

# FLY LINES



MARCH 2015

J.M. Gillies, in conjunction with RIO and Sage, are proud to announce that Simon Gawesworth will be here in Australia in March. Simon was British Junior Casting Champion at age 16, and in the years following broke seven British casting records and won the adult casting championships three times in succession, representing England in two European casting championships and one world team casting championship. He then turned his hand to competitive fly fishing, representing England in three home internationals, two European championships and five world championships.

We are pleased to announce that the VFFA has been able to organise two very exciting events featuring Simon. He will be guest speaker for our March meeting on Friday, March 20, and will present a casting demonstration at the Red Tag Casting Pool in Fairfield on the following day, Saturday March 21

**March Meeting – Dinner with  
Simon Gawesworth**

Friday, March 20,  
6:30 for & 7:00 pm, at the  
**Celtic Club**

Please note that our March meeting has been moved from the normal Thursday evening to Friday, March 20, for a Dinner at the Celtic Club, commencing at 6:30 pm. An invitation to this event is included as an inset with this issue. Simon will be the guest speaker at this function, which will also include door prizes and a raffle with some superb prizes.

An invitation to attend this exciting event is included as an insert in this issue.



# THE VICTORIAN FLY FISHERS' ASSOCIATION INC.

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*Tichborne watercolour - Stony River*

# The Visit to Melbourne by Simon Gawesworth

... a world class casting champion.

J.M. Gillies, in conjunction with RIO and Sage, are proud to announce that Simon Gawesworth is coming to Australia for a tour of Victoria, New South Wales and Tasmania. He will be conducting casting clinics and talks and hosting some special nights over a two-week period.

Simon's highly entertaining promotion of fly fishing is a must for all keen fly fishers. He is well known in fly fishing circles and is at the forefront of fly line design, as well as being a world-class casting champion.

The VFFA has been able to organise two very exciting events featuring Simon. Our March meeting has been moved from the normal Thursday evening to Friday, March 20, for a Dinner at the Celtic Club, commencing at 6:30 pm. An invitation to this event is included as an inset with this issue. Simon will be the guest speaker at this function, which will also include door prizes and a raffle with some superb prizes.

On the following day, Saturday March 21, Simon will present a casting demonstration at the Red Tag Casting Pool in Fairfield. This event is scheduled for 10:30 am to 2:30 pm, and will include a barbecue lunch. Peter Morse, well-known to us all, is also attending and will be assisting Simon at both events.

This weekend will be a highlight in the VFFA 2015 calendar. To have Simon Gawesworth's presence at these two VFFA functions is a unique and exciting privilege. And absolutely unmissable.

## **Brief biographical sketches – Simon Gawesworth and Peter Morse:**

Simon learned to fish at the age of six and took up fly fishing when aged eight. He was trained by his father, well-known



*Nice fish Simon*

British fly fishing instructor and author, John Gawesworth. By the time Simon left school at 16 to teach fly fishing he had become the British Junior Casting Champion. In the years following he broke seven British casting records and won the adult casting championships three times in succession, representing England in two European casting championships and one world team casting championship.

He then turned his hand to competitive fly fishing, representing England in three home internationals (against Ireland, Scotland and Wales), two European championships and five world championships. He was the England team captain and manager for the 2003 world championships in Spain.

During his career Simon has written numerous articles for the fishing press, published two books on Spey Casting, presented five instructional videos and DVDs, appeared on numerous television and radio shows, demonstrated casting at



*With a D-loop like that it's no wonder Simon can roll cast huge distances*

fly fishing shows around the world and became recognized as one of the leading authorities on fly casting and fly casting instruction. He is a FFF (Federation of Fly Fishers) master and Two Handed Casting certified instructor, and also holds the Association of Professional Game Angling Instructors and Salmon and Trout Association National Instructor Certificates for fly fishing instruction in the UK.

Simon now lives in Washington, USA, and works for RIO products, where he designs and tests fly lines, as well as being the brand manager for RIO. He conducts fly casting classes and seminars around the world. He is married and has two children.

Peter Morse grew up in Fiji where from an early age he fished from the family boat trolling handlines for mackerel, trevally, tuna and coral trout. His father and his grandfather were fly fishermen and Peter has fly fished since the early '70s in freshwater and in saltwater. He has written extensively on the sport for magazines and has written three books. He is well known by all fly fishers in

Australia through the *Wildfish* series, but has also taught fly casting for several decades. Peter is a Sage Ambassador and is a certified Master Casting Instructor with the International Federation of Fly Fishers, and conducts casting clinics all over the country from novice level through to training other potential instructors. He chases whatever swims on fly fishing gear.



*Peter Morse*

## April Meeting – with Neil Hyatt

Neil is Program Leader for Fish Production, Fisheries Victoria, and is based at Snobs Creek Hatchery.

He assures us he is looking forward to the April meeting and catching up with some familiar faces. His talk will focus on his work at the hatchery.

Neil has been involved in fish and fishing from a young age, when he lived just metres from the Goulburn River near Eildon. His grandparents were avid anglers and his grandmother tied flies for fly fishers from the 1930's to the 1970's.

When Neil left school he worked at the Goulburn River Trout Farm from 1978 to 1994. He then had a 'sea change' and managed a marine hatchery at Phillip Island for 10 years.

He started with Fisheries in research in 2004 and became manager of fish production in 2005. His role at the Snobs Creek Hatchery is to manage the site and the production and liberation team (of nine staff).

