



CHAPTER 4

“Haneda Here”

The Search for the Ultimate Small Stream Fly Rod



Casting control is the most important aspect of fishing small streams. Sequestered pools, with guarding alders overhead and shrubbery along the sides, are cruel masters of the casting art. For small streams, I still like short rods.

Dave Hughes, *An Angler's Astoria*, 1982.

It is often said that Japanese fly fishers love bamboo rods because bamboo is a part of Japanese culture. We may prefer bamboo to chemicals, but fly fishers here in Japan started loving bamboo fly rods more because we found a bamboo rod to be an ideal tool for the smaller streams and smaller trout we fish for most in Japan.

Yuki Bando *Mostly Bamboo – Eighteen Bamboo, Fibreglass and Graphite Fly Rod Makers in Japan* (Flybito Press 2020)

“Haneda here.” The voice, emanating from Tokyo and being relayed by satellite to Cape Town was surprisingly clear. It was early in the morning in late 1983 and I could not quite believe my luck. I was about to speak to the man whose rods, I believed, were going to provide a quantum leap in achieving my fly-fishing goals.

I had first read about Hisatsugo Henry Haneda’s rods in the May 1983 issue of the American magazine, *Fly Fisherman* and the account, in an article ‘Boron Update’ by Dave Engerbretson, seemed to be too good to be true - but tantalising in prospect nevertheless: *‘Another line of exquisite rods for the lightest lines is produced by Archistrial of Tokyo, Japan. Archistrial rods, well known for some time in Japan but only recently available in the United States are designed by Henry Haneda. An interesting feature of the Archistrials is that they are all four-piece rods – with a one-piece feel. Haneda uses a different boron/graphite ratio in each of the rod’s four sections which he says enables him to modify the overall action precisely. The rod’s actions are delicate and yet several of my testers and I found ourselves casting the entire length of a WF-4F line with incredible ease.’*

I corresponded with Haneda and bought a six-foot nine inch, three-weight. The delicate, all-cork handle was the most comfortable I had ever used and a sketch in a Japanese brochure he sent me showed that he used a chisel in their construction with the handle being held in a specifically designed template. It was to provide the parameters for subsequent experiments in small stream rod design and, although I never did learn to cast a full fly line, the Archistrial remains to this day, four decades later, the rod that is closest to my heart.

When I was no longer able to fish, I gave it to Stephen Boshoff who shares my reverence for small streams and whose craftsmanship played a pivotal role in a succession of experiments aimed at producing the ideal low mass, light-line and non-reflective rod which would provide delicate and accurate presentation with a metre of line outside the top guide.

The Leonard Baby Catskill

I was fortunate, when I started fly fishing in the late 1970s to acquire Ernest Schweibert’s double-volume book, *Trout*, with its intensive and meticulously researched discussion on the history and evolution of fly rods and the one which resonated most strongly with me was the Leonard Baby Catskill. Six foot long, weighing fractionally less than one ounce and casting a two-weight line, it was the organic progenitor of today’s ultra-light line ‘Whisper Rods’.

In substantial measure this was because of a 1974 article in *Piscator*, journal of the Cape Piscatorial Society, headlined *Lilliput Water*, by Peter Turnbull-Kemp. To me it defined and encapsulated my fly-fishing metier and focus and I have used that article at the beginning of this section of this book.

Turnbull-Kemp used a Leonard Baby Catskill combined with an Orvis CFO2 reel and, by coincidence and years later, I believe I actually held that rod in my hand. A local bank had organised a function, hosted by Tom Sutcliffe, to introduce its ‘Young Millionaires’ to fly fishing. One of them mentioned he had a split cane rod of uncertain provenance.

He fetched it from his car. It was a Leonard and, as I withdrew it from the bag, I knew instantly that it was the Baby Catskill, as mythical to me as a Ferrari F40 would be to the Tifosi and I have reason to believe that this rod, in fact, was the one once owned by Peter Turnbull-Kemp.

The Boron Baby Catskill

Dave Engerbretson’s article also contained a reference to the solid boron rods of retired aerospace engineer, Don Phillips. He did the pioneering stress calculations and holds patents for solid boron and boron hybrid fabrication.

The rods were built on a wire mandrel and I bought his tribute to the Baby Catskill – six-and-a-half-foot 3 weight – and its tip was needle thin.



The author's Don Phillips solid boron rod

There's a lovely description in Ernest Schweibert's double volume book, *Trout*, where the author had a few casts in an empty, chandeliered hall at a hotel during a fly-fishing convention where Phillips showed him the rod. Schweibert subsequently wrote the foreword to Phillips' book *The Technology of Fly Rods: An In-Depth Look at the Design of the Modern Fly Rod, Its History and Its Role in Fly Fishing* (Frank Amato, 2000).

At my request, Phillips wrote an article 'Boron: From Scouring Powder to Fly Rods' for the 1982 issue of *Piscator*. It can be found in the Tackle folder on the Cape Piscatorial Society website.

'Tom Thumb Work' - the Whisper Rod era

Charles Fox articulated and defined the need in his 1963 book, 'The Wonderful World of Trout':

Daintiness is required to drop a fly gently nearby and to appreciate the play of a small fish, and only the little rod gives the delicate close-range delivery and feel – Tom Thumb work.

What made the Whisper Rod era possible was the collaboration between first Orvis with 3M and then Sage with 3M/Scientific Anglers to produce a series of progressive thinner and light fly lines:

1984: Orvis Ultrafine 2-weight – 80 grains

1987: Orvis Superfine 1-weight – 60 grains

1991: Orvis "One Ounce" 2-weight

1997: Sage SPL 65 - grain 0-weight

2005: Sage TXL 60 - grain 00-weight

2006: Sage TXL 57- grain 000-weight

The Orvis Ultrafine

In 1981 Tom Sutcliffe journeyed to Manchester Vermont to meet Leigh Perkins of Orvis who granted him the company's agency and in June that year, South Africa's first shop devoted exclusively to fly



The author's Orvis 2-weight Ultrafine – the start of the 'Whisper Rod' era

fishing opened in Pietermaritzburg. I quickly acquired the 7/11, a four-weight but, three years later, Perkins and his wife Romi visited South Africa at the invitation of Tom and he could not stop enthusing about a new model produced by company rod designer, Howard Steere. The Ultrafine was the first mass-production 2-weight fly rod and it heralded the arrival of the 'Whisper Rod' era.



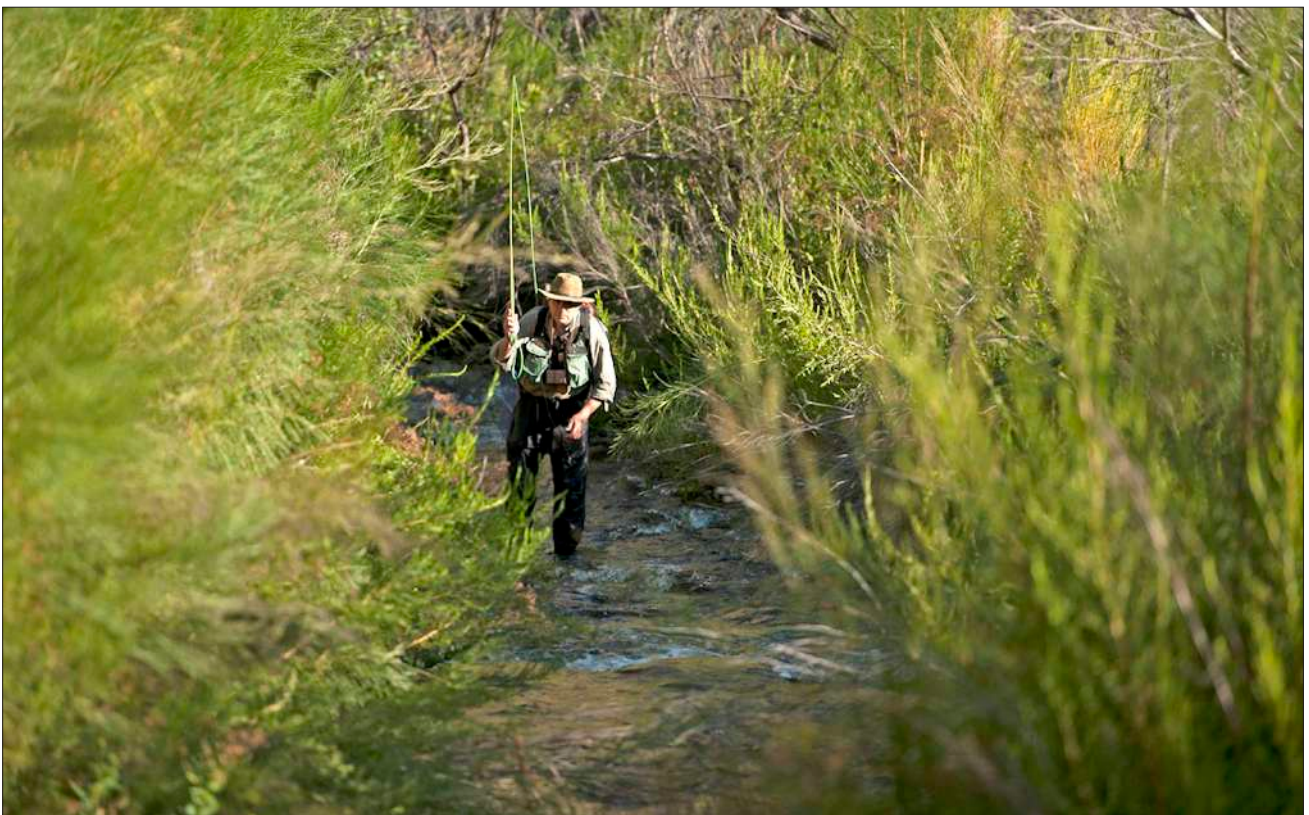
The combination of an Orvis One Ounce rod and CFO2 reel provide a happy moment for the author

