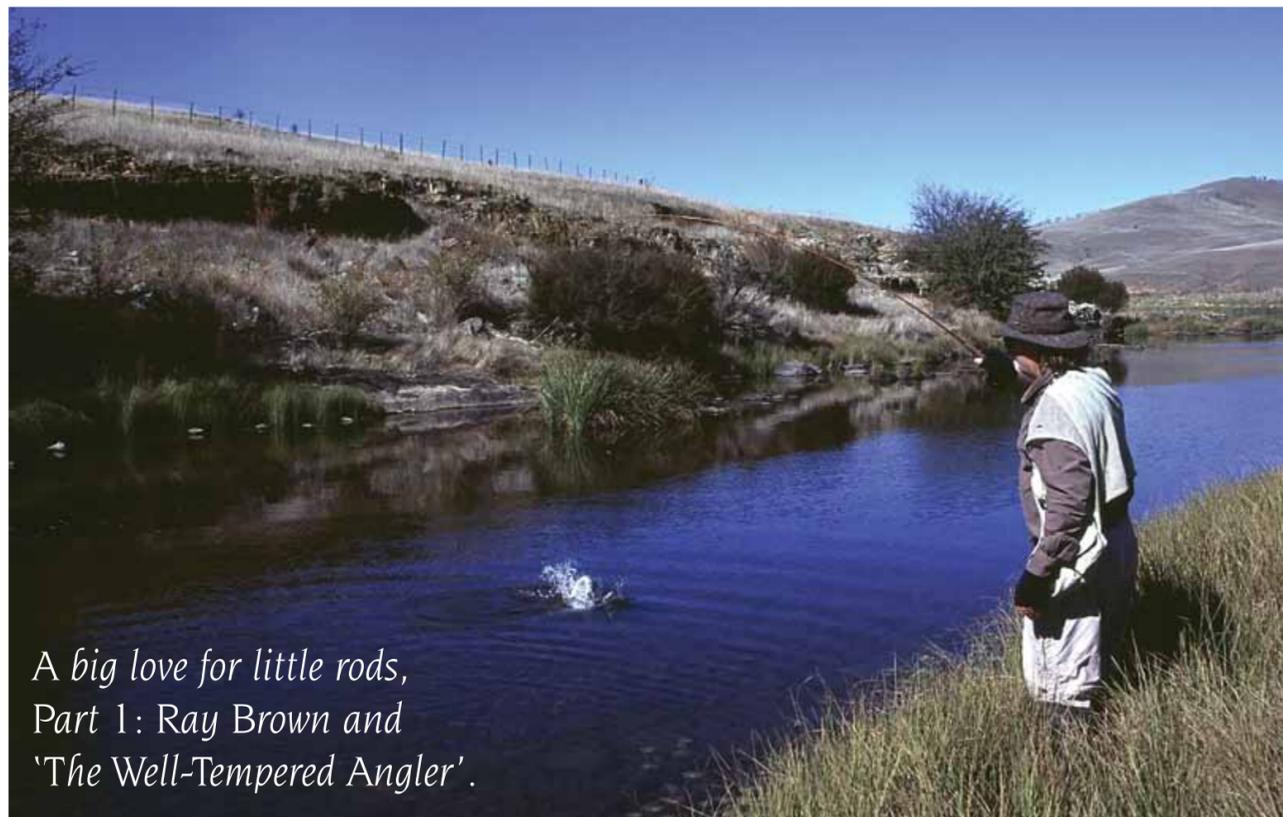


BAMBOO

NICK TARANSKY



*A big love for little rods,
Part 1: Ray Brown and
'The Well-Tempered Angler'.*

The next two columns are devoted to the passion for little rods. When I say 'little rods', I'm referring to those in the 4 to 6 weight class, and under seven feet in length. These are perhaps at their best dry fly fishing on streams, where many believe they are without peer. Of course, Lee Wulff's legendary feats with Atlantic salmon hint at wider versatility!

Like any rod with a specific set of attributes, the more you fish little rods, the more you enjoy utilising their strengths, (and also rising to the challenge of any perceived shortcomings). You can truly base your flyfishing life around this type of rod, and I know that for me that there is no turning back. There is probably a whole book on the subject (and maybe one day I'll write one!) but for

now, I will keep it to a modest introduction.

