

CHAPTER 6

Lines and leaders

Small stream fly lines...

A Terenzio Zandri silk line and furred leaders form the backdrop to a Palm Grip Sage 000 and my beloved Orvis CFO2, still going strong after 30 years. Appropriately, a real fly hitches ride.



"Call me old-fashioned, but I find brightly-coloured fly lines distracting. Splitting a jewel-like mountain pool in half with a fluorescent orange fly line seems profane."

Craig Martin *Mountain Water – The Way of the High-country Angler* (Pruett Publishing, 1999)

In 1984 when Orvis brought out the Ultrafine 2-weight, I approached the Phoenix silk line company in France and asked if they could supply one of their lines in 'Mere Green' for my new rod. They were happy to oblige, saying that they had already made such a line for an Italian customer.

It was everything I had hoped it would be.

Silk lines have a smaller diameter than equivalent synthetic lines which means they facilitate casting into the wind and lift off the water on the back cast with less water disturbance. They have

no memory and are less shiny and light reflecting than plastic lines.

My subjective sense was that, because they have no stretch, I got more hookups when using silk lines.

I was forced to use synthetic lines during the Sage 'Ought' era but then started using Terenzio Zandri silk lines and furred leaders from around 2006. Silk lines require more maintenance than synthetic lines but, to me, that was part of the ritual and the trade-off was a more pleasant and successful fishing experience.

Small stream trout probably average about ten inches and eight ounces and, once hooked tend to stay within the tight confines of their home range. That means that you are never going to be taken into your backing and your reel does not need a counterweight or a complex braking system.

The only time, in my experience, that a local trout got the reel to turn was in the beginning of spring when the water was still high and a hooked trout managed to get downstream of me and use the current to its advantage. I accordingly cut my double taper lines in half and filled the reel with Dacron backing. The backing ended with a Perfection Loop. I attached a short piece of Dacron with a Perfection loop to the back of the fly line.

I then connected the two, loop-to-loop.

Line winders upon which silk lines are dried have long existed, but my approach was simpler.

I hooked the Dacron loop on the fly line over the thumb of my left hand, bent my arm and wound the line over my elbow and between the thumb and forefinger creating loops of about a foot which I secured with overhand knots in small pieces of string. This looped line assembly was hung on a cup hook to dry.

Once dry, I would grease the two halves with red tin Mucilin and lay them out in a sunny place for an hour or two. The excess grease would then be wiped off and the half fly lines would go back onto the cup hooks.

Before going fishing I would put one half of the line on the reel and the other loop in a Ziplock bag which would go into my backpack. At lunchtime, I would exchange one for the other and be fishing a high-floating silk line for the rest of the day.

By 2006 I was fishing the silk lines and furred leaders of Terenzio Zandri and, if I was still fishing, I would like to try the line made by Koji Yano.

What I enjoyed about the Terenzio Zandri line was the loop-to-loop connection to his furred leaders. ... **and leaders**

"A good small stream rule of thumb is that the leader should roughly match the rod's length minus six inches to a foot or so. Practically, this means having more line out and working than the leader."

William C. Black *Creek Craft – The Art of Flyfishing Smaller Streams* 1988

"I tied on my standard length of fresh 5x tippet, in other words as long as my arm, which I can tell from years of holding the end of the spool under my chin and extending my arm full stretch

with the spool under my chin with the spool unwinding in my other hand. That's how I measure my standard tippets. That works out at about thirty inches. Ed uses a ruler marked in millimetres.

There's a fundamental difference in our approach here - I go by feel, he goes by formula – but, so far, the trout don't seem to have noticed the difference."

Tom Sutcliffe *Hunting Trout* 2002

Mono leaders

For me, small stream fly fishing was about enjoyment, enjoyment without frustration, enjoyment in comfort, the total experience not measured or determined by the number of trout caught, but how they were caught.