This was followed in 1987 by the first production 1-weight and the 'One Ounce' in 1991. The One Ounce was the genesis of small stream fly rod journey which, for me, would epitomise the 'Delicate Fly Fisher' ethos and approach. My first opportunity to fish the One Ounce came during a trip to Durban and members of the Natal Fly Fishers Club took me to one of their favourite trout dams, looking askance at my toothpick and the size 16 PTN tied Sawyer-style to the tippet. On my first cast I saw the plop of it landing and started to let it drift with the wind when the leader suddenly shot away – first cast with the One Ounce!

The Sage 'Ought' series

In 1997 Sage rod designer Jerry Siem collaborated with Bruce Richards of 3M/Scientific Anglers to develop a 54-grain line - then the lightest available – and a seven-foot nine-inch rod to go with it. I was very excited and sent Sage a fax – the longest in the company history apparently.

Meeting Stephen Boshoff



Lilliput Water: Stephen Boshoff fishing one of his short, light line split cane rods on a trout stream near Cape Town

I met Stephen Boshoff in 2000 when I booked a cottage for the weekend on Ernst and Anchen Stofberg's farm, Dwarsberg (www.trouthaven.co.za) so that I could fish the Holsloot stream.

I was told that a fellow Cape Piscatorial Society member had also booked a cottage and strolled across to suggest we share a beat as I am always wary of fishing on my own. It was the start of a valued friendship but also the beginning of a search for the ultimate small stream fly rod.

I was to discover that not only did Steve share my interest in low-flash, low-mass "Whisper Rods", but that he was also a consummate and visionary craftsman when it came to building them. I was fishing with one of the first Sage 'Ought' Weights to reach the country. After a discussion about what our ultimate small stream rod would be, I gave Steve my factory-produced rod and he built me a new one on a Sage 'O' blank that I ordered through local agents, Frontier Fly Fishing in Johannesburg.

Stephen's bespoke Sage 'O' was a revelation. The finest cork exported from Portugal and other European countries is used on champagne bottles and it was slivers of this cork which Stephen used on the first rod he made for me. It gave the handle a speckled appearance which appealed to me. In contrast to the factory rod, the handle tapered all the way down to the blank which facilitated casting with your finger on top of the grip and the shelf of cork which extended over the reel seat obviated the sharp drop on the original model. This handle design requires a lot of cork and exceptional skill because the tolerances are very fine but I don't think you will find a more comfortable or more adaptable grip design. Regardless of whether you fish thumb on top of the handle, forefinger on top or Gary Borger's 'Three point grip', this comfortable handle will suit you.

Another striking contrast was the thin, black sliding ring from an Orvis One Ounce which obviated the fish-scaring flash under the bright African sun which was an unfortunate factor on the US-manufactured rod. Stephen, at my request, was later to expose the blank at the butt by eschewing the butt cap, an idea first explored by Danish split cane master, Bjarne Fries.



Stephen Boshoff's Sage 'Ought- weight (bottom) with its 'Palm Grip' compared to the factory version

Because the average cast is short and upstream – on small, canopied streams one often has little more than the leader outside the top guide – line mending is not often called for. Furthermore, because of the often-broken nature of the water, drifts are very short and a casting tempo of two or three to the minute is not unusual. This can be tiring when you are fishing in the midday heat generated in the kloofs (gorges) of the trout streams near Cape Town.

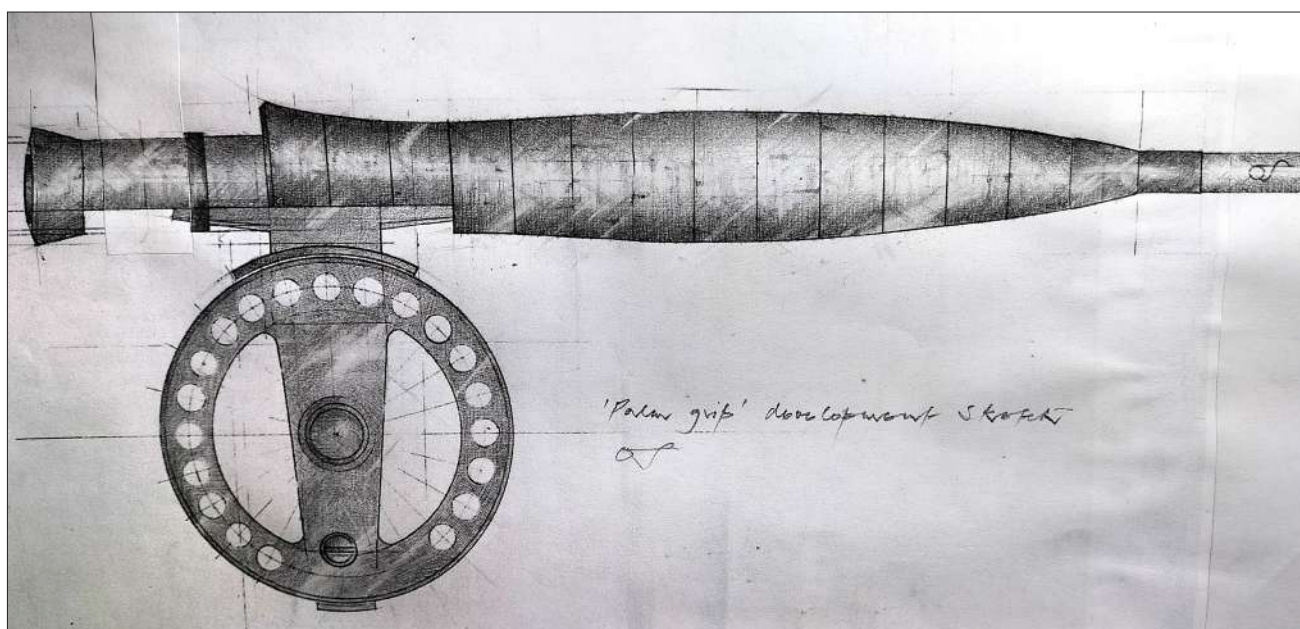
CHAPTER 4

I confined myself to pocket water because it compensated for multitude of sins. The water turbulence served to conceal one's approach and the trout in relatively shallow water have a small window of vision. Furthermore, because of the confined space of trout's holding area, floating insects quickly moved in and out of its field of vision, giving it little time to react.

With the constant, staccato and rapid-fire cadence of casting which Western Cape streams require, the rugged surroundings and great heat in which this occurs, fatigue is inevitable and grows with each passing hour. To avoid cramp, many fly fishers constantly shift their hand position on the grip and adopt different grips for different circumstances – thumb on top for more power when the wind comes up or for the occasional longer cast, forefinger on top for delicacy and accuracy. A handle design is required that most facilitates this constant changing of the grip.

Stephen's custom 'Ought' rod paid homage to Howard Steere in its search for lightness and the reverse half wells handle had its origins in the Henry Haneda's handle design which I had found to be the most comfortable I had ever used.

I was later to find in Ernest Schweibert's 'Trout' that the concept of a Half Wells handle tapering at the front of the grip all the way down to the rod surface was not new. His book showed a 1929 John James Hardy Special, originally owned by Ernest Hemingway, which featured this design.



A Stephen Boshoff sketch of the all-cork Palm Grip which facilitated holding the rod in different ways depending on the conditions

What made Stephen's all-cork design special was that the front reel seat made of ultra-thin aluminium was hooded within the cork grip. A shelf of cork extended along the top of the handle almost to the butt so that the transition from the handle to reel seat did not involve the abrupt gap which conventional, mass-produced fly rod handles have between the back of the cork handle and the conventional and mass-produced metal, wooden or plastic reel seat. Tom Sutcliffe was later to call this handle the 'Palm Grip.'

