

FLY LINES



MAY 2021

The May Book Launch and Auction

Roll up, Roll up, Roll up ...

Our Annual Auction is on again at the Kelvin Club, 7:00 pm on May 20.

Hughie Maltby will again be our auctioneer, and the items for sale include books and gear from the estates of John Philbrick and Rick Keam.

But note the earlier starting time – 7:00 pm. Mike Stevens will be there to introduce to us Rick Keam's brilliant new fly tying book 'Dressed for Dinner'.



Auctioneer Hughie

Thursday, May 20,
7 pm
at the Kelvin Club

Sadly Rick died some months ago, but his long-awaited book has now been published and Mike will have copies for sale. Further details are given on page 3 of this issue.

The auction will commence at 8:00 pm and there will be a range of gear for sale, including rods, reels, flies, etc, as well as a number of books. John Philbrick and Rick Keam were avid collectors of quality books, and many of the titles being auctioned are among the best of fly fishing and fly tying literature.

This will be a great opportunity to purchase some quality gear and books at doubtless very attractive prices.

Mark it in your diary - the Kelvin Club, Thursday 8:00 pm, on May 20.

We need to inform the Kelvin Club of numbers for catering purposes, so members who plan to have dinner before the 7:00 pm commencement need to email Terry Rogers to indicate their intention to attend. Terry's email address is - terryrogers@bigpond.com

THE VICTORIAN FLY FISHERS' ASSOCIATION INC.

VOL. 69 NO.7 - May 2021 Organisation No. A0024750J

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

info@vffa.com.au www.vffa.com.au

President

Chris Gray

Email: president@vffa.com.au

Phone: 0408 256 525

Vice President

David Hooke

Email: dhooke@icloud.com

Phone: 0411 683 684

Honorary Secretary

Kevin Finn

Email: secretary@vffa.com.au

Phone: 0401 695 414

Honorary Treasurer

Tony Mitchem

Email: treasurer@vffa.com.au

Phone: 0407 309 797

Vffa Website Administrator

Kevin Finn

Email: webadmin@vffa.com.au

Phone: 0401 695 414

Honorary Editor

Lyndon Webb

Email: editor@vffa.com.au

Phone: 0488 555 724

Honorary Librarian

John Pilkington

Email: library@vffa.com.au

Phone: 0407 356 676

Other Council members:

Councillors:	Will Davidson	(0418 160 020)
	Joanne Dobson	(0429 140 341)
	Hamish Hughes	(0418 108 686)
	Andrew McKenzie	(0447 333 818)
	Dermot O'Brien	(0412 330 265)
	Terry Rogers	(0438 553 326)
	Mike Jarvis (Immediate Past President)	(0418 265 390)

All material copyright © all rights reserved. No part of the contents of this publication may be reproduced without prior written consent of the publisher. Published monthly by the Victorian Fly Fishers' Association Inc., PO Box 18423 Melbourne Bourke Street, Melbourne, Victoria 3001.

Index

The May Book Launch	1	The Bruce Whitehead Challenge -2021	20
VFFA Office Holders	2	North-East Report.....	20
Rick Keam and his new book	3	Warrnambool Fly Fishers Club Letter	26
President's Message.....	6	Millbrook in May	21
The April Meeting with John Douglas	8	The Taliban's Trout	23
From the Editor's Desk.....	12	Beginner's Luck, ... or Perhaps Not	28
June Meeting - Guest Speaker: Craig Coltman.....	14	Staying Safe	30
Australian Trout Foundation Report.....	16	Fly of the month.....	33
Early Membership Badges.....	17	VFFA Meetings & Activities	36
VFFA Notice of Major Event (NOE)	19		

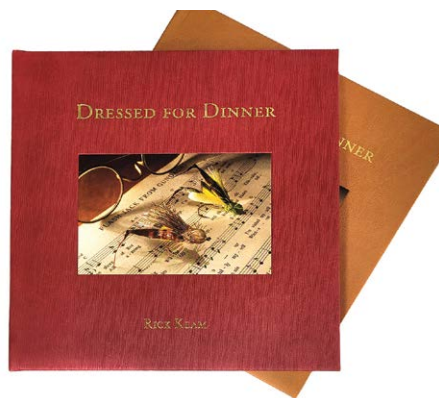
Rick Keam and his new book – Dressed For Dinner

... some reflections by Mike Stevens and Peter Hayes

Mike Stevens:

Who knew Rick Keam well? Not many people I suspect, and that was probably the way he liked it. He was happy beavering away on his own - tying flies, playing music, editing, researching or writing.

I didn't know him well, but I worked on quite a few projects with him over the last few years. There was the series of VFFA books, which with his editorial expertise were turned into books to be very proud of for all involved. They were not 'Club'





The master himself – Rick Keam

productions, but full-on classy tomes. That was how Rick was – he got it right. Boy, was he single-minded in getting it right, though he would say correct, not right. He was pedantic.

Working with Rick was a dream, and I recall when I asked him to help with some work for the Australian Fly Fishing Museum. We had several small projects that needed research, and there was no-one better than Rick in doing that. He always went to the primary source, rather than being lazy and perpetuating someone else's errors – of which there have been many in all historical works.

He badgered me to produce a book for his good friend Hugh McDowell, an Irishman who moved to and then saw out his time fishing in New Zealand. *'I Mind One Time'* was a lovely book by a great angler with some delightful reflections on Hugh's life of fishing.

When we were working through Rick's final work, his book *'Dressed for Dinner'*, I was time stressed for a bit, so my daughter Harriet did some of the publishing work. "How is Rick to work with?" she asked. I said, "He is the easiest

person I have ever worked with on a book, as he knows what he wants and whatever he gives you will be correct". I suspect that Harriet didn't believe me at first, but a week or two later when I asked how she was going it was a big thumbs up. Whilst Rick never got to see the bound finished book he did see the final fully complete and edited production. This was just a week or so before he died on November 11 last year. He told me he was delighted with it.

I didn't meet with Rick often, but had a great lunch with him one day near the top of Bourke Street in a pub I don't remember. It was a great day for me, but too short. We shared many stories and I really enjoyed his company.

There was a funny incident with *Ordinary Stories*, his music album from 2013. He had finished the album after a long stint and was working out how to sell it. He was not sure online was the way, and he did not like giving money to Apple and iTunes. He told me he was testing another online avenue. I looked it up and clicked on 'buy'. My album downloaded and I was happy. When next I spoke to Rick I mentioned it and he was distressed as he hadn't finalised the website – and I definitely should not have been able to BUY. He said I must have been the first purchaser and we joked about it for some time. I often play it when I am going fishing.

Ordinary Stories has an alt country, folk and country style with Rick's deep mellifluous Australian tone. Co-produced with multi-instrumentalist Hugh McDonald (Redgum), the album features Dave Folley (Killjoys, Tex Perkins and The Band of Gold) on drums, Dave Blight (Cold Chisel) on harmonica, acclaimed pedal steel guitarist Garrett Costigan, James Clark on tuba supported superbly

with vocalist Heidi McDermott. I don't know where you can find a copy now.

Dressed for Dinner is Rick's final work. It is a book from another planet of fly tying. Rick was very much a fur and feather tier, but when synthetics came along he embraced them. Often, when he had my ear, he would tell me that if you viewed xyz synthetic under a microscope it was similar in structure to seals fur or something else. I am pretty sure the trout don't know and told him so, but Rick replied with a scholarly answer which was usually about how it trapped air, or was hydrophobic, or the movement mimicked a live nymph. I'd usually agree - otherwise I would miss dinner with the long discussion which would invariably follow. He was intensely interested and interesting in his study of both the weird and common materials that could be adapted and added to hooks to fool trout.

