

2-8-07 "A Well-Equipped Fly Fisher Banks on Bamboo"

Like most things, the sport of fly fishing has witnessed a massive technological transformation in the past few decades. Once a sport deeply rooted into the lore and legend of a few devoted souls, the fairly recent explosion in popularity of this unique pastime has created a demand for more efficient, more comfortable and more forgiving equipment.

Present day anglers find themselves adorned in Gore-Tex waders and wind proof fleece. Waterproof fly boxes are tucked neatly in custom fit pockets on fly vests with built in hydration systems. Flies constructed of foam, rubber, mylar tinsel and beads have become so realistic they almost fly away on their own. Long gone are the days of tweed, the trusty flask and the Leadwing Coachman.

Are we more comfortable on the water than those who ventured before us? Are we better able to enjoy foul weather when it enters the picture? Absolutely. When it comes to comfort and function with modern day fishing apparel and equipment there is no turning back.

Of course the materials used to build fly rods over the years have also evolved to fit modern times as well. Now, after hooking oneself to a computerized casting analysis machine, an angler can be fitted to a lightweight, fast action casting tool that can improve casting distance and accuracy within minutes.

Indeed, multi piece high modulus graphite rods adorned with titanium components and whatever else are a perfect match to the modern angler. Not only are these wands fast and powerful, in a sense they provide immediate satisfaction. On top of that, if it breaks, most manufacturers offer a lifetime warranty and free replacement of the broken part. Easy, quick, and disposable - is it a perfect fit? Perhaps.

Unfortunately, where technology and human wizardry have managed to produce these supernatural casting tools, something has been lost in the process. For one, a top quality fly rod is not the treasured item that it once was. Though I'm dating myself, there was a time when a good rod was a possibly a lifetime purchase - with no insurance policy backing up a mishap, we took great care to keep these rods out of harms way. We valued these tools, fished with them for years and developed a bond that a warranty couldn't replace.

As one with a slight addiction to fishing equipment, I'll readily admit that I'm a fan of modern fly rods and the things they'll allow me to accomplish under most any weather conditions. And as a mediocre caster at best, I might be lost without the forgiving nature of the newest equipment. Even still, as one with an interest in fly fishing history and the fundamentals of its technique, I can't help but to admire certain aspects of the sport that have all but disappeared.

Though a sad statement on the inner workings of my brain, I've given this subject quite a bit of thought over the years and time and time again, the classic bamboo rod has entered the picture. As a means of exploring the roots of fly fishing and appreciating the true art of rod building and casting technique, I've longed to add a bit of cane to the collection of other odds and ends.

Unfortunately, unable or unwilling to spend several thousand bucks on a rod I'd be afraid to use, I've merely speculated on what the experience would represent. Often, I've dismissed the concept of bamboo rods as impractical while at other times I've considered the idea a refreshing change of pace. In many ways, a slow action rod, one that requires a

delicate touch as well as patience and timing to cast would capture the true essence of the sport. The opportunity to slow down and focus could do me a lot of good.

It was just last year that I met Roger, a master bamboo rod builder from Georgia. Much like me tying bonefish and tarpon flies in the middle of Montana, he too was stuck creating equipment that had little use in his home town. Last week, a package arrived with the rod I'd desperately wanted to try for far too long. An eight foot five weight work of art, polished and clean, waiting for a test run.

More than likely, those first attempts won't be pretty, I'll likely disgrace Roger's work as I beat the water to a good froth. Still, I look forward to a chance to step back in time and to prove to myself that in spite of all the technical progress we've made with rods, there isn't a whole lot that has really changed at all. Don't worry, I won't be wearing tweed.