I gave up hunting in my teens after wounding an animal, but I never forgot the tension and excitement of air rifle hunting, the need to get close, the need for stealth in stalking, the need for accuracy. I wanted to replicate and recall those memories in my fly fishing while making it as gentle and delicate as possible – the .410 approach rather than the 12 bore.

For me that meant short leaders that I could control.

Bob Miller lives for the Trico hatch and fishes size 22 – 24 flies on 7 x tippets on light line rods.

In his [1997 book on Trico fishing](#), he discusses leader length and I feel his views on leaders are just as applicable to someone fishing a size 14 Royal Wulff on a stream near Cape Town or in the rhododendron-closeted brook trout streams that Chris Barclay fishes with his short fibreglass rods in the Blue Ridge Mountains:

"In my early days of fishing dries, everything I read or heard about dry fly leaders claimed that they had to be long; up to fourteen feet or more in length. Thank God I didn't believe that. It didn't take me long to realize that to cast a long leader well requires holding a lot of fly line in the air along with the leader.

While over the years my involvement in small fly fishing has increased, the length of my leaders has decreased to the point that I don't fish any leader over nine and one half feet in length, regardless of the circumstances.

My reason is that I just don't cast a longer leader very well. Since Trico fishing is primarily made up of short casts, a long leader can be a hindrance.

The long and the short of leaders is that they be kept fine. The length should be whatever you cast best."

It was Charles Ritz, famous hotelier and fanatical fly fisher who created the baseline which determined current thinking on the design of conventional tapered leaders – sixty percent butt, twenty percent transition section and twenty percent tippet. The sixty percent of the longer butt section should have a gradual taper involving three sections of nylon in declining diameter, the short, fast-tapering transition section would be three pieces of six-inch nylon leading to the tippet.

When Czech-nymphing master Jiri Klima visited our streams in Cape Town I watched him build a leader with three sections of mono of declining diameter, each the length between his outstretched hands.

I didn't time the construction process, but I'd say that two minutes was about right – to save time he bit off the lengths of nylon.

A small stream leader tied to the formula suggested by Art Lee in his book ***'Fishing Dry Flies for Trout on Rivers and Streams'*** (Atheneum, 1982) would take much longer and require more finger dexterity than I possess. Here's one of the 15 leader formulae – ranging from six feet to 4 x to 20 feet to 7 x – which are listed in the book.

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6 feet – 4x

Diameter – inches Length – inches

.020" 13"

.017" 10"

.015" 8"

.013" 7"

.011" 5"

.010" 4"

.009" 3"

.008" 2"

.007" 20"

For me, knotting two and three inches of mono together would be both difficult and boring. I also have a problem with the butt diameter of this formula.

When I started fly fishing 40 years ago, I read a chapter *'The fallacy of the stiff leader'* in Richard Walker's 1982 book *'Dick Walker's Trout Fishing'*.

Walker averred, correctly, that the difference in flexibility between the fly line and a stiff mono leader resulted in an open loop presentation to the detriment of accuracy – here's the critical sentence in which he compares mono to its more flexible predecessor, silkworm gut:

"The reason stiff nylon or other plastic don't cast well is that they won't bend into so tight a loop."

That being the case, a heavy-butt, or should I say, large-diameter butt leader, becomes a liability when you try to cast tight loops because it is simply much stiffer than the more flexible fly line and does not smoothly continue the energy transfer as the loop unfolds when it reaches the junction between fly line and leader.

This is particularly important when roll casting which, in my small stream approach, forms the bedrock of what I call 'the small stream ethos'.

George Harvey in the USA was the first to move away from the heavy butt principle, going from the .022 of an inch butts that were conventional thirty years ago to .013 of an inch. Both Harvey and his contemporary, Joe Humphreys, provided valuable insights into what they called 'brush fishing' – the approach to tiny streams completely hemmed in by trees and shrubs.

