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CASTING ACROSS THE HEAD

by Gary A. Borger

CASTING WITH THE ROD TIPPED across the top of the head is a most useful tactic. It allows the fly fisher more latitude of rod movement and line handling capability than simple cross-body casting (done with the rod angled up across the chest). For example, it's quite possible for a right-handed angler to backcast with the rod tipped out to the right and then swing the rod behind and make a forward cast with the rod across the top of the head. This makes a great change-of-direction cast that works equally well with or without shot on the leader. Across-the-head casting is also great when obstructions on the normal casting side make it impossible to cast with the rod on that side. Casting across the head can be done with a double haul and will give you the same distance and control as casting with the rod tipped out to the casting arm side.

There is one sticker in learning to cast across the top of the head, however: It's very easy to accelerate the rod through an arc rather than along a straight line. The reason is rooted firmly in the anatomy of the arm. With the arm raised to hold the rod high across the top of the head, the natural tendency is to make the forward stroke from the elbow. This causes the rod to arc to the right for a right-handed caster (Figure 1).

Such arcing has the same effect as it would if the cast were made with the rod held vertically. Arcing through the acceleration phase is the classic "beginner" cast that results in a huge loop, or no real loop at all.

To practice across-the-head casting correctly, begin by moving your casting hand back and forward directly over the top of your

head—do this pantomime style with no rod. Move your hand straight out to the front as you come forward; with your hand directly over the center of your head it's very easy to see if your arm is arcing to the right. Try to involve your shoulder muscles as much as possible during the stroke. When using the rod, watch the forward loops, they'll tell you instantly if you start to arc.

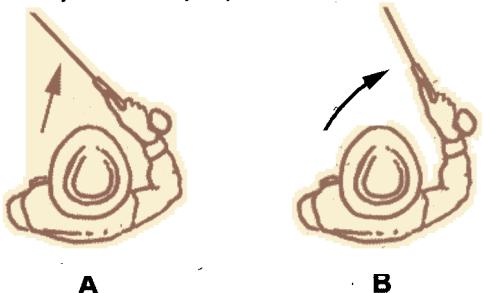


Figure Correct pathway (A) and incorrect (arcing) pathway (B).

Gary A. Borger is a member of the Executive Committee of the Board of Governors. He lives in Wausau, Wisconsin.

THE LINE HAND

by Joe Shedlock

AS INSTRUCTORS, how much attention do we direct to the use of the line hand? From an instructor's perspective, when does the line

hand become important? And, how do we teach a student its use? When we focus attention on the line hand we quickly see that it performs several critical functions in fly casting. When teaching, I'll introduce the use of the line-hand as soon as the student can demonstrate correct rod hand and arm movements (regardless of the student's casting experience). To more thoroughly get across the elements of line hand usage, I employ a series of descriptive terms.

I call the first of these terms "function flow control" or "braking." I'll show the student how the line hand and fingers can be configured to deliver any amount of tension or friction to the fly line during the cast. And I'll explain why this tension is critical for the cast's success. The hand configurations range from a clamped fist, to a series of various thumb and finger positions, to a circle around the line that uses only the tips of the thumb and middle finger. I also show how curling the palm and fingers to form a crescent under the moving line works well, too. I then demonstrate that freeing the line from the line hand, especially at the completion of the forward stroke, relinquishes control, limits accuracy and diminishes the effectiveness of the cast.

Another line-hand term that I use is "symmetrical positioning." During the cast the line hand should mirror the acceleration, abrupt stop, and pause of the rod hand. By instructing how to position and smoothly move the line hand, and by explaining why the motions are essential to the success of the cast, the student can begin to develop a sense of timing while practicing good form.

For teaching the basic casting stroke with a position for the line hand, I've found A.J. McClane's, and later Joan Wulff's, similar descriptions indispensable. McClane recommends positioning hands as in gripping and swinging a double-handed axe (an excell

antomime without the rod). This drill shows the student how the hand is separated from, and parallels the motion of, the rod hand.

When using the rod with line, this technique facilitates another line hand function I've termed "sensitivity." This refers to developing a "feel" for the weight of the line throughout the casting stroke.

From this point, I'll instruct the student on false casting with varying lengths of line, changing casting planes, and how to perform the elliptical casting stroke. At no time does the line hand block the sight line using these hand positions. This same line-hand position applies to teaching the roll cast off both shoulders.

Shooting line. For this lesson I'll demonstrate how, during the pause at the completion of the backcast or forward cast, the line hand maintains perfect position to slip or direct line into the stripping guide. And, I'll emphasize the increasing importance of the correct use of the line hand as the student attempts greater distance. Conversely, I like to teach students how to cast 20 feet or less by using the line hand to execute a stealthy bow and arrow cast.

