

# The Loop

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*The Federation of Fly Fishers' Journal for Certified Fly Casting Instructors*

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S P E C I A L S P E I S S U E

## **SPEY CASTING ~ MYTHS, BENEFITS & DIFFERENCES**

*by Paul Dolbec*

THIS IS A FIRST in a series of articles highlighting the enjoyment of using and teaching others to use a Spey rod. For the purposes of this discussion, the term "Spey Casting" will refer specifically to the use of a two-handed rod for single or double Spey Casts and associated techniques. Let's look first at dispelling a series of Spey-related myths:

MYTH #1: *I can make an overhead cast with a two-handed rod and am now Spey Casting.* A two-handed rod can be cast in an overhead or in a Spey fashion. However, in a Spey Cast the

line is not lifted overhead behind you, but rather is moved in a Roll-Casting fashion in front of you.

MYTH #2: *Spey rods are too heavy to use all day.* Regardless of rod size, if the line and rod are mismatched, you'll wind up working too hard. Some rods are physically heavier than others, so find a rod that suits you, but remember that a Spey rod doesn't have to be 18 feet long to work properly. I am less fatigued after using a Spey rod all day than I am using a single-handed rod casting similar flies and lines into similar situations:

MYTH #3: *You have to be big and strong to Spey Cast.* Fly size and line type being equal, it requires less effort to Spey Cast than to cast in an overhead style. This is a function of rod length and technique.

MYTH #4: *Spey Casting is difficult to learn.* Letting go of the one-armed orientation is a difficult thing for some people because of the "learning" they have engrained in their minds so strong. But like your overhead cast (single or two-handed), you can breakdown the Spey Cast into four parts and attribute the same load and unload characteristics of the overhead cast. What I tend to add then is technique and a greater use of my legs to make it easier and less tiring.

MYTH #5: *Spey Casting spooks the fish.* A poor cast and presentation with either a Spey Cast or an overhead-style cast creates the same types of problems. A proper Spey Cast, fished in a progressive manner (covering water), will not disturb a fish.

The primary benefits of using a long, Spey-style rod are the ability to cover a lot of water easily, having more control over the fly, and in fighting a fish. We will cover these in greater detail in future articles. The primary difference in Spey Casting versus overhead casting lies in the ability to cover the same amount of water with the same control without requiring much back casting room. This opens up entirely new possibilities for an angler.

If you extend this rationale to single-handed rods and trout fishing, you can see how getting a fly into proper position in

areas with little backcast room no longer poses a problem. If you think of Spey Casting as a tool and don't get hung up on the prevailing myths, you will not only become a better fly fisher, but gain ability as a teacher. And don't feel limited to using Spey Casting only for freshwater salmonids. Spey Casting is a truly versatile technique that can be used almost anywhere.

The articles to follow will focus on teaching your students to Spey Cast. Remember one thing, however: Become a true practitioner of Spey Casting before trying to teach the art.

*Paul Dolbec spent nine years as an instructor and coordinator in L.L. Bean's fly fishing and fly tying schools. A native of New England, Paul enjoys trout and bass fishing, but his first love is fishing for Atlantic Salmon.*

## GOOD FORM (THE ROLL CAST)

by Joe Shedlock

IT IS A VISUAL TREAT to watch an accomplished fly caster at work. The fluid shape and movement of the fly line is the result of subtle and precisely disciplined movements (i.e. "good form"). Moving a double-handed rod through the compound elliptical paths of Spey Casting requires such good form.

Good form in Spey Casting is best learned and practiced through the Roll Cast. This simple and fundamental cast is the foundation for all subsequent Spey Casts. The basic Roll

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Casting stroke provides students with a paradigm for reaching themselves good Spey Casting form, as well as understanding how to move the rod through the canted elliptical path required to successfully form the large loop behind the caster. Correctly forming this loop is critical to Roll and Spey Casts.

Foot placement is the foundation for good form in Spey Casting. It facilitates balance, body weight transfer and body rotation at the hips. For casts off the right shoulder, (reverse positions for left shoulder) have the student begin by positioning their feet shoulder width apart with the right foot slightly forward, taking most of the body weight and pointing directly at the target. The left foot points outward approximately 45 degrees.

The rod should be gripped as if swinging a double-handed axe, with the thumbs on top for applying power. The stroke should be begun with the rod tip low to the surface, hands below the waistline. Next, have the student move the rod tip about 30 degrees to the right and keep it tilted throughout the casting stroke. Without bending the wrists the rod tip is LIFTED to about 45 degrees. The hands are now above the waist. With the student's focus on the reel, have him/her SLOWLY move it back toward his/her shoulder, visualizing the lower limb of an elliptical path. The line follows safely to the right of the student. As the student's lower hand reaches his/her right shoulder, the reel should be SMOOTHLY accelerated up and around the radius of the ellipse. As the reel passes eye level, the

rod should get stroked straight forward toward the target, with a CRISP stop made by flicking BOTH WRISTS (have the student visualize burying an axe blade deeply into a tree). Follow through is facilitated by lowering the rod tip as the loop-unrolls to the target. Most good Spey casters keep their body upright with minimal movement during the cast. Rolling or dipping the shoulder can inhibit power and accuracy.