The last 10 years have been very challenging for the hatchery, with terrible droughts and fires, and there will no doubt be plenty of challenges ahead.

The main purpose of Snobs Creek Hatchery now is the stocking of fish for recreational fishing. In the past it had largely been a research centre, and it has had many changes since its origins in the late 1940's. The site was originally chosen because of the excellent creek water quality and good gravity flow, and trout were the only species reared until the 1960's when Chinook Salmon were introduced. In the mid 1980's Murray Cod ponds were built and the liberation



of Murray Cod began. The hatchery now releases around 500,000 Cod each season.

The hatchery now produces some two million fish a year, with 90% of those for recreational purposes and the other 10%, being Macquarie Perch and Trout Cod, are for conservation stocking.

Snobs Creek Hatchery plays a major role in our state's trout fishery, and Neil's presentation will undoubtedly provide a wealth of information on the fish we target. Mark it in your diary - Thursday April 16.

## Liar's Night 2015

Good information was the order of the night this year as only a small number of club stalwarts turned out to talk about their recent fishing experiences.

Andrew Mossman, a New Zealand specialist, had been back to his favorite river as recently as November. Andrew obviously had a ball on the Mataura River and he had the photos to back it up.

He told the small be intent group that he was changing the way he plays fish, by using the rod in a horizontal position and letting the line in the water do more of the hard work. He says he loses less fish with his new technique.

Hubert Reichelt had also been in New Zealand and encountered higher water on his favorite rivers. He said he also encountered snow in November and resorted to Mataura River tributaries for some of his time in country.

Hubert had been studying water conditions, especially where fast water sweeps past slower water. He says this forms a "swirlpool" and can be a real hotspot for fish.



*Three wise men. (L to R) Andrew Mossman, Hubert Reichelt and John Pilkington*

Both Hubert and Andrew reminded us that Mataura River fish feed in very shallow water.

John Pilkington and son Ben had also been to New Zealand around Gore and Athol and he sang the praises of Andrew's Possum Emerger. Pilks also said that Big River was low, clear and cool. He knew of one big fish taken up that way, but not on a fly.

David Hooke told an amusing story against himself, when he was "frozen" on a river rock in New Zealand when a large trout swam up and eye balled him.

Richard Kos was animated when talking about his recent good fish from Four Springs in Tasmania.

There is a full Tasmanian report in the Newsletter with details and photo of Kossy's Four Springs brown.

Dermot O'Brien



*Andrew Mossman with another Mataura beauty.*

## **Notice of Major Event (NOE) Big River, February 16, 2015**

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

**Event Co-ordinator (EC):** John Pilkington, phone: 0407 356 676; 9225 8616(w); 9489 2186(h)  
Email: [jpilks@vicbar.com.au](mailto:jpilks@vicbar.com.au) fax: 92257728

**Event date:** Friday April 17 to Sunday April 19, 2015. Arrive in afternoon or earlier for some fishing. Huts will be open from around midday. Leave Sunday afternoon or stay on by arrangement.

**Cost/s:** Usually around \$30 for weekend for 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 not necessary.

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

**Catering/ food and drink requirements:** Bring own food for BBQ on Friday night and breakfasts. Lunch and evening meal 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 essential. Maps are available. It is a remote area.

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

**Mobile phone coverage areas, or otherwise:** No mobile phone coverage after Eildon turnoff (approximately one hour away from Enoch's Point)

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

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

**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.

**Guiding:** NA

**Event Registration Form (ERF):** To be completed and returned to John Pilkington by April 13.

**Date of issue of this NOE:** As above – February 16, 2015 (mandatory for quoting in ERF)

**Event Registration closing date:** April 13, 2015

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]**

# President's Message

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It is now well into the open fishing season and I am still finding it difficult to find a trout in Australia, let alone catch one. After a fruitful week in NZ in January I was eagerly looking

forward to the VFFA annual trip to Tassie last month. As you will read in Dermot O'Brien's report the 16 attendees all had a good time. However the fish were few and far between. I was fortunate enough to catch a 5 pound brown on Woods Lake at the end of a drift with David Hemming and a 2 pounder on the Great Lake later in the week with Peter Hayes. All daily reports were that few fish were seen. Kossy caught the largest from the land at Four Seasons Spring. River fishing was even more difficult. All Tasmanian based VFFA members agreed that 2015 is even worse than 2014. Why? Cormorants, weather, irrigation levels, increased fishing pressure, who knows. I spoke to many including Peter Hayes, David Hemming, Mike Stevens, Ray Brown, Nick d'Antoine, Ray Brown and others about whether we should change the date for next year. All agreed we should not. 2016 could be a bumped year.

In Tassie the VFFA male only rule was discussed. After breakfast one morning Peter mentioned that after a recent female fly casting course at his Cressy Lodge a number of ladies refused to drink out of the VFFA embossed wine glasses in protest to our ancient men only membership rule. At first some of us thought this somewhat amusing but on reflection the consensus was that the ladies make a good point. Men and

women do fly fish together all over the World. It is 2015, not 1933 when the VFFA started or 1998 when this was last discussed. In 1933 business, politics, professions, government, defense and law forces were all single-mindedly male centric as were sporting clubs.

Later in the week Rick Dugina and I visited Daniel and Simone Hackett's new fly fishing store in Launceston. Daniel explained that due to demand from female anglers she has had to import wading boots, waders and other fly fishing clothing designed for women from overseas. She also mentioned that many of her female clients were well aware of the VFFA and our men only attitude. Understandably they are happy to give us a wide berth.

