

# The Loop

**The Federation of Fly Fishers Journal for Certified Casting Instructors  
Late-Winter 2000**

.....

## ***Distance Casting: A Method For Improvement***

*by Bill Gammel*

Distance casting has always been held up as some magical performance, when in fact it is simply hurling the fly line through the air as far as possible. This is achieved by casting *tight loops* with *high line speed*. These are gained by *practice* and are based firmly in the essentials of fly casting. By starting with these essentials and adding a few simple techniques, anyone can add substantial distance to his or her cast.

In this article, we break down distance casting and look at practice techniques that will allow you to achieve your goal of improved distance. Also, the following information can serve as a lesson plan for teaching your students to increase their distance whether they are beginners or seasoned casters.

### **Create A Tight Loop**

Loops of less than two feet are considered tight and will cut through the air very efficiently. Tight loops are formed when the rod tip travels in a nearly straight line. This directs the majority of the energy straight forward (or straight back). The path of the rod tip determines the loop size. If the rod tip travels in a convex path, energy is directed in three directions: up, out, and down. This causes the loop to be pulled open by the dispersal of energy, creating a wide or fat loop.

In order to achieve tight loops one must coordinate two essentials. First, *the length of the casting stroke must vary with the amount of line beyond the rod tip*. If you are casting a short line, use a short casting stroke. For a longer line, lengthen the stroke. Because different lengths of line will create different amounts of bend in the rod, the stroke length must vary with line length in order to keep the rod tip moving in a straight line. The second essential for tight loops is that *power must be applied smoothly and progressively, gradually increasing to an abrupt stop*. Start the stroke slowly and accelerate as you go—the majority of the power should come in the last half of the cast. Then STOP. This permits the loop to form. The momentum of the fast-moving line propels the loop forward.

### **Primary Practice: Make Perfect Loops—Then, Make Them Go Faster**

Let's look at practice techniques. No matter what your current skill level, start by practicing perfect loops. These three

drills are designed to teach tight loops, loop control, and increasing line speed.

- Start with 15 feet of line beyond the rod tip and a 9 foot leader. Do not double haul. Now, practice forming perfect loops. Cast loops that are as tight as possible, as softly as possible, without letting the loops fall. Use just the tip of the rod and cast as if trying not to bend the midsection of the rod at all. When you feel comfortable with this drill, add one foot of line and start again. Do this until you can cast 50 feet of line with a controlled perfect loop.
- After mastering the controlled loop it is time to add rod speed. This increases line speed. Start again with 15 feet of line and cast softly. As you false cast, speed up a small amount. Make sure to start each cast slowly and accelerate to a stop. However, you should accelerate faster and faster each time until you are casting *as fast as possible without destroying the loops*. Judge each loop for size and shape, increasing the speed only when the loops look good.
- Now, add one foot of line and repeat the process. Do this until you are casting 50 feet of line *as fast as you can, smoothly*. The faster you cast while keeping good technique, the higher your line speed, the farther you will be able to cast the fly. Good technique will outdistance brute strength any time, but if you put the two together, you will achieve great distance.

### **Add The Double Haul**

Practice the double haul; it is the most important addition to what we have already discussed. It increases the line speed, adding distance to the cast. In order to get a significant benefit from the haul, you must already be throwing good loops. Be sure to practice sometimes without the haul because it can mask casting faults.

(continued on next page)

### Hold A Long Line Aloft

Practice holding a long line aloft. The more line you can smoothly hold in the air with high line speed and good loops, the farther the line will go on your final cast. To do this, false cast as long a line as you can—no hauling, no shooting—with the line pinned against the grip. *The loops should remain tight and u-shaped.* When you can comfortably hold this length, add one more foot, and so on. If the loop opens, falls over to one side, or if the line speed diminishes, you are casting too much line. Shorten the line to regain control and then gradually work the line out to the desired length. Remember that a smooth cast will travel farther than a sloppy cast.

This drill enables you to increase your turnover-time, the time it takes the line to run through its loop. The longer the turnover-time, the longer the cast. Note that the length of line you can hold in the air will vary from taper to taper. You'll be able to hold more of a long-belly, distance taper than of a short-belly line such as a saltwater or bass-bug taper.

### Shoot Precisely At The Stop

When shooting on your final cast, practice releasing the line at the *precise moment* the loop forms (when the rod stops). For every extra millisecond that you hold the line after the stop, you deny distance to your cast. Even great casters sometimes hold the line a few milliseconds too long. Practice releasing the line a hair *too early*. Then *too late*. This will help you pinpoint the magic moment.

### Add Drift On The Final Backcast

Drift is a powerless repositioning of the rod that occurs after the stop of the final backcast—it does not affect the loop at all—and it is a *must* for distance casting. To drift properly, stop the rod on the backcast, and as the loop unfolds, allow the tip of the rod to “drift” or slide backwards, repositioning the rod for the forward cast.

