

Brumbys Creek

Daniel Hackett hunts trout
at Tasmania's premier tailrace fishery.

Photographs by Brad Harris.



Daniel prospecting deeper gutters between weed beds on a stormy day at Brumbys.

It's about 6 a.m. and the screech of dial-up Internet breaks the silence—there's no high speed communication in the hills of northern Tasmania. The local Bureau of Meteorology website pops up on the computer screen displaying river levels, and a quick scroll through the list shows that Brumbys Creek is flowing flat-out. A quick glance outside the lodge shows a few deer grazing amongst the sheep, mist rising from the river, and a clear blue sky beginning to burn through the early morning fog: perfect conditions for a day of

trout hunting at Brumbys Creek.

BRUMBYS OVERVIEW

Brumbys Creek, or just 'Brumbys' as the locals refer to it, is a tailrace fishery situated in northern Tasmania. It was created in its current form during the early 1960s to receive crystal-clear water from Great Lake via the Poatina Power Scheme: the very same water that previously flowed down the Shannon River creating the once-famous Shannon Rise. Prior to the hydro-electric works, Brumbys was a small stream flowing through pasture. Today it is a unique blend of slow-

moving currents over flooded plains and deep original creek bed channels, braiding their way down to join the Macquarie River just above the township of Cressy.

The clear waters of Great Lake flowing over lush aquatic gardens, interspersed with contrasting patches of silt, present ideal conditions for sight fishing. A milder climate than that found at higher altitude on the Central Plateau also provides more of the bright sunny days required for polaroiding and stalking the average 2 lb Brumbys Creek fish, or one of the 3 lb-plus trophies that are often seen scurrying away from wayward presentations or gangly approaches.

The fishery is broken up into four sections: the 'top weir' (or more correctly Weir One), the second weir (Weir Two), the third weir (Weir Three) and the stretch below, down to the junction with the Macquarie. The top weir is the typical setting for the classic hatches and fly fishing of Brumbys Creek, whilst walking above the second weir from the northern



A bead-head Black

*A closer view of those deep, weedy channels
in the foreground—ideal trout habitat.*

BRUMBYS CREEK IS WITHOUT DOUBT ONE OF AUSTRALIA'S BEST SIGHT-FISHING DESTINATIONS. IT'S A FISHERY BASED ON QUALITY RATHER THAN QUANTITY, BUT IF YOU ARE AFTER A DAY OF 'TROUT HUNTING', THEN BRUMBYS CREEK IS FOR YOU.

Brumbys really is an ideal fly fishing environment when conditions are favourable.



WHEN IT COMES TO
DRY FLY FISHING,
THE SHAVING BRUSH
WOULD TAKE THE CAKE AS
THE NUMBER ONE 'GO-TO'
FLY FOR BRUMBYS.

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The third weir is easily accessible and nearly always has fish showing. From there downstream, Brumbys becomes harder to fish and to access, although a high 'nutrient' output from the fish farm neighbouring the river can provide perfect conditions for growing double figure browns that loiter near the outflow.

BRUMBYS HABITATS

According to recent aquatic surveys conducted by Peter Davies and Laurie Cook, Brumbys Creek supports three major habitat types, with the main one comprising aquatic macrophyte (weed) beds which grow over a silt or mud bottom—this aquatic terrain dominates the pondage areas above each weir. For the fly fisher, this is where most of the quality fishing occurs, and where the larger fish are found. The dominant water plants are aquatic milfoil (*Myriophyllum*) and pondweed (*Potamogeton*).

From a fishing point of view, the milfoil beds found in the slower backwaters—in contrast to the pondweed beds which are found in slightly faster channels—are the key habitat. These give

rise to the best spinner hatches, tailing and finning fish, and polaroiding.

The other main habitat types identified by Davies and Cook are the channel hard pans found above and below the weir pondages, and the channel gravel beds. The gravel beds are of more interest to the angler as they support relatively high numbers of mayflies and snowflake caddis. Whilst the fishing in these areas may not be as good as that amongst the main weedbeds, larger trout are often found immediately downstream of productive gravel banks, where they Hoover down wayward duns and fluttering caddis.

