

# Grandad's Rod TRASH or TREASURE

BY: TED KNOTT

Every week or two I get at least one telephone call asking for information about an old bamboo rod. The conversation starts with something like "I was cleaning up dad's place when I found . . ." or "I bought this old rod at a yard sale and I wondered if . . .". The bottom line in most of these enquiries is, "What's it worth?" and "Can I use it on the stream?"

What are the current values of old bamboo rods? The prices vary dramatically: just because the rod is bamboo does not mean that it's worth a packet of money. The highest prices go for short, North American rods by premium makers. For example, a 6'6" Payne will sell for more than a 7' 0" Payne. Rods by top American makers such as Payne or Leonard will sell for more than those made by Hardy (English) or Pezon et Michel (French) in equivalent lengths. Mid range American rods by Heddon, Phillipson and Granger, while much sought after, fetch much lower prices than those by Payne or Leonard. Low end American rods, such as those by Shakespeare or Horrocks-Ibbotson will sell for even less.

The basic rule of thumb is that the relative cost of the rod when it was new is reflected in the price it commands today. For example, a 1950 Abercrombie and Fitch catalogue lists a Payne at \$110, a Heddon at \$45, and a Tonka Queen at \$13. The price spread is similar to that between today's high end and low end graphite rods. In 1950, a Payne cost the equivalent of an average month's earnings in 1950. Today, the same rod will cost the same in terms of 1999 income.

The dollar figures given above presume that the rod is structurally sound, is in fishable condition, has no short sections, and has a good finish. If the rod has to be repaired or refinished, the value drops significantly. The first thing you should do is check the glue seams, the ferrule fit, the finish, and the general overall condition. For example, dark glue seams could indicate that the splines are beginning to separate. The ferrules should engage fully and smoothly, with no evidence of looseness or



*Four old bamboo rods which were bought for less than \$50. All need work to make them fishable. The second from the left is an Ogden-Smith (English). The others are "no-name" American models.*

clicking when the rod is flexed. The thread wraps should be intact, without fraying or loose ends. The varnish finish on the wood and on the thread wraps should be sound and free from flaking, chips, and bag marks. Finally, the rod should be in its original bag and tube. While

all of the above faults can be rectified, any non-original work will detract from the collectable value of the rod.

I'm often asked if it's OK to fish an old rod. If the rod is sound, of course it is. Many bamboo rod owners prefer the forgiving action of bamboo over modern rods made of synthetics, and bamboo rods are much stronger than people think. In fact, one acquaintance of mine happily fishes a rod which is a hundred years old. However, if the rod is a particularly fine and valuable specimen, perhaps you will want to preserve it, rather than risk the potential for damage that is present when fishing any rod. The choice is yours.

Is that old bamboo rod you've chanced upon a treasure or a piece of trash? It's all a matter of perspective. If the rod once belonged to dad or grandpa, its nostalgic worth will most likely far outweigh any monetary value. I have seen some very attractive shadow box displays composed of dad's old tackle. Besides making an interesting and pleasing addition to the décor of your house, they also generate conversation and preserve family memories. On the other hand, the sale of a fine, old Payne is worth enough to pay for a fabulous fly fishing trip to Labrador. Again, it's all a matter of perspective: the choice is yours.

## Ted Knott

*Ted is a well-known southern Ontario fly fishing educator with over forty years of fly fishing experience. He is an FFF Certified Casting Instructor, a G.Loomis filed tester, and a builder of fine bamboo rods. One of his rods is in the Massey Crafts Collection in the National Museum in Ottawa. His bamboo rods are featured in an article by Ed Engels in the summer 1999 issue of Anglers' Journal.*

### A selection of used bamboo rods from a current catalogue

(prices in Canadian dollars).

Orvis Battenkill	7'6"	5wt	\$790
Heddon	8'6"	5wt	\$750
Sharpe Scottie	7'	5wt	\$525
Hardy Deluxe	8'6"	5wt	\$450
South Bend	7'6"	5wt	\$400
Horrocks-Ibbotson	9'	7wt	\$100