

BAMBOO

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*A big love for little rods,
Part 2: the Monaro 45
and the Bush Creek.*

In Part I, I wrote about Ray Brown and the rod he fished for over 20 years – the Partridge FA6345 (Fast Action 6'3" 4/5 weight). This style of short (6 to 6½ foot) mid line weight (4-6 weight) rod has long had a devoted following among many leading anglers. These rods can be cast very accurately in tight situations, as well as generating high line speed and casting long distances when required. The short length also makes them incredibly effective, when used properly, for playing fish of all shapes and sizes.

In this column, I will discuss two of my tapers – the Monaro 45 and Bush Creek – that evolved from the FA6345. I will also outline an approach to taper modification and rod design which will hopefully be of interest to budding rod makers.

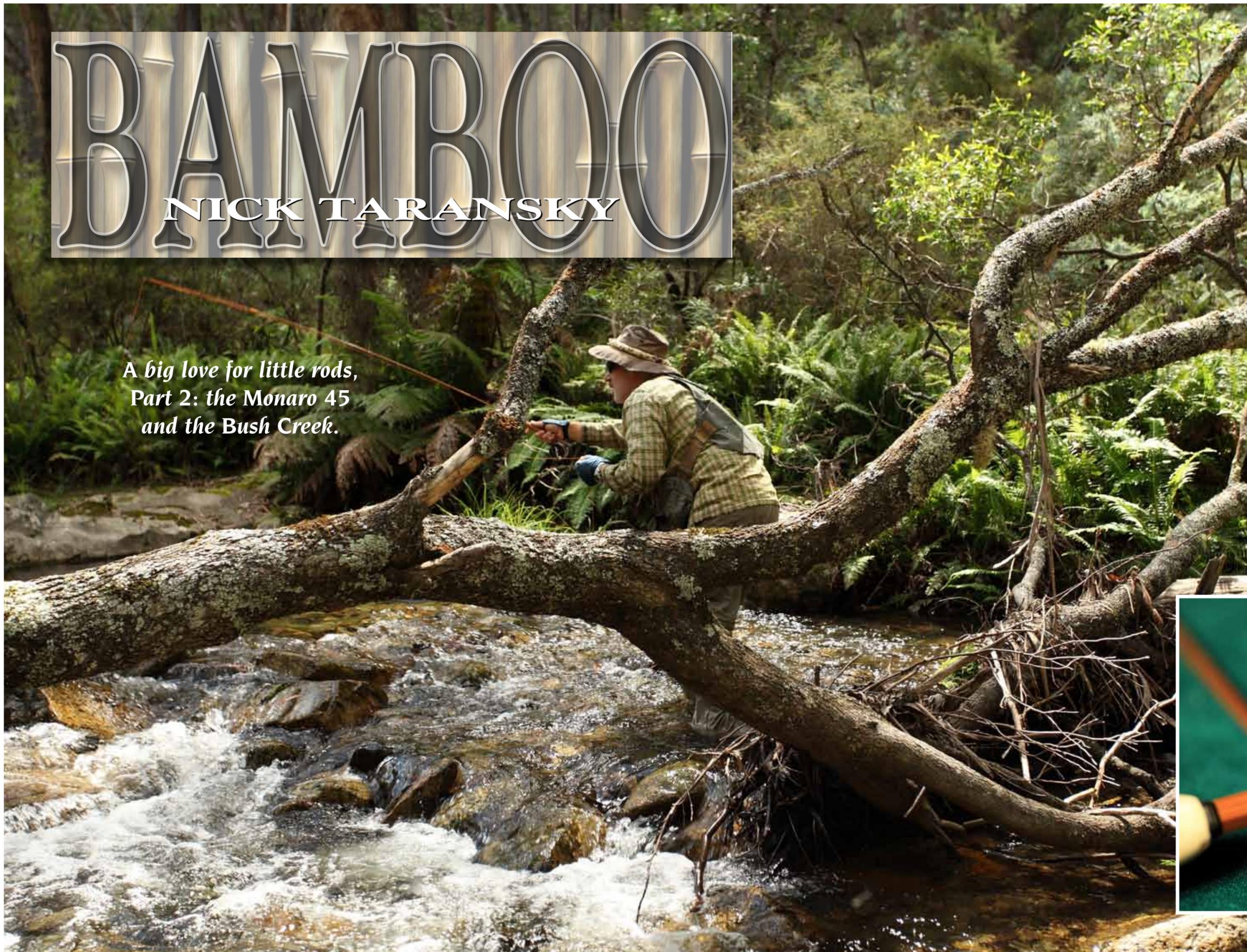
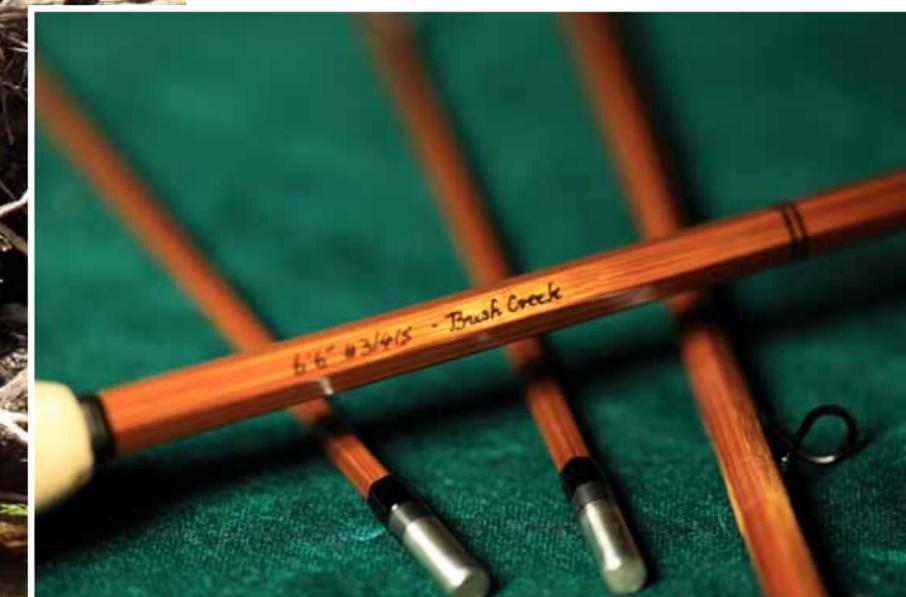
From the outset, I should qualify what I mean by 'my' tapers when it comes to originality and ownership. With many full-time rod makers experimenting with tapers for well over a hundred years, it is likely that these tapers, or at least very similar, have been made in the past. Here I simply hope to show how I came to these tapers in my own rod making, and how they were developed.