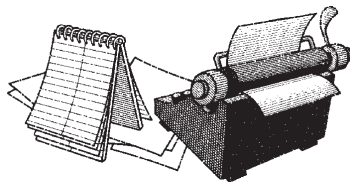
Many keen members have mentioned to me that they are concerned that we are rapidly becoming an old men's only club. We all seem to agree we need younger members. Why not both sons and daughters, grand children and friends and their partners if they are all interested in fly fishing? If it is good enough for all other sporting clubs, why not us? I intend raising this subject with Council for their views and would appreciate any feedback from members. Obviously no changes to the rules can be made without your approval at a Special General Meeting or the AGM.

In the meantime I look forward to seeing you at our special Simon Gawsorth dinner and at his casting demonstration the next day. We should all be in for a treat.

May the fishing improve before season ends. Tight lines



# From the EDITOR'S DESK



"The artificial fly is quite ancient as a means of fooling trout, for we are told that as early as the third century anglers were using flies on the unsuspecting trout of Macedonia. The philosopher Aelian tells us in his *De Natura Animalium* that a fly of wool and feathers was fished effectively on the Astraeus, and that these crude flies were an attempt to match the hatch." (David Scholes: *Fly Fishing in Australia*)

"Tying your own flies means different things to different people. For most, perhaps, the biggest attraction is the tremendous saving in cost. After a few days on the river, where rocks, underwater snags, roots and branches of fly-eating trees still take their terrible toll, the replacement of lost flies can be an expensive business, and it takes a brave man indeed to replenish his ravaged fly-boxes at the tackle shop and face the bill without blanching, flinching and developing a sinking feeling somewhere deep in the pit of the stomach." (Hugh McDowell: *New Zealand Fly Tying*)

Amen to that! I must confess that fly tying has occupied my thinking in recent days. This is partly because I had spent some time with both Hubert Reichelt and Andrew Mossman talking about Andrew's No Hackle Possum Dun – the fly featured in our last issue. Hubert had brought around a couple of his exquisite samples to show me – absolute works of art they were, so neat and beautifully tied. No wonder they caught fish. Then when I was at Andrew's place he offered to show me how he tied this pattern. A hook, size 17, was quickly locked into the

jaws of his vise, some hackle fibres attached for the tail, and the dubbing for the body tacked onto the hanging thread. A dubbing loop was spun and the body wound on. A possum pelt then magically appeared that had already generously donated much of its fur for Andrew's flies. He scissored a neat tuft off the remaining hide, removed the short fluffy under-hair, and quick as a flash had the wing tied in, drawn upright, and trimmed to size. All over in just a few minutes. How easy was that. And of course I couldn't escape from Andrew's residence without being presented with a handsome possum pelt so I could tie some NHPD's up too.

Straight home and to the vise, with all the bits laid out ready for me to assemble one of my own. Thirty minutes later, possum hair all over the bench, and something like a cockroach with a fur coat glaring back at me from the vise. It wasn't so easy after all.

I enjoy fly tying. It's a relaxing and pleasant way of replenishing the fly boxes when weather or a bulging diary keeps me from going fishing. But I know my limitations, and mostly stay with patterns that are both effective for me and easy to tie. Like Mick Hall's simple nymph he used to use in his guiding days on the Rubicon River – just four moving parts: a hook, a few fibres from an old tired Indian hackle for the tail, a brass bead at the other end, and a carrot shaped body of brownish synthetic dubbing in the middle. No rib and no thorax cover and no hackle and no legs, but it just keeps catching fish. Or Mick's

little olive green Scruffy that works a treat in lakes.

I like fishing Royal Wulffs, but they're a brute to tie. I saw a young bloke walk into Hookup Bait and Tackle some years ago, open his fly box and show all and sundry his sizes 18 and 20 Royal Wulffs. He specialised in tying Royal Wulffs, and the challenge was to go as small as possible. His samples, too, were exquisite. Now I tie Royal Wulffs, but I cheat. I tie the parachute variety, using a single upright wing of white Hi Vis or polypropylene. These are much easier and quicker to tie, and I've yet to encounter a trout that complained I was floating an imitation Royal Wulff over his head.

The fly tying experts in their books and videos endorse the idea of 'substitution'. The original pattern you've come across in some book or magazine tells you that the tail of the emerging Lake Deniliquin water supply reservoir dun that you want to try must be whisks from the

lower half of the feathers from the left breast of a three year old female honey-eating quail just after it has mated. These are hard to get (believe me), but the substitution principle suggests that a few brown fibres from a feather yanked out of my tired old Indian hackle that cost me \$3 at a sale twenty years ago might do just as well. At least it's worth a shot. And to confess to even worse heresy, I've got an old one inch paint brush in my drawer here. Dark brown bristles too. I haven't tried it yet but somewhere I read that when my Indian hackle runs out, the bristles from a paintbrush aren't half bad as tail fibres, and they're heaps cheaper than a packet of Microfibbets. Just so long as the trout don't notice or complain.

Yes, fly tying is fun, and an art form, and a skill. And it can be successfully performed by enthusiasts with a very wide range of abilities.

Tight lines and happy tying,

Lyndon Webb

# Web Fish

Cast regularly at [vffa.org.au](http://vffa.org.au)

## About the VFFA web site:

The VFFA web site has a comprehensive coverage of VFFA events, meetings, trips, ... updated monthly making it easy to track dates and times.

