

# FLY LINES



NOVEMBER 2020

## Bob Roles Passes

It is very sad to report that one of our esteemed members, Robert Roles, died on Friday, October 23.

Bob, as most of us knew him, has not been well for the past 18 months and had undergone several major surgeries.

A resident of Bendigo, it was a highlight to see him at functions in Melbourne over the years.

Bob's skills as a fly fishermen are well known, and many who knew him and who had fished with him regarded him as one of the finest and most skilled stream anglers we have had in our ranks.

In this issue of our newsletter Jim Allen, who fished with Bob from teenage years, and Dermot O'Brien, who fished and travelled with him in recent years, pay tribute to a genuine fly fishing elder statesman.



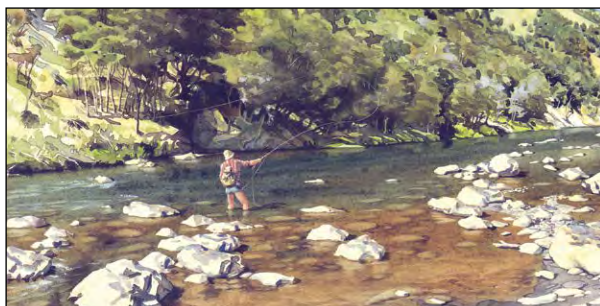
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## New Members

It is our great pleasure this month to welcome David Mackaway and David Beardmore as new members of the Association. We trust that their membership brings many years of pleasure, lots of fabulous fishing, and countless wonderful memories and rewarding friendships.



*Waiau River - a Nancy Tichborne watercolour*

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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](mailto:president@vffa.com.au)

Phone: 0408 256 525

## **Vice President**

David Hooke

Email: [dhhooke@icloud.com](mailto:dhhooke@icloud.com)

Phone: 0411 683 684

## **Honorary Secretary**

Kevin Finn

Email: [secretary@vffa.com.au](mailto:secretary@vffa.com.au)

Phone: 0401 695 414

## **Honorary Treasurer**

Tony Mitchem

Email: [treasurer@vffa.com.au](mailto:treasurer@vffa.com.au)

Phone: 0407 309 797

## **Vffa Website Administrator**

Kevin Finn

Email: [webadmin@vffa.com.au](mailto:webadmin@vffa.com.au)

Phone: 0401 695 414

## **Honorary Editor**

Lyndon Webb

Email: [editor@vffa.com.au](mailto:editor@vffa.com.au)

Phone: 0488 555 724

## **Honorary Librarian**

John Pilkington

Email: [library@vffa.com.au](mailto: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)

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# Mending Casts

changing lives one cast at a time

## The November meeting with John Billing and Joanne Dobson

Mending Casts Inc run free live-in weekend fly fishing retreats for Australians dealing with cancer. They host the internationally acclaimed programs “Casting for Recovery” in Victoria and “Reel Recovery” across Australia, as well as the “Casting for Kids” days now being planned. As a registered non-profit organisation run solely by unpaid volunteers, Mending Casts is entirely self-funded, with funds obtained through a broad range of fund raising activities, supporters, sponsorships, corporate partnerships and government grants. Every dollar raised is invested back into their programs and the activities that support them.

Initially setup to implement the “Casting for Recovery” retreat program in Victoria, Mending Casts has been operating since February 2019 and their first retreat was



*John Billing*

Thursday, November 19,  
8:00 pm,  
via Zoom

held in Eildon in September 2019. This year was to see the first “Reel Recovery” retreat to be held in Australia, but the Covid-19 pandemic has this event postponed until circumstances allow it to be run.

Reel Recovery was founded in the USA in 2003 by a group of fly fishers who were inspired by their fishing mate Stewart Brown’s ongoing battle with brain cancer. Combining expert fly fishing instruction with directed counselling through “courageous conversations”, the program now provides men dealing with all forms of cancer with a unique opportunity to share their stories, learn a new skill, form lasting friendships and gain renewed hope as they confront the challenges of their disease.

Retreats are conducted over a two-and-a-half day period at a venue with onsite or nearby fishing access. All meals, accommodation and fly fishing equipment are provided at no cost. Participants are responsible for their own transportation to and from the Retreat.

Men at any stage of treatment or recovery or in full remission from any type of cancer are eligible to attend one Retreat each and no previous fishing experience is necessary. Medical clearance from a physician is required. The Retreats are designed to provide support and information regarding cancer and cancer recovery, and to provide introductory instruction in the sport of fly fishing.



*Members of the Mending Casts committee*

Today the program is well established and wide-spread throughout mainland USA and Canada. There is even a retreat program operating now in New Zealand. To date over 3,500 men have experienced this program and many have subsequently described it as “life changing”.

The first Australian Retreat was due to be held at Omeo in October, 2020, but will be suspended until COVID restrictions are lifted and it is safe to resume.

Should you be interested in attending a Retreat or know of someone who could benefit, please email our secretary at [admin@mendingcasts.org](mailto:admin@mendingcasts.org) for more details. There is a limit of 12 places per event but we have plans to run one Reel Recovery and one Casting for Recovery event each year provided we can get the required funding. More information is available at [www.mendingcasts.org](http://www.mendingcasts.org)

**November Meeting on Thursday, November 19, at 8:00 pm.**

The guest speakers for our November meeting are John Billing and Joanne Dobson. This again will be a Zoom meeting and the simplest way to join us is to wait for Terry Rogers’ email just prior to the 19th giving us the invitation. Then you simply click on the Website link in this email inviting members to join in.

Alternatively, you can follow these steps:

- 1) Open your internet browser and type in <https://zoom.us/join>
- 2) Type these numbers - 873 6925 3537 - into the box labelled “Meeting ID or Personal Link Name”
- 3) Click on “Join”
- 4) A box will then open on your screen asking, “Do you want to allow this page to open zoom.us.app?” Click “Allow”.

It will take a little while for Zoom to open and then you will join the rest of the members for what promises to be another important and informative night.



# President's Message

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Welcome to our November *Fly Lines* newsletter.

We enjoyed another well-supported turn out for our guest speaker Andrew Fuller last month, with over 70 members and guests logging in to hear Andrew's excellent presentation.

Just as we seem to have rolled into a 'lockdown normal' over recent months, we will now try to move toward some informal gatherings organised in the short term, and hopefully get back to regular dinners and events beyond that. These informal meetings will not be listed in the calendar on the back page of our newsletters, but will be advertised at short notice and will hopefully include some informal lunches at the Kelvin Club, a Dam Day at Thorpdale, social catch ups at the Red Tag casting pool, and possibly even a fishing trip to a popular location. I am well aware we're all keen to "get out" from the constraints of the lockdown, and Council is in full support of some managed Covid-safe events.

I must pass on my appreciation to our council members for their continued support and wisdom through these changing times.

Our next two general meetings will be online (i.e. Zoom meetings) with Mending Casts (November) and Malcolm Crosse (December). All being well we will return to the Kelvin Club in February 2021 for Liars' Night.

Our calendar remains flexible as to when we may be able to catch up in person. Follow the updates from Jo, Will, Terry, Lyndon and our social media.

We have been facilitating discussion among our fishing brethren regarding the proposed "Camping Bill" amendment for



licensed crown land. It would appear that the message has been poorly presented to the public and has caused some significant concern. We have received a number of proposals from individuals and clubs opposing the amendment. If you would like to know more about this issue or want to submit your thoughts, I am more than happy to include such contributions in our overall submission.

The annual Talk Wild Trout Conference will be virtual this year. The draft presentations for the conference are:

- Fish photography: recording catch while caring for fish (David Anderson)
- Trout strategy – a long term vision on caring for our trout fishery (Paul Stolz)
- Trout management - how management is caring for our trout fishery (Taylor Hunt)
- Fish handling - caring for captured trout (Sascha Clark Danychuk)

- Genetics - caring about trout populations
- Compliance - caring for trout fisheries (Greg Sharp/Russell Strongman)
- Fishing ethics/social licence - caring about the future of trout fishing (Michelle Werner)
- Riparian vegetation and trout - caring for the fish (Julie Morgan/John Douglas)
- ATF - an overview of ATF activities (Terry George)
- North-east stream improvement post fires - looking after the habitat (Andrew Briggs)
- Care for trout products - caring for individual fish (Jo Dobson)
- Trout in Town - caring for urban fishers (Paul Gaskell)
- Seal the Loop (Zoos Victoria)

The conference will run over three nights and we will have a couple of selected presenters giving live forums on the first two nights where questions regarding the day's presentations can be answered. Then on the final night there will be an open forum with the VFA CEO, and other executives available to answer questions during a longer live Q&A session.

The VFA has continued to stock fish across Victoria with "stonkers" (very large rainbow trout) being released into Metropolitan lakes as well as a few in the Goulburn River.

Closer to home, we heard the very sad news that Bob Roles and Merv Mcguire had recently passed away. Both have contributed significantly to our fishing and will be missed.

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

Stay well.




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## Our October Meeting with Andrew Fuller

The Flyfisher store and the VFFA have had a strong connection for more than 50 years. Our fly shop was started many years ago by VFFA past president Jim Allen and long-time member Bob Roles. Many current and deceased members have worked at The Flyfisher, and much like the VFFA, we've been an important part of the local flyfishing fabric since our inception.

I started working at the store in 2004 when I was 19. I then purchased the business from Jim a few years ago, and since then there have been some important objectives we've tried to achieve.

The most vital of these objectives is developing a sound strategy for converting wannabe fly fishers into lifelong passionate fly fishers, and to that end I'm proud of what we've achieved. Without fly fishing I know my life would lack something significant, so I like to think that we've made a meaningful difference in the lives of a lot of other people. As well as what we do in the store, FlyStream.com (the digital magazine) has played a big part in helping us spread some fly fishing cheer. The articles in FlyStream are all designed to impart knowledge that then translates to bringing more fish to the net.

