

# FLY LINES



MAY 2017

## May Meeting with Scott Xanthoulakis

Scott founded Wilderness Fly fishing in 2016 because of his passion for fishing wild places.

He learned to cast a fly at the age of twelve, and subsequently learned his craft from some of Australia's finest fly fishers, fly tiers, guides and writers. The rivers and streams of Victoria's north-east and Snowy Mountains, and the lakes of Victoria's goldfields and volcanic regions have all been places he has spent time fishing and thus gaining a wealth of knowledge and expertise that he now puts to good use.



Thursday, May 18,  
8:00 pm at the  
Celtic Club

He also regularly ventures into locations such as New Zealand, Tasmania and a number of Pacific Islands, including exploratory trips to 'off-the-grid' islands.

Nowadays Scott gains a lot of fulfilment from teaching others the finer details of fly fishing. His aim is always to make those he guides into better fly fishers and to learn that fly fishing should always be fun.

At our May meeting Scott will entertain and inform us with a wealth of stories and suggestions, and is particularly keen that we sense the fun and excitement in fly fishing.

**So add this one to your diary – Celtic Club, Thursday May 18, 8:00 pm.**

All members are welcome to join us at 6:15 pm for dinner in the Shamrock Restaurant prior to the meeting, but **PLEASE** make a dinner booking by 5:00 pm on Wednesday, May 17, by phoning 0498 254 497 and leaving a message.

# THE VICTORIAN FLY FISHERS' ASSOCIATION INC.

**VOL. 65 NO.7 – MAY 2017**

Organisation No. A0024750J

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

**info@vffa.org.au** **www.vffa.org.au**

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## **President**

Mike Jarvis

Email: president@vffa.org.au

## **Honorary Treasurer**

Tony Mitchem

Email: treasurer@vffa.org.au

## **Honorary Secretary**

Kevin Finn

Email: secretary@vffa.org.au

## **Honorary Editor**

Lyndon Webb

Email: editor@vffa.org.au

## **VFFA Website Administrator**

Kevin Finn

Email: webadmin@vffa.org.au

## **Honorary Librarian**

Rick Dugina

Email: library@vffa.org.au

## **Other Council members:**

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Councillors: Alex Evans

David Grisold

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John Pilkington

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Terry Rogers

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## June Meeting - with Bernard Holbery

Our speaker for the June meeting is Bernard Holbery, well known to us all through his many newsletter contributions. Bernard is a highly skilled angler who spends a lot of his time fishing the rivers around Buxton and Taggerty.

He is one of those dedicated anglers willing to pay the price. When the fishing is good (and it often seems to be for him) he’s on the rivers at the crack of dawn, and often fishes well past sunset.

For the June meeting he will speak about his passion for fly fishing, especially in the Acheron and Steavenson valleys. He will describe some of the many wonderful memories recorded in his fishing diaries – important historical moments, lighter moments, his love of the natural environment and the rivers we fish, some of the wonderful characters who have influenced his development as



a fly fisher, and of course his encounters with some very large or challenging fish.

Bernard has an extensive collection of fabulous photos and will illustrate his presentation with a series of PowerPoint slides.

# President's Message

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Every time I sit down to write this monthly message I think that I should be preparing some deep and meaningful piece that discusses the merits of one fly pattern over another, casting hints or serious comment on river and fishery management policy. But I never really seem to do that.

And it's the same this time. Events of the month have once again dominated, and understandably, as I believe I have just experienced perhaps the most memorable month in my fly fishing life.

At the end of April I was honoured to attend and represent the VFFA at the 50th anniversary of the Bairnsdale Fly Fishing Club. Significantly, it would also have been my 50th anniversary as a member of the VFFA had I remained a member continuously from the time I first joined in 1967.



*Bairnsdale president Trevor Stow and VFFA president Mike Jarvis hold up the superb painting donated by the VFFA and painted by VFFA member Trevor Hawkins to mark the occasion*

During the celebrations I presented Bairnsdale's President, Trevor Stow, with a beautiful painting by our member and Freshwater Fishing Editor, Trevor Hawkins. The painting depicts the two lodges the BFFC has had on the Mitta



Mitta River set in the local scenery, with a montage of local insects, local fish, and the flies that are used to catch them.

Bairnsdale did it well: a celebratory dinner on the Friday night, followed by a tree planting ceremony at their Mitta Lodge after the conclusion of the Dudley Lee Donger competition between the BFFC and the VFFA, which I was fortunate to win with a 1 lb 10oz brown trout taken on the March edition "Fly of the Month", John Pilkington's Cinnamon Parachute Dun. What a team effort!

But winning the Donger was really secondary in my mind compared with the bigger event and the overwhelming hospitality and friendship shown by BFFC members to our group of 15 who made the journey to Omeo from Melbourne, Shepparton, Traralgon and Bright. Thanks to all of you for taking part.

The Bairnsdale members gave their lodge over to us, they fed us and gave us advice on where to fish, and we all spent many happy hours renewing old friendships and making new ones.



*Bringing the Donger home*

Perhaps, in a deep and meaningful way, that is what fly fishing is really all about.

A couple of weeks earlier I enjoyed the company of Hamish Hughes and James Carter during a trip to Khancoban. We fished the Swampy, the Murray and the Geehi with mixed results but caught quite a few small fish. But the highlight of the trip, for me at least, were the two sessions we had on the Nariel Creek. I'd heard all the reports of how poor this lovely stream had been for several years, how Fisheries had rated it as one of the worst in the State, and then last year at the Mansfield conference, announcing that their research showed a dramatic improvement in the stream and the number of fish in it.

Well, I was overjoyed to find lots of fish, mainly small but some over the pound mark, willing to take flies that I presented. One session of two hours

resulted in half a dozen fish and another produced several more including one over a pound-and-a-quarter. So yes, it looks as though the Nariel is once again on its way to the top of the river ratings in the state. Let's hope so.

The other event that really grabbed my attention during the month was the presentation at our April meeting featuring Goulburn Valley guides Antony Boliancu, Werner Birkner and Bo Nikolic, who selflessly shared so much information about fishing the Goulburn and its tributaries around Thornton. It really turned into a guides' forum with three very experienced and knowledgeable working river guides answering countless questions from a very attentive audience, and all about fishing water that we probably regard as "home ground".

And our next meeting on May 18 promises to be just as interesting. Another guide, Scott Xanthoulakis of Wilderness Fly Fishing, will be our guest speaker, and I look forward to being entertained with a wealth of stories and hints from his extensive fishing experience in some of the more remote destinations in the world. Don't miss it.

Well that's it for this month. No deep thoughtful prose, or maybe there was a little. I look forward to seeing you soon and until then, good fishing and tight lines. - Mike

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## New Member

It is our great pleasure this month to welcome Tony Ryan as a new member of the VFFA. We trust that Tony's membership brings many pleasant and enjoyable times and lots of wonderful memories. So Tony - a very warm welcome to the ranks of the VFFA.

## The April Meeting with Antony, Bo and Werner from the Goulburn Valley Fly Fishing Centre

Victoria's Goulburn River is one of our most important trout fisheries, and as it is an easy two-hour drive from Melbourne it sees a lot of angler traffic. It can be a challenging fishery though, for those of us who don't understand it's levels, seasons, hatches and moods. So at our April meeting three highly skilled guides who fish the river every day gave us the benefit of their knowledge and experiences. It was a very entertaining and informative night. Here is a summary of their presentation.

### Werner spoke first:

Thank you for the invitation. We have a number of our team with us tonight, including David Pickering, one of our senior guides; Cameron Parker, who guides for us in New Zealand; Antony and Bo, who specialise in drift boat fishing; and myself, whose speciality is backwater fishing along the edges. We're here tonight to talk about the Goulburn, because we are hearing that lots of people find it a difficult river to fish.

But first, some information about our Centre at Thornton. David, Antony and Geoff started the business in 1994, and built the Centre as a labour of love. They slept in sleeping bags on a dirt floor, and went next door to the caravan park to shower. The Centre was purpose-built, and as it was previously an old trout farm, much of it was already in place when the building was erected.

In the winter months the two lakes on the property are stocked, and the fish grow well. Last year an 11 lb trout was caught by a Northern Fly Fishing Club member. So during the winter people like yourselves are welcome to come up and fish our lakes. The Centre runs 365 days in the year.

During these colder months, when the season is closed, the lakes give us the opportunity to teach people about trout and how to catch them. We teach newcomers to the sport, along with people like yourselves who are



*Fly fishing classes at the Goulburn Valley Centre*

experienced anglers wanting to brush up on aspects of their technique.

Our beginners' workshops have been developed and refined over a number of years. The photo up on the screen shows a group from Scotch College in Melbourne, who come up every year and have a great time with us. We send those young students away with a wonderful gift - basic skills in fly fishing that will stay with them for the rest of their days. There is a lot of satisfaction for us when one or two of them call into the Centre a few years later to show us the two pound brown they just caught in the river.

I personally feel so blessed to be working with guys who have taught me so much about trout fishing and what the Goulburn offers. We're on the river every day and share information with each

other, and this helps enormously. The Goulburn poses more questions than answers, so hopefully tonight we can demystify a few things for you, and by the end of our presentation you will go away thinking, "Yes, I'm going to have a crack at it."

When you fish it by yourself, say once a fortnight or once a month, the knowledge that you garner from a trip is probably irrelevant a few weeks later. The river level may have changed three or four times in the meantime, and a fish that you fished to a month ago is probably no longer be there.