## Features of VFFA web site:

- Monthly Newsletter delivered to members in full colour.
- Live access to more than five years of past Newsletters
- Newsletter in PDF format for easy reading on computers / iPads / tablets & smart phones
- Newsletter in PDF format that can be read and saved on iPads and tablets like eBooks
- Calendar of all activities that can be synced with all your digital device calendars
- Gallery of events - Photos and Event reports
- Where to fish directories: Victoria, Tasmania, NSW, New Zealand

## The Wonderful World Of CDC

The following article was provided by Mick Hall. One of Mick's many overseas fly tying colleagues is Lawrence Finney, who is well-known in Ireland as a fly tier. Lawrence has been a professional fly tier for well over 35 years and has demonstrated his craft at workshops and demonstration around the globe. He has acquired a pile of qualifications along the way and his website, at [www.finneysflies.com](http://www.finneysflies.com), is well worth a visit.

Lawrence offers the following information and advice on the use of CDC in fly tying.

With the fly tying season well into stride, my fly tying classes featured a week on using CDC. Students were amazed when I used a PowerPoint presentation to show close up views of CDC, enabling the students to see why CDC has the floating properties it has.

CDC itself is a bunch of plumes that are around the preening gland of the duck, but the oil on the CDC was not the reason why it floated.

The CDC feathers surround the immediate area of the oil gland which is located at the upper side tail end of the duck, and if you ever get a duck drake or even a goose you can gently stroke the feathers forward to expose the area and clearly see the oil gland and the bunch of CDC plumes.

These become coated with the oil secretion. You will often see a duck or drake with its head turned to the rear and agitating its beak in the area. This is to transfer the oil from the gland that is coated on the CDC, and with its beak the duck would apply the oil to the surrounding feathers to waterproof and condition them.

When the diagrams of the CDC were shown to them they understood that it was not the oil but the structure of the feather, with the barbules and helicoils that trapped the air, that made CDC feathers float. The CDC was just a way of enabling the oil to be stored for use.



With this in mind I also explained that CDC was a fantastic feather for using on flies such as bumbles, irish mayfly patterns and nymphs, as when the feather becomes water logged it created movement in the fly, and on a mayfly nymph it cloaked the whole fly to create a fantastic shape when pulled through the water.

We have even used CDC on various wet fly patterns, and CDC dyed black was field tested on a black Pennell with amazing results in 2014.



A Mayfly emerger pattern was tied up to show students that this could be fished dry or wet by using a light olive for a swept wing and then hackling two CDC plumes dyed dark olive and bringing cock pheasant over to create the affect of legs and movement.



This meant the pattern could be cast over a rising fish and if left would float for quite a while, and if not taken by the fish it could be retrieved wet style and the CDC would become water logged and the fly could be pulled through the wave, with this resulting in the CDC collapsing on itself to create a nymph-like profile.

Finally a traditional Mayfly pattern was tied using CDC as an under hackle as this meant you could fish it the same as the emerger pattern.

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Over the year 2014 we have bleached and dyed 15 different colours of CDC and I have been using it on the majority of my patterns. Don't be afraid to bleach and dye CDC as the process does not affect the floating properties. At least it doesn't on wild duck CDC so I cannot say the same process works on commercial white duck.

Finally CDC can be used as a wing on small river and lake patterns as we tried these out on sizes ranging from size 10 to size 20, and this gave that extra floating property when fishing runs and waves.

A small trick I was shown was to keep an elastic band buttoned to my shirt or fly vest. Then when the CDC becomes water logged you simply hook the fly onto the elastic band, hold the cast, and twang the elastic 6 or 7 times. The vibration causes the fly to vibrate rigorously and, hey presto, the CDC is dried out. You can put oil on the CDC but this only conditions the CDC.

I hope this small article is of help and enables other instructors to try these tying methods as we have found them to be really productive over the past two years.

2015 will see more traditional Irish flies tied using Pseudo hackle, which has taken off over here big time.



If anyone would like any further information or photos of the different pattern please feel free to contact me.

Tight lines for 2015 and as we say over here in Ireland, 'happy wrapping.'

# The Taliban's Trout

## *Searching For Dinnawah In Afghanistan*

... by Tom Gregg. Tom is a neighbour and friend of John Pilkington, and spent three years working for the United Nations in Afghanistan. He is also a keen fly fisher, and very familiar with the Big River around Enochs Point. Tom wrote an article on his experiences fly fishing in Afghanistan which was recently published in the *'Flyfish Journal'*, a prestigious international magazine. He also has given permission for us to include it in our March issue. The original article ran to 14 pages, so here is an edited version.

The day would be typically warm, but morning sunlight on the peaks towering above Ghazni Province, in south-eastern Afghanistan, did little to remove the previous night's chill from the valley floor. I waded into the cool clear stream that snaked through the valley, my fly rod tucked under my right arm. The water quickly penetrated my leather boots and socks and sent goose bumps up my legs. A light mist hung over the stream. Smoke rose from mud chimneys in a distant village across the water before meeting the crisp air and sinking back down to the ground. A rooster called and a dog barked an answer. It was just as Izaak Walton described in *The Compleat Angler*—this was the “study of being quiet.”

