

The Western Lakes. By Steve Paul

I am writing this on the eve of the annual fishing week in the Western Lakes. Having been asked to write this has me dreaming of Julian Lakes and the tarns that surround them. First light will see me walking the bays and back waters on the bottom side of Julian's looking for tails and swells. A favorite dry will do, maybe a nymph for the fussy ones. 10am see us well fed and preparing for the days fishing that the Western Lakes are well renowned for. You will need sturdy boots and gaiters to protect your legs from the gorse bushes, carry a daypack for your raincoat, lunch, maps, compass and a cup to quench your thirst in the cool water of the lake.

Check that your leader is not too long, 9 to 10 feet steeply tapered to handle the wind and help with accuracy. These fish are fit and strong; don't waste your time with a light tippet, six-pound maxima no less. A pinch of mud from the bank run down the bottom half of the line will help to make it sink. The fly I use is the 'scruffy dun' (parachute) size 12 butt with a plump body, natural chocolate brown lambs wool, the lanolin helps the fly to float all day.

Last year I did away with the fly vest, just carrying what I needed in the pockets of my shirt, one fly box, floatant and a couple of spools of tippet material. You are walking eight to ten kilometres a day, so it is easier not to carry too much.

I believe the fly is not important (this time of the year, late January early February), if you walk into camp and check six rods you will see six different flies.... The trout are usually cruising looking for whatever is in the water or floating on top, your favourite dun or beetle pattern will suffice.

Walking up the river systems and up the tarns, scanners turn to high, looking as far ahead as possible, working from the edge to the middle of the tarns, in close looking under the over hanging bushes for a shape or out further for a translucent shape or a dark shadow on the light silty bottom. Always check the gutters where the water flows in or out the tarns.

I can't stress enough the importance of when you finally spot a fish, to keep your eyes on the quarry (the fly is kept in the second eyelet of the rod, so it is just a matter of running the hand up the rod without looking) and to get as low as possible. A lot of these tarns are half the size of a football field, a fish may patrol the bank from wing to half back flank four or five times a day, every day of the year. He knows every rock, kerosene bush and weather-beaten pencil pine.

For the cruising fish, I try to lead the fish as far as I can, (let the fish find the fly, he will hear it land anyway), six to eight inches short so it is harder to see the leader. For the green rocks out further, a closer cast but still short. In windier conditions the fish's window closes, it's harder to see out but the cast must be within a foot or so. The trout have all the time in the world up here, slowly rising to the fly and turning down, try to take a deep breath and wait as long as you dare. On hot days some of the tarns temperatures rise to high levels, the fish's activity slows and you have to look around and behind rocks and other shelter to find them lying up.

The further you go up the river, you notice the galaxiis get a bit bigger, this usually means less fish in the tarns, but the fish are usually larger. Sometimes you will see the galaxiis swimming freely in a tarn; it makes you sceptical there is any fish there.

On overcast windy days the fish are harder to see, try searching deep gutters, around rocks or drifting a dry into a wind blown bay.

Evening sees me back in the bays and backwaters or on the gravelly shores, which the wind has been blowing on all day.

Orange sky at night, fisherman's delight, time to go back to camp for a beer or two to talk about the ones bagged or released and discuss tactics for the morrow.