far more likely simply to glower fiercely at an intimidator rather than lash out and swipe him.

I am not now thinking of that kind of bad day caused by not using the right fly, or being in the wrong place, or going out at the wrong time, or some other more definable trouble. No, terrible that days of this sort undoubtedly are they cannot nearly compare with the heap of adversity that sometimes befalls a man when he claims the attention of whatever hobgoblins they are that dish out bad days.

Days, I mean, when, try as you might, you get hooked up both in front and behind - not just simple hookups, mind you, in some ordinary branch from which extrication is reasonably simple, but times without number veritable snarls in some horrible thorny mass, resulting either in a broken point and a lost fly, or a point so curled up and twisted that its renewal is imperative.

Even to think about such muddles pains me almost as much as it would to experience the real thing. Just consider for a moment, for instance, the trials and difficulties that present themselves in the tying of subsequent blood knots. Many they are and varied, made ten times worse on hot days by those beastly little flies, the ones that insist on walking up and down your nose just at the most awkward and crucial moment when you try poking the last end through the hole. Angrily you beat off the insect, unable any longer to endure its tickling feet, and out pops the



A well-known photo of David Scholes's work desk

end of the cast and your blood knot is finished.

Have you noticed, too, that the further you persevere on such days the worse they become? You might even feel like giving it all up, but more likely you feel compelled to press hopefully onwards. Finally, of course, unless somehow you manage to rally, you end up in an utterly frustrated and dangerous state, no longer in fact resembling to any great extent the man you set out as, so that when at length you land home your patient wife feels much more convinced than ever that fishing does not agree with you.

All in all, these are assuredly black days. Quite frequently the trouble begins, as I say, right at the very start when you step from the car. Out of the car you bounce, all eager to get started, and immediately you discover that your polaroids are

still where you left them on your desk at home. Already a little annoyed you begin rigging your rod, when either one of two things happens - or even both! Just as you attempt threading the last ring the line slips from your fingers and slides exasperatingly all the way back to the ground. Should this not occur then almost certainly at precisely the same stage of events you find it impossible to thread the last ring because the line has looped round the reel handle. Pull as you like you can never release it; surrender you must and go down to it, by now decidedly more than a little ruffled but still quite able, provided nothing further goes wrong, of cooling off entirely once the fishing begins.

But such is not to be. You try putting your wrong feet into your waders. Your wet-fly box always comes out of your pocket when it's your dries you want, or vice

versa. You select a fly quite successfully, foiling the wind's best attempts to blow half of them to glory, only to find you can't thread it because the eye is blocked up with varnish. Then, even when eventually you do clear it and thread it, there's no guarantee of success in the tying - an infuriating kink is sure to form in the cast just near the eye, causing the fly to sit all askew.

The tribulations one might expect now before reaching the water are almost limitless. Do you notice, for example, on such days, how clumsy-footed you have become? See how you stumble and flounder, catching your toe on each little root and stone. Every gate you come to is one of those horrors that is both awkward to undo and do up. Every fence you encounter is hard to get over or through. And woe betide you if you happen to be one of those anglers who carries his net unprotected, for verily it will entangle itself time upon time in obstructions, just tempting and taunting you to wrench it free, thus ripping holes in the mesh. Carry your rod high, I implore you, and watch where you're heading, or the chances of ramming a tree or a tussock are enormous - and a smashed top is remarkably successful when it comes to raising the blood pressure or otherwise doing you no good.

At last you reach the river and start fishing. Things don't improve. Where yesterday, when you allowed the fly to drift down almost against some semi-sunk log or snaggy outcrop where a patch of scum has collected and where usually a decent fish might be expected - where yesterday your retrieve came away cleanly and clear — now when you try it the fly almost certainly engages itself irretrievably in the obstruction, no matter how careful you are. Just see, too, how easily your offering becomes waterlogged



David Scholes in his later years

and disappears - especially when you cover a particularly healthy rise.

And another thing: any slack line you let fall beside you is sure to entwine itself around a root or a stick. Even when wading this happens, the line often sinking in the process, so that you have to reel up and feel down with your hand to unhook it, thereby getting wet up to the elbow and uncomfortable into the bargain.

Bad days are bad throughout, once they set in. Your striking, of course, is all to pot. Then when, by sheer chance, you do hook a trout, like as not he will go to weed, or come off, or break or some such. Do you know I have even seen quite a few decent fish lost after netting! Having been emptied out on the bank before bagging, a fish of this kind can suddenly flap itself back in the water, either unhooked or maybe still hooked, there to escape after snagging the line.

