

Tasmania Trip Report

The 150 year anniversary of brown trout seemed like a good reason to visit Tasmania, along with Christmas with the family. After years of the wife bringing home Tasmanian lures and fishing magazines, I relented, tied some flies, and ventured out. Driving down, a stop to Melbourne's Fly Fisher store was planned, but the parking meter had limited time, and it was quickly onto the ferry with a car load of Christmas presents and fishing gear.

Transport and License

Quarantine was no problems (even less so on the return journey), and the empty fuel canister for my camping stove posed no problems on the ferry. HAZMAT storage for butane cylinders is available, and the ferry even offered parks and licenses, but these were deferred for local suppliers for insider fishing advice.

Shopping for a fishing license, some more flies, and the wife's Christmas present prevented making use of the first few days there with nice sunny and warm weather ideal to chase trout. A visit to the Essential Fly fisher in Launceston showed a shortage not only of gum beetles, but also of the Evasote foam to tie them. Lucky I got those Copic pens for Christmas to colour mine in. Like many of the shops, the local Tackleworld was closed on the Sunday, and also on Boxing Day. There were a couple of other stores – one up near the pool (I never made it there), and an outdoors store also had some tackle. Most tackle shops in the area were focussed on saltwater fishing and some freshwater spinning, but Tackleworld had a reasonably good range of flies, and Georgetown had a couple of nice hopper flies that look like our local ones.

Like New Zealand, the Tasmanian license is for the season only, not 12 months. The temporary receipt was close to A5, making it hard to seal in a small plastic bag or to put in your wallet. The plastic one is advertised as arriving in 10-14 days. Thankfully I used my home address, as it was closer to 4-5 weeks, so if you want your plastic license before you go, order it early to allow for shipping time and also your license will still run out on the same date (31 July). Ironically, the anniversary badge I ordered from IFS 3 weeks later arrived in the post before my license did. IFS have separate sites for coastal fishing and freshwater fishing, and separate apps if you want the fishing regulations handy (the freshwater code/regs are usually kept behind the counter in many tackle shops, rather than on display). The only ruler I found was a saltwater one, and rigid plastic, so take a spare local fish ruler if you want one to roll up and keep in your pocket.

Many of the lakes had specific bag limits, but a trend appeared, particularly with the popular stocked lakes versus the more common ones. I heard a few times that with the drive to go native in the areas, particularly in the national parks. I noticed in my travels many of the old roads had overgrown since the forestry had stopped maintaining them, and that the bag limits tended to reflect the less-pressured, unstocked lakes.

North West

With Burnie as a home base, Lake Kara was recommended by the local Tackleworld. Local directions to take the next turn-off after the bakery took me down a different road, but it was a nice drive, and a nice river crossing was marked on the GPS. A guided tour took me to my destination, with some nice fish rising before dusk but no fishing gear.

A return the next day saw the lake quiet. An explore on a backroad took me to the irregular side. With tracks no longer maintained, the GPS tracks had disappeared, but an old 4WD track was nearby and

skirted the lake. An overgrown track turned out to go up the side of the lake with a short stroll, but with no rises seen (but one snake), I returned to the boatramp. It was a quiet afternoon (even trying lures), but one local spent 2 hours trolling in his boat and scored 1 60cm salmon (but nothing else). Returning the next morning, it was quiet again, only disturbed by a couple of platypus. Whilst trying to get a photo of one, a nice 35cm trout leapt in front of me. Only 1 other rise was seen, despite flogging the water. I was however quite cool, bringing out the gloves and beanie, and thankful for my waders but think I should have worn my thermal pants.



Looking from the boatramp to the outlet over deep water and where the salmon was caught (on the right), but otherwise very quiet at Lake Kara.



A couple of platypus swimming early in the morning (left with mist and centre). With no rises, it was very quiet – except for the one fish that leapt right in front of the camera when I was waiting for the platypus to surface further out (right).

There was some nice casting spots near the car park, but a kayak would be much better for fishing that water. Local blackfish are probably better to chase in the snags on the north side where I explored the 4WD track. Driving further north from Lake Kara, and exploring the various routes back to Burnie (there were 3 main ones), I spotted some nice tight water for future exploration. One nice brown about 30cm was just above one crossing. Some forestry tracks followed near the rivers at a few places for a few kilometres, but these were overgrown, single lane, and difficult in a loaned 2WD ute, so I put them aside for next time. These would be good half to full day trips, able to hike upstream from one road to the next, or hiking the 3-4km to the end of the overgrown road and fishing back to the road. I have yet to follow this idea through, but have some waypoints for next time.