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More fish to the net results in more fun on the water, and this invariably leads to more regular trips.

Getting folk out of the urban sprawl and venturing into Australia's wonderful countryside makes them far more aware, more conscious of, and more protective of our natural wilderness areas. If there's one noteworthy outcome from this pandemic, it will be that people will have a sharpened appreciation of just how good it is to have the freedom to explore these areas. For many it will reinvigorate that insight and I hope our environment will be the beneficiary of this for many years to come.

Of course that appreciation comes from having a magic time out in the bush, and for us that means catching fish. Which leads me to my main topic for tonight: where you need to be when the restrictions are lifted. As Premier Dan points out, restrictions will be eased in various steps and stages, so I'll start with the more likely things to be eased and then finish with some of the top destinations in Australia outside Victoria that I think are our country's most attractive places for fly fishers.

While we've been locked up in Melbourne, the rest of our state is showing signs of having the best trout season in recent memory. Officially we're in a La Nina year, so it's going to be a wet spring and summer on top of the already good water levels.

More immediately you should be thinking of the lakes that only fish well once in a blue moon.

If you've recently purchased Philip Weigall's new book *Fly Fishing Western Victoria* you'll have to read between the pages to work out which waters might be worth a look. For an obvious



*The cover of Philip Weigall's new book*

reason boom and bust fisheries only get a passing mention in the pages of the book, but this Spring we can be confident they'll be in the boom phase.

A quick check of stocking numbers from the last couple of years provides an invaluable piece of the puzzle.

Here's some examples of lakes in the west that have had solid stockings in recent years and hence are likely to be fishing well right now.

#### **Stocking numbers in 2019:**

Lake Burrumbete - 10,000; Green Hill Lake (Ararat) – 6,000; Konongwootong (Coleraine) – 5,000; Lake Wallace - Nearly 7,000; Lake Bellfield - 25,000; Barkers Creek Reservoir - 10,000; Lake Tooliorook - 10,000.

#### **Stocking numbers in 2018:**

Lake Burrumbete - 14,000; Green Hill Lake (Ararat) – 6,000; Konong Wootong (Coleraine) – 5,000; Lake Wallace - 17,000; Lake Bellfield - 20,000; Barkers Creek Reservoir - 5,000; Lake Tooliorook - 10,000.

So the news is bright for our lakes, and it's just as good for the rivers. We're coming off a series of hot summers and so we've had seasons where water temperatures simply got too hot to sustain good fishing. In comparison to the good fishing we've missed due to the coronavirus I think we've lost far more in the last few summers due to hot temperatures. Already the fishing in the north-east is firing, so when the summer arrives the fishing will be phenomenal.

We live in hope that New Zealand might be on the cards later, but you'd be foolish letting that hope get in the way of good trips locally. Anyone who's retired or managed to maintain normal employment during this pandemic has undoubtedly got some money put aside to spend on a decent fly fishing trip this season. Cancelled holidays to foreign countries and cash not spent in pubs and restaurants has hopefully topped up your kitty, so there's no better time to think seriously about making the most of a trip with some guided fishing.

As for our rivers, Gippsland and Eildon provide the obvious choices if all you can manage is a day trip from Melbourne.

The Eildon catchment receives the majority of Melbourne traffic - and for a good reason. The fishing is good, even in a bad year. So expectations are high with this coming season. Popular rivers like the Goulburn, Steavenson, Rubicon, Big, Murrindindi and Acheron will all have a great season. Should you need a guide for this area then [wildernessflyfishing.com.au](http://wildernessflyfishing.com.au) offer a fun day packed full of tuition if you need it.

Often overlooked by Melbournians, the Gippsland rivers, and particularly the rivers around Noojee, offer reliable fishing for mostly smallish but very



*Scott Xanthoulakis from [wildernessflyfishing.com.au](http://wildernessflyfishing.com.au) with a superb rainbow*

willing fish. If you're into your small stream fishing then you'll love this area. Pack your 3-weight and some small dries, and hit one of these waters - the Loch, Latrobe, Toorong or Tanjil west branch.

Should you need a guide then Corey Milner of Fly Addiction @ [flyaddictionflyfishing](http://flyaddictionflyfishing) will get you off the beaten path and on to some of Gippsland's best kept small stream secrets.



*Corey Milner fishing a fine Gippsland stream*

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If you can manage more than a day trip, the areas around Bright and Anglers Rest should surely be on your agenda. Targeting trout by day and Cod in the early evening is an incredible way to spend your day. The Bright/Myrtleford area offers one of the most reliable places to catch a cod on a fly, whilst also having the Ovens, Kiewa and many other small streams for trout. Bright is a great place for non-fishing companions as well, so it should be an easy sell if you're struggling to pull off a full blown fishing trip. If you need a guide in the area, Cameron and Katie of *River Escapes* can put a memorable package together for you. Some of my best trips have been with these guys and I wouldn't head up there without booking them.



*Cameron McGregor from River Escapes catches lots of Murray cod on flies*

The area around Anglers Rest is not one I'm personally familiar with but its reputation is no secret. The Mitta, Bundara and Cobungra are just a few of the hallowed waters in this area. Fly fisher and guide Nathan Vernon has recently purchased a property up there and is in the process of setting up for the season. He has no hesitation in saying that he believes it offers the best trout fishing in mainland Australia. The normally five-hour plus drive might turn

me off, but from the photos I've seen, and with our current restrictions, I think this is a no brainer. If you're looking for an adventure, Nathan can be contacted through instagram @cruisen\_4\_trout.

If travel out of Victoria is allowed over the next 12 months then Australia has some of the best saltwater fly fishing in the world, and the best of it, I think, can be found at Hinchinbrook, Gladstone, Albany Island, Weipa and West Cape, Bynoe Harbour and of course Exmouth. Most of these places (especially Gladstone) are heavily dependent on good weather, so go there knowing that at least on some days you might be blown out. If you get the right weather though, these places fish as well as anywhere on the planet.



*Nathan Vernon with a fine brown taken from very attractive water*

So being forced to look closer to home isn't the worst thing in the world, and I'm more excited about the fishing to come this year than any other!

## Our Christmas Dinner with Malcom Crosse

Malcolm has enjoyed a rich lifetime of involvement in fishing. It began when he was a youngster in the UK in the early 1950s, and continued when his family moved to Port Augusta in South Australia. In 1964 he commenced fly fishing as a provisional member of the South Australian Fly Fishers.

In 1969 he moved to Tasmania to pursue an occupation in communications engineering, which of course enabled him to experience the fabulous trout fishing that Tasmania offered. In 1971 he joined the Tasmanian Fly Tiers Club, and for the next 20 years was heavily involved in fly fishing Tasmanian lakes and rivers.

In 1988 he was a guide and host to the Welsh team for the World Fly Fishing Championships in Tasmania, and in 1990 was a team member of the Australian team that fished the World Fly Fishing Championships in the UK. In the same year he was a member of the Australian team that won the 1990 Commonwealth Fly Fishing Championships in Wales.

The years that followed saw Mal captaining the Australian team in World and Commonwealth championships. He also co-authored the two popular books *Australia's Best Trout Flies* and *"Australia's Best Trout Flies Revisited"*.

He worked as a part-time trout fishing guide for Peter Hayes whilst also acting as a consultant to the World Fly Fishing Championship Board and Committee.

In 2016 he prepared the bid for the 2019 World Championships to be held in Tasmania, was appointed director of operations and sponsorship coordinator for these Championships, and was heavily involved in the administration of the Championships in 2019 with 24 countries competing.

Malcolm is also Executive Officer for Anglers' Alliance Tasmania (the body that



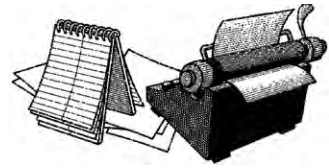
*Malcolm Crosse, our Speaker at this year's December meeting*

assists in policy making with the Director and Minister for Inland Fisheries). In his spare time he installs and maintains the Angler Web Cams in Tasmania - see [www.anglersalliance.org.au](http://www.anglersalliance.org.au)

Malcolm clearly has a wealth of knowledge about fly fishing, fly fishing in Tasmania and fly fishing championships. His presentation at our December Christmas Dinner will focus on the World Championships in Tasmania, and will include a number of short videos, pictures and PowerPoint files. He has also recruited some of the officials involved in the Championships to provide additional perspectives. So we will hear from Andrew Feed, the Contoller Coordinator, Mark Aspinall, the Sector Controller at Penstock Lagoon, and Steve Butler, boat controller at Little Pine . This panel of speakers will give a fascinating overview of the topic.

Malcolm and his team will join us for our Zoom Christmas Dinner at 7:00 pm on December 11. This will be a great night and one not to be missed.

# From the EDITOR'S DESK



*"The finest gift you can give to any fisherman is to put a good fish back, and who knows if the fish that you caught isn't someone else's gift to you?" (Lee Wulff)*

*"In the new world, it is not the big fish that eats the small fish, it's the fast fish that eats the slow fish." (Klaus Schwab)*

*"My big fish must be somewhere." (Ernest Hemingway)*

*"Sure, it was your idea and your fly, but he caught the big fish. Remember, fairness is a human idea largely unknown in nature." (John Gierach)*

Yes, big fish again. At the season opening last year the VFA dropped a number of 'stonkers' (large rainbow trout) into the Goulburn River. I think they planned to do the same again this year, but we had a virus running rampant, and all of us Melbourne anglers were on a string 25 km long. The Goulburn was out of reach. So the VFA changed the plan and dropped a large numbers of these stonkers into lakes and reservoirs in and around Melbourne.

