

## Second European Bamboo Rodmaking Gathering Sarnen, Switzerland

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The second European Bamboo Rodmaking Gathering was held in the middle of Switzerland in the lovely village of Sarnen on the week-end of 25 through 27 September 2009. Our Swiss friends organized it perfectly in the rowing sport centre by lake Sarnen a few kilometres from Lucern.

Just over 100 people from all over Europe met again in a beautiful Autumn weather to exchange knowledge, experiences and cheer, thus confirming this event as the highlight of the bamboo rod making arena in Europe.



For the first time we had one guest from the UK, while a few new visitors approached us during the event . Christian Diacon and wife came from France. The majority of people were old friends from the first informal gathering with the Swiss, Italian and German rodmakers – also held at the same place in Sarnen - back in 2006 and the following gatherings in Waischenfeld, Germany (2007) and Sansepolcro, Italy, (2008).

We can certainly say that, well a century and a half

into the making of the modern fishing tackle era, the “Renaissance” of bamboo rod making is alive and striving. Our French friend Christian confirmed that in France too there is a recent renewed interest in this tradition once deeply rooted in his country.

The beauty of these gatherings, and in Sarnen it was respected again, is that all information is shared and that part-time rodmakers can meet in a friendly, intimate atmosphere with real trade artisans such as Rolf Baginski (Germany), Robert Stroh (Germany), Christian Strixner (Germany), Bjarne Vries (Denemark), Larry Tusoni (USA), Jerry Kustich (USA), Nick Hughes (South Africa, based in Switzerland). Andy Royer (USA), our bamboo broker, also attended the event with his daughter...leaving us all at first disconcerted because of his new beardless look and a pony tail: too much time spent with bamboo rodmakers, he explained.

People started arriving and registering in the middle of the afternoon on Friday. Philippe Sicher, one of the 6 organizers, officially welcomed us in the evening before dinner. From non smoking requirements to a shuttle bus service to the nearby hotel, all was gently organized, including a dedicated Swiss pocket-knife kindly given to all participants as a gift. An elegant and friendly team of helpers and the cooks Beno Gisler und Christian Schmid rounded off the excellent organization of the event. Typical Swiss food like rösti and bratwurst, delicious salads and local ravioli, delighted us through the event.

This second gathering was structured almost exclusively around workshops. However, these were not mere how-to stations, but real work places where a complete bamboo rod making sequencing was in place. As a result, a three pieces rod, “C.C. de France of Hardy” was created and given as price in the final raffle which concluded the week-end.



The workshops began on Saturday morning with the splitting of bamboo culms, and continued with the straightening of the nodes, binding and tempering the strips, and down till the very end stage of varnishing and signing which occurred on the following Sunday morning. The rod was made in a record time of just one and half days by an international group of 33 rodmakers. Understandably, 33 people working on the same rod and applying all possible different techniques and tools for each building phase as an educational exercise could not end up in the very essence of a precision cane rod (we, for instance, randomly measured over 10 hundreds of an cm of differences in the mid section of the rod), but the exercise could perfectly illustrate the simple yet manifold world of rodsmithing.



At the same time, opposite the splitting area, another large group of people surrounded Mr Ferdi Wenziger working at the lathe and making nickel-silver ferrules - by drilling and not turning the original silver-steel piece. A high precision work perhaps to be attempted by the most experienced craftsmen. As always, it might look easy but it's not a trouble-free task.

Self-taught Luciano Oltolini and Claudio testa, IBRA members, showed on the other hand the painstaking art of making agate stripping guides. The result of their individual work was stunning. The process involves drilling agate stones with a hollow diamond tool and then polishing them. The agate plates are purchased in mineral shops. Claudio and Luciano said that many rings get broken in the making, since natural stones are unpredictable and have anisotropic properties. Once the ring is ready, it's then soldered in an equally hand-made framework. The whole process can take two hours or more for just one agate stripping guide. The job is frustrating, says Luciano, "because perhaps you are a good half an hour into drilling, that the agate ring falls apart and you have to start all over again". Other times " I lost one or two finished agate rings which fell on the floor and so I realized I had to have a soft rubber mat on the bench to prevent occasional bouncing and losing!" Sounds familiar, doesn't it?