Lake Kara gum beetles weren't touched by the fish

Later I also gave a few casts down at the beach at East Devonport with the boys, but no luck personally, although a couple of days later so kids managed to catch some chuck salmon (aussie salmon by the photos) down in Burnie harbour. With the local chores and Christmas looming, I focussed on my upcoming hike in the central plateau.

Central Plateau

After the first day or two up around the 30s, by the time I was close to heading off for a dash before Christmas, the rain and cooler weather was coming. Low twenties, and single digit evenings on top of the rain put me off, delaying me until after Boxing Day – but offering some interim family time. On the 27th I departed, and the last humans I saw on the way in noted they had snow flurries during their remote Christmas trek, I was confident I hadn't missed a summer hatch in the meantime. More will follow on this trek with a meeting evening in March.

On hiking out, the thunderstorms and strong wind came in. Near Lake Ada and Lake Augusta I saw some anglers sheltering I cars with full foul weather gear, as well as some unattended cars and assumed they must have some special places where they can cast – although the chap in foul weather gear passed me on the way out. I saw a 4WD coming past near where I had just spotted a tiger cat eating a dead wombat on the road, and let him know. He had just arrived from Brisbane, had driven through hail on the road to Great Lake a couple hours earlier, and was about to join his mates at Julian Lakes for a few days. He noted it was 4 hours at walking pace, in his 4WD. I took satisfaction in noting I also fished somewhere that was 4 hours at walking pace, but carrying the gear instead of driving, but did note the duration for next time if I have a 4WD. The hail, wind, and thunderstorms also confirmed my decision to return on the third day instead of hoping for good weather.

Derwent River

Being a busy period around Hobart, we found ourselves staying at New Norfolk, and during a whiskey shortage. Although looking a little dubious of a motor-in from the outside, the hotel turned out to be quite good. Looking past some "classic" fittings and furniture (one cupboard was made in the 1970s and the couches a bit worn), the kitchen and living spaces were ample, the bathroom great, and the two bedrooms nice and sleepy. The nearby Wigston's Sports (home of Wigston's lures) had closed, but some local fare was sources, and the local supermarket gave some additional supplies for the coming days. Inspect of the hotel's tapas bar had some good food at reasonable prices, and a good drinks menu including some of that hard-to-find whiskey like Sullivan's Cove, but the pizza was already waiting back in the room.



Derwent River after dinner, about 8:45pm. The rocks on the far right had some fish leaping.

I managed to get down to the Derwent River at a bridge by the Plenty River (Salmon Ponds) the first evening. The spinner before me caught a couple of small (25-30cm) fish. He gave some tips on getting down, so I donned the waders and had some quick casts before dark. The water was flowing fast, and despite some nice rocks to cast from, I had trouble getting flies across to the rising fish. Some downstream drifts from the rocks further up had no luck, so I planned to return in daylight and have a go before we ventured out for the day.



Derwent River the next morning, with white water over the rocks

Returning, I went upstream to where I had last fished from, and worked my way under the railway bridge. Despite some nice runs slower over near the bank, only a couple of small fish were seen, and no action against my flies. I tried the main stream, but it was too fast. I noticed the rocks I had fished from the evening before were underwater, and the water was at least a foot deeper than the evening. Rescuing a very young sparrow that appeared to be caught by the rising water, I planned instead for seeing the third giant fish statue on the way home at Cressy (in addition to Adaminaby and Gore), but the zoo was too fun for the kids and we headed straight back to Burnie. I did however work out the Western Tiers weren't just a bunch of Tasmanians keen on fly tying.



Wading upstream from the carpark, there were some nice slower pools near the bank below the railway bridge

Salmon Ponds and Museum of Trout Fishing



After the first night at New Norfolk, my wife realised why I was happy to stay so far out of Hobart – with the Salmon Ponds only 10 minutes up the road. I also recce'd out the Plenty River further up the road and some other possibly creeks (Oxley may have been one of them), but most were dry, dammed up, or just private access.

The Salmon Ponds were even better than expected. With fond memories of Rainbow Springs in Rotorua during holidays, I dragged the family and everyone was having fun spotting fish, and feeding them. It is certainly a great way to teach people to spot fish, but also to watch fish behaviour. I also found it fun to target a single fish instead of blind feeding the pool, and try to get the selected fish to take a pellet, especially if you could make it turn and chase down the pellet before the bigger fish came along.



Ta-da. Look Dad, a fish!

....and you can tell this one is a brook trout by the marks on its back.

The fish food was about \$2, so save your gold coins. We were lucky, and a backlog of food from one machine delivered twice as much as another one. I divided up the food into a few extra buckets to ensure the kids didn't use it all up at once.