Short rods are nothing new, but it was Arnold Gingrich who may have brought them from a talking point to a serious fishing tool. In his book, *'The Well-Tempered Angler'* published in 1959, he deals with the subject at length. Though I came to love short rods via another path, indirectly it seems I have a lot to thank Gingrich for...

In this column I will relate my introduction to short bamboo rods, through the person responsible (Ray Brown), and the rod that started it for me, the Partridge FA6345. Ray will also touch on the development of the Monaro 45 taper from the FA6345. In the next issue I'll elaborate further on the Monaro 45 as well as the Bush Creek taper.

Ray Brown

I still remember my initial visits to Ray's house at Port Noarlunga, soon after I joined the South Australian Fly Fisher's Association (SAFFA) in the early 1990s. Ray was the first person I had met whose life literally seemed to revolve around flyfishing. His place was a focal point for many keen SAFFA members. Weekly fly tying nights were well attended, and someone was always arriving, leaving or calling. Ray's was also the starting point for southern stream stocking – I remember driving CAREFULLY from our hatchery to his place with bags containing something like 30,000 trout fry.

On the wall in his fly tying room above the vice, were orders for hundreds of flies from Melbourne tackle shops, which he tied under the *Onkaparinga Trout Flies* name. He also dealt in antiquarian angling books, and he helped me greatly in choosing my early reading from the overwhelming number of flyfishing books available. His own library was, well, let's just say comprehensive, as was his ability to quote from it. I learnt quickly – from observation as well as direct experience – that if you're going to win an argument on angling (or anything for that matter) with Ray, you'd better be prepared for a late night. Oh yeah, and you better be right (though that may not actually help either). As a side note on angling libraries, if you have a copy of Jim Findlay's *Australian Fishing Books* look for Ray's book, *Dry Flies on the Fleurieu*. If you find a copy, please let me know...

Ray also had a very impressive collection of cane rods. These mesmerised me as each one came out of its tube and bag, revealing the golden cane and the smell of varnish. It was a joy and an inspiration to hold and cast these rods. Little did I know at the time that one day my career would be making such rods.

Ray was a major early influence on my flyfishing. As well as being dauntingly well read, he had applied this knowledge in a detailed and practical way to the streams of South Australia's Fleurieu Peninsula. From the outside, this fishery may seem small and unsubstantial. However it offered shy, selective trout and a diverse mayfly population. It's interesting to contrast those streams with some other popular, prolific destinations: with plenty of water and large numbers of non selective fish, it's easy to shrug your shoulders after a refusal and move on to the next trout. But as Ray explained to me, in South Australia, with fewer fish and less water, a refusal would encourage thought, analysis and research. This produced a number of extremely knowledgeable and highly skilled (yet surprisingly humble) anglers – like my other mentor from South Australia, Paul Bourne.

Watching Ray fish with a short cane rod was a revelation. Until then, I'd fished with what I thought was purpose, but compared to Ray I had been wandering aimlessly up the river waving a rod. Another of his passions was squash (he was a highly ranked player and coach), and on the stream he stalked and moved with similar decisiveness. High line speed and a delicate inch-perfect presentation, was usually followed by a merciless treatment of fish once hooked. Using his 6'3" Partridge of Redditch 'Stump Puller', the battle was generally over in short time, and the trout returned with a minimum of stress and fatigue. Despite Ray's large collection of rods, it was apparent that he spent a lot – nearly all – his time fishing with this one rod. He knew exactly what to do with it, and how it would react in any situation. Not good news for marketers, but maybe a lesson for many of us...



*...this fishery...offered shy,
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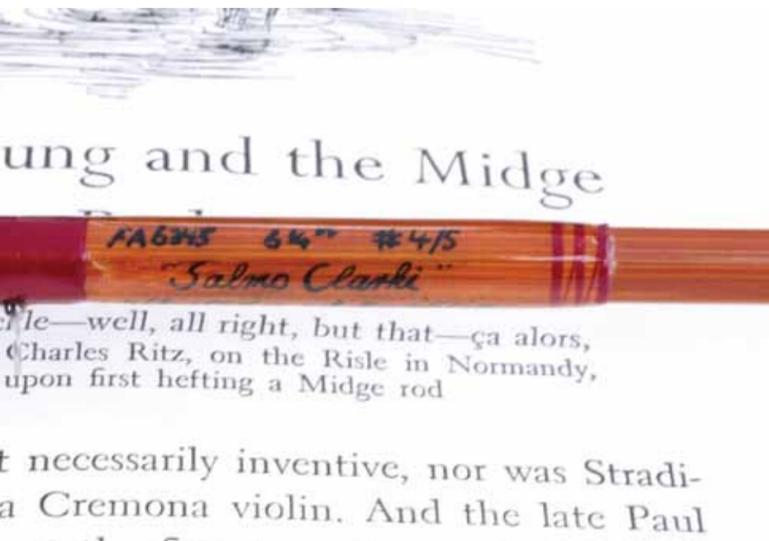
The Partridge FA6345

