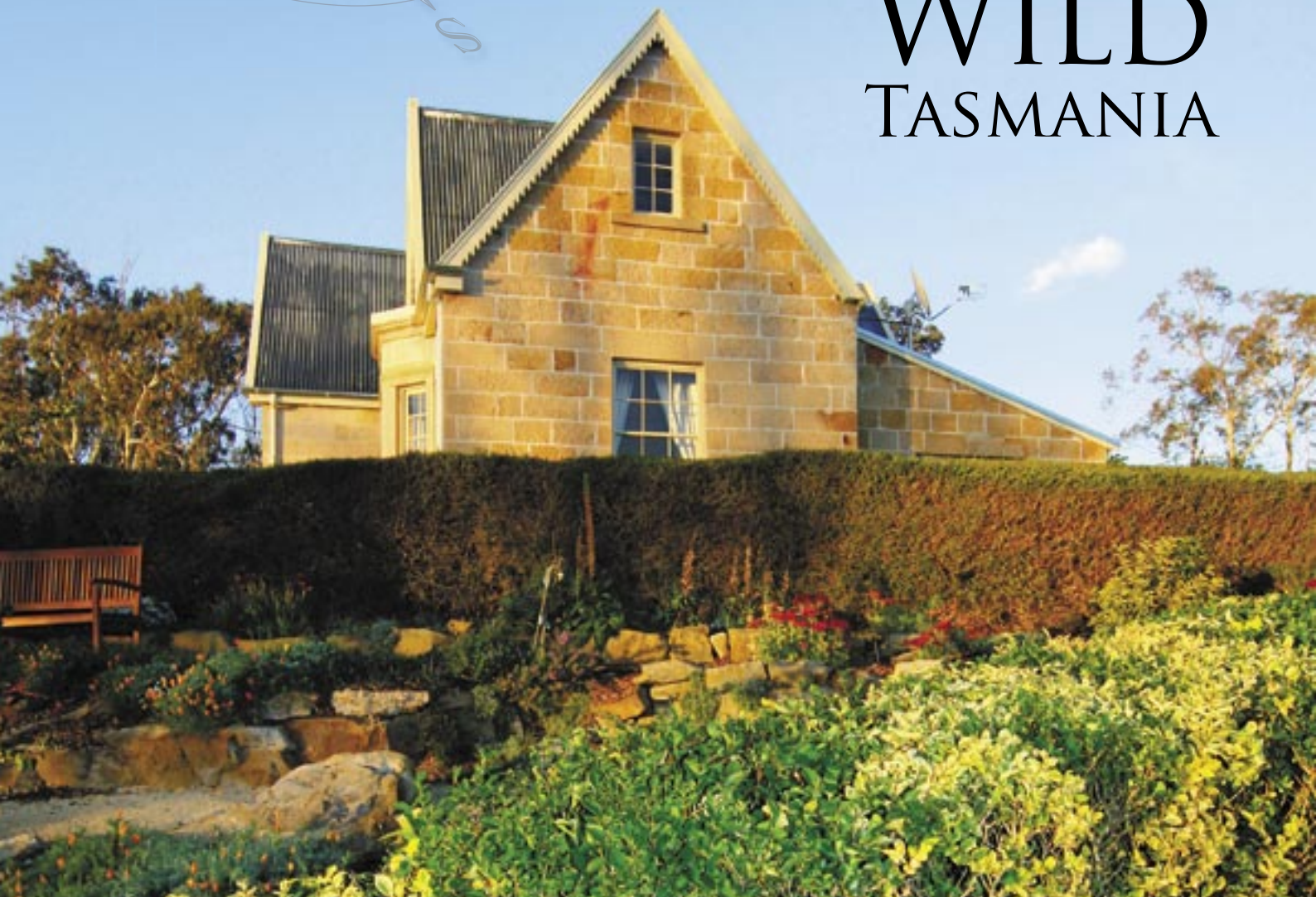




Guides

FISH WILD TASMANIA



Trevor Hawkins visits a new top Tasmanian lodge and gets some assistance at Woods Lake.

I've found there's something reassuring about fishing waters you get to know by visiting them to the exclusion of many others throughout ongoing seasons. It's a bit like your favourite old boots or fly rod. They fit comfortably and just seem to make fishing more pleasurable. Some anglers even travel overseas visiting the same regions time and time again each year, either because they particularly love the fishing, feel that they really have a handle on how a place fishes or both.