Just down the road from where I live there are three lakes in the suburb of Rowville. They have names – Lake Hill, Lake Sutton and Lake Cogley. They are part of a housing estate so are surrounded by houses. Lake Hill had 10 stonkers dropped in, and Lake Sutton received 20. I hasten to add there's no truth in the rumour that the addition of these monsters caused the lake levels to rise by 3 cm.

Of course my curiosity got the better of me, so off I went to investigate. It was a Saturday, and it looked like I was walking into a Melbourne Cup gathering. Cars everywhere, mums and dads and kids everywhere, barbecues smoking happily, tents and picnic tables decorating the ambiance, and a picket fence of rods propped up all the way

along the accessible edges. I spoke with one enthusiast who had virtually camped there since the big release. Yes, he had caught one. It weighed 7 kg and thus fed the family and half his street. Five of the ten stonkers had already been caught, so five still remained.

I wandered across to Lake Sutton, the largest of the three, where a young angler whipped out his camera (aka iPhone) and showed me the one he had caught the previous day. It looked truly immense. He claimed he had caught two, but released one and kept the other. These big rainbows were being a bit picky though. They were only being caught on 'Powerbait for Rainbows', an apparently vile-smelling brew. The spinner men and fly fishers had been left out.

This reminded me that when those big rainbows had been released in the Goulburn last year anglers who caught them a week after their release found that they had empty stomachs – they hadn't been feeding. Perhaps back in the hatchery they had got quite accustomed to being fed with fish pellets every day, so the challenge of actually having to hunt for food was a talent they had dodged. I wondered how long it took for fish

like this to develop the necessary skills associated with learning to hunt for their food.

One of the young anglers at Sutton Lake told me that he and his friends often rounded up handfuls of gravel and threw them into the lake. Yearling trout are stocked into these lakes two or three times a year, and these fish often revealed their locations when the gravel landed. The sound of the gravel arriving clearly stirred some memories of past good times at the hatchery.

I know that the release of these huge fish in lakes and dams around Melbourne raised a few eyebrows and drew some critical comment, but on seeing the interest and enthusiasm that these fish created among the keen anglers in my area I couldn't help feeling that it was a really good thing. A 10 lb trout caught on a fly from a Western Victoria lake or reservoir might well be regarded as a more notable capture, but us Melbourne anglers didn't have that option. We've been locked up for several months, and many have found it

tough going. These monster fish provided a target and a lot of fun and excitement among anglers in the suburbs, so well done VFA.

And still talking about monster trout, I received a note recently from James Carter with information on a truly monstrous trout caught in New Zealand recently. The Website to check is:

<https://www.stuff.co.nz/timaru-herald/news/300143657/fisherman-who-landed-massive-trout-in-mackenzie-wishes-to-remain-anonymous>

The fish was caught from the Mackenzie hydro canals near Twizel by a man who wanted to be known as 'Seamus from Turangi'. The fish, a brown trout, weighed 20.1 kg which is 44.3 lb in the old money. That's a lot of trout!

Take care and stay safe,

*Lyndon*



*The enormous brown trout of just over 20 kg caught recently near Twizel*

## This Month's Yarn:

(... from August 1966)

"I've been lead to believe that most of the rainbow trout on sale here," said David, while the lunch glasses were spirited away to be re-filled, "now come from Japan."

"They come here frozen, of course," remarked McTaggart.

"I asked a friend of mine about this the other day," David continued, "and he's a bloke who reckons he knows something about fish. I asked him if he could tell the difference between a Japanese rainbow and one that's bred in Australia. He said you can easily tell them apart by their spots."

"Their spots?"

"Yes, their spots." David continued, "The Japanese rainbows have their spots organized in straight lines along their sides and the spots are all equally spaced. It's because of their cultural passion for organizing things sensibly. If the spots are equally spaced in straight lines it makes it a whole lot easier to prepare those sushi dishes for sale."

McTaggart looked very pensive. Then he said, "The spots are not the only difference. The Japanese rainbows have other national characteristics they exhibit while they're alive. I'll give you one example. It's not well known but some years ago the VFA stocked the upper Rubiburn River with rainbows directly imported from Japan, probably as an experiment. These fish proved difficult to catch because they knew some of the principles of ju-jitsu. One of the tactics in ju-jitsu is this - if a fellow tries to pull you in a certain direction you suddenly go the way he's pulling, and this so surprises

him that he loses his balance and his grip."

"Well these rainbows did exactly the same thing. They'd suddenly swim quickly in the direction in which you were exerting pressure, and that usually got you into all sorts of difficulties and freed the hook. And there was one big rainbow up there that many anglers had lost, in spite of using heavy tackle and letting him swallow the fly. This was because he had developed a karate trick."

"A karate trick?" queried David.

"Well, that's the best way I can describe it", replied McTaggart. "This fish had a sharp-edged operculum, probably self-developed, and using this and a sudden adroit movement, he would cut the leader and thus escape."

"But I suppose you caught him?" asked David.

"As a matter of fact I did. That's how I found out about the operculum. I cut my hand on it."

"How did you manage to catch him then?"

"By a trick I learned years ago on the Wingiwoba," replied McTaggart. "When the fish rose to my fly, I flicked the fly back past his mouth and hooked him securely in the tail. As he hadn't learned to swim backwards, I was able to manage him."

## Vale Bob Roles: June 27, 1944 - October 23, 2020

On Friday, October 23, one of our most revered and esteemed members, Bob Roles, died. In a recent issue of our Fly Lines we announced that he had been made an Honorary Member of the Victorian Fly Fishers' Association.

Two of his many friends, Dermot O'Brien and Jim Allen, have written tributes to his memory.

### Dermot O'Brien:

There is a spot on the Mataura River in New Zealand where the river makes a hard 90 degree turn and the farmer has tipped tonnes of rocks and concrete blocks into the bend to stop erosion. Then the mighty Mataura has itself dumped massive logs, roots, bits of farm machinery, star pickets and rusty barbed wire into the bend in flood after flood.



*Tough going on the Mataura River*

And it was down into this tangled mess that Bob Roles climbed in November 2015, because he had seen a fish rise way out in the river. Bob cast a long line along the bank and let it come to rest in the tangled mess of debris. He sat and waited. Eventually the fish rose again, and Bob, to my amazement, lifted his line off without snagging and changed the direction of his back cast in mid-air, shooting his line out into the river. He then caught the fish and simply said to me: "That was a good outcome."

Bob and I had arrived in Queenstown with much anticipation of fishing the Mataura. However our first snag was getting through New Zealand Customs because Bob had fallen behind. When I went back to find



*Well done Bob – 'a good outcome!'*

him he was explaining to a Customs Officer why he had a wooden pepper grinder in his bag. Then the official saw a long cylindrical object on X-ray, and perhaps thinking it was a rifle barrel he shouted: "What's this?" Bob had some difficulty but eventually explained that it was a Salter spring balance and he used it for weighing trout. Bob and I were finally waved on, leaving the Customs man scratching his head.

Bob Roles was a unique character and he liked to do things his way. He was a stickler for accuracy and when listening to fishermen boast about the sizes of their trout, he would simply say: "Was it on the Salter?" That comment certainly brought a lot of discussion to an abrupt end.

Bob was part of a well-known group of fly fishers who, as young men, fished the Goulburn, the Monaro and >>>



*A trout spotted and a careful stalk*

Tasmania. His comrades were Marty Rogers, John Philbrick, Jim Allen and others. Whenever Marty Rogers was asked: "Who was the best fly fisherman you had seen?" he would say without hesitation Bob Roles. In a recent conversation I had with Jim Allen, Jim backed that claim up.

Bob may well have been Australia's first trout bum. To be close to good fishing he worked as a traffic controller on a Snowy Mountains road gang, but got the sack because he kept disappearing whenever they worked near a stream. Eventually the foreman gave Bob his job back on the condition Bob would catch him two nice trout each day for his lunch.

Rick Keam reminded me recently of the story of when Bob had taken up residence in a bush walkers' hut in the Snowy Mountains. He arrived back late one night to find that a pair of honeymooning bush walkers had moved in for the night. Bob banged pots and pans around to make his presence known in the dark, and eventually said to the couple: "Don't worry about me, just carry on with whatever you were doing."

Bob had a short attention span for some topics. His eyes would glaze over, for example, when talking about gear for more than a couple of minutes, but he could talk for hours about the ways of the trout. His knowledge about trout and trout behaviour

was extraordinary and he was among the first to write about trout habitat, water temperature and conservation.

He has been a consistent contributor to the VFFA newsletter since the early 1960s and in the VFFA's *Geehi to Great Lake*, an anthology of the Association's newsletters, Bob has seven of his articles published.

In *A Country for an Angler*, our own history, some of Bob's exploits are documented. Both books are indexed and well worth another read.

Over the years he became something of a purist. He cast only to sighted fish. On his last holiday to Corryong in North-East Victoria, a place where he camped and fished every year for more than 30 years, he had ten fishing trips, or as he called them, "outings." Because he never saw a worthy fish on these ten outings, at no stage did he rig his rod up.

Bob loved to stalk backwaters, and the Goulburn backwaters in willow grub season were a particular favourite. He would stand for hours waiting for a trout to swim under the willows and was always on the lookout for a better willow grub pattern. He believed that the Goulburn has lost its clarity over the years, but still loved to fish it. He admitted it brought back wonderful memories.



## Jim Allen:

Word came through first from Greg Kelly that Bob was very ill and a few weeks later Dermot O'Brien informed me that he had died. It was a shock. We were fishing mates first, and then business partners in the start-up of Roles and Allen that later became the Compleat Angler store.

