

Trout Tackle

Trout Rods

The first trout rods of which we have record were long and of very slow action. Dame Juliana Berners (*see HISTORY*), recommended that the butt be of willow, hazel or aspen, the middle section of green hazel and the upper section of blackthorn, crabtree, medlar or juniper, the parts being attached and tapered. These rods were of such considerable length—up to eighteen feet—because casting as we know it was not done in those days, the fly being presented only by a short line attached to the end of the long rod.

From the recommendations of Juliana Berners of various woods, solely or combined, rod makers gradually moved towards bamboo. From such reports as I have been able to locate, Samuel Phillipi of Easton, Pennsylvania, was reputed to have been the first rod maker to produce a bamboo rod. In 1845 he created one of which the tip and second joints were made of three splits of bamboo and the butt of ash. The first completely split-bamboo fly rod seems to have been made by E.A. Green of Newark, New Jersey, in 1860. All three joints of this rod were made of four split sections.

Apparently the first split-bamboo rods for the trade were made by Charles E. Murphy of Newark, New Jersey, in 1863. These were also four-section rods and were sold through Andrew Clerk & Company of New York City, by L.H. Abbey, later of the firm of Abbey and Inbrie, organized in 1867. In 1870, Hiram L. Leonard of Bangor, Maine, put the first six-section split-bamboo fly rods on the market; and the first cork grips appeared on fly rods in 1888.





The trout rod was developed in America to suit the variety of our waters and the importance of casting skill to native anglers. *Above*, the author makes a long throw to the far bank of the Clark's Fork in Montana; *right*, an angler casts a short line with a small-stream rod on New York's Schoharie Creek.

On the North American fishing scene, several rod manufacturers of the early 1900s produced outstanding split-cane fly rods: The Orvis Company, of Manchester, Vermont; the Paul Young Company, first of Detroit, now of Traverse City, Michigan; and the Leonard Company, whose rods were made by William Mills & Sons, of New York.

Tubular steel was also used and Hardy of London made (and still does) a cane rod with a steel center. In the United States, Everett Horton made a telescopic steel rod that he could stick down his pants



leg when he went fishing on Sunday so he would not be discovered by those who disapproved of the sport on the Sabbath.

The first glass rods began to appear just as we turned the corner into the 1950s—only a short time ago as fishing years go. To date it has been my experience that no glass rod, no matter how fine in many ways, can quite match the smooth action of a really good bamboo rod. But it is also my belief that, in time, glass will entirely take over from bamboo, both because of cost and because of the increasingly fine glass rods now being produced by American fishing tackle manufacturers. Today's glass rods are lighter than they used to be (and lighter than corresponding cane), more delicate, and much more has been learned about tapering the glass stick to get the action where you want it, be it in the butt, middle section or tip.

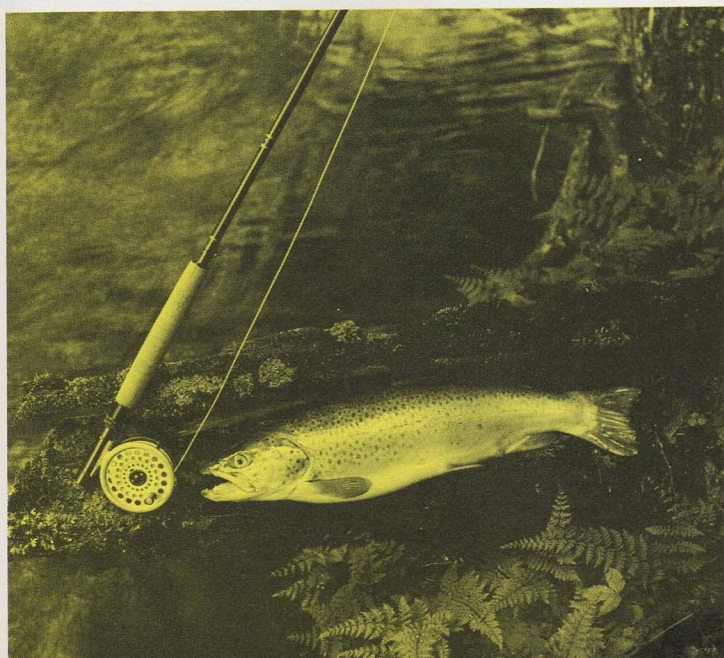
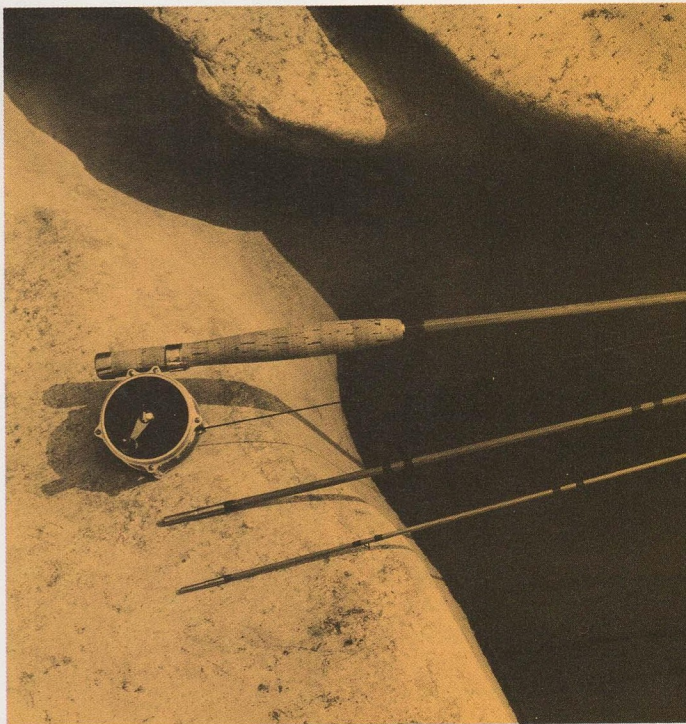
The modern trout rod is also much shorter than long ago. Undoubtedly the very long rods originally employed by English trouters (and still in use on many English and European streams) came about because the anglers fished with short lines; and they fished salmon and trout with the same rods. Many of the salmon rivers were either heavy by nature or were in spate when the angler fished them, and therefore were not wadable. The long rod was needed to put the fly out where he wanted it, from his position on the bank, and always with the wind in back of him. These early anglers fished always with the wind behind them, to get the line out. The development of heavier lines brought a corresponding development in the technique of casting. Trout rods became shorter because of the greater ease of handling. The very long stick continued to have its place, for fishing some of the very large, heavy-flowing rivers in Norway for European sea trout and for trout in lakes. But trout fishermen have increasingly gone to shorter rods.