As well as tying flies commercially, and dealing in books and collectable tackle, Ray imported Partridge bamboo blanks and had them built locally, selling the finished rods. These were available in the short 'Midge' style that Ray fished, as well as longer, more traditional action rods in the 7½ foot range and beyond. I was keen to get a bamboo rod as soon as I could, but Ray suggested I spend some time improving my skills. He preferred to sell to experienced anglers, who had the ability to both fish these rods, and care for them properly. It was frustrating to wait at the time, but in hindsight I think it was excellent advice. All good things to those who wait!

I knew I would get a rod, but which one? I remember discussing this on more than one occasion with Ray. My recollection of his advice went along these lines: a longer, more relaxed rod would be a beautiful thing to cast and fish – a joy to own and use. The short FA6345 (Fast Action 6'3" 4/5) was a serious stalking, fishing, hunting tool – a rod you would grab walking out the door regardless of the conditions. The fact that the FA6345 was his rod of choice for around 20 years helped me to decide. And yes, seeing him fish with it sealed the deal. A FA6345 was my first quality bamboo rod, which I purchased from Ray in 1999.

The Partridge FA6345 was a starting point for my love of bamboo in general, and short rods in particular. But there is a history behind this taper and its introduction to Australian flyfishing. Rather than tell it secondhand, I'll let Ray do that in his own words:

I suppose it all started in 1960 when my Nan and Pop arrived home from overseas. Pop had bought me home from Japan a boxed bamboo fishing rod set. I reckon I was pretty excited. My family were fisherman, always! Fresh and salt, but I wanted to fly fish, an obsession I still have today. The fly rod in the set wasn't the best and the level line my Pop gave me didn't load very well, but I persisted. Things improved when for my 11th birthday I received a double taper line, absolute magic! I could now cast reasonably well at the hoops I placed on the front lawn between the trees.



Dad was most impressed and over the next few years I acquired a Jarvis Walker Gold Medal 6 weight, a Shakespeare Wonder Rod 5 weight, a Daiwa glass on glass and lastly a Hardy Smuggler 8 ft 4 piece. These were all fibreglass rods. I regularly fished in a couple of creeks for trout during this period – the River Torrens was a favourite haunt. In the latter part of this period I acquired a Turville Princess from the Melbourne tackle business J. M. Turville Pty Ltd.

I, like most other South Australian fly fisherman, read all and everything we could find on trout. J M Turville still made cane rods and I read that a Victorian caster was taking a 8 ft Venus to the World Casting Championships. I had to have one. I contacted Jack Turville and talked to him, a rod was put aside and I worked all of my school holidays to pay for it. I christened it on Sixth Creek in the Adelaide Hills. The Venus was perfect for short distance dry fly fishing on the narrow streams of SA. In a couple of years I had added both a JMT Dry Fly and a Jenny Anne to my collection.