The Goulburn is a tailrace river with Lake Eildon at the top of the system. The lake is huge and stores water in the wet months to be released in the summer period. The picture now on the screen shows the top of the Goulburn at the Eildon dam wall. I remember that when I was a kid people used to sit there with their surf rods and pull 10 lb fish out of this section. Fortunately the 200 metres of river there has since been closed to fishing. If they could now just stop the pelicans and cormorants from sitting up there between June and September we'd have a real chance.

If you stand on top of the gates and look down into the water you will see lots of very large fish, giving you an indication of the number and sizes of the fish in the river. I personally don't fish this section much from the bank, because there are too many difficult edges covered with blackberries. But Antony flogs it from the drift boats. They work hard to get in there and chase those big fish. But then the levels change and the fish move, and it's our job the following day to find where they have moved to.

**Antony:**

We have some video on the screen now showing a fish rising in very shallow

water right on the edge of the Goulburn. A lot of anglers see this huge river and immediately ask how they could possibly fish it. What we do is concentrate on the narrow band of water out from the edge, possibly just a few metres wide, where the fish are feeding. We look for seams and bubble lines and the places where fish will move to escape the velocity of the main current.

This video was taken at Thoms Lane, where the river runs close to the road about 3 kilometres upstream from our Centre. The fish was about 4 lb, and was the largest of three that were rising in a quite small area.

The water out of Eildon comes from the bottom of the dam, so is consistently cold - typically 10 – 12°C. And doesn't vary much from this throughout the year. The fish thrive in this clear, cold water, even in the heat of summer. So this bit of video shows a typical sight for us right throughout the summer months. We search for and find these fish, then stalk them either from the bank or from the boat. Both methods are equally effective.

These fish are typical of the trout that we see each day. In the high season, from November to January when the cicadas are on, it would be nothing special for us to see 15 to 25 fish like this in an afternoon, with sizes ranging from a pound up to three or four pound, with an odd five or six pounder too.

**Werner:**

The fish in the video was mopping up spent spinners, beetles, and some other stuff too. He wasn't picky. And getting close to these fish is not hard. The Goulburn is willow-lined, and nearly every bend is covered with willows. The fish get in behind those little places where the current breaks. It might be some slow current flowing straight downstream, or a current reverse, or water that is >>>



*The GVFFC headquarters blends into the landscape*

almost still. We see fish like this most days, and will get behind a tree with a camera and spend time watching and recording their behaviour.

When you find a fish like this one it is important to monitor the body language. A lot of anglers will immediately tie on a Royal Wulff and go bang straight over it. But you will learn a lot more from these fish by just watching them for 20 minutes or so, and observing how they're feeding and how far they're moving.

In the video you can see how relaxed this fish is. But remember – if you put a cast over a fish like this and there is something slightly flawed with your presentation, then the fish will be aware of it and his body language will change. He will stop feeding and then you have to wait to see if he starts feeding again. If one more thing happens to that fish that he is not familiar with then you have lost your chance with that one.

Quite often these fish are not selective and the fly pattern is not that important. If you have a refusal then usually the best

strategy is to go down a size to smaller flies before changing the pattern. People in the drift boat are often very quick to want to change flies, but when you are blind fishing it's usually better to just persist and keep putting flies in the right spots, whilst making sure that you're not seen and you are getting drag free drifts to these guys.

The fish in the video was sitting in shallow water at the edge of the river, using almost no effort to maintain position. He had good cover close by – a flick of his tail and he would be off into the deep water to his right. He was also under an overhanging tree so is hidden in the shade, even though this doesn't show in the film. He has an ideal spot on an outside bend on Thoms Lane, and there are always fish on the banks there. Mind you, there are days when you go there and the level is right and the temperatures are good, but you don't find anything. Well, that's the Goulburn. But nine times out of ten you will encounter enough fish to get at least a couple to the net.



*A fine rainbow from one of the lakes*

Probably the hardest thing in fishing the Goulburn is working out where the fish will be when the levels change. Part of our job as guides is knowing where to find fish at all the different river levels. When this video was taken the level was about 4,000 ML/day, but if the river came up a thousand or dropped a thousand then that fish wouldn't be there - the edge would be dry or there would be too much current flowing through.

**Antony:**

This video we are putting up now shows an ant feeder filmed from a high bank, again at Thoms Lane. This fish was in a very slow pocket of water and was not having to work at all. And before you go rushing off to have a crack at Thoms Lane, this is just one of many places where fish like this will be found. The reason why we get lots of video of fish there is because of the easy access - we don't have to traipse long distances carrying piles of camera gear.

One of the things that happens in springtime is that we get humid days that

produce phenomenal ant falls. The fish in the video was eating tiny carpenter ants, and this was at about 10 o'clock in the morning.

It is perplexing to hear people say how difficult the Goulburn is to fish, because we find this sort of thing almost on a daily basis. I take hundreds of photos a week because there are so many fish about, and it's in these sorts of places where we find them. You are not going to find fish out in the heavy runs and the deeper water, because they won't waste energy coming up to eat something small off the surface. So it's the bigger fish that dominate these edge positions.

You can see in the video that there is a real soup in the water coming down, but this particular fish was being very selective. Quite a few caddis and beetles were drifting past, but these were ignored. He was locked into those little ants, and we're talking here about size 22s. There were probably a dozen fish feeding like this on that day, but he was the easiest to photograph.

>>>

On spring days in November there are all sorts of things happening. There are tiny caenids on the water from first light through to about 8 or 9 am. These are size 22 or 24 “no see-ums”. The hatches can go through from dawn until mid-morning. We also have dun emergences just before first light. They come out and turn into the spinner almost immediately, then mate and die. It’s a very quick process.

We learned some tricks about fishing this hatch from our American friends who have a very similar hatch they call Tricos. At the end of the hatch when the dry fly action appears to be finished the fish are still eating, so we tie the same fly on but with a tiny bead head. The fly sinks just below the surface and then we get another hour or so of fishing with the trout mopping up in the current reverses. To the untrained eye they appear to be eating nymphs, but they are actually eating those sunken almost indiscernible ‘Tricos’.

**Werner:**

September is a bit of a dead month. We see a lot of visitors in September, and again in May, but for me personally these are the worst times of the year to fish the Goulburn. The river is low and we have our hardest fishing. The bigger fish tend to disappear (we suspect they are feeding more at night), so we see a lot of little fish around. People fish the Goulburn in these months because the river is low and easy to wade. But once the river comes up and starts to cover the gravel bars and push over into backwaters that’s the sort of conditions that we like. It puts the bigger fish within reach.

So if you’re wondering when it’s best to come, the start of October is always good. Our serious hatches start at the end of September, and by early October they are going in earnest, with multiple species of mayfly, heaps of caddis, and small stone



*Drift boat fishing the Goulburn River*

flies too. As October rolls into November we start to see an emergence of terrestrials, and all those little ants begin to appear. Probably the best fishing occurs in December and January when the cicadas are on.

This year was a particularly good year for cicadas, and we had serious numbers of fish eating cicadas - those big ones with a red eye. I started fishing smaller patterns and was getting fish, but then we had days when fish were coming up and just bumping the fly with their snouts. We blamed our clients for missing fish, but after a couple of days it became obvious that the fish were actually giving the cicadas a bit of a push to test and see what was going on.

But it didn’t take too long before they started eating those big cicadas. We had clients who wanted to argue over the species and life-cycles of the cicadas there, but I can assure you the fish didn’t care at all how long they took to pupate. They just knew they were getting a



*A big brown prowling the feeding lane*

decent mouthful. So we fished big flies, sometimes large American stone fly patterns, because we needed to give them something similar to the real deal.

**Antony:**

In terms of lines and leaders we assume that you can cast reasonably well and that the fish will see the fly before it sees the leader, so we aren't too shy and use fairly strong leaders. For general fishing we normally fish something small in sizes 16 or 18, such as a Parachute Adams or an ant pattern, or perhaps a Bushy's Emerger.

When people get into my boat they see that the rods I have rigged up are running 10 to 15 lb tippet. In fishing from the boat we're coming at the fish front on, so mostly the fish will see the fly before they see the leader.

And if you knew how long it takes me to tie those big rubber-legged flies you wouldn't fish light tippet either, because too many of the clients put them up in trees. With 15 lb tippet you can usually get them back. Werner uses tippets a little

bit lighter when he is fishing the edges. But even when he is fishing backwaters he rarely goes lighter than 8 lb tippet. He prefers 10 lb, but when he is fishing with willow grub patterns tied on a #16 hook, 8 lb leader is the largest he can get through the eye. There are some big fish in the Goulburn, and if you do hook a 6 or 7 pounder (and they are there) you don't really want him running up the river with some 7X tippet in his mouth.

But there is a time and a place for everything. Sometimes in the early spring or autumn when we're fishing to fish that are eating hatching bugs on the surface we do in fact scale right back to 6X tippets that are degreased and attached to 15 foot leaders. Then it comes down to casting ability. If you can cast well and present well the length of your leader is not that important. If you can get the fly to the fish without him seeing the leader then that's half the battle. If you can also get it to arrive in front of him floating naturally, then that's pretty much the rest of it. Fly selection is up there, but it's not as important, >>>



*Another magnificent photo taken by Antony Boliancu*

provided your flies are reasonably close to the right size.

**Werner:**

In watching the video of that fish rising to ants it was obvious he was making hardly any disturbance on the surface. Many anglers would possibly not even see the tiny ripple, or if they did they might assume that it was being made by a small fish. But the rise does not indicate the size of the fish.

Down at the Breakaway last spring the fishing was unbelievable from October through to Christmas. Over winter the river didn't rise at all because we had a very wet winter that didn't really end until October. The river was low and discoloured, particularly below where the Rubicon ran in. But once it cleared up we encountered these overlapping hatches.