**W**e first met in about 1963. I was driving to the Eildon Pondage to fish with mud-eyes under a bubble float and saw Bob and Arthur Ford hitch-hiking at the gates of the Maroondah Reservoir just past Healesville. They had packs and were carrying fishing rods, so I stopped to give them a lift to the Steavenson River near Buxton.

That was the start of an intense friendship that saw me convert to fly fishing. Bob was working for Jack Turville after the untimely death of his uncle Maury Turville, so it wasn't a moment before I was kitted out with a split cane Victoria fly rod, a Kingfisher silk fly line and a Silver King fly reel - all collector's items today!

A few weeks later I joined the VFFA. Bob had been a member for a few months. Fred Stewart was president and he welcomed us as young teenage members. The annual subscription was one guinea or one pound and one shilling (\$2.10). The VFFA met in the Amateur Sports Club in McKillop Street in those days, and after the meetings members either went to the bar or stayed downstairs for coffee. We joined those in the bar. A 200 ml beer was a shilling (10c).

It wasn't long before a coterie of younger members joined the VFFA, most of them through the connections at Turvilles and the subsequent weekend fishing on the Goulburn River. The Association has struggled to find younger members these days but in the 1960's and 70's there was a large group of new members in their twenties. Senior members such as Alf Probert, Jack Ritchie and Tom Riley all encouraged us to belong to the VFFA and join in the activities.. We became a "university" of fly fishers, fishing the



Goulburn each weekend and ending up back at Iven Gneil's Igloo roadhouse at Buxton for steaks and a de-brief after the weekend's activities. Bob Roles was the leader of this gang.

In those days the fly fishing fraternity in Victoria was closer than it is today. The VFFA traditionally sent a team to Ballarat to fish in the annual Wastell trophy. Many VFFA members teamed up and fished in the Brunn Shield, which was a winter fly casting competition amongst all Victorian fly fishing clubs. And members of the VFFA went to "smoke nights" or dinners at the various fly fishing clubs at Wangaratta, Gippsland, Albury, Daylesford, Warrnambool, Ballarat and more. I remember over 130 coming to our annual dinners from all over Victoria.

I remember Arthur McAdam and Fred Eva asking Bob and I to join Ballarat members to fish Tullaroop and Ettrick. There was a short-lived boom in rainbow trout fishing at Ettrick, near Lismore, in 1964. The Ballarat boys designed an elongated nymph tied from black and yellow seals fur which was deadly on the rainbows. I also remember Bob fishing midge patterns with Bill Ricketts, who had discovered the strategy of drawing the sunken midge fly.

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Bob was undoubtedly the most serious and intense fly fisher I have ever fished with. Those meetings at the Igloo were more of an inquisition than anything else. Bob was starved for anything relating fly fishing and after a few years, and probably to the time of his death, I doubt there was anyone with more knowledge about trout and their habits and how to catch them.

For a period Bob became a sort of hermit. He lived in a hut at Kiandra whilst working part time at Harvey Palfrey's pub, then at Hain's hut out on the upper Tantangara River, and later on a creek bed near Maryborough. Always with a fly rod.

Like us all, he had a few faults. He refused to accept some of the rules we all live by. He didn't think he should pay parking fines, and he didn't fill in a taxation return for many years.

I remember a couple of suits walking into the newly-named Compleat Angler store and asking his whereabouts. I refused to answer until they identified themselves as federal police. I then got out a map of the Snowy Mountains and showed them five likely huts that he might be living in. I told them they would need over-snow transport to find him. I also told them there wouldn't be any financial outcome as he was tying a few flies for Jim Maiden's Sports Store at Cooma for provisions.

I informed them that when they caught up with him they would meet the most polite and agreeable guy ever, be offered some smoked trout and coffee, or perhaps there might be a braised rabbit on offer. But don't expect much else. He was, however, the best outdoorsman they would ever meet. He could set a snare for a rabbit with piano wire better than anyone else.

Eventually Bob returned to Victoria to discover his lifelong bride Murene. They had a daughter who he adored, and he lived his later life in Bendigo. He used to smoke Senior Service cigarettes. Nothing else would do. I remember him calling in on a dozen milk bars one Saturday without success. Later on a doctor lectured him



*A youthful Bob Roles, a skilled angler even in those early years*

and commented that he wouldn't see his daughter's 21<sup>st</sup> birthday if he didn't stop. He never smoked again!

In our short time as business partners he corresponded with Dick Wigram and we sold Dick's famous brown nymphs and black and cocky spinners. He wrote to Frank Sawyer's widow and we sold the original Sawyer Pheasant Tail nymphs. He was as detailed as any man I've ever met, even to a point of frustration.

Some time ago I was asked who was the best fly fisher I'd ever encountered. My answer was Bob Roles. Not because he caught more fish, but because his whole philosophy of fly fishing was, in my opinion, so complete and comprehensive. He was generous to a fault in sharing his knowledge. In later years he was intensely interested in trout management matters. When fishing he would go out with a rod in hand and not cast until he saw a trout rise or he spotted one using polaroid sunglasses. He had mellowed.

In earlier times he would fish through the freezing night at Eucumbene or Tantangara, casting an outsized Alexandra wet fly into the rough waters. But in later years his fishing was sight fishing only. We had fished together countless times, starting out on the west branch of the Kiewa River where he taught me to fly fish, then the Monaro high plains, and in later years Tasmania.

He loved to read books, particularly those on fishing the chalk streams of England.

It is a pity he didn't write a book of his own, though we at the VFFA do have some insights into his depth of knowledge through the articles he penned for our newsletters.

He had many friends in the fly fishing world, including men like Bill Morgan-

Payler and Marty Rogers who have passed on before. Those of us left who knew him well are greatly saddened by his passing, but so grateful to have known him. We knew a true fly fisher; one who was truly aware.



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## ATF Report - Looking Ahead In 2021 & Beyond

... from ATF President Terry George

A huge shout out to our passionate habitat volunteers. Unfortunately some significant "Trees for Trout" planting days planned for the Ovens and Steavenson rivers were cancelled due to Covid-19 restrictions.

However, together with GBCMA, VFA, VFFA and the allowed number of volunteers, we did manage to walk the Steavenson River between Buxton and Marysville, and the Rubicon River between Tumbling Waters and Camp Jungai. Without going into detail, the notes taken will translate into many riparian and in-stream restoration projects, weed control, and the installation of some 20 stiles, in consultation with landowners, to enhance angler access.

We have had meetings with NECMA Officers at Wangaratta and GBCMA Officers

in Melbourne, including further Zoom and phone discussions with EGCMA and WGCMA. The planning continues for habitat enhancement projects throughout our waterways as soon as practicable, although most will be scheduled for Autumn and Winter 2021.

We greatly value our relationships with CMA's, our volunteers and Landcare groups, and all are enthusiastic about working together to enhance the health of our waterways and fisheries.

Together with Glenelg Hopkins CMA, we are planning a Habitat Workshop in Warrnambool when travel and meeting restrictions allow. Additional workshops will be planned in other catchments regions as required.

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## Fly Tying for Extreme Beginners

... by Peter Whitelaw

(Peter reviews the basics in a comprehensive introduction to fly tying for those considering taking on this fascinating aspect of fly fishing.)

I have enjoyed fishing since childhood and have fly fished for the last 25 years but had never tried to tie a fly. Too busy to learn and usually focused on the fish.

This year is a very different one and the VFFA initiative of fly tying lessons via Zoom sparked my interest. Kossy's introductory session was great, but I realised that I needed pre-school lessons just to understand the fundamentals and how to apply the

instructions. I'm now the proud owner of the Aussie Angler fly tying kit, have read five books on fly tying, and watched several YouTube videos. I'm still very much a fumbling learner but have actually tied my first flies. I thought I should share my learning curve as others may feel they, too, need a pre-school lesson.

It's apparent that the various types of flies are intended to either imitate

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*Andrew Mossman tying flies with an engrossed audience*

a natural insect or crustacean, or be so annoying to the fish that they'll bite it. There are numerous books and articles on fly patterns, outlining their purpose and the materials needed to tie them, so I won't venture into that realm. Nor will I try to tell you how to tie a fly (also known as 'dressing a fly') as the books, videos and courses cover these in considerable depth. Unfortunately, many of these sources assume a level of basic knowledge of terminology and the components used. This article aims to fill that gap and add a few hints.

### **First, some notes on equipment:**

#### **The Hook**

A fly is tied onto a hook. There are innumerable types and sizes of hooks, some long and some short. I suggest you have a look at the tackle shop websites or a hook manufacturer's catalogue to view the range. It seems that the commonly used hooks (for beginners) are sizes 8 to 16 (the higher the number, the smaller the hook). A good starting point is a size 12 (barbed or barbless) hook which is about 13 mm long. Kossy provided a useful Fly Hook Cross-reference Chart in the May 2020 edition of *Fly Lines*.

#### **The Vise**

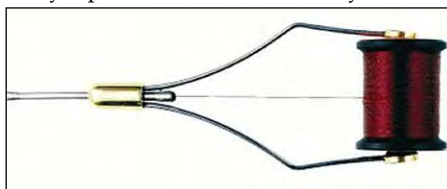
The vise holds the hook while you tie a fly. There are two types – models that clamp on the edge of the table and others that sit on the table. When using the vise, the eye of

the hook should be nearest your dominant hand – so for right handers, the vise jaws are on the left, and vice versa. Tighten the vice on the bend of the hook (also known as the shape) just behind the barb (or point) so that the shank is clear and horizontal. The shank is where the fly will be tied.

