



AUSTRALIAN TROUT FOUNDATION

Trout Fishing on the Murray River



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When to Fish

There are two peak periods for fishing on the Murray River. The first is in late autumn/early winter when the water temperatures drop and the first rains flush down the main river and the brooks. At this time fish that have been sheltering in shady deeper holes of the river over summer become more active and will move to rapids and riffles looking for food. Fish that are ready to spawn will move to the mouths of brooks and then move upstream once there is a strong flow in the brook. They will congregate below obstacles such as rock bars and water falls. Later when the river floods with winter rains the Murray can rise by as much as 4 metres and fishing is often difficult in the deep water and strong currents. Typically the river is turbid during floods and carries a lot of sediment. Fish move back to the main river at this time but can be difficult to find although they will push up into backwaters and flooded shallows after dark.

Water levels can still be quite high in late winter /early spring, but the fishing improves. The best time is spring to early summer when there is still plenty of water flowing, the temperature of the water is still cold and the water is clear. When the height of the river is less than 11 metres at Baden Powell the river is perfect for wading and crossing the river at rapids is relatively easy. The height at Baden Powell is measured by a telemetered logger and is available online at: <https://kumina.water.wa.gov.au/waterinformation/telem/stage.cfm>

As water levels continue to drop in summer fish become much harder to find but some will congregate at the mouths of brooks where colder freshwater is still flowing into the river.



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Angling Regulations (Fisheries)

The regulations listed here relate specifically to the Murray River and its tributaries. A valid Freshwater Angling Licence (available online from Fisheries) is required to fish for freshwater fish. The licence fee covers a 12-month period from the date of issue. Anglers under the age of 16 do not require a licence. There is no closed season on the Murray River.

Anglers may only use a single fishing rod and line or a single hand-held line. The use of both lures and bait is permitted. Landing net restrictions apply. Anglers may possess only a short-handled (maximum 500mm) net within 50 m of the waterline of most dams and rivers all year round. The landing net regulations are designed to protect the marron fishery for which you need a separate licence and there is a restricted open season. More information is available on the Fisheries website.

Bag and size limits

Daily mixed species bag limit, per angler

You may take four fish (combined) of the following species:

- rainbow trout;
- brown trout; and
- freshwater cobbler.

'Daily' means from midnight to midnight.

Minimum size:

- Trout, rainbow and brown: 300 mm
- Other species (redfin perch): no size limit

Fish smaller than the minimum size must be gently returned to the water immediately. There are no bag or size limits for other freshwater fish. To help keep WA waters pest free, please thoroughly clean and dry all fishing and wading gear before fishing in another waterway. Pest species such as carp, goldfish, tilapia and other cichlids and redfin perch destroy habitat and prey on juvenile marron and native freshwater fish. It is recommended that they are NOT returned to the water and are humanely euthanised, with dead fish NOT left on the shore. For more information visit the Fisheries website at:

www.fish.wa.gov.au or download the recreational fishing guide

at: www.fish.wa.gov.au/guide

Please note that this is only a guide - Angling regulations change from time to time.

It is important to check the Fisheries website to ensure you are familiar with the current regulations.

The Murray River

The Murray River is the fourth largest river in the South West with an average annual flow of 245 gigalitres. From headwaters in the wheatbelt the river flows west, crossing the Darling Range and Swan Coastal Plain to discharge into the Peel Estuary near Mandurah. The two main upper tributaries are the Hotham and Williams Rivers which are too saline to be used for drinking water. The other two main tributaries are the North and South Dandalup Rivers which combine before meeting the main river downstream of Pinjarra. These Dandalup rivers are both fresh and both have been dammed to supply drinking water. There are no dams on the main channel of the Murray River and from the middle reaches down to the estuary the river flows all year. While salinity is high in the upper catchment (where land has been cleared for agriculture) the river has lower salinity downstream of the confluence of the Hotham and Williams Rivers because the river flows mostly through state production forest and the heavily forested Lane Poole Reserve. Trout can be found from Pinjarra to the confluence of the Hotham and Williams Rivers but the best trout waters lie between the western edge of the scarp through Lane Poole Reserve and upstream to where the river runs alongside the Harvey /Quindanning Rd. There is more than 70 kilometres of fishable water.

The Murray was first stocked with trout in the 1890s when brown trout fry were variously sourced from the Preston hatchery, Whitby Falls hatchery and the Canning hatchery.