In late 2004 I accepted a job as a Political Affairs Officer for the United Nations in Afghanistan. The job took me to far-flung pockets of the Pashtun tribal areas along Afghanistan's south-east border with Pakistan. It entailed conflict mediation and negotiation, human rights work and coordinating with the United States military and Afghan government. So it was with loose but exciting “terms of reference” that, in January 2005, I arrived in Gardez, a mountain town in eastern Afghanistan where remnants of Alexander the Great's empire can still be seen.

Unlike some other countries in the region—Pakistan, Mongolia and India, for example—Afghanistan is not a well-established fishing destination. The decades of conflict that started with the Soviet invasion in 1978 certainly haven't helped. Even as far back as the 1850s, Henry Bellew, a British army officer, reported that in Afghanistan, “Fish are not very abundant nor varied in species.” Hence I had neglected to pack my fishing gear when I left my hometown of Melbourne, Australia.

On my second day in Gardez the region's gravel roads were blanketed in several feet of snow. Regardless of the storm, I was sent on a field mission to acclimatize myself to the place I'd call home for the next three years. Wearing my warmest winter clothing, and with two armoured United Nations vehicles and four escort vehicles with 20 heavily armed soldiers, I took a look around the provinces on the border with Pakistan that were dominated by conservative mountain tribes. As we set off I attempted to wind down the SUV window, but couldn't. My driver, Wahid, explained the windows couldn't open because they were bullet-proof. He assured me that if we were attacked, the windows could withstand 25 rounds from an AK-47 before the bullets started to penetrate the glass—great!

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*On the banks of the Bande Sarde River. The guy with the gun was a former soldier who provided security. The other two guys are U.N. drivers. Wahid on my left and Qadir on the right.*

*Photo: Tom Gregg*

The region had a dramatic beauty I could never have imagined. Snow-capped mountains form the border of long desert plains that stretch to the horizon. Nestled in the foothills of the Banoozai Mountains are villages that look like a scene from a bygone era—mud huts with smoking chimneys, donkey-drawn carts, traditional blacksmiths huddled over glowing hot irons and children queuing to collect water from communal wells. I also saw that the area was covered in streams.

Obviously, I needed to find out if there were fish. I went with Wahidullah, my translator, to a local village to consult with the elders. To my dismay, the answer was invariably that the streams stopped flowing after the snow melted in spring and didn't start again until the following winter. In some areas the rivers were permanent, but after years of drought, fish stocks were chronically diminished. However they told me that there were still some areas where streams kept running throughout the

drought and were able to sustain viable fish populations. A few months later I had my first glance at such a river.

As the June sun was setting late one afternoon over snow-capped mountains, I came across a stream not far from the border of Pakistan. I had just had green tea with a local warlord. He had been a key asset of the U.S. Special Forces in their hunt for al-Qaida operatives in the wake of 9/11. Fresh off the U.S. payroll and without a job, he had arms, men and plenty of spare time. It was a typical meeting where you talk politics, share stories, have a laugh, assure each other of the need to continue to work together and then, as you're about to depart, lie about the road you're taking home so his men don't set up an ambush or plant an improvised explosive device to detonate under your vehicle.

As I drove away after the meeting, escorted by 20 Afghan soldiers clutching AK-47s and rocket-propelled grenades, I was reflecting on just how extreme

everything is in Afghanistan. Its climate, its poverty, its hidden beauty, its history of war and fundamentalism, and more recently, its reputation for harbouring al-Qaida makes it a place unlike any other. Lost in these thoughts, I was distracted by the shimmering sunlight on the water in front of me—the convoy had hit a river crossing. On the bank was a shepherd boy watching over his herd of goats. When Wahidullah asked about fish, he replied, “I slept here last summer, and during the day my uncle and I saw some fish.”

I needed to establish what type of fish he had seen. We stopped at the next village to ask the tribal elders if they could confirm what the shepherd boy had told me. Yes, there were fish in this river. With excitement, I asked whether the fish were trout. “Yes” was the answer. However to be hospitable to visitors, Afghan villagers tend to say “Yes” or “OK,” whatever the question. I decided to probe a little. No matter what the species - bluefin tuna, Spanish mackerel or humpback whale - the villagers were able to confirm that all the fish I inquired about resided in their little river. Trout or not, it was time to have my gear sent over and, when the snowmelt was complete, to try my luck.

I was unwilling to wait the five weeks it would take for my rod, reel and fly box to travel from Melbourne to New York with Australia Post; New York to Dubai via Diplomatic Pouch; Dubai to Kabul via the United Nations Humanitarian Air Service; and Kabul to Gardez via donkey. Instead, I decided to make my own.

Needless to say, in south-east Afghanistan you cannot simply walk into a shop, pick up a few flies, test a new rod and inquire about which streams are fishing well and what fly patterns the trout are taking. Instead, you need to find a tree, approximately eight to nine feet high, which is not too brittle but not too malleable either. This sounds easy, but is extremely difficult in a place where there are almost no trees left because of severe deforestation, and those that remain belong to tribesman who carry Kalashnikovs rifles, hand grenades and possibly a rocket-propelled grenade. However once a tree has been acquired, the rest is relatively easy. In every bazaar, in every village throughout Afghanistan, cobblers ply their trade. For 50 Afghani (one U.S. dollar), it is possible to buy more thin, strong, boot-making twine than a boot maker would use in a year.