His greatest interest in later years was raffia and foam. What he did with these products is extraordinary and he corresponded with many fly tiers about how both could be used. Rick came up with some superb and practical patterns that you would be wise to study. In his book there are mudeyes, damselfly, hoppers, beetles and just so much more.

Rick sent me lots of bits and pieces over the years. Included with some items for *Dressed for Dinner* there was a box with a note in it from Gary LaFontaine, co-owner of Greycliffe Publishing and a fly tying hero of world acclaim. It said, "Here is an introduction to the President of Umpqua Feather Merchants", and then went on to say: "Would you consider doing a book on terrestrials covering Australia, New Zealand, the US and Europe - in other words an international book. You are an incredible writer and researcher and this book would be a classic."

Another letter in the same box said: "I'm excited about both books ... your fly tying book and the international book on terrestrial insects. My partner will be contacting you about contracts for both books."

This is indeed a great illustration of Rick's skills, connections and brilliance as a fly tier.

(*Dressed for Dinner* is only available from Essential Flyfisher - www.essentialflyfisher.com.au)

Peter Hayes:

Rick Keam was certainly an interesting cat. Different. A deep thinker on all things fly tying. We talked a few times over the years as we shared some of the same ideas regarding the power of general representation rather than direct imitation.

Rick sent me flies a couple of times that looked terrible but worked remarkably well. His damselfly nymph came alive in the water and some of his patterns reminded me of the late great Muz Wilson's BMS - another fly that looked very ordinary in your box but came alive in the water and trout loved it.

One of Rick's suggestions to me a couple of decades ago was to put a red tag in front of the furnace hackle when you tie a normal Red Tag. In effect a double Red Tag. That way you get to see the bright red spot when you cast it. Since that conversation I've always tied my Red Tags in reverse. The fish don't seem to notice, but my clients can see their fly more easily - and that is a very good thing.

Rick's new posthumously published book '*Dressed For Dinner*' will give us all fish food for thought, and that would make him very pleased if he was still with us.

President's Message

Welcome to another *Fly Lines* newsletter.

John Douglas entertained us over lunch at the Kelvin Club with some informative research on water temperatures and trout, as well as an update on the rivers after a cooler wet summer. This was followed by some pertinent questions from members on VFA's management practices of our freshwater fishery.

JD answered most questions, and had a few to take back to the office for some clarification.

While we were not able to muster the numbers for a week at Millbrook Lakes for the social State of Origin, it would seem the NSW contingent has enjoyed some success with Councillor Andrew McKenzie catching the monster shown on the next page, the smile on his face reflecting 11 lbs of happiness! No doubt a great battle, so well done Andrew.

I recently had the pleasure of attending a function where the guest speaker was Past President Jim Allen OAM. As we know, Jim always has a story to tell and follows up with some great jokes. Jim's talk was one that captured his audience and filled the room with laughter as he walked us through his journey of fishing, hunting and shoe repairs from an early age. Most significant in Jim's message was the way our lives have changed from some simple outdoor living to a technical world while trying to be more conservative in our fly fishing passion. It was a wonderful evening, so thank you Jim for taking us back to memories of our own fishing adventures.

One of the north-east's most iconic trout streams is set to get a helping hand from a week-long tree planting event this month. The Nariel Creek has long been



a fabulous trout stream, but it suffered significant vegetation loss along its banks in the 2020 bushfires. The Australian Trout Foundation, North East CMA, Corryong Angling Club, Native Fish Australia, Victorian Fish Habitat & Flows Group and the VFA are combining forces to plant hundreds of trees along the Nariel in mid-May (May 15-22). A healthy riverbank with shrubs and trees provides essential cover, food and shade for trout, so this is an important team effort! The ATF is now seeking volunteers who are keen to help out. One day, two days, ... the whole week. Contact Terry George or The Australian Trout Foundation for more information. It's a great initiative to support. More details are given on this with contact information in the ATF report later in this issue.

Congratulations to Ballarat Fly Fishers' Club on holding your 100th Annual Dinner and official launch of your book '*Mallard & Claret 100 Years of the Ballarat Fly Fishers*'.

News from Victorian Fisheries Authority. The Fishing Licence Trust celebrates its twentieth birthday this month, having substantially improved fishing opportunities through hundreds of projects delivered by fishing clubs, community

groups and government agencies. One of the key projects we have been aligned with is the Wild Trout Management Plan. We hope there is continued support for this program, extending it further with recent recommendations relating to size limits, dedicated catch and release rivers, and dedicated fly only rivers, to name just a few.

The North East CMA has been installing purpose-built fish habitat, called lunkers, in the river at Katie Peters Reserve to help the river's trout and blackfish populations. Boulders being seeded into a stretch of the river near Eskdale will also create areas of variable flow.

Our May general meeting will be an action-packed event. At 7:00 pm Mike Stevens will start the evening with the official launch of Rick Keam's last book "Dressed for Dinner". There is a limited print run of 100 books, and they will be keenly sought after. Mike has also donated

some of Rick's fly fishing gear to be auctioned.

At 8:00 pm we will conduct our annual auction with books and gear from the estates of Tony Brothers, David Featherstone and John Philbrick.

If you would like to join us for dinner at 6:00 pm, please contact Terry Rogers who will co-ordinate bookings. Terry will email members with details.

Our General meeting in June will see Craig Coltman present on the "One Percenters" we all need to brush up on. Get along to this informative evening presentation from Craig.

When you manage to get out to enjoy some time on a river or a lake, savour the time and take a mate.

Stay well.



Andrew McKenzie holding 11 pounds of happiness

The April Meeting with John Douglas

I'm going to talk today about some of the research we have been doing in recent years, particularly on temperature – temperature and trout, and the impact temperature has on trout habitat, trout movement, and of course on fishing for trout.

I enjoy fishing for trout and don't mind tying flies, though I'm not very good at it. I enjoy reading about it though, and am getting there.

I'm involved in stocking programs but am also part of a bigger team at Fisheries and the thing about that is that my colleagues in Fisheries are all keen anglers themselves.

They all fish and they are passionate about it. It is a good thing for us as fishermen to have the people who are making the decisions on our fishing so passionate about it themselves.

We deal with more than just trout, because there are in fact 17 species of freshwater fish in Victoria that we are concerned with, just to give you some idea of the scope of the things we have to deal with.

I personally am involved in the fish stocking program, and that involves chatting with anglers to see what they want, finding out what Fisheries is deciding to do, and seeing what resources



John was happy to tackle all of our questions

we need in order to get the best we can out of our fisheries. Most of the trout that we stock go into lakes and other stillwater fisheries, and I think that these fisheries tend to be forgotten about a bit. In recent days we have tended to focus a lot on wild trout in streams, for very good reasons. The slide now on the screen tells us that there are more than 260 waters that we stock annually, and nearly all these are stillwaters.

A friend of mine sent me this picture just a few weeks ago of a fish he caught in Tullaroop Reservoir. He tells me that Tullaroop has been fishing well in recent months, and the size and condition of the fish have been extraordinary.

Over the years I have done a lot of stocking assessments using a variety of methods. We always had a focus on recreational fishing and we have looked at a number of fisheries with a view to improving them for the anglers. There was a clear focus on recreational fishing for anglers.

At one stage some years ago we became aware of a potential problem with estuary perch in Marlo. They were hatching and then schooling up in big numbers, and anglers were getting into them. This was a possible issue of concern. So we put some radio trackers in these fish and followed them around to see what was happening.



John's presentation included an update on river health after our cooler summer

We also started looking at golden perch in Lake Eildon. We were catching lots of big perch in our survey nets, but anglers weren't catching them. So we were wondering if we could find some ways to help anglers catch these big perch. We put tags in some of them and found that in spring they were along the lake edges,



Tight water to fish

but a little later on they were in among the trees. So now when you see anglers fishing Eildon they fish the banks in spring and then start fishing around the trees a bit later on.

