

# Exploring Khancoban – November 2011 With Steve Williamson

## A fly fishing weekend for the skilled and not so skilled.

The purpose of our Explore the Khancoban District Fly Fishing weekend is to look at as many different locations in the area as we possibly can and fish as many rivers and streams that are fishing best at the time.

The district is spectacularly beautiful and has its own little micro climate very different to the northern side of the mountain.

Khancoban was constructed to house workers involved in the Snowy Mountains Scheme, Australia's largest engineering project, designed to provide hydro-electric power and water for irrigation to vast areas of the nation. The town is still mainly populated by workers employed by Snowy Hydro Limited working in places such as Murray 1 and Murray 2 Power Stations.

During our weekend, even waters over the border into Victoria, like sections of the Murray River and Nariel Creek, are often fished. These waters are less than an hour from Khancoban and so within an easy days fishing range.

## November 2011

The Snowy Mountains area offers the best trout fishing in Australia and while I am regarded as an 'expert' on fishing the region, it is really the northern side of the Great Dividing Range that I am most familiar with having fished the region for over 35 years.

Although having trout fished the southern most trout waters through NSW and Victoria in my early days of fly fishing, my guiding operation in Jindabyne had kept me on the northern waters for 20 years or more with only the occasional trip south of the ranges however in 2009 I decided to rediscover the region and offer other anglers of similar interests the opportunity to do the same and so my guided fly fishing weekends called 'Exploring the Khancoban district' originated.

*This is the story of the 5<sup>th</sup> trip to the Khancoban region, our November 2011 trip, in which 5 anglers originating from as far as Sydney, Wollongong and Cowra joined me for what is 2 ½ days of fly fishing fun.*

## The Stars of the show!.



## The Guides.



Now read on-

Ah, another trip to beautiful Khancoban and the experience of the great trout fishing the area offers.

We meet at 'Steve Williamson's Tackle Shop' in Jindabyne at 12 noon on the Friday. Time to stock up for the trip before heading over the Great Dividing Range via the Alpine Way, following the picturesque Thredbo River, past the alpine ski village of Thredbo and down the mountain firstly stopping at the Tom Groggin Picnic Area to check out the top end of the Murray River and try to spot any of those little trout we are to chase.

Storms and heavy rain the night before in the mountains had the Murray running a little hard and dirty, so we made the decision to carry on along the Alpine Way, stopping at the Gheehi Camping Reserve beside the Swampy Plain River which luckily was better looking water, nice and clear and not flowing as hard as the Murray River over the other side of the range.

This is our warm up water, time for the anglers to pull out their rods and reels, dust off the cob webs and get that rusty arm swinging once again.



*Our first stop is about rigging up, making certain everything is in order, lines are cleaned and there is no leaks in the waders!*

I'm personally there to help clean and straighten the lines, select a fly and yell out 'not so far back with the cast, you're hitting the water and all your going to catch is the trees!'

That done everyone now should be ready for a full days fishing tomorrow, no fussing about sorting out their under used tackle and trying to remember which way the reel attaches to the rod.



*Bruce rigging up by one of the huts in the Gheehi Camping Area.*



*Frank started off well with a small rainbow after plenty of casting practice.*



*The Swampy was at its best, water clear and flowing just right.*

On we go to Khancoban and if time permits it may be worth while checking out the pondage at Murray 1 power station. If the water is at a high level, there are often big trout cruising the margins well within casting range.

Arriving in Khancoban it is also worth having a look at Khancoban Pondage. We go to the boat ramp and check out the lake level. Being a hydro lake, the level of the water can change quickly by day to day and if high and over the grass, it can provide excellent fly fishing when the fish are cruising close to the edges.

On to our chosen accommodation at Queens Cottage.

On arrival anglers are allocated their private ensuite room, comfortable beds, hot shower and with mini kitchen etc. Fantastic accommodation! Guests then have time to explore the facilities at Queens Cottage and even have a relaxing soak in the 30 degree waters of the 'plunge pool', time to relax those casting muscles before a full day on the water the next day.