You learn at your expenses all the little details of your craft. Claudio was the first IBRA member to go along this path, alone, and out of his home workshop. “Buy the more expensive but best quality tools, you will never regret it” he advised us. A remarkable achievement, by both Luciano and Claudio whose work was very well received by many fellow rodmakers. By the way, Luciano Oltolini’s agate stripping guides can be seen and purchased through Alberto Poratelli’s website ([www.aprods.it](http://www.aprods.it)) ...just for those who asked to buy some



Another innovative workshop was carried out by Kurt Zumbrunn: how to make handmade grips of birch tree bark. The craft of using birch tree bark to make basketry and other objects has a long tradition but it was the first time that it was presented in our rodmaking circle in a step-by-step way. The first stage is to staple little squares of birch tree bark around a long bolt, then gluing them together and finally working them down on the lathe.



The grip has a smooth, very pleasant touch. The weight is slightly heavier than natural cork, but aesthetically, the distinct colouring of each ring and the unique natural pattern which result have a tremendous impact on the viewer. We, on the other side, immediately thought of other materials or uses which could be invented.



Gerd -Peter Wieditz delighted us with his simple yet very effective way of making steel snake guides out of metal wire. He just used two simple handmade tools: one to make the desired spiral shape and size – he uses small pins of different sizes as pivot around which the wire is properly twisted - and the other one is a flat metal bar with holes and a straight path for flattening and correcting the alignment of the snake guides' feet. The snake guides were then used for the rod in preparation.



Jaroslav Vecko wanted to become an engraver in his native Czechoslovakia when, like many of his countrymen, fled to Switzerland in the aftermath of the Prague Spring of 1968. Engraving is the art of manually drawing and chiselling in metal to make either prints or stand-alone masterpieces like those “carvings” or “drawings” you can see on knife handles, guns, rifles...and, yes, even ferrules and reel holders. The task is daunting since no mistake is allowed. Many years of practice are necessary to master this magnificent fine craft. Today, the best schools are in Belgium and Italy.



Jaroslav demonstrated us how to engrave a ferrule by using a special turning vise and a hand graver.

Perhaps the most useful and clever workshop was the “15 degree power measuring” by Mr Theodor Matschewski and Ludwig Reim, from Germany. These two gentlemen have spent the last 20 years in developing this very simple but stunning test which provides a measured account of how your fishing rod (any kind of fishing rod) performs. The characteristics and performance are simply derived by the basic physical law of Newton. I

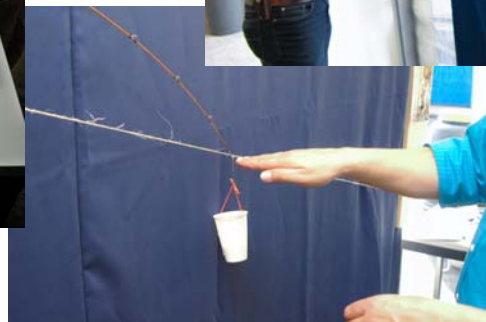
n practical terms you set the rod at a “zero” level, horizontally, the tip touching the line marked as “zero”, then you add a weight  $M_1$  at the tip until a “static” level just below is reached and then again another weight  $M_2$  till the tip of the rod is bent so to touch a 15 degree line with line “zero”.

The two masses  $M_1$  and  $M_2$  give you the kind of rod action you have (e.g. medium-fast) and the equivalent line number. We tried with an Alberto Poratelli’s IRP, 7.2’, #3 rod and the result confirmed that it was a medium-fast, #3 rod as Alberto and IBRA stated

By means of this test, one can compare rods independently from line, length and material. Beginners and interested anglers could then use it before buying a new rod knowing what they are looking for. Mr Reim also developed a test to measure the speed of a rod but we do not enter into it in detail in this article.