We also did some work on brown trout. We wanted to know what trout did in impoundments, particularly in summer when air and water temperatures were high. A lot of the time trout fishing seems to go off in the summer, and we wanted to know why. What did the trout do in those hot summer months? So we put some tags in them.

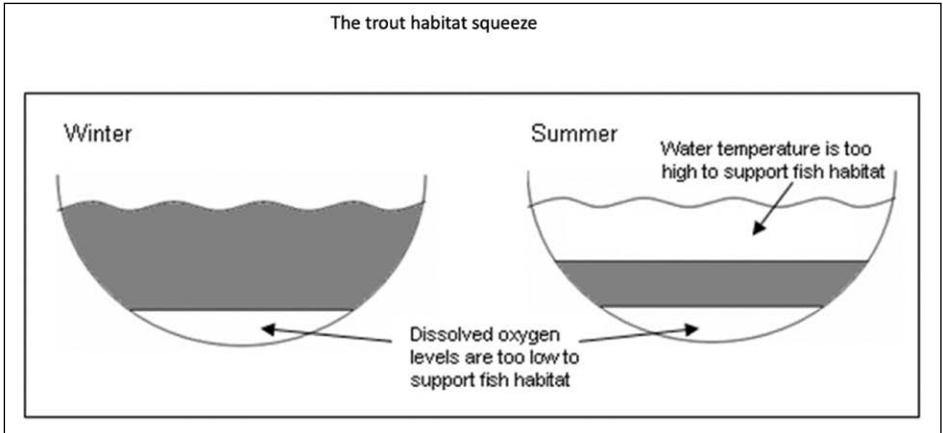
The background thinking to all this is that trout don't like warm water and they have a quite narrow range of water temperatures that they live in comfortably. In looking at the graph now on the screen we can see that any water temperatures outside that band are not going to be very good for them. In the winter months, when the water is cold, trout are found right from the surface all the way down towards the bottom. They don't get right down to the very bottom because there is no oxygen there, so there is a limit.



Dr Taylor Hunt from the VFA looks very pleased with this one

>>>

The trout habitat squeeze



In the summer months the lakes heat up. The sun starts hitting those upper layers and the surface gets too hot, so the fish have to go down to find more comfortable temperatures. They can't go all the way to the bottom because there is no oxygen there - so we get this habitat squeeze.

So what's happening to the fish in places like Lake Hume and Dartmouth Dam? Lake Hume is relatively open and shallow, whereas Dartmouth is narrow and deep with steep sides. We think that the differences between the performance of these lakes has got something to do with his habitat squeeze.

Here on the screen is a chart showing Eildon in 2004 when we had a lot of thermometers, almost like a curtain, hanging down in the water. The chart shows that in summer time in February the surface temperatures were reaching 24°C and this was down 10 metres or so, so the habitat squeezes was quite narrow. The question then arose - how does this affect other lakes which have different sizes and shapes.

We thought we could develop some sort of model that described all this. We were hoping we could then check our model over time to get some idea of the changes that would help us manage, among other things, our stocking levels. We might have this big lake somewhere that looks great to

stock, but the necessary habitat might just not be there.

We looked at Eildon which has some quite deep water. The Eildon graph here shows that it has deep water up the middle but is quite shallow along the edges. Our model predicted that in the winter months trout could live right across the lake, but in the summer there was just a very narrow region in the middle where the temperatures were comfortable for trout to live in. This was theory, so we decided to test it.

We put tags in some trout and followed them around. In the summer we saw where they went and discovered that our model fitted where they went. We then did this for winter and spring and again our model correctly predicted where they would be found. In the winter they were right up in the arms, but in the summer they stayed in the deeper water. We found them where we predicted they should be according to our model. It was pleasing for us to see that our model made sense and predicted where the fish might be found.

We then had to get this information to anglers because that was the whole point of doing the exercise - to try to improve angling.

We did the same stuff on Lake Dartmouth and learned that we could actually



Rainbow trout remain a very popular target in Victorian streams

draw a chart giving an idea of where the thermocline was. In looking at the information on the screen for Lake Dartmouth we can see that in November a depth of 4 metres down is where the good stuff starts. The fish can come up closer to the surface into the warmer water but then their body temperature starts to warm up and they have to move down again to the cooler water. Dartmouth is quite deep so at this time of the year most of the fish will be in the column of water from 4 metres deep down to a maximum of 48 metres, as the chart tells us. But in December the cool water starts at about 12 metres down, so if you are fly fishing it's pretty difficult to get your fly down to where the fish are in these warmer months. This information is quite helpful to boat people and trollers, but it is pretty difficult for those who are fishing from the bank.

So for summer lake fishing anglers should try to find the thermocline, ignore the shallow arms and fish the steeper edges as they give better access to deeper water. Though trying to find water 9 – 12 metres deep is very difficult for fly fishers.

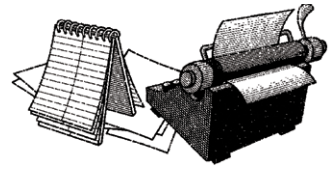
Let's change the story a bit and talk about the rivers. Rivers still have this habitat squeeze but the fish can't get down deeper to find cooler water. So the habitat squeeze in rivers is not vertical as it is in lakes, but linear and seen in the lower, warmer reaches first. The fish move upstream to find cooler water, so anglers need to move further upstream to find the fish.

The Wild Trout Management Program findings suggest that there is some evidence that trout move upstream to avoid warm water, or seek temperature refuge. The temperature impact is seasonal and dependant on environmental conditions. While the overall trend is of a warming climate there is variation each season, and trout bounce back quickly if conditions right. Trout are very resilient.

And this season is an example of that – overall it has been very good! (Sort of ...)



From the EDITOR'S DESK



"On a trout stream only the space near to hand is important. The immediate stretch of river you confront holds enough challenge to eclipse everything beyond its strict boundaries, if just for a little while. The entire world is reduced to a single riffle." (Glenn Law: *A Concise History of Fly Fishing*)

"Some say trout fishing is a contemplative sport, but it never is when you stick a tiny fly into a big unsuspecting trout." (Vincent Marinaro: *Small Fish: Big Fish*)

"What is the best time of day for fishing? Any time after breakfast. Never go before, because trout are not early risers. I have known men to get out of bed at daylight, making much noise, to the disgust of those who wish to sleep, and rush off with an empty stomach save perhaps for a drink of whiskey, and return several hours later to a cold breakfast, having captured nothing but a headache. Trout will bite just when they feel like it, and the best way to ascertain their biting time is to give them a frequent opportunity." (Charles Bradford: *The Brook Trout and The Determined Angler*. 1900)

"More big fish are caught within a range of 15 yards than outside it." (Dermot Wilson: *Fishing the Dry Fly* 1970)

"... Until man is redeemed he will always take a fly rod too far back." (Norman Maclean: *A River Runs Through It* 1976)

Our president reminded me recently that Prince Philip was a passionate fly fisher. Here are a few quotes from various sources:

"Fly fishing for trout and the occasional salmon, Philip sometimes spends hours in the water, wearing chest-high protective waders, only breaking to join the Queen and guests for lunch or tea."

"The 94-year-old has been spending days on end on the River Dee at Balmoral Castle during his summer holiday with the Queen in Scotland."

"This summer the Duke has almost been obsessed with fishing and it has become his main activity. He goes out for hours with just a ghillie and only stops for

meals. He has been out in all weathers and just can't stand being idle."

"Prince Philip had a lifelong love of fishing, spending many hours fly fishing when at the royal couple's Scottish residence, Balmoral."