I once lost a positive leviathan of a rainbow in the early days of Eildon Weir, in Victoria, when it broke through

the bottom of the net as I lifted. What a predicament! There I was with the net in my left hand, the rod straining perilously in the other, with the line disappearing through the net into the depths. I could do nothing. With a smaller fish I may have managed to back out of the lake and somehow beached or dragged the quarry ashore, but with a still far from done for rainbow of considerable poundage, the safety of my rod seemed paramount. He broke me.

Bad days, once you have survived sufficient of them to acquire the requisite composure, are best accepted as a kind of necessary evil. We all have them. None can slip the collar, none reach some sort of standard of excellence or proficiency that affords immunity. There is but one and one way only of lessening their sting and this is the development of a cold restraint and cheerful resignation. You must never, never allow them to outwit you, for, once bettered, you soon wither to a rattled and angry state of hopelessness.

I have seen good anglers so tormented and so upset by mid-morning that they might just as well head homewards. The way things look, unless they can revive, the rest of the day is doomed to failure. And yet, against this, I have known others, who, although undoubtedly and obviously experiencing a truly fearful day, by their passive attitude, manage to overcome their misfortune (to a large extent anyway) and make a reasonable day out of what otherwise would have been chaos.

Next to, yet I suppose necessarily part of, this cheerful resignation is the ability to recognise and even derive some sort of amusement from the humorous side of your calamities. No matter how serious or disastrous they might at first appear there is always a brighter side. Always things could have been worse. When

for instance, your fly becomes lodged so annoyingly in the wattle hanging low over the far bank and you pull clear, instead of breaking the cast at the fly you could easily have lost the bottom link entirely, thus necessitating not only a new fly, but also a new point.

Yes, things could always be worse. But once the fact that today is not really your day dawns on you, and you accept it, much of the gloom consistent with a bad day is gone. What little successes befall you are now immensely enjoyed. And how great are the thrills of these minor triumphs!

On other days they would almost be taken for granted, but today even the removal of one of the simplest of fish is counted an achievement. Amid all this sea of uncertainty if only you can locate a rise, cover it cleanly, time the strike correctly, then steer him safely to net, no matter how much trouble comes with the next hour, the pleasure of this welcome breakthrough lingers sufficiently to outweigh whatever torments present themselves.

But every so often a bad day undoubtedly does us more good than harm. Certainly, we appreciate the good days so very much more because of them, and probably we learn to fish better also, since they promote in us a constant yet almost unconscious alertness and caution, which prepare us continuously for all kinds of knavery and pitfalls.

There is, however, one kind of bad day that is quite intolerable. When weather conditions turn out to be so adverse that there is no opportunity to fish at all, the result can only be described as ghastly. Nothing, surely, can lash one into a state of rage more violently or more thoroughly. Poor weather, especially when time is limited or crucial, is a terrible adversary, difficult to withstand, no matter how

composed or patient you endeavour to be. I once went for a ten-day holiday to the lake country, but after eight days of continuous cold showery westerly gales I gave up in defeat, returning home utterly vanquished and sadly disappointed.

Bad days when the mayfly is up are particularly hard to take. The duration of this very special time is really confined to only several weeks of the season. Every passing day, therefore, is precious. To lose even one of them through unfriendly weather is painful enough, but to be under the influence of the bad-day bogies when conditions are good is a fearsome ordeal, sickening even to be contemplated.

Again, to meet with a bad day somewhere just after others have had good ones on the same piece of water is hard on both

body and soul. Perhaps these happy fellows have meticulously described the place to you in every smallest detail, so that you feel you know it like the back of your hand and all you need to do is to go there and cast out with your eyes shut to be fast to a whale. But no, you go there alright, chock-full of enthusiasm and hope, only to end up in a disarranged mess. So there it is. No matter who you are, or where you come from, or how old a hand you may be, or how proficient you are, bad days will sometimes attend you. If you resign yourself to this and expect them, enduring them with as even a temper as can reasonably be managed, things like torn waders and broken rod tips will be far less likely to ensue.



A truly magnificent brown

Catfish are coming back across Northern Victoria!

