

Nick Taransky – Australia's Man Of Cane

Nick Reygaert

Having grown up in the age of graphite rods, the 6'3" bamboo rod that I cradled felt little more than a flamboyant, varnished chopstick. Like a bachelor holding a newly born baby, I was sure that at any moment a clumsy, ham-fisted movement would break the exquisite object that balanced in my hands. I really didn't want to snap this thing, not on the first trip! It didn't help that the rod's maker, Nick Taransky, was hovering in a paternal fashion, just over my shoulder. Wafting the rod around in the car park I started to warm to its feel.

Nick's laidback manner and humour soon relaxed the situation. Of course he has a certain fatherly pride in his rods, he does spend over 40 hours making each one, but he wants to see them get used. If that means that the odd one breaks, so be it. Well that's what he told me and I'm inclined to believe him.

To give the rod its christening, Nick had chosen one of his favourite spots, a small stream in the Snowy Mountains. The Snowy Mountains are often called 'the roof of Australia', due to the high altitude of the area. It is home to some of the country's most celebrated trout waters. To a large extent, this area is the epicentre for stream fishing in Australia and the culture that has developed from it.

Nick's story is a compelling one. In his previous life he was a public servant and his job took him around the globe. During a stint in America he took a bamboo rod-building course, for little reason other than to build a rod for himself. He was so happy with his first effort that he built another one. Soon after, he started building rods for friends. Word spread and eventually he was building so many rods that he was able to quit his 'real job' and become a full-time rod builder.

Nick is the only full-time bamboo rod-builder in Australia. His business is, however, still a cottage industry and you get the feeling that this is the way Nick would like to keep it. Like most craftsman he has the hands-on and unhurried approach that assures quality. Quantity, on the other hand, seems of little consequence to Nick. If you want a Taransky bamboo rod, you have to be prepared to wait for it.

Of late there has been a boom in the popularity of bamboo rods. In an age of mass manufacturing and synthetics the idea of a handcrafted rod, made with natural fibres, holds much appeal to the romantics amongst us. Indeed the idea appeals to me, on a certain level, but I would never sacrifice rod performance for such an ideal. I had always thought of bamboo as an inferior material, only capable of producing heavy rods with slow, noodle-like performance. I was wrong!

Nick and his contemporaries are producing bamboo rods that are relatively light and have medium to fast actions. Admittedly, these tend to be relatively short rods in the six to eight foot range, but they are perfectly suited to small stream fishing and more than capable of



Nick Taransky setting up one of his split cane midge rods (above) and fishing a small stream in Australia's Snowy River Mountains for brook and brown trout (below).





A brook trout caught on Nick Taransky's split cane masterpiece.



The Thredbo River in Australia's Snowy Mountains.

throwing some tight loops.

In this tiny, overgrown, icy-cold spring creek, the rod came into its own. Capable of loading with very little line out, it was perfect for the close-quarters fishing that is required to fish small waters effectively. In such places roll, flick and bow-and-arrow casts make up the majority of your options. Controlling a nine-foot rod in this situation is a nightmare. Conversely a short rod is in its prime and quite often feels like an extension of your own arm. I was able to flick my little dry fly effortlessly into every shaded corner or overgrown pool.

It was so much fun! Blind fishing a tiny creek presents its own particular set of challenges. Luckily, while they all need some level of application, most are not daunting. If you are stressed or pre-occupied in any way, small stream fishing is the perfect elixir. Within moments all thoughts of the outside world melt into the infinite rhythm of the stream and its seductive dance.

I was so distracted with the joy of using my new rod that thoughts of catching fish had wandered from my mind. I tried a weird, sideways, water-loaded flick cast that happened to land the fly right in the foam-line of a small undercut. Smugness and lightening reflexes rarely go hand in hand; I completely missed the strike as a fish boiled on the fly. My lack of reactions was a boon, the fish attacked the fly for a second time, this time I was alert.

The fight was over very quickly. There is only so much resistance a six inch fish can manage and it flipped and flopped into my outstretched hand. Only then did its deep green hue, yellow dots and white underbelly reveal it to be a brook trout.

Brook trout are one of the prettiest species of salmonid. They are members of the char family and closely related to dolly varden and lake trout, species found in Canada and Alaska. Although not a true trout, their common name is trout due to their very close resemblance. Reams of prose have been written about the brook trout, such is its captivating beauty.

The morning passed quickly as we wound our way slowly upstream. Every bit of attractive water held trout. They were mostly small rainbows but with just enough brook trout to keep things interesting. Patterns seemed inconsequential as our dry flies were hammered with reckless abandon. It was one of the most relaxing days fishing I have had in a while and was made all the more enjoyable by Nick's company.

Editor's note: Nick Rygaert (www.gin-clear.com) is a Johannesburg-born, New Zealand-based producer of fly fishing documentaries who visited Cape Town in December 2007 with his Rise – Fly Fishing Film Festival. I spent a day on the Holsloot with him and asked him to write an article for Piscator. He will be back with another film festival in mid 2009 which will include a bonefish trip to remote islands in French Polynesia. His DVDs can be ordered online. Nick Taransky (www.taranskybamboo.com.au) builds what must be the ultimate split cane rod for Cape streams, the six foot, one piece, #2/3 weight Arundunaria.