Encourage the student to practice in front of a reflective surface, (mirrors indoors, large glass surfaces outdoors). The image on the reflective surface will immediately reveal any awkward or handicapping motions.

*Joe Shedlock is a Master Certified Instructor with a prior background as a Pacific salmon/steelhead biologist. His last Loop article was in the Summer 1998 issue.*

## FLICK OF THE TIP

by Al Buhr

THE "FLICK OF THE TIP" is a casting exercise that teaches the student how to stop a two-handed rod. First used by Carol Green and Gladys Gray in teaching single-handed casting, it has been adapted to Spey Casting and provides amazing results. Many of the frustrations of the two-handed rod can be attributed to poor or faulty stops. Large, open loops, low line speed,

excessive line noise, poor line rollout, excessive pushing or working the rod with the upper hand can all be quickly corrected or avoided by learning how to "stop" the rod properly. The Flick of the Tip has the student focus only on the stop—how it is done and how it should feel.

Have the student begin with 60-70 feet of line. With the line laid out in front, the student should slowly bring the rod back at 20-30 degrees off of vertical (on the casting arm side). When the rod reaches about two o'clock, it should then be circled or rotated up to the vertical position and the forward movement begun. Note that this change of direction is done in one fluid motion. As the rod comes forward, the student should slowly accelerate it. When the rod reaches the 12 o'clock position, have the student pull the lower handle in, towards his or her waist and stop. This causes the rod tip to flick over. The rod, now at 11 o'clock, will give a recoil kick to the student, which is a sign of a proper stop. The ideal loop is a 12-inch wedge shape, parallel to the ground and as high as the rod tip. The student should not make a full cast, but should focus on forming a tight loop using the lower hand, forcing the stop to be crisp, whether the line rolls completely out or not.

After instructing the basics of this exercise to the student, step aside and allow the student some time alone. Nearly always, after a few minutes of flicking the tip, the student's urge to cast will take over and he/she will begin making full casts.

Quietly allow the student to cast for a short time, then have the student start the exercise over, focusing on the Flick of the Tip.

*Al Buhr is a member of the Board of Governors and lives in Salem, Oregon. His article, "A Grass Leader for Rolls and Speys," appeared in the Summer 1998 issue of The Loop.*

## A FIVE-COUNT CADENCE

by Floyd Dean

I LIKE TO THINK of Spey Casting as two-handed fly casting made with a series of controlled loops (sometimes referred to as "D" loops). It is unlike a conventional roll cast because in a conventional roll cast there is too much line making contact with the water for a Spey Cast. So the two-handed fly cast requires that you limit the contact of the line on the water to just the fly, the leader, and if anything, a very small portion of the fly line. In teaching/learning the Single Spey Cast, I have found the following five-count cadence very helpful: LIFT, SWEEP, ANCHOR, DRIFT, STROKE. There should be a very slight hesitation before each step. This coaching cadence helps students understand the timing of the cast.

The LIFT is to clear most of the fly line from the surface of the water—a very smooth semi-vertical lift upward and

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slightly to the right for right-handers. The SWEEP starts with a slightly downward, then parallel motion in relation to the water. The tip of the rod should move 4-8 feet or more depending upon the length of the line and rod. As you start to raise the rod into the back cast position, keeping the line in front of you and to the right, the fly and the leader will kiss the surface of the water. That's the ANCHOR point. The fly will be 10-30 feet away from you. At this point, the DRIFT occurs. As you lift the rod into position for the forward stroke, (the rod must lift to maintain a rising loop just prior to the drift) you will have a rising loop slightly behind you; it should not touch the water. The drift will move the rod far enough behind you to maintain a proper casting arc (between one o'clock and two o'clock, not three). At this point you STROKE forward. This should be a smoothly accelerating stroke to a positive stop.

There is no need to overpower the cast. The rod tip should stop between 11 o'clock or 10 o'clock, not nine. There is no positive stop in the backcast portion of the Spey Cast; rather there is only slight hesitation between each word of the five-count cadence cadence as you change direction.

*Floyd Dean is a Master Certified Instructor from Sausalito, California. A member of the Golden Gate Angling and Casting Club, he is also a regular participant in the American Casting Association tournaments in the U.S.A. and Canada.*

## STATE OF THE LOOP

by The Editor

WE HAVE SPEY! A full issue of it. In addition to what you see here, we have at least one full Spey-oriented series already planned (thanks to Paul Dolbec), with other possibilities forthcoming. It looks like 1999 could be a very good year for those interested in the long rods. Stay tuned!