... from Taylor Hunt VFA

(While catfish are not a target for us fly fishers, they are an important species in our Victorian rivers, and as concerned anglers we of course are always interested in the health of our rivers and the species of fish living in them.)

Endangered native freshwater catfish (*Tandanus tandanus*) populations have expanded through the release of over 10,000 catfish into 19 locations across northern Victoria. The initiative was a collaboration between recreational fishers, Traditional Owner groups and fisheries and catchment management authorities to help recover catfish by re-establishing more populations of the species.

For eight weeks the VFA Arcadia Native Fish Hatchery team have diligently cared for and fed the thousands of catfish that were saved from Lake Lascelles near Hopetoun after an incredible breeding event.

Geneticist Dr Peter Unmack assessed the genetics of the catfish and found that they originated from the Wimmera, Mallee, Gunbower strain and were suitable for release – perfect!

The VFA swiftly developed a translocation plan with partners including the four Northern Catchment Management Authorities (CMA's), recreational fishers and Traditional Owner groups and the catfish were released in mid-May 2025.

At each release site, the team were greeted by locals, recreational fishers and CMA staff who were equally excited to return these native fish back to where they once were. Catfish were released into:

- Ovens River (3 sites) – 2,106
- Loddon River – 895
- Campaspe River – 872
- Goulburn River – 828
- Broken Creek Upper – 605
- Broken Creek Lower – 603
- Loch Garry – 544
- Lake Sambell (Beechworth) - 544
- Horseshoe Lagoon (Gunbower) - 544
- Lake Victoria (Maryborough) – 504
- Gunbower Creek – 480
- Winton Wetlands – 315
- Wooroonook Lake – 305
- Arcadia Pondage - 273
- Walkers Lake (St Arnaud) – 284
- Arcadia Pondage - 273
- Foletti Lake (Donald) – 206
- Watchem Lake – 200

To re-establish 19 populations of an endangered native fish is a huge step towards recovery and downlisting of the species. For more information – check out the reels on VFA's Facebook page or contact Taylor Hunt, Manager Recreational Fisheries on 0418 478 028.





Isabelle Staples (right) and local Hoptoun recreational fishers and community who helped us rescue the catfish from Lake Lascelles after an incredible recruitment event



Jarryd McGowan with some of the thousands of catfish at Arcadia before release



James Milne releasing some catfish into the Loddon River - Pyramid Creek junction at Kerang.



Kate Norman helping release catfish into the Ovens River in Wangaratta



Perfect habitat to release catfish into at Safes Lagoon off the Gunbower Creek



Andrew Colston, avid local rec fisher, was pumped to see catfish being returned to the Ovens River



Contemplating the evening rise



The remains of lunch

VFFA Council Member - John Wieladek

(... John was asked to tell us a little about himself and his interest in fly fishing)



John enjoys fishing the Toorong River

After seeing the original ABC broadcast of *A River Somewhere* as a teenager, I have fly fished since late high school, mainly focusing on trout fishing in Victoria. My first trout was a brown trout that took a clumsily presented Geehi Beetle on a warm evening on the Upper Mitta Mitta River, near its junction with Middle Creek. Soon after this followed a pair of rainbows on the Howqua River at Eight Mile; and the die was cast.

My favourite waters are the Victorian north-east streams such as the Howqua, Delatite and Steavenson Rivers, and the Moorabool, Newlyn and Dean Reservoirs. I fished Tasmania for the first time in 2024 and am looking forward to spending more time there. As far as 'dream fishing destinations' go, one day fishing for mouse-feeding rainbows and dolly varden on the Kamchatka Peninsula would rank as my top pick.

Outside of fishing, I practiced as a solicitor before being appointed a Judicial

Registrar of the Magistrates' Court of Victoria in 2022.

(John has been a member of the VFFA since 2022 and joined the Council in 2024)



... and the Howqua

Practice Makes Perfect

(From Phil Bailey in the UK. This article was originally used in our May 2013 newsletter. It is worth reading again.)

It is worth reading again.)

As I write this the trout season on rivers (or 'game fish season' as it is known here in the UK) has started in some counties, but most begin on April 1 each year. Where I am in Yorkshire our season starts on March 15, but this year it has been far too cold to get out.

So what have I been doing?

As you may know I have converted to the Italian style of casting and fishing. This has meant long hours (probably about 200) relearning how to cast and unlearning old habits. One thing that I always note when teaching or just observing is how poor most fly fishermen are at presentation and accuracy, not to mention fly selection.

