

History of the Commonwealth Fly Fishers

The idea for a Commonwealth Fly Fishing Championship originated during discussions amongst members of some of the commonwealth teams attending the successful World Fly Fishing Championships held at Kimbridge (home of Anne & Arthur Humbert), on the River Test in England in May 1987.

Competitors from Australia, Canada and New Zealand approached Anne and Arthur Humbert with the idea that there should be a separate, simpler competition than the more formal FIPS-Mouche WFFC. They proposed that it should be based on the simple idea that "friendship in fishing" was more important than just competing to win. The idea was enthusiastically supported by the Commonwealth teams present at that WFFC.

Arthur Humbert and Tony Paulson agreed to take the idea forward

It was, from the beginning, designed to provide a counterpoint to the more serious and formal World Fly Fishing Championships (WFFC) and to foster a deep sense of friendly competition, fair play and fun amongst fly fishers from the Commonwealth family of nations.

An organisation called "Commonwealth Fly Fishers" together with a set of rules and protocols for a championship was defined by Arthur & Tony. Many of the initial proposals and technical advice on defining a suitable format was provided by Tony Paulson, the experienced English Captain. And so the "Commonwealth Fly Fishers" was born.

Rule 1 of the original rules states "Rules and organisation should be kept simple, the twin aims are enjoyable fishing and companionship and a chance to sample each other's waters and methods. The results to be secondary to these aims". Although the rules have been modified since this time, this idea is still the underlying philosophy of the CFFC.

Anne and Arthur, with these aims in mind, arranged to hold the inaugural Championships with the enormous support and co-operation of Jason and Barbara Garrett at London Lakes Lodge, Tasmania in December 1988. Six teams from Australia, Canada, England, New Zealand, Scotland and Wales participated together with a celebrity team. This was a great success so the decision was taken to make this a regular event.

The Humberts had a logo, flag etc designed for "The Commonwealth Fly Fishers" as the organisation was to be known. The name was a deliberate choice to emphasise that the membership was open to all fly fishers of either sex. Together these helped

to formalise the organisation and to provide a link between each event. It was also decided that this competition should normally be held in the Commonwealth country closest to the annual World Fly Fishing Championships location. When this was not practicable, the competition would not be held that year.

In the late 1990s it was agreed by the representatives of each team then present that the competition would be held every second (even numbered) year unless the FIPS-Mouche competition was actually in a Commonwealth country in the intervening year in which case an additional CFFC would be held.

From the beginning, the founders were committed to the idea that this Commonwealth Fly Fishing competition would be free from the "politics & formality" associated with the FIPS-Mouche world fly fishing championships. It now lives on in this wonderful biannual event as a friendly, international, fishing competition which we now take forward under the slogan, "Fishing in Friendship".

The basic idea that attendees would get to meet other like minded fly fishers and form lasting friendships has turned out to be one of the best features of this competition. It has enabled many of the participants to travel the Commonwealth, fishing with like minded colleagues locally.

The inaugural winners received a magnificent perpetual trophy donated by Jason Garrett Snr. Australia won the first Championship and handsome piscatorial prizes were presented to the medal winning team members.

Many successful events have taken place since; England hosted the Championship in 1989, Wales in 1990, with generous sponsorship from Welsh Water, New Zealand 1991 in Rotorua in conjunction with the WFFC, Canada in 1993 following the WFFC in Kamloops, and Scotland in 1995 at Kinross. 1997 was held ? (let us know if anyone remembers such a championship). This was followed in 1999 by a CFFC organised by Ballarat Fly Fishers on behalf of Fly Fish Australia (FFA).

In 2000 the CFFC was held in England at Rutland Water following the WFFC. In 2002 the Welsh Salmon & Trout Association again hosted the CFFC based in Llangothlan. In 2003 an unofficial CFFC was held at Pitsford and Rutland Waters with Bob Church as host. In 2004 we held an official CFFC on Loch Fitty in Dunfermline, Scotland. Following this, in 2006 the competition was held in Wales on the River Dee and Lyn Brenig reservoir. 2008 was held in NZ in Hawkes Bay mainly on the Tukituki River following the WFFC in Rotorua. 2009 was held in Scotland on the Island of Islay as the WFFC was also in Scotland that year.