Friday night is also my welcome BBQ night, (expertly cooked by 'chef' Steve) and thus giving guests time to get to know each other, telling their stories about why the hell they took up this crazy sport of fly fishing in the first place?



*Friday night at Queens Cottage*

Early to bed and early to rise. Breakfast in the dining room at Queens Cottage is made up of fresh made hot porridge, fruits and cereal, toast and a hot cup of tea or coffee, plenty to give you the energy to get through a full day of fly casting.



*The stars of the show just before we left for Saturday's fishing.*

There are plenty of trout filled waters within minutes of our accommodation, however this time we have decided to head over the border into Victoria and meet up with our 'very local 3<sup>rd</sup> generation' fishing guide Neal Bennetts (Nariel Neal) at Corryong which is about 20 minutes away from Khancoban.

Neal (of course) suggests the Nariel Creek might be worth a fish, (funny about that) so we follow Neal's Subaru wagon (number plates NARIEL) down through the Nariel Valley, past Bennetts Road (as you would expect), and to a private property where we open a few gates drive through a few paddocks, chase away a few cows and finally we see water!



*The creek was running a little higher and slightly dirtier than normal, also after the rain, but was not too bad.*

This season has been very late, in that I mean that the weather has been colder than normal and although today is expected to be sunny with temperatures reaching near 30 degrees, when checking out the surrounding grass the hoppers were only pin head size and besides a few caddis moths, there was not a lot of terrestrial life about. Looks like it will be nymphs and possibly streamers if we are going to catch a trout.

While not as visually exciting, more fish are caught on wet flies than dry flies by far and fish with an indicator, so as you can see the fish take the underwater fly, then anglers have a better chance of catching a trout.



*Rigging up and selecting correct flies for the conditions is part of the real art of fly fishing.*



*Neal suggests a bead head nymph with an indicator and fishing across and down in the currents might be the way to catch a trout. Getting the fly down in the fast water will be the trick to catching a trout today!*



*Frank rigging up.*

The Nariel is a well stocked waterway, and there are plenty of small browns and rainbows to catch. Although there are big fish in the stream the average size would be about 12 to 14 inches, but these fish are very feisty and will test any anglers skills before landing one.

We also saw some very big European carp, anything over 6lb can be caught, and they seem to co exist with the trout although Cameron and I saw a big brown chasing a big carp but the brown just didn't want to take the fly.



*We split up the anglers, assigning them all with their own private 'beat' and stand by with the camera awaiting the action!*



*The Nariel Creek lives up to Neal's expectations and produces a strike first cast and then a fish on third cast for Cameron.*



*Another rainbow for Cameron.*



*In fact it wasn't long before all anglers had their first fish for the day. Guides could now relax!*

I try to photograph most of the fish caught but with anglers spread out along the river and with double hookups a possibility, I don't always get the photographic evidence I would like, and then there's the ones that are camera shy and get away before I have a chance to photograph them. Sometimes the angler is camera shy!



*One for Robert.*



*Bruce is on the board with a small rainbow.*



*One for David.*



*Frank managed a small rainbow as well.*



*A brown for Robert.*



*Another little one for Bruce.*



*A brown for Cameron.*



*Yep another one Robert!*

*The fish just kept coming for all anglers, so all in all they had a good morning on the Narjel Creek but only one strike on a dry fly!*

With a successful morning on the Nariel, it was time for lunch and a discussion about our afternoon options.

How about a small creek experience? Only small fish but plenty of them!

The Thowgla was chosen, only a short trip over the next valley from where we were fishing and not a lot of fishing time wasted traveling.

Hmmm, thunder clouds and spots of rain, change about to happen, could this be the 'Webley Curse' again?

Luckily the weather held out and anglers were once again split up along the narrow stream.



*Yep that's a small stream all right!*

*It was a matter of getting into the water and staying in the water and if you can get out you do.*

*These small streams however are full of trout that hardly ever see an angler, but you need a light weight rod and reasonable casting experience and it helps heaps if you are good at roll casting.*

After an hour or so of casting and a couple of fish caught, the thunder overhead reminded us that we were carrying (not the guides) 'lightening rods' Fly rods are manufactured out of graphite a perfect conductor of electricity! Since I had a perfect record of returning all my clients back to their families alive and well, it was best we called it a day!



