The Acheron River – an angler’s daydream

Bruce Smith  |  November 2004  |  Regular Features / Freshwater /

The rivers of central and northeast Victoria provide a wealth of fishing opportunities. The Acheron River, in the Eldon region, is no exception.

The Acheron begins in the Yarra Ranges and Lake Mountain catchment and flows hard and fast through pristine habitat over rock and pebbles that are clean and free of sedimentation. Through the township of Taggerty the river slows and continues its travel through cattle and sheep farmland, losing some of its pristine river qualities due to riverside degradation and sedimentation build-up. Eventually the river enters the mighty Goulburn River at the Breakaway.

The Acheron provides excellent fishing for brown and rainbow trout that average 500g in the upper reaches. The further downstream you travel, the better the larger the trout become with 1-1.5kg fish not uncommon. The river throughout the seasons provides rich aquatic and terrestrial insect life that is great in diversity, with scenery that is breathtaking and, in some parts quite isolated, for those that like solitude.

SPRING FISHING

When the fishing season opens in September the Acheron is normally flowing hard and fast along its entire length due to the winter rain and snowmelt. The upper section flows extremely fast and can become un-fishable, but the middle and lower sections, while flowing fast, will be fishable due to the many backwaters that form.

Baitfishing

Bait anglers that target these backwaters with earthworms, scrubbies, wood grubs and caterpillars have good success due to these natural baits being wash into the river. It’s the backwaters that accumulate the many food items and using a running sinker rig with the lightest possible sinker will produce many trout that frequent these backwaters.

Another bait that works exceptionally well, if you can find them, is an aquatic beetle. This bait is somewhat fragile but fishing the backwaters requires only a short cast and with a gentle lob the bait will remain attached.

Lurefishing

Lurefishing at this time of the season isn’t all that unproductive. It’s best to wait until the river flow reduces and clears. That said, anglers casting unweighted soft plastics in the backwaters can have some success. Flashy metal lures, however, tend to spook the trout in the shallower water at this time.

Flyfishing

With the high water flows a lot of insects are washed into the river. Flyfishers using wet flies can imitate insects like aquatic beetles, shrimps, backswimmers and caddis, midge and mayfly nymphs.

Like baitfishers, flyfishers need to target the backwaters and work flies very slowly with the figure-of-eight retrieve, working both the main calm and the area where the fast flow meets the slow flow. The edge water – the first few feet of water from the bank – is another area to fish.

Recommended fly patterns for this type of flyfishing are weighted brown and black nymphs, gold bead-head nymphs (size 16-14); black chenille beetles and latex shrimp (size 14-12); Goulburn Caddis (size 16-14); and Sparkle Midge in black, red and olive green (size 18).

SUMMER FISHING

By late spring and early summer the Acheron is clear and flowing at a normal pace. As the season progresses, the outside air temperature increases with some days becoming unbearable. Insect hatches are high while falls of terrestrial insects dominate the fishing.

Baitfishing

Like other fishing methods at this time, baitfishing is very productive. Earthworms and scrubbies still work well when fished in the quieter sections. Added to the list of baits are small yabbies, mudeyes and live minnows. These baits can be fished on the bottom with the use of a running sinker, or on top with the aid of bubble and quill floats.

Lurefishing

The clearer water conditions of late spring and summer create good fishing conditions for anglers using lures. Imitating a number of baitfish and other food items, lures are also great attractors by way of flash to the trout. The faster upper section of the river calls for the use of small lures like Celtas in red and green, Strike Pro Small Fry (553/70) and dotty spinners. The lower section of the river, being slower with more
water volume, is better suited to casting lures like Wee Wobblers, Raider 10 and Maniac 7, and Tassie Devils (63, 6 and 38). Of course, try your favourite.

**Flyfishing**

Late spring and early summer sees big falls of terrestrial beetles and flyfishers can have great sport with dry flies. Best results are obtained by using your streamcraft skills to locate where the trout are likely to be, then cast upstream allowing your fly to drift back drag-free along through the ripples and runs. A few recommended beetle patterns are Red Tags, Coch-y-bonddus, Tee Tree Beetles and Deer Hair Beetles (size 18-14).