These three components, and in that order, are critical to successful fly fishing, irrespective of whether you are fishing streams or still waters. I bet that if you spent time observing the really good fly fishermen you would find that they are extremely efficient. They are constantly trying to remove faults in their fishing, looking at ways to correct bad habits and streamline their selection of flies.

Most fly fishermen do very little in this regard and simply do not improve between or during the season. I spend a lot of time on these three elements, especially during the months when I am not fishing. So I practice. Here are some of my thoughts and tips that may help you. This is how I prepare for the season ahead.

Presentation.

It is no good locating a fish and then blowing the opportunity to catch it through poor casting or bad habits. I

read recently that an experiment was undertaken in New Zealand to assess the impact of false casting on fish catch rates. It was demonstrated that the likelihood of catching a fish after the first false cast decreased by 30%, then 50% after the second false cast, 70% after the third, and almost 100% after the fourth. I agree with these observations, and when I am fishing, or even practicing, I try to limit the number of false casts that I make. Two false casts is the exception for me. So during the off season go down to a park, set up a target, and try to get the line out to it after a single false cast.

This may mean that you need to deploy mini double hauls into the back and forward casts to create line speed. Interestingly, this is exactly what the Italian style does in order to generate high line speed on underlined rods.

Another thing to note is the plane in which you cast. Most people tend to cast in a horizontal plane (i.e. the line travels back and forth parallel to the ground). In the final cast the line straightens out and the leader turns over and delivers a 'delicate' presentation. To me, there are a couple of things wrong with this. The first is that the line generally hits the water first and if you are fishing a stream drag will immediately start to pull the line downstream so that when the leader finally lands the fly is almost immediately impacted by drag. The second is the effect that wind has on a leader that is trying to turn over when all of the line speed has been removed.

Try this. When I first started fly fishing I was mesmerized by Charles Ritz's 'high speed - high line' theory. Get the back cast up high and change the plane of the

forward cast downwards so that you're targeting the spot at which you want the fly to land. In the Italian style of casting, and because we are casting at high speed, we achieve this sort of delivery as we believe that you only have one chance at catching a fish. You could take this same approach, so practice it.

I practise using two hoops set up two metres apart with the front one higher than the rear one. I then cast through those hoops and their orientation forces me to cast in a plane that is directed down at the target.

Accuracy

I think that this is vitally important. I cannot even begin to count the number of times I have seen people overcasting. I am even guilty of it.

Vary your leader length and you will invariably overcast because you are not used to the additional length. So I practice line control religiously. I take a target down to the park and I cast to it, not at it. I move a couple of paces back and do the same, then move forward and repeat the exercise. From this I get to understand the length of line I am casting PLUS the leader so that I am placing the fly right where I want it. If you are fishing in New Zealand then this is one competency you cannot afford to neglect.

I use three hoops. I start with a hula hoop (yep, you can remember those) and once I have got into the slot of casting every cast inside this hoop I move to a smaller one and repeat the process. Finally I move to a hoop that has a diameter of about 50 cm and concentrate on hitting it every time.

Lining a fish with your cast to me is unforgivable. Yet I see it all the time. I even do it myself sometimes and admonish myself every time. So I practice a different approach. I make a cast off to the side so that I know that the amount of

line I will ultimately cast to the fish will be the right length. This is much easier to achieve on running water as you don't have that luxury to a cruising fish in a lake.

But if you fish rivers then practice it. Using the same target, make one cast off to the side and then the next cast right on target.

Flies.

The more I fish the more convinced I am that a generalist fly with the right shape and size for the food chain is all I really need. Yes, I carry quite a few patterns, and carrying a number of fly boxes is a habit I have tried to break but failed; I simply love tying flies. But I mainly fish out of one fly box, and in that box I have five flies in three different sizes. If I am getting refusals I change the size before I change the fly. This makes it easier for me and I become more efficient as I concentrate on PRESENTATION and ACCURACY. Something to think about!

In Summary

I know how lazy we can become in the off season or if we cannot get away fishing regularly. I also understand that what I do is not for everyone. But I do know that a few sessions of practice using some simple props can make a substantial difference to your fly fishing.

So for me, the weeks leading up to the season will find me out in the park at any opportunity with a few hoops and targets, just practicing my presentation and accuracy. It can be quite a lot of fun if you do it with your fishing buddy.

