

The Fly Rod Corner

MISTAKES AT THE BENCH ... MIGHT ASSIST THE ANGLER ON THE STREAM

Story and photo by Dave Mosley

I couldn't attend Conclave this past summer as a result of surgery, and therefore was unable to man the bamboo rod booth. Lowell Davis, Bill Armon and some of their friends graciously agreed to help out. Thank you very much, fellow rod makers, for your help and for a successful booth.

While recuperating from knee surgery, I began planning new projects and fishing trips. Some trips require the building of a new rod based on the rod action desired and the number or length of the pieces needed. I have built 2-piece, 3-piece and now 4-piece rods of the same taper and have found that the action is not generally affected if the taper isn't too unusual. While planning and anticipating for this trip, I reflected on a rod – with a mistake – that I had built for another trip. This rod enabled me to capture a fish I probably would have otherwise lost. Let me take you on a journey back in time.

In 2002, I took my wife to New Zealand for touring and a bit of fishing. I had been there the previous year and made some Kiwi friends, who had invited me to return for another visit. On that trip, I had used a medium action 3-piece, 6-weight rod, but the action was a little too slow for the dry fly fishing I had experienced on the Mataura River on the South Island.

I decided to build a 3-piece, 5-weight rod with a faster taper. Then I could take both rods on the trip and use one for dry flies and the other for subsurface offerings. I built the 5-weight just before going on the trip and after constructing the bamboo



The prepared bamboo pieces are triangular in shape, with two sides coming from inside the bamboo culm and one from the outside. Here, the half-round illustration prepared by the author has the center piece installed with one of the "in" sides facing out – a mistake.

blank, I noticed that when I had been gluing and wrapping one of the tips, one of the six strips in that section had flipped over and an inside surface was facing outwards. It was too late to build another tip, so I completed the rod (the butt and both tips) as they were. I decided to just use the mistake tip and fish it, while throwing all caution to the wind. I planned on replacing it after my trip.

My wife and I flew to Christchurch, New Zealand, and toured the west coast down through Queenstown, Milford Sound and then on to our friends in Gore. I had purchased some flies along the way and one was a Bottle Fly (a black Humpy with a bright light-blue thorax). Two of our friends, Bev and Peter McDonald, decided to take us on a picnic at a friend's sheep station. The trip required an hour and a half on paved roads and another hour of dirt roads. The scenery was delightful and the picnic menu was superb as the couple owned two of the most popular restaurants in Gore.

We had stopped for lunch beside the upper part of a local river and, after lunch, the ladies talked while Peter and I went fishing. I remembered a local shop owner telling me to use the Bottle Fly if sheep lived close to the water. I hadn't observed any rises on the stretch of water, so I decided to try a size 16 Bottle Fly based on his suggestion.

The second cast produced a rather large trout and, of course, I was using my mistake tip with a 5X leader. I decided to apply as much pressure

to this big boy as I could because I really wanted to land it (and didn't care if I broke the rod in the process – I had already decided it was expendable). I fought the fish for about 15 minutes, refusing to allow him to run. The ladies came down to watch, but my wife couldn't see the fish. Bev told her to look at the small log under the water, and when my wife replied that she could see the log, Bev told her that was the fish!

Peter helped net the fish – a brown trout weighing 8 pounds and measuring a shade less than 28 inches. Considering the tackle I was using, I was very pleased to have landed it. Peter had been using an 8-weight cane rod for fishing this stream and was amazed that the 5-weight "mistake" stood up to the test. He referred to the fish as "a wee tidler caught on a matchstick."

I was so pleased with the mistake tip that I have refused to rebuild it, and when I went back to New Zealand two years later, I fished it again through the same hole and caught a 6-pound brown. I could apply as much pressure as I needed.

The moral of this story is something that I learned many years ago, but frequently forget: "Mistakes teach you more than your successes." Bamboo is a stronger and more resilient material than I had believed possible, and a visiting angler should pay attention to local experts – even if the fly color is blue. 🐟

Dave Mosley is retired from teaching and has been active in the FFF since the early 1980s, holding various offices and organizing bamboo rod activities. He resides in Hamilton, Montana.



Even a blue fly can be productive. Here, the author shows off a beautiful New Zealand brown trout.