An all-cork reel seat is almost half the weight of a wooden one and this is important in the context of what Vincent Marinaro wrote in his book, 'In the Ring of the Rise' about the influence of reel weight on the cast: ***'Every inch that the cast is lengthened or shortened changes the alleged balance and every unnecessary ounce in an unnecessarily heavy reel dampens and degrades the cast. With the lightest reels the casts are sharply and cleanly delivered flat out with enough velocity to turn over the leaders. You also get a tighter front bow if you want it. As the reels get heavier, there is a noticeable lagging in the forward loop until finally with the heaviest reel there is a decided dropping of the loop and probably a failure to turn over the leader properly.'***

We're adding to the history of the flyrod.

1860's -- the first split cane in Maine
 1900 -- cork handles in common use
 1912 -- Hardy's "The Halford" split-cane rod developed
 1930's -- Chinese Tonkin cane discovered
 1945 -- the first fibreglass rod appeared
 1968 -- Jim Payne's death
 1970's -- end of the fibreglass era and popularity of graphite
 2001 -- ARC™ (Beavertail-design) handle ...U.S. Patent No. 6,629,382

How could we improve upon the modern-day flyrod?
 That was the question. It had already gone through a number of important changes in its relatively short history. From bamboo to fibreglass to graphite. From long to short to long again. And from down-lock to up-lock reelseat. Every change had a reason but the bottom line was simple -- to make flyfishing more enjoyable and accessible to as many people as possible.

▼ Static Balance Point ▲ Kinetic Balance Point

Split cane rod (down-lock reelseat)

Graphite rod (up-lock reelseat)

ARC™ (Beavertail-design) HANDLE

The original split-cane rods were long and weighty and needed a down-lock reelseat to counterbalance a tip-heavy rod (static balance). The up-lock reelseat was developed as far back as Hardy's "The Halford" in 1912. But it wasn't until the development of the graphite rod in the seventies that it received long-overdue recognition. You could say it was an idea born ahead of its time. Too light for first and second generation rods, it took the graphite rod to provide the perfect environment, and a union of synergy and kinetic balance was formed.

Rod handles, however, had remained largely unchanged. What if we could create a handle that would let you change grips easily as well as maintain a grip comfortably for hours? That was the challenge. The result was the ARC™ (Beavertail-design) handle. Its cork handle with its distinctive curved paddle shape lets you hold the rod way down at the reelseat for improved distance casting. It gives greater precision by eliminating reel wobble. And its ergonomic benefits let you enjoy flyfishing with a level of comfort never before experienced.

The ARC™ (Beavertail-design) handle may not make you an expert caster overnight. It will, however, give you an important tool to maximize your potential so you too can reach your casting goals ... and add your own line to the history of the flyrod.

To find out more about our special offer, just call our toll-free number
 1-877-726-0440, fax us 1-514-426-9446 or e-mail us at wyoshida@sprint.ca.
 Website: www.anglersroost.net
 Anglers Roost 285, Boul. St-Jean, Pointe-Claire, (Qc) H9R 3J1, Canada



The Angler's Roost advertisement for the ARC™ (Beaver-tail design) rod handle

A year after Stephen built the first Palm Grip Sage, US Patent number 6,629,382 was granted for the ARC™ (Beaver-tail design) rod handle.

In February 2005 an Anglers Roost advertisement on the back cover of *Flyfisherman* magazine coincidentally listed the advantages we had already experienced:

“What if we could create a handle that would let you change grips easily as well as maintain a grip comfortably for hours? That was the challenge. The result was the ARC™ (Beaver-tail design) rod handle. Its cork handle with its distinctive curved paddle shape lets you hold the rod way down for improved distance casting. It gives greater precision by eliminating reel wobble. And its ergonomic benefits let you enjoy fly fishing with a level of comfort never before experienced.”

In his 2005 book, *Presentation*, Gary Borger succinctly lists the benefits of an up-locking, all-cork handle:

“Your grip should be comfortable, and it should be as far back on the handle as possible. You should crowd the reel. In fact, the heel of your hand should be directly above the centre of the reel. This position removes the counterbalancing effect of the reel’s weight during the casting stroke. To me, this hand position immediately dictates reel seat design.”

“With the up-locking seat, the fixed ring can be buried under the first band of cork in the seat. In this position it’s hidden from view and from your hand. In addition, burying the band in the handle shortens the overall effective length of the seat by ½ to ¾ of an inch, allowing you to more easily position your hand over the center of the reel.”

Your hand cannot ‘crowd the reel’ with comfort if the cork ends abruptly and it slides onto a metal, wooden or plastic reel set. To me, the Coke-bottle shape of a reverse half wells ‘Western’ handle which tapers all the way into the blank provides the best compromise between comfort and versatility.

For close range accuracy, you can slide your hand forward and cast with your forefinger on top of the handle as Tony Biggs always did. If you are casting into the wind, you slide your hand back and put your thumb on top of the thickest part of the handle for maximum power.



Above and next page: Pretoria-based rod builder Koos Eckard mastered the technique of building the labour-intensive ‘Palm Grip’. Each cork ring must be individually prepared.
The process cannot be rushed



For me, these rods and this 'Whisper Rod' period defined an absolute in the design of the small stream fly rod – it must have an all-cork handle.

This is becoming increasingly rare because the Palm Grip, in particular, requires skill and a great deal of time to construct. It is far easier, quicker and less expensive to just slide one of the multitude of readily-available wood or synthetic reel seats over the blank and then add one of the often brightly-chromed reel seat components from a manufacturer such as Lemke, Struble, REC and Bellinger.

They are all, however, heavier and more reflective than cork as well as being a lot less comfortable to hold in the transition area between cork and a metal reel seat. Initially, to try to simplify and expedite the rod handle construction, Stephen built a simple cigar rod handle with the reel secured with cable ties, but he did not persist with this approach.



Two views of Stephen Boshoff's cable tie rod handle design – the bottom photo shows the rod spray-painted khaki to reduce flash

In Japan, Katsumi Harada of Harada Takezao approached this concern by blending the front section of the cork handle with a sculpted section of wood, the smooth transition between the two facilitating a hand position which is comfortable and promotes casting accuracy.

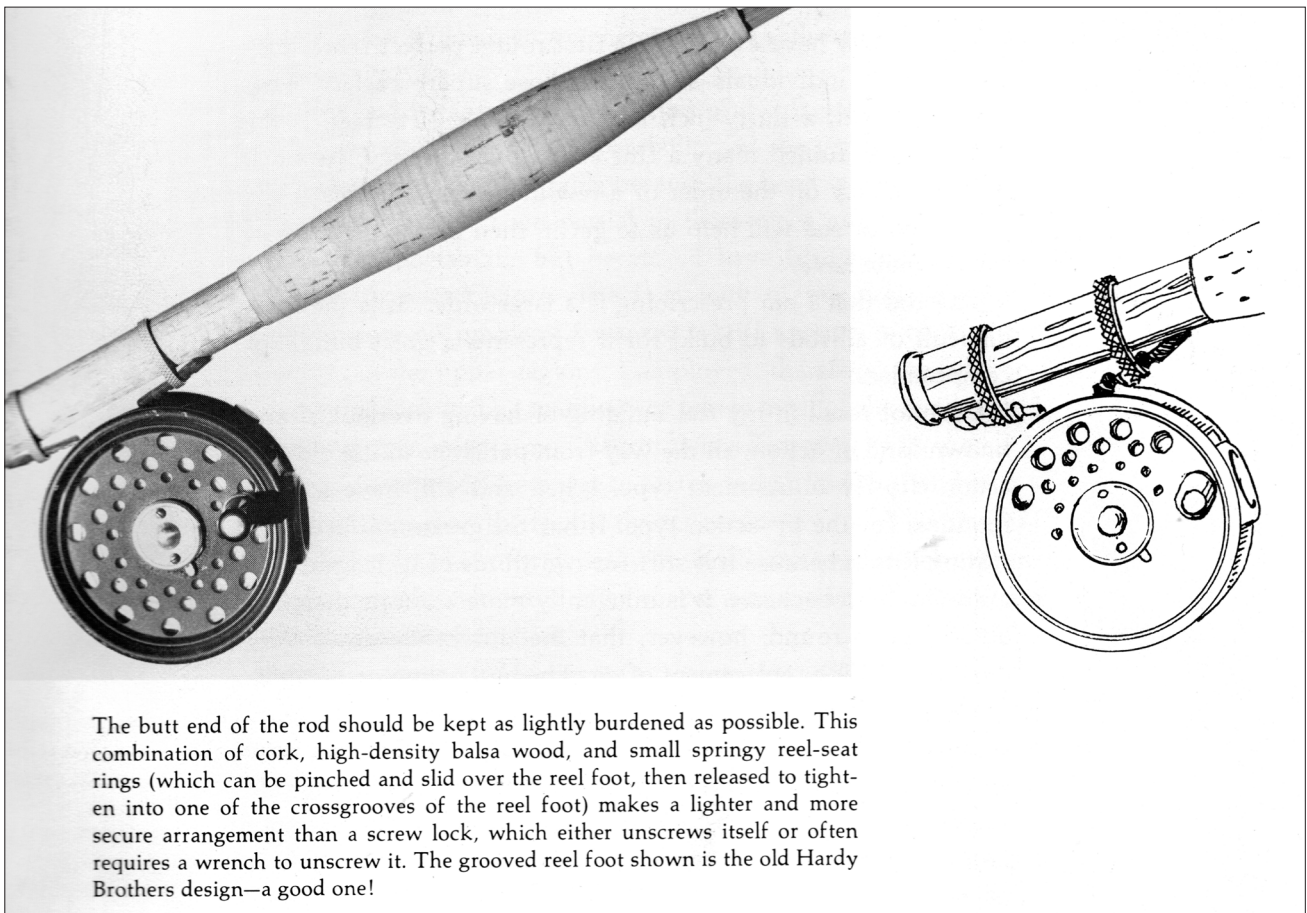
On pages 181/182 of his book ‘Mostly Bamboo – Eighteen Bamboo, Fibreglass and Graphite Fly Rod Makers in Japan’ published in 2020 by Yuki Bando, he writes:

Katsumi is fifty years old and one of the youngest bamboo makers in Japan. His rod has a uniquely shaped reel seat filler. He once noticed his hand was uncomfortable while casting because of the small bump between grip and reel seat filler. That gap hurts his right palm. He wanted to improve it. He stopped using a common round filler and curved it to an oval flattened shape. I like it because it looks like a miniature artwork done by Antoni Gaudy to my eyes. “It is more time-consuming work than it seems, but I am sure there are many fly fishers who feel the same way I did, uncomfortable while casting.” “Yes, I often had some pressed lines in my palm after fishing.”

Sliding reel seat rings

‘In the Ring of the Rise’, Vincent Marinaro’s enormously influential 1976 book, contained useful information on fly rod building and performance. He emphasised the need for light reels and reel seat components: ***“There can be no such thing as balance in a fly rod. There can never be a ‘fixed fulcrum point’. Every inch that the cast is lengthened or shortened changes the alleged balance and every unnecessary ounce in an unnecessarily heavy reel dampens and degrades the cast”.***

He emphasises the point again with a photograph and a caption:



“The butt end of the rod should be kept as lightly burdened as possible. This combination of cork, high-density balsa wood, and small springy reel-seat rings – which can be pinched and slid over the reel foot, then released to tighten into one of the crossgrooves of the reel foot – makes a lighter and more secure arrangement than a screw lock, which either unscrews itself or often requires a

wrench to unscrew it. The grooved reel foot shown is the old Hardy Brothers design – a good one!”

The only rod maker who, as far as I know, has seen fit to emulate the Marinaro design is Henry Haneda with my beloved Archistrial and I struggle to understand this. He uses conical and wafer-thin sliding rings made of stainless steel and they work brilliantly. The only way I would alter them is to make them matt black.



The flexible conical sliding reel seat rings on the author's Archistrial fly rod compress over the tapered reel foot of the Orvis CFO2, holding it securely in place while adding minimal weight

Rubber O-rings

The Ultralight Fly Fishing Forum website (<https://ultralightflyfishing.com/forum/>) contains a wealth of information on light line fly-fishing subjects and on 17 August 2015, 'Cross Creek' of Fayetteville, North Carolina posted some interesting information on securing the reel to the rod handle – a combination of an all-cork cylindrical rod handle with the reel being secured by rubber O-rings:

"I'm an admitted grip-slider—I like to move my hand all over the grip and seat, depending on how I'm casting, and I do it without even being aware that I'm doing it. The problem is that most reel seats are uncomfortable, what with locking rings and/or skinny proportions. I gave up on factory grips years ago, their uplocking seats and flared butts not at all conducive to my habits. Ed Herbst in South Africa has come up with some designs that make it easier to grip his rods way down on the seat, but they are complex affairs requiring careful inletting and fitting."

"How do I mount the reel, you ask? It's magic—no, simply O-rings. It's important that they're the

1/8 inch thick ones to ensure the reel is held securely. The rings roll up onto the reel foot and do not try to roll off unintentionally. O-rings last a long time, but are cheaply replaced at any hardware or plumbing supply store. Carrying a few spares is easy. The other little trick that this design accomplishes is the option to move the reel practically anywhere on the grip/seat. Grips may be fatter or skinnier than this—all that's needed is larger or smaller O-rings."

Marcel Terblanche - @driftflyfisher – picked up on this idea to build some ultralight midge rods on Mudhole six-foot 2-weight blanks.



The six foot 2-weight midge rod built by Marcel Terblanche which uses a rubber O ring to secure the rear reel foot. The front reel foot is secured within a hooded aluminium cap contained within the forward portion of the handle, a feature of the original 'Palm Grip'

The Lee Wulff Midge

Cape Town's summer is characterised by strong south-easterly winds, often downstream and I really struggled at first. My answer was to commission a custom nine foot 6-weight Orvis from Roger Baert at *The Flyfisherman* in Pietermaritzburg. In my ignorance I assumed that line weight rather than line speed was the answer.

I was fishing with Tony Biggs one windy day and I was not coping. When we stopped for lunch, I asked him if I could try his rod, a six-and-a-half-foot split cane Lee Wulff Midge made by Farlowes. It was a five weight but Tony had underlined it with a four weight line to speed up its casting stroke.

To my surprise I found that it was far easier to cast than my nine-foot Orvis because short rods cast tight loops and the rod loaded easily for close-range casts. More than 30 years later, I read Yuki Bando's book and I had a flashback to that day when casting Tony's short, split cane rod and the way in which it helped me cope with downstream wind.

It's a wonderful book and a quote from it is found at the start of this chapter. What is heartening to me is that the spirit of small stream innovation which I encountered with the rods of Henry Haneda in 1983 continues in Japan.

US aquatic scientist, Robert Bachman, has said that the average brown trout in that country will rarely get much bigger than 13 inches and, on the small streams of Dartmoor in England the trout are said to weigh 'three and four to the pound' i.e., four to five ounces.

The trout in the infertile, freestone streams near Cape Town average ten to 12 inches. In Japan's heavily-wooded mountain streams, a Yamame of that size is considered a trophy or a 'shaku' inspiring the YouTube video 'The Great Shaku Hunter' by Rolf Nylander which every lover of small stream fly fishing will find enthralling. One of the interviewees in Bando's book is Satoshi Maruyama - nickname So - who builds carbon fibre rods with a unique manufacturing process.

You can find an article on him and his rods at

<https://www.eastwindartisans.com/post/solid-octagon>

He calls it the Solid Octagon and the tip is solid which means that it is extremely thin, a characteristic of the solid boron rods made by Don Phillips. Yuki Bando fished a Solid Octagon and was astonished. It was a #4 weight rod with a length of 8'3" in three pieces.

"As soon as I started casting, I found the smoothness to be what I had only dreamed of. Since that day, I stopped saying that bamboo is always the best. I learned the material is not everything. There are some fine bamboo rods as well as some excellent graphite rods."

Bando's interview with Satoshi Maruyama made me re-think my quest for the 'less-than-one-ounce' fly rod.

"So believes most of the major rod makers have, for years, been too enthusiastic about making fly rods lighter for years. If you use a light fly rod, it is difficult to turn over a fly with a 12-foot leader of 6X in a short distance. It is just because the rod does not have enough weight to bring the fly, tippet, and leader forward."

My perception now is that the greater weight of a fibreglass rod might make it load more easily for short-range casts than carbon fibre and that this, along with its lesser expense might explain the substantial growth in the number of rod makers who sell custom, light-line fibreglass fly rods which are ideal for small streams.

Rod length

In 1975 Doug Swisher and Carl Richards published their book *Fly Fishing Strategy* and it contains this reference which is of relevance to those fishing small streams:

"It's a mechanical fact that, for the same casting stroke, a short rod automatically throws a tighter loop than a long rod."

"The short rod will not only keep your casting plane low, resulting in less tangling and more control in the wind, but it will also help keep the angle of your casting plane in the proper perspective. Ideally, for most fishing situations, your casting plane should be parallel to the water. This is true

for both your false casts and the final delivery. With the short rod, you can let your candy cane straighten a few feet above the surface and gently parachute to the water. Unfortunately, the long rod advocate does one of two things, neither of which is conducive to the small-stream angler. 'Most will tilt the casting plane forward so they can aim their forecast more directly at the target. This causes the delivery to be drilled into the water, scaring every fish in sight, and back casting at such a high angle that every tree near the stream is snagged. Some slightly more sophisticated anglers cast their candy canes on a nearly level plane but, with the long rod, they are elevated so high that they splash down rather sloppily on the water. Control and accuracy are also sacrificed when a high casting plane is used.'

What I found interesting is that the late Gary Howells is revered as the pre-eminent split cane rod maker in the USA of his era -1957 -1990 – and when he was interviewed by Yuki Bando for his 2020 book, *Mostly Bamboo*, Howells said he loved small stream fly fishing and considered seven foot and three inches as the ideal split cane rod length for this purpose.

