

When you cast a tandem rig you certainly won't look like Brad Pitt, and since a tandem rig is a multi-fly setup, you can forget about that long tight loop as well. Brad didn't cast a lot of tandem rigs in "*A River Runs Through It*", thirty years ago, but ask yourself, "Do I want to look like Brad Pitt or catch fish?!" Caution, it is a mistake to ask your wife, trust me.

The terminology used in tandem rigs can be as confusing as the fishing is productive. European fly anglers, and they are masters of multi-fly rigging, refer to the flies used as "the cast", like the actors in a play. If the upper fly is a dry fly, it is called the "bob"... because it bobs? Progressing towards the end of the tippet, the next fly is coined the "dropper", and the fly furthest away, the one at the end of the cast, is called the "point". Confusion occurs when the first fly is a nymph or wet fly, in place of the dry. In that case, the upper fly is called the dropper, with the second fly called the middle dropper. Fortunately, the fly "on-point" is still the point fly.

With self-explanatory and colorful names as the Hopper-Dropper and Barr's Hopper-Copper-Dropper, many commonly used tandem setups can easily be deciphered. However, I firmly believe utilizing them is a different story. Multi-fly rigs, no matter what they are called, tend to make less experienced fly anglers nervous for several reasons, not the least of which are the possibilities of insurmountable tangles and /or deeply impaling one's self while casting. Yet, there are areas in Scotland where 6 or 7 flies in a cast are traditionally used. It just occurred to me that Scottish fly anglers, if not credited with inventing macramé, certainly must be perfecting it!

WHY USE A TANDEM RIG?

We don't use tandem rigs because we are sadomasochistic... we use tandem rigs because they flat-out catch fish! Of course, even to the most casual observer, logic dictates the more flies used, the

more fish caught. Nevertheless, that reasoning is as simplistic as it is naïve, since it is just part of the story. Just how empowering can tandem rigging be and how can doing it facilitate a better fly fishing experience?

Let's review two areas that quickly come to mind: 1) How multi-fly rigs function in collecting information and making informed decisions, and 2) How tandem rigs can increase the effectiveness of presentations and prime an angler for the take.



Hopper Locator with Callibaetis Cripple

Information Collection and Decision Making

Pattern choice: Using greatly diverse flies simultaneously, an angler can more quickly identify the *soupe du jour* (*soupe du moment!*), or discover a hidden hatch. On initial explorations, choose flies for your cast that are vastly dissimilar patterns, varying significantly in size, shape, and color.

Depth: Presenting flies at different levels can quickly locate fish in the water column. This is valuable information for stillwater anglers as, contrary to moving water in which trout primarily feed either near the bottom or the surface, trout in stillwater tend to continually relocate in the water column throughout the day, dependent on: 1) comfort (temperature and oxygen); 2) cover; and 3) cuisine.

Ahead of the hatch: An angler using a well thought-out multi-fly rig can detect very early-on when a hatch is beginning to occur and adjust strategies accordingly. For example, in the morning on Lake Davis, I start fishing with a chironomid on point about a foot above the lakebed and a callibaetis nymph dropper midway up the water column, suspended from an indicator to keep them in place. Trout almost always take the chironomid for the first hour or two, at which point they switch to the callibaetis nymph, thus signaling the beginning of hatch. That tells me to do three things: 1) fish higher in the water column (always do that when trout start actively feeding); 2) change the chironomid on point to a more active pattern such as a damselfly nymph; and 3) take off the indicator and strip the flies.

Presentation and Take Detection

Covering the zones: Utilizing a dry-dropper combination allows the fly angler to fish in two places simultaneously. This is especially useful in moving water, allowing the angler to quickly and completely cover suspected trout lies with a number of methodically incremental passes, fishing in the two zones that trout actively feed.