#### **The Thread**

Thread, also traditionally called the 'silk' (even though it is rare to be real silk), is usually coloured and waxed nylon. Its weight (and therefore strength and thickness) is stated in denier. It is common to use 70 denier thread for small flies, 140 for medium flies and 280 for large flies. The other thread coding often used is 'aught' sizes. 8/0 is equivalent to 70 denier, 6/0 is 140 denier and 3/0 is 280 denier. I suggest starting with 140 denier (6/0) but Kossy recommends 70 denier (8/0) for a tighter fly with a small head.

In addition to the thread, various other materials could be wound around or attached to the fly, including Chenille (a fuzzy rope-like material), tinsel (Mylar),



*A common Bobbin Holder*

Lurex, Kevlar, Vinyl, raffia, synthetic floss and wool.

#### **The Bobbin Holder**

Thread is usually supplied on bobbins (reels or spools) that are 3 cm long and 2.5 cm diameter. A bobbin holder is usually a forked spring wire device with knobs on the end that fit into the end holds of the bobbin. The holder has a thin tube through which the thread is 'threaded' using a bobbin threader or a piece of folded fine copper wire. Make sure you remove any labels from the end of the bobbin to ensure it turns smoothly and, if necessary, bend the spring legs a little to adjust the tension on the thread so that it is firm but doesn't cause breakages. Correct

tension on the thread is important as you wind it around the fly.

### **Hackle Pliers**

The hackle (see below) is usually a long thin feather which is wound around the fly in the neck area (just behind the eye), and you need to be able to grip the thin end of the hackle to wind it on. These simple spring-loaded pliers enable this. They grip well if rubber valve tubing is slipped over each jaw of the pliers.

### **Bobkin** (or dubbing needle)

This is used for teasing out the fur on the fly body or for placing a drop of glue or varnish.

**Hair Stacker** – A small tube into which hair, such as deer hair, can be stood vertically to align the ends before attaching to the fly.

### **Dressing a fly:**

Flies are usually formed with a series of continuous winds of thread around the shank of the hook. The first layer of wound-on thread forms the base upon which the rest of the fly is built up. It's important that it is tight. The other components (many optional) are added to the fly and held in place by more turns of thread.

These might include (in the order they are usually added) some fibres to form the tail, a body, thorax, wings, a hackle around the neck, a head (which might be a metal or glass bead) and possibly legs and antennae. All of these can be different colours, and some might be deliberately hairy.

The 'balance', or proportions of the fly is very important. The length of the tail, body, wings and hackle should follow the specific fly-tying instructions for each type of fly.

The two important parts to winding on the thread are the start (to first hold the thread in place) and the finish (to secure the final loose end of the thread). The former is usually done by winding thread over the loose end of the thread to trap it on the shank of the hook near the eye. The latter is usually called 'whip finishing' or 'tying off' and there are several methods for this – one can use a 'whip finisher' tool, an empty biro case, or fingers to apply a half-hitch knot. Often some varnish (clear nail polish) or glue

(e.g. Headset Cement or even a tiny dab of superglue) is used to secure the last knot.

There are many materials that can be used in tying flies. I'll mention a few types:

### **Dubbing**

A natural or synthetic fur (or hair) is often used to create the body or thorax of a fly. This is done by applying the fur to the tying thread and rolling the two between your thumb and forefinger to form a 'rope', which is then wound onto the fly. The process of applying the material in this way is also called 'dubbing'.

### **Feathers**

These come from a hen or rooster, duck, turkey, goose, partridge or pheasant, and are used as hackles, wings or tails. Sometimes they are speckled or 'grizzly' (alternate light and dark colours). A 'cape' is piece of skin from the neck of a bird with feathers attached. Feathers may need to be dissected and trimmed to size. Note that CDC stands for 'Cul de Canard' – soft oily feathers from the preen glands of ducks or geese.

### **Fur**

Hair from a variety of animals is used as dubbing for bodies, or for tails or wings. Sources include deer, elk, possum, caribou, moose, seal, bucktail, wallaby, fox, kangaroo, wombat, rabbit, goat, calf tail or squirrel. There are also lots synthetic materials these days, a popular one being Antron.

### **Hackle**

A longish feather, usually wound around a hook immediately behind the eye, to represent legs or feelers of an insect or to provide buoyancy to the fly. Hen hackles are softer and rounder than cock hackles and are used predominantly in wet flies. Sometime deer hair is used for the hackle.

### **Herl**

A long thin feather that is from a peacock or ostrich tail or sometimes a goose or pheasant tail. It is often wrapped around the neck of the fly. Peacock herl is often used in the bodies or thoraxes of flies.

### **Marabou**

The soft under-feathers found on a turkey or chicken. It is very soft and >>>

is often used for the long tails of flies such as Woolly Buggers because, being very soft, it moves around in an enticing way and looks alive when the fly is retrieved.

### **Ribbing**

Material such as wire or nylon is wound as a spiral along the body of the fly to either reinforce the dressing or divide the fly into segments or to fasten a hackle to the body. This wire can be lead, copper, gold or even fuse wire.

### **Tag**

A piece of material (sometimes wool) that is attached underneath the tail of the fly.

Your next step is to learn about the proper techniques from instructors, videos or books and to try tying your own basic practice flies.

From there you can access the descriptions of hundreds of flies, their components and how to tie them that are provided in newsletters, books and online.

Tight threads and tight lines!

### **Sources:**

*'Basic Fly-Fishing'*, 1993, by Les Hawkins

*'Beginner's Guide to Fly Tying'*, 1999, by Chris Mann and Terry Griffiths

*'Fur and Feather – Fly-Tying for Trout'*, 1991, by Peter Leuver

*'Pursuit of Fly Tying'*, 1987, by G.E.P. Rowney

*'The Elements of Fly Tying'*, 2008, by Tom Sutcliffe



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## **Our Next Visit to Millbrook**

Assuming that Covid-19 travel restrictions have been lifted by late November, members are reminded that again this year we have been invited to spend a day at Millbrook Lakes, the private fishery near Gordon that is owned and managed by VFFA member Mark Weigall. Gordon is just off the Western Highway about 25 km from of Ballarat.

The date for our next visit is Wednesday, November 25, and our time at Millbrook will commence at 11 am and continue till dark.

We will have access to four of the 31 privately stocked lakes (three with Murray cod). At this time of the year, with warming temperatures and bugs about, the fishing promises to be brilliant. Mark Weigall will provide a guide to help us with fly selection, best tactics, and likely locations of fish.

Members interested in visiting Millbrook on November 25 will need to email Terry Rogers on [terryrogers@bigpond.com](mailto:terryrogers@bigpond.com) to confirm their interest and arrange payment.

### **VFFA Notice of Event – Millbrook, November 25, 2020**

**The Event:** One-day visit to Millbrook Lakes private fishery.

**Event date:** November 25.

**Travel:** You are responsible for making your own arrangements to and from the fishery.

**Cost/s:** Email Terry Rogers for the latest pricing ([terryrogers@bigpond.com](mailto:terryrogers@bigpond.com).)

**Event location & address:** Millbrook Lakes near Gordon.

**Mobile phone coverage:** excellent.

**How physically challenging:** Comfortable fishing in all areas.

**Fishing license required:** No.

**Event Registration:** To be completed and returned to Terry by Wednesday November , 2020. Obtain ERF from [www.vffa.com.au](http://www.vffa.com.au) or pick up one at a General Meeting.

**Event Co-ordinator:** Terry Rogers – contact by email – [terryrogers@bigpond.com](mailto:terryrogers@bigpond.com)

**Date of this Notice of Event:** November 3, 2020

# This Month's Tasmania Report

... from Chris Wisniewski, IFS Tasmania

The rain continued through October with high water levels in most rivers and a number of lakes very high or spilling. Little Pine Lagoon has gone from being quite low with lots of tailing fish to spilling, so the fish are now back in the bushes chasing frogs and terrestrials that had been flooded out. It is now starting to fall again and tails are popping up on the back shore. As you are aware, these fish are not easy but the visual spectacle is what the Pine is known for.

The gate to the Nineteen Lagoons was opened on October 22 and anglers have been busy exploring the area and beyond. There have been plenty of tailing fish in low light conditions, and on sunny days polaroiding has been a good option with fish looking up and happy to take a nondescript dry fly.

The really good news story is that Arthurs Lake has been fishing well, with water quality improving. Most fish have been caught pulling wets from drifting boats, but with the slowly rising level inundating new ground there are fish now sneaking in very close to the shore. They have been full of stick caddis but have also been rising to midges in calm corners. The fish are in great condition. Everyone is now waiting to see what the dun hatches are like and if the fish are up on them.

Woods Lake has been spilling and is fishing as well as ever. The water is back into the trees and the fish are feasting. Lots of fish are being caught.

Lake Leake is also spilling and the fish are in super condition, with some of the best fish now being caught. No doubt there will be some fantastic dry fly fishing at this lake over the summer months.

The duns have arrived at Talbots Lagoon and the fishing is starting to heat up there too. In coming weeks there will be plenty of surface action for the dry fly anglers. This lagoon always produces super fish.



*Rubicon River whitebait feeder – they tend to come in larger sizes*

On the other hand Four Springs has been somewhat patchy. As mentioned in earlier reports it fishes well on overcast days but as soon as the sun comes out the fishing gets tough. There are still lots of duns hatching.

The big brownies at Curries River Reservoir have been smashing bait around in the shallows, providing some exciting fishing.

The whitebait run has been affected by rain during the month, but there have been some super fish chasing the bait run in the estuaries as the flows ease. Big fish are being consistently caught in the West Coast rivers, with Pieman River being the standout.

The rainbow trout spawning run has just finished at Liawenee. This year some 920 adult rainbow trout were caught in the fish trap. For 2020 the average weight of rainbow trout in the spawning run was 933 gram and their average length was 44.4 cm. The female rainbows' average was almost 100 gram more than the males and all fish were in great condition.