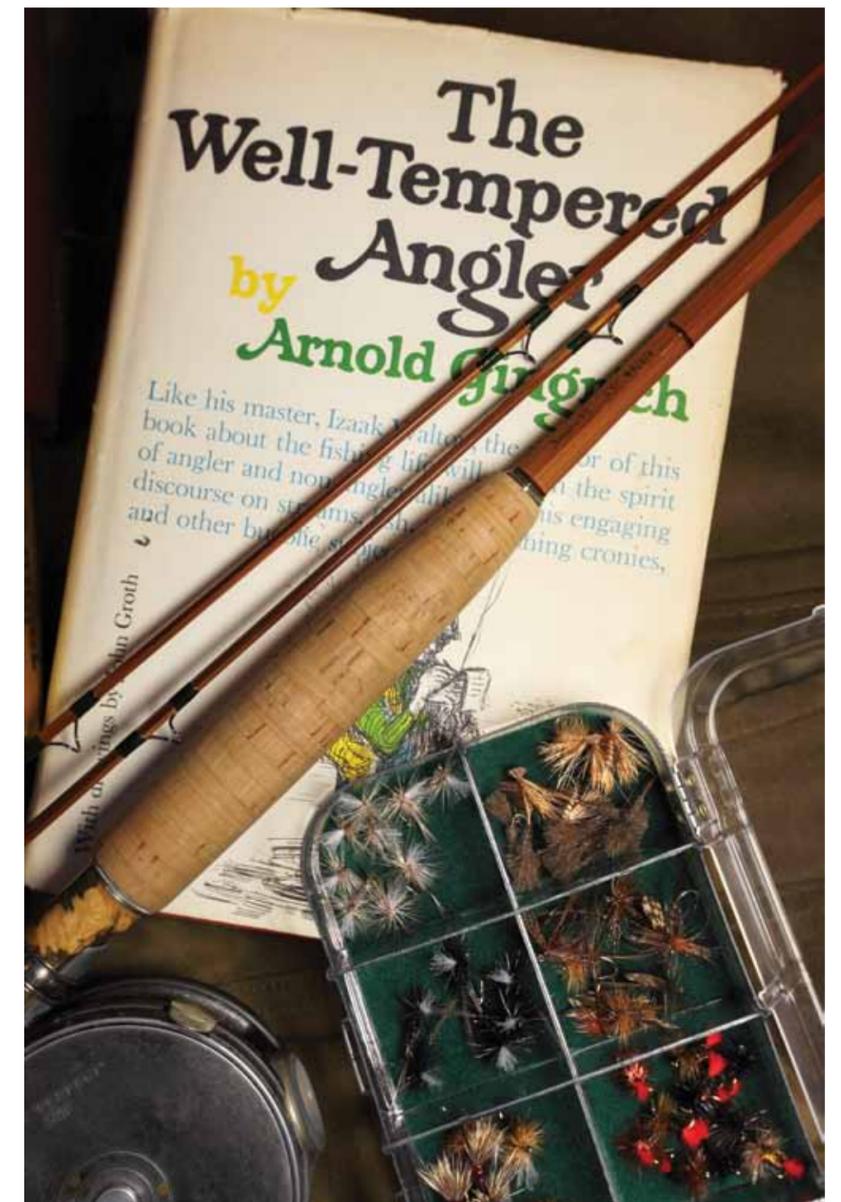
A chance meeting with Lee Cramond on the banks of Sixth Creek one afternoon was the catalyst for major change. Lee was also fishing with cane, shorter again than my 7 ft Jenny Anne. We became lifelong friends. Lee was also passionately addicted to books. He gave me a copy of 'The Well-Tempered Angler' by Arnold Gingrich.

Gingrich was the champion of the Midge rod; more specifically the Paul Young Midge.

Within the pages of 'The Well-Tempered Angler' I found a passion for short bamboo.

Gingrich wrote of McClane, Paul Young and Lee Wulff. Lee had developed a 6 ft Midge built by Wes Jordan for a 7 weight line that he fished for Atlantic salmon. He even took it to the Spey River in Scotland for a contest with Jock Scott, the famous salmon fisherman. Paul Young went on to develop the Midge, the outcome being his 6' 3" 4 weight. Gingrich was a member of the 20/20 club, only open to those who caught a 20 inch trout on a size 20 fly using a 6'3" Midge. The rod was invincible. Well I found a Sharpes of Aberdeen version of the 6' Midge, not a 7 weight, but a 5 weight. Fantastic rod, I christened it 'The Stump Puller'. Hundreds and hundreds of fish later I broke the single tip. I tried to buy another rod from Scotland, but the rod I received was a far cry from the first in both action and quality.

Around this time I was also Queensland rodmaker John McGinn's South Australian representative. I came into possession of a Partridge Cumberland 7' 6" 4 weight. The rod was very impressive. Built on an Everett Garrison taper, it cast silky smooth with a reserve power I had not experienced in a bamboo rod before. I contacted Partridge and bought two cane rod blanks, a 7'6" 4 weight and a 6' 3" Midge for a 5/6 line. The Midge was based on the Paul Young Midge. The rod was a revelation: fast



action, powerful and it weighed around 2 ounces. Greg Wirth of Victor Harbor built the blank up for me. I still fish with it and the 4 weight Midge that Partridge sent me later in 1985. As the years progressed I fished more and more with the two 6'3" Midges, even though I had built up a fair collection of bamboo rods, something I wish I still had today.