Hauling is another function of the line hand. A disciplined line hand is absolutely essential for mastering hauling techniques. For this lesson I prefer to teach the single haul on both the backcast and forward cast separately. Again, the basic line hand position easily accommodates the opposing hand motion for the single haul and greatly helps students master the "bouncing" hand movements for the double haul (I use Mel Krieger's pantomiming method as my basis).

Once the student's line hand has been trained to haul smoothly we'll advance to applying the hauling movements and hand functions some specialized applications for fly casting (for example, using the line hand to effectively execute a speed cast).

If necessary, I'll also instruct the use of line hauls for the distance roll cast. And, I'll demonstrate how to blend line hauls into the figure-eight movements for single and double Spey casts using a single-handed rod.

For students desiring to master the double handed rod, McClane's advice is again indispensable as a teaching paradigm. The line hand position and movement is now applied to the lower end of the rod grip. Using only the rod butt section, I'll teach the same basic motion of the hands (swinging the axe) as with a single-handed rod. Working up to a fully-strung rod, we'll progress through roll casts, overhead casts, and the single and double Spey casts (and reverse Spey casts) off both shoulders.

I've found that teaching fly casting students of all levels the basic position, movements, and functions of the line hand, as soon as practical in a learning sequence, will form a solid foundation for incorporating the full range of fly casting skills.

Joe Shedlock is a Master Certified Instructor from Millington, Tennessee.

A GRASS LEADER FOR ROLLS AND SPEYS

by Al Buhr

TO ANSWER THE FRUSTRATIONS of trying to teach roll and Spey casting on grass, I created what I call my "grass leader." Its short "bars" catch on individual blades of grass, simulating the drag resistance of water—a needed element for creating realistic rolls and

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Speys. And since the leader doesn't slither around uncontrollably, it allows the instructor or the student to pause at any point, analyze the cast, and then continue on.

The idea of the leader is simple: A series of blood knots tied approximately three inches apart. Ideally, the stub ends of the blood knots are at alternating 90-degree opposing axes (or as close to 90 degrees as is realistic). When tied correctly, the leader looks like a length of barbed wire. It takes about 40 knots to produce a 12-foot leader, a length that works well for a variety of casts.

The leader material is limp 30-pound test monofilament (Trilene XT Solar, for example). The mono needs to have some weight (thus the large diameter) so that the leader doesn't loft in the air. The limpness factor is required so that the leader drapes amongst the blades of grass, rather than bridging stiffly across the blades.

To make your own grass leader, start with a separate foot-long long piece of mono (with a loop tied in one end if you wish). Then using the mono that's still attached to the spool, tie a 3-turn blood knot to the foot-long section. Try to alternate the tag ends 90-degrees when snuggling up the knot, and make sure you leave those tag ends at least $1\frac{1}{4}$ -inch long. Once that first knot is tied, cut the mono on the spool side of the blood knot approximately four inches from the blood knot. That way, you always have a long handling length with which to form the next knot. Continue making knots every 3-4 inches or so until you've got a leader that's about 11 feet long. At the end of that leader, tie on another foot-long piece of mono. This makes your total leader length 12 feet. If you wish, you can tie a piece of yarn to the end of the leader. Once the leader is completely tied, snip all the tag ends of the blood knots to $1\frac{1}{4}$ to $\frac{3}{8}$ of an inch in length.

Your grass leader is now complete and ready for some roll and Spey action (Figure 2).

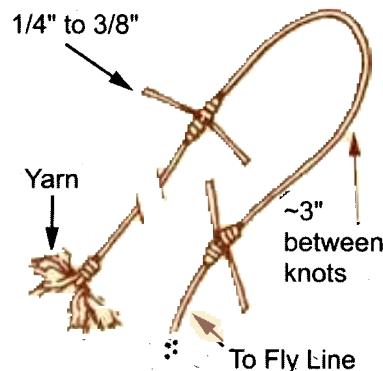


Figure 2. Al Buhr's grass leader.

Al Buhr is a member of the Board of Governor. He lives in Salem, Oregon

(SPEY) CASTING CALL

by The Editor

SPEAKING OF SPEY CASTING, there certainly hasn't been much in *The Loop* recently about that aspect of our sport. Given its growing popularity amongst users of both double- and single-handed rods,

out time this publication had some tips and tricks on teaching Spey C's. As such, I would like to devote some real space to just that topic. I may do it as a supplement in an upcoming *Loop* (perhaps Fall 1998 or Winter 1999) or even as a special "Spey Skills Issue." The scope of the devotion will be primarily up to you, the Certified Instructors, as it's from you that the majority of the content must come. So, if any of you've got a few Spey tips to share (I'm not asking for proprietary teaching secrets), let me have them. We could make a good reference source for those who are just stepping into the Spey realm, or for "old dogs" wanting some "new tricks."

