

# Late Season Tasmania

I have written before of the attraction for me of fishing in Tasmania at this time of year. The fish are usually in the very best of condition, the water is cold making them especially energetic on the line but they are also very subtle and deliberate in the way they feed. The fish are normally paired by this stage in the proceedings meaning if you can only see one fish there is almost certainly another of similar size in the immediate vicinity. A cast to the fish you can see, risks spooking the one that you can't but that only heightens the excitement.

The water conditions in Tasmania this year were very good. Typically the highland lakes towards the end of the season are low in anticipation of winter rains but despite the best efforts of the Hydro, this year they were for the most part about 85% full. The last week of the Season featured mostly fine and mild weather. That too is unusual. I have fished the same week now for over 20 years and typically it is marked by at least heavy frosts, if not snow and ice.

In New Zealand they look forward each season to the prospect of a "mouse year". Years with mice in plague numbers. Those mice follow a food trail and regularly fall or are stranded in rivers enabling the large trout to really stack on condition on the back of a diet supplemented by mice.

In Tasmania the seasonal wish for trout fishermen is a "jassid year". Jassids are a small but solid leaf hopper (either red or brown bodied) that have the capacity to get traction on the surface tension of the water. Because they can literally jump on the water, the trout tend not to muck about with jassids and hit them like a bass taking a cicada off the top. It is a real "chuck a half brick in" kind of take.

I got down to Hobart on the Wednesday after Easter and went straight up to Bronte Park, the town in the geographic centre of the State. I pulled on my clobber and went out with Greg Beecroft, the guide I have used for the last 6 years or so. Greg told me that the fish had been up and feeding on gum beetles for the previous 3 days. While there were still some beetles about and more falling, the fish were literally becoming full of beetles after consecutive days of feeding, making them very particular and quite difficult. The weather was really too good, a mirror surface and gin clear water that cut no slack for a

bloke who had not had a dry fly on the water for the past 4 months.

I missed a whole string of early chances before I saw one fish that seemed to be going just that little bit better than the others and waded out. Fortunately it took pity on me. I was so surprised when I landed the fish as it turned out to be a tiger trout – a brook trout – brown trout cross. Obviously a stocked fish but the first tiger trout I had seen outside of a hatchery and the first I had ever seen caught.

The next day the weather was cooler and that brought about a change in the fishing. The gum beetles seem to like the warmer days. On the cooler day they give way to the midge and to the jassids – the red jassids that the trout seem to especially like. If I had not been so rusty I would have caught more but I ended up with 5 trout to around 4 pounds for the day – 4 browns and a rainbow.

I felt sorry for the rainbow. It must have been a magnificent fish in its prime. From its length it would have been at least 6-7 pounds but it had lost all condition with age and after a delicate take, it virtually turned up its fins and died with no fight. I tossed it up on the bank and guess that it made a nice meal for a quoll later that night.

Friday was again cooler with a strong northerly breeze building throughout the day. It was a difficult day, as the breeze where we were was from the wrong direction for falls of beetles and jassids and the waves being whipped up by the wind caused the midge to disperse which resulted in there being no real centre of activity or pattern to the way the fish fed. Just the odd fish "once-ing".

On Greg's advice we abandoned the shore and took to a drift boat using a wet fly to search around the discernable structure.

I was varying the strip and depth as much as anything to help keep my interest up when the fly was grabbed by a large fish well down in water column. Greg asked me to make a call but the best I could manage was that it was a "something" and it was big. I love my Winstons for the pleasure they make of casting but with a large fish this deep I would have preferred something with a bit more "umph" in the butt to lift the fish a bit quicker.

## Late Season Tasmania ...(continued)

The fish fought like a trevally. Eventually it came to the boat and my something turned out to be a redfin of 4-5 pounds.

We stayed in the boat the whole day. I ended up with 5 browns plus the redfin but towards dark dropped a very large trout that took a dark coloured woolly bugger right next to some timber and just kept on going. I saw the large head and broad shoulders of the fish as it went. It was a real shark.

Saturday was my best day of the trip. The breeze dropped out and the midge and other insects were able to regroup. I caught 5 trout before breakfast to around 4 pounds, 4 browns and a nice rainbow of just under 4 pounds. After breakfast the rainbows seemed to come and stay on. I caught 3 more rainbows in fairly quick succession including a particularly nice fish of a tad over 4 pounds. They were lovely fish, deep and athletic in conformation and a real handful when on the line.

Greg, the guide, complained that my drag setting was too light but when I dropped a fish by accidently standing on the shooting line, only to find that the fish had in fact straightened the hook, he was more understanding of just how strong and full of beans these fish were. I went on the end up with 12 fish for the day, the last right on dark, making it the first time ever I had technically caught my bag in Tasmania.

I was heading home on the Sunday so I really had only until lunchtime to play. Breakfast was officially stricken from the record and I fished from 7.00 am until noon with no break. At this time of the year 7.00 am is first light in Tasmania.



We started by heading back to the area where the fish had been midging the day before. There were fewer fish moving but we found a couple working a strip just outside of the weed beds. I caught one rainbow of around 3 ½ pounds but the weather went downhill from there. It started to rain quite heavily and the winds picked up causing the dry fly to be binned and the wet flies to come out again.

If wet fly fishing devolves into “blind flogging” it can be boring but if you accurately and systematically fish structure, weed beds, timber and run ins, it can be interesting and very exciting. After 4 days of getting my act together, I was now fishing quite well and caught 4 more browns including one buck of between 5 and 6 pounds that was pronounced the best of the trip. When I saw that large fish I knew how big the one lost the night before had been. They could have been twins.

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