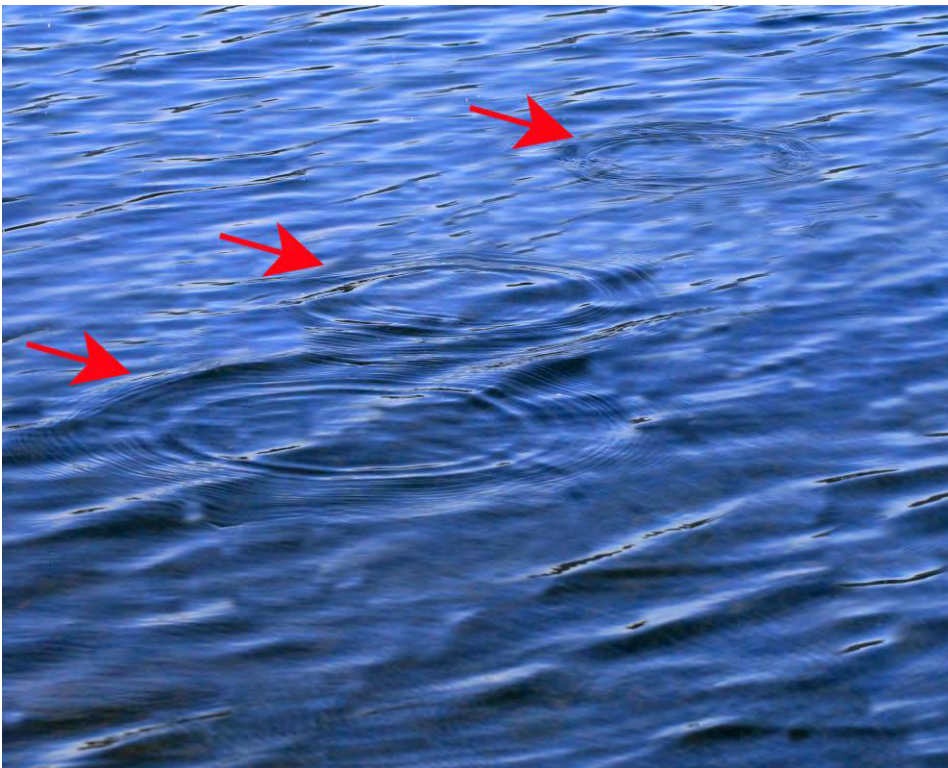
Getting down: Fishing flies tandemly allows an angler to add and adjust weight utilizing flies as opposed to adding split shot. Czech nymphing provides a good example for moving water, as it characteristically employs three flies for just that purpose: 1) the mid-weighted fly on the first dropper, 2) the heaviest fly on the middle dropper and 3) the lightest fly on point.

Regarding stillwater, when I use an indicator, I prefer not to use a weighted point fly to achieve a fast sink rate. Added weight to that fly may impede seductive motion. Instead, I suspend my point fly from a bead head (or otherwise weighted) dropper fly, and use that to assist sinking my setup. Nevertheless, when casting long leaders (15'+) with three flies, use a weighted point fly to straighten the presentation.

Attractor: One of the flies in a tandem rig can be used as the attractor, a fly just to get our prey's attention. Bass fly anglers have been doing this for years, using a surface disturbance fly to attract bass to the trailing fly. For trout, rigging a small nymph behind a streamer (wooly bugger), is amazingly effective.

Fly locator: The bob fly obviously indicates a take if it suddenly disappears under the surface when used in tandem with a nymph, and who wouldn't react to that? Nonetheless, I often use a larger dry fly to indicate the general location of a smaller dry or emerger. I enjoy fishing the surface film but those small half-sunken flies are hard to see let alone track; seeing my size sixteen callibaetis cripple at 15 feet can be a challenge especially if the current is swift. It is much easier to locate the larger dry and know the smaller fly is in the vicinity.

WHAT ARE THE CONSIDERATIONS?



Watch for multiple rings after casting.

Casting: Casting strokes have to be modified when using a tandem rig: 1) open up your loop, 2) slow your stroke, 3) cast shorter distances, and 4) do not over power it! Furthermore, learn the Belgian Cast! It is ideal for casting multi-fly setups, as there is no pause and the line never reverses its direction to travel over the same path. Lastly, listen and watch. Listen for any unusual sound during casting and watch the water for the rings that indicate all is good. If either deviates from the norm, immediately check your flies!