*A special thanks to those who rose to the occasion and cast your Spey articles into The Loop's literary pool (and to any and all who will be submitting articles in the future, please read the guidelines under the Loop Staff section).*

## COMING EVENTS

*Pre-Registration is REQUIRED!*

Contact Evelyn Taylor at (406) 585-7592

**SAN MATEO, CALIFORNIA** - February 4 & 5; International Sportmen's Expo; Basic & Masters.

**SEATTLE, WASHINGTON** - February 11 & 12; International Sportmen's Expo; Basic & Masters; Must preregister by February 1.

**DENVER, COLORADO** - February 26 & 27; International Sportmen's Expo; Basic & Masters; Must preregister by February 17.

**CHARLOTTE, NORTH CAROLINA** - February 27 & 28; The Fly Fishing Show; Basic & Masters; Must preregister by February 21.

**SALT LAKE CITY, UTAH** - March 5 & 6; International Sportmen's Expo; Basic & Masters; Must preregister by February 21.

**LONG BEACH, CALIFORNIA** - March 6; SWC Conclave/Fred Hall Show; Basic with Allan & Barbara Rohrer.

**CALGARY, ALBERTA, CANADA** - April 17; Basic with Peter Wacko & Dan Bell; contact Peter Wacko (403) 271-9330.

**PENSACOLA, FLORIDA** - May 15; South Eastern Council Conclave; Basic with Tom Jindra.

**GATLINBURG, TENNESSEE** - August 4 & 6; International Fly Fishing Show & Conclave; Basic & Masters.

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WE WELCOME YOUR SUBMISSIONS via typewriter, FAX, disk, or e-mail. Please attach a *short* instructor bio (1-3 sentences), including your location and Certification level. Please indicate whether or not you are willing to allow for your submission's possible re-publication on the Program's Website. Any illustrations should be in black ink on white paper, or if submitted digitally, in TIFF format at 300dpi (if possible). *The Loop* reserves the right to accept or decline any submission for any reason, and to edit any submission as it sees fit. All submissions should be sent to the National Office:

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## THE LOOP LIBRARY

*by Mike Maxwell*

*Submitted by Denise Maxwell*

*Introduction by The Editor*

FLY CASTING INSTRUCTORS need a good reference library. This section of *The Loop* features snippets of casting knowledge from books and articles by masters of the art.

This issue's Library column comes from one of North America's most well-know Spey specialists, Mike Maxwell. Here Mike is examining what he considers the three most

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important stages of fishing in the Spey realm, as well as an additional section on casting as it relates to real-world situations. The original article from which this excerpt is taken first appeared in *B.C. Sportfishing*. Thanks, Mike, for allowing *The Loop* to re-print your work. And thanks, Denise, for the submission of this piece and accompanying materials.

**ONE - Casting Control:** The first requirement is the ability to take the line from downstream and place it out on the river to any angle selected without making a backcast. This could vary from a downstream dry fly to an upstream nymph presentation.

**TWO - Line and Fly Control:** Probably the most important requirement is to control or mend the line and present the fly to the fish, so that it mistakes it for its natural food and eats it. Failure to show the fly to the fish correctly is often the cause of disappointment when working on difficult fish.

**THREE - Fish Control:** The final and very important stages of spey fishing is to be able to detect the slightest touch of an interested fish—to control it when hooked and finally land it quickly and efficiently to assist in its survival on release. It should be pointed out at this time that not all double-handers are suitable for the three important stages of spey fishing.

**EFFECTIVE CONTROLLABLE RANGE:** There is one more extremely important item in successful spey fishing that must be thoroughly understood and that is the effective controllable range of your casting.

This is the distance from your shortest, to your longest cast over which you can control the line and the fly. Casting beyond your ability to control the fly is very good for the ego, but rarely impresses fish. It has been proved on many occasions that more fish have been hooked at shorter controllable casts than by 'out of sight' extreme distance casting. If you have developed into a compulsive excessive distance caster, get it out of your system and get back to fishing. For example, when demonstrating excessive distance spey casting at my spey fishing school on the Bulkley River, casts of one hundred and twenty feet really impress my students, however my longest controllable cast when fishing is only eighty feet to the fly with the same rod. Remember that successful speyfishers spend more time reading the river—and less time distance casting."

*Mike Maxwell has been Spey Casting for over 50 years. Based in British Columbia, Mike is an author, video-maker, lecturer and teacher of Spey Casting and Spey fishing subjects.*

*Denise Maxwell is a member of the Board of Governors. She teaches on a wide variety of fly casting and fishing topics.*