Line weight

Taking all factors into account, my sense is that a 3-weight line is the best compromise for the small streams fished by the 'Shaku hunters' in Japan, by Chris Barclay in the Appalachian Mountains of the USA, those who fish the Yorkshire Dales streams in England, South Africa's mountain streams or tiny streams anywhere.

I say that in part because a seven foot, three-weight rod seems to be the sweet spot for both fibreglass and bamboo and silk lines, my favourite, are freely available in this line weight. A 2-weight line is thicker and more than double the weight of a 000. The thinner the line, the less water disturbance it will cause on the back cast. On small stream casts the length of fly line impacting on the surface is small but the consensus is that a three-weight line will have the advantage if the wind comes up.

(When faced with a downstream wind, I eventually learned to fish downstream using the parachute cast which I picked up in the 1973 Charles Ritz book, *A fly Fisher's Life*.) The Scientific Anglers Infinity line is half a line weight heavier than normal which will enable a carbon fibre rod to load more smoothly at short range and the lightest line in this model is a three weight.

Guide Placement

Since reels were first invented, guides have traditionally been attached to the rod in a straight line, level with and on the same plane as the reel. This tradition was, for me, challenged when I came across an intriguing alternative in an article, 'On The Right Lines' by Paul Canning in the August 1992 edition of *Trout & Salmon*: This is what he wrote: ***"At the casting demonstration I saw the unusual way in which Lefty Kreh had ringed his rods. I went home and tried it and was immediately convinced of the distance benefits. Ever since then I have used the set-up on rods from which I seek distance. Basically, one uses three single-leg oversize lined rings offset towards the free hand. These would be 25mm inside diameter at 30 degrees offset, 15mm at 20 degrees and 10mm at 10 degrees offset."***

"When you cast with this set-up, you can see the line coming down and settling as it flies up the rod. Any flapping around, which will cost distance, is kept clear of the rod."

Admittedly, in our conditions, we are not seeking distance but, as I have said, the fish almost never take line from the reel and, if you are a right-handed caster, you are constantly feeding line from the left hand and controlling your distance from it with very short drifts before you pick up and cast to another pocket. To me it would seem logical that if you are always feeding line through the rod at an acute angle from your left hand, then Kreh's offset guide idea would pay dividends – not necessarily for distance but for smoothing out the line flow.

Most of our trout are small and fought from the line hand rather than the reel so this approach would not seem to have any intrinsic empirical disadvantages for small streams. Black, single-foot guides are appropriate on small stream fly rods.

Avoiding rod flash

At the time of writing in mid-2022, Sage had produced a Euro Nymphing rod, the Sense, which is advertised as having a 'Stealth Grey blank colour with black primary thread wraps' and a 'Matte black reel seat'. Ideally, the rod would not be a single colour but mottled. The market would, however, not respond favourably to a splotchy rod finish.



A photograph taken by Peter Brigg on a stream in the foothills of the South Africa's Drakensberg Mountain range which emphasises the need for matte-finish rods, particularly in bright sunlight

As Peter Hayes points out in his 2013 book 'Flyfishing outside the box – Emerging Heresies':

"... the flash generated by the rod with which the angler is casting starts at the butt and travels up the rod to the tip with incredible speed as the rod's power is released. It shoots towards the fish like a missile."

Tom Sutcliffe became convinced that the light reflected from rods bounced off the water in front of trout and back into their eyes when fish that were facing upstream and feeding hard, spooked as he lifted his camera to take a photograph. This seems to be borne out by the work of Brian Clarke and John Goddard who used underwater cameras to photograph rod flash for their 1980 book, 'The Trout and Fly':

"In all our experiments concerning the reflective power of rods, the matte-varnished rod was much less easily seen. It is quite clear that the reflection of sunlight off gloss varnish must alert many trout even if the angler is not aware of it at the time."

If you doubt this, then watch the DVD 'Trout Vision and Refraction', volume 3 in the series 'The Underwater World of Trout' by Wendel (Ozzie) Ozefovich (<http://www.underwateroz.com/>).

Hayes recommends spraying your rod with Windsor & Newton aerosol matte varnish. Manufacturers such as CTS will supply low-flash blanks if requested. Bright reel seats and chrome guides have no place on small stream fly rods.

That light-reflecting rods reduce one's chances of fishing success has been recognised for centuries and a chronology of quotes from anglers such as G E M Skues, Gary LaFontaine and John Goddard can be found in my article 'Quotes on avoiding rod flash – ideal blank colour and finish' in the 'Tackle' folder on the website of the Cape Piscatorial Society. (It goes without saying that wearing mirrored sunglasses is disadvantageous).

Spliced joints and the Centre Axis Reel

When Sage introduced the SPL 'Ought' at the Denver Fly Tackle Dealers Show in November 1997 they also announced a collaboration with the Swedish company, Danielsson, to produce a second version of this rod in which the reel was not slung beneath the rod but was an integral part of it.

This 'Centre-axis' collaboration did not last although the concept endures in the model produced by reel manufacturer Waterworks who claim significant advantages:

"By closely aligning the center mass of our Litespeed reel with the center axis of our rods, we've de-levered the mass of the heavier object. The result will amaze you. You'll feel the pulse of your cast like never before."

To smooth the abrupt step between cork handle and most conventional fly rods which utilise a metal, wooden or synthetic reel seat which slides over the rod blank, Stephen Boshoff - [@boshoffbamboo](https://www.instagram.com/boshoffbamboo) – adapted the basic design principles of the 1980s 'Centre-Axis' collaboration between Kurt Danielsson and Sage which used the Loop reel.

A subsequent email to him from what is now Danielsson Innovation AB read:

"Kurt Danielsson designed the 'centre-axis' rod/reel in the early or mid-eighties. The idea of this project was to make a kit with a rod and reel in a small box to open and use. The kit was made in a very limited series (I believe not more than five) and the box was made of a modified violin case."



Stephen Boshoff fishing a prototype centre axis reel and rod combination

The Sage reel screwed onto the back of the rod and his first prototype echoed this approach. His

later versions are much more elegant – and functional - to hold and fish with because they allow the rod hand to comfortably surround the reel.

He then developed a more comfortable and aesthetically more appealing method of blending rod and reel on a Scott 2-weight blank and combined it with a brightly chromed Vision reel. To counter this, he spray-painted the blank and the reel heron grey as recommended by G E M Skues.



Two views of the centre-axis format adopted by Stephen Boshoff more than a decade ago. It is comfortable, aesthetically attractive and the way the front of the handle blends into the blank allows one to cast with your forefinger on top of the blank for short-range accuracy



It was a natural progression to start building split cane centre axis fly rods.



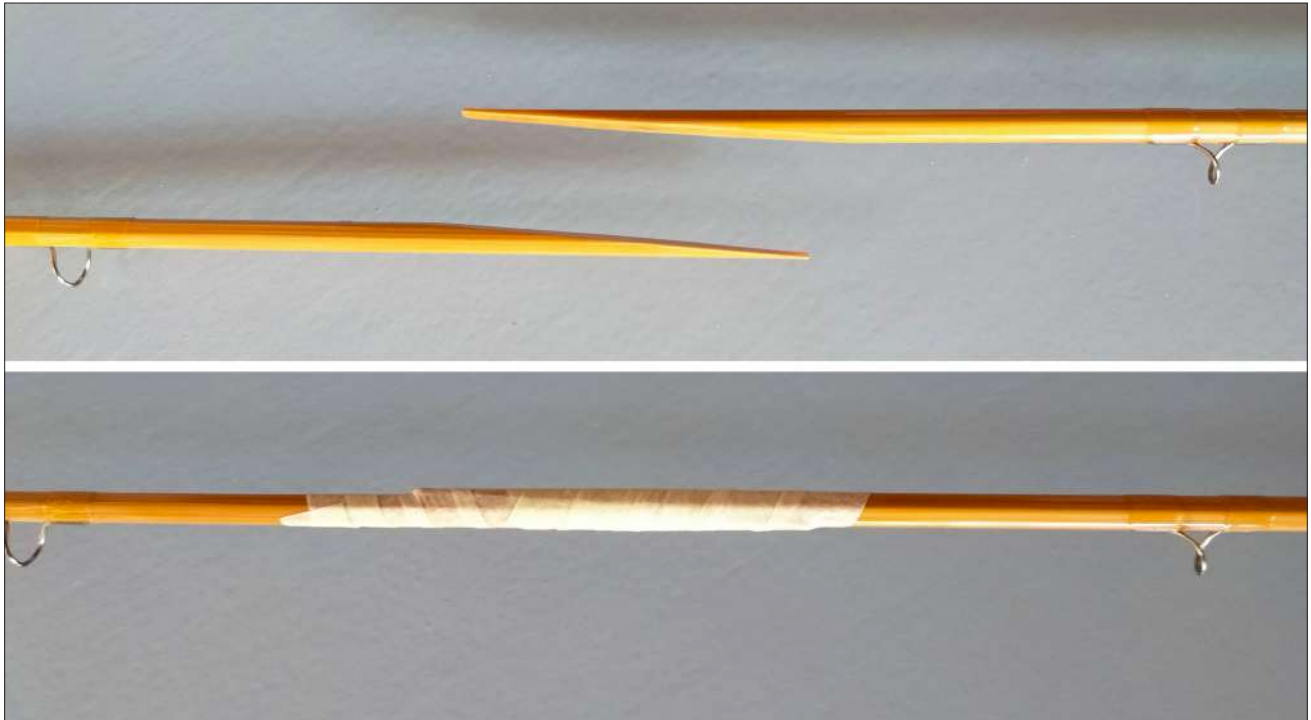
A split cane centre axis fly rod combined with a Hardy reel. *Clotalario sparttiodes*, an indigenous briar, is used to link the cork handle to the reel and is echoed on the centre of the reel