*Tight fishing!*



Safely back at Queens Cottage, anglers hit the plunge pool with a cold beer and a relax before dinner.

Tonight's dinner was hosted by 'chef' Annie and consisted of rack of lamb, honey glazed chicken and followed by apple crumble with fresh fruit, ice cream and cream, but not for Frank (in case his daughter reads this!) and double ice cream for Cameron who is building himself up after a recent illness.

That's Cameron's excuse and he is sticking to it! A glass or two of fine wine, a few 'angler stories' about past fishing experiences before an early night in preparation for the day to follow.

## Sunday

A weather change overnight with showers and a much cooler morning may make it interesting for the fishing but at least it was predicted that the weather should improve as the day progressed.

We decided that we would once again meet 'Mr Nariel' in Corryong, so over the boarder we headed and after a quick chat, the group decision was to head up the Nariel Valley a little further today and try a bit of water that should be a little more open water that we experienced the previous afternoon.

Mmmm, those showers in the valley look more like heavy rain. No Way! Could it be the Webley Curse once again?



Arriving at the fishing destination we checked out the water and with last night's rain the stream had risen and was a little dirtier than yesterday, so it would be weighted nymphs and streamers again. Nothing flying about today with the cool wind and showers about, so much for dry fly fishing!



We donned the rainwear (just in case), rigged the rods and started walking through the field to the river.



*Over fences, under fences and through fences!  
Bloody farmers and why do the cows have to shit  
everywhere?*

Mmmmmmm, that rain is getting heavier!  
(Everyone looks at Robert!).



*Beats along the river were once again allocated.*

I stayed with David and Bruce, the tree was big and I had some cover from the “Webley Curse”. Neal swam off with Frank, Robert and Cameron further downstream.



David’s first cast with a bead head Woolley Bugger and it looked like a strike, as the indicator dipped under water. Something there, the fly is getting hit but just not hooking up! Finally, a rainbow trout, only about 12 inches long but a very strong fish and it used the flow of the water to its advantage. Bruce worked over his beat, inch by inch, a couple of strikes but the fish were not really hitting the fly today. We moved further down towards the other hopefuls. Good thing was the rain had eased and the sky was clearing slightly! Frank had managed a small rainbow but Robert and Cameron were still scoreless.

Bruce changed flies to something smaller and heavier, a small brown nymph and he managed to hook up. The fish jumped and threw the hook, but the hook must have hit a nerve or something because as the trout swam away up the river it leapt out of the water by at least two feet four times as it escaped!  
Never seen that before!



*Casting again a few times, Bruce finally managed to land a fish. Better choice of fly?*

Could the others be using flies that were too big? Thinking the problem might be the others are not getting the fly down deep enough in the faster water.





*Robert finally hooks up on a rainbow that jumped at least 5 times out of the water, boy was it a fighter, taking Robert all over the stream before finally landing it with the help of Neal.*

No photo of that trout with Robert holding the fish, the fish didn't want to be photographed! Robert and Neal looked like they were playing 'fumble the fish' as they tossed it between each other before the trout stuck its fin up in the air and said goodbye! Well try as he did Cameron went fishless for the morning, time was up and we were all hungry and needed some sustenance if the boys were to cast the rest of the day away. We said goodbye to Mr Nariel here as we were heading back to Khancoban to spend the rest of the day on the pondage.



By now the weather had cleared nicely and although sunny, the breeze was cool. At the pondage we new that there had been some redfin (English Perch) down by the boat ramp. Cameron had polaroided them from the bank while testing his new sunnies on Friday when we arrived. The pondage had dropped almost a metre since then and so we were unsure if the fish would still be about.



Most of group had never seen a redfin before let alone caught one, so it was just another species of fish they could add to their list! Redfin are quite aggressive fish, so make a good sports fish and although considered a pest species, they are actually good eating, some say better than trout! Frank said his fly casting arm was about to fall off, so he went for his spin rod!



