

Never too old to learn OR too late to change an opinion! by Jason Stratford of South East Queensland Fly Fishers

Part of a series titled "50 Friends on Fly".

Not wanting to bore any 'exclusive' saltwater-only fly fishos that hang here, its prudent to put forward a warning before this recount of the experience with my articles friends 16, 17 and 18 in '50 Friends on Fly'...

If you are a 'trout hater'...stop reading now!

For anyone else that is still here (anyone...anyone?), 'twigwater' trout hunting may just be some of the most technical, yet addictive, fly fishing there is!

Everything about the 'small end' of the sport of flyfishing, particularly when hunting in the narrow, high alpine streams, seems to be stacked against the angler.

'Twiggin' calls for light rods (1-3wt), microscopic flies in the order of size 18, 20 or 22, tied on 'blind' hooks. Blind because they don't seem to allow anything thicker than spiderweb thin tippets (2-3.5lb), to pass through the hook eye.

Further, twiggin' often requires short 'leader only' casts that are affected greatly by the lightest winds (...think anything more than a grasshopper fart). Yet the angler must still deliver a fly ever so softly into a portion of a stream that is often not much bigger than a teacup. Then manage line to achieve that 'drag free drift' and all the while applying sniper like stealth and ripple free movement in overgrown, but beautiful surrounds.



These difficulties were not something I was adequately prepared for when I met up with Lyall (Friend 16), in the Snowy mountain highlands recently.

Lyall and I have fished together a couple of times, chasing sailfish in Rompin and once before in the twigwater around his neck of the woods. Problem was, that during our last attempt at twiggin' back in early 2016, we (read: 'I') was hampered by 90km hour winds, which aren't friendly when trying to put flies into tight places. (Well that was my excuse for not catching fish on that trip anyways!).

The experience hadn't, at that time, changed my long held belief that trout on fly (at least in Australia) doesn't deserve the high regard that 'trouties' seem to hold for the introduced species. In fact, the other introduced, but considered 'feral' species (carp), provides the best pound for pound fight there is in freshwater rivers of this country. So why isn't it held in such high regards?!?! (oops...I digress).

So Lyall agreed to drop in at a semi regular gathering of a band of 'mates' comprising the previously introduced, Stu Jamieson (Friend 13), his father, Jim Jamieson (Friend 17) and John Klose (Friend 18).

These three guys fish for trout more often than I and it's fair to say that they were much more experienced leading into the trip. For that reason, my regular questions to them were the standard, 'what fly', 'how long of a leader', 'what size tippet', 'where do I cast' and more often than not...'why the heck do we have to have all this sh#t clipped to a vest and carry half a tackle shop full of gear on our backs all the time'???

The guys 'tolerated' my cynicism toward trout on fly and had in the past given enough info for me to catch a few fish each trip. So part of the disdain for trout really extended from knowing 'sweet F A' about how to target them correctly.

So, to improve my previously poor trout catch rate, the goal for this trip was to milk Lyall for all his local info, streamcraft and trout fishing knowledge that, as it turned out, he was more than willing to share.

So, for the first one and a half days, the other guys frequented their tried and tested spots using their personal tactics. While Lyall and I fished together in what was more like an intensive 'trout master class!'

While the opportunity for learning was great, it was also rather nice having someone who was happy to give instruction, provide flies and tie them on, net your fish and hold them for photos plus carry a spare rigged rod for you. But most importantly...Lyall would quietly retrieve all flies that I cast into



the bushes...so I could continue to fish. This was full service 'guiding' at its best.



On return to the accommodation each night, the normal exchanges of 'how did you go' were starting to show some very interesting changes. As a result of Lyall's tuition, it was evident that my catch rate was significantly better than the rest of the group. A point not lost on a few of the guys who later in the trip would avail themselves of an opportunity to fish with and learn from Lyall also.

As it turned out, Jim had been struggling to land a fish despite having been a trout on fly fisher for many decades – starting in Scotland as a wee boy. So it was really pleasing to see that after spending time with Lyall, Jim not only began landing fish, but also improved his casting too.



John on the other hand was content to absorb Lyall's advice on fishing locations and accesses which turned out to be the difference between catching a few fish in the main river adjacent to our accommodation and his higher catch numbers taken in the smaller feeder streams.



What also became apparent during the trip was that fishing the main open river for trout was nowhere near as challenging, nor as enjoyable, as fishing the beautiful twigwater streams.

For twiggin', being able to throw long casts to 100+ feet is of no importance if you can't put short casts right where the fish are likely to be. In some cases, as little as a few centimetres off target was the difference between eliciting a successful take OR spooking the entire pool because you snagged the fly in bushes near an undercut bank where these ambush feeding little rockets often hold up.



Likewise, the speed at which the dry fly can be taken and rejected if a strike is not made equally quickly...means that your eyes must be on the fly and your mind remain on high alert at all times. Awareness of your surrounds, for things such as loose rocks in the stream bed, bushes in the back cast area, changes in wind direction or speed, seams, bubble lines, back eddies and lots more, were all things that had the potential to easily bring you unstuck. It really is 'active' fishing and something I enjoyed much more than I had expected.



In fact, my opinion of trout fishing, well at least in twigwater trout fishing, has definitely changed. So much so that I may just have fallen further into this fly fishing addiction!

Beware...if you ever run across Lyall he is a pusher of dirty twigwater drugs!



Bring on Friend No.19!!!!