We are now looking forward to the borders opening and having lots of VFFA members coming down to enjoy some of our fabulous fishing.

# A Report on the Rivers Around Thornton

... from John Douglas

Spring still has its grip on the rivers and La Nina is proving to be on point as well, so there is a lot of water about. Through October the smaller streams have been running very fast and cold, and the trout are in excellent condition if you can find a window when the streams are a little bit settled. When they are up a bit I find them harder to fish.

The Goulburn has been the pick of the rivers and has been very good. The hatches are getting stronger and more complex, and some evening rises have been epic with lots of fish up, feeding and providing some fantastic dry fly fishing.

At the end of October the Goulburn was still down at 400 ML/day and while often coloured, the fish didn't seem to mind at all.

If the Goulburn stays low into November and you can get up here....do it!

Successful flies in the Goulburn have included Woolly Buggers during the day or weighted soft hackle flies swung through the riffles.

My best fishing has been when the larger duns are coming off almost on dark. Unweighted soft hackles, larger grey duns, and emerger patterns like klinkhamers and shaving brush flies of around size 14 have all been good.

Spinners are also about, particularly on and below the faster rapids.



*Scott Douglas fishing the Delatite River in October*

# The Feather Thief

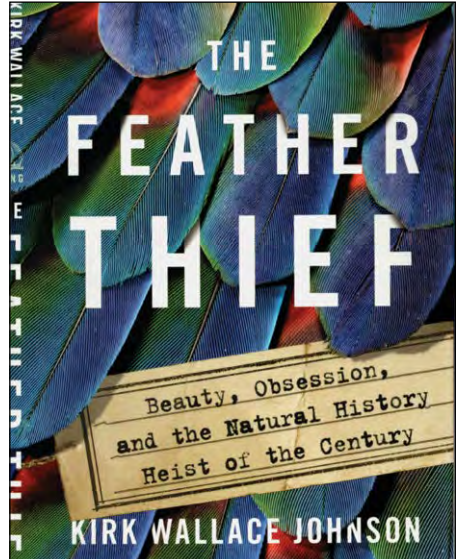
... by John Pilkington, VFFA librarian. This is a review of a book written by Kirk Wallace Johnson

For the avid fly tiers amongst us this is a good read notwithstanding that it deals chiefly with salmon flies.

Edwin Rist was a young obsessive American fly tier of the highest order and one of a small group that specialised in competitively recreating original Scottish salmon patterns. Of course these demanded original materials which often included feathers from extremely rare birds of which the King Birds of Paradise (New Guinea), Resplendent Quetzals (Panama) and Indian Crows (British Guiana) were but a few. Many of these birds are now protected and even individual feathers commanded very high prices on what had developed in America into a black market.

Edwin was also an accomplished flautist and managed to secure a position in England with the Royal Academy of Music. He became aware of the Tring Museum, forty miles north of London. This was a repository of a fabulous collection of bird skins, many of which had been collected by Charles Darwin and his rival contemporary Alfred Russell Wallace. The museum of natural history had been set up by Lionel Walter Rothschild, son of the fabulously wealthy Baron de Rothschild in 1892 to house his own collection, and later bequeathed to the British Natural History Museum.

And so Edwin in 2009, armed with a wire cutter, glass cutter and a large suitcase managed to break in and get away unnoticed with 299 bird skins that had been meticulously labelled by their gatherers and which were of the rarest



and most sought after by the salmon fly tying fraternity. Edwin couldn't possibly use all the feathers that he had stolen and set about disposing of them to other fly tiers, either as full skins or separate packets of feathers. Eventually the theft was discovered and Edwin was brought before the Court to answer to a charge of theft.

This is a ripping yarn and has many twists and turns.

It discusses the development of salmon and trout flies and delves into the subculture of specialised fly tying at the highest competitive levels and the obsessive personalities of many of the characters involved in this ancient and arcane past time that has developed into an art form. Many of these tiers do not even own rods or reels.

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It includes a long description of the difficulties and travails of Alfred Russell Wallace, the great naturalist of the mid 19th century, and his relationship with Charles Darwin whose 'Origin of the Species' only just trumped Wallace who had reached the same conclusions about evolution by natural selection as Darwin at around the same time.

It discusses the introduction of the use of rare plumage as a fashion accessory in the late Victorian era and the effect that this had on the near extinction of those

birds who were unfortunate enough to have feathers that were highly sought after and priced accordingly. It gives as an example the fact that some feathers crossing the Atlantic on the ill-fated 'Titanic' were insured for more than diamonds that were also carried on the boat.

It is an interesting and well researched book and available for loan from the library.



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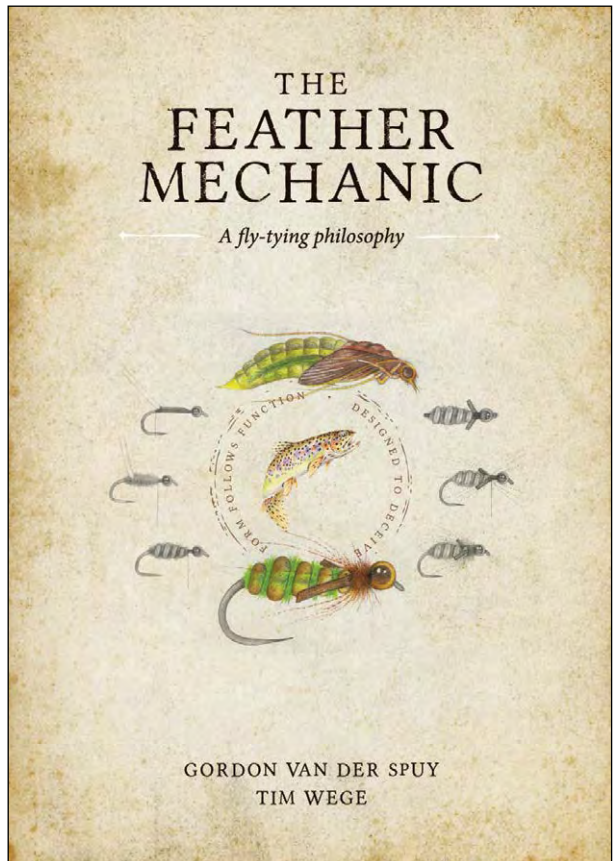
## A New Fly Tying Book – The Feather Mechanic

Peter Brigg, a great friend of the VFFA, lives in South Africa, and one of his fly fishing colleagues has just completed a fly tying book that has drawn high praise in many places. The book is called *The Feather Mechanic*, and is written by Gordon van der Spuy.

Gordon's book has been reviewed by Leon Links, a prominent fly fisher and fly tier in Europe whose articles have been published in Holland, Belgium, Germany, Sweden, Finland, England, Italy and South Africa. He has also contributed to several fly fishing and fly tying books.

Leon's review of *The Feather Mechanic* reads as follows:

"What an extraordinary achievement this is! Gordon van der Spuy's book is an enormous asset to all true fly fishermen - not only in his home country South Africa, but worldwide. It was a great joy reading the memories of



the author's early years as a fly tier and fly fisherman, as well as about his later fly fishing experiences and his encounters with many well-known South African fly fishermen, all described with love and humour.

His favourite fly patterns are central to this book and are provided with clear tying instructions, meticulous explanation and beautifully detailed illustrations with them.

Gordon asks himself what impact these flies have had over time for their creators, for himself, and where he can improve them. What would be the perfect silhouette? With what techniques should they be tied, and, no less important, with what materials...?

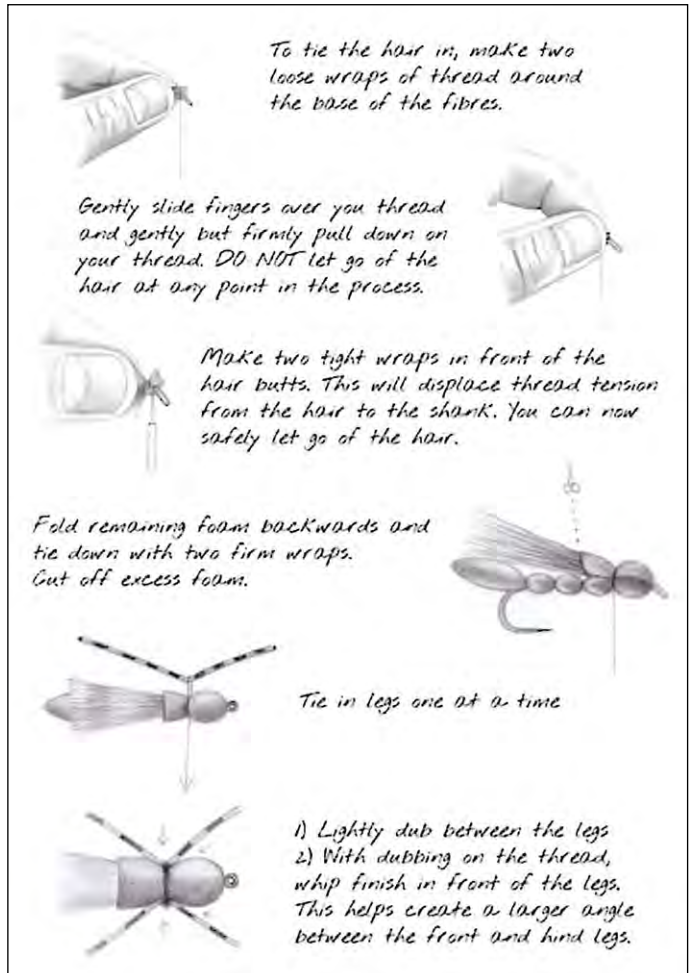
In his quest for the answers the author goes further than most fly fishermen do. He tries to push boundaries, sometimes in unorthodox ways, and is only satisfied when his flies meet his highest requirements.