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*In southeast Afghanistan, it's the Taliban that own the roads*

Fish hooks are harder to come by. Over the next week, I sent drivers, translators and soldiers out to dusty old bazaars in Gardez and Paktika to source some hooks, confident I would have a complete setup before my fly fishing gear arrived. Sadly, the search proved futile. Save for some clothes hooks a shopkeeper had cunningly assured a soldier were perfect for catching fish, the men came back empty-handed.

I had returned to Paktika to meet the governor who had requested I investigate reports of a mass grave. After the meeting, I lamented the difficulties of my hunt for hooks to John, a former British SAS soldier who was providing private security services to the United Nations. He replied, "If only we had a survival kit— every military-issue survival kit has some fish hooks."

So I needed a survival kit, and knew exactly where to get one. About 25 minutes away along a sandy desert track was a U.S. Special Forces Base, and if the Special Forces guys didn't have survival kits, no one would. I contacted the base to inform them of my impending visit, and despite nightfall, jumped in a vehicle with John and we headed out to get some hooks. United States bases are hard to find at night because, for security reasons, they're in total blackout. When we eventually found the base, we pulled up to the perimeter razor-wire fence and pondered our next move. I suggested we move the razor wire away from the path and knock on the base's big steel gates. We managed to move the wire and take two steps before several spotlights lit the desert night as bright as the midday sun. I turned and noticed my colleague's head and body had several small, bright red dots trained on it and, sure enough, I too was in the line of sight of several powerful rifles from the towers. A rich southern drawl from a tower above

shouted out, "Don't f—king move! Put your hands up!"

I froze every part of my body as my arms levitated above my head. Moments later several well-armed soldiers opened the gates, searched us and decided we were, in fact, U.N. workers and not some al-Qaida operatives in a bright white, armoured Toyota Land Cruiser with "U.N." painted on the side. "You guys scared the shit out of us," the sergeant said. While in the ensuing months I would experience some fairly close calls, this was the closest I'd come to being shot. It would be tragic irony if we were to be killed by U.S. soldiers while trying to obtain a U.S. military survival kit. Fortunately, the Special Forces guys had exactly what we were looking for and I left the base half an hour later.

It had taken five weeks to pull together my homemade kit, but three days before the first opportunity came to test it on a stream, a package arrived from home. My beloved gear! It was time to wet a line. I would be in Paktika province for a week and hoped I'd find time to fish in the neighbouring province of Ghazni. Over lunch I informed an Afghan colleague who specialized in clearing land mines and unexploded ordnance of my fishing plans. He laughed and warned that riverbanks are known to collect land mines during periods of flooding. He gave me an updated map of minefields and with a thick, red X, marked a safe access point on the banks near Bande Sarde, which straddles the provinces of Ghazni and Paktika.

Friday came, and before daybreak I drove along the dusty road out of town toward the historic city of Ghazni—once home to Mahmud Ghazni, the first sultan of Afghanistan whose small empire stretched across Afghanistan, northern India and eastern Iran.

Due to the Taliban presence in the area, I had decided to take a lower profile and rent two old Russian jeeps from the chief of police. I would drive one and five soldiers would escort me in the second jeep. When we arrived it was still only 7 a.m. and the sky was burnt orange.

In very bad Pashtu I asked the soldiers to stay behind me so as not to spook the fish. I carefully cast a size 12 Red Tag out on the water in front of me; the soldiers laughed and shook their heads at my elaborate cast. My fly danced across the surface of the fast flowing stream but did not attract any attention. Before the fly hit the water from my second cast, a loud burst of piercing shots tore through the still morning air. Startled, wild ducks scrambled across the water, desperate to get airborne. I dived onto the bank for cover, smashing my kneecap on a rock along the way. A second burst followed, then a third. Dogs barked in the distance. I pressed my face hard into the dirt. This had all the hallmarks of a fire-fight—except for the laughter that followed. Then music and another short sharp burst from an AK-47, followed by singing of the *attan*, a tribal song of the Pashtuns. This was not an attack.

With my heart racing I clambered up the bank to discover the soldiers dancing together in a circle. I asked what the hell had happened. The soldiers' commander told me one of the soldiers in my security detail had been overcome by the beauty of the morning. He had fired his gun out of happiness and three of his colleagues had returned it. I asked that he tell his men to please not fire anymore and returned to the stream. I waded shakily back into the cool water and cast a fly toward a fast-moving run in front of me. The silence had returned but the stillness had not, nor had the ducks.

I changed to an Adams after having no luck with the Red Tag and after 25 minutes came across a small run leading into a deeper pool. I launched a cast near a rock on the edge and a silver flash darted up from the depths and struck my fly with an explosion of water—I was on! After a quick fight, I had a fish cradled in my hand that looked nothing like any trout I'd seen. It looked like a silver-coloured brook trout, but with a more angular head that resembled a bonefish and a mouth that had migrated below the snout. I decided it was a keeper—there are no such things as bag limits, licenses or size limits in Afghanistan.

I gutted the fish and brown caddis in different stages of decomposition filled my palm. There were also some bright yellow remains from the wings of a beetle. I washed my hands in the crystal stream, rinsed my catch, and searched through my fly tin to see if I could match the yellow colour I'd seen in the stomach. A yellow humpy was the best I could manage, so I tied it on and continued upstream. With the new fly I had much more success—it seemed irresistible to these strange fish. Pool after pool, run after run, I pulled out eight of them; sizes varying from 6 to 12 inches.