South of Adelaide is the Fleurieu Peninsula with rolling hills and lush river valleys. The streams are just creeks by national standards, but they contained trout that readily rose to the dry fly. Fertile, bushy, narrow and slow flowing, they provided the perfect conditions for using the short rod. Mayfly hatches were prolific; the trout (browns and rainbows) selective and well conditioned. Idyllic conditions for the dry fly.

I had reached this point purely by the conditions of my environment.



I fished the small streams where fast, accurate casting was required. The rod had to load with a short line, often with only a leader out of the rod tip. Casting through narrow gaps in the tea-tree to trout sitting on station was a requirement, only achievable with the short rod. The conditions had dictated the terms, the equipment and the flies.

Nick came down to Port Noarlunga one day to talk about buying a new rod to fish the small streams, both in the mountains and around Canberra. He had cut his teeth fishing the streams around Adelaide, the very ones that had occupied my youth. His enthusiasm was evident. I was always cautious of newcomers taking on a bamboo rod. However Nick was just so interested in all aspects of the art and even then he expressed a wish to construct a cane rod. He purchased 6' 3" Midge 4 weight. We had become good friends by the time he moved to Canberra. It was rare to find as passionate a fly fisherman as Nick. Interestingly, my fishing partner at the time was Paul Bourne, another fly fisherman who was on that level; fishing only dries with a Thomas & Thomas Hendrickson bamboo rod. In 2002 Nick and Miri were fortunate enough while working in the USA, to participate in a bamboo rod building course conducted by Jeff Wagner. Later that year they returned to Geraldton, Western Australia to work. Then in 2003 they spent a few weeks in Adelaide on their way home to Canberra.



It was during this period in Adelaide that the Monaro 45 concept was conceived. Previously Nick had traveled down on occasions to visit us at our camp at Kybeyan – I had fished the Monaro streams for a month a year since the early 1980s and after the drought for a number of years the fishing was sensational. We fished the dun hatches on the Mac and the Kybeyan, the red spinner falls on the Bobundara, the hoppers on the Delegate and lots of other small streams whose names escape me. All were fished with my pair of 6' 3" Midge, mainly the Stump Puller because of its extra power in casting into the wind and its ability to place a fly accurately on the water. Fly size was between 16–10, all dries – I don't ever remember using a wet fly on the Monaro streams during that period. Now a Tasmanian, I am allowing myself to be more versatile and the submerged fly has been used as required on the odd occasion.

Nick and Miri called down while in Adelaide and showed me their pair of Paul Young Driggs rods they had built with Jeff Wagner. Nick asked me if he could take the specifications of the Stump Puller and during a subsequent day out fishing we discussed how to improve the 5/6 weight Midge. What evolved was a rod for me to fish the Monaro streams. Firstly it had to be a fast action, 4 weight dry fly rod with a fair bit of grunt in the butt. This suited my casting action and my desire for a swelled butt that was a feature of many of the famous American tapers. A few months later I received the first Monaro 45, not as swelled in the butt as I imagined, and probably closer to a 5 weight than a four. If ever there was a rod made

in heaven just for me, this was it! Forget Preston Jennings for president, Nicholas Taransky was a genius – of the many bamboo rods I owned, nothing came close to it.

Early 2005 Nick tweaked the original Monaro 45 taper. I sent back my original and received my new rod. It was better, crisper, had improved ferrules and a figured timber reel seat. I have fished with it for the last 6 years; it's tasted the waters of the South Esk, Meander, Leven and Mersey in northern Tasmania. I have fished with it in the Western Lakes, Nineteen Lagoons, Great Lake and Arthurs to name a few. These are not the sort of locations you would expect to fish a 6'6" bamboo Midge. But this is an exceptional fly rod, originally built and developed by two of modern America's fly fishing pioneers, Lee Wulff and Wesley Jordan. I am delighted to have played a part in the establishment of Nicholas Taransky as a master rod builder.

Thanks to Ray for his input and possibly overly generous words! Ray, it sounds like I might owe you a new rod (if you ever wear the old one out.)

In Part II next issue, I will describe in detail how the Monaro 45 and Bush Creek tapers evolved from the Partridge FA6345, as well as outlining for budding rod makers a general methodology for experimenting with taper design.

Bamboo rod maker Nick Taransky lives in Queanbeyan near the streams of the Monaro and Snowy Mountains.
Visit www.taranskybamboo.com.au

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