



The Tailing Loop

***The Federation of Fly Fishers Newsletter for Casting Instructors
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The Fly Rod

by Mel Krieger

As the medium through which we feel and control the line, fly and fish, the fly rod has received a great deal of loving attention over the years. This simple, flexible rod is the very essence of flyfishing.

Unfortunately, the writings of generations of anglers and craftsmen and the advertising hype of some rod companies have turned this wonderfully simple tool into a nightmare of complexity. Rod action - the manner in which a rod bends, has somehow come to be a mysterious and indefinable concept. Various new rod materials have only added to the confusion. A recent flyfishing book finished a chapter on rods with this amazing statement: "For the student who wishes to analyze the subject scientifically, the physics of movement which apply to dynamic rod action and kinetic line travel are contained in Newton's Law of Motion and Einstein's Theory of Relativity." Clearly, the case has been overstated!

I'll define the workings of a fly rod in simpler terms and explain how rod action and rod stiffness affect fishing and casting. I'll use the words BUTT and TIP to describe the parts of a fly rod, and the words STIFF and SOFT to describe a fly rod's resistance to bending.

Rod action can be defined in terms of where the bending takes place. A TIP ACTION rod bends mostly at the tip; a BUTT ACTION rod, at the butt of the rod. One highly desirable compromise, or combination, of these two basic actions is called PROGRESSIVE ACTION. A progressive action rod bends primarily near the tip with light loads and bends progressively farther down the rod to butt action as the load increases. The load is a result of the weight of the line outside the tiptop and the amount of power applied by the caster, both of which make the rod bend.

Rod stiffness - resistance to bending, ranges from stiff to soft. Usually a reference to rod stiffness is within the context of a given line weight. Thus a fly rod that balances best with a 6-weight fly line could be described as either stiff or soft. A rod that is overly stiff with a 6-weight line will more properly balance with a 7-weight line. The basic overall stiffness of a fly rod, of course, determines its appropriate line weight.

For hooking and playing fish, the advantage of one rod action or rod stiffness over another (within a given line weight) is minimal. Rod action and rod stiffness are most important in their relationships to flycasting.

Rod Stiffness in Flycasting

The stiffness of a fly rod determines the range at which it casts most effectively. A stiffer rod generally casts a longer line because it produces greater line speed. This additional speed also helps on windy days and often has advantages in fly presentation. On the other hand, shorter casts can be made more comfortably with a rod soft enough to bend easily with the lesser weight of a shorter line. Most of us are creatures of habit, with strong tendencies to put ourselves into the same fishing situations all the time. For example, some trout fishers like to get as close to their quarry as possible, often making casts of only 10 to 15 feet. Others stay back and make 60-foot presentations. Some fishing situations also demand long or short casts; for example, large rivers and lakes generally demand longer casts than small streams. Try to evaluate your own needs and inclinations. Now factor in another personal preference - the slow, easy, full casting stroke of a soft rod versus the more forceful loading, narrower stroke of a stiffer rod, and you should be close to making a decision on the sort of fly rod stiffness that's right for you.

Experienced anglers often underweight or overweight a particular rod by changing the line to make the rod feel stiffer or softer. A fly rod rated for a 6-weight line is effectively stiffer with a lighter 5-weight line, and feels relatively softer with a heavier 7-weight line. You should also be aware that rod manufacturers often differ among themselves in rating rods for line sizes. Be sure to try any new rod with more than one line size.

Rod Action in Flycasting

Now let's consider rod action - where a rod bends, in relation to a flycasting stroke. The butt cast, with its wide arc casting stroke, requires a full bend in the fly rod to maintain the straight-line path of the rod tip that's needed for good casting. You can generally make that full bend more

easily in a fly rod inclined toward butt action. Flyfishers who limit themselves to the full stroke butt cast will almost invariably choose a rod that bends easily in the butt - a butt action rod. On the other hand, those who like to fire the line off the tip of the rod, using a narrow casting stroke, would do best with a tip action rod.

