

Small Streams Are Sweet

... from Mike Stevens



... Heading off

Mike Stevens gives some tips on fishing small streams for little fish.

I don't particularly chase big fish. I like to catch them of course, but often I would rather catch ten small trout in a stream rather than one big trout in a lake. I love the small northern streams in Tasmania. Fishing these predominately with small dry flies is such fun I can barely even begin to describe it. Most headwater streams have enough water, and the eager little trout will come up and inspect your offerings.

Start Late—Finish Whenever

There are real bonuses of this style of stream fishing and the first that comes to mind is the timing of your fishing day. You don't need to start early and probably don't need to be on the water until around midday. This allows the temperature to rise and terrestrial insects to start moving about. If they end up on the water the trout soon find them. And rising trout will also find your little fly as well.

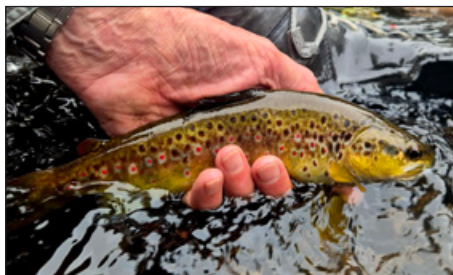
It can get too hot at this time of the year, and a shady tree is a welcome spot to take a break. Sit back and eat some lunch, have a cold drink, and just watch. The fish can sometimes take a break as well as the heat

gets too much for them. As the day starts to cool the fish start again, and on evening caution can be thrown to the wind as the big fish come out to feed.

The big fish come out just on dusk if you care to wait that long – or perhaps just go for an evening session. You will get about twenty minutes of fishing, and this is the time to see the big fish. You will usually only find them though where there is cover nearby.

More Than Fish

Little streams have an abundance of wildlife other than trout, and as I sat recently a deer came down to drink as a platypus was nosing around looking for food. We live in a special place. The fallow deer, like trout, was introduced,



A typical small stream brown



Well done - more of those pretty Tasmanian trout

but it seems so much at home. I was just a few metres away and downwind, sitting motionless, and was not even noticed.

Small streams usually offer excellent protection from the strong sea breezes we get late during summer days, so generally you are not battling with the wind all day. You still need to work with the wind though, especially in the tiny creeks where even being 300 - 400 mm off-line will have your fly in the grass, not on the water.

Leaders

The construction of your leader is vital in this regard as well. It needs stiffness in the butt to turn the fly over, but also needs a tippet that is long and limp enough to give you a drag free drift. My favourite leader is a 4X with 40-50 cm cut off the butt, and then I add two metres or more of tippet. I use either 5X or 6X. Tippet needs to be strong enough to retrieve your fly from trees and grass.

Increasingly I like to use a small tippet ring on the end of the leader. It makes it easy to change tippet, or change the length of the tippet. I vary the length of the tippet as needed during the day depending on the water.

Work on drag free drifts too. It is probably the most important single thing to success. If you can't get a drag free drift the fish will not eat. That is why a long tippet is

critical. The leader should NOT straighten, and the fly should land with control, and drift two metres at least – drag free.

You also need to be able to roll cast and bow and arrow cast and turn the fly over at the end. You don't need to cast 15 metres, but no one is disadvantaged if they can cast that far. You need every cast in the book fishing these streams, and accuracy is vital. And line control is also vital. Perhaps the most important part of line control is what is behind you rather than in front. Mostly you won't get the luxury of open areas for a long back cast, and often you will need to curve cast under a branch, drop it through a narrow slot, or roll cast away from a vertical backdrop. Accurate stream casters will catch four times more fish than those who struggle.

I put my less than brilliant distance casting down to too many years using wrist action casting on streams. I can cope with that.

Flies

I use a few different flies, from beetles to Red Tags, Royal Wulffs and little hoppers. The hoppers this time of the year work really well as the real things become more active. These are certainly more effective on the meadow streams where grass is close by, rather than the streams that filter through mini rainforests.