I got to the Breakaway one morning and the main drift line under the bridge was thick with caenids on the surface for about 50 metres downstream. But there were only half a dozen small fish whacking the caenids because there was

an overlapping caddis hatch happening as well, and a couple of bigger fish were sitting inside the weed bed. You could see their mouths opening as they were feeding. Then when I went further downstream I came across a dun hatch and an ant fall. At one point there were 15 to 20 fish feeding within a 30 yards of each other, and they were eating four or five different things selectively.

I now carry a small pair of fly tying scissors in my vest. I found some fish down there eating carpenter ants, but I didn't have anything small enough to match the hatch. The ant patterns that I had were too big. But I found a caenid pattern in my fly box, so cut off the tail and a bit of the wing, and that was enough to do the trick.

If you carry a black Texta pen and a pair of scissors in your vest you can change any fly into something else. We ran out of cicada patterns over the summer as we'd sold 30 dozen in two weeks. Now it takes me 10 minutes to knock up a cicada pattern with the wing and all the other bits, so I bought a couple of black marker

pens and all of a sudden Geoff Hall's famous Nobby X grasshopper patterns were being redecorated with black Texta. And they worked well as a cicada pattern.

This is an idea that we got from America, where guides there were tying everything in white materials and carrying a box of permanent marker pens. Then they'd match the hatch on the river by colouring their white patterns the appropriate colour. This way you don't have to buy 47 different expensive hackles.

I love the Breakaway because I live close to it and I fish the river there a lot. There are a lot of fish in the river near the caravan park and it gets flogged. But 99% of anglers fishing this area apparently don't know that these fish are there, as indicated by their approach. They move too quickly and they cast too far. When you are on the Goulburn belting out big casts on a flat glide your line landing on the water is spooking fish.

Fishing a shorter line accurately, getting up closer to the fish, and reading the current seams is better. Perhaps a fish will come up and have a look at your Stimulator but not take it. Well at least you now know that he is there, because you could see him with your polaroids as he was 20 foot from you and not 50 foot away.

Have you ever stood watching a hatch but didn't know what fly to use because a fish was rising up ahead and you couldn't see what he was eating? The answer is usually at your feet. The flies up ahead where the fish is rising are very likely to be the same flies floating at your feet. Observation is king, and you'll miss a lot if you move too quickly.

When you are walking along an edge and find a fish that looks hard to hook and land, then if you watch for long enough you will probably work out a strategy to get it out. You might only land three of ten fish that you see, >>> but the seven that break you off or



*A nice brown bringing a smile*



*The red spots make this a handsome fish*

get spooked will entertain you for the rest of the day.

If you spend an hour stalking a 4 lb fish and you finally hook him and then he busts you off, that's still a great day. I've had clients polaroid a fish for an hour and they hooked it and then lost it, and they were not disappointed. They often say that it was better than the best hour of television they had ever seen.

When I come to a backwater I look for certain things. I like it to be snaggy and in among the willows, and to have some flow coming in and going out, and deep edges and an escape route back to deeper water. I especially like to see a build-up of debris in the corner, because if there is debris then there will be food in there too.

In the summertime from November through to January there are all those terrestrials that come into play. We'll have cicadas and grasshoppers and willow grubs - this plethora of protein along the edges and fish of course are taking advantage of it.

I am one of those anglers who enjoys the really high levels we get on the Goulburn

that are quite intimidating. People see those flows of 6,000 to 7,000 ML/day coming down and they are terrified. But I love it. At these levels there is less room for fish to hide. At 3,000 they've got gravel bars and weed beds, and they can spread themselves right through the river. But when it gets up to 6,000 and 7,000 the currents out in the middle are really dramatic, so the fish push back into the edges because it is easier for them there and that's where the food is.

When you find fish you will learn just how territorial they are. You'll find three or four larger fish trying to push back into an edge, but they won't eat your fly because they are too busy worrying about the other fish biting their tail. They will eventually settle down if there is enough food there. When the willow grubs are on you can have backwaters with four or five fish working it, and they are all happy there because they are all getting a feed. But when the food starts to taper that's when the trouble starts.

Once the river stabilises at these high levels you might come up for a weekend and find a big fish but for whatever

reason you don't get him. However, provided the river stays at that level, you can come back the next weekend and he will still be there because they are so territorial.

And that's the problem with the rise and fall of the Goulburn. It's not that the insects stop hatching or that the food disappears, but rather the fish worry more about each other than about feeding. If a carp works up through a backwater or an edge that has a couple of feeding trout the carp can swim through the middle of them and they won't even acknowledge his presence. But if another brown comes in, then it's on. You'll have two or three fish chasing each other. They will all disappear down the river and only one will come back. Then perhaps another fish might come back and they will tolerate each other once they establish a pecking order.

When the level is really low, say 130 ML/day, you may spot a fish feeding in a pool but you can't wade out to get close because your wading sends pressure waves that wobble his window above him and this makes him nervous. Then if you make a long cast and get a fly over him he is going to have a very close look at your fly before he considers taking it. So everything has to be perfect. And if there is a nice run that you could fish at this level there will already be 40 cars at Gilmore's Bridge and 100 other anglers queuing up to fish that piece of water.

Last spring we were averaging a fish every 25 minutes of fishing, which is unheard of. According to Fisheries we're supposed to get one fish for every hour of angling time, but we hadn't been able to achieve that in the past three or four seasons. But this year it was wonderful. And it didn't matter how you fished because you could go to a little backwater up around Leaks Lagoon and find three

fish working it eating spent ants, and 150 metres down the river you could fish 40 metres of a gravel bar with a Stimulator and a nymph and also get three or four fish.

But you must be prepared to treat every bit of water on its merits. A lot of guys who fish the Goulburn just want to fish it the same way every time. They want to use a 9 foot leader with a Royal Wulff attached to the end, they want to unload 20 metre casts, and they want to do this all day. But you can't fish any river like that. If it means cutting bits out of your leader to fish a backwater, then later re-tying it to make it 12 foot long, well so be it. You have to assess each bit of water and then decide the best strategy, and explore and experiment a bit.

In regard to levels, you all know that there is a phone number that you can ring to find the level of the river before you leave home. However you can go to bed with the Goulburn running at 7,000 ML/day and find when you get up in the morning that it is now 5,000 ML/day. So phone calls must be seen as a rough guide – levels can change at any time without any warning.

Water temperatures vary down the river too. In spring the water coming out of the Pondage is 12°C, but then it gets mixed with water running in downstream from the Rubicon which is at 7°C. In summer the Acheron River further down is perhaps running in at 23°C. We have discovered that at certain times of the year fishing above the Rubicon confluence can be a lot more productive than fishing below it.

All this affects the fishing at different points along the river. I know, for example, that the Breakaway takes a month to come online after the fishing upstream at Thornton has already started to fire, because the Rubicon water >>>



*This one, like nearly all the fish caught by clients, is being released*

running in can be really cold until well into November. This, of course, affects hatches below where the Rubicon runs in. If the flow in the Goulburn is low, say 1,000 ML/day, then the inflow from the Rubicon can have a significant effect. If the Rubicon is flowing strongly and is very cold it might lower the Goulburn water temperature by one or two degrees. This doesn't sound much but it has a huge affect because water temperatures effect the hatches.

An obvious question is what affect do these sudden changes in level have on the fish and their feeding. I have been fishing a backwater on the Goulburn when it's at 3,000 ML/day and suddenly saw that the grass on the edge of the river had bubbles all over it. Then I looked out into the main channel and saw debris floating down. That's the river coming up. You'll ring the hotline and, yes, it's rising to 5,000. And fish will immediately start moving into the backwater as the level is rising. So it can be really good. But at other times it causes discolouration of the water, especially at the start of the season, and it might take a couple of days to clear.

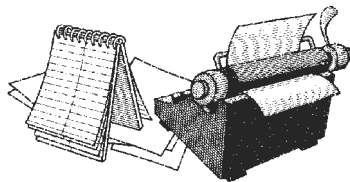
On occasions like this I might decide to go downstream and fish the Breakaway, because the changes might not reach the Breakaway until 8 o'clock that night. You might get a day's fishing before the river there is impacted by the rise or fall.

This year we've had one of the best seasons we've ever had on the Goulburn. But we had an occasion when the river came up to 7,000, and I'm normally happy when this happens because it gives me a world of backwaters to explore. However, when it happened this year I couldn't find a fish. The 20 or 30 fish that I had pegged and was on a first name basis with had all disappeared. And they didn't come back.

The fish just simply disappeared for two weeks, and the guides running the boats had the same experience. So we have bad days too. There was a day when Antony got 23 fish and Bo got 17, and on the next day we drifted down in the boat from the Pondage for several kilometres of river, and didn't see a single fish. So the mighty Goulburn can humble you at times.



# From the EDITOR'S DESK



*"Anything that can go wrong, will go wrong."  
(Murphy's infamous Law)*

*"While Murphy's law says that anything that can go wrong will go wrong (eventually), it will always go wrong at the worst possible time with the worst possible outcome."  
(Sod's addendum to Murphy's Law)*

Fly fishing is a complicated business, and thus there are always ample opportunities for Murphy to rise to the occasion. Without wanting to tarnish this month's issue with too much that is negative, I thought I might outline a couple of examples, just by way of warning.

Last month's newsletter carried a report on the Big River weekend, and it included details of the misfortune that popular member Bruce Houghton encountered. He fell in the river, broke his rod, and was then bitten by a bee. These things can happen to any of us.

A few weeks ago I was re-reading the VFFA's *"Geehi to Great Lake"*, and came across John Philbrick's grim account of his boating experiences. With John's kind permission we've reprinted it in this issue. There are salutary lessons there for us all.

