Tenkara Fishing

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Topics

• Background
• History of tenkara
• Equipment
• Techniques
• Notable people
• Spread of tenkara
• My experiences
• Q&A
Background

• January 2011 GBF talk by Daniel Galhardo on tenkara. Founder of TenkaraUSA.
• I purchased basic tenkara rig in 2011
• By 2012, fished only tenkara
• Attended Tenkara Summit July 2012
History of Tenkara

• Means “from heaven” or “from the skies”, for how the fly lands on the water
• Believed to have originated 400-500 years ago, among mountain hunters
• Evolved as simple, effective approach
• Documented in late 1800’s
• Modern resurgence of tenkara in 1920’s
• Currently spreading internationally
Typical Japanese Streams
Japanese Stream Trout

- Amago and Yamame
  - Both prefer cold mountain streams 45-65 deg.
  - Similar in size to rainbows
What is Tenkara?

• An efficient fixed tight-line technique developed in streams of Japan

• Overall Philosophy
  • Simplicity
  • Minimize the equipment needed
  • Importance of identifying fish holds and fly presentation
  • Choice of fly not as important as presentation
  • Importance of overall environment
Equipment

• Designed for lightness and simplicity
• Emphasizes relaxed fishing
• Maximizes fishing time
• Allows one to focus on:
  • Locating fish
  • Fly presentation
Rods

• 10’-15’ in length
• Telescoping: collapses to about 20-24”
• Made of carbon fiber. Examples:
  • 13’ Ayu and 13 ½’ Amago: 3.5 oz.
  • 11’ Iwana: 2.5 oz.
  • (TenkaraUSA rods)
• Approximately equivalent to 1-3 wt. Western rod
Rod Action

• Rods vary in length and stiffness of action
• TenkaraUSA describes their rods by the relative proportion of stiff lower sections to softer end sections (e.g. 5:5, 6:4)
  • They will be moving to another approach soon
• http://www.tenkarausa.com/about.php
Lines

• Traditional lines:
  • Braided, fixed length tapered line
  • Very flexible with light presentation
  • Tend to be shorter lengths (e.g. 10 ½’, 13’)

• Level lines:
  • Mono, fluorocarbon
  • Cut to desired lengths (e.g. 10’, 14’, 19’)
  • Can keep more line off water
  • Typically #2.5 to #4.5
Lines (cont.)

• Tippet
  • #5 and #6 usually used
  • Many use fluorocarbon

• Line Holder
  • Very convenient for holding single line
  • Can attach fly, wrap line, and keep attached to collapsed rod
Lightweight Fishing

- My basic rig:
  - 13’ Ayu rod (3.5 oz.)
  - 2 Spools of level line: 13’ and 18’
  - #5 tippet spool
  - Fly box
  - Nippers
- Total weight: 6.5 oz.
- Can add Amago rod – adds 3.5 oz.
My Basic Rig
Example Start-up Cost*

- Iwana 12’ rod $158
- High-viz line (65’) $20
- 2 line holders $20
- #5 fluoro tippet (98’) $8
- 3 tenkara flies $7

• Total: $213
Knots

• Simple by Western standards

• Line-to-rod:
  • Rod has braided line segment at end ("lilian")
  • Braided line: girth hitch to lilian
  • Level line: slip knot to lilian connection

• Tippet to line: double slip knot against stopper knot

• Fly to tippet: improved clinch
Flies

• Easy to tie
  • Hackle and body
  • Usually finished behind the hackle – no eye crowding!

• Types: wet (dominant) and dry

• Hackles back, straight, or forward (classic style)
Typical Flies
Fly Styles
Sample
Techniques

• Tend to use single fly on a given occasion

• Casting:
  • Index finger placed on top of rod handle
  • 12:00-10:00 stopping points on back & forward cast ([http://www.tenkarausa.com/about.php](http://www.tenkarausa.com/about.php))
  • Wrist action important, little arm motion
  • Many types of casts, but standard is forward cast
  • No false casts needed
Techniques (cont.)