*Spin rod on a fly fishing trip? Frank, come on mate, that's just not right! Hey you want to see my new 4 piece Okuma spin stick?*

Hang on, where getting off track here!

What fly? Well Mrs Simpson is not only a great traditional trout fly, but one of the flies that sort of look like tiny redfin and are quite often the best fly to also catch them on.

Frank opted for a pink Tasmanian Devil lure.

The group split up and started casting, you could see that a day and a half of waving a fly rod was starting to take its toll.

I went back to the car and took out that 4 piece of the 'devils advocate'.

Choice of metal 'fly'? Why not a 'blade', trout love them and they are easy to cast into the wind.

Virgin rod, virgin reel, line and lure!

First cast, 'hookup', lost at feet! Good start! 2<sup>nd</sup> cast nothing! 3<sup>rd</sup> Cast hookup! Small redfin landed!

Not bad – got Frank's attention! Another cast, another redfin! Handed rod to Cameron!

Couple of casts – redfin! Cameron is on the board for the day!

Results of afternoon. Robert few redfin landed on fly! Bruce a couple also on fly!

Metal fly, about 10 redfin landed with many lost or just not hooked up!

### [Weekends results.](#)

All anglers caught a few trout and some a few more than others. All anglers had a great time and fished some new waters learning heaps along the way.

All anglers got plenty of exercise, walking up and down rivers.

Some lost a little weight along the way, others regained the lost weight by enjoying the hospitality at Queens Cottage.

All anglers slept well in very comfortable beds, especially after a good relaxing soak in the plunge pool.

Some anglers are sure to return once again to explore more of the trout waters south of the great divide!

### [Please note-](#)

All redfin caught were humanely returned to Frank's esky to be scientifically tested in back in Sydney!

All trout were released for next group of desperate anglers attending Steve Williamson's 'Exploring Khancoban' weekend of fly (lure?) fishing!

## **FACT SHEET**

### [Jindabyne to Khancoban](#)

85 kmls. But it is a slow trip over the mountains, a 1 ½ hour trip without stops.



### **[Khancoban is a delightful town on the edge of the Snowy Mountains](#)**

Khancoban is one of those well kept secrets which only people who have actually visited or holidayed in this charming, small township know about. The secret to its unassuming success is its isolation. If you want to drive the 567 km from Sydney via Cooma (166 km from Cooma) you have to drive past Thredbo Village (and all the delights of the Kosciusko region) and wind through the mountains before reaching this town which is located only 13 km from the Victorian border. The road, known as the Alpine Way from Jindabyne to Khancoban, was constructed in 1956 as a direct result of the needs of the Snowy Mountain Authority. Prior to that there had been a track which had been built in the early 1930s and supposedly followed the route the Aborigines took when making their annual pilgrimage to the bogong moth country. Unfortunately the track was so steep (it rose 1800 metres in every 10 kilometres) that even cattle had difficulty using it.

The area had been first settled in the 1830s when it was known as Swampy Plains. From that time until the arrival of the road it was a lonely and isolated settlement which virtually unknown.

Located 300 m above sea level on the edge of the Snowy Mountains (it is a southerly equivalent of Talbingo) it is a true gem. By any conventional measure the autumn colours in Khancoban are equal to those in Tumut, Canberra or Bright. The valley turns a myriad of dramatic colours in the autumn as willows, poplars, and other deciduous trees change their colours.

While it is not as totally an SMA town as Cabramurra (there are a number of private businesses in the town and it does have accommodation for outsiders), Khancoban is very much a Snowy Mountains Authority town serving and maintaining the nearby Murray 1 and 2 power stations and Khancoban Dam. It has a population of 500 of whom the vast majority are connected with the SMA.

## **Queens Cottage**

Queen's Cottage is our choice of accommodation when we are in Khancoban. Queen's Cottage was built in 1961 by the Snowy Mountains Hydro Electric Authority for visiting dignitaries and senior management. These included Queen Elizabeth 11 and the Duke of Edinburgh, Princess Anne, Governor General's, Government Ministers and guests.