If it ain't broke, why fix it?

Like the iconic tapers developed by Payne, Garrison, Dickerson, Young, Gillum, Leonard and others, the Partridge FA6345 has stood the test of time. Rod makers of yesterday had to pay their bills with their work, and competition in the market was no different to today. Tapers become well known and survive for good reason – quality. So why mess with them?

DON'T, is the initial advice I would give to someone starting to make rods; at least not if you want to develop a true appreciation of the craft. To gain a solid understanding of rods, the best way to begin is to start with the accumulated wisdom of generations of rod makers.

Make faithful replicas of well-known tapers. This will give you a frame of reference for modifications that you might make in the future.



Consider the alternative – you modify an established taper and make a rod from it, without having ever made the original. It feels good. Great, but is it better than the original? Or worse? How different does it feel, and how does it feel different? What have you learnt?

Once you have made a range of rods from established tapers, changing things a little at a time will teach you a great deal. You can then start to design tapers in an informed way, to suit different casting styles or fishing locations.

As an aside, it's interesting to note that if you, say, lighten parts of the tip of a Garrison 201, add more to the lower butt... wait a minute, that's a Payne 98!



The Bush Creek (left) and Monaro 45 (right) tapers with interchangeable sections.

Tapers are really a continuum that work within a set of basic parameters – things like tip size, ferrule size, weight and butt thickness. And however they were derived, classic tapers seem to fit in the 'sweet spots' of these variables, so quite a few have similar or overlapping tapers and other characteristics.