Here's Humphreys' 1989 brush fishing leader formula keeping in mind that this was for a 6-weight rod and it therefore starts at .017":

11 inches of 017

9 inches of .015

9 inches of .013

10 inches of .011 (0X)

9 inches of .009 (2X)

9 inches of .008 (3x)

14 inches of .007 (4x)

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That's a six-foot leader tapering to 4x to fish a size 12 Humpy.

Charles Meck, in his 1991 book, *'Fishing Small Streams with a Fly Rod'*, concurs:

"There's no way you can control and accurately cast a leader twelve feet long under most small stream situations."

He provides several formulae for short leaders up to a maximum of seven and a half feet, all starting with a butt diameter of .015 inches although, if you were fishing fly lines from 0 – three weight, you would probably achieve a tighter loop with a butt diameter of .013 inches.

Gary Borger then radically simplified leader design by pointing out that the progressive tapering of the leader using shorter and shorter lengths of mono of decreasing diameter as illustrated by the Art Lee example quoted above, was not necessary:

"Many fly fishers believe that to build a tapered leader each new segment that's added must be no more than 0.002 smaller than the last segment or the leader will 'hinge,' i.e. collapse back on itself and not turn over. This is absolutely NOT true. In fact, the cross-sectional area of the leader can be reduced by 60 percent and the leader will not hinge."

Here's Borger's nine-foot leader tapering to 4x:

4 feet of .013

1 foot of .010

4 feet of 4x

Borger cautions that when connecting sections of mono of widely differing diameter, one should use his '5/7 blood knot', five turns of the thicker mono and seven of the thinner.

In 2013 Pascal Cognard visited South Africa. He is one of only three people to have won three individual gold medals in the annual FIPS-Mouche world fly fishing championship.

An article on the leaders used by the French team can be found in the Tackle folder on the website of the CPS. This is the formula for the 'short regressive' taper which found particular favour with competitive fly anglers who fish the trout streams near Cape Town – a 12-foot leader tapering to 6x.

24 inches of .016

20 inches of .014

15 inches of .012

12 inches of .011

10 inches of .010

8 inches of 3x

6 inches of 5x

Five feet of 6x

Just a caveat on that five-foot 6x tippet – Ed Shenk was a Letort regular along with people like Vincent Marinaro, Charles Fox and Ernest Schweibert, but he loved short, single-piece rods and fishing headwater streams. Two of the chapters in his 1989 book *Fly Rod Trout* are headed ‘Short Fly Rods’ and ‘Jewel of the Headwaters’.

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His take on leaders and, in particular, tippets for small streams is succinct:

“I usually fish with 10-to-12-foot leaders on more open water, such as the Letort or Falling Spring. My mountain leaders are scaled down versions designed to turn over properly at close range. These are seldom longer than 9 feet. Butt sections are seldom more than .017 inches and I top out at 4x or 5x, usually the latter. These shorter leaders seem to turn over better if the tippet is no longer than 20 inches, even though tippets of 24 inches are used more often.”

Extruded leaders

In *Trout from Small Streams* – the best book on the subject – Dave Hughes gives leader design short shrift:

“Now I buy 7½-foot leaders as the base for all my small stream fishing...”

Tom Sutcliffe agrees in principle. In his wonderful 2002 book, *Hunting Trout* he has this to say in a chapter headed ***Dry Fly Leaders for Freestone Streams***:

“I use a 9-foot, 4x continuous taper nylon leader with twelve inches cut off the butt to reduce the diameter slightly from the average of say 0.021 inches, down to around 0.017 inches. This gives a butt of around sixty percent of the line-tip diameter. Attach a tippet of 3 to 6 feet of 4,5, or 6x nylon, depending on conditions.”

Tim Rolston, for many years Cape Town’s leading guide, advocates a similar approach in an article headlined ‘***Take me to your leader***’ on his ‘***Fishing Gene Blog***’:

“My simplified approach is to use as a base a purchased tapered knotless leader. I use a nine foot leader with a tippet diameter of approximately 2x more than I want to finish up with. Equally I normally put the leader into boiling water for a few minutes and stretch it, this seems to add a level of springiness which better protects the light tippet when fishing, yet another French innovation.