Most of the better fly rods available today are designed with some version of progressive action, with varying degrees of emphasis on tip and butt. Although progressive action appears to be a poor compromise between tip action and butt action rods, the opposite is usually true. A good progressive action fly rod enhances the tip and butt casting strokes and, of course, is ideal for the angler who uses a wide variety of casting strokes.

Personally, I evaluate a fly rod's action by the way the rod handles the full range of flycasting strokes. A tip action rod in which the butt is too stiff and a butt action rod in which the butt is too soft both have limiting actions. My choice is a progressive action rod that is nicely balanced between tip and butt. The rod should be sensitive enough to let me feel the tip working while I'm casting a short line with a tip casting stroke. As I lengthen line and increase power, the rod must comfortably cast off its middle without the tip giving up or the butt beginning to hinge. During both of these casts, the butt section should be stiff enough to stay intact, with no feeling of any appreciable bend. As I apply more power still, I want to feel the rod bend well down into the butt section. In this butt cast, I'd like the bend to progress through the rod - from butt to tip, with no feeling of inconsistency or hinging. I can imagine putting into the fly rod itself a casting loop that sweeps through the rod and out into the line. Such a beautifully balanced rod casts smoothly and well from a tip cast to a butt cast, from leader-only range to the full length of a fly line.

Is there a perfect fly rod? Of course not. Fortunately, most of us have a wonderful time searching for the ultimate fly rod. Over the years, fly rod action has been relatively unchanged. Some old bamboo rods have excellent progressive action and, to this day, cast and fish well. Although bamboo and fiberglass fly rods are still made and are fine fishing tools, I believe the new graphite rods are a substantial step forward. Modern fly rods, like medicine and tennis rackets and some of the other fruits of man's progress, are superb. Super-light graphite rods handle the full range of fishing situations exceedingly well and have tremendous casting range, comfortably loading and casting from short through long distances. I might add that a large percentage of fly rods available today have excellent design and the type of progressive action that approaches my description of the perfect fly rod. As you spend some time with the various casting strokes, you will develop your own perspective on rod action. The variable stroke whumping exercise doubles as an excellent way to determine rod action - a great fly shop "wiggle".

Perfecting the Thirty Foot Cast

by Ray Johnson

Beginning casters will, without question, strip off line after completing each cast. After three casts they will have out an additional 10-15 feet of extra line they cannot handle, yet they will continue to strip off more line.

A suggested method to prevent this action and a teaching benefit which produces a good high back cast and a low forward cast: allow the student to hold the rod and line in the casting hand with the fly line under the index finger.

Next, have the student hold the free hand at belt height with the hand open and the palm facing upward. Start with the casting hand resting on the free hand. Lift the rod from the elbow, as an extension of the rod, and stop smartly at the top of the ear. To start the forward cast, keep the wrist stiff and **pull the rod down**, thus preventing a tailing loop, then apply thumb pressure to load the rod and stop smartly at 10:30 to 11:00 o'clock.

Have the student watch the line form a loop and watch it straighten out and then lower the rod, with the line, and return the casting hand on the outstretched palm where the cast was begun. Do not introduce the line hand until the above method is mastered.

I still believe in the clock method to orient the student as to rod position. Rod and thumb pointing to 9:00 o'clock. Lift and point thumb to 12:00 o'clock and the rod tip will automatically point to 1:00 o'clock throwing the line up. Pulling the rod down and then loading the rod with thumb thrust and a sharp stop at 10:30 or 11:00 o'clock insures a good loop. It really works!

Instructors Plus

by John J. Seidel

Some time ago I spoke with a FFF Certified Instructor on the phone. After our conversation I really started to think about the importance of Casting Instructors. They are much more than just teachers. They have the unique opportunity of helping to shape the future of fly fishing. It is important to understand the impact that Casting Instructors have on their students.

Students vary in ability from novice to intermediate and even advanced. Regardless of their ability, they have a common goal of wanting to become more accomplished fly fishers. Technical skills are just a part of what the student learns and emulates. They also learn about conservation, river etiquette, catch and release practices, when and why to harvest fish, obedience to laws regarding fishing, and many other fly fishing ethics. The truth is that Fly Casting Instructors teach much more than just casting. They help to shape the future of one of our greatest sports.