In 2010 Stephen gave me a centre axis, scarf joint rod and set out the rationale in a *Piscator* [article](https://www.piscator.co.za/CPS2/wp-content/uploads/2017/03/Small-stream-accoutrements-%E2%80%93-Steve-Boshoff.pdf) headlined 'Favoured tools for small streams: an interim hypothesis' which can be found in the Tackle folder on the CPS website. <https://www.piscator.co.za/CPS2/wp-content/uploads/2017/03/Small-stream-accoutrements-%E2%80%93-Steve-Boshoff.pdf>



In 2010, Stephen Boshoff (right) presented the author with a centre axis, spliced-joint 3-weight split cane rod coupled with Sage Click reel and one of the nets he makes

The spliced joint is an old and well-proven concept having originally been used over a century ago on long salmon rods where the stresses were much greater.



The advantage of the splice joint (above and below) compared to the conventional metal ferrule is that it is lighter. It is rarely seen nowadays as bamboo ferrules, originally developed by Bjarne Fries are the contemporary convention

In 2020 Stephen's work was featured in [issue 21](#) of the Italian Bamboo Rod Makers Association's journal and a year later he was invited to the Association's annual conclave but Covid-19 travel restrictions prevented him from attending.

<http://www.rodmakers.eu/BJ21/BJ21ENG.pdf>

The future

I tried a Scott fibreglass rod about 20 years ago and simply found it too slow for my liking. In the interim, fibreglass technology has changed significantly. Perhaps incorrectly, I attribute this to New Zealand's first win in 1995 in the America's Cup in 1995.

With composites playing such a huge role in yachting, it was inevitable that their research and development would accelerate exponentially from then on and the fourth victory for Team New Zealand in 2021 emphasised the point. Composite Tube Systems was set up in 1999 by Stephen Pratt, a graduate in technology from New Zealand's Massey University and CTS is now recognised as a world leader in fly rod technology. What distinguished CTS was its willingness to produce one-off blanks to customer specifications.

In 2010, intrigued by the growing use of ten and eleven foot rods in competitive angling, I commissioned an eleven foot 2-weight which I only got to use once because a neurological illness which affected my balance intervened.

In the past decade an improvement in fibreglass technology coupled with a cost benefit compared to carbon fibre has seen an exponential growth in the number of custom rod builders whose products display exceptional craftsmanship. Playing a huge role in this surge in popularity is *The Fibreglass Manifesto*, the blog run by a policeman from South Carolina, Cameron Mortenson.

Now we have short, light-line fibreglass fly rods in the seven to seven and a half foot, 2- 3-weight

range, that excel in the small stream environment because they are rugged, load easily for short-range casts and can easily be produced in muted colours and matte finishes.



Stephen Pratt (left) of CTS – supplying rod builders with the blanks that meet their specific needs. A CTS employee (right) – testing a rod blank at the company’s factory in New Zealand

The impact that this new generation of freely available and relatively inexpensive fibreglass blanks has had was brought home to me when I read that Edward Barder who, in my opinion, has inherited the mantle of the late Tom Moran, is now applying his exquisite craftsmanship to the CTS blanks.

Now the Lilliput Water fly angler can commission a custom rod which, in the broader context of cost, performance and durability, provides the best compromise for someone seeking a rugged, matt-finish, light-line fly rod which will excel in delicate, short-range casting.

What was intriguing to me in this resurgence in fibreglass popularity was the increasing use of ventilated rod handles. They were introduced by the South Bend rod company in the 1940s, subsequently popularised by Paul Young and are now often used by custom rod builders such as Chris Barclay, Graywolf and others. Such handles with a space between cork rings are fractionally lighter and enable one to feel the blank flexing.

The Single-Piece fly rod

If you are looking for a rod which saves fractions of a gram and if you normally walk from your vehicle to a small headwater stream, then a single-piece rod becomes the preferred option, not least because ferrules tend to dampen casting feel.

In his 2006 book *The Loch Fisher’s Bible*, Stan Headley bemoaned the way in which the multi-ferruled travel rod had come to dominate the fly rod market to the detriment of casting accuracy and enjoyment.

Ed Shenk, one of the Letort regulars during the era of Vincent Marinaro, Charles Fox and Ernest Schiwebert who loved fishing headwater streams with tiny flies - ‘the Itsy-Bitsies’ - wrote a chapter on

the benefits and joys of short, one-piece rods in his 1989 book, *Fly Rod Trouting*.

A year earlier, Ed Koch expressed similar sentiments in his book, *Fishing the Midge*.

The Red Cross War Memorial Children's Hospital in Cape Town has benefitted each year from a charity auction organised by Tom Sutcliffe through his monthly newsletter and Stephen Boshoff has contributed split cane rods to this auction in the past.

In 2021, funds were sought for a new emergency room at the hospital and I thought it an appropriate opportunity to explore the possibility of a single-piece seven foot six inch 3-weight – this time in fibreglass.

CTS provided the blank - designated 376-1 and Derek Smith, the country's leading synthetic rod builder, agreed to build the rod at no cost and the auction was conducted by *The Mission* magazine.



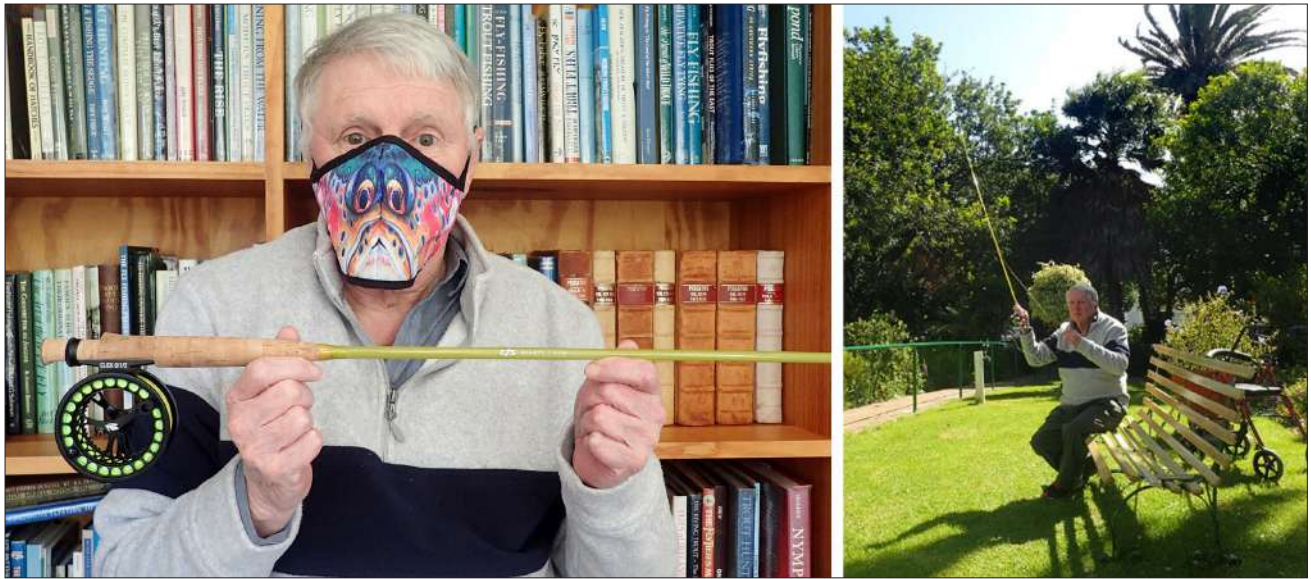
Derek Smith in front of the Emergency centre at the Red Cross War Memorial Children's Hospital in Cape Town. The auction of this rod raised R26 500 for the hospital bringing the total, raised for it by fly anglers to more than half a million rand

The rod was fitted with black Pacbay light wire snake guides offset towards the line hand of a right-handed caster in the configuration favoured by Lefty Kreh. We needed photographs to promote the auction and Tudor Caradoc-Davies, editor of *The Mission* magazine fished it for a day to get the necessary photographs.



Tudor Caradoc-Davies fishing the one-piece CTS fibreglass three-weight on a trout stream near Cape Town

He said it lived up to expectations. Tudor brought the rod to the retirement home where I live to show it to me and, seated on a bench in the garden, I had fly rod in my hand again - a poignant moment last experienced a decade earlier.