My most recent encounter with Murphy occurred a few weeks ago when I visited Cogley Lake at Rowville for a bit of casting practice. I happen to own one of those reels that has interchangeable plastic spools, and was fiddling around at the back of my car trying to swap spools and install a fancy Skagit line for a bit of Spey casting practice. But the spool slipped out of my hand, landed upright on the road, accelerated rapidly downhill and

disappeared down the opening of a storm water drain. It was gone. I couldn't believe it! I was stunned. Disaster!

I found a small torch in the car, and on lying in the gutter managed to spot the spool down at the back of the pit. So I pulled out the tip of a rod I had with me and tried to spear it. No luck – it fell off the tip and slid further down into the mire.

I drove home, totally disconsolate, pondering my next move. My dear wife was much more positive, and confident we could recover the lost spool. So we returned to the scene of the calamity equipped with a shovel, a stronger torch, some pieces of broom handle including one with a metal hook on the end, and a very heavy and rusty old crowbar that my wife inherited from her handyman father many decades ago.

When we arrived back at the storm water drain I found that the spool was no longer visible. It had somehow disappeared deeper into the detritus. Perhaps we could lift the very heavy one metre square cover over the pit, though I'd dismissed this option earlier because it was a very tight fit, overgrown with weeds, and had obviously not been opened in a long time. I retrieved the crowbar and after poking around tentatively found a tiny corner of the cover that responded to a bit of leverage. It rose half an inch. With lots more pushing and grunting and liberal spousal advice, it rose another inch. A man walking past offered to help and vigorously levered the other side of the cover with one of the broom handles. Our combined efforts finally raised the edge

enough for us to get fingers under and pull the cover open. My wife then leapt forward, fossicked around in the muck using the broom handle with the hook, discovered the missing spool, and hooked it out. Much cheering and high fives all round. We lowered the lid back; the rescued spool now laying in the gutter.

But the drama wasn't over. At this point a woman walking by with a dog rushed over to see what all the fuss was about. The dog spotted the spool, was clearly intrigued as he probably hadn't encountered too many Skagit lines previously, so put his snout down for a vigorous sniff. This propelled the spool rapidly back towards the storm water opening. I shrieked and the dog's owner, suddenly appreciating the impending disaster, stepped forward and planted her big heavy dog-walking boot firmly on the plastic spool to prevent any further movement. I was now starting to feel the onset of chest pains, but my dear spouse quickly reached down, lifted the boot, grabbed the spool and tossed it into the back of the car. Safe at last! Home for a coffee. And despite the heavy boot the spool wasn't damaged, and after a soak in some warm water both spool and line were as good as new.

But Murphy stories abound in fly fishing. Hubert Reichelt told me years ago about an evening when he fished the evening rise on the Acheron. When he finally packed up and commenced the trek back to his car it was quite dark. Along the way he stumbled into a swampy backwater that existed then, and was suddenly floundering around up to his neck in fetid water. He eventually extricated himself, recovered most of his dropped gear, and squelched back to his car where he stripped down to his underpants, cleaned off as much mud and slime as he could with his singlet, then hopped in the car, cranked up the heater, and headed for home.

When he finally arrived home his wife, alarmed at the hour, came rushing out to see why he was so late. "Hubert, where have you been?" she asked. Hubert leapt out of the car in his underpants and stormed past, muttering: "Don't ask woman! Just don't ask!"

But the misfortune that represents my most memorable Murphy moment occurred in the late 1970s when I was living in Warrnambool. Four of us had driven over to the Moyne River near Port Fairy to have a fish. We were spread out along the river when Neil Martin up ahead shouted that he had just spotted a sizeable fish cruising a pool. We all hurried to get there to see the fish and witness the action. I scrambled over an intervening barbed wire fence, caught my toe on the top strand, and fell headfirst into a concrete culvert. I saved my rod, but dislocated my left elbow. It was incredibly painful and looked horrid.

Jim Blakeslee walked me gingerly back to my car and drove me to the Warrnambool Base hospital. I was quickly admitted and then a pretty young nurse took me into a room and explained that I was heading off to an operating theatre to have my elbow repaired. But first, she said, she had to remove all of my clothing and dress me in a very flimsy hospital gown. Now I had some difficulty with this because I knew the young nurse well. She had been a student in one of my senior classes at the local high school the year before. Not sure how others would cope, but I was mortified and embarrassed beyond description. And to add to my problems, it was some weeks before I could cast properly again.

Dear friends - beware. Fly fishing is indeed a complicated business, and opportunities abound for Murphy to materialise. So take care.

*Tight lines, Lyndon*

# VFFA CANE DAY IS BACK



**Please note: Change of Date**



The day when no cane rod should be left at home alone  
Bring your dear old friend and admire someone else's

This is a wonderful opportunity to catch up with friends and enjoy a pleasant Sunday morning  
in the park.

Come and talk to some of Australia's Best Cane Rod Builders

A very special Hugh Maltby inspired Barbeque lunch provided  
BYO lunatic soup

Please come along and support the VFFA

**SUNDAY 2<sup>nd</sup> JULY 2017**

RED TAG POOL  
FAIRFIELD PARK

Be there 9am till 1pm.

For further details contact: David Grisold 0419558462

## Bairnsdale Celebrates 50<sup>th</sup> Anniversary and We Win The Donger

It was a weekend to savour and remember. Firstly, celebrations to mark the 50th anniversary of the Bairnsdale Fly Fishing Club, and then a momentous win for the VFFA in the annual Dudley Lee Donger fishing competition.

The party began with a dinner in Bairnsdale, complete with band and entertainment, which was also attended by nine VFFA members. During the dinner, VFFA President Mike Jarvis presented a fine, framed painting to BFFC President Trevor Stow to commemorate the anniversary. The painting, a watercolour commissioned by the VFFA, was by artist, journalist and VFFA member Trevor Hawkins. It depicts the two lodges the BFFC have had on the banks of the Mitta Mitta River near Omeo set in local scenery and featuring the fish and insects of the area and the flies most often used to fool the trout.

Mike also proposed a toast to the BFFC, making reference to the many people from both organisations who had contributed to the establishment and successful development of the Bairnsdale club.

“A lot of water has passed under the Hinnamungie Bridge since 1967 and the founding BFFC has survived and prospered. What you have managed to achieve with relatively few members, makes Bairnsdale the envy of many other fly fishing organisations,” he said.

The action then moved to the Mitta Lodge where an additional six VFFA members joined the original group to take part in the annual Donger competition on Saturday and Sunday. There were plenty of fish around in the



*Two clubs; one mission*

Mitta and its tributaries providing good sport for the 30-or-so anglers from the two teams.

Mike Jarvis managed to snare a nice 1 lb 10oz brown in the Victoria River on the Saturday afternoon, and despite the BFFC's best efforts, it remained the heaviest fish of the weekend and took out the Donger trophy for the VFFA for the first time in ten years, and only the tenth time in the long history of the competition.

Commenting on the win, Mike paid tribute to the team effort of the VFFA. “Having a group of 15 members making the trip to Omeo is a great effort that demonstrates our commitment to Bairnsdale and provides terrific support. In addition, the winning fish was caught on John Pilkington's Cinnamon Parachute Dun which was Fly of the



*Members of the VFFA and the Bairnsdale Fly Fishing Club at the Mitta lodge*

Month in the March issue of *Fly Lines*.  
Nice fly, thanks Pilks," he said.

The Donger presentation was followed by a tree planting ceremony to mark the 50<sup>th</sup> anniversary by Beryl Lee and Pat Fisher, whose late husbands were part of the founding group of the BFFC.

All in all a great weekend. Wonderful hospitality and friendship on the part of the Bairnsdale club, great celebrations of an historic event, some good fishing and an historic victory for the VFFA.

Long may it continue.



*Beryl Lee and Pat Fisher planting a tree to mark the Bairnsdale club's 50th anniversary*

# Tasmania's Gourmet Trout Foods

... by Greg French

This is the text of a talk given by Greg French at the Melbourne Flyfisher store some weeks ago. It is used with the permission.

In *The Last Wild Trout*, I picked what I believe to be the world's twenty best trout fishing destinations, and Tasmania made the list. It would still have made the list if I had to narrow the choices down to six. Honestly, the quality of the fishing in Tasmania is equal to that in New Zealand, Mongolia, Yellowstone and Iceland. Yet Victorian fly fishers often confide that their fishing holiday in Tasmania was harder than they hoped or expected.

Over the last few years I have done a fair bit of guiding, and I have come to see firsthand why so many people struggle. The good news is that the common problems I see are very easily overcome. All you need to do is:

- Understand sight fishing
- Choose a venue appropriate to the prevailing weather conditions
- Cast in front of the fish

Everything else is secondary. Though it's worth mentioning that in Tasmania very successful anglers always concentrate on looking for fish, cover lots of water, maintain a sense of urgency and use well-tied functional flies

By the way, poor casting is by far the single biggest problem I see. There is no excuse for this. Anyone can learn cast well, and if you understand the mechanics of the cast and are prepared to do a bit of practice you can learn to do it very quickly. By no means do you have to be tournament caster - all you need to be able to do is present a fly directly in front of a sighted fish on the first cast.

**Seek tuition!** Practice dinner-plate



*Greg French at the Melbourne Flyfisher store*

accuracy over distances 2 to 12 metres. Long casts are rarely needed, or even desirable. **Good casting is easy.** Hell, even a klutz like me can learn to do it.]

The main point of this talk, however, is about the other two main ingredients to success: understanding sight fishing and choosing an appropriate venue.