Time: More flies, more knots, and more tippet, means the more the time needed to set up or change flies. Plan not only to allow extra time, but also consider setting up rigs prior to being on the water. Use pipe insulation foam to store several rigs. It works well with barbless flies because the foam absorbs the tension necessary to store the setups. It also serves as a quick place to put used rigs when re-rigging.

Failure points: More knots translate to more points where things can go wrong. Use the best leader and tippet material you can afford, and know the knots.

Tangles: Utilize the Ninety Second Rule. If it appears as though it will take more than 90 seconds to untangle, or after untangling, the leader will be distorted with kinks... don't bother, re-rig the setup!



Note the shape, securing wraps and ease of removal.

Strike Indicators: I have specific criteria for indicators for multi-fly rigs. They must: cast well; be easy to remove, without any untying; leave minimum wake when stripped; be shaped in such a way that even small takes can be detected; be reusable. Wapsi Lightning Strike Football indicators are by far my favorite. Nevertheless, indicators are like religions, and all are entitled to their beliefs.

Releasing: Be aware of the position of the second fly while landing and releasing a fish. It will catch on anchor ropes, landing nets, released fish and you!

RIGGING

Earlier I mentioned several two-fly combinations and how I might utilize them: Dry-Dry, Dry-Emerger, Dry-Dropper, Nymph-Nymph and Streamer-Nymph... and I am sure you can add several others. Now let's consider a few ways of setting up a multi-fly rig.

Know the knots

Knots, on T.V. they fight wars over them. They are also religions! And never demonstrate a knot to a group. You wind up with five guys that have eight knots that are better! In all, Boy Scouts have to learn ten knots. Excluding specialty knots, e.g. Bimini Twist, I believe a trout angler has to master just five for most multi-fly rigging situations. Listed in order of my frequency of use, they are the: 1) Non-Slip Loop knot; 2) Clinch knot; 3) Triple Overhand knot (variation of the Surgeon's knot); 4) Perfection Loop; and 5) Blood knot.

I have two suggestions regarding knots. First, purchase a ten foot piece of cotton rope at the hardware store, cut it in half and practice until you can tie them with your eyes shut; learn to tie these knots at home, not on the water! Second, when attaching a subsurface fly to a tippet, whether as a dropper or point fly, use the non-slip loop knot.

CONNECTING THE FLIES

Off the Bend- Tying the point fly off the bend of the hook of the bob or dropper is the most common attachment for ease of casting and positioning flies for stripping. Two concerns with this setup are: 1) impeded motion of the dropper fly: 2) and, with smaller flies and fish, the tippet tied to the bend may obstruct a take of that fly. I use a clinch knot on the bend for attachment. Hint: Hold the hook upside-down when you tie the clinch knot, or pre-tie the clinch knot on your finger, slip it off and onto the bend of the hook.

Off the Eye- Tying a point fly off the hook eye of the dropper, rather than off the bend, allows the dropper to drift a little more naturally, with less rigidity. Obviously hook and tippet size are concerns, as is vision... yours.