• Presentation
  • Up, across, or downstream
  • Dead drift (line off water)
  • Dead drift with hesitation or twitches
  • Sideways motions to flies
  • Surface or sunk flies (several techniques)
  • Excellent for popping tippet and fly into pocket water
Dead Drifting Flies
Notable People

• Daniel Galhardo (Boulder)
  • Introduced tenkara to US in 2006
• Dr. Hisao Ishigaki
  • Leading tenkara authority in Japan
• Masami Sakakibara ("Tenkara no Oni")
  • Considered the top tenkara fisherman in Japan. Widely known for fly presentation skills
Notable People

• Tenkara Guides – Salt Lake City
  • Guide exclusively using Tenkara
  • Both classic and modified approaches
  • Hosted 2012 Tenkara Summit in SLC
Tenkara Summit 2012 - SLC
Dr. Hisao Ishigaki

• Casting Video
  • [https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=uMza19EFLf0](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=uMza19EFLf0)
  • Note elbows in, arm not extended
  • 12:00-10:00 back and forward cast (the stop at 10:00 is subtle!)
  • Brisk casting and drifting
  • Downstream presentation, fly just under surface
  • Pulsing of fly
Spread of Tenkara

• TenkaraUSA has stimulated much interest in the US, with full line of equipment
  • Creative Sports (Pleasant Hill) and Fly Fishing Specialties carries their products (no markup!)
  • TenkaraUSA now markets products through 25 dealers in the US.

• Spreading throughout Europe

• Web sites, blogs, YouTube, Facebook, Twitter, Podcasts, …
Tenkara Modifications

• Places to fish
  • Larger rivers
  • Lakes

• Many fly patterns

• Adapting Western techniques to tenkara rig
  • Nymphing: Czech, Spanish, French
  • Dry fly fishing
  • Western fly patterns (dries, terrestrials, …)
Recent Fishing

• Joined GBF in 2008
• Small streams are my focus
• Short-line nymphing was primary approach
• Purchased tenkara rig after Daniel’s talk
• Have fished tenkara since 2011
• Fished only tenkara in 2012
• Attended Tenkara Summit in 2012
Places
My Tenkara Experience

• I have become more focused on fish location and fly presentation
• I use a single pattern on a given trip.

• What I like:
  – Light equipment, easy for hikes
  – On the stream fast
  – Change lines quickly
  – Collapse rod for moving around
  – Light presentation, great drifts
Questions

• What about rivers?  Y
• What about small streams, long rods?  Y
• Steelhead, salmon, striper fishing?  N
• Stillwater fishing?  Y (High elevation better)
• How much variation in tenkara fishing in Japan?  Not the only approach used.
• Where can I get more information?  See Links
7 lb. New Zealand Trout
Links
These slides are on GBF website

  Daniel Galhardo – info, videos, blogs, equipment ordering, etc.
  “About Tenkara” section is essential reading for basics of tenkara and care of equipment!

  Masami Sakakibara: videos
Links (cont.)

• Tenkara Guides (SLC)  [http://tenkaraguides.com/](http://tenkaraguides.com/)
  • Excellent info on tenkara and modifications

• Tenkara Talk (Jason Klass) - blog  [http://www.tenkaratalk.com/](http://www.tenkaratalk.com/)

• Tenkara Bum  [http://www.tenkarabum.com/](http://www.tenkarabum.com/)
  • Equipment info

• Tenkara Fisher  [http://www.tenkara-fisher.com/content.php](http://www.tenkara-fisher.com/content.php)
  • Equipment and interviews
Books

• Tenkara Fly Fishing – Insights & Strategies, David E. Dirks, 2013
• Tenkara – Radically Simple, Ultralight Fly Fishing, Kevin D. Kelleher, with Misako Ishimura, 2011
Thanks!