To all of this I say half his luck. It sounds like he's had time to fish and some very nice water to cast a fly over. And he was still hard at it when he was 94. There's a challenge for the rest of us.

Mind you, us Victorian members were in lockdown last year for 112 days, so fishing, at least for us city slickers, was taboo. So I guess like many others I found some close to home fishing-related activities to fill the space. One of these

was casting – I regularly took a rod and reel up to a nearby oval and just spent some time casting an old line across the grass to imaginary fish. Very relaxing and enjoyable.

I also found a way to add several yards to my cast with no extra grunt or change in my technique. How so? Well, I was poking around in my fly fishing gear and discovered an old 7 weight line that was still in fair condition, so threaded it up on a 5-weight rod and started false casting whilst lengthening the line until I found a length of line outside the tip that had the rod working nicely.

Then I laid it on the ground and cut the fly line off at the rod tip. I took the thick end of this line I had just cut, poked about 8 inches of it into a bottle of nail polish remover, let it sit for about 5 minutes, then used my fingernails to tear away the now very soft plastic (i.e. PVC) part of the fly line leaving just the exposed core. I tied a perfection loop in this core, filled up an old reel with lots of thin backing line and tied the end of this backing line to the perfection loop.

Up at the oval again I loaded the reel onto a 5-weight rod and discovered I could now cast longer than normal distances easily. I had of course just constructed a primitive ‘shooting head’.

Most anglers these days use weight forward lines, and these consist of a fat front end (the head) connected to a long thin running line. When you cast such a line it sails out for a bit then drops to the ground. So what factors limit how far you can cast such a line? Air resistance of course steals part of the energy you give to the line, so casting with a tight loop helps reduce this air resistance. The other factor limiting the distance we can cast is the friction of the running line racing through the runners, so if we replace this

running line with some very thin and soft backing line then this friction is greatly reduced – and your normal cast will travel further.

I read somewhere that shooting heads were very popular years ago with saltwater fly fishers in the USA. They wanted to maximise their casting distances, and shooting heads were the way to go. So should we replace our regular fly lines with shooting heads? They’re fun to cast with and the easy extra distance is a bonus. But I soon discovered there are also some disadvantages. First, they land heavily, so are not good where a gentle presentation is needed. They are best used on lakes on days with some wind (and the wind is nearly always blowing on lakes, isn’t it?). You wouldn’t use a shooting head on a small stream. You don’t need those extra yards on streams, because the experts tell us that nearly all fish caught in streams are caught within 10 yards of where you are standing. Accuracy is far more important than distance here.

I also discovered that my shooting head sailed out in great style with a tail wind but seemed somewhat less enthusiastic when flung into a head wind. And all that loose fine backing I’d pulled off the reel for my next big cast blew all over the place and either tied itself up in pestiferous knots or got caught up in every nearby shrub or weed. So organisation of this loose line prior to casting was an issue. But once I managed to control those loose loops I was in business.

This raises the point that some heavier or different type of backing line might be more manageable and friendly, but this would probably be at the expense of some of that extra distance we were seeking.

>>>

Do you have to make your own shooting heads? Of course not. Creating one of my own was a fun exercise, but I also happen to have an old shooting head in my kit that I purchased very cheaply at a sale many years ago. And it actually casts a lot better than my home-made effort.

The spey casters among us are well aware that spey casting is all about shooting heads. Most spey lines are purchased as a 'head' and are then connected using a loop to loop connection to running line left permanently on the reel.

I'm sure that most of the larger tackle shops around Melbourne now carry stocks of spey lines but Rick Dobson at Aussie Angler was my very helpful advisor. Rick sold me a 240 grain Airflo Skagit head and some good running line. Now 240 grain is equivalent to a 9-weight

line, so when I put this on a 7-weight rod it was very easy to make (for me) some quite lengthy casts. So if it's a windy day and you're at Newlyn Reservoir needing some extra distance then a shooting head might be handy.

Winter is approaching and the rivers will soon be closed to trout fishing, so then it's time to visit the lakes and reservoirs. I'll sneak my shooting head into the bag – just in case.

Best of luck with your winter fishing. I hope it's all about tight lines and wet nets.

Lyndon



June Meeting – Guest Speaker: Craig Colman

An experienced angler, Craig has travelled to diverse locations all over the world, mastering his skills and techniques in his pursuit of the “perfect fish”. Whilst trout are his favourite sport fish, he has also chased and landed golden trevally in Western Australian waters, kingfish offshore from Narooma, bonefish on the Christmas Island flats, bream in the Mallacoota estuary and Giant Tarpon (exceeding 150 lbs) off the Florida Keys.

Craig's fishing obsession first became apparent as a child when he continuously fell into his grandparents' goldfish pond.

Craig grew up in Ballarat where he had easy access to some of Victoria's premier fly fishing lakes and rivers, including Lake Wendouree where he perfected his loch-style fishing techniques. Mentored by his uncle, Mike Spry, he honed his

stream-craft skills on the Swampy Plains, Thredbo, Eucumbene, and Nariel Rivers of Victoria and NSW.

In his first attempt at competition fishing Craig finished third in the National Fly Fishing Championships held in Tasmania in 1994, and has since gone on to represent the Ballarat Fly Fishers' Club, and Victoria, and Australia in many competitions. As a member of the Australian team, he competed in the World Fly Fishing Championships in Ireland (1995), New Zealand (2008), Scotland (2009), and Poland (2010). He captained the Australian teams in championships in Sweden (2001), France (2002), Slovenia (2012) and Slovakia (2017), and the Australian World teams in Scotland (1995), Australia (1999), England (2000), Wales (2002), Scotland (2010) and Australia (2012). Craig is highly respected amongst his peers for his experience,

commitment and extensive knowledge of fly fishing.

Craig is happy to share his experiences with other fisherman. He is a proactive contributor in the fishing community and a member of several groups concerned with fisheries and environmental issues, including the Ballarat and District Angling Association, Ballarat Fly Fishers' Club and Ballarat Acclimatisation Society.

In 1981 Craig made his first visit to Tasmania and was captivated by its beauty and the high quality of Tasmanian fishing, so he purchased a property in Miena and now regularly spends a large part of each trout season fishing the Tasmanian rivers and lakes. Since selling his business he plans to fish in as many fabulous locations as possible, including spending more time in Tasmania.

In 2007 Craig used his long service leave to guide for Neil Grosse. Based in Tasmania, this first guiding experience taught him the importance of adaptability and the guiding skills necessary to ensure his clients experience a successful and satisfying day on the water. He now regularly guides in local waters for Millbrook Lakes and guides during the season in the Central Highlands of Tasmania. "Tasmania is the most interesting and exciting location to guide, as there are always fish moving somewhere. You just need to know where to look!"

Craig is a first class speaker and presenter with an incredible wealth of fly fishing skill and experience. You won't want to miss this meeting – Thursday, June 17.



Craig is a highly skilled angler and trout guide

Australian Trout Foundation Report

The ATF continues working hard for our trout fishery. Here are some items from the Foundation's most recent newsletter.

From ATF President Terry George:

The Australian Trout Foundation has been very busy in the first months of 2021. The lifting of covid restrictions has allowed the ATF to recommence some much needed activities that were put on hold due to the restrictions imposed in 2020.

Activities includes the partnership work with the North East Catchment Management Authority, Department of Environment, Land, Water and Planning and the Corryong Angling Club to plant 10,000 trees in the Nariel Valley for bushfire recovery.

The ATF, in partnership with Native Fish Australia, has also conducted a very successful 2021 Ovens River Challenge with over eighty anglers competing.

Electro-fishing to ascertain success with stocking and Jordan Scotty incubators has also been undertaken and stream gauge upgrade to provide live data to anglers is well underway. New Habitat projects are also being planned.