To that is added a compound tippet of two three-foot sections of copolymer tippet material, these days most often Stroft which I like very much.

So the base leader is then a 4x tapered leader, 3ft of 5X and 3ft of 6X. On calm days and flat water, I may add an additional 3ft of 7 or even 8X to that. That means that most of the time the leader is between 15 and 18 feet long.”

Tim can fish an 18-foot leader because he is a casting instructor who has written a book on the subject – I would struggle to control one half that length, particularly if it was windy. My approach is to get as close as possible, fishing from a kneeling position if that is feasible.

If I was still able to fish, I’d buy a nine-foot leader tapering to 3x. I’d cut two feet off the butt, tie a Perfection Loop in that section and loop that through the loop at the end of my silk fly line.

To the 3x tip, I'd attach a foot of 4 x Rio Two-Tone Indicator Tippet – which has alternate sections of fluo pink and yellow - and finish that with a Perfection Loop Knot.

That would give me the option of a loop-to-loop connection to another section of 4x tippet material or 5/6x if I was fishing a small fly.

When fishing a small sunken terrestrial, I would slip the loops apart, insert a small tuft of glo-bug yarn which had been pre-treated with a floatant like Loon Fly Dip to function as a strike indicator. If I changed back to a dry fly, I would simply remove the yarn.

Leader length for small streams depends entirely on the stream circumstances - Joe Humphreys used a six-foot leader for brush fishing and Chris Barclay, who fishes his beautiful fibreglass rods in the Blue Ridge Mountains of North Carolina, usually fishes a rod-length leader of around seven feet.

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Google Earth Maps and the advent of outstanding short, light-line fibreglass blanks which are relatively inexpensive combined to produce 'Blue lining' – opening new fields of exploration for those who love small stream fly fishing.

Scientific Anglers and Rio were quick to realise the commercial potential of blue lining and to market products catering for the increased interest in small stream fly fishing.

Scientific Anglers produced the Amplitude Smooth Creek Trout fly line with a taper designed to roll cast well at short range. To go with it, they produced a six-foot extruded leader, the Amplitude Smooth Creek Trout with tippet diameters from 3x to 6x.

Rio's small stream line is the 'Creek'.

Furled leaders

Darrel Martin did us all a favour in 1999 with his chapter on furled leaders in '***Micropatterns: Tying and Fishing the Small Fly***'.

In 2001, with the assistance of FOSAF, he visited South Africa with Taff Price and demonstrated how to make furled leaders. Three-foot furled leaders in dark colours for light-line fly rods are now freely available on the market. Their benefit for small stream anglers is significant, most particularly in the context of their turnover at short range and their soft descent.

Here's a quote from *Micropatterns*:

"I took the first furled leader I made into the backyard for a dry cast. I hoped it would extend with a slow, soft cast. My cast pushed the leader out thirty feet. The line landed, but the leader, paralyzed in midcast, hung four feet off the ground. I did not understand. I laid the rod down and walked to the leader. The leader, tippetless, was held in mid-cast by a single strand of spider's web strung across the yard. Evidently, a tender web caught and held the delicate, drifting leader. Surely this was a soft descent. The furled leader makes a difference. A supple thread leader can pitch the pattern softly into the trout's strike zone."

If the small stream angler combines the soft descent of a furled leader with a big, wind-resistant Variant as recommended by Al McClane - or the South African equivalent, the Tony Biggs RAB - the results can be surprising.

The great benefit of such flies is that their soft descent ensures gentle presentation and, if you see them land, they are easy to follow in the drift thereafter.

Stephen Boshoff remembers using a one weight rod and a RAB on a furled leader when he and Peter Brigg fished the tiny Didima stream in the Drakensberg Mountain range in Natal.

