

# Walking the Western Lakes

by Allan Semmler

## Part 1. Lake Baillie, Pine River, Lake O'Dell and Lake Agnew.

Tuesday the 5<sup>th</sup>. February dawned fine with intermittent cloud and the ever present Tasmanian wind. A good day for Jeff Baldock and myself to drive up to the Western Lakes and head off on a day walk with our packs and fly rods.

Part of the purpose of our day walk was to stretch our legs and prepare ourselves for some planned longer walks camping out overnight on our Tasmanian sojourn.

We arrived at the carpark between Lake Botsford and Lake Kay about 10 AM, assembled our gear, sorted out our bearings from the map and Jeffs GPS, donned our packs and set off for our first stop – Lake Baillie.

We were walking across typical alpine terrain – rolling slopes with rocky outcrops, tussocks and heathy shrubs to about waist height with various sized wallabies bouncing away from our approach. We were both very conscious of watching where we placed our feet after hearing Jeffs local friend Duncan's comment that he had walked in the same area the previous week and "there was snakes everywhere!"

As we arrived on the banks of Lake Baillie a very large black cormorant departed. The water was very clear and low with less than 50cm in depth. A hatch of small black midge was coming off the surface on our arrival. To fish the hatch required casting into the wind so Jeff with his seven weight rod tied on a small midge pattern and started prospecting with almost immediate success with a small brown on and then off before he could bring him to hand. Jeff had several more hits from small fish over the next 20 minutes before the word went out and the fish sought a safer part of the lake.



*Jeff with his 2 1/2 pound brown taken on a deer hair shaving brush. Lake O'Dell is behind the trees to the left of the picture.*

After a muesli bar and a drink we continued on towards the Pine River which we intended to prospect along for a couple of k's until heading over the ridge to Lake O'Dell. As we approached the river walking became more difficult with lots of rat holes and narrow gutters concealed under tussocks. Best method seemed to be to step from tussock to tussock checking for nasty surprises before each step.

The Pine River is a shallow meandering stream surrounded by tussock flats with intermittent deeper holes. As with all the lakes in the area the river had a very low flow as a consequence of the continuing drought. The deeper holes contained some good sized but very spooky fish. It was very difficult to approach and cast in the ever present wind without spooking the fish into cover under the reed beds or streambank overhang. Once under cover they were very reluctant to come out as Jeff ably demonstrated by poking his rod into a patch of weed where he had seen a good fish dive into but without any sign of the fish showing despite his efforts. The river would lend itself to fishing with a three weight seven foot rod as a day walk on its own.

With the day drawing on we left the river and set ourselves on a south westerly course through a low saddle towards Lake O'Dell. Despite getting away from the river walking was still reasonably difficult due to the spongy nature of the vegetation under foot and the proliferation of loose rocks as we climbed the saddle.

Upon reaching the saddle our map reading skills were confirmed as we admired Lake O'Dell shining below us and a glimpse of Lake Elora to the east. From there it was a short walk down to O'Dell for a quick snack and a drink as we observed the water for signs of activity. Water level was again low with an occasional dun hatching and intermittent moths being blown across the lake. Jeff then went left and I went right to begin prospecting.

After some success with Jeff landing a 2 ½ pound brown on a deer hair shaving brush and me dropping a smaller fish on a red tag it was time to start heading back to the vehicle via Lake Agnew.

We chose to leave O'Dell by following the drainage line exiting the lake down to Pine River. Not a good choice as we were back in the tussocks and hidden gutter country and after spotting three small snakes in a short distance including one small brown who demonstrated his ability at climbing up a steep sided gutter we moved upslope and contoured around a low ridge and then down to the river again.

Upon reaching the river it was interesting to note some fresh marks of a deer in the mud. Obviously they can handle the altitude and cold okay.

After again trying to play with some more spooky trout in a river bend we crossed the river and pushed on to Lake Agnew.

Lake Agnew is smaller in area than O'Dell but quite rocky which offers lots of potential spots to prospect for fish in. The wind had increased in velocity and while I persevered in trying to cast across it Jeff moved around to the leeward end of the lake at its overflow. Jeff again had some takes but didn't manage to get them to hand.

With the day drawing in we left the lake for the last short walk up to the vehicle in sight in the distance. A very encouraging sight to know that after eight kilometres through strange country your navigation is as it should be!

We both arrived back at the vehicle with tired legs and a sense of achievement at having completed our shakeout walk as planned and at having seen and fished some of the renowned Western Lakes of Central Tasmania.

The next steps we took in the Western Lakes area would have a more serious intent.