Stream Gauge Data

One of the priority actions stemming from the RFL grant provided to the ATF was to collect and disseminate water temperature data on priority trout streams and provide live online data for trout fishers.

The abundance of trout, as well as their catchability, is heavily influenced by water temperature. Increasing temperatures, which are further compounded by reduced stream flows in drought conditions, are affecting trout populations. At high water temperatures (>20°C) trout become less catchable because feeding and activity are reduced, and at higher temperatures trout become stressed and vulnerable.

Instantaneous access (via telemetry) of water temperature information in priority wild trout streams will have multiple benefits to anglers and fishery managers. The provision

of information to fishers will help them decide when and where to fish trout streams. Temperature information will assist in identifying areas potentially too hot for trout to feed actively. It will also identify times of the year and stretches of rivers affected by high temperatures. This information may help guide habitat improvement works such as tree planting for shaded areas. Dr John Morrongiello of Melbourne University did research that showed that an unshaded pool can be up to 10°C higher than a shaded pool.

Nariel Valley Trees for Trout

The 2019-20 bushfires had a significant impact on the cross-border areas around Corryong, Tumbarrumba and the Alpine National and Snowy Mountains National Parks. The Nariel Valley and tributaries were badly affected. Streamside vegetation was razed and subsequent rains produced oxygen-draining sludge in rivers and creeks that badly affected aquatic life. Electrofishing after the fires indicated very limited fish and aquatic invertebrates remained in some of the iconic streams in this area.

The North East Catchment Management Authority project team of Andrew Briggs and Mick Broughton have organised a substantial 'trees for trout' event at Nariel Creek, and NECMA have also sourced the funding from the bushfire relief funds they were able to acquire.

The Nariel Creek has been an iconic trout stream for many anglers and suffered severe damage in the fires. So North East Catchment Management Authority (NECMA), Corryong Angling Club, the Australian Trout Foundation, Victorian Fisheries Authority, Native Fish Australia and the Victorian Fish Habitat & Flows Group are all combining in this joint effort over seven days from Saturday May 15 to Saturday May 22.

The Group is calling for volunteers interested in participating in a massive tree planting exercise on the Nariel Creek. This is a prime opportunity for current and new volunteers to donate their time and efforts to

assist in the recovery of this fire devastated region by revegetating the riparian zones along the creek.

If you would like to participate in some or all of the days, please register your interest on the ATF Website - <https://australiantroutfoundation.com.au/find-a-project/> or by contacting Terry George: habitat@atfonline.com.au or mobile 0418 332 744 or Shea Bloom: shakaleg_12@hotmail.com (Corryong Angling Club) or mobile 0419 541 756

There will be camping at the Nariel Folk Festival Ground, or accommodation at Colac Colac Holiday Park, or Mt Mittamatite Holiday Park, or enquire about Motels, Cabins etc at Corryong Information Centre: 02 6076 2277.

Lunch is provided for all volunteers. BYO: snacks and drinks. Bring gloves, spade, shovel or a small pick. Fishing gear (optional) – here is an opportunity to take some time off to try the Swampy or Indi, or

other nearby streams before the end of the season.

Please accept this request for assistance and come and join us for a great time and a very worthwhile revegetation project to restore the Nariel Creek and other tributaries.



Mark Flook was one of our 25-year members last year. He caught this fish in New Zealand a few years ago

Early Membership Badges

... from David Grisold



1940's unnumbered Sterling Silver



1990's



Current badge

I was lucky to win the first badge in an eBay auction recently and started to wonder how our badges have changed over the years. The first badge is from the 1940's and is sterling silver. I was led to believe all early sterling silver badges were numbered, but the one I came across is not. All early badges were produced by a Melbourne company Witten Bach.

The second badge is the first badge I received some 23 years ago when I joined the VFFA, and the third badge is the current design. After making many phone calls I came across other sterling silver badges. All are numbered. Jim Allen has badge number 20 below, given to him by Colonel Spud Hoare, a foundation member of the VFFA. >>>



Number 2 badge, belonging to Colonel Spud Hoare, a founding member of the VFFA



1940s badge – unnumbered



Back of the 1940s badge - sterling silver

Gerald Dryden has badge number 121 below, which he received when he joined the VFFA in 1948. Note the different clasp, and a special thank you to Kaye, Gerard's daughter for her assistance.



The front and back of badge number 121, again of sterling silver, belonging to Gerard Dridan. Gerard is our longest serving member – now 73 years

I then discovered Peter Boag has badge number 59 below, which was owned by member Jack Gardner. Jack's great great uncle was Dick Wigram.

David Featherstone had been given Harold Darby's membership badge. David and Harold fished together regularly. Harold was an early VFFA member, joining in the 1940's. David's daughter Nessa is currently looking through boxes to try to locate the badge.



The badge belonging to Jack Gardner, No. 59, again sterling silver

Notice the difference in the Past President and Honorary Life Member Badges. The above are my badges and how they vary from earlier badges I am keen to know.

I would love to know if members have anything different to the badges shown here, and if there are any other numbered or unnumbered 1940's sterling silver badges in existence.

Please send photos and details to David Grisold at email: chocodavid@bigpond.com or mobile 0419558462.



David Grisold's two badges – for Past President and Honorary Life Member. Note the different fish heads. Do any other members have badges different to these?

VFFA Notice of Major Event (NOE) - Western Lakes, 2021

Date of this NOE – April 27, 2021

Event: Weekend trip to Lakes Purrumbete and Bullen Merri on May 28 - 30

Event Co-ordinator (EC): Hughie Maltby.

Event date: Check in Friday May 28, check out on Sunday May 30.

Event location & address: Lake Purrumbete Caravan Park, 540 Purrumbete Estate Road, Camperdown, VIC, 3260, Phone: 03 5594 5577. Also Lakes and Crater Lakes Holiday Park,

220 Park Road, Camperdown, VIC, 3260, Phone: 03 5593 1253.

Accommodation: Shared cabin, cost: TBC - cost based on the number sharing a cabin.

Sleeping requirements: Bring own bedding and towel.

Catering/ food and drink requirements: Breakfast/lunch: self-catering or in Camperdown, Friday night: One of the hotels in Camperdown, Saturday night: TBC.

Description of fishing areas: Lakes, fishing out of boats or from the shore.

Mobile phone coverage: Whether within mobile phone coverage areas, or otherwise within mobile phone range.

How physically challenging: Comfortable fishing around lake edges, though quite a walk if fishing from Quarry car park on Lake Purrumbete. Warrnambool fly fishers have offered to provide boats to transport anglers across to the quarry.

Fishing license required: Yes, if applicable.

Strongly recommended personal equipment: Waders, wading boots, wading staff, gaiters if wet wading; brimmed hat; glasses/sunglasses, sunscreen; wet weather gear, warm clothing; water and food for lunch, UHF/VHF radio, torch at dusk onwards, mobile phone.

Optional but advisable equipment when fishing out of sight of other participants: UHF radio

Event Registration Form (ERF): To be completed and returned to Hughie Maltby at reddtag@hotmail.com or posted to 14 Diane Crescent, Viewbank, Victoria, 3084, by May 15. Any inquiries - phone Hughie on 0423 283 079.

Date of issue of this NOE: April 27, 2021

Event Registration closing date: May 21, 2021

*The Event Registration Form (ERF) can be downloaded from the VFFA website or obtained at the next meeting.



Robert Bett was another of our 25-year members last year. This photo was taken by his wife when he was fishing the Eucumbene River near Kiandra in November two years ago.

The Bruce Whitehead Challenge – 2021

After a year off due to Covid-19 this annual competition with the Bairnsdale Fly Fishers will again take place in Camperdown this year with competitors fishing the lakes in the district. Fishing can be either land-based or from boats.

