

## **2013 European Bamboo makers Gathering**

### **The Two Handed Rod**

I would like to thank Philipp and the organisers of this meeting for inviting me to such a wonderful gathering. I am honoured to be here. I will tell you a little about myself and how I have come to making bamboo spey rods. When I was young fisherman the rod of choice was fibreglass. Some of the older fisherman still fished cane. I was attracted to it at first by its beauty and then by its smooth and gentle casting qualities. I latter moved to Northern B.C. to pursue Steelhead, the western counterpart to Atlantic salmon. I fished with fiberglass, graphite and bamboo rods. After collecting some single handed bamboo rods .I decided I would like to learn how to make some of these wonderful rods. Tom Morgan, whom I had met through guiding phoned me up one day and said he had an idea about a new way to make bamboo rods and asked would I like to help him. In jumped at the offer and was lucky enough to be there when Tom created the Morgan Handmill system. I was his experimenter the following year and we talked almost every day on the phone, as I tried to get it right. Being a steelhead fisherman and wanting to make my own steelhead rodsI looked around at the ideas and tapers of the past. With singlehanded steelhead rods the problem was finding a rod big and powerfull enough to handle a larger line size and yet be light enough to fish all day. This led me to EC Powell and the semi hollow rod he built.

Then along came the spey revolution to steelhead fishing in North America. I could see the advantages of the double handed rod and began to do some research . I asked Per Brandin what he knew about spey rods and he pointed me towards some Payne double handed tapers he had collected. Using EC semi hollow methods we made them lighter and faster. I managed to have Bailey Woods make me some big butt ferrules and then it was research time. Unfortunately almost every rod I built broke at the ferrule. A combination of spey casting, big fish and most decidedly sinking lines were just too much. The metal ferrule created a stiff unyielding stress point which led to fatigue and failure of the bamboo. Conferring with Per again, it really good to have friends like this, he informed me of the spliced ferrule. That fall,coming up to steelhead fish he brought out a big Sharpes spliced rod. It was a brute to cast but I could see the advantages of the spliced ferrule.

And indeed I still think it is the best system one could have for joining spey rods. The rod transfers stress to the bigger diameters of the butt smoothly and effecently . Easy to build and at no expense. Its looks may through people off but through time and experiecnce people get used to it. Now people ask me for it. I no longer have to convince them of its merits.

### **Design ideas and thoughts**

Philipp asked me to talk about what I call the the modern bamboo spey rod. In the past traditional bamboo spey rods lifted a lot of line out of the water. The rods had to be long and powerfull, and of course ended up being heavy, to be up to move so much line. Shooting the line was not done on a regular basis.

When I began to fish single handed rod, shooting heads and running line were the norm . In the early eighties the spey rod started to appear on our streams. They mostly were of the traditional size, 15 to 16 footers. North Americans have a sporting tradition of light tackle and a skillfull approach. They

wanted something lighter. To give fair chase. To be more sporting. So the long rod got shorter and lighter and new lines, such as the Skagit shooting head system were developed. The scandi line was also adopted because it also suited the new style of rods.

Now big bamboo rods of the past , as I stated before were heavy, even when hollowbuilt. But with the new line systems that were developed and borrowed, a rod did not have to be so long . I started at making 13 footers and I now fish a 11 footer as my everyday rod. The shorter rods take a little more skill to cast as they are not as forgiving as the longer rods. I always tell a novice to start with a 14 foot graphite rod to learn how to cast. D loops and anchor points can more easily be corrected . But once you get the hang of it, a lighter ,shorter, quicker rod is a joy to fish with and quite competitive with graphite rods, which are the norm today. Unfortunately for us, the bamboo rod builder, the graphite rod of today is the only rod most anglers are familiar with and the qualities of these rods have been accepted as the norm. Education on alternate rods is usefull, but for bamboo to remain a viable option it must be somewhat competitive to the standard of today. After casting a new lightweight 14 foot graphite rod you cannot stick a 14 foot Sharpes in their hand and expect them exalt you on its virtues. Its just too heavy and slow. But give them a 11 to 12 foot hollow built bamboo rod with some modern Scandinavian lines they might just want one. This is what I call the modern bamboo spey rod.

Lines for spey rods are much more critical than in singlehanded casting. With a spey rod there is no falsecasting which enables you to feel the load. It's a lift, backcast and a forward roll type cast. The line must load the rod properly or.... There are an amazing choice of lines on the market today. What a shorter rod needs and demands is a smaller head length. If you desire to cast longer belly lines a longer rod is necessary. A longer bamboo spey is not out of the question, but it is alot slower in action than a graphite rod of the same size. There are people who prefer this type of rod. The shorter Scandinavian and skagit lines are available in 25 grain increments allowing for fine tuning for individual casting styles.

### **Step one Learning to Spey cast**

As with single handed casting one must evaluate what one builds. Truly great rods are built by great casters. If they can translate their needs into design, a notable rod is born. Three attributes must come together, design ,construction and appearance. So understanding design by evaluating the cast is the first essential. If we are new to the spey rod I would recommend lessons with a professional. Select a long graphite rod for starters and get it matched with the right line. As your skill progresses try shorter rod. Now we can understand what a rod demands and can start to design one.

