

FLY FISHERS ARE PACK RATS

By Jack L. Parker

Basically, I think at least most fly fishers tend to be pack rats. By that I mean we not only collect, but seem to hoard as well. How many of us own more equipment than we will probably ever need? Flies for example; I personally have enough to last many lifetimes. I could almost certainly get along with about six dry fly, four or five nymph and a couple of streamer patterns for most of my trout fishing. As it is, I must have at least a zillion dries a million nymphs and half a million streamers. A little exaggeration in my figures, perhaps, but not by too much.

However, when it all boils down to ones equipment my first love is bamboo fly rods. I love everything about them. I love to handle them. I love to fish them. During those bleak winter days I love to take them out of their cases and just admire them. I'm not going to admit how many I really own. Unlike glass or graphite, each bamboo rod has a personality all its own. Each is an individual.

Believe me I'm not condemning glass or graphite. However, my bamboo rods, unlike those made of other materials, become close friends and companions. I do not fish with a single bamboo rod I don't consider to be a friend. Many have helped me through considerable on-the-stream trials and tribulations. On blank days I still have had the pleasure of casting one of them. If I caught a fish or two, so much the better. To the uninitiated, this may sound a trifle weird, but not to those who love and fish with bamboo rods.

The first good fly rod I ever owned was made of bamboo. It was a birthday gift from my parents. I used that rod for many years. A couple of years later, they gave me another rod for my birthday. This one was made from the then relatively new material for rods called fiber glass. Unfortunately, the rod met a quick end. We were on our annual trip to the Mammoth Lakes region of the Sierra. It was my first evenings fishing. The wind was blowing hard down the meadow on Mammoth Creek. I hadn't made many false casts into the wind when there was a loud snap! The rod broke just above the handle. That incident probably unjustly prejudiced me against glass. Fortunately, I had my trusty bamboo rod as a back up. This rod, in all the years I fished it, never once let me down.

While writing this piece I received a call from my old friend Tony Maslan, up in Marysville. Tony is the son-in-law of that late great bamboo rod maker E.C. Powell. Tony still carries on in the footsteps of E.C. building those wonderful rods and in the same old shop E.C. built way back in 1937. Tony called to tell me the 8 footer I had asked him to build for me was ready. He had in fact, built two. I could have my pick. I won't go in to just how many E.C. Powell rods I already own.

I picked up fellow club member and close friend Jim Peters at his home that next

Saturday morning at exactly 9 a.m. We arrived at the shop shortly before 10. Tony was waiting. It was cold outside, but warm and snug inside the old building. Of all the many times I have stepped through that door I always seem to have the feeling I'm stepping back in time. Even though it was Jim's first visit I think he had the same feeling. After introductions, Tony gave Jim a tour of the premises. I could tell he was deeply impressed.

Tony must have sensed my feeling of eagerness, because he said smiling, "Okay pard, (a term he uses a lot), I guess you want to have a look at the rods." He walked over to a table where the two were lying encased in their cloth bags. Putting one together he handed it to me saying, "this is the heavier of the two and should handle a No. 6 line very nicely." Reverently, I took the rod from his hand and flexed it several times. "Magnificent," I managed to reply. Next, he handed me the other rod stating it was lighter and even though a bit stiffer, it without a doubt, would be more suited for a No. 5 line. It was equally as magnificent.

We drove to a nearby park for the ultimate test. I would cast the rods. I cast the rod for a 6 wt. line first. Sheer poetry in motion. The rod for a 5 wt. line was just as magical, but in a different way. Each had an action and feel all its own. I was perplexed to say the least. What rod should I choose? While pondering my dilemma, Jim cast one then the other. All he could do was shake his head and mutter words under his breath, but I was only able to catch a "wow," and "unbelievable." It was Tony, who relieved my quandary stating why didn't I take them both. I could pay for the other at a later time.

On the drive home, both rods safely in the car's trunk, Jim told me he felt that maybe it was about time he gave some serious thought about having Tony build him a rod.

If you have never fished or cast a fine bamboo rod you are missing a memorable experience. It's true, in recent years bamboo may have gotten a reputation for snob appeal. I am sure there are those who fish it for just that reason which is a shame. I fish bamboo strictly, because I truly enjoy it.