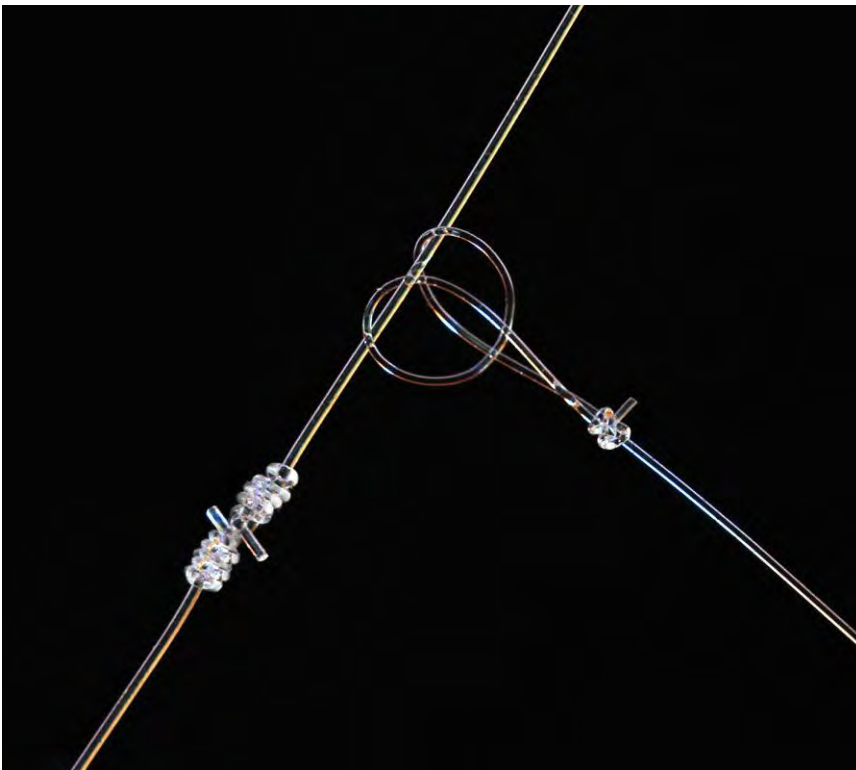
Sliding Dropper (Don't tie knots as close as pictured.)

The **Sliding Dropper** is a variation of the off the eye approach. In this setup a 6" section of tippet the same diameter (X) as the leader is tied on the leader and the dropper fly is slid onto it. The last section of tippet is then attached, the length of which is dependent on how far away the fly on point is to be. Of course, the knots that entrap the sliding dropper fly have to be large enough as to not pass through the eye of its hook. Blood knots worked well, but the choice is yours. Changing the dropper is not as time consuming as you might imagine... only one knot has to be tied, albeit a fat one!

Tying **off the bend** or **off the eye** establishes a direct connection between the line, dropper fly and point fly, but they are not necessarily the most tantalizing ways to present flies. Indirectly attaching a dropper, though seemingly threatening to cast, may be the answer. However, a dropper precariously dangling from a leader evokes a memory of that bird's nest like tangle that would inevitably transpire. Because of those long ago occurrences all too many of my fly angling brethren have withdrawn to the sanctuary of the above setups, fearful to venture again to that which so screwed-up their day. *Fear not, for ye have learned to cast...* so consider the following three indirect attachments that vary only in the attachment knot.

Blood Knot - Tying tippet onto a leader with a blood knot, leaving a 12" tag end from the leader, provides an attachment for the dropper to be initially held at a right angle to the line... the greater the diameter of the leader material the more rigid the angle. Two concerns are: blood knots are very difficult to tie with small diameter leaders; and if the dropper is replaced several times, the blood knot must be retied thus shortening the leader.

Triple Overhand Knot - Using this attachment takes some prior planning. Not only would a 12" tag end of leader material again have to be left for the dropper's attachment, but an entire length of tippet material (possibly up to 5') has to pass through the knot three times. It takes longer to rig and the dropper is not held out at a right angle, but I recommend it. Nonetheless, as dropper flies are replaced the tag end shortens and, like the blood knot dropper, becomes worthless.



Perfection Loop Dropper connection ready to be tightened

Perfection Loop - Using a perfection loop dropper affixed above the tippet knot solves several abovementioned concerns and it can be removed with the fly attached. When the dropper of either of the two above methods becomes too short, just trim it off and slip on the perfection loop dropper above the knot. Droppers can be pre-tied (there was a time when flies were sold that way). Using a ring or swivel will also prevent the perfection loop from slipping down to the point fly, but they can be mistaken for a flash back or chironomid. Trout are not all that smart.

Yes, I foresee a sequel to *A River Runs Through It* in which Brad is thirty years older, thirty years wiser, using a tandem rig and looking like me! Carol will be so let down.