It is an often-misunderstood aspect of distance casting that *a drift allows you to lengthen the stroke without widening the loop.* When false casting, the caster puts a certain amount of strain on the rod. The longer the line, the more load on the rod, the longer stroke the needs to be in order to keep the rod tip moving in a straight line. And, by casting harder on the final cast, you further increase the bend in the rod, which requires an even longer stroke. The drift permits this.

### Trajectory

The trajectory in which you release the cast is important. Direct the cast 3 or 4 degrees above horizontal, using your energy to gain distance instead of altitude.

### Secondary Practice: Putting It All Together

Begin to blend all of the aspects discussed above. First, using the primary practice drills, incorporate the double haul. Start with a slow line speed and increase it gradually. This should be done with a comfortable length of line.

The next step is to increase the length of line that you are holding in the air. Remember: lengthen the stroke as you lengthen the line. A good drill is to under-line the rod,

with, for example, a 7-weight line on an 8-weight rod. This gives you the ability to hold more line aloft. By doing this you will learn the timing and smooth application of power that is needed when distance casting. Be sure to judge each loop as you cast and adjust each one. To tighten a loop, shorten the stroke. If the loop is tailing, lengthen the stroke.

Now it is time to let one fly.

- While hauling, hold a comfortable length of line aloft at a comfortable speed;
- Gradually lengthen the line to your maximum *comfortable* limit;
- When everything feels smooth and sustainable;
- Choose one perfect backcast, and then drift;
- Make the final forward cast go *as fast as you can, smoothly*;
- Release the line.

By following these steps with proper practice, you and your students will enjoy increased distance casting success and more opportunities to catch distant fish.

*Known by his peers as a superb practitioner and teacher of distance casting, Bill Gammel serves on the Board of Governors and lives outside Houston, Texas. With his father, Jay, he co-authored the FFF publication, The Essentials of Fly Casting.*

## Casting

by Wayne Sheldrake

submitted by Mel Krieger

This is honesty.

A long, glistening flight of it.

Slicing the delicious blue current in two.

This is the note singers would sing.

Shedding the skin of thoughts.

A soft whip of daydreams beyond the sand.

This is what lovers want.

Whole, halveless days untangled and weightless  
and unspinning in the air.

Again and again and again.



## New Master Instructors

Tom Broderidge - Florida

Jay Clark - California

Katherine Hart - Washington

Don Simonson - Washington

## ***Suggestions For Your Next Casting Class***

*by Chris Menadier*

There is a big difference between giving casual pointers to friends while fishing, and teaching structured classes to larger groups. I have found the following to be valuable in the classes I teach and I hope you'll keep them in mind as you refine your curriculum.

### **Motivation**

In 1996, the North Carolina Wildlife Resource Commission ran streamside surveys which revealed that 2% of the fly fishers averaged over 12 trout per hour, while the other 98% averaged less than one trout per hour. The North Carolina study was not an aberration: studies by other states have had very similar results. Can you imagine a more compelling argument for taking fly fishing instruction?

### **Tackle Audit**

The more you teach, the more you work with students who arrive with rod/reel/line combinations that are either badly mismatched or are badly matched to the student. Too often, a well-intentioned parent or spouse will give their loved one an outfit they no longer use. This may result in a 12-year-old girl trying to learn with a heavy, fast-action, 9-foot, 8-weight rod when she would be more comfortable and effective using a medium-action 8-foot, 4-weight. Remember that rod selection is not always driven by fly size, wind condition, or size of the quarry. It is sometimes a function of the caster's size or strength, however transitory that might be in the case of a rapidly maturing teenager.

Another tackle problem you will see sometimes is when a student shows up with Granddad's 3-piece, 9-foot bamboo rod, badly in need of restoration, matched with an HGH or HDH braided silk line. It takes a certain amount of diplomacy to guide such a person into the modern tackle era.

These instances can be turned around by what I call an "audit" of the participants' tackle, done in such a fashion as to minimize embarrassment. Keep generic rod/reel/line outfits on hand to allow for ongoing class participation of those who need to replace their initial outfit.

### **Casting Other Outfits**

I was teaching a clinic at Squam Lake in New Hampshire several years ago when it struck me that the 10 or 12 students had quite a diversity of gear. Their outfits ranged from 3-weight to 8-weight, and rods from 7 feet to 9½ feet. Midway through the morning session, with appropriate prefacing comments, I had the students lay down their outfits and move one position to the right. They were told to pick up the outfits in front of them, and resume the exercise. There was an immediate chorus of commentary on how the feel of the new outfit differed from that of their own. They kept moving, trying one outfit after another, and developed a heightened sense of the meaning of "fast", "medium" and

"parabolic". They were able to feel the great difference in energy required to effectively load a 3-weight versus an 8-weight.