## Why sight fish?

People fly fish for different reasons.

- Many cite the history and romance of the sport;
- Others enjoy the poetry and physical feel of casting;
- Some insist that it's all about tying flies, especially ones that 'match the hatch';
- A few confess to being fascinated with the gear: precision rods, lines and reels – even accessories like waders and boots, tippets and floatants;

- There are specialists too: people interested only in casting dry flies, or chasing big fish, or fishing streams, or even fishing 'blind' (that is, not spotting fish before casting);
- And there are some who are very competitive and care only about catching more fish than everyone else.

Some blind fishing methods (such as Czech nymphing) can be extraordinarily effective and are commonly used in competition angling. Nonetheless, when selecting the world's best fly fishing destinations for *The Last Wild Trout*, my choices were heavily weighted towards places that offered opportunities for sight fishing. (If you want to know why, read the book.)

So, tonight I'm talking about what Tasmanian trout foods offer the most spectacular and reliable opportunities for the trout hunter.

First, though, the question I'm most often asked is, "*What time of day is best?*"

My usual approach to the day goes something like this:

**First light to sun up** – A great time to fish if the morning is calm and I want to chase tailers or bait feeders.

**Sunup to say 9:00 am** – This period can be relatively uninspiring, so I usually take the opportunity to have breakfast.

**10:00 am to 5:00 pm** – This the very best time of day for polaroiding (and for many hatches), and invariably it is when I most want to be on the water.

**5:00 pm to an hour before dusk** – This is usually a period of relatively slow activity, so I often take the time to eat the lunch I didn't have at midday.

**An hour before dusk to just after dark** – If the weather is calm and warm there can be a good evening rise, and the fish will often be bold, so I'll stay out late.

### **Polaroiding**

Tasmanian waters are generally clear and cool. This means that you can always see feeding trout in shallow water, even in the heat of summer. If the fish aren't tailing, rising or charging, you can still see them even if it is cloudy and windy. Always wear effective polaroids, and get into the habit of always looking for trout.

Remember, the best polaroiding is always from 10:00 am to 5:00 pm. If I had to choose between fishing in the morning, the middle of the day or in the late evening, I'd always choose the middle of the day. This applies all over the world, even when local lore suggests otherwise. Sure the evening hatch can be easy, but once you get the hang of what day time fishing is all about, you'll understand why I feel the way I do.

### **Now, the Gourmet Foods:**

#### **Whitebait**

Imagine: the water surface dimples, and then there's an eruption of frightened baitfish, which fall back to the surface only to be lost amongst big swirls of one or more predatory sea trout. Or else you notice a bow wave sprinting across the shallows, centimetres deep but adjacent to the main current, with veils of spray streaming from the wake as baitfish flee everywhere. Then again, the trout might adopt an ambush strategy, lying in wait in bankside cavities, then punching out into the current as a cloud of whitebait migrates upstream.

In Tasmania, whitebait run up rivers from the sea from August to late December, though the most reliable time is from mid-October to early December. The fish are small (40–50 mm long) and

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usually transparent, but they cluster in their thousands, often forming dark ribbons along the edges of the current.

I love fishing from white sand beaches, principally on the West Coast (the Henty and Little Henty estuaries), though sometimes I don a pack and walk 25 km along the South Coast Track to the outlet of New River Lagoon.

If you have access to a boat (I use a sea kayak) I can also recommend the Huon River in vicinity of Huon Bridge, and the Lune River downstream of the road bridge that crosses the head of the estuary. Then there's the freshwater reaches of the Mersey River (from Latrobe all the way through to Kimberly) where you'll see savage trout in the riffles and cruising in the shadows of overhanging willows.

The best fly? A Sloane-style whitebait pattern tied from natural seal's fur.

### **Scud and Snails**

Classic tailers feed in weedy shallows, standing on their noses with nothing but their tails waving clear of the water surface. Invariably, they are feeding on scud and snails, and invariably they are hard to fool. Hence the ongoing fascination.

The most famous destination is Little Pine Lagoon in the highland moors. Here, action can occur anytime during the season but is most reliable from early October to late December. It pays to be on the lakeshore before first light because the fishing stops when the first rays of direct sunlight hit the water. Calm mornings are divine, but trout often tail in very rough conditions.

Other waters can fish well throughout the season at any time of day. The Pump Pond is ever reliable, but the shallower parts of the Western Lakes offer much bigger fish.

All sorts of flies can work. I like to splash down small, heavy-bodied dry flies. Others use lightly weighted nymphs and snails. The only thing for certain is that a fly that works well one day is bound to fail next time around.

### **Frogs**

The best habitats are sheltered marshes. The trout cruise slowly, usually with both the tail and dorsal clear of the water, and often half the back as well. When there's lots of food about, fish will sprint two metres or more to savagely intercept a fly. Only grasshopper feeders are easier to catch.

The most reliable time is from mid-October to early December. Prerequisites for red-letter action are high water and overcast conditions. Warm rain is best of all.

The tussock marshes at Bronte Lagoon are renowned, but my personal favourite waters include Gunns Lake (and neighbouring Little Lake), Talbots Lagoon, Bruisers Lagoon, the Nineteen Lagoons and the Chudleigh Lakes.

Flies need to make a splash and wake, and be snag resistant. Sloane-style rabbit fur patterns are superb, though I often prefer to tickle and dabble a dry fly across the surface. Really, you can't beat a big Black Cricket.

### **Earthworms**

After heavy rain, when the meadow streams break out into the paddocks or highland lakes back up into grassy bays, the trout move into the shallows, often instantly. The first things they start eating are spiders, which they sip from the surface, but such action is relatively short lived. More durable are drowned earthworms, which have a half-life to rival uranium.

In very shallow water, wormers can be seen mooching about with their dorsals



*'It was this big' – and Greg doesn't need to stretch the story*

and tails clear of water. Sometimes, though, the best habitat is knee-deep and you need to polaroid the quarry, which is a lot of fun in bright weather.

Lakes in particular can stay high for weeks at a time, and long-drowned worms disintegrate on contact, so trout are forced to inhale them. Inert presentation can be paramount; otherwise you'll find yourself unwittingly pulling the fly from the fish's mouth.

In Tassie the most reliable rains occur in September, October and November.

The best rivers include the lowland sections of the Meander, Macquarie, Mersey, Leven and South Esk rivers. The most reliable lakes are ones which rise quickly over long-exposed ground. Echo works well any wet spring, Great Lake only after a succession of flood years.

My go-to fly is Daniel Hackett's Earthworm, as described on his *Fly Cards*.

### **Chironomids**

Tasmanian chironomids (midges) are real buggers. They don't ball up like those on, say, Lake Eucumbene, and they are much, much smaller than the dominant varieties on most New Zealand lakes, and this means that imitation is just about impossible. Trout sip them down cruising quickly, often porpoising rhythmically with the rises just a metre (or less) apart. Accuracy is paramount, and to complicate matters the fish are often very easily spooked.

Chironomids are usually concentrated in offshore slicks and wind lanes, so most fishing is done from a boat. (Rob Sloane's *The Truth about Trout* is essential reading for this). Cool, calm mornings from early December to late March are most reliable.

The classic destinations are Hydro impoundments like Lake Burbury, Dee Lagoon, Great Lake, Arthurs Lake and Lake Echo, but there can be plenty of action on smaller lakes and tarns.

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As for flies, you'll end up trying everything. Tiny 'imitations' work well at times – both dry adult patterns and wet pupae patterns – but sometimes you are better off trying to induce a savage reflex response with a weighted nymph.

### Large Mayfly Duns

Mayflies are unique in the insect world in having three distinctive stages: juvenile nymphs hatch into adolescent duns, and the duns hatch into adult spinners. In many lakes the nymphs of the predominate mayfly crawl out onto rocks to hatch and the duns largely go unnoticed by trout (see *FlyLife* #84). In other lakes, however, the nymphs ascend through the water column and the duns hatch on the water surface, where they drift aimlessly like little sail boats and are clomped down by showy, noisy rising trout.

The best lakes are shallow and weedy, and the hatches – which occur throughout summer – are one of the most revered events on the fly fishing calendar. Warm, cloudy conditions are best. We anglers prefer calm conditions, mainly because they make the rises so easy to see, but in many lakes the fish feed furiously off the top even when conditions are quite choppy.

The most famous venue is Little Pine Lagoon, but you are likely to find good action on Penstock Lagoon, Bronte Lagoon, Tooms Lake, Arthurs Lake, many of the Western Lakes and the more sheltered bays at Lake Echo.

Any well-tied imitation will do the job nicely.

### Large Mayfly Spinners

Mayfly spinners are eaten by trout when they fly back over the water to mate. Trout prefer to pluck them out of mid-air before they have laid their eggs, and will sometimes leap a metre or more clear of



*Greg in action in the Tasmanian Highland Lakes*

the water. Not only is this activity spectacular, it is common. (Get primed by watching Nick Reysgaert's DVD *Hatch*.)

Black spinner mayflies (see *FlyLife* #84) are reliable on warm, calm days from early December to early March. A clear blue sky is no impediment, so you can often easily polaroid the fish between rises. Riverine varieties are relatively small and prefer rocky or silty substrates. (My favourite locations include the full length of the Mersey River, the mid-reaches of the South Esk River, and the Meander upstream of Deloraine.) In lakes, the main black spinner varieties are quite large. (The most reliable venues include St Clair Lagoon, Gunns Lake, Little Lake and most of the Western Lakes.)