"Form follows function" is what he always keeps in mind. A fly must sink when it must sink, float when it must float, and preferably have something extra. These principles are expertly described in this book with the intention of maximizing his and your enjoyment and success in fly fishing.

This book is written and drawn with so much passion that it inspires from start to

finish. It challenges you to consider what fly tying and fly fishing are all about, and to take a critical look into your own fly boxes. It will make you want to sit down at your tying cabinet to immediately put his advice and his guidance into practice yourself. The Feather Mechanic delights on every page!"

So – a fabulous fly tying book. I look forward very much to acquiring a copy for myself.



A page from *The Feather Mechanic* showing the detailed layout

## In Praise of Smaller Trout

Little fish manifest the wonder of all trout  
... Alan Pilkington

A fly fishing memory that has stayed with me is of a twelve inch wild brown trout I caught near Stockbridge in Hampshire, perhaps thirty five years ago. I was a guest of Rod Foale, a school mate of my brother John and an Enoch's Point alumnae, at his beat on the River Test, and our families enjoyed the full Monte of a May afternoon by the hallowed waters of Marrayat and Halford. Reached by a drive down a winding lane bordered by flowering hawthorn, then through a weathered rickety wooden gate, there was rich early summer streamside growth, manicured edges, chestnuts in full bloom, and lunch on a spread blanket by the fishing shed while the kids played and swarms of mayfly filled the air.

Later, I crossed to a small island connected to the river bank by a broad, bent plank, and found a small trout rising at its upstream edge where the current divided on either side. The fish was not taking the large and abundant mayfly, *ephemera dancia*, but smaller ones, and was taking them just under the surface. I tied on one of my favorite mayfly emergers, which it ignored, then I cast another with an olive tone I'd bought that morning from a fly shop in Stockbridge. The fish took it enthusiastically on its first drift, to the acclaim of Roddy who had walked over to watch the show. The smallest fish was exquisite. Wild, feisty, brightly coloured, and no worn down tail fins like the larger 'stew pot' planted three and four pounders we caught later in the day.

It had not been all that difficult to figure this fellow out, but I cracked its code, and I was elated. The little bloke was the trout of Walton and Ronalds, a direct line into the history of our sport, and I set it free.

Another memory, so strong I've written of it several times before, is also of a small brown taken on the Big River in Victoria,



*The matchless colours of wild trout, large and small. Nature's gift to the angler.*

also many years ago. At the instant it took the Adams, the fly had floated into a small patch of dazzlingly bright sunlight on otherwise ti-tree shaded water. The little fish rose slowly, its red spots and yellow belly alive in the light, and leisurely took the fly and turned, as nice as you please. The image of the slow, confident ease of the fish, at twelve or thirteen inches small by the standards many trout fishermen aspire to, rising out of tannin-colored water into a spotlight, has simply stayed with me. I sometimes dial it up in my memory and it revives or inspires me. I happened to be giving a new bamboo rod its first outing, and this was its first blood, even though I released the fish after a good run around the shaded pool. But I don't think giving the rod a successful maiden voyage was the reason for the moment staying with me so vividly.

So why? Why do these memories persist when others of much larger fish fade? Was it fishing the holy water of the Test or the illumination on the Big River? Or was it simply that these strong, brightly coloured little fish manifest the wonder of all trout, somehow offering hope and promise for the

future? After all, what is a small trout but one that hasn't yet grown into a large one.

When my brother and I were kids playing near the billabongs and lagoons that fringed the Goulburn River flats near Yea in Victoria, we'd fish for small native perch with crude rods, whatever size hooks we could scrounge from our father's fishing bag, and worms we'd dug from mother's vegetable garden packed into a rusty jam tin. For us a four incher was as good as an eight incher; we were taken by the moment, by success as much as by the size of the fish, and we competed more over how many we each caught than over their size. We were happy just to be there with the magpies and the cockies, with the ibis and herons and kingfishers, counting the tiger snakes, avoiding both them and the dairy herds' pats in our bare feet. We were learning that fishing was fun, a lesson we learned catching small fish.



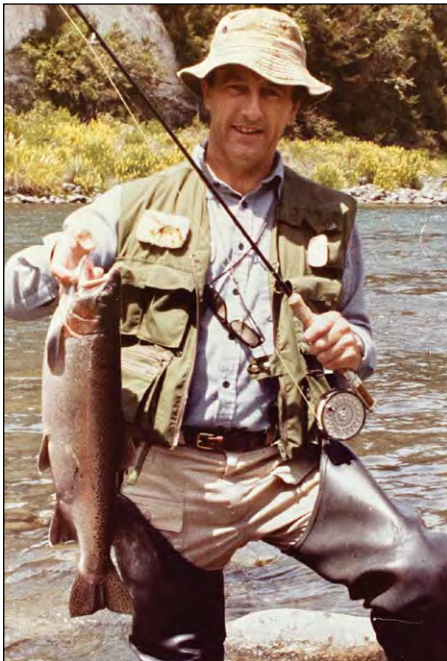
*Alan's grandson Otto, aged ten, with his first trout on a fly, a 12" rainbow from the Big Hole River, Montana.*

Later all that changed. As our horizons broadened, our skills developed and our tackle became more sophisticated, culminating in fly gear and the tying of our own flies. Success was judged, at least for me, in the size of the catch, and the bigger the fish the better. Eucumbene, Jindabyne, Lake Pedder, the old Eildon Reservoir and other waters made their names with ten pounders; often rainbows whose growth rates were so prodigious their body growth out-paced that of their heads, turning them into torpedoes.

Newspapers wrote about huge trout in both nearby and faraway waters. I looked at faded photos of Zane Grey holding fifteen pound rainbows, or steelhead which I believe they technically were, which ran out of Lake Taupo up the Tongariro River back in the 1920s. Those were the fish I wanted to meet! So I fished the Tongariro in the 1980s, enjoying the pleasures of the Admiral's, Red Hut and Harry's Rock pools, took photos, had big trout mounted and hung on my walls, had them smoked and made treats of some of them, dining with my family and friends.

I was hooked.

A 'light' trout rod was no longer enough; nor were smaller fish. For me this pattern persisted when I moved to the >>>



*A magnificent Tongariro rainbow taken by Alan in 1981 on a claret seal's fur nymph. Smaller trout lead us to set our sights on bigger fish like this 7 pounder.*

United States to live. I'd concentrate on fishing the tail-water rivers flowing from dams and reservoirs where cold, highly oxygenated water produced abundant tiny crustaceans which accelerated trout growth, as it does below the Flaming Gorge dam on the Green River in Utah, where I fished for years. Complex fly fishing, yes; bigger fish, yes, but better?

I started to wake up after a few years of this when my wife asked, "Is that the same fish? It looks exactly like the one in the picture you showed me last year, and the year before." Now, you come after me for suggesting we shouldn't target larger trout, don't get me wrong, I still have the disease. I like the deception, the take, the fight and the release of a large trout as much as the next man or woman - the whole adrenaline rush, the singing reel, the alarm as the backing races from the tip of the arced, pumping rod, the almost paranormal emotional collapse when a really big one breaks you off or just spits the fly at the edge of the net. Tasmania, the south island of New Zealand, Alaska, the American Rockies and Patagonia have drawn me back time and again just to be in the company of really big trout.

But in my waning years I've come to understand that what enriches me most is not the size of the trout or their quantity, but the experience, now just as satisfying for me with smaller fish as it is with larger ones. The ambience, friends remembered or with us or met along the way, the weather, clouds and light, the ever changing river, reading its flow and its lies, understanding its insects and their behavior and which fly's prospects are best for this time and place, all of which affect small trout in much the same ways as they do their big brothers and sisters. The knowledge that a small fish will sometimes hold in the same water as a bigger one, and that whichever one decides to take your fly will be a gift bestowed by the river, is as fine a gift for me if it is a small fish as if it were a larger one. The brilliant colors and patterns Mother nature gives these wild trout, their spirit



*Small fish get us started on great adventures. Here Alan is on the Winisk River in Northern Ontario, Canada, in 1984, with six brook trout taken on streamers.*

whatever their size, their willingness to come to the surface, the rise, the take and the fight, all make any sized trout a worthy target.

Yet the spunky fight of a smaller fish on lighter tackle, the joy of seeing it recover quickly if carefully handled, holding in the current after its release, then slowly gaining confidence as it swims to safety, to be caught again, perhaps much later as a much larger fish, now gives me a satisfaction as great as if it were a big one.

Perhaps I knew this all along? That the small wild brown on the Test or its cousin taken in the spotlight on the Big were as rich gifts from their rivers as all the bigger trout I'd ever caught. How big is a trout if it looms large in one's memory, anyway?

## The Mitta – After the Fires

As we all recall, before Covid-19 appeared early this year we had experienced horrendous bushfires in East Gippsland. Some of those wonderful trout streams there were badly affected, though the Mitta River, probably the best and best-known of them all, escaped untouched. Trevor Stow has been out taking photos. Here are his reflections

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The upper Mitta River is in great shape. It escaped the ravages of the fires. I fished it today for a couple of browns. It has been a poor year for snow and consequently the river is running quite nicely for this time of the year. The water temperature is 9oC, and you would normally expect it to be about 4 degrees this early in September. So long as we get some spring rains it all looks good for the forthcoming season.



*A typical river brown from the Mitta Mitta River*



*The Upper Mitta is in great shape. It escaped the fires*



*The Bundarra River was badly affected. A lot of damage is evident, though vegetation is starting to reappear.*

Above are two photos of the Bundarra River. You can see how badly the fire effected this area. The trees are just starting to shoot and some vegetation is reluctantly starting to appear along the riverbank.