Our fly fishing friends from the Warrnambool Fly Fishers' Club will join us on Saturday, May 29, and then all anglers will be able to find a seat in a boat to fish Lake Purrumbete.

On the Saturday evening we all come together for dinner in Camperdown.

Fishing finishes at 11am on the Sunday, followed by a BBQ and presentation of the trophy on the banks of Lake Purrumbete. It would be great for the VFFA team to win the trophy this year to honour Bruce Whitehead, who died recently.



The Bruce Whitehead trophy that will be keenly contested by both teams this year

The lakes are in magnificent condition and fishing well for brown and rainbow trout, chinook salmon and redbfin.

Being one month earlier than in previous years will also make fishing conditions a lot more comfortable.

Contact Hugh Maltby on 0423 283 079 for information, as bookings are filling fast.

North-East Report

... from Brian Eddy

Not a lot happening now up here in the north-east. Although water levels here are currently low, I have seen it lower (and warmer) in past years. The Ovens is very clear and cold but with reasonable flows, so fishing conditions are quite good.

Fishing pressure has been heavy throughout the season and continues even now. The brown trout fishery seems to have suffered somewhat from the pressure and browns are certainly not as numerous as they were earlier in the year. Rainbows, particularly young fingerling/yearling size, are around in good numbers and this should produce some good fishing next season.

Shorter days and very low overnight temperatures mean that hatches are brief and seem to be mostly of very very small mayflies. Caddis hatches are now pretty much over. I'm not sure when we are likely to get a good autumn break, but when it happens I expect that the browns will start pairing up (or competing for the right to) and will be losing interest in our offerings.

Overall this season has been one of the best seasons seen here in many years, but like all good things it is now drawing to a close.

Cheers, Brian



E-mail: jtblakeslee@westvic.com.au
Phone: 03 5562 5168
P.O. Box 1380 Warrnambool 3280

WARRNAMBOOL FLY FISHERS CLUB INC. 2021 ANNUAL GAME DINNER INVITATION

Members of the Warrnambool Fly Fishers' Club are holding their 53rd Annual Game Dinner on Saturday, July 31, in the Function Room under the Warrnambool Racing Club Pavilion on Grafton Road, Warrnambool. VFFA members who wish to attend on the night are most welcome to do so.

As usual, it will be a BYO wine and beer night. There is no bar at the venue. The cost of the dinner has been set at \$85 per head. The Chef is Robert King. Before dinner drinks with canapés will begin at 6:00 pm. We will sit for the first course at about 7:00 pm for the start of what should be a fabulous night of fine food and company.

Because of the size of the venue the total number attending this year is limited to 70, so it would be appreciated if VFFA members confirm their intention to join us for dinner a.s.a.p. and no later than July 15.

I can be contacted at my e-mail address - jtblakeslee@westvic.com.au or by calling 0437 983 421 to make a booking.

Jim Blakeslee
Social Committee Member
Warrnambool Fly Fishers Club Inc.
112 Bridge Road
Woodford, Victoria 3281
jtblakeslee@westvic.com.au

Millbrook in May

... a brief report from Andrew McKenzie. The proposal for the 'State of Origin' event with teams of NSW and Victorian VFFA members enjoying a week of friendly competition at Millbrook Lakes didn't eventuate, but Andrew still managed to organise a week at Millbrook with three of his NSW friends, courtesy of Mark Weigall's generosity. Here is Andrew's report on their first three days.

>>>

Just a quick report from Millbrook Lakes. We have just finished our second day on the water. We are fishing a number of different lakes each day, and are fishing indicators with nymphs or stick caddis, or lightly weighted wets, or we are walking "carrots" across the top.

The fishing has been superb with multiple fish on both days. We managed an 11 lb, a 7.5 lb and a 6 lb fish amongst others yesterday. Today we landed three fish in the range of 7 lb to 8 lb, along with a number around 4 lb.

A special mention of our guides, as they have been fantastic. We had Philip Weigall guiding us yesterday, and today we had Kiel Jones. They have managed to put up with us 'north of the border' types while keeping us in front of fish the whole time.

We are well settled in now, with a fire, dinner and a few reds. Who knows what tomorrow will bring? But we are ready!

Day 3:

It was harder conditions today. Bright, full sun, blue sky and no wind. We ended up with 10 fish between us to 7lb. So going along ok. Here is a photo of a fish Mark Weigall thought would have been close to 10lb. Nice fish!



A fine Millbrook rainbow – looking a bit surprised at his new surroundings



Theo Baisi and friend, this one close to 10 lb and again taken on a Stickie



Rob Lennon with a 7½ lb Millbrook rainbow that took a Stick Caddis imitation



The Taliban's Trout

Searching For Dinnawah in Afghanistan

... from Tom Gregg. Tom spent three years working for the United Nations in Afghanistan. He is also a keen fly fisher, and as a friend of John Pilkington is very familiar with the Big River around Enochs Point. Tom wrote an article on his experiences fly fishing in Afghanistan for the *Flyfish Journal*, a prestigious international magazine. He also gave permission for us to publish it in our March 2015 issue. The original article ran to 14 pages, so we printed an edited version. I regarded this as one of the most fascinating articles we have published, so thought it was time to give it another airing.

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 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 these "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.

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 would 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 be opened 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!

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 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 I came across a stream not far from the border of Pakistan. I had just had 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, 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 whales - the villagers were keen 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 can't simply walk into a shop and purchase a rod. Instead, you need to find a tree approximately eight to nine feet high that is not too brittle nor malleable. This is difficult in a place where there are almost no trees left because of severe deforestation, and those that remain belong to tribesmen 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 was possible to buy more thin, strong, boot-making twine than a boot maker would use in a year.

Fishhooks were 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, but 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.

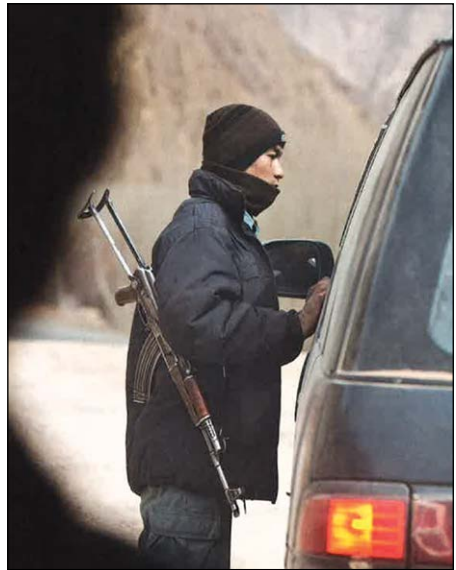
I had returned to Paktika to meet the governor, and after the meeting I lamented the difficulties of my hunt for hooks to John, a former British SAS soldier. He replied, "If only we had a survival kit—every military-issue survival kit has some fishhooks." So I needed a survival kit and knew exactly where to get one. About 25 minutes away 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 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 them 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!"



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



I froze 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. 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 7:00 am 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 while the soldiers laughed and shook their heads at my elaborate cast. My fly danced across the surface of the fast flowing stream but didn't 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. 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



On the banks of the Bande Sarde River: The guy with the gun was a former British 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 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.

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. 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, and 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, 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 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 south-east 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 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*). 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.



Beginner's Luck, ... or Perhaps Not

... a delightful account of a fly fishing mission shared by new member Barry Cawthorn.

Easter 2021 presented my friend Jennifer and myself an opportunity to enjoy the April of 2021 rather differently from the April of 2020. No masks, fresh air, the calm, and the prospect of a river rested after the heat of summer. So the opportunity to enjoy Jennifer's lodge membership at Thredbo with the prospect of settled autumn weather was too good to refuse. Jennifer wanted to get back to the river, "curious", as she put it, about my world of fly fishing after I had pointed out a snowflake caddis hatch earlier in the summer.