Red spinners are associated with weedy waters, and deserve special mention because they feature so strongly in Tasmanian fly fishing lore, notably in the works of David Scholes. The most famous venues are the sluggish meadow streams of the north and midlands, notably Brumbys Creek, the lower Macquarie River and the lower Meander River. The season here is short: from mid-October to early November, with a brief and

subdued encore in early autumn. And conditions need to be just so: air temperature around 20°C and no breeze. (Red spinners are also found on some lowland lakes, notably Talbots Lagoon.)

Without doubt the best flies are Daniel Hackett's Black Spinner and Red Spinner, as described on his *Fly Cards*.

### **Damselflies**

Trout also leap high out of the water to take damselflies.

Tasmanian damselflies have a strong preference for marshy water. My favourite venues include St Clair Lagoon, Gunns Lake, Little Lake, the Nineteen Lagoons, the Chudleigh Lakes and Brumbys Creek.

The best hatches occur throughout the day from early December to late February, and the best fly is Hackett's foam-bodied Blue Damsel.

### **Caenid Mayfly Duns**

Caenids are tiny, fat-bodied mayflies with opaque wings, and trout adore them, especially the duns. The best action occurs early on calm mornings from late November to Christmas. Once the sun hits the water or the wind gets up, it's finished.

In rivers, the duns typically float down easily recognised bubble lines. Trout mostly sit on station and sip them down one after other as they drift overhead, usually with just the tips of their snouts breaking the surface. My favourite streams are the Mersey River from Latrobe to Liena and the Leven River at Gunns Plains, though Brumbys Creek and lower Meander can also be very good.

In lakes the duns are often scattered all over the place, and although the trout rise regularly their rises can be frustratingly erratic. If you're game, head to Dee

Lagoon or, my favourite, the northern basin of Meadowbank Lake.

Hackett's CDC F-fly, as described on his *Fly Cards*, is good enough.

### **Willow Grubs**

What makes willow-grub feeders so iconic is the degree of difficulty (see *FlyLife* issues #18 and #66). The grubs hatch from galls on willow leaves around Christmas time. They are very small and green, and commonly fall onto the water even when there is not much wind.

In Tasmania, willow-grub feeders are most common on sluggish rivers, like the Coal River downstream of the Craighourne Dam and quieter pools of the lower Mersey. And because the trout have all the time in the world to inspect your offering, they are much harder to catch than the willow-grub feeders I've encountered in New Zealand and Patagonia. Tasmanian trout rarely take up station in 'chow lines', but prefer to cruise back and forth in the shadows of overhanging branches, and the rises are quick and subtle.

Imitation is essential, and you can't beat Stu Tripney's pattern. You also need fine, soft tippet and super-accurate casting. The leader needs to land fairly-soft, but the fly itself needs to plop.

### **Grasshoppers**

The best thing about grasshoppers is that trout feast on them in a frenzy of big, splashy, gulping rises. When it's on, the fishing is easy, with fish willing to move big distances to engulf naturals or imitations. You can use very big flies, and there's no need for subtlety.

The best venues are lowland rivers flanked by pasture: the lower Macquarie, South Esk, Leven and Mersey.

The best time is late summer when green pick is largely confined to the >>>

riverbanks. (Grasshoppers are affected by pesticides, so underdeveloped pasture is always best.)

My go-to fly is Hackett's WHM Hopper.

### **Gum Beetles**

In Tasmania, gum beetles are an iconic trout food (See FlyLife #2). The rises are showy and steady, but you need good imitations for consistent results. Foam-bodied patterns (as described in Tony Sloane's *The Truth About Trout Flies*) are ideal.

Beetles take to the wing when the air is warm, so northerly winds any time from mid-November to early March are best. In truth, trout seem to prefer mayflies and other aquatic insects, so beetles are of most value on deep lakes where they are likely to comprise the bulk of the easily available surface food. (If it wasn't for gum beetles, destinations like Great Lake, Lake Echo and Dee Lagoon would not be quite so revered as they are.)

Beetles commonly get funnelled into wind lanes and slicks, most of which form off shore, so fishing from a properly equipped boat is a real advantage.

For best results, you need to polaroid the fish between rises. Tasmanian lakes are crystal clear but in the deep water off shore, where there is no visible substrate, the fish can be difficult for beginners to see, even when they are cruising mere centimetres below the surface. Read Rob Sloane's *The Truth about Trout* before you hit the water.

### **Dragonfly Larvae (Mudeyes)**

Trout are most likely to rise to take mudeyes from the surface at night. I have been privileged to witness massive hatches following the inundation of Lake Roseberry, Lake Mackintosh, Lake Burbury and Brushy Lagoon, with insects so thick they were constantly crawling

down your neck, up your nose, and in your ears. Inevitably, as the drowned vegetation rotted away, the hatches diminished, but you can still find worthwhile action on these waters, and on others such as Parting Creek Lake and Lake Pedder.

Muggy, calm weather in high summer is best. On such evenings you will often find yourself standing in waist-deep water amongst drowned sticks. At first you rely on spotting rise-forms, but as the light fades to pitch black, you become super-alert to 'clop' sounds. Relying on hearing alone, it's amazing how good you can get at judging 'line and length'.

The best thing is that the fish are keen. Even rough presentations likely to be taken almost immediately, providing the fly makes a silhouette and a wake.

Sloane-style cork flies work a treat.

### **But wait, there's more!**

The events I've just spoken about are only the tip of the iceberg: the ones novices are very likely to witness if they go my recommended destinations at the appropriate time of year. Soon you'll be looking for more unpredictable and challenging foods – ants, lampreys, jassids, crabs, *Paratya* shrimps, tadpoles, daphnia, copepods – all of which make trout behave in wildly different ways.

(At the end of the talk Greg was asked and responded at length to a number of questions. As an example, Andrew Fuller asked which month was the best month to fish Tasmania. Greg suggested that his personal favourite month was November, because as he lived in Tassie and could choose his days. But the Tasmanian weather in November can be very wild and unpredictable, so for tourist anglers the best month for both good fishing and more settled weather is February.)



# The Joys of Boating

... John Philbrick, aka 'Phil from Blessington' August 2003

Over the past decade or two it has become fashionable to fly fish the lakes of the Central Plateau of Tasmania from a boat. Indeed, last summer every second vehicle on the Lake Highway seemed to be a Toyota Landcruiser towing a gleaming Quintrex boat. Boat owners could usually be identified by their pastel-shaded Columbia shirts.

I have previously described in this newsletter the fascinating herding behaviour of these anglers. Rather than seeking peace and seclusion, they seem to feel uncomfortable if they are not fishing in close proximity to at least several other boats. This herding instinct was particularly noticeable last summer at Little Pine Lagoon on the first grey, drizzly day, following a hot bright spell, when invariably thirty or more boats would be found on this water.

But I cannot be too critical, as over the past few years the tales of fly fishers from boats taking huge bags of trout from boats at Arthur's Lake and other waters gradually weakened my resolve to remain a river fisherman. Finally I succumbed and joined the hordes and bought everything but the Columbia shirt. I was assured that the whole system, boat, motor and trailer was absolutely foolproof. So, this was going to be it — the trout and other sundry fish species were not going to stand any chance. This is the story of how it did not quite work out that way.

It was with great pride that I headed out into Port Phillip Bay from the Altona boat ramp with a couple of friends on the solo voyage in my new boat. All went well until the late afternoon; we even caught a few flathead. The moment of truth came when I turned the key to restart the motor

to move to a new spot and nothing happened. After an hour of tinkering with the motor and a lot of cursing we were no further advanced. Strangely, despite there being a lot of other boats in the vicinity, none of their owners seemed to see our attempts to draw their attention to our plight. This was a phenomenon I was to notice on each future occasion the motor failed. Eventually, after much futile paddling, a benevolent surf skier came to our aid and I suffered the humiliation of having my boat slowly towed by the surf ski back to the boat ramp which I had so proudly left a few hours previously.

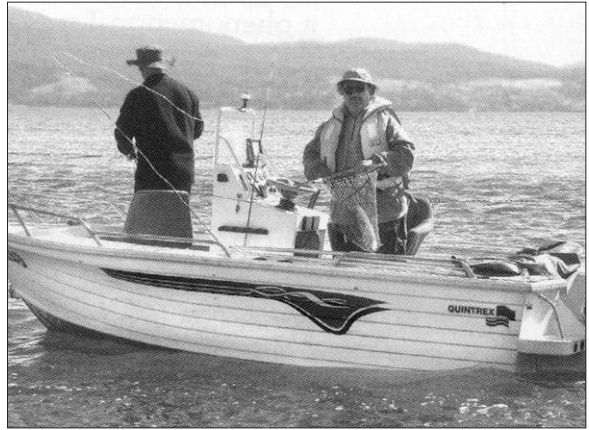
There followed three separate visits to two different boat repairers before the fault was found — an indescribably minute fuse concealed in a jumble of wires in the innards of the motor. I was assured that the motor was in perfect order and that I would have no further problems.

Reassured by this advice I headed to Cairn Curran Reservoir on a cold windy winter's day. The motor purred as we powered from the boat ramp at Picnic Point to Treloar's Bay where we fished for a while and then ate lunch. After lunch we completed a drift across the bay but again, try as I might, the motor would not start. Luckily there were two fly fishers in the only other boat in the bay and this time we were able to attract their attention and ask them for help. I suspect that the only reason they heeded our cries for help was to show us the two beautiful trout that they had caught. They certainly were not interested in helping us get back to the boat ramp. When we asked for help we were told in forthright terms that "We're fishing till dark. Can't you make a call on your mobile?" as they motored away. As our mobile phone was out of range >>>

this advice was decidedly unhelpful. We cursed our luck at the wind blew the boat aground in the muddy shallows.