The declared target is to have this system adopted as THE worldwide standard by rod manufacturers.

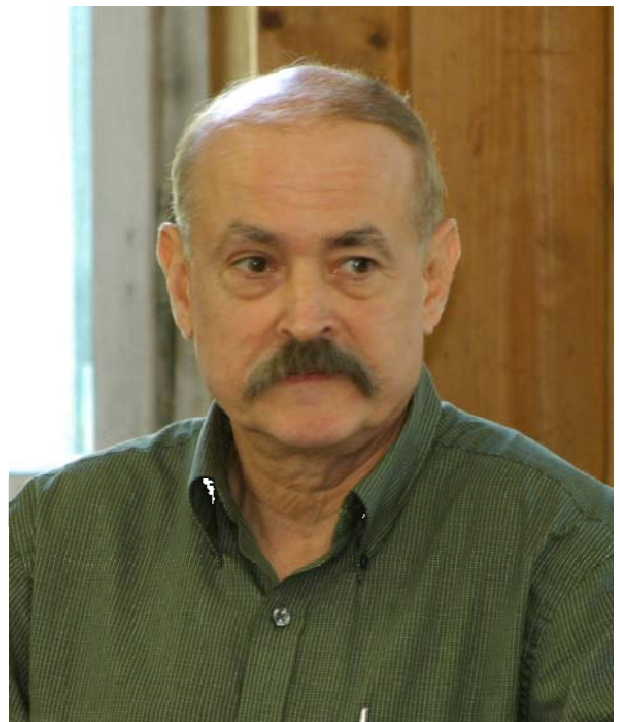
Besides, more and more people are recognizing its importance. “The test is as simple as effective, so what could be against it?”, say the two entrepreneurs? More about their test at [www.solitip.de](http://www.solitip.de) and soon also in English ([www.solitip.com](http://www.solitip.com)).



Terenzio Zandri and Gianluca Nocentini have become a fixed presence of our gatherings. Again their beautiful flies made out of a special loom, the hook vertically placed, created a sensation. But Terenzio is also known for his famous silk line. To learn more about Terenzio, check his website [www.terenziosilklines.com](http://www.terenziosilklines.com)



Larry Tusoni gave a speech on Sunday morning explaining the new features of his popular software - and taper data base- "RodDna" which has now reached version 1.4. Larry was also busy in the workshops, on the planning form, on the Tormek machine giving a presentation on how to sharpen blades and was very active throughout the gathering.





Fly Reels were again presented by aficionados of this craft like Waldemar Nowak who makes "S-shaped" reels, Wolfhard Schulz, both from Germany and Markus Rohrbach (Switzerland). We met Wolfhard for the first time in Waischenfeld in 2007. With a direct mentoring of Joe Janciuras who lives in the USA, Wolfhard has been gradually trying to reproduce Edward vom Hofe reels, the only person in Europe! Markus Rohrbach of Swiss Tackle, a mechanical engineer, exhibited his beautiful fly reel and the new tippet dispenser.

He said "It all started in 1999 when I first build the prototype of the dispenser for myself. After using it for a while friends were asking for it and I decide to produce a small series for them in 2000.

After that I started the reel project and sold the first reel at the end of 2003 to the USA and another 15 piece to Japan" His reels and tippet dispensers are available to try at next gathering and of course on his website ([www.swisstackle.ch](http://www.swisstackle.ch)).