It was built in a commanding position with stunning views across the township of Khancoban, Khancoban Pondage and the main range. The adjacent bushland features abundant birdlife and kangaroos are seen at dawn and dusk. Relax with the view from your four star room balcony, main deck, or the solar heated salt water swim spa.



*Plunge Pool*



*Enjoying the view from the dining room.*



*Lounge area*



# EXPLORING KHANCOBAN ITINERARY

**3 day Tour - Meet Friday – Leave for home Monday!**

## **FRIDAY**

**10 am Meet at Steve Williamson's Tackle Shop Jindabyne - Gear up and tackle up.**

This gives us a chance to talk about the weekend and if need be sort out and gear that you may need for the trip.

If we need to organise rods and waders etc we can do this then. **Tackle Hire is FREE!**

**10.30 am - Leave Jindabyne for Khancoban.** (Cars will travel in convoy to Khancoban)

**11.45 am** Stop on the Murray River at Tom Groggin

**2pm** –Stop over at Geehi Reserve on the Swampy River for a warm up fly fish. (Instruction included)

**4pm** – Leave Geehi for Khancoban

**4.30 pm** – Arrive Queens Cottage Khancoban

**5pm – Relax, swim in the pool, drinks and meet each other and explore Queens Cottage.**

**6.30pm** – BBQ Dinner at Queens Cottage

**After Dinner** – Fish the evening rise on Khancoban Pondage if feeling enthusiastic enough.

**Early to bed big day tomorrow!**

## **SATURDAY (# November tours may include an early start to fishing and a later breakfast!)**

# 6am- Optional fish the morning rise on Khancoban Pondage.

**7.00 am – Breakfast at Queens Cottage**

8am – Fishing - guided by Steve Williamson and Neal Bennetts

1pm – Lunch

1.30pm - Continue Fishing

5pm - Back to Queens Cottage

6.30 pm – Dinner – Hosted by Andrew and Anne Laycock.

## **SUNDAY AM**

**7am – Breakfast**

8am – Fishing till 12 noon

**1pm till 5pm** More fishing

Includes extra afternoons guiding, Sunday night accommodation and Sunday evening meals as well as Monday morning continental breakfast.

**(Option for those that want to leave at 5pm Sunday )**

## **MONDAY MORNING**

**Sleep in with breakfast at 8am and then depart for home.**

## **What you get -**

- \* Guided fishing for 2 ½ days.
- \* 4 ½ star Private motel room accommodation – air conditioned TV, Microwave, Fridge etc.
- \* All Meals (Lunch and Dinner Friday and Breakfast Lunch and Dinner Saturday and Sunday)
- \* Free hire of any tackle

# EXPRESSION OF INTEREST / BOOKING FORM

## “Exploring Khancoban District”

with Steve Williamson

### Fly Fishing Weekend

Please keep me up to date with arrangements ( )

#### **BOOK ME NOW! - I Don't want to miss out!**

Please book me into - *(Please circle option and cost)*

#### **OPTION 1**

Meet Steve Williamson on Friday – Travel to Khancoban including a warm up fish on the Swampy Plains River. Fishing all day Saturday and ALL day Sunday leaving for home Monday am.  
Includes accommodation Friday, Saturday and Sunday Nights. All meals included.

**Cost -**

#### **OPTION 2 (for those coming from the Victorian side and meeting us at Khancoban.)**

Meet at Queens Cottage on Friday Night.  
Fishing Saturday and Sunday leaving Monday morning.  
Includes accommodation Friday and Saturday Nights. All meals included.

**Cost -**

#### **OPTION 3 Non Fishing Partner.**

Bring along a NON fishing partner so as they can enjoy a stay at Khancoban relaxing and sightseeing.  
Includes share accommodation, breakfasts and dinners.

**Cost -**

Name/s.....phone.....

E-mail address.....

Number of people ..... Private or Share

Room\*.....

\* Share rooms can reduce your total price if you want to share with a partner or friend!

Details above please accept a Deposit of \$ ..... for OPTION ..... (1,2, or 3)

Send to – Steve Williamson C/- PMB 5 Jindabyne 2627 or call my shop on 02 64561551 BH (9am till 4pm)