Interchangeable Section Modification Methodology

The good news is, you can have the best of both worlds. Bamboo rods are traditionally made with two identical tips. A time-effective way to learn about taper modification is to make a rod as close as possible to a known classic, but then make the second tip that's different in some way – lighter, heavier, different compound taper – while still able to fit into the same size ferrule. This way you can swap between the tips and feel the difference. Note that in the past, some rods came like this by design, such as the Paul Young Parabolic 15 which came with a light (dry fly) tip and a heavy (wet fly) tip.

Taking this a little further and realising that ferrules only come in fixed sizes (in 64^{ths} of an inch increments) you will notice that many popular tapers share the same ferrule size. The Payne 98 (and 97), Garrison 201 (and 201E), Dickerson 7012, T & T Midge and others, are all two piece, 7 foot rods which use a size 12 (12/64th) ferrule. If you make, say, a Payne 98 and a Garrison 201, each with one tip, and tune the ferrule so you can interchange them, you now have four different ways of assembling the butt and tip sections – including the original two faithful versions. Make a different tip again, and you have six variations, and so on. The rule is:

(Number of Different Butt Sections) X (Number of Different Tip Sections) = (Number of Different Overall Rods)

We can also do this with 3 piece rods, instead of 2, as long as we again keep the ferrule sizes interchangeable. The formula here is now:

(Number of Different Tips) X (Number of Different Mids) X (Number of Different Butts) = (Number of Different Overall Rods)

So if we make 2 tips, 2 mids and 2 butts (with each section a different taper) we end up with 8 (2 x 2 x 2) different overall tapers, depending on how the rod is assembled. Add an extra tip and we now have 12 (3 x 2 x 2) combinations. It's a very effective way to experiment and develop with rod actions. Now if we try casting two different line weights over these twelve tapers, there are no less than 24 different options to choose. It can all get beyond being meaningful at a certain point! Still, from a rod *maker's* point of view, learning how changing a taper in a part of the rod translates into rod action, is valuable. And from a rod *user's* point of view it gives a range of rod actions to try – you may not care how it was developed, but if you pick it up and like it, it's a good rod!

Back to the FA6345...

Of course, the aim of all of this is to come up with a rod that suits your fishing methods, locations and natural style. It's as simple as that. Often, anglers tend to like rods that fit in with their personalities. An energetic, intense, assertive person is often best served by a fast responding, tight action rod which responds to an active casting



Bush Creek closeup

... an ideal rod for fishing tight, overgrown ... bush creeks...

stroke. A more laidback personality usually fits better with a longer, deeper-loading rod action.

I knew the FA6345 was a very functional taper, and was close to the ideal rod for me. I knew Ray liked it too of course, but I sought his input on elements to change and what he would be interested in seeing in his ideal rod. The search, I suppose, is for a 'Thought Rod', as suggested by legendary maker Tom Morgan – a rod that you are so in sync with, that it seems to respond to your thoughts and works intuitively for you. Is this possible? Well yes, I think so. But you're also dreaming if you think you can pick such a rod without learning how to cast properly, and without spending a fair amount of time casting and fishing with a range of rods.

The Monaro 45

Starting with my Partridge FA6345, I stretched it out 3 inches, from 6'3" to 6'6", to give it a little more long distance lift for re-presenting to cruising fish in large, lily-pad fringed pools. Extra length has the effect of deepening the action a bit, so the butt was thickened a little to retain a tight, positive feel. The tip was lightened somewhat at the top to allow it to flick a leader quickly at close range. I then made a three-piece version, initially just to make it easier to travel with, though the change in ferrule weight distribution did help load the rod up a bit for short range casting. The two piece original takes a size 13 (13/64th of an inch) ferrule, while the three piece uses a size 10 and 15 (both truncated style to minimize extra weight).

After some other minor changes and adding a rapid dry fly swelled butt, the Monaro 45 as I currently make it was born. The

name was partly in honour of Ray and the way he fished this style of rod on the large, educated Monaro fish during his trips to the region from South Australia, and partly because I moved to live here myself! I've been proud to have Ray use one of my early Monaro 45's since 2004. He tells me that it's caught between 2,000 and 3,000 trout! It's had a couple of repairs along the way, but it's still going strong. This is also testimony to the resilience of bamboo rods if properly cared for, and fished hard but with respect.