One of the best all round flies I have found is a Klinkhamer in size 16/18. Klinkhamer style emerger patterns that hang half under water supported by a parachute hackle are fantastic. I use a version with a bright orange indicator tuft. It is rarely refused by a feeding trout, and I have caught more than 20 fish on a single fly.

Other great flies I am more than happy to use are small Bibio Hoppers, Red Tags (a bit fragile) and Royal Wulffs. When the fish are really hard I also put on a little Pheasant Tail nymph. I do this reluctantly, not because I am anti-nymph but because I just love seeing a trout put its head over the top of a fly. If a fish refuses a fly after a good look at it I change flies straight away.

In Summer when the sun is high most fish can be spotted and I love seeing them take – or even refuse- a fly. Little fish can be quite fickle though, and just like their big New Zealand cousins they can treat your fly with disdain — just take a look and drift off. When this happens I have sometimes spent half an hour changing flies repeatedly, and getting 15 - 20 refusals. This is when a nymph eventually

gets a run – trying to catch a tiny trout off guard. This is a battle between a 20 centimetre trout with a very small brain and a geared up fishing machine. I love it and wonder if anyone else thinks the same way.

Rods

Rods should be appropriate to the place you fish. I love 3-weight rods – some short and some longer. Some little streams are open and a longer rod is advantageous, but if a stream is tight and in the scrub a short rod is better. There are some fabulous rods around these days and the selection has never been better.

Finding streams

I am not going to give you any names. If you are keen you will find plenty. Hobart has its share, the north-east has heaps, and the north across to the north-west has plenty as well. My suggestion is to look at streams that flow into our larger streams and rivers. Headwaters of the bigger rivers and streams are well worth a look, and if they start in a temperate/ rain forest take a very close look. Drive around a lot and then walk a lot. You are looking for



Pondering the possibilities - where to land the fly?

places that no one else fishes. Check out the maps and Google Earth places as well. I must warn you though that Google Earth is not so hot for finding small streams as the overhanging canopy often hides a treasure trove of water beneath it.

On your own - or with a mate

A big question this one—especially when you have discovered a secret spot. You take a mate there and then he does the same. In a few months there is a well-worn track, and one day you arrive all keen on tricking tiny trout to find there is a car parked exactly where you park. It is a little gut wrenching when you realise this is because you shared it. But fishing with a mate can be great – pool hopping or fish hopping – taking it in turns to catch fish. Get serious and you have to hand the rod over when you miss a strike.

On your own can be just the best therapy in the world. A stressful day or week will be well and truly forgotten as you concentrate on getting a bow and arrow cast up under a tree. You can skip a pool, fish fast or slow, or just sit and watch, catching heaps or catching none.

Not much gear required

One great thing about the small stream caper is you don't need much tackle - a box of flies, floatant, some tippet material, cutters/forceps, polaroids, a hat, ... and that's about it. Of course you can have

heaps more, but it is not really needed. I used to take several boxes of flies because I scrounged them out my huge bag of fly gear where there are boxes for emergers, another for hoppers, another for nymphs, then there's the wets and others - you get my drift. So what I did was just organise one kit with only stream gear in it. One box with a few of everything. It is only a small box, but it has everything I need; and if it doesn't the fish will just have to change their diet.

I use a Lanyard and it works really well. The other really useful piece of kit is a piece of amadou or something to dry your fly. The modern powdered desiccants are great too.

Advice from David Scholes ...

David Scholes was Australia's greatest fishing author and he loved the little streams. They were the places he learned to fish - the Upper Yarra and tributaries, and then later Tasmania. He especially enjoyed the small northern streams and often chatted to me about them as we sat in his sunroom. He pointed out with great passion the importance of getting in the right position. "There is always a best position", he said. "Take note of the flow and eddies and set yourself up so drag doesn't ruin your drift."

I often think of his wise words—especially when I muck it up.



Fishing a typical Tasmanian small stream