A simple taper such as a Powell B-9 is a good place to start. Then corrections will be made by trial and error once one can understand what is lacking or needs to be enhanced. What are the qualities we are looking for? How do we get there? Learn from the past ,change and enhance, know what we are looking for.

### **CONSTRUCTION and special problems**

When building the bamboo spey rod we must realise we a pushing the limits of the material alot more than with a trout rod. We are after a bigger quarry. The spey cast creates more twisting and stress in

the fibers than with single handed casting. We must design and construct in a method that allows for these stresses but does not turn the rod into a heavy piece of wood.

**Glue** What may hold in a trout rod will be tested in a spey rod. Use a strong somewhat flexible glue.

**Binding** Some rod builders of the past thought by increasing the the pressure when binding that they would get better glue lines. I have found that if the strips are not correct all the pressure in the world will not make them fit. Added pressure only puts twists in the blank and big blanks are hard to straighten. Go easy here.

Bigger **nodes** cause bigger problems. Flatness of the strip around the node is a constant concern. Reevaluate at every turn. Visually check the node against a straight edge at every opportunity. A single stager I believe is best with 5 others strips supporting the node

**Ferrules** Spliced ferrules transfer the stress smoothly to a larger diameter of the rod . We will talk latter in depth about different ferrule designs Each has its virtues and weaknesses.

**Handle Length** Must be tailored to each rod providing a proper balance point at the top of the grip, with a reel of moderate weight. Short handles and a heavy reel, although balancing the rod in hand, increases the swing weight. Anything that slow a rod down can be a problem. I am not saying this is the only limiting factor, for if I did i would be fishing graphite instead of bamboo, but it is important.

**Reelseats** Older reels have longer feet and many people prefer to use then so the reelseat must be made to accommodate this. This can be done by increasing the machined metal barrel or lengthening the wood insert. The latter only allows you to use the longer reel feet.

**Guides** stripping guides made of agate are beautifull but somewhat fragile in their bigger diameters . a durable carbide stripping guide is a good choice. A regular wire snake guide is appropriate here.

**Wraps** Nylon is preferred here as silk is very hard to wrap in the bigger diameters.

I personally like both 5 and 6 strip construction. I have had no experience with 4 as i felt I did not have the time to experiment . Per Brandin has suggested I give this a try. One day perhaps i will or perhaps one of you will. I would go with 6 strip as it is easier to measure what you've built. Once the right taper is achieved a 5 strip conversion can be worked out. The bigger butts and mids demand alot of attention to nodes. Tips are easier to build than trout tips as they are not as fine.

**Hollowing** is, I believe is mandatory and I would start with around 110 thousand in the butt and work your way up to 50 in the tip. I use the scalloped semi hollow EC Powell method as the bigger flats in a spey rod tend to split using the fluted method.

## **Appearance**

This is a personal thing. I do like some of the features of rods of the past and I build upon that as well as incorporating some new looks of today. As well as being cosmetic they can add to the durability of the rod. Composite cork/rubber rings can add a nice look plus be used in high wear areas. Reelseats can be

made to accommodate today's and yesterday's reels. Modern Poly finishes can protect the cane better than ever. Oil is nice finish but it needs replenishing from time to time. I am sure we could have a complete discussion on this topic alone

## **LETS TALK ABOUT FERRULES**

**Ferrule design.** It has been my experience that nickel silver ferrules do not work. Every rod I constructed broke at the ferrule as the metal was stiffer than the rod. They are also very expensive in the bigger sizes.

**Spliced ferrules,** in my mind are the ferrule of choice. If designed properly the rod flexes as one piece. There are a few rules to learn such as splice length ratio and swelling of the ferrule as two halves do not make a whole. It's a good choice to start with and to learn and negates the high cost of metal ferrules.

**Composite ferrules** made from graphite and epoxy are a compromise. Not As stiff as metal. Not as flexible as the splice. This takes some extra learning, but provides a rod that can easily taken apart. It has its disadvantages as well, due to swelling, but with a little caution and special construction techniques it can be resolved.

**Bamboo ferrule** Great flexibility. Then problem here again is swelling and taking your rod apart in wet conditions. It is not something I have done alot with because of what I perceive as problems. I believe Alberto will talk of this and I shall be glad to learn what he has discovered,

### **Composite ferrule design** Mark 1 2 and 3 Explanation of construction

Mark 1 Building the universal ferrule by Ted Barnhart is available on the internet. Great place to start This is a sleeve over design -female built over male. This guide also explains how to build the jig and all about the materials needed.

Mark 2 Alot like Mark 1 except the male is hollowed and has 3 terns of graphite covering it. Female fitted over the stabalized male. This hopefully corrects the problem of male swelling and getting stuck in female ferrule

Mark 3 This is Tim Andersons design with a little tweaking on my part. The female is the same as the universal ferrulle. The male has a fiberglass composite construction. After cutting off the first ½ of the ferrule length a solid fibreglass rod is inserted in the male and beyond. The second half is tapered to the fibreglass rod which is sticking out of the rod. The whole ferrule is then covered in fibergass then shaped to the male taper. The female is formed the male this using a release agent. Final fit as with all models is an epoxy wet fit.