The Monaro 45 has a very fast feel for bamboo and it appeals to many graphite rod users who have difficulty transitioning to the more traditional, slower action bamboo rods. It can be fished with a 4 weight line, loads up nicely with a 5 (how most people fish it) and it will also handle a 6 weight. While it has a feel of its own, it retains the essence of, and a connection to, the FA6345. The short length and powerful butt section make it a very effective tool for playing large fish in confined spaces. Subsequently, I've further stretched it out to make a slightly easier loading 6'9" version. This is a very versatile rod too, as well as being a little more accommodating for more relaxed casting styles.

The Monaro 45 is one of the two rods I fish a lot, and if I had to choose only one rod for all my fishing this would probably be it. For my own style however it is maybe a little too tight in action. I wanted something with a tad more spring and close in, leader-only casting.

The Bush Creek

I was really happy with the Monaro 45, and it was proving popular with quite a few other people too. However for my own style and



The thin butt on the Bush Creek (left) contrasts with the heavy swelled butt on the Monaro 45 (right).

personality (which I'd hesitate to call lazy!), I wanted a rod that was a little slower in pace, but which would respond to a reasonably active casting stroke when asked.

Starting now with the three piece 6'6" Monaro 45, I modified the taper while keeping the same ferrule sizes (10 and 15). Lightening the tip and midsection gave it a little more inherent flex for rolling out a long leader alone. Not too much flex though; too light a tip collapses under load, causing bounce and line wobble. I then took

nearly all the taper out low down, creating an almost level 'parabolic' butt. This holds up firmly throughout the whole casting range, but provides a little low down 'swing' as my longtime friend and guide Paul Bourne calls it. It's barely perceptible in a short rod like this, but it gives that parabolic kick which can shoot well with little line out of the guides.

Overall the Bush Creek has quite a different feel to either the FA6345 or the Monaro 45, with maybe just a hint of its parentage. In some ways, it is getting closer to the legendary Paul Young 6'3" 4 weight Midge than either of these, though it has a little more cane most of the way (basically it's a ferrule size up on the Midge). This goes back to what I was saying earlier – if you change things a fair bit, you'll eventually arrive at another well-known taper.

This is an ideal rod for fishing tight, overgrown, well...bush creeks! This is the rod I fish most on the small streams of the Snowy Mountains. It's a pleasure to use on typical creek fish, but with a low rod angle it has also stopped some very large browns in quick time, both on the Snowy/Monaro and in New Zealand as well.

Where to from here?

The weight and flexing properties of bamboo in these short lengths seems to sync up naturally with the speed of many fly casting strokes and styles, which is good news for both anglers and rod makers.

If you haven't cast or fished with a short bamboo rod before, I recommend getting your hands on one and giving it a try. For me, they have several advantages by virtue of their manageable length. Learning to deal with the slightly lesser reach is a challenge that is part of the fun; and learning new casts, mends and other skills is satisfying in itself.

Yes, it is definitely possible to make a bad short rod. Nevertheless, there are a huge range of tapers and configurations that result in excellent casting and fishing rods to suit many tastes and styles. As mentioned earlier, I can't state strongly enough the case to start with faithful reproductions of classic, proven rods to build your understanding and knowledge base. There are plenty of classics to choose from – the Paul Young Midge of course, and shorter rods from Dickerson, Gillum, Leonard and Powell, as well as Sharpes, Farlows and others.

By the way, when it comes to design and tweaking, I'm cautious about recommending some of the software that is around to assist with this. At the very least I wouldn't take the results as gospel. I have cast some real dogs supposedly designed by software, and some gems that don't conform to what the software says should be a good rod. Would you want a violin made by an experienced craftsman, or a dude in front of a keyboard?

I take great comfort in the fact that there are many tapers from the last 50 years which I would be happy to fish on streams for the rest of my life. Still, there is plenty of room for experimentation and expression, even if much of it leads back to something from the 1940s – when sex was dirty, the air was clean, and the trout were the same as they are today.

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