

Master Casters

Words & Images Brett Foster Additional Images Courtesy GVFFC

They may not act like us, or even think like us,
but isn't that the quintessential lure of fly-fishing?

Fly-fishing has always intrigued me. I've often watched those enigmatic fisherman stalking creeks and riverbanks, casting their lines back and forth in whip-like arcs without apparent regard for a reel, and wondered – what's wrong with them? Well, now I know.

Knowing I would never obtain those peculiar skills from a book I hunted around for an instructor and found the website of the Goulburn Valley Fly Fishing Centre. GVFFC is a 16 acre property abutting the Goulburn River at Thornton and is laced with private ponds, lakes and streams all fed with gin clear water from the river itself. These waterways are stocked with some impressive trophy sized trout! The focus of the business is a huge architecturally designed mud-brick lodge which houses a fly-fishing shop, a lounge/informal classroom, a fly-tying studio and conference facilities. Most importantly for me, they teach the curious art of fly fishing.

Wasting no time I grabbed my mate Al and headed off. Two hours later we were settling into the comfy, two-bedroom, mud-brick Caddis Cottage on the edge of the lodge pond and joking about the serenity. GVFFC is literally a slice of fisherman heaven.

At noon we went to fly-fishing school. Standing on the lodge's vast verandah built over a large pond, master caster David Pickering began by teaching us the casting techniques which are critical to fly-fishing. "It's all about the rhythm," he explained. Al got off to a good beginning and surprisingly, after a few false starts and a near strangulation I quickly got the hang of it myself.

David was a fantastic instructor, constantly cajoling and correcting our technique with critical good humour to the point where we could judge distance and aim accurately. When he was satisfied with our progress we paused and went inside for the theory element of the lesson.



Fly-fishing is all about trying to coax a fish into taking your 'fly', a manufactured insect tied around a hook using a variety of textiles and natural materials to look like the real thing. To be successful the fly needs to be presented in the right way, in the right location and of course it has to be the right fly – if it isn't on the menu the fish won't touch it. To bring it all together the fisherman must be able to read a waterway, looking for signs of habitation and studying the insect life to see what the fish have a taste for. The range of flies available staggered me. I ended the theory lesson not only with an appreciation of the approach to fly-fishing but a far more intellectual view of fishing in general.

GVFFC is unique in a number of ways, not the least of which is its own meandering stream specifically created for schooling new fly-fishermen. Our lesson continued here with David teaching us how to move around and allow for obstacles while casting and how to actually land a fish. My respect for his skill escalated after I hooked a dozen trees while his very first cast hooked an impressive trout. Thrusting the rod at me he said, "You land it." My instinct was to go straight for the reel and start winding, but with excess line bundled at my feet this obviously failed and the trout almost escaped. When fishing this way you pull the line in by hand, keeping the tension just right the whole time as only very light line is used. But I landed the fish! Eventually (note catch and release is the norm here).

Our second day gave us the opportunity to practice our new skills with a rafting expedition down the Goulburn River. Master caster Geoff Hall was our guide for the day, rowing us downstream for an amazing eight hours while Al and I fished. Geoff's fly-fishing knowledge was impeccable. He taught us how to read the river and its insect life and guided our casts to all the best fish haunts. We learned roll casting and techniques for getting in low under the trees. And all the while Geoff patiently tied on new flies for us, regaled us with fishing stories and served up a veritable wealth of fishing information.

I enjoyed one of the best days of my life. The peacefulness of drifting downstream, the crystal clear water, meetings with platypus and a day in the Aussie outdoors interspersed with the thrill of the hunt – what more could a person want?

As for fly-fishing, I'm hooked. I'm not sure whether to call it sport or recreation, but I can tell you this: for me fishing has become far more about pitting my wits against nature in an exciting contest.

Whether you're a beginner or experienced fly fisherman GVFFC is a fantastic resource, conducting regular lessons, local and international fishing tours and even provides an online video report for the region. ▣

at a glance...

Goulburn Valley Fly Fishing Centre

Location: RMB 1270 Goulburn Valley Hwy, Thornton
(2 hours' drive north-east of Melbourne)

Phone: Freecall 1800 458 111

Landline: (03) 5773 2513

Email: info@goulburnvlyflyfishing.com.au

Web: www.goulburnvlyflyfishing.com.au

Retail Website: www.theflyshop.com.au

Pricing: Accommodation: Caddis Cottage 2-Bedroom, self-contained mud-brick cottage.
Minimum: \$95.00 pp low season mid-week, \$170.00 for 2 persons.
Maximum: \$120.00 pp high season weekend, \$195.00 for 2 persons.

Fly Fishing Lessons: 1 hour = \$45.00

Guided Fishing Experiences: Cost: ½ Day (5 hours): \$190.00
Full Day (10 hours): \$300.00

Rafting Trips: Cost: ½ Day (5 hours): \$240.00
Full Day (10 hours): \$350.00

New Zealand Tours: Week long tours run Jan thru March for beginners and experts alike.

Beginner set up: Cost for beginners to start up fly-fishing from scratch: Basic but quality full set up kit: \$350.00.



Master caster David Pickering



Cottage Bedroom



The two-storey mud-brick Lodge