

## Letting It Fly

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The Tasmanian Central Highlands offer a spectacular backdrop for anyone wanting to learn the finer aspects of fly-fishing. For a complete beginner this complex combination of lures and casting looks more like fantasy than fishing.

Without the help of a local expert I might have had more luck landing a platypus than Brown Trout, but, in my case at least, luck had nothing to do with it.

The lakes and lagoons of Tasmania's Central Highland are brimming with trout. Originally introduced in the 1800s the brown and rainbow varieties of trout are now as much a part of the landscape as quolls and pademelons, and unlike their native forest friends there's no law against catching and cooking your own trout.

This fishing adventure began at Tarraleah, an hour drive from Lake St Clair and even closer to another 18 lakes where trout stocks are managed and abundant.

Tarraleah has transformed itself from a 1950s hydro-electricity town into an oasis of comfort for travellers between Hobart and Strahan. This infamous drive is both beautiful and challenging, so the option to rest a few days with luxury accommodation, fine dining and a spot of fishing is hard to pass up.

My guide was Marty, who began the day with a sit-down session on how to make your own fly. My only previous experience fishing was the occasional weekend in my youth sitting on a pier and dangling some bait. This idea of creating detailed impostors to mimic the shimmer and shape of ill fated bugs seemed like a black art to me.

Each fly is hand made using intricate bits of feathers and line. The finished fly is smaller than a ten-cent piece, but designed to catch in the light and present a variety of familiar colours to a hungry trout. The task of making each fly demands painstaking detail and a great deal of patience.

Marty popped open his fly-box and added his latest lure to the collection. I counted over twenty faux insects sitting patiently, posed with hooks tucked out of harms way, for now.

Marty explains, "Matching the right fly to the seasonal and local preferences of the trout is half the battle." Landing the fly in the right place is the other half. Trout have very sharp eyesight, but only in a narrow range. A carefully engineered fly is of little appeal to the trout if he can't see it.

The fly weighs next to nothing so the trick is to use the weight of the line to carry forward and land softly on the surface without splashing. Technique and timing make this possible, and with a relaxed whipping of the line back and forth you can gradually extend the fly.

Learning to cast takes just minutes, but actually finding a trout to cast at is another matter. Again, local experience is the key. Marty just isn't the kind of fellow to miss a chance to go fishing, with or without companions, so his knowledge of where the fish are biting is always up-to-the-minute.

Our lake for the day was hidden down the end of a 4WD track that you would have trouble walking on let alone driving. Marty knew what he was doing. While changing into our waders we saw the tell-tale splash of trout striking at the surface, and I couldn't wait to get out there.

The edges of the lake were shallow and broad, perfect for wading through and spotting the trout. It can be hard to focus on the task at hand, this remote patch of wilderness is so scenic that I naturally paused every so often to enjoy the views while my line drifted into the weeds.

The relaxed tempo of the afternoon quickly changed when we spotted some Brown Trout feeding in the shallows. They were loitering in a small cove, frequently dashing at the surface to feed. The game was on.

My first casts were panicked and I either tangled my line or flopped the cast in a heap. The technique came good again a moment or two later and bang, my fly landed right on target. We both watched the fly drift along for a few moments, our breaths paused in anticipation of what might happen next. Looking directly into the sun I was struggling to see my line at all.

And then it happened. The trout lunged at the line and got a taste of the fly. His grab was typically gentle, which is why you have to keep an eye on the water. But it seems I have forgotten the final lesson of the day. Plastic and feathers don't taste much like the real thing and you only have a split-second to pull back on the line and jam the hook.

When Marty looked over to me I realised what has happened. This one didn't just get away, I let him off the hook. We had a good laugh over it, spent a few minutes staring into the water and finally gave a sigh once the excitement of the chase had gone.

The afternoon was turning into evening by this time, and in the remaining light of dusk we could hardly see where to place our feet. We knew we should head home, but we heard another trout making a snatch nearby. Have we got time for one more cast?

This is a sport that never ends. "Give a man a fish and he'll eat for a day, teach a man to fish and he'll be gone the entire weekend."