BRUMBYS FLIES & METHODS

A more detailed look at the reported aquatic surveys reveals a dominance of small aquatic snails and amphipods in the weed beds, and this has a bearing on fly selection.

I would guess that 75 per cent of the Brumbys fish caught by guided anglers are taken on the Black & Peacock Spider which, when tied in sizes 14 and 16, is essentially a snail imitation. When retired guide Andrew



Harker introduced me to the Black & Peacock at Brumbys, I could see that it worked (Andrew made me row him around whilst he caught six fish on the trot using it), but I didn't know why it was so deadly. The recent survey data explains this in no uncertain terms: snails account for 40 per cent of total fauna abundance in aquatic milfoil habitats and 17 per cent in pondweed habitats.

Another wet fly I rely on a lot at Brumbys is one I call a Woolly Caddis. This began life as a clipped Woolly Worm, inspired by stories of Cressy local Terry Connell's exploits with his own Woolly Worm at Brumbys. Slowly the fly was downsized and colours were tweaked until, at a distance, perhaps with your eyes slightly squinted and blurred, the fly could pass as an amphipod. According to the surveys, amphipods represent 24 per cent of total fauna abundance in aquatic milfoil habitat and 41 per cent in pondweed habitat, and Brumbys fish love to feed on them with heads down in the weed and tails waving in the air.

The final addition to the fly was to include a yellow chenille 'stick caddis' head, making it a generalist caddis/amphipod pattern, ideal for tailing fish anywhere.

With snails and amphipods account-

ing for at least 60 per cent of available food in the weedbed habitats, these two wet flies have things covered. This knowledge saves time wasted when constantly changing flies and allows the angler to focus on searching for fish and making effective, confident presentations.

When it comes to dry fly fishing, the Shaving Brush would take the cake as the number one 'go-to' fly for Brumbys. You can tie these in a few different ways, including adding a bit of sparkle either side of the collar, or

adding a Glister dubbed body on a curved hook, but generally, the good old Shaving Brush and a good drag-free presentation does the trick.

The Shaving Brush is not ideal for suspending a snail pattern, so for fishing the snail in tandem with a dry, something like a Red Humpy is a good choice. Avoid the Royal Wulff: although it works from time to time, I find that it spooks a lot of Brumbys fish whereas a small Humpy, with its lower beetle-like profile, seems to get eaten when you least expect it, and



Cold, clear water adds to the fighting spirit of Brumbys trout.



Woolly Caddis—part caddis, part amphipod?

blind fishing, a snail pattern used to prospect the likely holes and pockets between the weedbeds is a good starting point.

BRUMBYS CALENDAR

Depending on water levels, which fluctuate with power generation (the higher the better, with rising water being the best), Brumbys can offer high-quality, challenging sight-fishing from the first to the last day of the season.

During August and September the usual approach is to look for tailing trout, particularly all the way upstream

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from the second weir on the northern bank or, alternatively, downstream from the third weir. October sees more good tailing (typically to amphipods and stick caddis) interspersed with an evening rise of caddis and, if you're lucky, cockchafer beetles which can provide breathtaking opportunities to catch big fish on the dry.

November sees the red and black spinner mayfly fishing begin, as well as the first appearance of early morning caenids (tiny mayflies) and afternoon damselfly and dragonfly fishing. December brings micro-caddis hatches on the shallow waters during the day, which for me provides the most exciting fishing of the season.

Surface feeding begins to slow down by mid-March, although tailing and finning fish become easier to find once again, and this activity continues until the end of the season in late April.

BRUMBYS ACCESS

Access to Brumbys Creek is via the town of Cressy, forty minutes south of Launceston. Immediately south of Cressy the main road crosses Brumbys Creek from where a dirt road either side leads to car parks

and park benches at Weir Two and Three. Foot access can be gained from either of these areas. Alternatively drive past this bridge until you arrive at Fisheries Lane, which leads you down a small gated road to the pondage above Weir One where a small boat can be launched, or further foot access can be made.

Brumbys Creek is without doubt one of Australia's best sight-fishing destinations. It's a fishery based 