The trout rod has been developed to its greatest variety in North America, where the pleasure of executing a skillful cast holds almost as much importance as does the catching of the fish. Accordingly, the rod has been adjusted to be the most capable of casting in the circumstances in which we fish. An angler perfectly equipped to fish for all species of trout dealt with in this book would need a minimum of six rods: a midge for the smaller streams, a 7- or 7½-foot stick for slightly larger brooks and creeks, an 8-foot rod for wet and dry flies and nymphs on medium rivers, and 8½-footer for the same waters when using a bucktail or streamer, a 9-footer for really large streams and lakes, and a 9½-footer for some of the big steelhead rivers.

The choice of a rod is often a difficult one for the novice trouter, and indeed, even for experienced anglers, because of the variation of action in rods of the same weight and length, as produced by different manufacturers. This, plus the fact that far too much emphasis has been put on a rod style suitable for tournament casting, as compared to practical fishing.

The tournament casting rod, made to throw a heavy line a long distance, is just the antithesis of what a good trout rod should be. You can adjust to some of the mechanics of this powerhouse through your leader and tippet, but not enough to take care of the effect of dropping a too-heavy line on the surface. A heavy line is bound to create some disturbance, and thus scare the fish. I have seen fishermen using a 9½-foot stiff-action rod with the heavy WF-11-F line that it demanded, and trying to fish a stream only 60 feet wide. They have not caught

Eight-foot bamboo fly rod, made by H.L. Leonard Rod Company. Hiram L. Leonard, founder of the firm, built the first six-section bamboo rods in 1870.



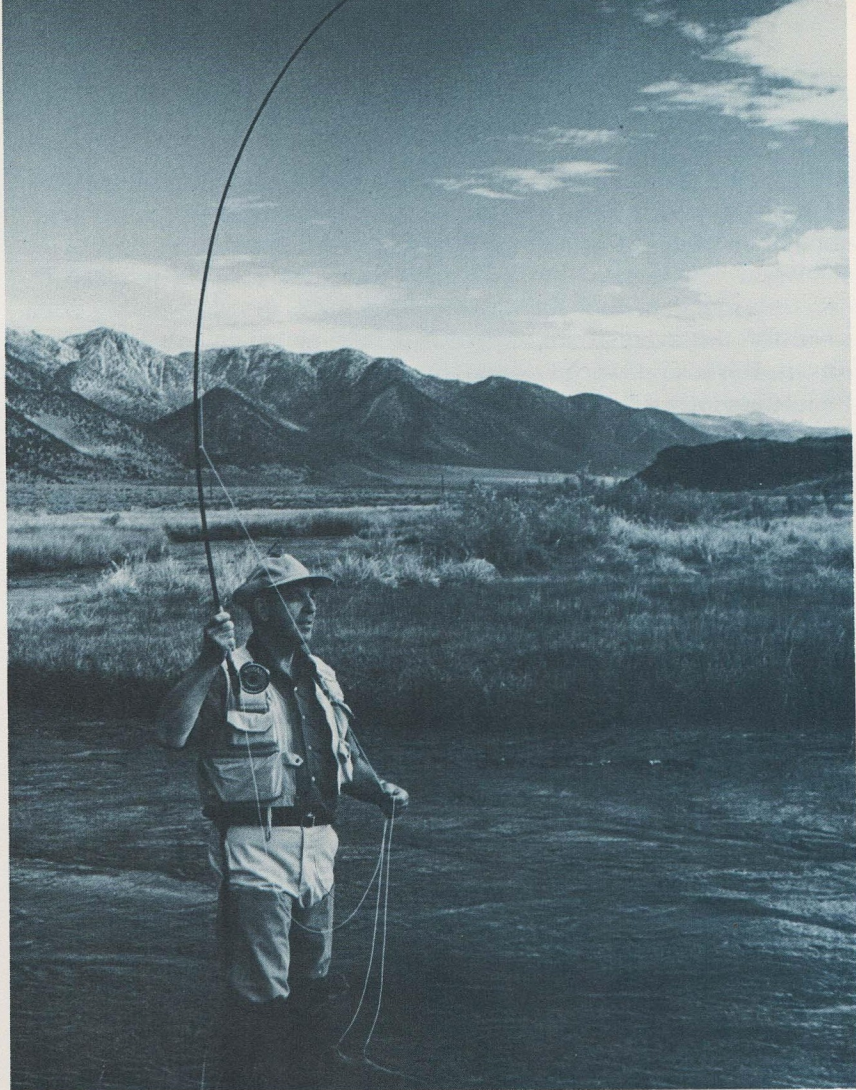
Glass fly rods, which appeared in the early 1950s, are favored by many anglers for their economy and lightness. This is a Scientific Anglers System 5 outfit—matching rod, reel and line.

