

T I D A L T A L K

by

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We met him late one afternoon at Murray Mouth, and a more devoted disciple of Izaak Walton it would be hard to find.

His name? We never did discover it, but he was a true blue angler of the older breed, full of fish lore and as keen as a youngster with his first brand new rod and reel.

I like to think of him now as "Old Joe", not so much because he is twenty to thirty years my senior but because he is old in experience of the ways of fish.

We were preparing to depart when Old Joe arrived, as is his habit, to spend a night alone on the cold unfriendly banks of Hindmarsh Island. Such is a man's love for angling.

An exchange of greetings as Joe unloaded gear, an enquiry as to how they were biting, and soon, as always happens when anglers meet, we were engaged in discussion on local methods, tackle and tales of previous catches.

Old Joe pointed out where there was an underwater ledge of rock on the far side of the channel and told how the bream often kept to the far side of this ledge, just out of casting reach of the majority of anglers. Hadn't we hung up a few rigs there during the afternoon, and dragged an odd bream back over the ledge without fouling and breaking off?

"Where did you dig those worms" asked our friend, pointing to a tinful of brown centipede-like worms. "They look like Port River worms, and are mighty good bait for bream and mulloway in these



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parts."

"We didn't dig them" we replied; "They were pumped right here with this bait pump." Out of a sugar bag we produced the syringe type pump known in the north as a yabbie pump. Now the conversation swung over to this modern method of obtaining fresh bait.

We told Joe about pumping great numbers of the salt water yabbie or nipper in the eastern states. We knew, of course, that they are also found in America where they are known as ghost shrimps. To our surprise these shrimp-like crustacea were found admittedly in small numbers in the colder waters of Victoria and South Australia. Our surprise was not as great as that of the local angling fraternity who usually did not know of their existence.

The yabbie is probably the most successful estuary bait for the bream of northern waters, but, because of its scarcity both as a natural food and as bait, its place is taken in the south by the tube worm as the general favourite for the southern bream and mullock.

Again, the same pump used in the correct manner can provide ample bait. Crabs too, can be obtained from the sand flats in a similar manner.

The shellfish baits which can be gathered by picking up from the sand flats at low tide quickly become scarce at most well frequented fishing spots. The worms, crabs and yabbies living mostly under the sand surface are now available to the angler with a bait pump for little more trouble than picking them up. Old Joe believes and I agree with him that the live moving baits will attract a fish sooner and generally take more fish than cut bait or shellfish.

We could see that Joe was still a little sceptical about our having pumped our worm supply in the immediate vicinity, so, leaving a



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couple of set lines it was decided to give him a practical demonstration.

The tide had reached about three-quarter flood as we walked the hundred yards around the point to a backwater of Seagull Island, but there were still a few worms tubes showing in six inches of water.

We showed Joe how to adjust the wing nut inside the open end of brass tube to give adequate suction without being too tight for easy pumping.

A couple of practice pulls of the plunger handle and then the first worm was squirted out, to be quickly followed by others, two and three at a time.

To say Joe was amazed would be an understatement. Questions followed quickly as we gave our friend some hints on using a bait pump. Perhaps you would like to hear them too.

These tube worms are quite prolific in estuaries along the Victorian and South Australian coast and their presence is disclosed by the top quarter of an inch of tube, about one-eighth of an inch in diameter projecting above the surface of the sand-flats in backwaters and along the edges of sandbanks and islands.

The tubes can easily be seen at the low tide when they are uncovered but are more easily pumped on a making tide, particularly, to the half flood, after which the water over them is usually too deep. Pumping is usually carried out in water up to about six inches deep.

With the plunger handle fully depressed, the open end of the pump is placed over the tube or in the vicinity of a colony of tubes if the worms are reasonably plentiful. Holding the body of the pump by its handle with the left hand and the plunger handle in the right hand the pump will be forced down a few inches into the sand as the right hand commences to pull the plunger out.



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As the plunger is firmly pulled out to its maximum position the whole pump is quickly removed and emptied by depressing the plunger handle.

This action will squirt a slushy mixture of sand and water, usually containing a worm or two, into the surrounding shallows or dry bank nearby. A small hole or depression left from the first pumping should be pumped once or twice more before moving a yard or more for the next try. Many times we have obtained three or four worms from one hole and sometimes as many as six.

Do not be discouraged if you do not meet with immediate success as some spots are quite barren although the presence of old tubes may indicate a colony of worms. The state of the tide will vary your chances. The higher the percentage of mud the more difficult it will be to see your worm as the water shallows become discoloured. Keep trying and you will soon get the knack and find your efforts ~~will be~~ rewarded.

Usually we found the worms most easily obtained close to the waters edge, working our pump in an inch or two of water. Sometimes the damp bank just in front of the flooding water gave the best results. There were other times, such as when we met Old Joe, that the tide was too near the flood and we were forced to pump in six inches of water.

Take care when picking up the worm that you grasp it by the head. In some locations, and this may be a seasonal characteristic, we found a tendency for the worm to break in two unless grasped in this manner.

A fellow angler we know of in Victoria, likes to use his pump from a boat as it drifts over the shallows. He squirts each pumpfull into a strainer which allows the water and sand slush to pass through. It's an easy way of collecting the worms. A plastic sieve is ideal for this purpose and is worth using at any time you are pumping in water that becomes muddy. Hold the strainer part of the sieve just under the water so that the worms will not be damaged, as they are squirted out.

"I've fished this area for more than forty years," said Old Joe, "and didn't know there was such bait available for the taking. Wait until I get one of these pumps and then my wife won't be able to complain about wearing myself out by digging half the day at the Port River before every fishing trip. In a few minutes you have pumped more worms than I would dig in an afternoon, and with a fraction of the effort. Moreover, the worms are fresh and lively, and with a pump here on the spot, I could easily obtain a few more, should I be running short of bait."

Dusk was fast approaching as we walked back to our set lines. Old Joe was grateful for a mulloway which had found the worms to his



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liking, and insisted on driving us back to our own vehicle some half mile distant.

Thanks Joe for an interesting interlude, your wealth of local fishing knowledge so readily passed on. We enjoyed your excellent company and hope some day to meet you again down at the Murray Mouth. We are always glad to meet a man who really loves his angling.