In that bleak position we stayed for well over an hour as we vainly tried to start the motor. Meanwhile our fly fishing friends in the boat drifted here and there about the bay doing exactly what they said they would do, "fishing till dark", seemingly oblivious to our plight. We had been unlucky enough to strike a couple of new breed of fly fishers with a take-no-prisoners philosophy. However, luck was with us as darkness started to fall when on the hundredth attempt, the motor spluttered into life and we managed after a great deal of effort and churning of mud to grind our way out of the flats and into the main lake.

So it was back with the boat from Woodend to the repairer at Preston. This time I was told the problem was definitely fixed. Fortified by this advice I took the boat to Womboyn Inlet in New South Wales in pursuit of the elusive bream. All went well till the last day when a bare kilometre from the jetty the motor failed. Three hours later I was still trying to paddle against the wind back to the jetty. I had plenty of time to ponder the sage words of Dr Johnson, 'Being in a boat is like being in prison with a chance of drowning'. Whilst drifting in the boat I observed the same phenomenon that I had seen on Port Phillip Bay when I had tried to get help from nearby boats. For some reason, no matter how loudly I shouted and how frantically I waved, the occupants did not seem to notice my attempts to attract their attention. Finally, a charitable soul did tow the boat the 600 metres to the jetty and I was able to escape with the boat back to Victoria.



*John Philbrick standing proudly in his boat*

Again, I headed down the well-worn path from Woodend to Preston. This time I was assured that the agent of the manufacturer had inspected the motor and he had said that the problem was definitely fixed. So there I was back at Cairn Curran Reservoir. This time the motor would not start after the first drift. There was no boat to tow us back this time and my hapless companion and myself had to take it in turns of trudging through the mud pulling a rope towing the boat along a kilometre of shore to the ramp. And of course the next week there I was towing the boat back from Woodend yet again to Preston.

The next trip was to fish the mayfly hatch at Lake Wendouree. The day was perfect. Grey, humid and drizzly. This was definitely going to be it. I could possibly not miss out on a day like this. I can now assure any boat owner wanting to fish Lake Wendouree in spring that they should check to make sure that they do not attempt to do so during the Ballarat Begonia Festival. After spending the better part of an hour battling through the crowds I found that boat access was barred.

After these protracted 'teething' problems I took the boat on the ferry to Tasmania.

The motor was finally fixed and I was looking forward to foolproof boating. I was to learn that there is no such thing. It is difficult to know where to start when cataloguing the series of disasters and near calamities which befell me over the next month. The low point was definitely at the aptly named Jonah Bay boat ramp at Arthur's Lake. I had, I must confess had a great deal of difficulty reversing the boat. With the patient assistance of a very stoic Rick Keam I had finally, after a great deal of difficulty, managed to reverse the boat down into position to be launched at the ramp. And I remembered (for once) to undo all the clamps and straps and other bits and pieces so that the boat was ready to launch. But then I saw that one wheel of the trailer was off the concrete and decided to move forward and properly align the trailer. As I drove forward I heard a scream from Rick's direction, stopped and got out of the vehicle to investigate only find to my horror that the boat had dropped off the trailer and smashed on to the concrete ramp. Amazingly, beside a small dent on the bottom it was not damaged and with the assistance of some bystanders we finally managed to launch the boat. This was the major of many reversing mishaps.

Over the course of the next month I had many other minor disasters and managed to break or rattle off all tail, stop lights, and indicators and broke off the rear number plate off the trailer and lose the straps, hit numerous rocks and stumps, smashed the navigation light on an

overhanging branch and did a bearing on the trailer wheel. I dare not think of the money that I have spent on this boat over the past year. Yes, I did catch fish but I doubt if I landed any more than would have fallen to my rod had I fished from the shore. And so it was that I came to realise the truth of the adage, 'The best two days with a boat are the day that you buy it and the day that you sell it'. Alas, I have yet to experience the latter exquisite pleasure.



## CALL FOR ENTRIES AUSTRALIAN FLY FISHERS' ART & CRAFT SHOW

**Closing date 31 July 2017**



Organised by the  
Victorian Fly Fishers'  
Association (VFFA)

**\$5,000 first prize**

**Entry information:**

**[www.vffa.org.au/vffa-art-craft-show](http://www.vffa.org.au/vffa-art-craft-show)**

**Show date: 13-16 September 2017**

**Steps Gallery, 62 Lygon Street, Carlton Vic**

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### Rick Keam Hint

In Rick Dobson's excellent talk to the VFFA in February he spoke about removing the shine from new graphite or glass rods. My own preference is to use a cleaning paste sold in supermarkets under the name of Gumption - it's the successor to White Lily, which was around for decades. Just rub it on with your fingers and clean off with a soft cloth, which only takes a few minutes. It's such a superfine abrasive that it removes the shine without the slightest risk of scratching.

## Report on the Mitta River

... Trevor Stowe (VFFA member and President, Bairnsdale Fly Fishing Club)

Fishing has been good in the upper Mitta Mitta River (ie upstream of Dartmouth Dam) this season. Since 2011 we have experienced poor fishing, but last season we saw a lot of small fish appear in the rivers. This has continued on to the present season where these small trout from last year seem to have stayed around and grown. As a result we are now seeing plenty of fish up to one pound and the odd one up to 1¾ pounds.

What we are seeing is in line with the Fisheries study of the river system. At the Mansfield meeting last year they reported catching 107 trout in the section that they were surveying. Of these only four trout were 20 cm or bigger. The conclusion that Fisheries gave was that the fishery was in very good shape.

We have experienced good water flows right throughout summer and recent rain again this week. This has meant that the summer water temperatures have been within a comfortable range for the trout. In addition, we are currently experiencing a very good grasshopper year. Needless to say they provide a valuable food source for the fish.

Presently it doesn't matter much where you fish. Reports are good in all parts of the Mitta, and all the tributaries are fishing well too. Hopper patterns are working well (not really much of a surprise), but as we move into late April, nymphs should take over as the most popular fly.

Tight lines, Trevor.



*The Mitta River – firing on all cylinders*

## Philip Weigall writes about our near Western lakes

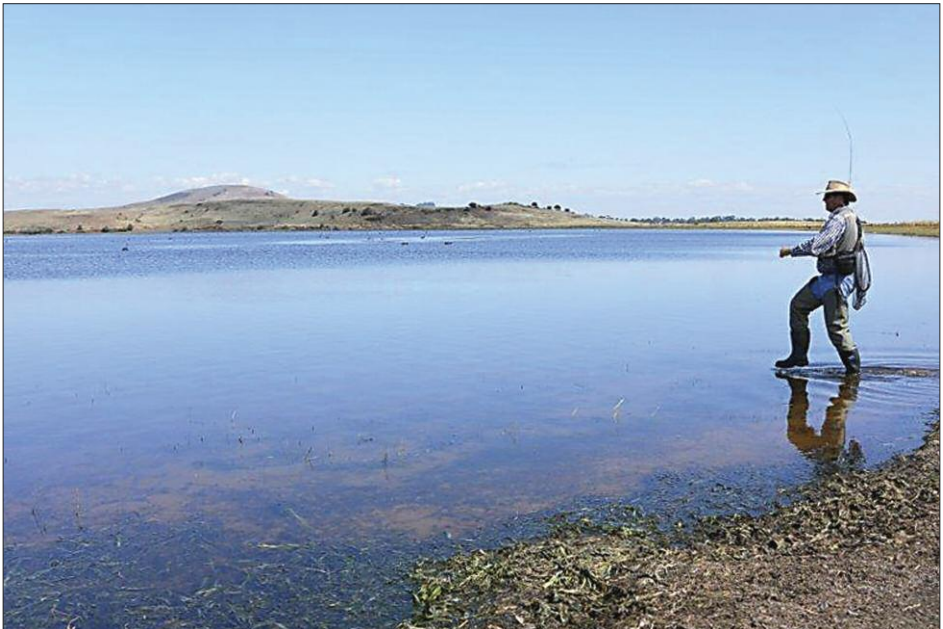
Philip Weigall edits the very popular digital fly fishing magazine FlyStream. The magazine's website, <http://flystream.com>, also hosts a blog, which provides fabulous up to date information on our local fishery. Philip has very kindly given us permission to use material from his blog in our newsletter. Here is the first of these, dated April 7 – a brief report on our near Western lakes. As the river season heads to a close in a few weeks many of us will spend the cooler months fishing our local stillwaters, so Philip's assessment is very timely.

**I**t's the first blast of really cold autumn weather that usually has me thinking seriously about the central Victorian lakes. So, after such a system hit last week, I've been waiting for an opportunity to head out and see how these waters are going and the last three days provided that. It hasn't been one solid session, but rather a series of visits when the chance arrived.

First the bad news: Moorabool Reservoir is currently closed due, apparently, to

blue-green algae. This lake, like most, is at a good level for mid-autumn and looks pretty clear from the road. Let's hope CHW reopen it soon.

Fortunately, that was the only negative of the last few days. Hepburn Lagoon is a little discoloured with about 2-3 feet of viso, depending on where the prevailing wind is blowing. However, it too is holding a good head of water for this time of year at 55%. There's lots of weed of course, but also plenty of open >>>



*Hepburn is clear enough to fish, and the moderate discolouration may even help on bright days*



*Newlyn rarely looks any better than this*

water, particularly along the north-west shore. I don't normally like fishing Hepburn under bright conditions. However the colour in the water gave me faith that I might be able to flog one up, and after a couple of hours, I picked up a nice rainbow on a Woolly Bugger MarkII. I saw one other big fish porpoise beyond range.