The author holding the single-piece 3-weight CTS fly rod and in the garden of the retirement home where he lives in Cape Town

It was light and crisp and sweet, loading easily with a yard of line outside the top guide and it delivered the fly with authority. I suddenly realised what the fibreglass renaissance was all about.

Fibreglass is not dead to paraphrase a popular website, it is flourishing and one of the reasons is the extraordinary range of colours available – CTS offers its blanks in all the colours of the rainbow – well, more than seven dozen to be correct.

Gary LaFontaine recommended matte battleship grey for a camo rod and Megan Dinwiddie, who handles customer liaison at the company, says ‘Satin Space Gray’ is the CTS designation for the colour that most closely approximates that shade and finish.

So, if you want to replicate this rod, the blank is designated CTS Quartz 376-1 in ‘Satin Space Gray’.

Here is Tudor’s assessment:

The Taylor Swift Test

When Ed told me about this one-piece CTS glass rod he had made by Derek Smith, it sounded like my kind of rod. On our skinny streams down in the Western Cape of South Africa, I usually fish a 7’6” 4-weight Epic glass rod (coincidentally also built by Derek Smith) from The Swift Fly Fishing Company, another New Zealand rod brand. For these streams most people fish a 2 or 3-weight and I used to too until I won the Epic on auction and gave it a bash. For dry fly fishing (Cape Doctor or no Cape Doctor), it handles all conditions and kicks ass, plus even small fish put a satisfying bend in the rod while it can handle much bigger fish too. I call it my Taylor Swift outfit as it’s paired with a Taylor reel.

I tested the CTS for Ed and absolutely loved the rod, but probably for slightly different reasons to the ones that motivated Ed’s decades-long quest. Here’s what I found:

It’s Not Super Light

I get the appeal of light rods, but I’ve never really understood the obsession with rods so light they feel like little more than a piece of grass in hand. It always felt like it was one of those pointless arms races humans engage in, like that period in the early 90s when tiny phones were all the rage, or the

ongoing fixation with uber-expensive watches that can handle being 300m underwater (when most people never dive deeper than the deep end of a swimming pool). This rod has a comforting weight to it that gave me confidence from the get-go.

It Can Handle The Doctor – Our Summer South-Easterly Gale

The day I tested this rod, the morning started off relatively still but by 11-12am the wind was gusting downstream and getting our dries down where wanted them to be became a lot harder. I adjusted my cast to make a faster, punchier forward cast and the CTS one-piece did the rest, laying down RABs and hoppers exactly where I wanted them in the bubble line.

It's a Shock-Absorber

I have a tendency, especially in the early season when I'm a little too eager and rusty, to strike too hard. On carbon fibre rods I've found that can result in small fish flying through the air or the 6x tippet breaking. Glass small stream rods like the CTS and Taylor Swift are forgiving, protect the tippet by acting as a shock absorber between the lightning fast strike of our small stream rainbows and the over-enthusiastic/clumsy movements of the angler.

It's Tough

Another reason I like glass rods, especially where the wading is challenging, is because they are incredibly hardy. Having had a few knee reconstructions over the years, I tend to wipe out a lot and as such Taylor Swift has come in for the kind of abuse the mere thought of which would have snapped a 000-weight carbon-fibre rod. The CTS is equally tough and will do duty for you for years to come.

It's Practical

Even though I live 45 minutes away from the streams, I love the idea of a one-piece, a rod designed so specifically for regular fishing on hyper-local waters that you need never break it down. When not fishing, hang it from the wall so that it speaks to you every day, asking you to take it out for another session.

Thanks Tudor.

In his 1989 book *Fly Fishing Small Streams*, John Gierach says: ***"... a good medium-action bamboo could just be the ultimate small-stream fly rod."***

Tom Sutcliffe agrees, citing the following benefits over synthetic rod materials:

- they load more easily than graphite, so you can fish closer in,
- they roll-cast better,
- you can actually feel the rod loading and unloading, which makes timing your cast easier and its far easier for beginners to learn casting with a bamboo rod,
- they protect light tippets really well and then finally and importantly,
- bamboo rods dampen out your casting mistakes and are far better instruments for beginners to learn to cast on.

If you have fished one of Stephen Boshoff's splice joint, centre-axis fly rods you would very probably agree, but split cane fly rod can be expensive and there is often a long waiting period.

The fact that you can get a rugged, matte-finish seven foot three-weight fibreglass fly rod built to your specifications with a much shorter delivery period will tip the scales for most small stream fly anglers.

Thanks to Leigh Perkins and Howard Steere of Orvis and, subsequently Jerry Siem at Sage, small stream fly anglers now have a plethora of light-line fly rods that load easily at short distances and

deliver pinpoint accuracy.

The original split cane Whisper Rod was the Leonard Baby Catskill. Chris Bogart of Shenandoah Rods has provided the taper for his seven foot 2-weight, the Yellow Rose

In fibreglass there are the beautiful ventilated grip rods that Chris Barclay constantly field tests in the small streams of the Blue Ridge Mountains in North Carolina accompanied by his dog Stella, and JP Ross spent years developing his Beaver Meadow series of rods which were specifically designed for the small streams of the Adirondack Mountains in north-eastern New York

Barclay's Synthesis rod range feature an all cork, down-locking ventilated handle which has an almost seamless transition to the reel seat.

In an email to me he wrote:

"Most people that try a ventilated grip on a lighter rod (usually 4wt and under but I've made a few strong 5wts with a ventilated grip) end up buying one. Sometimes people send their rods back in the off-season so I can add a second butt section with a ventilated grip."

"I feel that on full flexing rods (not progressive stiff butt rods) a ventilated grip will give the caster a better sense of timing and feel for what the rod is doing. Sometimes people mention that they feel it gives them a better grip on the rod when their hand is wet. Or that they find that their hand doesn't want to hold the rod with a tight grip and that relaxes their casting enough to make a difference. It's very interesting to me that people like them for so many different reasons. I really enjoy making them and usually have at least one personal rod with a ventilated grip."

The Swith - Rethinking the Palm Grip

The Palm grip was never going to gain market traction because it is expensive, requires exceptional skill and is very time consuming to create. In 2022, two decades after the first Palm Grip Sage Ought Weight was built, Stephen found a new way and named it the Swith. It is a seven foot, three-piece, two weight. This had emotional resonance with me because the Swith stream holds happy memories for me which I recorded in an article 'Small Stream Paradise' which can be found in the 'Eastern Cape' folder on the website of the Cape Piscatorial Society.

The Swith: "A search for minimalism, and a celebration of the streams, landscapes and people occupying my mind." That's how Stephen describes his latest rod, an alternative design to the rod handle he built on the Sage 0 Weight in 2002



"A small innovation is the larger than normal diameter reel seat (+/- 21mm). It enables a smooth transition between the palm of the hand and reel and also provides a wider and more stable flat for the reel foot. In essence, it is a simpler development of the original Palm Grip."

The Small Stream Fly Rod – Stephen Boshoff

I asked Stephen to articulate his rod building approach:

I have been tinkering with fishing rods – trying to make them perform and look better – for as long as I remember. In my youth, this involved all kinds of rods, mostly in glass and graphite. Later, I focused more and more on fly rods, and particularly light line rods suitable for Cape Kloof streams.



Stephen Boshoff who has collaborated with the author for the past three decades on developing and building the ultimate small stream fly rod – Photo by Jan Ras

through taper, but also hollowing and the nature and number of ferrules. The focus on bamboo also resulted in a turn from chasing one or two weight rods to settling around three and four weights, more suited to windy stream conditions (with lightness achieved in leader construction). Rod lengths of between 7' and 7'6" appears to enable rods of a gentle yet authoritative action.

While I still offer the centre-axis, the palm grip has evolved. This came about through a combination of seeking a simpler (albeit still time-consuming) design, and cheaper reel fittings which doesn't scratch the feet of prized reels. The new rods in the 'Swith' range offer simple cigar 'superfine' grips with a wider than normal reel seat section (in cork). The wider reel seat is the function of using simple brass

I met a kindred spirit in Ed on the Holsloot stream, and was exposed to his collection of rods, not only those by big name manufacturers but also some from makers seldomly seen locally, including Don Philips and Henry Haneda. For more than 20 years, he has been the champion, partner, and client assisting work in pursuit of a rod functionally suited to – and worthy of – hunting small stream trout in Cape Kloofs and the North-eastern highlands.

Early work focused on development of the 'palm-grip', looking for a comfortable hand position close to the reel, countering the weight of the reel and assisting accurate casting. It was only later that we discovered the Italians following the same 'wrap-around' rod grip position, assisting casting in overgrown streams.

We also explored using lighter guides, changing rod action through varnishing sections of graphite, painting blanks to counter rod-flash, and so on. Later, my 'centre-axis' followed, overcoming the uncomfortable metal transition between grip and reel of the first Sage centre-axis rod and reel.