So we arrived in Thredbo, the newbie and the guide, all set for the walk to the top of Mount Kosciusko and for some fly fishing. Beautiful Easter weather meant outdoors was the only place to be.

Ascending Mount Kosciusko allowed us to appreciate something of the vastness of Australia and walking into this awe-inspiring alpine world reminded us to be respectful.

With this first mission accomplished, I turned our attention to the next day. I wanted to provide Jennifer with an experience similar in my mind to prising open a door - just enough to see that something vast and wonderful was waiting. A taste, so to speak.

How could I stack the odds in her favour? Well, the journey to the river can't be arduous. No bush bashing. Then the river access point should provide an appreciation of the character of the river that day. So I needed to find somewhere with good visibility, grassy banks, longish riffled runs, some holding water and also some bank cover. I knew there were equal probabilities of good fish either under

the banks or looking diligently for food floating by, or perhaps even out feeding in the holding water. The ideal place was right behind the village car park. Sometimes the best places are the closest by.

We arrived and rigged up, and then befitting my own continuing journey of discovery, I selected from my fly box one of the flies I had recently learned to tie with the help of a friend. I knew that Jennifer was beginning to enjoy this when she demanded a photo of my fly box.

She liked my "red bug" as she put it. "How did you know it was red bug day?" she asked.

Knowing an entomologic answer would not achieve my aim, I simply said, "It imitates all sorts of bugs that live here." She seemed happy with that, and it was true enough in any event.

I explained the arc of a cast, how a loop is formed, timing, ... etc. After five or six practice arcs with my 2-weight rod she felt she was casting "just like me".



Jennifer and Barry celebrating an important event

Well, I thought, let's bring this to life. I left her there with the suggestion that just a few more practice casts might be a good idea and walked upstream. Twenty-five metres later revealed a beautiful 2½ - 3 lb autumn brown out feeding, happily but gently, taking dries periodically.

I walked back to reclaim the student and explained that we could keep talking but we must move quietly and slowly so I could show her the fish.

"There it is. Can you see it?" "No."

"Look over the rod tip. Can you see it?" "No."

"Look for the dark shape. Can you see it now?" "No."

"Ok, don't look into the water. Look for something moving. There it is moving now! See it?" "No."

The joy of learning.

Ok, no matter. With me holding her hand and guiding the rod arc, we cast gently. I dropped my hand away and three casts later the Red Tag landed at the end of the unrolling leader. The fish casually moved across for the take. But the fly flew off. Jennifer was enjoying this casting thing a bit too much.

"I said leave it in the water until I say lift."

We go again, same thing, but this time, "Wait, wait, wait, ... here he comes, lift!"

With less than fifteen feet of line out I grabbed the net ready for an early landing. I would only get one chance to bag the dream for us both.

It happened a few seconds later.

Lots of grins and hugs, and the wonder of what just happened overwhelmed us

both. We had found something unique together, a privilege and memory, and importantly a portend perhaps of the future.



Well done Jennifer – a great start to your fly fishing career

Staying Safe

... this is a brief summary of an article by Steve Dunn, writing in Philip Weigall's *FlyStream* Digital magazine on April 10 of this year. *FlyStream* is an excellent source of quality material on all aspects of fly fishing and is well-worth the \$24 annual subscription. <https://flystream.com> is the digital address where readers can read Steve's full article.

Is fishing safe?

For most people, fly fishing is a safe sport. Minor injuries are not uncommon, anything from a puncture wound from hooks and gaffs, to cuts from knives, to bruises and sprains from slips and trips, sunburn, dehydration, mild hypothermia or hyperthermia, and the odd broken bone. The benefits of sport fishing however – fitness, mental health, social engagement, etc – far outweigh the risks.

However, we should never lose sight of the fact that we are in the outdoors, on lakes, rivers, beaches and rocks; sometimes in boats, and weather and water conditions can change quickly. Witnessing a southerly buster hitting a beach, or a squall line at sea, or a cloudburst on a river, are sights you never forget.

All this means it is a tragic reality that every year many people setting off for a day's fishing will either be injured or will die. What makes this even sadder is that many of these incidents could have been avoided with some planning and a bit of attention to safety. These days we are all encouraged to have a bushfire plan – to plan for something which, for most of us, would be a once in a lifetime event at worst. And yet we often head off fishing into a changeable and potentially hostile environment, with no more thought than Tom Sawyer planting a kiss on Aunt Polly's cheek and disappearing with his knapsack and fishing pole.

Learning from experience

We learn from our own experiences, and the stories of others, and I've had my fair share of near misses. My first fishing injury was a hook in my eyebrow with a trip to casualty, a local anaesthetic, and a few stitches.

I once slid backwards 300 metres down a steep hill in my four wheel drive – we hadn't quite made it to the top when we lost traction; and on another day I found myself sliding sideways down a gravel bank. I've fallen off a rock ledge when wading up to my chest. I've become hopelessly lost, I've slipped and fallen hard when boulder-hopping, I've been stuck in mud over my thigh waders, and I've been stranded on rocks by a rising tide more than once. I've been completely swamped in a boat by a massive wave (and very thankful for level floatation). And I've suffered both hyperthermia and hypothermia; neither was severe thankfully.

My favourite truism, Murphy's Law, states: 'Anything that can go wrong will go wrong'; or in other words if you can imagine it, sooner or later it will happen to someone somewhere.

Tips for staying safe

- Have a plan and let someone know what you are doing and what to do if you don't get back on time. Think about risks, how you will manage them, and what you will do if something goes wrong. I tell everyone

in my risk workshops that the best thing you can do is to think about and talk about risk. If you're doing that, you're thinking about managing the risks.

- Check the weather and water conditions before and during your trip. If you see a storm coming, seek shelter. If it's a thunderstorm don't shelter under trees. Never shelter under gum trees – they don't call them 'widow-makers' without good reason.
- Subscribe to weather alerts, like the safe fishing alerts in NSW.
- Always wear and carry sunscreen and a hat.
- Wear and carry clothes which allow you to cope with changes in weather: layers you can easily put on and take off and that will keep you dry. Strong winds can turn a warm day into a cold day; getting wet leads to evaporative cooling in even a light breeze; and a cold winter's day can get really hot with sun and no wind.
- On a small boat, always wear a lifejacket when underway, at night, and in rough weather whether it is the law or not.
- Carry a compass when hiking off known tracks.
- Carry a personal locator beacon at all times when on a boat, and when fishing alone in remote locations.
- If you're planning a boat trip, look up a boating safety check list.
- Rock fishing safety is a whole topic on its own.
- Water levels in lakes and rivers can change quickly due to the weather but also due to hydro and irrigation

releases, and can occur with no warning at all.

- If you've been fishing in the cold and go into a warm place like a heated car, the rush of blood from your warm core back to your extremities, can temporarily cause extreme drowsiness. It's a syndrome that's not hypothermia, but related. It's not controllable through willpower, so if you're planning to drive, plan time for a coffee break first. Yes, I know it's Sunday night and you need to be at work the next day, but trust me: take that time to let your body and brain restore equilibrium.
- If you have a choice, level floatation is much better than basic floatation when you are buying a boat – it is a requirement that the Builders Plate states what kind of floatation the boat has. Basic floatation is the common standard but does not guarantee your boat will float. In fact your boat may well sink if there is significant extra weight onboard, or at best float with the bow in the air. The Australian Maritime Safety Authority provides more information on this.
- If you are river wading, make sure it's safe. In strong currents, use a wading stick and use extra caution in dirty water. Avoid putting your upstream foot ahead of your downstream foot when crossing fast moving water.
- If you are wading in the surf, wear a lifejacket and watch out for rips and gutters.
- Carry food and water. No matter how clean a mountain stream looks, you never know what died upstream in the storm three months ago.
- Four wheel drives are for getting out of trouble, not getting into it. >>>

Be cautious and conservative, don't take risks, and do a training course if you're planning a serious 4WD trip. Do more research than just Google maps when looking for remote access tracks.

