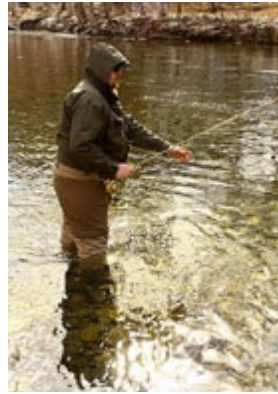


BAMBOO FOR YOU?

MARC PAYNE



In today's fly fishing world, the mantra has become "faster is better." Being able to shoot line three quarters of the way across any given body of water has become the benchmark of a quality rod or angler. But there are places and situations where a long

ultra quick rod is an impediment, particularly on the small mountain stream. The waters of the smokies are an example: small and majestic providing the perfect opportunity to use one of the oldest fly fishing materials we have at our disposal--bamboo.

Many anglers seem to be intimidated by bamboo as if it were some archaic item that is fragile and prone to difficulties. Others look at the price tag and turn the other way. Though it is true that a lot of bamboo fly rods do have large price tags affixed to them, a good serviceable rod can be obtained for about the price of a mid level Sage or Winston. It is also possible to pick some rods up on eBay that will provide you with years of angling joy for a low bid in most cases.

So what are the advantages of a bamboo fly rod on a small mountain stream? In a word... presentation. Regardless of your skill level or type of technique you employ, the gentle drop of a Yellow Sally placed on the water by a bamboo rod is something that you cannot replicate. Bamboo is, in this writer's opinion, the high point of dry fly fishing, period. I

have used graphite in the park on multiple occasions, but the first time I felt that slow tug of the bamboo on my forward cast and watched as the fly fell to the water as if it were in slow motion, I was hooked.

Nymphing is also not a problem with bamboo. In most cases, you are neither casting far nor with very large weighted beasts and as with a dry fly, the presentation is subtle and the takes are sure. You also have the freedom to scale down on your tippet diameter as well. A 7x tippet or perhaps even an 8x is protected beyond measure because the flex of a bamboo fly rod reduces the shock of the hookset. Your hook will still have the power to penetrate the jaw of the trout, but the rod will not be so stiff that the sudden jerk snaps you off.



If bamboo is a direction you have toyed with heading toward in your angling life, then the obvious next step is picking out a rod that is right for the conditions that you will find yourself fishing. Line weight and rod length are not nearly as critical as they are on graphite, but it is still a rather important decision to make. Most rod makers of both today and yesteryear have a wide variety of combinations that can provide you with a tool that will cover just about any condition you may find yourself in on the water. The trick is to take a look at your yearly fishing: where you go and the size of the water you normally fish.

In today's fly rod market, a 5 weight is just that, a 5 weight. However, if you fish a bamboo fly



rod, you are offered much wider latitude as to what line weight you can use. Say, for instance, you buy an 8 foot 4 weight bamboo fly rod, you can easily over line or under line the rod and it actually will still be as responsive. What the over or under weighting of the rod will do is either speed up or slow down the rod to the conditions or type of fishing you are doing. Though it may seem counterproductive, if I am high sticking a nymph in a mountain stream with a 4 weight rod, I will put on a 3 weight line because the lighter line weight will actually stiffen the rod just enough to better detect strikes. If I am just casting dries, I will go with the standard line weight or the next size up so that the rod can load softer which makes for much better fishing.

Length of a fly rod is not always critical, but in some cases you might be on a stream where a 9 foot rod is just too much rod to use. This is when things get off the beaten path with a bamboo. By design, the taper of a bamboo rod will

provide amazing loading properties even if you don't utilize the full rod. If I have on the water with me a 3 piece 9 foot rod and the water has grown to skinny to really use the full rod, I will leave the butt section in the truck, take the middle and top sections, stick the reel in my vest, and just go fishing. If you are somewhere like Walker Camp up in the Smokies and you hook a fish so large that you need to put it on the reel...you just made the record books. If you don't need it, don't use it. I have had great days on small streams with two sections of a three piece rod and it never felt like I had an incomplete setup.

The life of a bamboo fly rod should never be in question. With just a few basic maintenance issues you can insure that your bamboo rod will be in fine shape to hand down to the next generation of anglers. Take a new high speed, high action, space age technology fly rod and fish it exclusively. I feel quite certain that the odds of your having that rod to pass down to your grandchildren will be dramatically less that if you fished with a





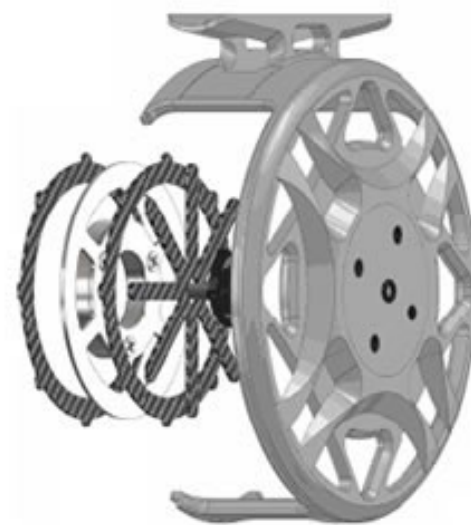
bamboo rod. My favorite bamboo rod is an eight foot, three piece, four weight that was built by Winchester back in the early 1930's. I often wonder just how many men and kids have fished that rod, and I feel very confident that when it is my time to leave this earth, that same fly rod will be fishable, just a beautiful, and moving forward without me.

To stand in a cool mountain stream and let the rush and worries of the day drift down stream while the slow graceful bamboo does its work is as sweet and moving as prayer. A bamboo rod by design will tell you when to begin your forward cast, and after the fly gently kisses the surface film and you see the trout pull it under, you will find the most amazing thing about bamboo, energy transference. It is common, after the hookset, to literally feel the fish move in the cork grip. Bamboo is a wood, and wood carries vibrations while graphite stunts vibrations. When a fish gives you a shake with bamboo, you feel it. When a

fish gives you a shake with graphite, you feel a slight tug and the line moves across the top of the water.



Tradition/Acquisition



Brad Befus



DAVIDSON RIVER OUTFITTERS
 WNC's Fly Fishing & Light Tackle Specialist
 Sage • Rio • SA • Ross • St. Croix • Columbia
 Year Round Guide Service
 95 Pisgah Hwy Pisgah Forest
888-861-0111
www.davidsonflyfishing.com