

across the river by the strong wind and become snagged on the top of a big rock at the head of the pool.

So I crossed over at the Weir bridge and went down-river to the pool.

Walking out carefully on the ledge of rock I reached the fly.

The gent had picked up the rod on his side of the river and I threw the cast about 1 yd. on to the water.

Before I could turn to step back, there was a shout.

The rod was bending and the reel singing. I must have practically dropped the fly into the fish's mouth.

I scrambled back on to the bank, ran all the way back to the Weir, crossed over, and then raced down-stream.

By now, three more anglers and other people were watching the fight.

Lord L— had thrown his rod down, likewise the other two anglers, and three stood there, each with a gaff.

## Rod Finish and the Elimination of Cracked Whippings

By T. C. IVENS

The English split cane rod is probably the most beautifully finished rod in the world, but for all that its finish falls seriously short in one respect: whippings over ferrule serrations and, frequently at rings too, are cracked almost as soon as the rod begins its useful life.

As I see it, this cracking results from the desire for maximum lustre and beauty of colour from the tying silks. The maker is not to blame for he has to supply what the angling public demands and he knows that whether it improves the wearing qualities of whippings or not any process which results in loss of silky sheen will make it harder to sell his rods.

So far as rings are concerned, whippings exist only as fastenings, but ferrule whippings serve a different purpose. The cement between timber and metal should, of course, provide all the security necessary and this is certainly so if the cement is of a plastic nature; that is to say a cement which never becomes brittle (rubber compounds, latex and so on are the most extreme examples of flexible jointings). It is probable that ferrule serrations were primarily intended mechanically to lock the ferrule to the joint by allowing close contact between timber and metal at the point where the built-up and rounded timber tapers to its normal hexagonal section, i.e.; between AI and B in the diagram below.

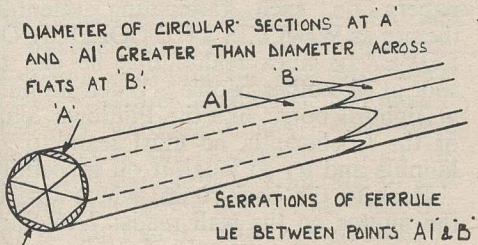


DIAGRAM 1

Well, I also had my gaff, being the riverkeeper, and we certainly looked a well-armed squad.

The fish put up a splendid fight for about fifteen minutes and then came by close under the bank.

All three gents swung out their gaffs and missed.

I managed to poke my gaff between his lordship's wellingtons into the fish and pulled it through his legs, causing him to sit down suddenly in the water, but there were plenty of hands to the rescue.

It was a fresh-run fish of 20 lb. and it was a creditable performance for an old gent of seventy-six, in a full gale of wind and rain and being told what and what not to do by the excited spectators.

By the way, one of the other gaffs had severed the cast and I was just in time by a split second, otherwise this story would not have been written.

Such a locking device is probably unnecessary, but the serrated ferrule remains because serrations allow of a gradual lessening of the timbers' bending.

A ferrule bends with the rod but to a very much smaller degree—diagrammatically we might exaggerate the bend and show the union of ferrule and timber thus:

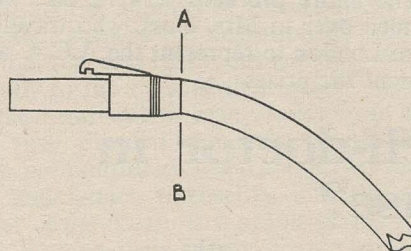


DIAGRAM 2

The line A—B is clearly the most probable position of fracture, and this danger is more pronounced if the cane has its corners removed and is perhaps additionally weakened by being undercut in order to fit the ferrule. Obviously any clear line of demarcation between timber and metal is to be avoided if at all possible and serrated ferrules avoid such a line by providing an area of gradually increasing rigidity between the naked and very flexible timber and the relatively rigid wood totally enclosed by brass tubing. Diagram 3 shows how the curve of the timber merges gradually into the relatively straight ferrule. As in diagram 2, the curves are much exaggerated.

Since that part of the ferrule from C to D is going to bend with the timber within its confines it follows that the whipping too is going to bend. I have not yet

used a new, professionally-finished fly rod whose male ferrule-whippings I could not crack by fair usage within an hour!

The oft-mentioned danger of water getting inside the ferrule and opening up the strips of cane scarcely applies to a modern and well-made rod even when animal glues are used, and cannot apply

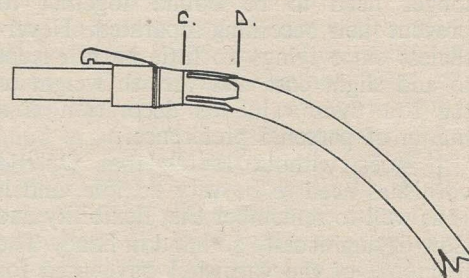


DIAGRAM 3

when resin cements are used to build the timber, but there is danger of the whipping becoming water-logged and rotted and resulting in reduced efficiency of the serrations as a safety factor—quite apart from any unsightliness accruing therefrom.

In order to retain the colour of a whipping silk the maker has to ensure that varnish is excluded from the whipping. This he can do by heavily beeswaxing the silk or by giving a first coat of french polish or cellulose before copal varnish is applied. The whipping therefore exists as a silken tube enclosing the metal serrations, and is itself enclosed by a further tube of varnish. Metal, silk and varnish, not being keyed to one another, tend to move separately in bending and the result is a crack.

It is not claimed that the method of ferrule whipping given below entirely overcomes the tendency to crack; I merely state that it takes me a minimum of one and a half seasons' use to crack such a whipping.

The silk used is of the usual stoutness and is soaked in varnish before whipping begins. Starting at B fairly close to the serrations, the whipping is carried to A and finished off. On the following day, when the varnish is still tacky, a further varnish-soaked silk length is carried over-all from C to D.



DIAGRAM 4

When this second whipping has become tacky the hairs are laid up by rotating the whipping between finger and thumb, and when dry the normal varnishing process is carried out. Whippings done in this way are transparent, and red silks become very dark; I have now decided that since whippings are transparent they might just as well be "invisible," too, so my standard silk is white in colour.

What is true of ferrule whippings is true to a lesser degree of ring whippings. These



also crack, but take rather longer to do so, and whipping with a varnish-soaked silk again provides the remedy.

Intermediate tyings appear to me to serve no useful purpose at all. In these days cane strips are accurately cut and usually fit well both at the centre and surface of the stick; in other words they no longer need to be bound together to prevent their becoming separated. Nevertheless since tyings do little harm except to add slight cost and varnish weight to the rod their value as decoration is a matter of personal preference.

It goes without saying that fly rod varnishes need to be very flexible, and it is as well to remember that flexibility and slow-drying usually go hand in hand. The first coat of the varnish I have used for the last few years takes two weeks to dry. (I do not know the formula for the varnish was given to me, already prepared, by a rod-maker). The whole task of finishing

taking a total of six weeks, and the finish can be marked with the finger-nail twelve months later!

An excellent method of keeping varnish in a flexible condition is to rub down the rod with "Brillo" steel wool (the soapless type) and to apply a coat of raw linseed oil and allow it to remain forty-eight hours before wiping the sections dry. The oil not only tempers varnish but will also soak through any cracked whippings which may exist and will help to preserve the silk. Incidentally this process much reduces varnish flash and I use it now for all my rods.

It may be thought that the treatments I have mentioned ruin the appearance of a rod, but the truth is that despite their unorthodoxy, transparent and almost invisible whippings and non-flash finish have a character and beauty of their own. That the finish is efficient makes it in my opinion infinitely to be preferred.