- Know how to deal with snake bites, and what to do if someone is unconscious.
- Think about doing a first-aid course, especially if you're doing remote area fishing, or rock fishing.
- Above all, think of the risks of your next trip, how those risks might compound into an incident pit, how you are going to manage those risks, and how you are going to get help if you need it.

Disclaimer: The advice provided in this article is general in nature. We all have a personal responsibility to take reasonable precautions against specific risks, and to seek advice or assistance on the risks and dangers potentially faced when planning a fishing trip.



This photo was sent to us by Joe Kahler, one of our US friends. He writes: We're able to fish for sac-a-lait (crappies) and catch them on a fly of my own design. Great fun on a 5-weight, but my buddy tells me I'm being too fancy when I use my Winston trout rod on them. I say, "Life is short; use the good crystal



Bruce Houghton provided this photo capturing the magnificent roast dinner under the stars at this year's Big River trip



FLY OF THE MONTH

... *David Coutts's "Pete Watson Stimmi"*



I mentioned last month David Coutt's special 'Stimulator fly' – a fly that he had found to be particularly effective in NSW rivers. Let's share the good news.

When I did some searching I found that David's fly was in fact very similar to some Stimulators with other names. This is no reflection at all on David – his description of how he came by this fly is given below. Stimulators are clearly a group of flies having similar construction but with minor variations in their materials and names.

In David's note to me he reported fishing for rainbows with his mate Andrew Warnes in the Snowy Mountains some years ago. On one particular day he was missing a lot of fish on his usual size 12 Stimulator, so he begged a smaller Stimulator-type fly from Andrew and this seemed to solve the problem.

So David headed off to the vice and tied up his own version of this fly on a size 16 hook, and it was certainly effective - until one day when he was fishing a small Snowy Mountains creek in dappled light and kept losing sight of the fly in the mixed light. So he added a white polypropylene wing and this "sorted out the visibility problem."

David then adds that over the past seven or eight years he and Andrew have caught several hundred trout on it, and it is now his first choice fly as a hopper imitation.

As for the name, one of David's other fishing companions caught a fish on this fly and referred to it as that "Pete Watson Stimmi" and the name stuck.

(For the record, and your editor's research has been fairly limited, websites show similar flies which were referred to as an "X-Stimulator Royal", a "Stimulator Orange Fly", a "Royal Stimulator", ... the list goes on. After all that I quite like David's version. It worked for me on the Owens River a few weeks ago.)

Materials:

Hook:	Black Magic B16
Thread:	8/0 hot orange
Tail:	Fine natural deer hair
Rear Rib:	Fine gold wire
Rear Hackle:	Brown dry fly hackle
Rear body:	Chartreuse Uniflex
Under-wing:	Fine natural deer hair
Over-wing:	White Polypropylene
Front Body:	8/0 hot orange thread
Front Hackle:	Grizzly dry fly hackle
Legs:	Fine orange and black barred rubber legs

Tying Procedure:

1. Wind hot orange thread back along the hook shank to just before the bend, then tie in a small bunch of fine natural deer hair that has been levelled using a hair stacker.
2. Also tie in a short length of fine gold wire for the rib.
3. Wind the thread back to just before the midpoint of the shank, then tie in a small brown hackle.
4. Wind this hackle to the rear of the fly, then wind the gold wire rib forward to lock the hackle in place.
5. Tie off the hackle and trim the waste. Also tie in the rib and then cut the wire. (Note that the rear part of this fly occupies less than half of the total hook shank.)
6. Wind the orange thread forward a little and tie in another bunch of fine deer hair. This should be tied in just in front of the rear part of the body so that the deer hair stands up at an angle of about 30° to the shank.
7. Tie in the white polypropylene just above the deer hair, then trim it to size with some scissors. It should lie over the top of the deer hair.
8. Wind the thread forward to just behind the eye and tie in the grizzly hackle. Then wind the thread back to just in front of the white polypropylene.
9. Wind the grizzly hackle in, then tie it in with a couple of strong turns of the thread.
10. At this point you also need to tie in the rubber legs. Cut two lengths of the leg material a bit longer than what will be needed and then tie in the leg on the side facing you with a couple of turns of thread. Wiggle it around so that it is horizontal, then tie in the leg on the other side. Turn you fly upside down in the vise if this makes it easier.
11. Once the two legs are held in place wrap a couple of more strong turns to lock them solidly in place.
12. Complete the fly by winding back through the grizzly hackle and then tie in a half

hitch behind the eye. Trim the rubber legs so that they are the same size on both sides. Add a drop of head cement on the thread behind the eye.

11. Wind the grizzly hackle in, then wind the thread back to the eye, trapping the grizzly hackle in through the process.
12. Complete the fly by tying a half hitch in the tying thread behind the eye, and trim the rubber legs so that they are the same size on both sides.



This photo shows NSW member Rob Lennon fishing the Gungarlin River in NSW. The Gungarlin River is in the Thredbo-Perisher area of Kosciuszko National Park, about 60 km from Jindabyne

Our Sponsors

A collection of logos for various fishing-related sponsors. The logos include: AFN Fishing & Outdoors, FlyLife, Compleat Angler, FLYFINZ fishing tackle & books, Armadale Angling Fishing Tackle Specialists since 1954, Harley's FLY FISHING, Aussie Angler fishing tackle, Hook Up BAIT & TACKLE, J.M. Gillies, Millbrook, and mayfly.

VFFA 2021 meetings & other activities

May 2021

- 20 Thursday General Meeting – 8:00 pm at the Kelvin Club:
Annual Auction of books and equipment
Book Launch of Rick Keam’s fly tying book: *Dressed For Dinner*
- 26 Wednesday Council Meeting – 6:30 pm
- 28 – 30 Annual Bruce Whitehead Western Lakes Challenge – VFFA vs
Bairnsdale, with accommodation at Camperdown.

June 2021

- 11 Friday The trout fishing season in Victorian rivers officially closes at
midnight on Friday, June 11, this year
- 17 Thursday General Meeting – 8:00 pm at the Kelvin Club:
Speaker – Craig Coltman, who will speak about the ‘One Percenters’
- 20 Sunday Social Casting at the Red Tag Pool, commencing at 10:30 am
- 30 Wednesday Council Meeting – 6:30 pm at the Kelvin Club

July 2021

- 15 Thursday General Meeting – 8:00 pm at the Kelvin Club:
Speakers – Bernard Holbery and Jason Platts, who will tell us all
about Streamcraft on Small Streams.
- 18 Sunday Social Casting at the Red Tag Pool, commencing 10:30 am
- 28 Wednesday Council Meeting – 6:30 pm at the Kelvin Club

August 2021

- 20 Friday Annual Dinner at the Kelvin Club, Guest Speaker: Jim Allen
- 22 Sunday President’s Casting Day at the Red Tag Pool, commencing 10:30 am
- 25 Wednesday Council Meeting – 6:30 pm at the Kelvin Club

September 2021

- 4 Saturday Victorian rivers open again to trout fishing
- 16 Thursday 2021 Annual General Meeting - 8:00 pm at the Kelvin Club
- 29 Wednesday Council Meeting – 6:30 pm at the Kelvin Club

(VFFA events still to be finalised include Sunday Casting, casting tuition, winter fly tying, a possible Cane Day, nymphing and river tuition on local streams. The date for this year’s Donger Competition is also still to be finalised.)