And yet if you make the effort and visit new waters then the rewards can often be very surprising and all of a sudden you have another 'favourite' water on your list. If you're taken to these new waters by someone who knows them well, then that's so much the better, as the chance of coming up with fish is greatly increased. So it was with my recent trip to Tasmania.

The guide

Bob McKinley, owner and operator of Fish Wild Tasmania has been a full time guide in Tasmania since 1999 and operates out of Hobart, guiding clients on trout and estuary fishing. It is with some pride that he talks about, in a very unassuming way, the clients he guides with whom he has formed a bond over many visits. Some of these clients he has seen grow from rank beginners whom he originally taught to cast to very accomplished flyfishers who often travel extensively to fish and yet still pay return visits when in Tasmania.

I met Bob many seasons ago, but only this year got around to having a fish with him on a short, three day visit to Tasmania at the tail end of the season. Bob has a reputation as a gun guide on Woods Lake in the Central Highlands of Tasmania and

as this was one water that I had never before got around to fishing I was eager to give it a try if he gave it the nod.

I was based at The Priory Country Lodge in Bothwell for my stay and Bob is the principle guide for this 5 star establishment. Bothwell is approximately one hour's drive from Hobart on the road to the Central Highland lakes and as such the Lodge is perfectly located for those travelling from the state capital.

Bob rang the lodge on the evening of my arrival to check whether I needed to borrow his gear or if I had brought my own. He was also keen to hear whether I had a preference as to the waters I'd like to visit during my stay. When I mentioned that I had never fished Woods before and wouldn't mind having a look at it, I could tell by the sound of his voice that this water was one of his favourites and that he was



This is another reason where a guide can be a great asset. I fish Tasmania perhaps two or three times a season most years and yet other than a few favourite waters, I still don't know where to fish with any real certainty in the Central Highlands in various weather conditions. I don't know what waters are best fished so as to take advantage of onshore or offshore winds at different times of the year to give the best chance of scoring fish! With limited time on our hands, most anglers can spend a lot of time driving around looking for favourable places to fish instead of actually fishing! This crucial knowledge only really comes about through years of being on the water at all times of year and building a data bank of where and how to fish the time of year and prevailing conditions.

A couple of day's fishing

It worked out nicely for us the first day out on Woods as we had some good shelter from the strong northerly that was blowing. Woods Lake, Bob informed me, was a natural lake that at some time past had had its waters raised a metre or so when a dam was placed across the Lake River that flows in and out of the original depression. After getting Bob's Polycraft boat into the water we set up to drift with drogue along a far shore of the lake. The water had a very noticeable silty discoloration to it that Bob said was normal and while this in no way affected the quality of the fishing, it did mean that the best way to fish it was with a wet fly unless we saw fish movement. Spotting fish in these silty waters would have been a major effort, although I imagine it would be possible when they are in the very shallow margins.

After tying on an olive Yeti-like creation that Bob gave me, I was told to cast into the gaps and pockets in the weed banks that existed along the shore we were drifting. It seems that the trout (mostly browns) take up position around these weed banks waiting in ambush for the

keen to see if he could show me some of its trout.

Bob's a country lad from the bush and as such has a wonderful sense of humour that makes you feel as though you've been fishing with him for years. I can see why clients would feel relaxed and under no pressure to come up to the mark regarding precision casting, or feel they'll be admonished for missing the strike. He's there to make sure he gives you a real chance at coming up with a fish and he does this by talking you through where he expects the fish to be and how to fish the fly to achieve success. If you're not confident about your casting abilities he's only too happy to spend a few hours before hitting the water proper to enhance your chances of coming up with a trout.

Due to the late season visit I was in some ways rolling the dice as to what waters would be firing. Normally by this time in the season most of the hatches have finished other than the gum beetles, jassids and midges if the weather is kind. As it was, the weather held for the first day's fishing and got progressively worse on the second day, with forecasts of snow on the third. Sounds like typical Tassie weather really, doesn't it?

Bob with a typical Woods Lake brown caught from the shore in the shallows.

With plenty of structure and weed, the shore at Woods Lake offers a rich feeding ground for the trout and excellent pickings for the angler.



minnows that are a feature of this lake and a major part of their diet.