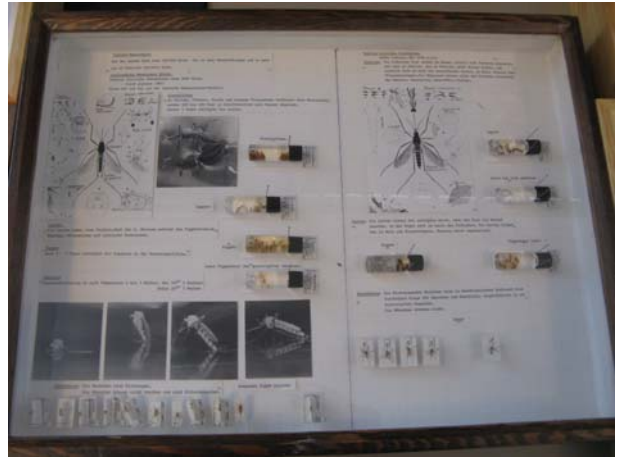
Our friendly and cheerful Daniel Hoda (<http://hoda-bamboo-rods.ch>), always present since the beginning of our gatherings, showed a bamboo spinning rod along with his beautiful fly fishing rods.



He and Tim Anderson also suggested the use of a USA-made glue to varnish the rod. Tim, who from scrimshaw artist in Waischenfeld back in 2007, has since become a convinced bamboo rodmaker, showed us the way of using this special glue, named "Gorilla Glue" to varnishing the rod.



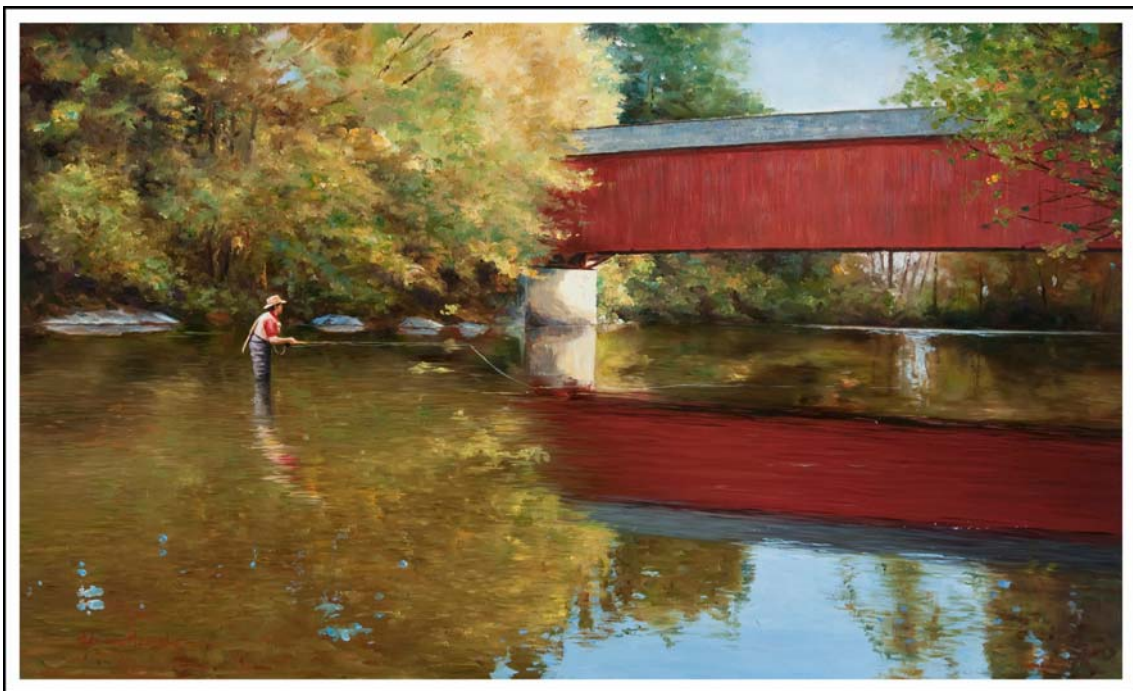
The variety of the workshops and presentations did not finish here. The Swiss entomologist Heinz Suter, provided a magnificent display of aquatic insects. A masterful work which could be easily placed in a Natural Museum without doubt!



As we said, the gathering finished with a raffle. Many prizes were on the table including the rod which had just being finished and provided with a document with all 33 names of the people involved in the making.

We left Sarnen after lunch together in a nice, autumn sunshine





A Perfect Fall Day