Sometimes it's the Equipment!

by Capt. Dave Cornell

As a salt water fly fishing guide, I am involved with anglers of greatly varying skill and experience levels. I am often asked to help improve someone's casting, whether during a fishing charter or in an instructional session. While many people seeking help believe their technique is the main weakness in their attempt to cast well, I have found several times that a basic problem with equipment is partly to blame.

A quick story will help to illustrate this. During a recent winter I decided to build an 8 weight rod and was discussing my plans with a friend. He decided to build the identical rod, his first, with my assistance. The rods came out fine, and I outfitted my new rig with an 8-weight intermediate line. I felt after fishing this a few times that with this particular line, a 9-weight would have been better. So when my friend's birthday rolled around, I gave him the heavier line, and vowed that I would try it someday to see whether I was right.

Well, the chance didn't come for almost a year, but finally I had him out in my boat and the fishing was slow, so I asked him if I could try it. I had noticed that he was having a lot of trouble casting the outfit that day, but just assumed that he was a little rusty. Upon picking up his rod and attempting to cast, I found that not only would the rod not load at all, but I was throwing huge loops and was not able to shoot any line. I looked down at the spool and saw the thick portion of the weight forward line still on the reel! He had, of course, put the line on his reel backwards and had been trying to cast with the running line - a very frustrating experience. A lack of confidence in his casting ability prevented my friend from questioning the tackle when confronted with poor results.

Another person called me for a casting lesson and complained that he was having trouble getting the distance he needed for striper fishing from his boat. A quick look at his rod tip helped explain why. The tip-top had been mashed flat and was creating tremendous friction against the line, restricting his ability to shoot line. Rebending the tip with needle nose pliers added 30 feet to his cast, and we hadn't even gone into his casting stroke! I wish it were always that easy. It takes more than great technique to throw the perfect loop 80 feet - it takes good equipment properly rigged.

HELP!!!!

We need your articles, antidotes, and cartoons for future issues. They should deal with fly casting, fly fishing, guiding and of course, fly casting instruction. Your contributions are greatly appreciated and without them we wouldn't have a newsletter!!! Please send to:

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A Tall Tale from British Columbia

by Jame McLennan

It was a dreary day around Tsacha Lake for most but not for Bob, a guest at the Lodge. We spent most of the day fishing up the Blackwater River looking for the fast running, high jumping Kamloops Rainbow. We caught lots of them on dries (Adams, Parachutes and Elk hair Caddis). The snow started to fall, so Bob's son wanted to go back to that nice warm fire at the Lodge. We warmed up at the Lodge a while, then Bob and I set out to brave the elements in the 30 hp Yamaha. We headed back to the Blackwater 3 miles up the Lake. He hadn't done that well in the morning as his leader and mostly his tippet was giving him some trouble and he missed a good hatch of travelling Sedge that came off for about 30 minutes. It wasn't that he didn't catch any fish, he caught lots of 7" to 12" ers, but Robert, his son and I were into the big ones. Bob netted a 21 and 3/4" beauty. It must have weighed at least 3lbs., not to mention lots of 16 to 18 inchers he released with love in his eyes.

We pulled up to the river mouth, Bob was looking red about the ears and nose. I said, "How about we make a few casts here and after we warm up a bit from casting we'll continue up into the river and do some wading." It turned him on so we did just that. Bob made a cast out, still complaining about his tippet. I swung my head to say, "lets put a new tippet on" and that's when it happened...an 18" Rain-

bow came out of the water a foot from his Adams and came straight down on it! And a 20 and 1/4 pound Dolly engulfed the Kamloops so fast that if he hadn't have been out of the water 6 to 10 inches we wouldn't have even seen the exhibition. Bob reeled the mighty beast to the boat with the help of me and a 30 hp Yamaha and we netted him. He now resides in the Lodge under glass, in full mount. Bob still swears that he had a 7X tippet on but I beg to differ! Cuz most fishermen are liars except me and thee and sometimes I doubt thee.

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