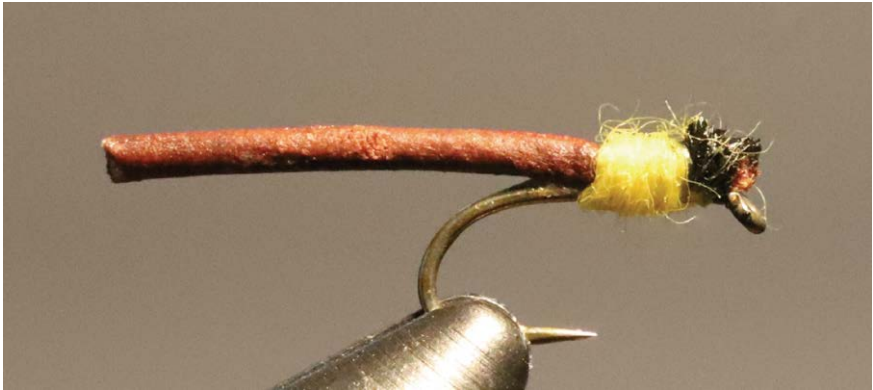
The lower Bundarra River was hit badly by the fires. This little creek (below) runs into the river in the farmland area and you can see the amount of silt that is being washed down the river. Nevertheless, the river is now running clear and some smallish browns are being caught.



*This small creek suffered huge quantities of silt washed downstream*

# FLY OF THE MONTH

... *Rick Keam's Stick Caddis – the Backpacker*



When Philip Weigall spoke about lake fishing at our September meeting it was clear he had a very high regard for stick caddis patterns. They are deadly flies for lake fishing. Philip nominated his Scintilla Stick Caddis as his favourite lake fly, a pattern that was featured as our Fly of the Month in our June 2014 issue.

It was perhaps Philip's enthusiasm for stick caddis patterns that prompted Rick Keam to suggest his version, the "Backpacker".

There are lots of stick caddis patterns, and Philip's Scintilla pattern is without doubt one of the best. It has proven extremely popular with anglers and with the trout. But Rick's fly is an interesting alternative. It looks like the real thing and is fairly easy to tie. It is written up in *"Australia's Best Trout Flies – Revisited"*, a popular fly tying book compiled by Malcolm Crosse, edited by Rick Keam, and published in 2016. Tying details are given in this reference by Rick.

There are two issues though – finding the right hook and obtaining the right material for the body. In a recent email Rick said: "I'm now beginning to realise that selecting the right hook might be a problem for people wanting to tie the Backpacker. I tie mine on the Tiemco 921 hook, the world's best beetle hook and the one I used for almost all my hoppers. However the current owners of Tiewell (Mayfly Tackle) don't stock it. The Tiemco 921 hook, by the way, is a 2X short hook.

The reason for tying the Backpacker on such a small light hook is all about weight reduction – the heavier and larger the hook, the harder it is to suspend it under a dry fly or indicator, and the more it impedes the flexibility of the wet leather. So whatever other hook people might try instead, it should ideally be a short shank hook and it shouldn't have a wide gape. Failing all else a small short dry fly hook could be tried – the strength would still be adequate and there would also be some weight saving.”

In terms of the material, Rick tells us: “The Backpacker is a specific imitation made almost completely of a single length of round goat-leather beadcraft cord. This is produced in India and as soon as I found it in a handcraft store it suggested stick caddis. The textured suede finish looks natural. Once wet it is no longer stiff, and the colour darkens to a nice shade of brown.”

So the body (case) of the Backpacker is 1 millimetre diameter round suede leather beadcraft cord (sold to Rick by Riot Art & Craft stores and supplied by Darice in Ohio, product number #1919-01 and described as “1 mm Leather Cord - Natural”). However recent inquiries with Riot indicated that this material is no longer in stock. But a local Lincraft store had Arbee 1 mm leather beadcraft cord (made in India) in a packet. (Arbee Craft Pty Ltd, Overseas Drive, Noble Park.) This is a very light brown colour so a medium brown permanent marker pen is needed to darken the leather.

### **Materials for the Backpacker:**

**Hook:** Tiemco 921, size 16. (Some alternatives are possibly the Daiichi 1640 or 1310, Dai-riki 305, Mustad signature 94838, and Kamasan B410. The hook needs to be a 2X short light dry fly hook.)

**Thread:** UTC 50 yellow (i.e. bright yellow and thin and strong).

**Case:** 1 millimetre diameter round suede leather beadcraft cord. (The flies that Rick supplied were 15 millimetres long, so a short length of the leather cord will tie a lot of flies.)

**Grub Body:** A very small amount of bright yellow dubbing. (Your editor found some fluorescent yellow Float-Vis in his fly tying kit that was a very bright yellow. But any fine bright yellow dubbing will do.)

**Grub Head:** The forward tip of the leather, tinted black with a laundry marker pen then varnished with a tiny drop of black nail varnish.

### **Tying Notes (from Rick):**

1. Even using the strongest tying thread, the leather cord tends to slip around the shank. But there is an answer. The day before you tie this pattern use a bodkin to paint a batch of hooks with a little solvent-base contact cement such as Kwik Grip (not the newer water-based version). Then place each of the treated hooks

in a small bulldog clip and set them aside to dry. This treatment provides a grippy surface.

2. Flatten 3 or 4 mm of the leather cord tip with narrow-nose pliers, and dab the front millimetre with a black laundry marker.
3. Put the hook in the vice and wrap the front half of the hook with some thread, then position the flattened cord section over it and bind it down hard for 5 or 6 turns forward and then back again, leaving the black tip projecting at the front.
4. Whip finish over the leather to lock in the thread tension, and then tie in a very thin noodle of dubbing, which should be brighter than the natural caddis grub. Dub forward two or three turns and whip finish again behind the black tip.
5. Add a drop of black nail varnish to the black tip to simulate the grub head. Then cut the leather cord about 8 mm behind the hook bend, making a total fly length of 15 mm.

When fishing this fly Rick suggests that though it is lighter than most other stick caddis imitations, the Backpacker's narrow profile means that it casts like a rocket and sinks quickly. In the shallows it is best fished suspended under a buoyant dry fly.



*Waipahi River - a Nancy Tichborne watercolour*

VALUED DONORS

**The following made donations for the raffle at the 2019 Annual Dinner:**

- AFN Fishing & Outdoors • Armadale Angling • Aussie Angler
- Australian Trout Foundation • Compleat Angler (CBD) • Essential Flyfisher
- The Flyfisher Melbourne • Fly Finz Fishing Tackle & Books
- FlyLife magazine • Hook Up Bait & Tackle • Hurley's Fly Fishing
- J.M. Gillies • Mayfly Tackle • Millbrook Lakes and Victorian Fisheries Authority.

## VFFA 2020 meetings & other activities

Members will appreciate that activities planned for the rest of this year and early next year are tentative because of possible changes due to Covid-19 restrictions. So activities and events will need to be clarified and confirmed as they get closer. Following discussions at a recent Council meeting it is possible that the annual trip to Thorpdale as guests of the Latrobe Valley members might still be on. A possible barbecue at the Red Tag casting pool and a lunch or dinner at the Kelvin Club are also being investigated. These aren't scheduled in the calendar below, so members need to watch out for emails from Terry Rogers advertising these proposed events.

### November 2020

- 3 Tuesday Fly Tying session - 8:00 pm. A Zoom session by John Pilkington who will take us through the process of tying a fairly simple but very popular fly – the Red Tag.
- 18 Wednesday Council Meeting – 6:30 pm.
- 19 Thursday General Meeting, commencing at 8:00 pm.  
Speakers - John Billing from Mending Casts and Jo Dobson from Casting for Recovery. This will be a Zoom video presentation.
- 25 Wednesday VFFA members visit Millbrook Lakes.

### December 2020

- 1 Tuesday Fly Tying session - 8:00 pm. A Zoom session by Andrew Mossman who will take us through the process of tying two very effective flies using possum fur.
- 2 Wednesday Council Meeting – 6:30 pm.
- 11 Friday Our Christmas Dinner, with guest speaker Malcolm Crosse, who was Director of Operations for the World Fly Fishing Championships in Tasmania last year. Malcolm plans to tell us about the vagaries of organising the World Championships, as well as updating us on the Tasmanian trout fishery. This will also be a Zoom video presentation.

### January 2021

- 3 Wednesday VFFA members visit Millbrook Lakes.

### February 2021

- 3 Wednesday First Council Meeting for 2021 – 6:30 pm.
- 13 – 21 Tasmania trip to Hayes on Brumby's (subject to border crossing rules).  
Event Co-ordinator – Chris Gray.
- 25 Thursday General Meeting – 8:00 pm at the Kelvin Club:  
“Liars' Night” – reports from members on their summer fishing.

### March 2021

- 2 Tuesday Fly Tying session - 8:00 pm. A Zoom session. Details still to be confirmed.
- 3 Wednesday VFFA members visit Millbrook Lakes.
- 18 Thursday General Meeting – 8:00 pm at the Kelvin Club:  
Speaker – TBC.
- 26 – 28 2020 Big River trip. Event Co-ordinator – John Pilkington.
- 31 Wednesday Council Meeting – 6:30 pm.

### April 2020

- 2 - 4 Easter 2021
- 6 Tuesday Fly Tying session - 8:00 pm. A Zoom session. Details still to be
- 15 Thursday General Meeting – Lunchtime at the Kelvin Club  
Speaker – TBC.
- 28 Wednesday Council Meeting – 6:30 pm