many fish that way. And these big, powerful rods do not give the feel and fun to a caster, nor the accuracy, that a smaller, lighter outfit does.

When you go to buy your rod you may find two excellent rods of equivalent length and weight, each marked by its manufacturer for a recommended line. One may carry the recommendation for a WF-6-F while the other suggests a DT-4-F. How do you make your choice? You must make it according to how you plan to use the rod. In the above instance, WF-6-F, according to standards established by the American Fishing Tackle Manufacturers' Association, means a weight-forward line whose basic weight in grains meets the 6 category, and which floats. Weight forward indicates that when you cast, the weight of your line, the big part, which causes the most commotion, is going to be out near your leader. Conversely, the DT-4-F means a double-taper line, with a basic weight of 4, which floats. But the heavy part is in the middle, that is, it tapers from light to heavy and back to light. So that when you cast, you have lighter line up front, near the fish, then the heavy part, far enough forward to help you to cast, then more light running line to follow.

While nothing in trout tackle is quite this simple, it could be boiled down to the following: You could use the first line, with its heavy belly, where you must cast a fairly long distance and therefore need that weight; or where you will cast a large, wind-resistant fly such as a spider, big dry fly, bucktail or streamer. You would use the lighter outfit where you need greater delicacy of casting, in the way the line hits the water, and where you will use small flies. With a big, stout rod and a heavy line you lose the finesse of casting and the delicacy of presentation which are an intrinsic part of fly fishing. Therefore, in making a choice of a trout rod, whether it is glass or bamboo, I always urge the angler to look for a rod that is not too stiff, and this is doubly important in rods which will be used on small streams. I have seen 7½-foot rods which are capable of throwing a #8 or even a #9 line. But this will not add to the trouterman's fishing success. Even on an 8½-foot rod, the trout fisherman should never use heavier than a #7 line. It is difficult to be accurate when the line is too heavy, and as already mentioned, the sight and sound of the line falling on the surface scares the fish. On the other hand, a too-light line on a stiff, heavy rod is equally difficult to throw. The rod needs more weight to bring out the action.

The "midge" or "flea" rods, as they are often called, measuring only 6 to 6½ feet in length, are great fun to use if they are properly lined, and even with the light line they require it is possible to cast



For the angler limited to one rod, the eight-footer is the best choice. Here rodmaker Russ Peak, of Pasadena, Calif., casts with his Golden Zenith in the Owens River.

far enough, 60 or 70 feet, for such streams as the Letort in Pennsylvania and the spring creeks of the Rocky Mountain area. Small mountain streams are also best fished with the short rod because of the woods and brush that overhang them.

On bigger streams, the eight-footer is better. In fact, if I were limited to only one rod for all my trout fishing, I would choose an eight-foot stick. It is entirely usable on the smaller streams just mentioned, and is the ideal size for fishing larger streams with dry flies, wet flies, nymphs, and even small streamers and bucktails tied on a number 10

or 12 hook. You can get an even bigger fly out but it takes some effort. I never like to force a rod, not because it will hurt it, but because it spoils the pleasure of casting. You lose the feel of the outfit.

When you want to go to bigger flies, go to a bigger rod, too. An $8\frac{1}{2}$ -foot rod is perfect for throwing big, fluffy dry flies on big water, and for the average streamer or bucktail or heavy nymph used for trout. It is also powerful enough to get out into the wind that you often encounter when fishing.

The still larger trout rods are necessary mostly when using a sinking line, because of the added weight of the line and the distance you must cast, plus the weight of some of the big streamers and bucktails used on sinking lines. In such fishing, delicacy of delivery is not as important as in shallower and probably more placid water, and these powerhouses have plenty of backbone to put the line out, then handle it in the water.