

## Trip to the Snowy Mountains

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Having spent a long weekend in the Snowy Mountains with Steve Jobson in November I was keen to return there to try my hand at some dry fly fishing when the weather was a little warmer and there were more insects on the move. I had this opportunity for 2 weeks from 1 January.

Our first camp was at Tumut on the banks of the Tumut River. I was all gung-ho about the prospects of fishing the Tumut perhaps even from a chair under the caravan awning. I was quickly disabused of this idea upon seeing the river. The power station at Blowering Dam was releasing over 7,000 megalitres per day, which meant the river was running hard and fast. It was difficult to fish, and despite a few valiant attempts in various locations, led to no success. We took a drive up the valley of the Goobragandra R. and found a delightful stream, one which showed great promise for fly fishing. This stream has its headwaters up near Long Plain, close to the headwaters of the Murrumbidgee, and joins the Tumut just a few kilometres out of town. Much of its length is through private property but there are several public access points from about 20km upstream. These include: a TSR (Travelling Stock Reserve) approximately 20 km from Tumut, a camping area at the Thomas Boyd Track Head on the Hume & Hovell Walking Trail a few kilometres further upstream, and a National Parks camp area on the river just beyond Goobragandra homestead.

My fishing partner was Brian Johnson, a member of Lakeside club. Our first dip in the water was at the TSR. There I managed to land a nice little rainbow to 30cm. Fishing was interrupted when Brian who was fishing a little above me, drew my attention to a *Pseudonaja textilis* which was swimming across just upstream of me. I decided that it was prudent to give this sizeable Eastern Brown Snake plenty of opportunity to cross the stream unimpeded so I left the water and watched it beach then slither off into the undergrowth. We decided to explore further the following day.

After returning to camp I saw a fellow practising casting with a fly rod on the grass beside his caravan. Fly fishers being a friendly lot I introduced myself to him. I learned that Gary had just bought the rod that day. He'd never fly fished before, in fact I don't think he'd ever FISHED before. Recent retirement from running his own business meant that for the first time for a long time he'd had the opportunity to travel (he'd sold up house and he and his wife were on the road in their caravan) and to fish, among other things. Anyway, Gary had somehow developed a real interest in fly fishing. Just that day he'd bought a 6-7wt combo and a few flies from the local sports store, and was getting to know it. It was in fact quite a nice rod, very easy to cast. After providing a few casting pointers (even if I'm not a great caster I do know some of the principles!) I invited Gary to join us the following morning.

This morning we headed straight to the National Parks camp area. I initially spent time with Gary getting him going with a dry in a beautiful pool. In the meantime Brian landed two nice rainbows taken on a Copper John – Blue nymph, from the run into the head of the pool. Brian then offered to provide some coaching to Gary while I fished a run a little upstream with a Prince Nymph under a Royal Wolff. Here the dry proved on the money with a 36cm brown. We then fished some runs and pools a little downstream for some small rainbows, on a personally designed little black beetle pattern. I had been repeatedly casting a Prince Nymph under the Royal Wolff without success until I thought I'd just try my beetle pattern. This was based on an examination of the stomach contents of the earlier catch, which showed little black beetles had been on the diet. And bingo! – first cast, a

feisty little rainbow, with a second to follow only a few casts later. That day Gary didn't hook a fish but he had a great time fishing some lovely runs and pools.

Next day Brian had to head home but in the evening Gary and I headed back to the Goobragandra. In the meantime Gary had been to the sports store and bought himself a vest and a set of breathable waders. He was definitely hooked. On this outing we tried a couple of new runs on the river. Within a few minutes Gary had hooked his first trout. It took him under a boulder and was gone but Gary's heart rate was racing. I managed to hook a 35cm rainbow that took some 7-8 minutes to land – that was one feisty little fish. And I had a cast of Gary's rod and got busted off by a good fish. We then moved up to the pool we had fished the previous day, hoping to take advantage of the late evening rise. There was plenty of activity on the surface. I had no other hook-ups but Gary landed his first trout on fly and he was ecstatic. Although it wasn't a big fish it gave him a run for his money. I suspect we can all remember our first trout on a fly – a very memorable occasion.

That was my last day on the Goobragandra for next day we headed up the mountain to spend overnight at the free camp at the Yarrangobilly River crossing. This is another delightful mountain stream carrying plenty of fish, even if small. Their lack of great size was more than compensated by their fighting spirit. In the afternoon I landed three rainbows to 30cm. Then in the morning a brown of similar size all within a couple of hundred metres of our camp site.

Next stop was Three Mile Dam at Kiandra. This is a delightful campsite and we were pleased that there were only a handful of other camps, so there was good choice of sites. After lunch we took a drive to Long Plain, Coolamine Homestead and Blue Waterholes. The upper Murrumbidgee looked a very enticing little stream to fish as did the stream at Blue Waterholes, but this particular afternoon we were just sightseeing. Definitely one for the diary though!

On returning to camp I decided to try my luck on the western shore just across from the campsite. While still quite light I thought I'd try prospecting with a Jindy Bugger. Nothing. The day had been a little windy but as dusk fell the wind dropped. And there were some fish rising though out of reach. I tied on a Royal Wolff and did some more prospecting. I was considering calling it a day when there was a rise within (my) casting range. Somehow I got the cast right in the centre of the ripples – nothing. After a few seconds I gave a little twitch on the line to just move the fly a little, and woooof! - a 34cm brown had taken my offering. I started heading back to camp when there was another rise, again within casting range. So again I managed to drop the fly right in the "sweet spot", let it sit for 5-10 seconds, a little twitch, and woooof! - a 37cm brown. Dry fly fishing doesn't come better than this. It also says something for our attempts to hit the rings at our Sunday casting competition – it makes for good practice at judging distance and accuracy.

The temperature dropped down to about 8C overnight and the wind was up again the next morning. Time today to move on to Jindabyne where we set up and relaxed for the remainder of the afternoon. Next morning it was even cooler at about 4C as a very gusty cold change had arrived. I thought I might get some protection from the wind on the Thredbo above the Gaden hatchery. Well, I was able to fish, that is, casting between wind gusts, but it was hard work, and quite unrewarding. My only hook-up was on a small rainbow in a run on an elk-hair caddis pattern. I eventually was discouraged from continuing when a thunderstorm came over and it started to rain.

Next day was a different prospect. Although the wind was still up somewhat it was fairly clear. I tried at Paddy's Corner for a little while but realised this area is very over-fished and either carries few fish or they are particularly wary. Anyway I left there and drove up to the Ski Tube carpark which has access to some really nice pools on the Thredbo. Again I fished with the elk-hair caddis, and this time it was successful with a 35cm brown and a small rainbow.