Bob set up the boat to give me the prime casting position and as we drifted parallel to the bank I just fired off shot after shot into any area that looked fishy or that Bob said was worth a cast. What a session we had, with many trout of about 1.2 kg absolutely hammering the fly at times and on at least three occasions lifting their heads completely out of the water as I 'hung' the fly at the end of each retrieve. On one occasion I had a trout literally surfing along on top of the water with its mouth open trying to catch the fly as I was lifting for a cast. It was hilarious, as no matter how hard I seemed to try I just couldn't force myself to stop the lift once I was committed to it! As I said to Bob,

'There was no way that trout was going to get that fly, not if I had anything to do with it at least.'

We fished a number of shores with the boat before heading across to a sheltered bank to have a bite to eat. Afterwards we set off on foot wading a lovely shallow bank, Bob searching with a dry and I with the 'killer' wet. Late in the afternoon we decided to have an hour on Penstock Lagoon, which gave up one of the beautiful brown trout that this water is famous for.

The second day saw the wind up and the clouds low and to be honest we were both a little sceptical as to whether or not we would even get the boat in somewhere. We decided to hit Dee Lagoon and try to find some cruising fish along any sheltered bays, thinking that we might also see some gum beetles and jassids on the water. Conditions were against us with only the occasional insect to be seen and in reality we probably only got three shots at reachable fish for the whole session and I blew them all. Bob didn't yell at me but I did feel a steely stare in the back of my neck at least once. Sorry mate!

The weather was getting worse and the thought of a fine whisky and a nice red over dinner held too much appeal over a wet bum and no fish day on Dee. So we decided to retire hurt and head back to The Priory.



Bob releases a trout at Woods Lake, one of his favourite stalking grounds.

Packing up

While the fishing on the second day was tough due to the weather, the first day made up for it with at least thirteen fish coming to hand and quite a few missed or dropped on the lift. Bob's operation is top notch and Woods Lake is a great place to try your hand at fly fishing. The water has reasonable protection from the weather and Bob's Polycraft is very quiet and smooth to ride in, and very comfortable to fish from. If you're just starting out on your flyfishing journey or you're like me and wouldn't mind trying somewhere different then give Fish Wild Tasmania a call and ask Bob to take you to Woods. He does many other waters as well, but I have the feeling that you might just like a return visit to Woods. I know I do. 📍



Wade fishing success on the Woods Lake shoreline.

FWF FISH WILD TASMANIA

Bob and Lyn McKinley's Fish Wild Tasmania is a fully accredited and insured guide service operating out of Hobart. Bob McKinley is the principle guide for The Priory, Tasmania's newest 5 star country lodge in Bothwell. He also guides for Central Highlands Lodge in Miena.

Bob aims to provide his clients with a quality experience and as such likes to limit angler numbers to a maximum of two per guide. His guiding packages can be tailored to suit the clients needs, be that one day or several days to give clients a variety of fishing experiences.

Bob is happy to help people who want to give fly fishing a try and as such offers fly fishing tuition. He also offers fly and lure guiding on Tassie's big black bream and other seasonal saltwater species.

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The Wild Fish Tasmania set up has plenty of room for the restricted number of guests that Bob takes at a time.



FWF THE PRIORY COUNTRY LODGE

The Priory, built in 1848, has only recently been stunningly refurbished into a beautiful country lodge offering 5 star comfort and amenities for the astute traveller.

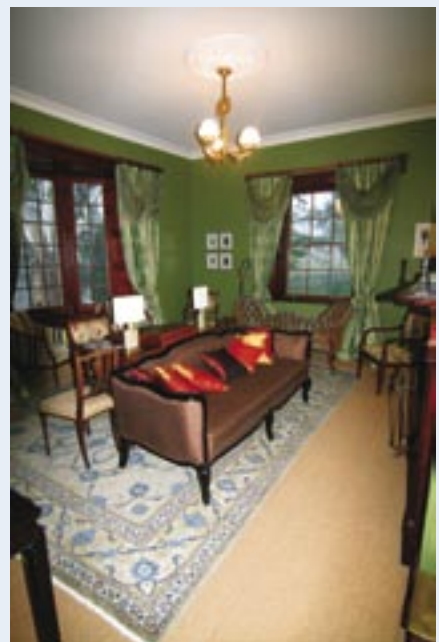
The four bedroom Tudor house now includes marble bathrooms, formal lounge, drawing room, library, hunt room, movie room and fabulous country kitchen to enjoy produce from the local area, prepared by your very own chef.

It is set within lovely landscaped gardens and situated on a hillside overlooking the historic town of Bothwell, which lies at the foothills of the many excellent lakes of the Central Highlands.

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The Priory is a very special getaway, especially so as it is handy to the Central Highlands lakes.



ADVERTS