He said three 8–10-inch browns simultaneously leapt out of the water and tried to intercept it in mid-air.

The French leader

Jean-Pierre Guillemaud (Piam) became legendary in the 1970s and 80s for his ability to catch big trout in wide, clear and slow-flowing rivers like the Loue and the Ain in the Jura Mountains of eastern France.

He did this with a 25-foot leader tapering to 8x which consisted of eight lengths of mono which became progressively longer as the diameter decreased.

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This states the obvious – the longer the leader, the less chance of the trout detecting you visually or being alerted to the alighting fly.

I would struggle to fish a leader of that length with the short rods which I enjoy fishing.

My approach is to wade thigh-deep pocket water concentrating on the bubble line and focusing on a soft descent which means aiming not at the water but above where I think the trout will be holding. The soft descent is achieved either with big-hackled Variants or through the aerodynamic effect of the yarn strike indicator about the size of a match head. When used in conjunction with a small and lightly weighted (1 mm countersunk brass bead) sunken beetle or ant, the indicator enables an automatic tuck cast.

Convex leaders

Quite who came up with the idea of a double taper leader, I don't know. They were already being used in the early fifties by legendary fly fishers such as Charles Ritz and Al McClane. In *'Creep and Crawl'* a 1956 article on small stream fly fishing in *Sports Afield*, Al McClane gave this formula:

"You can turn a balanced double taper leader over with your hand. I designed one that is a comfortable 7 ½ feet long and it is ideal for short casts. Here are the specifications: 18 inches of .014, 6 inches of .015, six inches of .017, 15 inches of .019, 9 inches of .013, 12 inches of .011 and 15 inches of .009. This will roll with very little line extended."

McClane ends his double taper leader at a diameter of .009"/.23mm which is 2x. This would be considered excessive in terms of today's much stronger monos, but his favourite flies for fishing the little creeks were large RAB-type variants. They usually require quite large diameter nylons to turn them over effectively unless one uses a knot like the Surgeon's Swivel which eliminates the twisting which occurs when large flies are tied to fine tippets. McClane's formula could easily be adapted to a leader butt of .013 to make it more effective for 0-3 weight lines.

In the September 1981 issue of the British magazine, *'Trout & Salmon'*, George Beall gave his version of a seven-foot, five inch, double taper leader devised by Pierre Creusevaut of Belgium who

for several years was the world's champion distance caster: 22 inches of 0.015 diameter nylon, 30 inches of 0.17, 12 inches of 0.013 mm, 10 inches in 0.009 and a 15 inch tippet of 3x.

The idea of convex leaders was given momentum by an article that appeared in volume 14, no 6 of the US magazine, *'Fly Fisherman'* (September, 1983) by an engineer, Bernard B. Beegle. Here's a quote:

"You don't have to attach them to a fly line and cast them with a fly rod to see and feel the blessings of the new design over the old. Just grasp the butt section of each leader in your casting hand and give each a try, alternating between the old and the new design. I have done this many times to demonstrate to fly fishermen the blessings of the convex taper. Each angler could tell just by observation which leader was the convex taper. During both the backward and the forward cast, this design turned over better and with less effort-especially during the forward cast. The leader comes through in a tighter loop and straightens out much better. Furthermore, the convex taper exhibited an extra kick at the end of the toss, the tippet landing in a serpentine pattern as expected, the caster not having to mend the toss to achieve this."

In his 2001 book, *'Drag Free Drift - Leader Design and Presentation Techniques for Fly Fishing'*, Joseph A. Kissane said of the convex design:

"The convex or weight-forward configuration of these leaders makes them a particularly logical choice for windy conditions. Regardless of whether the convex geometry helps energy transfer, their ability to turn over well makes them useful for longer casts and larger flies."

Kissane later reverted to conventional straight taper leader designs and Cape Piscatorial Society

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members who experimented with the concept, myself included, found they offered no advantage for small stream fly fishing, even when shortened appropriately.