Newlyn is arguably the prettiest lake in the area at present – very clear, 70% and the weed is light enough that you can fish a wet fly just about anywhere. I timed my visit for an early afternoon autumn dun hatch. Alas, the cloud stayed away, but I still saw a trickle of duns and the shore swarmed with spinners, so the duns must be hatching well under the right conditions. (Saturday maybe if the cloud comes in in time?) My tactic would be to bring a mate and work a side of the lake each.

Newlyn duns rarely hatch everywhere at once, so keep in touch by mobile phone and if one of you finds a hatch, the other can come running!

The clear highlight of the last few days was Cosgrove Reservoir just now. At 60%, this tree-lined lake is at the perfect height to enable easy shore access (if a little steep in places) while still keeping the forest – and windfall – close to the water's edge. Don't be fooled by the murky-looking water; clarity is actually quite good at one metre plus. It just looks bad from a distance because Cosgrove is so uniformly deep.

Although the day has been beautifully warm at 20°C, at first I worried it might be too windy – despite Cosgrave being very sheltered, when it's too windy the gusts and swirls can push the food all over the place. With that, the trout are

scattered too and the consistent autumn dry fly fishing that I love on lakes like this one, Wombat, Bullarto, Lauriston and Wartook, dies away.

However, today I was in luck and despite the wind, on a number of shores I found concentrations of leaves on the water – always a good sign. Sure enough, the rainbows and an odd brown were rising well; often only a metre or two off the bank. You had to be super quick and accurate to get the fly in front of the rainbows, which really motored along. They weren't fussy about the fly though – I fished a Claret Carrot and a brown Paradun about a metre apart for

coverage, and I caught two rainbows on each, and missed a brown.

I left them rising to come home and post this blog, so the last part of this post (and the last pics) are only an hour or so old – almost live! Looking at this weekend's forecast, at first there may be more of this sort of fishing on the lakes listed two paragraphs above. Sunday's cold, wet blast will kill it (maybe perfect for Hepburn?) but when the weather settles down again midweek, the trout on the forested shores should be up once more. By the way, maximum water temps are down to 15-16°C up here, so the trout everywhere will be loving that.



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## Late Notices

### The Bruce Whitehead Trophy

Readers may recall that last year a team from the VFFA competed with members from the Bairnsdale Fly Fishers (BFF) in a winter "friendly" match in the lakes around Ballarat. President Mike Jarvis assures us that the competition will continue, this time on the weekend of June 24 and 25. More details will be given the June issue, but members keen to be involved again this year should phone Mike on 0418 265 390 for further details and to confirm their interest.

### Fly Tying Lessons

Members keen to improve their fly tying skills will be pleased to hear that Richard Kos is about to resume fly tying lessons at the Celtic Club. Classes will be held twice a month on either a Tuesday or a Wednesday evening, depending on which night participants prefer. Those keen to improve their fly tying skills, or who are starting from scratch and would like to learn, should contact Kossy on [kossy1@bigpond.com](mailto:kossy1@bigpond.com) or on his mobile - 0430 091 300.

### Fly Casting

Ian Sambell, one of our council members, is a qualified casting instructor. Ian is a superb caster and a skilled teacher, and has agreed to run some free casting classes for interested members through the winter months. Possible dates are the third Sunday in each of June, July and August. Venue – Red Tag Pool in Fairfield. Suggested topics include roll casting, overhead casting with narrow loops and less effort, casting for greater distance, slack line casts for drag free drifts, coping with the wind, and casting heavy or saltwater flies. These are some possible topics that Ian is offering, and no doubt others can be suggested by members. More details will be given in the June issue.

# FLY OF THE MONTH

## *Rod's Caddis*



At the April meeting the guides from the Goulburn Valley Fly Fishing Centre told us a lot about fishing the Goulburn River. Antony Boliiancu, one of the guides, also left us with a suggestion for a caddis pattern that they find particularly effective on the Goulburn and other surrounding streams. Antony described it as particularly deadly on the Steavenson River.

The fly has its origins in the USA, where it is a very popular pattern that is mostly used as a stonefly imitation. Back in 2002 Antony had an American client who offered half a dozen Yellow Sallys to him as the client was leaving. They then stayed in the bottom of Antony's fly box for quite some time, until one evening when he was fishing the evening rise unsuccessfully to some very difficult and contrary fish that ignored all his offerings. And you know the rest. In desperation he pulled out a Yellow Sally, tied it on, and proceeded to catch 12 or 13 fish.

Since then it has proved consistently successful. It was kept mainly as an in-house fly by the GVFFC guides, but in 2013 they started selling it at the Centre as a commercial fly for sale, and it proved exceedingly popular. The Centre now sells many dozens of the pattern every year. It is used a caddis pattern as it loosely represents a number of our common caddis species. One advantage it has is that in the dull and falling light of evenings it is very easy to see on the surface.

**Materials:**

|        |   |
|--------|---|
| Hook   | Any standard dry fly hook sizes 14– 20, though the Goulburn Valley guides mainly use it in sizes 16 and 18 .  |
| Thread | Grey 8/0 UNI-thread   |
| Tail   | Blue dun or pale grey hackle fibres, or microfibrils in the same colour   |
| Butt   | Bright orange thread or fine dubbing  |
| Body   | Lime green or pale olive Antron or other suitable synthetic dubbing.  |
| Wings  | There are two wings – a horizontal wing tied to lie along the body of the fly, and a vertical wing post for the parachute hackle. These can be the same colour and material, e.g. white polypropylene or similar winging material. But some anglers have the horizontal wing in a subdued colour such as grey or light blue dun, and the wing post a bright orange. |
| Hackle | Light blue dun or grizzle   |

The photo of the fly above suggests some that there are grey fibres sticking out the sides. Antony tells us that these are not needed and can be ignored.

**Tying Procedure:**

1. Put the hook in the vice and tie in the bright orange butt at the bend. Tie off the thread used for this.
2. Tie the tying thread in and run it along the shank to just before the butt, then tie in the hackle fibres to form the tail.
3. Dub some of the body material on the thread, then wind the dubbing on to form the body. The body should cover about three quarters of the shank.
4. Take a piece of winging material slightly longer than the combined length of the two wings, and tie this in at the end of the body, just a few millimetres behind the eye so that the back half forms the horizontal wing. Trim this to size.
5. Bind thread in front of the wing material closest to the eye and around the base of the wing to stand the front half of the wing up to form the vertical post the vertical post.
6. Prepare the parachute hackle feather and tie it in so that it is tied at the base of the vertical wing.
7. Dub some more of the body material on the thread and build up a small thorax, as shown in the photo, around the base of the two wings, and in front of the vertical wing.
8. Now take the tip of the hackle feather in some hackle pliers and carefully wind the hackle in horizontal turns around the vertical wing post, working the turns progressively down the post to form the horizontal parachute hackle. Four turns is ample.

9. Wrap the tying thread tightly around (under) the hackle fibres to tie the hackle off.
  10. Take a few turns of the thread immediately behind the eye of the hook and tie it off with three four half hitches.
  11. Add a tiny drop of head cement on the knot. Fly now finished and ready to catch evening risers.
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# 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 you digital device calendars
  - Gallery of events - Photos and Event reports
  - Where to fish directories: Victoria, Tasmania, NSW, New Zealand
- 



*Tichborne watercolour – Kaiwi Lakes*



# LIBRARY NEWS

A note from our librarian, Rick Dugina:

Because of impending changes and development at the Celtic Club our library books are to be placed in storage and won't be available for borrowing for a while. We'll keep you posted.

## 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
- Book *Time Flies: A Victorian Fly Fishers' Association Fly Box 1932-2015*.....\$70.00 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 2016 Annual Dinner:

- Aussie Angler Tackle Outfitters • Armadale Angling • Australian Fishing Network
- Essential Fly Fisher Launceston • FlyLife Publishing • FlyFinz Fishing Tackle and Books • Gavin Hurley's Fly Fishing & Pro-Angler • J.M. Gillies Pty Ltd
- Mayfly Tackle Pty Ltd • Millbrook Lakes • Ray Brown Onkaparinga Flies
- Stevens Publishing Pty Ltd • The Flyfisher Tackle Store Melbourne
- Hook Up Bait & Tackle •



*Tichborne watercolour  
Ahuriri River*

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

### May 2017

- 8 Monday Council Meeting - 7:30 PM
- 18 Thursday General Meeting – 8:00 PM  
Guest Speaker: Scott Xanthoulakis, trout guide

### June 2017

- 15 Thursday General Meeting – 8:00 PM  
Guest Speaker: Bernard Holbery
- 19 Monday Council Meeting - 7:30 PM

### July 2017

- 2 Sunday 2017 Cane Day at the Red Tag Casting Pool
- 20 Thursday General Meeting – 12 Noon (Lunchtime Meeting)  
Guest Speakers: Simone and Daniel Hackett
- 22 Saturday Warrnambool Fly Fishers' Annual Dinner
- 24 Monday Council Meeting - 7:30 PM
- 31 Monday Closing date for entries in the Australian Art & Craft Show

### August 2017

- 14 Monday Council Meeting - 7:30 PM
- 25 Friday Annual Dinner, with Guest Speaker Greg French  
(Well known Tasmanian fishing guide and author)

### September 2017

- 2 Saturday Rivers again open to trout fishing
- 4 Monday Council Meeting - 7:30 PM
- 13 - 16 Australian Fly Fishers' Art & Craft Show, Steps Gallery, Carlton
- 22 Thursday Annual General Meeting – 8:00 PM

### October 2017

- 19 Thursday General Meeting - 8:00 pm: Auction of Fishing Tackle
- 23 Monday Council Meeting - 7:30 PM