

## SPLITTING CANE: CONVERSATIONS WITH BAMBOO RODMAKERS

By Ed Engle

(Stackpole Books: 2002; 1-800-732-3669;

www.stackpolebooks.com)

212 pp.; hardcover; \$29.95

There's more than one reason people fish rods crafted from the culms of a giant grass. Ed Engle offers his own a dozen times in *Splitting Cane: Conversations with Bamboo Rodmakers*. One my favorite examples is found in Chapter 14, "F. D. Lyons Rod Company."

Engle describes receiving a new rod, beginning with the process of picking it up at the post office soon after a flood. Not to put too fine point on this, but think of Russ Chatham approaching a duck, or maybe Don Juan reveling in the attributes of an eminent conquest. . . .

Engle notes the packing materials in which his prize arrived, the "slender aluminum tube capped with brass at both end," then the "khaki-colored" bag. When the rod itself emerges, "it was clear that the ghost of H. L. Leonard was lurking in the three-piece 3½ ounce, 8-foot bamboo rod that I held in my hands."

Engle then goes on to describe the physical act, casting that is, with just as much detail:

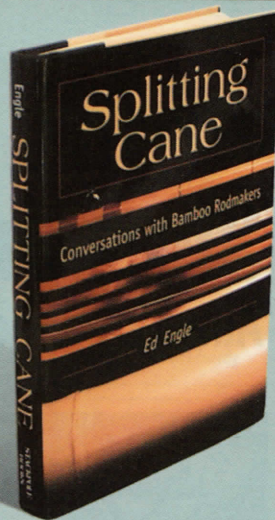
"I deviated from my normal rod-testing agenda, where I make short casts first, and found myself cranking out line on the initial false casts. I just couldn't help it after I felt the first pulse of life enter the cane as the line went out through the guides. It was the silky smooth kind of feeling that can only come from a rod endowed with a fuller action. . . .

". . . One of the great pleasures of bamboo is that it handles a broad range of tapers and their resulting actions so well. I appreciate the so-called slower rods because I think they make me a better caster. Besides, they make for a sensuous fishing partner."

There you go. But lest I lead readers astray, let me report that 16 of the 21 chapters in *Splitting Cane* are about the making of the rods, and the men who labor in this service—"the secret lives of rod-makers," as Engle puts it. Engle casts their products using a variety of lines and tapers, and—despite the exception identified above—a consistent approach. Although he likes most he meets, each rod receives a remarkably distinctive vignette, intimate and "personal." This one throws well at that range, for example, with a particular line; another loads well for another application. Most importantly, Engle understands that individual tastes will vary: whatever his own response, the highest priority is to give a would-be fisher a sense of what a rod does well, and how, along with some sense of the why.

No small task, given how much of casting is a sensory game. But *Splitting Cane* is a book I'd buy before investing in this kind of partner, certainly before signing the pre-nups; and as a reader, I frankly enjoyed wandering through the experiences of somebody who's so clearly delighted by the chance to indulge himself, wrap by wrap and loop upon loop.

## Splitting Cane



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