STATE OF THE LOOP

by *The Editor*

AFTER MORPHING through three different versions in as many issues, *The Loop* has at last arrived at a fairly stable form factor. Along the way, I designed a new *Loop* header logo and dug out some of my fly illustrations to add as ambient background filler. My final goal was (and is) to make *The Loop* more appealing from a visual standpoint, as well as continuing to provide useful written content. Even with the cosmetic enhancements and glued construction, the "new" *Loop* is as cost-effective as it was in its previous 11 x 17 folded form.

Beginning with this issue of *The Loop*, each article will be followed by a very brief "casting biography" of the author. This is intended to give other instructors some insight into who is contributing, and where they're coming from. The bios include the con-

tributor's Certified level (e.g. Basic) as well as their residence location (city, state or province, and country). If I personally know more about the contributor, I'll add an extra line or two. If you, as a contributor, want me to know more about you, then you'll need to add the extra line or two (include it with your submission). One caveat: Be conservative—saga-length bios will be edited as I see fit.

You'll also notice something else in this issue: Illustrations! While *The Loop* certainly has had illustrations before, I will be doing what I can with the time I have to make them a regular addition. If I feel that I can illustrate a piece quickly and simply, I'll do it, but I would rather that authors provide their own drawings. If you can't draw, or don't have any friends who do, give me a sketch and I'll see what I can do (time and space providing). I prefer to get black-ink drawings on plain white paper. If you want to go digital and submit a computer-generated (or scanned) work on disk, it should be at 300dpi or better resolution, anti-aliased if necessary, and in TIFF format (if you can). My Power Mac and Photoshop can work wonders, but I'd appreciate it if you'd make it easy on me.

So, that's the general "state of *The Loop*." I do have a few more ideas skulking about (which will be stepping into the light in upcoming issues), but no more titanic changes are on the horizon. Of course, if the Federation would let me delve into four-color....

NEW MASTER INSTRUCTOR

Congratulations to the following new Master Certified Instructor!

Dave Leonhard, Michigan

COMING EVENTS

Pre-Registration is REQUIRED!
Contact Evelyn Taylor at (406) 585-7592

IDAHO FALLS, IDAHO - International Fly Fishing Show and Conclave

August 4 (3-5pm); How to Teach Fly Casting - a panel moderated by Al Kyte. This is your chance to bring questions to the experts on the teaching and learning of fly casting.

August 5 and 7; Basic and Master Certification, respectively.

August 7 (9-11am); Roundtable for Casting Instructors.

GANDER, NEWFOUNDLAND, CANADA - August 15-16; Gander River Outfitters; Basic with Jack Sherrill; contact Dennis Grant (902) 673-2590 (flyfish@instructor.net)

BROOKFIELD, NOVA SCOTIA, CANADA - August 21-22; Atlantic Fly Fishing School; Basic with Jack Sherrill; contact Dennis Grant (902) 673-2590 (flyfish@instructor.net)

HOUSTON, TEXAS - August 29; Shallow Water Fishing Expo.; Basic with Bill Gammel

MOUNTAIN HOME, ARKANSAS October Southern Council
Conclave: Basic with Tom Lindra

SUN VALLEY, IDAHO - October 30; International Festival of Wc Fly Fishers; Basic with Mel Krieger.

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WE WELCOME your teaching tips, tricks, and discussions.
Loop reserves the right to accept or decline any submission for

on, and to edit any submission as it sees fit. All submissions
will be sent to the National Office:

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THE LOOP LIBRARY

*by Eric Taverner
Introduction by The Editor*

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

For this issue's Library column, I've selected a work that comes not from a modern-day master, but rather from Eric Taverner, a master of a bygone era. Taverner was a visionary of many elements of fly casting and presentation, and the following excerpt is taken from his sizeable 1929 work, *Trout Fishing From All Angles*. In this piece, Taverner is discussing backcast timing, as well as the dropping of the backcast (and its usage for more advanced casters). While we have

modernized terms for the actions he describes, Taverner's work is spot-on with current teaching ideas and fishing techniques. So, without further ado, here's a little lesson on casting from 1920's England.

"The faults one naturally looks for in a learner are taking the rod too far back and not waiting [to make a forward cast] until the instant when the line is extended [behind the caster]. It helps a learner to discover the critical instant, if he is told to wait until he feels the weight of the line bending the tip of the rod, before beginning the forward cast. Taking the rod too far back is often due to a hurried lift of the line from the water, so that the rod acquires impetus enough to force its way past the point [where it should be stopped], the line is thrown downwards at the back and in travelling forwards is thrown in an upward direction and falls vertically in a heap or in wide curves at the caster's feet. This trick of casting into the air is very useful to an experienced angler, when he wishes to put a dry fly across a fast current*. It gives the fly a chance of being taken by the trout before the slack line is taken up by the stream which will immediately cause drag, but it is a bad fault in a beginner which must be cured, if he wants to learn how to cast a straight line."

* In today's casting parlance, we would refer to this technique as "puddle casting," "puddle mending," or "slack-line casting"—Ed.