

bamboo for you

GARRISON'S OLD TAPER AND A BIG BROWN

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There is a spot in the Smokies, quite easy to miss if you don't know what to look for, that ages ago was a home to a kind and loving family. He worked in the logging industry that was so prevalent before the National Park was created, and she busied herself as a mother to their children, raised a garden and livestock, and enjoyed their little piece of paradise along a cool running stream.



Now, well over half a century removed, all that remains of their homestead is the jonquils that still bloom in the early spring. If you look around find the stone foundation of a smoke house. It is most visible in the fall of the year, at least until the leaves have all abandoned the trees and covered the forest floor in a carpet of red and gold. The rest of the year this place remains hidden and protected from view by the seasons. It was there one fall day, as the leaves fell, that I caught the largest brown trout I have ever pulled from the waters of the park.

I brought with me a 6' 6", 4 weight bamboo fly rod that I had made myself based upon a Garrison taper. Everett Garrison was one of the finest bamboo rod builders in history of fly fishing. His tapers made great dry fly rods because of the slow action that they imparted, that today some folks would think to be too "noodley" to be effective. Perhaps that would be the case on large tailwaters, but when the largest fish you have even witnessed come out of these waters would have to be pulled quite hard to go fourteen inches, and the stream isn't much wider than the carport at home, you don't worry to much about it.

I fished this particular run with a Parachute Adams and though the fly had been productive for me all day, now it was as if someone had purged the fish from the stream. No rising trout could be seen anywhere in the pool I worked the runs and deeper pockets that formed further upstream. It was getting late in the day. The last vestiges of heat from the summer were still fighting with the fall for supremacy. The clothing I wore for warmth that morning had become an impediment. I had made up my mind to fish the head of the run with a nymph for a few minutes before heading for home.

The pool was deep enough that the bottom was obscured from close examination. I tied on a heavy golden stonefly nymph. The fly was so heavy that the tip of the bamboo bowed under its weight. Not the optimum setup for a fly with this much weight, but it was all I had to use so I thought through my approach and went with it. Any type of overhead cast was nothing short of fool hearty under the canopy, so I just flipped the fly out into the very head of the pool much like a bass fisherman would

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pitch a jig to deadfall along a lake bank. It wasn't pretty, but I got the fly where I wanted it and that was all I needed.

As the fly sank and began its slow trip downstream, I looked across the water to the old smokehouse foundation. In my mind, I could imagine the smell of hog meat being smoked filling the air and a flurry of early fall activity around the old homestead. I imaged that could hear wood being cut and stacked for winter, and perhaps linens flapping as he hung from a line in the back yard. I even imagined that I spied an old workhorse or mule standing stoic in a lot off to the side of the now gone house where I am dogs napped in sunny spots on the porch.

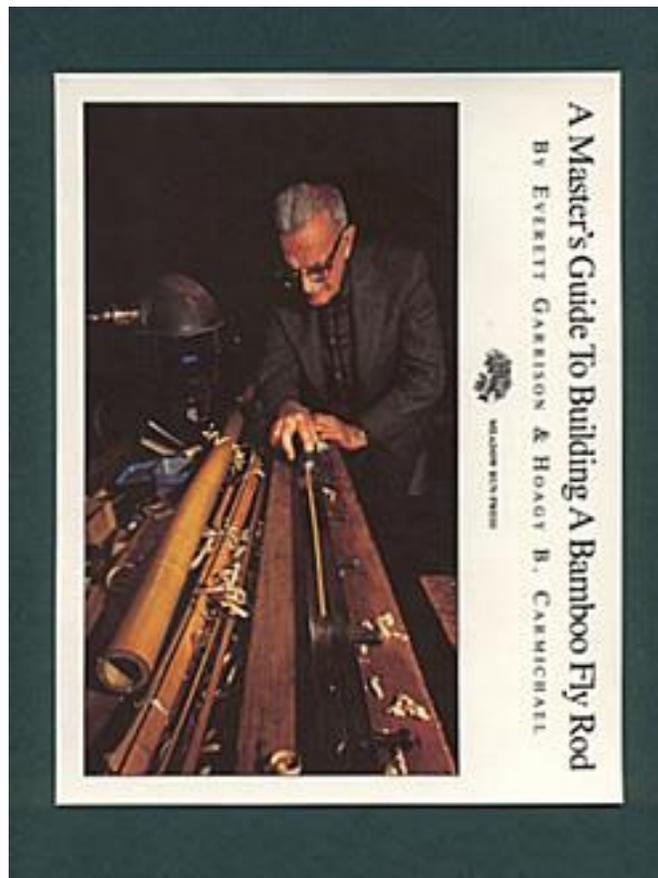
I almost did not notice that My line had stopped moving downstream--my mind returned to the task at hand. Not feeling a tug, I assumed that it had caught a rock and quickly popped the rod tip up in hopes of breaking it free. The fly did not break free, instead, the line sped downstream to the tail of the pool and whatever was at the end of that line was large and not happy at the feel of the hook in its jaw. My little four weight splices of cane bent nearly down to the handle. The click and pawl reel sounded like a bicycle tire with a baseball card laid against the passing spokes. At that instant I felt totally outmatched, but in reality had it not been for a wispy bamboo rod and a reel that freed the line so easily, I no doubt would have lost the fish right then and there.

Reeling like a madman, I sped down the bank to keep constant pressure on the big fish. I

stepped out into the water as the butt of my seven and a half foot leader came out of the current. My free arm reached behind me for my land net. There are moments when you are certain that you are going to loose, and at the very second I remembered that I had forgotten my net. Before I could recover from that shock, once again the line zoomed—this time upstream. The tip of the bamboo danced like Morse code and I danced to retrace my steps back upstream.

It was only then that I finally saw the fish, a brown trout. Eyeing the leviathan, it was clear that it was least twenty inches long and was frantically moving upstream. With nerves on high alert, I followed the fish as best I could. On the right side of the pool was a small waterfall and the trout tried desperately to leap it and navigate its way through the pocket water beyond. But every time, with every extreme move the brown made, Mr. Garrison's mathematics held true...the rod was tapered in such a way that every time it tried to escape the pool, the rod pulled it back in to play.

Finally, after what seemed to be forever, the fish moved into shallow water, and with the rod bent double, I reached down and grabbed it by its thick tail and lifted it from the water. With its color vibrant for fall spawn, the fish seemed to glow in my hand. It was beautiful. The purple spot on the side of its head was the size of a nickel. After taking the hook from its mouth, I held it into the faster water. My whole body was shaking, and after it finally got its wind back and raced away into the



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deeper water, I looked for a good place to sit and regain my composure.

I had been told of large browns in the lower sections of the river, but I never thought that they would grow that large in water that small. I had found a seat on some deadfall and looked directly across the stream in the direction of the old home place and wondered if they had caught the ancestors of the one I brought to hand.

The leaves, big and golden fell about me, and I stared into the pool for a long time before I had the strength to climb the bank and head for home. No photos, a memory being the only record. Much like the homestead that once was, and Mr. Garrison and his amazing taper that transcended time to this place and this day.



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