Aerial Mends with Tenkara

John Pellegrin

In Western fly fishing, there is the important skill of mending floating line after a cast. The purpose of line mends is to minimize the affect of surface currents on the natural drift of the fly. There are also aerial mend casts to accomplish this during the cast. There is a similar concept in tenkara fishing, endeavoring to line up the tippet with the fly in the current, and possibly line also, if some of it will be in the water. If the tippet and fly are not aligned with the current, then the natural drift is disturbed. Line sag, which occurs to different degrees depending on the weight and type of line being used, can drag the tippet and fly to the side. With tenkara casting, the aerial mend is a technique to address this.

Let me refer to a subsurface presentation as one where only the fly and tippet are in the water, whereas a deep presentation is one where some of the line will be in the water and sink to some degree, getting further down the water column. At first, let's consider surface and subsurface and dead drift casts, or drifts with fly manipulation; that is, where our objective is to entice the fish to come up near the surface. For many tenkara flyfishers, this is always the first approach, whether or not they also make deep presentations.

There are four different casts to consider: surface and subsurface, downstream and upstream. Consider first a downstream surface cast. In order to align the tippet upstream of the fly when it lands, towards the end of the forward cast you do an upstream curving sweep of the rod, causing the tippet to line up upstream of the fly, giving immediate contact with the fly. Whatever kind of cast you are doing, contact with the fly is important. The fly will land either gently or firmly, depending on the firmness of the forward cast.

If you doing a subsurface downstream cast, rather than an open sweep at the end of the forward cast, you do a tighter, and possibly firmer, J stoke upstream. This lands the fly more directly downward, sending it below the surface. The current is slower than on the surface, so right away the tippet will pass over the fly (subsurface), giving contact with the fly.

For an upstream surface cast, the opposite of the downstream cast is used: do the sweep at the end of the forward cast in the downstream direction. This puts the tippet lined up with the fly, but leading it and moving at the same rate as the surface current. This can only be done across or quarter upstream; a straight upstream cast needs no aerial mend.

The last situation is an upstream cast for a subsurface presentation. Here, the cast is the same as the downstream subsurface cast: a J stoke in the upstream direction. Again, the tippet lands upstream of the subsurface fly, passes over it in the faster surface current, and established contact with the fly. This can only be done is the cast is across or quarter upstream of where you are.

In all cases, subsequent casts may use fly manipulation to further entice the fish.

There are also deep presentations, where one is taking advantage of a line that sinks, and one wishes to use some of the many deep water manipulations for tenkara. The same subsurface mends can still be used, where both the line and some initial section of line is in the water and aligned with the current. It's possible to do a deep presentation that starts as a surface or subsurface presentation (e.g. dead drift); but then over the course of the drift you feed it line, letting the fly, tippet, and line sink. This works well if the surface current is gentler. There are several alternate ways to sink flies utilizing various water features.

Some typical ways to fish a section of stream or river, would be to 1) clear the close water first of fish by casting back from the water (easy with a tenkara rod), 2) cast surface downstream, 3) cast subsurface downstream, 3) perhaps fish downstream deep, 5) cast surface upstream, and 6) cast subsurface upstream. This is along with whatever the overall strategy is regarding various structures in the stream, etc. There are various manipulations that can be used, which can be used independently of aerial mends. It's also the case that fishing surface and subsurface downstream or upstream may entail working outward with those casts from close to further out, thus covering the reachable area, before switching to upstream. The places targeted and the nature of the presentations are informed, of course, by the specific structures and various main and micro currents in the stream.

So, just to summarize the 4 types of aerial mends:

- Downstream surface: upstream sweep
- Downstream subsurface: upstream J
- Upstream surface: downstream sweep
- Upstream subsurface: upstream J (across or quarter up)

I would be happy to demonstrate these aerial mends on any of the tenkara fishouts, as well as discuss the overall strategy in fishing a particular stream or river.

John Pellegrin
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