

Walking the Western Lakes

by Allan Semmler

Part 3. In search of the trophy fish of Tin Hut Lake and the Zig Zag Lakes.

Monday the 11th. February dawned fine and sunny with intermittent cloud. The favourable forecast meant it was all systems go for Jeff Baldock and my further our exploration of the Western Lakes.

Our intention was to walk into the Zig Zag lakes from the car park at the south west end of Lake Augusta with a stop at Tin Hut to try our luck. A relatively easy walk of about five kilometres or so we thought.

As we commenced to walk the clouds cleared and the temperature began to rise. Clearing the low ridge dividing Tin Hut from Augusta we were disappointed to see four fly fishermen already wading across Tin Hut so we plodded on to inspect the old tin shepherds hut on the northern slope above the lake.

We then made the mistake of following the rock cairns towards a low saddle to the northwest which led us into some rougher country not particularly to Jeff's liking but nothing out of the ordinary to an old sambar hunter. After some scrub bashing and losing some sweat we eventually crested the saddle and commenced to contour down through low heathy scrub towards the Zig Zags now in sight to our west.

Arriving at Zig Zag we found the water to be very low and clear and we continued around to a sheltered flat on the north west corner of the lake and commenced to set up our hike tents and enjoy a snack and cuppa.

Then it was on with the serious business of slowly moving around the lake edge to polaroid for cruising fish. Not with any success however so I waded out towards a rocky area of the lake while Jeff prospected around a reed bed. Very little insect movement was evident but an occasional black galaxid was seen near the rocks and eventually I spooked a reasonable fish lying doggo beside a rock.



Zig Zag Lake—some wonderful scenery

Jeff had a take but failed to hook up on a drop off as we continued to patrol the edge. At the southern end of the lake I discovered a deep channel which I began to prospect and the usual happened. A very large fish announced his whereabouts with much splashing just when I was in a very exposed position and unable to offer any creditable response.

Jeff arrived and after some patient observation we again observed a large dark body cruising in the depths of the channel. We both agreed it was a 10 pound or better fish. After waiting for some time without any further movement we moved on only to spook the fish from amongst a shallow reedbed in a little inlet. Game over but an experience in itself to have seen such a fish.

As we moved on with Jeff in the lead Jeff spotted a large brown lying doggo against the edge of a small inlet near a little reedbed.

After watching the fish through a low bush for some time Jeff stealthily withdrew to attempt a cast into the inlet as I acted as forward observer from a distance of about three metres.

With Jeff in position on some rocks about 10 metres behind the fish the first cast was short and too far left, second cast still left and short, third cast perfect about a metre left and a metre ahead of the fish which solicited a slight turn of the head from the fish but no further response. Obviously not interested in an orange beetle pattern so I politely suggested Jeff put something black on like a woolly bugger or a dunny brush.

Jeff opted for a black dunny brush and first cast again hit the water about a metre left and one and a half metres in front of the fish just on the edge of the reedbed followed by an instantaneous attack on the fly as the fish launched himself out of ambush onto the fly and with a lift of the rod he was on. A long dogged rolling fight then ensued as the fish attempted to get to deeper water and Jeff worked to keep in touch. In due course a large bodied fish of about 6 pounds in poor condition was brought to hand and released.

We deduced from our observations of the fish in the lake that the drought conditions had forced them into survival mode where they conserved energy by lying in ambush for any galaxids which might come by and not actively patrolling for food. Fish numbers in Zig Zag were low but all the fish seen were of a good size.

With dusk drawing in we returned to camp for a hot meal and then it was into the sleeping bags.

After a nights sleep interrupted by the thump of wallabies and roos as they moved past our camp we awoke to an overcast sky and a wind from the south west pushing stormy looking clouds towards us.

After a quick brekky we were off for a quick prospect around the most likely spots. The large fish near the deep channel was spotted cruising in some shallower water and Jeff attempted some casts but was unable to quite reach the area he was patrolling in so it was back to camp to pack up and head for the vehicle before the weather closed in.

With our packs once again on our backs we returned via the southern end of Tin Hut which avoided having to bush bash over the saddle. The wind continued to build as we trudged out. Fortunately Jeff being the faster walker got the job of clearing the tiger snakes from our path including a rather large one which had him stepping sideways in very fine style.

We arrived at Tin Hut with the wind blowing a gale so we continued on to the Rodeo and back to the lodge.

The last of our walks for this Tasmanian visit successfully completed and a year to plan and dream of our next walks in the Western Lakes.



Jeff Balbock releasing his brown trout caught in Zig Zag Lake