In the 1930s brown and rainbow trout from the hatchery at Pemberton were released into the river. Stocking was not a regular annual event for several decades but after 1968 rainbow trout have been stocked in most years. There was a halt to stocking between 2003-9 but since then both rainbow fry and yearlings have been stocked each year. Typically yearling fish are released into the main river while fry are stocked into a number of small tributaries, although in recent years fry stocking has been confined to Nanga and Cypress Brooks which still flow all year round.



Rainbow Trout

Fishing Tips and Techniques

Stream and river fishing for trout is probably one of the most exciting forms of trout fishing. As your experience grows you will begin to learn how to 'read the water' and understand where fish will prefer to sit in the river's flow. In flowing water trout tend to face upstream into the current and often have a 'preferred lie' where they can sit out of the direct force of a strong current. This can be behind an obstruction like a rock, or log. Here a fish does not have to work so hard to maintain its position in the current and can shoot out from their lie to grab passing food then return to the same spot to wait for more food. Sometimes fish will also sit in front of an obstruction where the water hitting the obstruction forms a pillow of water that is not moving so strongly. Other favoured lies are under tree roots, undercut banks and the deep shade under overhanging trees. Your observation skills are the key to success. Take the time to observe your surrounding environment such as the insects in the streamside vegetation and the various creatures living on the river or stream bed. Trout will often lie in deeper water just downstream from a riffle or rapid where the strong currents dislodge small animals from the bottom and they then drift down to the waiting trout. The drift below riffles and rapids typically forms what is known as a 'bubble or foam line' and fish often lie directly in these seams.

Look for signs such as fish rising to take food on or near the surface. Polarised sunglasses are very helpful for spotting fish lying below the surface (amber is the best colour).

Trout are opportunistic and eat a range of insects, crustaceans, small fish, worms and amphibians. The fish will be where the food is. The four main areas to concentrate on are:

- the headwater and channels of fast flowing rapids;
- river bends, behind rocky outcrops and timbered structures;
- grassy flooded river banks; and
- in summer where the cold water from streams join the river.

Try and fish on overcast days to avoid casting a shadow on the water, and wear clothing that blends with the environment.

For bait and lure fishing all you need is a good quality 1.8 - 2.1m, 2 - 4-kg spinning rod matched with a 1000 or 2500 sized reel. Use 2.7 - 3.6 kg braid line with a similar weight fluorocarbon leader.

For bait fishing, attach a light weight sinker (or split-shot) with a 40 - 50 cm leader coming off a small swivel and a size 6 or 8 hook drifted down with the current works well. For lure fishing, a similar outfit can be used - just tie your lure straight to your leader or attach a small snap swivel between. Live baits such as earth worms, mud eyes and grasshoppers are ideal bait when fished on a pattern and size of hook that suits the bait. Dough

Baits (e.g. PowerBait) are a good option for people who don't want to handle live baits.

Lures in the size range of 2 to 5cm are best, the easiest lures are small floating or slowly sinking hard bodies. When casting these lures it is recommended to vary the retrieve often; fast, slow, twitchy, steady and so on. Best approach is to keep moving along the bank and other structures casting and retrieving. Bladed spinners and spoons can also be used to allow for longer casts. Use lures that are natural colours (ie. green, brown, olive and black).

Trout also respond well to jigging soft plastics fished on weighted jig heads fished under logs and in fast flowing water. Also jig deep holes, steep banks and rocky drop-offs and remember to vary your retrieve according to depth.