Greased leaders and tippets

"The floating leader was far less affected by currents because it was riding half above the water instead of fully immersed in it. Would you fish a dry fly with a sinking line?"

Tom Rosenbauer *The Orvis Guide to Prospecting for Trout* (Lyons Press, 2008)

The vocal opposition to the greased tippet bemuses me – the greatest inhibitor of dry fly success is drag and the moment any section of the tippet sinks below the surface it is pulled by the current causing the dry fly to drag.

Among the members of the Cape Piscatorial Society, I am probably alone in advocating greasing the entire leader including the tippet, an approach favoured by Tom Rosenbauer of Orvis and Peter Hayes, author of *'Fly Fishing Outside the Box – Emerging Heresies'*.

M C Coetzer, the country's most experienced competitive fly angler, is adamant that the rear section of the leader must be greased to enhance lift-off into the back cast, but that the tippet must sink.

Siding with him is the city's most experienced guide, Tim Rolston, and he wrote a cogent article on the subject – *'Should Tippets Float'* for his Paracaddis website.

I focused on specific sections of stream – thigh-deep pocket water – and to me the most compelling segment of this debate relates to the first rule of fly fishing – do not let the fish become aware of your presence. That, in part, means not drowning your dry fly on lift-off into the back cast via your sunken tippet and then having that dry fly expel the water so accumulated in a fine, incandescent mist as the back cast ends. A mist which, backlit under our bright African sun, creates a kaleidoscope of colours.

Drone footage of the extent to which the stream surface is disturbed during lift-off into the back cast has reinforced my view.

Furthermore, a floating fly moving at odds with the current during a dead drift guarantees failure and, in the braided currents found in the knee-deep pocket water which I chose to fish, any part of the tippet which is below the surface instantly causes drag.

I was therefore cheered when Peter Hayes published his fascinating book, ***Fly Fishing Outside the Box – Emerging Heresies*** in 2013.

He said that the waterproof autofocus cameras which had just become available enabled him to see the leader and the tippet as trout see them

The idea of doing this was not new and he cites the experience of G E M Skues who used an underwater observation chamber constructed by the naturalist Dr Francis Ward. (A photograph can be seen in Paul Schullery's, ***The Rise: Streamside Observations on Trout, Flies, and Fly Fishing***).

In a footnote, Peter Hayes says:

“This business of sinking the tippet with which I so disagree has been handed down for decades, but actually only for a few of them. Skues, writing in The Way of a Trout with a Fly in 1921 (p 41) referring to what he had learned from looking up through the sunken window of Dr Francis Ward’s experimental pond, said that when thrown on the surface dry, the gut was not noticeable from underneath except in the window, and not very noticeable then. Sunken gut he says ‘became obvious’

and goes on to say that ‘the insistence of the dry fly angler on ... absolute dryness of gut and fly seems ... to be thoroughly justified.’

So not only did Skues see the same as my camera, but he is clear that keeping your tippet floating was de rigueur up to the 1920s at least. Who was it that led us astray?”

What is interesting in the historical chronology on the floating tippet, is that two prominent writers, first Al McClane and then Tom Rosenbauer agree with Hayes.

Al McClane: *The Practical Fly Fisherman*, (Prentice Hall, 1975) Pages 80 – 81:

“Whether a leader sinks or floats can be a worrisome question to the neophyte. While it is extremely important that the leader be rubbed perfectly straight, I doubt if it matters whether it sinks unless you are fishing a wet fly or nymph which requires that it go under. Traditionalists will raise a bloodshot eye at the idea that a floating leader is just as effective as one sunk below the surface, but I am convinced that trout see it one way or the other, and any attempt to hide it underwater is wasted effort.