The 2010 CFFC was again held in Wales at Rhayader & Llandrindod. 2012 saw a hugely successful (and the largest to date) CFFC in Tasmania hosted by FFA and

organised by Malcolm Crosse. 2014 was organised in Devon by Dave Grove of the Commonwealth Fly Fishers of England. 2016 will be held in Canada at Mont-Tremblant, Quebec, in August just prior to the WFFC in the Vale, Colorado, USA. It is being organised by Fly Fishing Canada under their President, Jim Iredale and Organiser, Alain Monast.

In 1995 at the AGM during the CFFC held at Kinross, Scotland, Arthur Humbert announced his decision to stand down as Chairman. He proposed that Jill Mandeno from New Zealand assume the Chairmanship, which was duly agreed by the attendees. Bob Church was also appointed as Technical Advisor, replacing Tony Pawson. And so after firmly establishing the CFFC as a permanent fixture on the fishing calendar, the Humbert's relinquished the reins of the CFA and passed the management into the hands of Jill Mandeno who remains Chairman today.

The CFFC has evolved over the years. An AGM is held in conjunction with each championship following the Captains Meeting. The Team Captains are the designated representatives of each country present. Changes to the rules and format are discussed and voted on at these meetings. In the late 1990s it was agreed that each Commonwealth Country would as of right be able to enter one team of men, women or mixed anglers. If space permitted, they would also be able to enter a second team as well. Preference for the entry of a second team would be given to those countries which operate their men's and women's fly fishing separately. In this case one woman's team and one men's team would be allowed. Any additional available places for second teams will be available to any member on a first come, first served basis.

In order to provide the same fishing rules as anglers must adhere to at world level, the competition is now conducted under the latest published international FIPS-Mouche fishing rules (with the only changes being rules modifications to meet local laws). However non-fishing rules relating to the formalities associated with that event are used at the discretion of the local organising committee.

We continue to emphasise the need to bring together friends old and new, sharing a common understanding and reaffirming again that old adage "there's more to fishing than catching fish". In line with our slogan, Jason Garrett's trophy has been renamed "The Friendship Trophy" and is now considered the top award at the CFFC. It is unique in that the winner is decided by all the teams present with each team having one vote (for other than themselves!) for the team they perceive as best exhibiting the ideals of the CFA.

Over the years there have been some truly worthy winners with the 2012 winners being the novice fly fishing team from Kiribati attending their first such event.

Sadly some of our founders are no longer with us. The CFA first lost Tony Pawson, then Arthur Humbert, first Chairman of the Commonwealth Fly Fishers, passed away on Thursday, October 13th 2011 after a long illness. Fortunately both Anne Humbert and Jason Garrett Snr are still associated with the CFA as we move forward, to an enlarged organisation with new member countries and a new, younger generation of anglers.

In 2014, the name "Commonwealth Flyfishers Association" was formerly registered in the UK with Jill Mandeno as its Director. Dave Grove & Malcolm Crosse were formally appointed Secretary and VP respectively. The society is a registered "not-for-profit" organisation. In order to keep this name and status of the society, from 2016 a small annual membership fee will be introduced to cover the filing of annual tax returns, registration etc. This will be fixed at the 2016 AGM.

Membership is open to only one registered sports fly fishing organisation in each Commonwealth country. First right to join will be made to the society who is the registered member of FIPS-Mouche. Where this organisation is not interested in belonging to the Commonwealth Fly Fishers, interested anglers in that country may formally register another society and apply for membership. Once a country representative society has joined, it can only be replaced if it resigns in favour of another society.

The society now comprises representatives from:

Australia, Fly Fish Australia
Canada, Fly Fishing Canada
England, Commonwealth Fly Fishing England
Isle of Man, Isle of Man Fly Fishermen
Malta, National Federation of Sports Anglers in Malta
New Zealand, Sport Fly Fishing NZ Inc.
Northern Ireland, Trout Angling Federation of Ireland
Scotland, Commonwealth Fly Fishing Scotland
South Africa, South Africa Fly Fishing Association
Wales, Welsh Salmon & Trout Association

A number of other Commonwealth nations have expressed interested in joining the society and it is hoped that CFF can be a catalyst for increasing sports fly fishing throughout the Commonwealth.