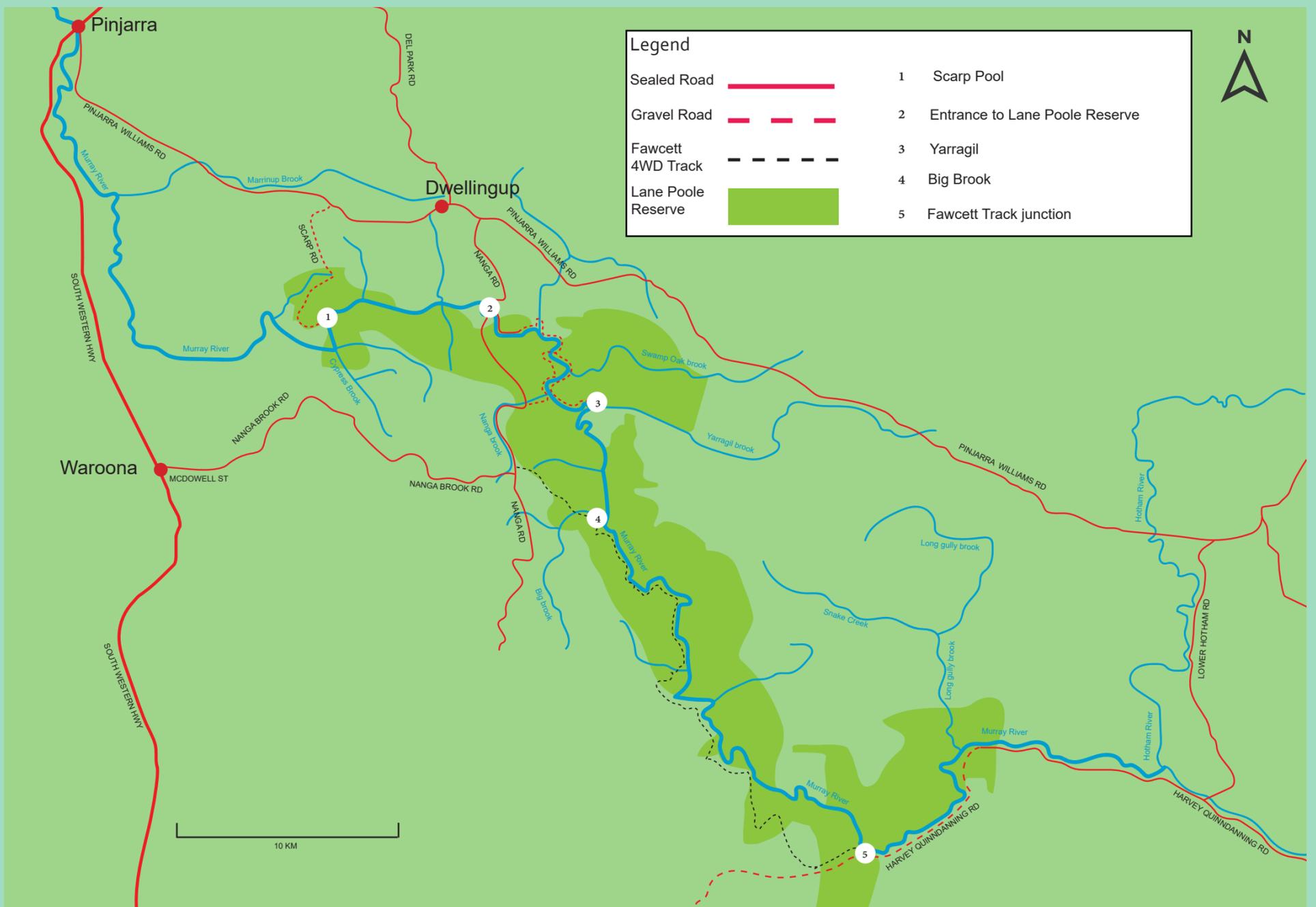
Fly fishing requires fly rods, lines, casting methods, and 'flies'. Most fly fishers use a medium action 2.1- 2.4 m (7-8ft.) carbon fibre 4 - 6 weight fly rod with a weight-forward floating or intermediate fly line. The flies are hooks tied with artificial and natural fibres made to look like the wild food trout prey on. Upstream fly fishing using nymphs (weighted or unweighted) or wet flies can be very effective casting upstream, using good line control to watch the end of the fly line, or an indicator anywhere along the leader (could also help to govern the depth of the fly through its drift). Another popular option is to fish a streamer fly across and down. It is important to keep good contact with your flies at all times and to work a consistent line length, covering all the likely positions in a stream where a fish may be lying. Popular flies include streamers such as Woolly Bugger, Mrs Simpson, Craigs Night-time, Fuzzy Wuzzy, Matuka, dry flies such as ant, caddis and hopper patterns and small bead head nymphs in olive or black colours.

Fishing from a kayak or canoe can work well on the river using all of the techniques above, but be aware that the Murray River can be dangerous when in flood during the winter months, particularly through the gorges in Lane Poole Reserve.