The late-morning sun warmed the back of my neck and the valley around me. The soldiers called out that it was time to leave. Their radios had picked up some Taliban chatter. Paktika was a stronghold of the Taliban-led insurgency. It wouldn't be long before news spread of our presence in the area. I rushed back along the leafy bank to find the fork in the river where we'd parked earlier that morning. I threw my gear on the backseat and we started along the bumpy road, radioing in my location and my expected time of arrival. I still had 90 minutes before I'd reach the relative safety of Sharan. "You

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*A river that flows next to a section of the old Silk Road in Afghanistan's central highlands near Bamyan. There was an old, bombed-out trout farm that date from the time of the last king of Afghanistan, Mohammed Zahir Shah, who reigned from 1933 until his ousting by coup in 1973.*

*Photo: Tom Gregg*

bloody idiot," I said aloud as the car lost traction and slid sideways before correcting itself. In my pursuit of some escape from daily stress (and a trout), I had taken an unnecessary risk. In southeast Afghanistan, it's the Taliban that own the roads.

We made our way to Sharan, collected our U.N. vehicles and headed north to Gardez and the relative safety of the fortified U.N. compound. I cooked up my catch over the glowing coals of a fire. The meal was a feast.

That evening, as the sun was setting and the wailing chorus of the call to prayer rang out over crackling speakers, I sat on my terrace with my laptop open to see what I could learn about the mysterious fish I had just caught. I eventually made the match on an obscure Food and Agricultural Organization document from the 1980s. I had just caught my first Dinnawah snow trout (*Schizothorax*

*progastus*). I learned these trout are found in the high-altitude rivers and streams of the Himalayas including in Nepal, Pakistan, India, Afghanistan, Iran and Tibet. I read that they are particularly well known in India and Nepal for being an excellent table fish. The last bite-sized piece of meat was sitting in a pool of lemon juice and olive oil. I put it in my mouth and swallowed. It had been the most carefree and enjoyable day I had experienced since arriving in Afghanistan.

I closed the laptop and looked up at the star-filled sky. Despite two decades of fly fishing rivers and streams across Australia, the United States and Europe, it was through fly fishing for Dinnawah snow trout in the Taliban heartland that I understood what Walton had meant in 1653—I'd never known such quiet in Afghanistan.



## Tough Tassie Trout

Sixteen super-keen VFFA members embarked on this year's week-long annual Tasmanian trip, kicking off on February 14th, all staying at Hayes on Brumbys.

Seeing all the gear, including boats and four-wheel drives, it was clear that planning had been underway for a quite some time.

And a massive rain-storm across the North of the State the day and night before arrival did have members looking skyward, but enthusiasm was not dampened.

Richard Kos was the first to have the kinks taken out of his line with a beautiful fish from Four Springs. "Kossy" was using one of his own damsel fly nymphs to add to his satisfaction.

President Hamish Hughes managed a lovely fish to the boat guided by Dave "Bamboo" Hemmings on Woods Lake.

As the week wore on it was obvious that fishing was tough and the 2015 tally

would be a little on the low side, particularly with streams having taken such a battering.

Obviously 16 on the trip was a very healthy gathering and Hayes on Brumbys was a hive of activity both morning and night.

It was good to see Bob Roles, a member since the early sixties on his first club trip.

Hugh Maltby assisted by Gordon Baker exceeded expectations with evening meals and general catering arrangements and at various times everyone pitched in to get things done.

A surprise guest on Monday night was Ian Norton from Reptile Rescue Tasmania. Ian arrived with a basket of snakes for a demonstration and then showed the gathering the latest techniques for treating a snake bite with pressure bandages.

Peter Hayes, no fan of snakes, was extremely brave in letting a Tiger snake go between his feet.

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*VFFA members and guests enjoy a chat and pre-dinner drinks.*

Thursday night saw a big turn out for dinner with local VFFA members, visiting members not on the trip and local identities all present.

The Tasmanian members included Mike Stevens, Ray Brown, Andrew Braithwaite and Mark Youngman. Mark received his 25-year badge at the dinner and Gordon Baker was presented with a folding knife for his story telling at dinner time.



*Hugh Maltby and Colin Morrison*

Jim Allen and Peter Dixon joined us for dinner, along with local pastoralist Ian Dickenson and local businessman Randall Trethewie ( also a member ) who were thanked by the President Hamish Hughes for their continued support of the VFFA.

Local VFFA members Mike Stevens and Ray Brown were generous with local knowledge, tips and joined some members for outings on the water.

It was tough going for all concerned and even when there was a good hatch trout were difficult.

One highlight was the surprise guest local Arthur Ford who moved to Tasmania 43 years ago from Victoria. It turned out that as a young man Arthur, a life-long fly-fisherman, had been a regular on the Goulburn River with Jim Allen, Bob Roles and Marty Rogers.



*More than 150 years fly-fishing experience between (L to R) Arthur Ford, Jim Allen and Bob Roles.*

Neither Jim nor Bob had seen him for all those years. It was good to see old mates re-connect and one can only wonder if a fishing trip may not be that far away.

Hayes on Brumbys was a perfect location to cater for both stream enthusiasts and those who like it up top.

Lets hope the fishing picks up for the rest of the season.

Tight Lines till next year's Tasmanian club trip.- Words: Dermot O'Brien.  
Photographs: John Permewan and Richard Kos.