In some ways, I found working in 'plastic' materials limiting. Bamboo offers more possibilities to manipulate rod action, not only

plumbing tube for reel seat rings. These rings have the added advantage of making for a wider reel seat flat (given more stability) and not scratching reel feet (as brass is soft). Covering the rings with cork (following the style of Bjarne Fries) avoids rod flash and adds to a minimalist aesthetic. Rods are three piece (assisting travel) using sleeve bamboo ferrules which are lighter than nickel silver and more durable than integrated bamboo ferrules. The lightly toned colour of the rods reflects the colour of the Kloofs and stream beds that we frequent.

After more than 20 years working in bamboo, I offer the following 'credo' of work (equally applicable to other fly-fishing pursuits, including fly tying).

1. The work draws from and builds on that of others who came before, as well as those working today. Be proud of and respect the tradition and acknowledge the people and work that inspire you.
2. Explore the methods of others, to know and release ways of expanding the craft. Take pleasure in the achievements of all makers, whether newcomers or established rod makers.
3. Understand that advancements in the craft are often in the form of small, private, and not easily discernible approaches and ways of work.
4. Make rods the way you like them, as opposed to what the market or "experts" suggest.
5. Recognise the craft as of equal status to all other work and approach all facets of work with the same commitment and care, whether functional or aesthetic, hidden or exposed.
6. Find comfort in and be honest about your own ways of work, whether by hand or machine tools. Each has its place and is a matter of choice.
7. Make every rod as if for yourself and destined for a last cast. Know that the best bamboo rod has not yet been made and may not come at the highest price nor from an established centre of the craft.
8. Explore local and everyday materials, and guard against waste or environmental harm.
9. Assist new entrants to the craft, enabling them to find their own ways.
10. Make time to use your own work on the water.

The Bjarne Fries legacy

If you were to single out a person who, more than any other, has beneficially improved the design and aesthetics of split cane fly rods, it would have to be, in my opinion, the Dane, Bjarne Fries.

https://splitcaneinfo.com/wp-content/uploads/2018/10/fries_rods_2003_en.pdf

The bamboo ferrule, which he pioneered, while initially proving somewhat fragile, is increasingly taking precedence over nickel silver ferrules.

What appealed to me most was the way in which he left the split cane exposed at the butt of the rod and when I teamed up with Stephen Boshoff to come up with the ultimate small stream fly rod, I asked him to leave the carbon fibre blank exposed at the butt of the grip.

He took this further, with the butt finishing at a downward slant which was not only for aesthetic reasons, but because it allows any fly line which ends up behind the reel, to slide away from the rod. This instantly became an intrinsic element of the Palm Grip 'brand'.

His current rod, the Swith (named after an idyllic little stream midway between Rhodes and Maclear near the summit of the Naude's Nek Pass in the Northeastern Cape Highlands) uses the cork-covered sliding reel seat rings which were also a practical and attractive feature of the Fries rods. It is equipped with sleeve bamboo ferrules which are a further development of the original Bjarne Fries concept.



The bamboo ferrules and exposed bamboo at the rod butt – two Bjarne Fries inspired features on Stephen Boshoff's Swith small stream rod, a seven foot, 3-piece, two-weight



The Bjarne Fries inspired, cork-covered sliding ring on the handle of Stephen Boshoff's Swith

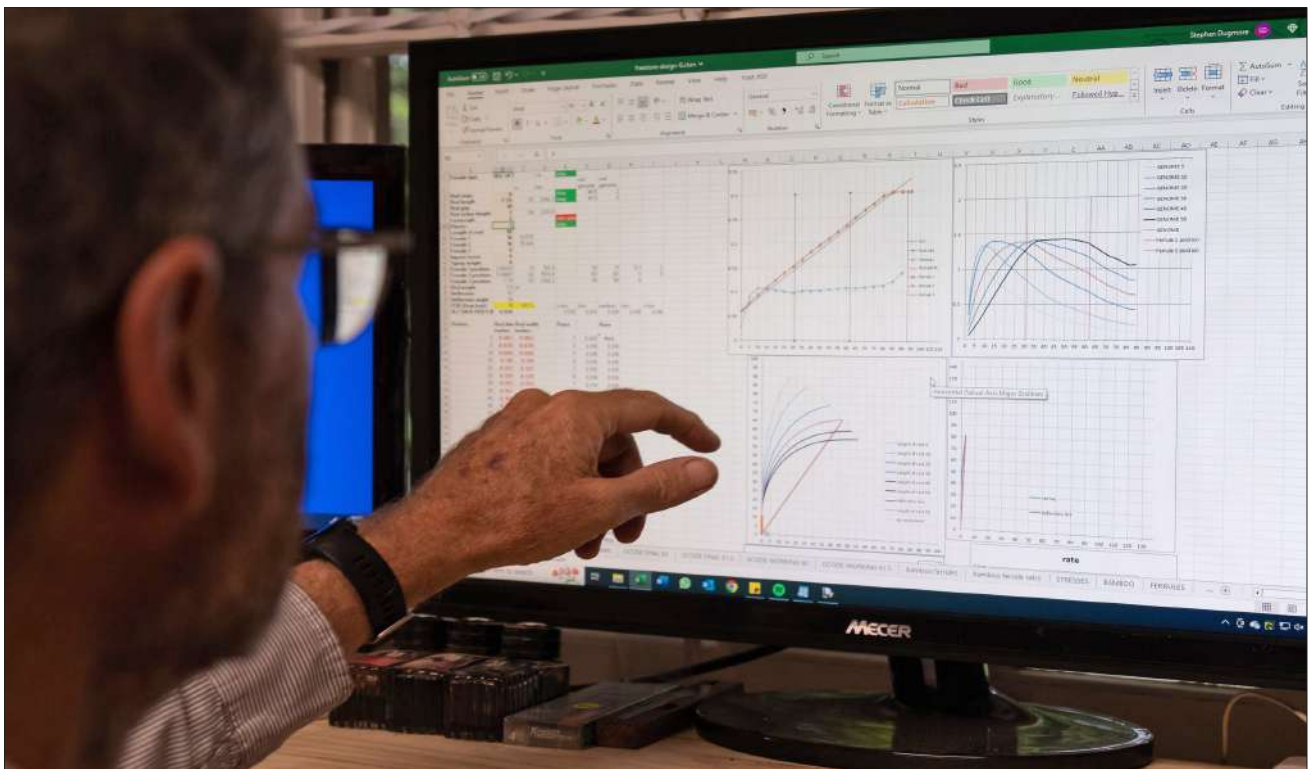
Re-thinking the Baby Catskill

I started this chapter with reference to the Leonard Baby Catskill which was used by Peter Turnbull-Kemp for fishing his beloved moorland becks. Well, how does a single piece six-foot version that can comfortably cast the Sage 'Ought Weight' fly lines sound to you?

CHAPTER 4



Stephen Dugmore planing some cane (above) and looking at a spread sheet of rod tapers (below)
Photos Matt Kennedy – The Mission magazine



In 2006, while chatting to a fellow member of the Cape Piscatorial Society, Stephen Dugmore, he told me that he had started to build split cane rods. He is an architect by profession so I knew he would have a good understanding of the tensile strength of materials and I asked him to write an article for the CPS journal, *Piscator*, of which I was editor.

You can find that article 'The allure of the of the split cane rod' in the Tackle folder of the CPS archives. His understanding of the craft and his skill at building these rods has progressed considerably since those days.



The author fishing his Stephen Dugmore Wisp on a trout stream near Cape Town

He feels that seven foot and three-weight is the sweet spot for split cane small stream fly rods and he built me one which he called 'The Wisp' in 2010. It was superb, but I only got to fish it once before a neurological illness that affected my balance intervened.

His website, 'Freestone Rods' provides a great deal of useful information on split cane rods as well as on the models he offers and it is definitely worth a visit.

Let me close with two quotes that justifiably illustrate the reverence in which split cane rods are held:

"Bamboo, being a natural product, like flesh and blood, can establish a greater affinity with its owner than any other material. There can be a powerful bond between them, an identification, that lets the caster feel that the rod is an extension of his own personality."

'In the Ring of the Rise' - Vincent Marinaro

"There will always be bamboo rod makers, because bamboo possesses characteristics beyond any other rod material. Bamboo has heart, muscle and sinew. A rod of bamboo is a living thing and

CHAPTER 4

you will never go to the river alone because the maker who fashioned it is always with you. All the engineering skill in the world cannot put heart into glass, metals or high technology synthetics."

"Pick up a sleeping bamboo rod and feel it come to life in your hand. Break the tip of a graphite rod and there's no harm done or felt except perhaps to one's wallet. There may even be a no-fault lifetime guarantee to mitigate such a loss. But snap the tip of a bamboo rod and one's heart breaks with it."

'Jordan the Rodmaker, A biography of Wesley D. Jordan at Cross - South Bend - Orvis '

William H. Jordan