In winter when the river flows strongly adult fish will look to move upstream into the brooks looking for spawning sites. As water levels drop in spring most trout return to the river from the streams and will be hungry. September through November are the peak months for fishing on the river when levels make access easy and flow and water temperatures are optimal. In summer fish can be hard to find as they retreat to deeper water.

This is the second in a series of brochures the ATF is developing on where to fish for trout in the SW. If you would like to see more of these brochures then consider joining the ATF: <https://atfonline.com.au/home/page/membership>





Where to Fish

Pinjarra to Scarp Pool

Downstream of Scarp Pool the Murray River runs some 10 km through a series of rocky gorges as it falls down from the scarp and emerges onto the Swan coastal plain. The gorges are rugged and access is very difficult. In winter when river flows are high this section of the river can be very dangerous. In late spring when water levels fall, it is possible to walk some distance down into the gorges from Scarp Pool but the country is steep, rugged and heavily forested and is only suited to fit and experienced anglers. The pools below the many rapids can hold very good fish. On the Swan coastal plain the thick forest gives way to private farmland all the way to Pinjarra (25km).

There is a public right of way along most of the river but access is limited to several bridges and the thick vegetation along the banks makes fishing from the banks difficult. Remember to always ask permission before crossing private property to reach the river.

Kayaking upstream of Pinjarra is not recommended because there are many fallen trees and logs blocking the river.

Scarp Pool to the entrance to Lane Poole Reserve

This section flows mostly through the Lane Poole Reserve but access is limited. The river flows through a heavily forested steep sided gorge. There is a track but it is closed to vehicles. Here the many rapids and deep shady pools hold very good fish but can only be reached by walking upstream from Scarp Pool when the river is low. Anglers need to be fit and experienced. Near the entrance to the Reserve the river is accessible through private property on the northern bank but permission is required from the landholders.



Lane Poole Reserve, from entrance to Yarragil

This section of the Reserve has many easy access points to the river and is the most popular with visitors, especially on weekends and holidays when it can be very busy. There are roads on both sides of the river which are suitable for 2WD vehicles. There are also many facilities including campgrounds, toilets, picnic benches, barbecues, and walk trails. The campgrounds are very popular with school groups and there are often large groups of kayakers when water levels are suitable. Hotspots for fishing include Tom's Crossing, Bob's Crossing, Baden Powell, Island Pool and Nanga Brook but any stretch of the river here can produce fish. Target spots where water flows over a rapid and into a deeper pool



Lane Poole Reserve, from Yarragil to Big Brook

Upstream of Yarragil there is limited access to the river. There is a fire line road but it is closed to vehicles. You can walk alongside the river for several kilometres particularly when the river levels are low starting at Yarragil and walking upstream, or downstream from the mouth of Big Brook. This section is mostly long shallow pools and is not likely to hold many fish.

Lane Poole Reserve, from Big Brook to end of Fawcett Track

The northern end of the Fawcett Track can be accessed off Nanga Rd. It crosses Big Brook and then continues alongside the river for about 35km before joining the Harvey Quindanning Rd. The road is only suitable for high clearance 4WD with low range as there are many sections where the track is deeply rutted and during the winter months the track can become very boggy. It is sometimes closed over the winter months. The track is very popular with 4WD enthusiasts. There is good access to the river at many places along this track. The river flows through steep sided hills and there are many rapids. Fish

stocks in this section of the river are not well known but there is plenty of good habitat including deep shady pools in the summer months when fish need refuges from the heat.

End of Fawcett Track to confluence of the Hotham and Williams Rivers

The Harvey Quindanning Rd follows the river upstream and here the river changes character, becoming shallower and broader with multiple channels flowing through paperbark and tea tree swamps. Access is possible where the river passes through the reserve, but the banks have thick bush. There was a bridge over the river at Long Gully Rd but that no longer exists so access is limited unless river levels are low. Further upstream there is fenced private land on both sides of the river.



Tributary Brooks

There are many tributary brooks that are worth exploring. Brooks are worth fishing at the onset of winter when the flush of cold freshwater down the brooks draws fish up out of the main river looking for suitable spawning sites. When water levels fall in the main river and the water temperature start to rise, fish can often be found at the mouths of any brooks that are still flowing as fish are attracted to the colder water.

In the past quite a few of the brooks were stocked with fry but most no longer receive fish because they dry over summer. Nanga Brook and Cypress Brook are currently stocked with fry each year because they flow all year round and these brooks support a permanent population of small trout.