Cheers,

Philip Bailey

FLY OF THE MONTH

Peter Lapsley's Nymph



This month we'll feature a fly that was our Fly of the Month in our December 2013 issue. It's a great fly too!

For a number of years I've enjoyed the British magazine '*Fly Fishing & Fly Tying*', and particularly the many articles by writer Peter Lapsley. Sadly, Peter passed away some years ago - a victim of leukaemia. According to his obituary in *The Times*, "He was one of Britain's leading writers on fly fishing. In a career spanning more than 35 years he produced ten books and hundreds of articles, demystifying the sport in clear, crisp prose. Many thousands of anglers were inspired and encouraged by his work."

Peter started fishing on his sixth birthday and was to become an authority on British trout fishing. One of his books carries the title: *River Fly-fishing: The Complete Guide*.

He was also actively involved as editor and in an advisory capacity to the British Medical Journal, as well as writing for and editing the *Flyfishers' Journal*. According to his friends he was a man of great intelligence and wit, very charming, self-effacing and a great story teller.

Peter Lapsley was also a superb fly tier and designed and tied a number of successful patterns. One that proved particularly popular and effective was his variation of the Pheasant Tail Nymph.

Peter Lapsley's Pheasant Tail Nymph:

Hook: Barbless size 16 nymph hook.

Thread: Brown 8/0.

Bead: A small black (or dark grey) tungsten bead.

Tail: Four pheasant tail fibres

Body: A small bunch of pheasant tail fibres.

Rib: Fine gold wire.

Thorax: A small amount of dark hare's ear fur tied in, then teased out.

Tying Procedure

1. (As described by Neil Patterson, a close friend of Peter Lapsley's and another prominent writer and fly tier in the UK).
2. Thread a small lead-coloured tungsten bead on to a barbless #16 nymph hook.
3. Wind the brown thread down the hook shank and tie in four pheasant tail fibres as a tail. (A few camel-coloured Antron fibres can be used instead.)
4. Also tie in a small bunch of pheasant tail fibres to form a body and a length of fine gold wire as ribbing.
5. Wind the pheasant tail fibres to just behind the bead, leaving a small space to put the thorax. Rib with the wire and tie it off.
6. Dub a small amount of dark hare's ear fur behind the bead. Tease it up so that some loose fibres can suggest legs.
7. Whip finish, then with a dubbing needle place a blob of varnish on the thread and let it run down to secure the whipping.



Our President Simon Joel and Vice-President Rod Hirst are both keen and successful anglers



... and here they are again!

The VFFA thanks our
loyal sponsors in 2025



VFFA 2025 meetings & other activities

June 2025

- 18 Wednesday (VFFA members' visit Millbrook Lakes has had to be cancelled due to the lack of rain and the lakes being very low and unfishable)
- 19 Thursday General Meeting – 12:30pm – at the Swiss Club, 89 Flinders Lane, Melbourne. Speaker – Scott Xanthoulakis from Wilderness Fly Fishing
- 25 Wednesday Council Meeting – 7:00pm on Zoom

July 2025

- 17 Thursday General Meeting – 12:30pm – at the Swiss Club, 89 Flinders Lane, Melbourne. Speaker – Jim Blakeslee, from Warrnambool Fly Fishers
- 23 Wednesday Council Meeting – 6:30pm at the Kelvin Club

August 2025

- 15 Friday Annual Dinner and Auction– 6:30 for 7:00 pm, venue to be decided
Speaker – to be confirmed
- 17 Sunday President's Casting Day at the Red Tag Casting Pool, commencing at 10:30 am
- 27 Wednesday Council Meeting – 7:00pm on Zoom

September 2025

- 6 Saturday Trout season opens for Victorian rivers
- 18 Thursday 2025 Annual General Meeting – commencing at 7:30 – Zoom meeting
- 24 Sunday President's Casting Day at the Red Tag Casting Pool, commencing at 10:30 am
- 24 Wednesday Council Meeting – 6:30pm at the Kelvin Club

October 2025

- 5 Sunday Annual trip to Thorpdale to fish the Latrobe Valley club's stocked dams as guests of the Latrobe Valley members
- 16 Thursday General Meeting – 6:30pm – venue to be confirmed
Speaker – TBC
- 22 Wednesday Council Meeting – 7:00pm on Zoom

Millbrook Dates: We hope we can visit Millbrook on these two dates:
Wednesday September 3, Thursday October 2