Mayfly hatches, although not prolific, occur in late spring and early autumn. Recommended patterns are Seals Fur Emergers, Highland Duns, March Browns, Cripple Duns and Macquarie Reds (size 20-16).

Throughout mid-summer a 'hopper pattern will produce excellent trout captures when casting to sighted rises or searching the river. Fly patterns in like Nobby Hoppers, Banjo Hoppers, Latex Hoppers and Hackle Hoppers (size 14-10) are all good.

**AUTUMN FISHING**

After a hot summer the river starts to cool and nature brings on a scenery wonder of autumn colours that demonstrate that there’s more to fishing than just catching a fish. The river is low and clear at this time and the feeding times change from early morning and late evening of summer, to the preferable midday warmth of autumn.

**Baitfishing**

With the cooler weather the normal baits of earthworm and scrubbies continue to catch trout with mudeyes having a greater influence. Yabbies fished on the bottom of the quieter pools and along the slower river edge also take quite a few fish. Bait drifting (see fact box) continues to work well with the addition of using crickets as bait, which are fished the same as the grasshopper.

**Lurefishing**

Conditions are still good for working lures through the deep pools and fast runs. Some anglers have their favourite and some change to lures like small Lazer Lures, Min Min lures, Wee Wobblers, Strike Pro Pygmy (205, 71), Raider 10 and Maniac 7. Additionally, soft plastics like Glitter Minnows, Nippers, Swim Minnows and Power Frogs do well.

**Flyfishing**

Autumn on the Acheron (like many other rivers) sees a small resurgence in mayfly hatches with the small Baetis and Caenis species making a greater show. Although the hatches are smaller than those in spring, trout feed hard to prepare for the coming spawning months.

Flyfishers are best served with a fly called the Para Dun (size 20-16) to best imitate these species. Caddis still make the odd appearance and midge hatches are prolific in the right weather conditions, namely windless days. Crickets are also on the trout’s list and a Letort Cricket or Black Muddler Minnow (size 10) will work either fished blind or cast to a sighted rise.

**All-round acheron**

The Acheron River has great wild trout, breathtaking scenery, serenity and many fishing challenge. Whether sitting on its banks or wading the water, by day’s end most anglers walk back to their cars, refreshed, happy and satisfied. I’m daydream of the place right now.

**Facts**

**STEVENSON RIVER**

The Stevenson River also starts in the Yarra Ranges and flows into the Acheron River at Buxton. It flows clear and fast with excellent fishing for all methods. While the brown and rainbow trout are small, they provide fantastic fishing in breathtaking scenery. Fishing tactics are basically the same as the Acheron.

**Facts**

**THE SUMMER EVENING RISE**
The evening rise on the Acheron River can be spectacular with hatches of midges, mayflies, stoneflies, damselflies and more. But it's the caddis that really excel on this river, creating floating white clouds along the riverbank triggering trout into a feeding frenzy.

Starting on twilight and finishing on dark the trout voraciously feed. A well-presented caddis imitation to a rising trout almost always assures a take. Patterns like the Elk Hair Caddis, Goddard Caddis or Creel Caddis (size 16-14) work well.

Facts

BAIT DRIFTING

One form of baitfishing that’s highly successful, but needs a little more effort than sitting on the bank, is bait drifting. This is where the angler takes a natural bait, threads it through a small hook and with no added weight gently lobs the bait only a short distance upstream and allows it to gently flow back with the current. In the right conditions and locations can produce better results than all other methods.

Most bait can be used for bait drifting and it’s surprising how well some stay on the hook. In the middle of summer grasshoppers are perfect for bait drifting. Early morning is the best time to collect grasshoppers, as they are still a bit sluggish from the cool of night.

CAPS

X-3. Steve Edwards works this pool with a weighted nymph after not sighting a rising trout.

129. When the fast flows of spring settle, flyfishing comes into play.

196. This angler holds a nice pan-size trout from a small stream.

614. A golden-coloured brown trout from the fast section of Acheron River.

964. John Guljas watches the head of the pool for any signs of rising trout.

Images