

TO MELBOURNE OR TO FISH? (by Jeannine)

Just before Christmas John and I overnighted at Goulburn Valley Fly Fishing Centre in Thornton, Victoria, a 130km from Melbourne. (A good excuse to leave the Hume!) We stayed at the Cottage, a mud brick building sited on the edge of the Centre's trout stocked casting dam across from the Centre's teaching facility and shop. The Cottage is surrounded by a wooden deck that extends over the dam's bank, perfect for casting while relaxing after a long day at the wheel. Venturing a few extra steps delivers a grassy bank with no back-casting obstacles, and a few steps further a large lagoon, overhanging gum trees and reedy banks, the occasional rise an indication of the fishing potential.



The Cottage comprising a good size kitchen with appliances, cutlery, crockery, sandwich maker and tea/coffee. The combined dining and lounge room that came off the kitchen took up the length of the cottage giving the occupants a good view of jumping trout in the dam through the floor to ceiling windows and glass sliding door. There are two bedrooms divided by a bathroom, one with a queen size bed and the other with two singles. The Thornton pub (which serves yummy meals) and local store is within walking distance or a two-minute car drive.

David Pickering, one of the proprietors, met us upon our arrival, after introductions, general conversation and a purchase or two, David enquired about our plans for the following morning, inviting me to participate in the fly-fishing opportunity of a "life-time", a drift down the Goulburn River in a purpose built "Clackacraft" drift boat. Following an inspection of the boat and being assured by David (and John) that I would be safe in the boat I agreed to this new adventure (John has been trying to get me on a boat for years).

Following a very enjoyable meal at the local pub and as the sun slowly set against the song of thousands of cicadas I dipped my fly line in the water and practiced casting in and beside the dam in anticipation of tomorrow's drift. John walked through the property past the

lagoon and disused trout hatchery ponds to the Goulburn River, scouting for rises and checking out the river so we would be ready for the early morning drift down the river.



David and his partner Dell settling me into the drift boat.

For those who know me, yes, I was assisted into the boat, leaving my wheelchair on the bank and I could move across to the comfortable swivel chair at the front of the boat. John sat in the swivel chair at the other end with David in the middle rowing and directing. As we and the boat drifted down stream, Dell returned my wheelchair to the Fly-Fishing Centre where we would disembark in three hours' time.





The river and river bank were spectacular even though I didn't get to soak in the scenery as much as I would have liked as I was watching my dry fly bobbing up and down, waiting for a take. I eventually hooked a 3lb trout following an extended fight, I just missed out on getting it into the boat, a LDR (I bet you've heard that story a few times before). John also had a couple of takes, enough to tease him and encourage him to keep casting towards the bank. All in all, we had a great time and admired the enthusiasm and tenacity of David who piloted the boat continually for 3hrs.

The drift down the Goulburn River was truly an experience of a life time, particularly for those of us like me, challenged by limited access to our great waterways. I will be back!



David and his partner Dell were the perfect hosts, both enthusiastic, encouraging and helpful, with the booking and during our stay. For those weary travelers driving south towards Melbourne, the Goulburn Fly Fishing Centre is a worthy bypass and a drift down the Goulburn an experience not to be missed!

Footnote: For those of us who have mobility challenges we found the Cottage was easy to navigate with a manual wheelchair. While the bathroom isn't designed with all the fittings necessary for access, it is spacious and accommodating. The Fly Fishing Centre is also spacious and comprises a shop, office and large meeting area with a lounge and log fire. The Centre's amenities include a unisex accessible toilet.