Trout will even hit the knots in a leader when they’re busy gorging on midges. To convince

myself, I spent time in a wet suit with scuba gear studying the subject from the trout's point of view; I only came to the conclusion that a sunken leader is more visible with its double image reflecting against the surface when it's an inch or so under the water than a floating leader, which frankly I had more difficulty finding.

Leader shadow on the bottom is of no consequence because from the trout's position, facing the current, his view of the river is horizontal and upward. To a fisherman standing in the water and looking down on the full length of it, the shadow may be alarming, but a trout has no such advantage. The important thing is that the leader makes it possible for an artificial fly to arrive on the stream like a natural insect. And to achieve that depends on how smoothly you present your casts."

Tom Rosenbauer: *The Orvis Guide to Prospecting for Trout* (Lyons Press, 2008) Pages 159 -160:

"I originally started greasing my leader with silicone dry-fly paste because I had trouble following my fly in a pocket water stream that never seemed to see the sun. I found I could trace the fly better by looking for the shine of the leader on the water, and it didn't bother the trout at all. Using a greasy leader in other streams because I was too lazy to change leaders or rub mud onto the fly to remove the silicone, I started noticing that drag wasn't as much of a problem - I was getting longer floats.

Switching back to a non-treated leader, I could see what was happening: The floating leader was far less affected by currents because it was riding half above the water instead of fully immersed in it. Would you fish a dry fly with a sinking line?

I still like to keep my leader sinking in smooth water, and often use fluorocarbon tippet, especially for the last five feet, because a leader's shadow can disturb a nervous trout. But in riffled water, and in the smooth windows in pocket water where the trout don't see much of your leader, it pays to keep the whole thing floating."

My decision to follow the dictum of Skues, McClane, Rosenbauer and Hayes was primarily and fundamentally based on the water I chose to fish, the water I enjoyed fishing. Knee-deep pocket water where the braided currents would tug at the sunken portions of tippet causing drag.

I didn't de-grease the tippet when fishing my little sunken beetles and ants because trout in water that deep are always on the watch for surface food and the 1.5 mm countersunk brass bead on the beetle or the weight of the copper wire in the ant would take them just below the meniscus anyway. I couldn't see them in the water, but I could see the small yarn indicator the size of a match head and, forward of that, the brightly coloured mono held at the surface by the ever-reliable Mucilin paste.

Hi-vis leaders

In the late 1970s an article on nymphing by Dave Whitlock in *Fly Fisherman* significantly improved my fly-fishing success and enjoyment. He advocated sliding a small piece of brightly coloured fly line onto the leader as a strike indicator. At the time Stren had yellow mono on the market and I combined the two ideas. Since then, competitive angling has given us leader material in a combination of bright colours by companies such as Rio, Scientific Anglers and Hanak which, when greased with Mucilin, help guide the eye of the small stream angler towards the fly.

Hi-vis leader material can be combined with Loon Bio Strike mouldable putty on a tippet knot. It's

quick and easy to apply and I keep a blob of it stuck to the reel seat behind my hand so that it is quickly available. Another option would be to use black Skafars Neon Wax where the yellow and pink sections of Rio Two Tone tippet material merge or to colour that section with a black permanent marker.

This brings me back to the objections to the greased tippet for dry fly fishing which we know decreases drag. Is the objection, then, that the greased tippet is more visible to the trout? The objectors seem to be unaware or to have forgotten that, in the early-1970s, Doug Swisher and Carl Richards experimented with tippets dyed fluorescent pink and yellow and found that they made no difference as they explained in their 1975 book *'Fly Fishing Strategy'*:

"The strict traditionalist will no doubt be turned off by this revolting idea, fearing that every trout in sight within sight would swim for cover. This has not been the case. In fact, not once have we found a situation where the high visibility leader has caused a drop-off in success but there has been an advantage. Even with size #28 midge adults and pupas in clear, slow-moving water, the bright yellow or pink leaders and tippets do not put fish down. We think that the trout is only concerned with the fly which, of course, represent its main diet and ignores all the other objects, of which there are many, that come drifting in on the currents."