Fish feeding and spotting for the whole family

There was also good BBQ/picnic facilities (about four separate huts), good food and coffee onsite, and some fishing in the Plenty River for anyone with impaired mobility. The river was also good for spotting fish, and putting a pellet or two upstream and try to time it with some of the big resident fish's patrol to get a take. There is also a bunch of native plants, including a guide on the map to keep everyone interested.



The kids having fun feeding an eel in a slow pool of the River Plenty, and a cruising brown in the river above it



....if only our house looked like this

The Museum of Trout Fishing in one of the old Salmon Pond buildings was quite good, with everyone entertained for at least 5 minutes. Whilst my wife was busy spotting surnames from her family tree (apparently Greg French is also a likely relative), I was looking for some secret flies, recognising an old Alvey tackle box, and looking for rods similar to my split cane one from the UK. There is also an impressive display of Noel Jetson's fishing badge collection, which includes a Canberra Anglers' badge.



The Noel Jetson memorabilia display in the Museum of Trout Fishing

The gift shop had a few little memorabilia, mostly postcards and magnets – no really much in the way of books, or anything celebrating the 150 year anniversary. Apparently they had an initial stock of the 150 year badges when they had their anniversary dinner, but the sold pretty quick. As such, the only source is the IFS website which links to their shop. Note though, there doesn't appear to be any volume savings, so you pay postage with each item....which reminds me, I must order another badge and coffee cup. Your entry is good for the entire day, so if you want to drag the family back with a BBQ pack of just to watch the fish (and the tourists getting splashed), you can return again.

Just down the road is a little distillery. With the whiskey shortage noted at Helliers' Road in Burnie and Lark's bar down in the port at Hobart (nice and close to the Maritime Museum), these guys were without whiskey but had some schnapps-style liqueurs and marmalades. They ensured the Plenty River water taken downstream from the Salmon Ponds was highly purified. The place was under renovations – the old stable from memory is being modernised, and for a small fee the wife was able to tour the garden whilst I checked the quality of the water.

North West - Gunns Plains

Back in Burnie with the days fast disappearing amongst the social duties, I managed to combine a trip to Lower Gunns Plains with a family trip to the zoo. Unfortunately with only an hour or so, it was a short fish, but a nice day for wet wading. The water near the camping ground and zoo had some nice small fish, and I dropped a couple on my dry. A small path runs the bend from the carpark on the opposite side to the camping area, allowing some fish spotting but landing a fish from slipping banks would have been difficult. The path ends on the next bend, requiring about waist deep crossing to the last of the tents. The water then deepens, making it unable to be fished from the bank. Despite the map indicating some angler access, it is not until you get back to the main bridge that access is possible. The upstream access is a short track over an electric fence – it appeared anglers were not overly encouraged on this side. The track then had an almost 5m sheer drop where erosion has taken any remnants of a trail down to the water. Downstream is a BBQ area and park, with some shallow runs. An angler access path led further downstream, which looked more promising but after all the walking my time was up and I had to return. It turned out my waterproof camera didn't like being in my shorts pocket and had lost some of its waterproofing over the year, limiting my photographic opportunities.

Last Cast

After a week or two, phone numbers were finally resolved and I was able to make direct communication with one of the cousin-in-laws. The fishing that night had given him a couple of nice fish, and I was offered an hour or two fishing the river over on his property on my last day whilst he had a break from his own renovation. So, whilst the pantry paint dried, I loaded the ute up and headed out. With lures recommended (reportedly quite tight water), we drove the short distance down, and pushed through the overgrown trail. My wobbler went down through some weed, although on one cast the weed behind my lure turned white as it turned out to be a nice follower. Moving up that pool was a nice rapids, and from there the river opened out. My fellow fisher caught 2 or 3 nice foot-long fish casting from his side to the lefthand pool, but chasing the rising fish in front of me was unsuccessful. He noted the fish were rising, and the water up there was open so perhaps my fly rod would have been better. The pools and rapids kept continuing up, and although it was very pleasant wet wading up towards these promising pools I was cognisant of my host's schedule, and had to retire with only fish in the central plateau, but with the offer of next time fishing this river, and his other farm's river. The thought of cheap flights from Canberra, knowing a spare car was available, and having a license for the rest of the season filled my head on the ferry back to Melbourne (and the Fly Fisher shop) of using a spare 5 days to take up the offer and get some more fish on the scorecard...flights last week were only \$330 return to Launceston.....

Driving off with this in mind, I confirmed what I suspected whilst fishing the last few bends. The first attempt to find Lake Kara had put me over a river where I put a waypoint of a likely fishing spot, and was just upstream of where I had been fishing. I had come full circle in my fishing trip.