*Tasmanian snake expert Ian Norton and "friend".*

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*The Skipper Peter Boag*



*Kossy with his Four Springs trout taken on his own damsel fly nymph.*



*John Permewan kits up.*

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*The President Hamish Hughes pleased with his lake trout.*



*(L TO R) Wayne Sanderson, Ian Dickenson and Ray Brown listening to proceedings at the VFFA Tasmanian dinner.*



# FLY OF THE MONTH - 2

## *Rod Barford's Orange Spinner*



Rod is well-known in the Australian fly fishing world, being a prominent guide and member of a number of Government committees and groups involved in our trout fishery. He is currently president of the Australian Trout Foundation.

He is a very keen fly tier and has designed a number of very effective flies he uses regularly in his fishing and guiding. Here is his orange spinner.

### **Materials for Rod's Orange Spinner**

Hook: Kamasan B400, sizes 12 & 14.

Thread: Orange Pearsall's Naples (or orange 3/0 Unithread).

Tail: Three black Microfibbets.

Body: Orange Pearsall's Naples.

Hackle: Good quality well-marked Furnace cock hackle.

## Tying Procedure

1. Tie in three black Microfibbets, using the thread to ensure the three tail fibres are widely spread in typical mayfly fashion.
2. Then continue winding the silk to form a typical tapered mayfly body.
3. Tie in the prepared hackle feather and wind it on. Ensure the hackle placement leaves room for a larger than normal head. The dark centre of the furnace hackle gives a good representation of the dark thorax of the real insect.
4. Whip finish the fly and add a drop of head cement.
5. Then trim off the bottom of the hackle so that the fly sits flat on the water surface. Ideally the remaining hackle should be about half of the hook gape.

## Bairnsdale Donger Weekend

All members are invited to enjoy a great weekend of fishing and fun.

Our hosts will be the Bairnsdale Fly Fishers, the date is Saturday March 28 and Sunday March 29, and the event is the annual fierce competition between the Bairnsdale members and the VFFA members for the Dudley Lee Donger. Fishing is over the two days and the trophy is awarded to the winner on the Sunday at lunchtime. You can then stay on if you wish and fish again on the Monday.

The Bairnsdale Fly Fishers' Mitta Lodge is five-star accommodation. It sleeps 12 and is very well appointed. The main meal on the Saturday evening is roast beef with all the trimmings, followed by apple pie with lavish helpings of cream. There is a barbecue lunch on the Sunday at 1:00 pm, following the official weigh in.

The fishing in this area can be quite challenging. However you will be given plenty of advice and guidance and possibly even guided by one of the Bairnsdale club members on some delightful stretches of the justifiably famous Mitta Mitta River. You can also fish some of the many other surrounding streams. They will all be flowing well and running clear at this time.

The Notice Of Event for this weekend is included in this issue on the next page, and the Event Registration Form can be downloaded from the VFFA website. If you have difficulties getting hold of the Event Registration Form then email Kevin Finn (Email: [webadmin@vffa.org.au](mailto:webadmin@vffa.org.au)) and he will email you a copy as a pdf file.

For further information please contact Peter Campbell on 9744 3308 (after 8 pm).



# LIBRARY NEWS

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

The library is divided into three parts.

- Part 1 Books available for loaning to members.
- Part 2 Books available for reference only and not to be taken from the library.
- Part 3 Books bequeathed to the Association and not to be taken from the cabinet.

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

The Association has the following quality items for sale:

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

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

### VALUED DONORS

#### The following made donations for the raffle at the 2014 Annual Dinner:

- Aussie Angler Pty Ltd • Armadale Angling • Australian Fishing Network
- Bernard Holbery • FlyLife Publishing • FlyFinz • Hayes on Brumbys
- J. M. Gillies Pty Ltd • Mayfly Tackle • Mick Hall • Millbrook Lakes Lodge
- Mountain Stream Company • Nick Taransky Bamboo Rod Maker
- Pro-Angler Tackle • Ray Brown Onkaparinga Flies • Stevens Publishing Pty Ltd
- The Complet Angler Box Hill • The Flyfisher Tackle Store Melbourne
- Vision and Pisces Fly-Fishing Tackle

## VFFA Meetings at the Celtic Club & other activities.

### March

- 20 Special Dinner – 6:30 for 7:00 pm  
Speaker: Simon Gawesworth  
Master Casting Instructor &  
Marketing Manager Rio Fly Lines USA
- 21 Casting demonstration by Simon Gawesworth & Peter Morse  
Red Tag Pool, Fairfield - 10:30 am to 2:30 pm
- 25 Council Meeting - 7:30 pm
- 28 & 29 'Donger' weekend at Bairnsdale Fly Fishers' Lodge  
Event co-ordinator – Peter Campbell

### April

- 3 – 5 Easter
- 16 General Meeting - 8:00 pm  
Speaker: Neil Hyatt, Program Leader Fish Production, Fisheries Victoria
- 17 – 19 Big River trip - 'Chateau Pilkington', Enoch's Point  
Event co-ordinator - John Pilkington

### May

- 21 General Meeting - 8:00 pm  
Auction of Fishing Tackle
- 27 Council Meeting - 7:30 pm
- 30 – 31 Closing Weekend – venue to be advised

### June

- 7 Sunday Casting - 10:00 am Red Tag Pool
- 14 Sunday Casting - 10:00 am Red Tag Pool
- 18 General Meeting - 8:00 pm
- 21 Sunday Casting-10:00 am Red Tag Pool
- 28 Sunday Casting -10:00 am Red Tag Pool