This makes sense because, for the same reason, trout and other fish ignore the plainly-visible hook which is part of the fly. Brian Clarke and John Goddard devised upside down patterns which made the hook less visible when they were working on their 1980 book, *'The Trout and the Fly – A New Approach'*. They never caught on because they were unnecessary.

Boiled leaders

Boiling leaders made of Maxima mono is universal practice among competition fly anglers for a very good reason – it increases the elasticity of the leader giving it a greater shock-absorbing capability on the strike which, in turn, facilitates the use of finer tippets. A decade ago, MC Coetzer and other members of the South African national team used Google Translate to parse online French articles where they found references to this.

MC asked a friend to experiment.

"When he phoned me back, he said he was literally shaking with excitement", MC

recalls. To create this stretch, MC advises boiling the Maxima leader in wide coils for two minutes.

Stephen Boshoff advises boiling Maxima leaders in tea which gives them a beautiful brownish tinge, a possible advantage in the peat-stained streams near Cape Town which are a pale amber in colour. Al McClane experimented with leaders of different colours and came to the conclusion that it was a debate of no significance – but Stephen's ritual appeals to me.

The tippet is not boiled.

Here are the relevant measurements of Maxima Ultra-green mono:

2lbs .005" 6x

3lbs .006" 5x

4lbs .007" 4x

5lbs .008" 3x

6lbs .009" 2x

8lbs .010 1X

10lbs .012"

12lbs .013"

Elasticity

Darrel Martin says a furled leader may stretch 15% of its total length. If you combine this with the elasticity of boiled Maxima mono, you build in significant shock absorption. For short casts with short rods on small streams you could start with a three-foot furled leader and loop that to three foot of 4 x boiled Maxima for a basic length of six foot. Add a tippet ring to the 4x and add your sections of 5 and 6 x after that.

Tippet rings

One of the significant advantages that competitive fly angling has brought us is the tippet ring which floats as part of a greased leader. It allows one to change tippets when they become too short with constant fly changes, without affecting the basic leader length. A 2 mm tippet ring, particularly on a greased leader, will not adversely affect dry fly presentation.

Line to leader join

When Pascal Cognard visited South Africa in 2013, local fly anglers gained useful insights and an [article by Tom Sutcliffe](#) on his website illustrated Cognard's leader construction methods and the extent to which he streamlines the line-to-leader join.

Leader and Tippet Knots

Blood knots are streamlined, easy-to-tie and strong. I wipe Loon Knot Sense onto my mono before tying the knot so that it is infused within the knot. This serves two purposes, reducing friction and bonding the knot internally.

Reduce friction by tightening the knot slowly and keeping your hands about 10-12 centimetres apart, thereby distributing the heat stress across a greater length of nylon. When the knot is completely tight, Borger recommends that the relevant section of leader be held in that stretched position for about ten seconds – presumably to allow the heat generated during the tightening process to dissipate.

He recommends five turns with the thinner mono and seven with the thicker for his 5/7 blood knot, particularly if mono of widely differing diameters is used. [The Improved Blood Knot](#) is used for the [same reason](#) and doubles the thinner strand.

Conclusion

The approach of South African small stream anglers is eclectic.

Tom Sutcliffe, like Dave Hughes and Tim Rolston modifies a commercial, knotless leader.

Peter Brigg and I like short, furred leaders designed for light-line rods but use the Sutcliffe/ Hughes/ Rolston approach if they are not available.

South Africa's most experienced competitive fly angler, MC Coetzer uses a [boiled Maxima leader](#) based on the Pascal Cognard short regressive taper and greases the rear section of the leader.

In the end, small stream leader choice comes down to whatever works for you in maximising enjoyment and minimising frustration, but a maxim which cannot be challenged is that for small stream stalking, a six-foot leader offers more control and ensures more dry fly accuracy for the average caster than a 16-foot one.