Something else that came out of the rod swapping was that light-line casters with chronic tailing loops didn't have such tendencies in the heavier line weights. They learned to energize their rods over more of the casting arc, instead of resorting to the abrupt application of power so many beginners use in their forward cast.

### **Sit-Down Casting**

Here's an exercise for those who try to load the rod with body English instead of with their arm and hand. Have them false cast while sitting down cross-legged or in a chair. This simulates being in a float tube or canoe, and takes the lower body completely out of the equation.

Motivating your students, auditing their tackle, having them swap outfits, and having them practice while seated have much practical value. Try incorporating some or all of these ideas into your next lesson.

*Chris Menadier was certified in 1994 and assists in workshops to train casting instructors. He has been fly fishing since 1948, when his father taught him how.*

## ***The Loop Staff***

**Editor:** Macauley Lord, [macauley@ime.net](mailto:macauley@ime.net);  
(207) 729-3737

**Loop Layout & Program Coordinator:** Evelyn Taylor,  
[castingcert@fedflyfishers.org](mailto:castingcert@fedflyfishers.org); (406) 585-7592

**Chair, Board of Governors:** Floyd Franke,  
[ephemera@wpe.com](mailto:ephemera@wpe.com); (607) 498-4508;

**FFF Webmaster:** Jim Abbs, [accwritr@itis.com](mailto:accwritr@itis.com)

YOU CAN HAVE A LINK from your FFF Website listing to your own Website or E-mail address. Contact Jim Abbs (see above).

We welcome your submissions via E-mail, fax, or disk. Please attach a short instructor bio (1-3 sentences), including your location and Certification level. Please indicate whether or not you are willing to allow for your submission's possible republication on the Program's Website. Any illustrations should be in TIFF format. The Loop reserves the right to accept or decline any submission for any reason, and to edit any submission as it sees fit. All submissions should be sent to the National Office:

**FFF Casting Program**

*P.O. Box 1595*

*Bozeman, MT 59771*

*(406) 585-7596 Fax*

*E-mail: [castingcert@fedflyfishers.org](mailto:castingcert@fedflyfishers.org)*

*Web: <http://www.fedflyfishers.org/castingcert.shtml>*

**The Loop** is the quarterly publication of the FFF Board of Governors for Casting Instructor Certification.

## ***Hello Again***

*by Macaulley Lord*

After a hiatus of over three years, I'm happy to be editing *The Loop* again. It was an honor to turn this journal over to Jason Borger in 1996 and it's an honor to receive it back from him. Jason is off to the Northwest to focus more on his passion—creating. Whether it's in words, pixels, vinyl or graphite, he's creating things to help flyfishers enjoy the sport even more. He's a hard act to follow.

Jason left *The Loop* better than he found it. He brought many of the luminaries from our field into these pages—bringing us their wealth of teaching experience and wisdom. He made this journal pleasing to the eye. Most importantly, he furthered our mission—to help casting instructors, all of us, become better teachers. Thanks, Jason.

In the next issue, we'll report on what's new from the Board of Governors. As is your lesson plan for teaching the roll cast or the double haul, the Casting Instructor Certification Program is a work in progress. The board has heard thoughtful suggestions for improvement from many of you and we are hard at work to improve things.

As always, keep learning, keep teaching.

## ***COMING EVENTS***

### **Pre-registration is REQUIRED!**

Contact Evelyn Taylor at (406) 585-7592

**Long Beach, Calif** - March 4; SWC Conclave/Fred Hall Show; must preregister by Feb 25

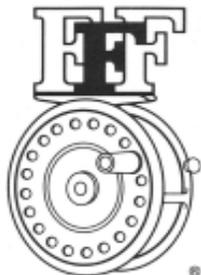
**Salt Lake City, Utah** - March 17 & 18; International Sportsmen's Expo; Basic & Masters; must preregister by March 9

**Mountain Home, Ark** - March 17 & 18; Sowbug Roundup; Basic with Dave Barron/Chuck Easterling

**Gatlinburg, Tenn** - June 2; SEC Conclave; Basic with Wanda & Gary Taylor, David Diaz/Tom Broderidge must preregister by May 25

**Grayling, Mich** - June 17; GLC Conclave; Basic with John Van Dalen, Bob Braendle/Dave Leonhard; must preregister by June 9

**Livingston, Montana** - August 2 & 3; International Fly Fishing Show; Masters & Basic; must preregister by July 24



### ***FEDERATION OF FLY FISHERS***

*Fly Casting Instructor Certification Program*

*P.O. Box 1595*

*Bozeman, MT 59771*

***Address Service Requested***