

Rod Building 109A Two-Handed or Spey Fly Rods

By Larry Lee

Previous rod building articles have primarily discussed single handed casting fly rod advantages and disadvantages of use, how to select blanks and components, and the construction. This will be first of five articles that will discuss the two handed fly rod (also called a Spey rod). These articles will provide a brief history of the two-handed rod, advantages and disadvantages, selection of size, length, action type, guides, handles, and reel seats. A brief discussion of reels and lines will also be included.

A brief history

The roots of this type of rod can be traced back to the 1850's near the Spey River in Scotland. Originally, these two-handed rods were used on coastal rivers of the British Isles and Scandinavia to fish for Atlantic salmon and trout. Early two handed rods were made of ash, lancewood, and shaved greenheart wood. These rods were constructed with ferrules, and the line tended to flop against the blank when the line passed through poorly designed, unbraced, brass ring guides. Rods also weighed 24 ounces or more, and sometimes spanned 18 to 20 feet in length. At that time, dedicated anglers made their own rods. An angler had to be fairly physically fit to fish with these two handed rods because it took both hands and arms to use them effectively. A fisherman in the 1850's could expect to use the entire length of the rod to just dip the fly in front of the fish or perform an overhead cast. An expert could roll cast 90 to 100 feet. When a fisherman had completed their fishing for the day, he may have had to indulge in some sort of pain remediation by the use of alcohol.

After the invention of fiberglass (1950's) and graphite (mid 1970's), two-handed fly rods made with these materials were much lighter and more responsive than their Scottish ancestors. In short, they provided a superior casting tool for fishing using these new materials. A couple types of two-handed rods were developed: a traditional type or a Scandinavian (European) type. The traditional type tended act like the old Scottish wooden rods in terms of action by having a moderate to slow action. The Scandinavian two-handed rods had a much faster action for those that like a faster, quicker rod response.

Why use a double handed rod?

These rods were developed for large rivers and streams with steep banks and/or heavy vegetation. Typical one-handed rods with back casting were not very effective in getting the fly out to the fish in this type of situation. However, using the long two-handed rods and special types of casts that keep the line loops to the side or front, an angler can cast large distances with very little effort. An angler can also cover large sections of sizeable streams, lakes, or salt water with casts of 70 to 140 feet, again with very little effort. In addition, fly lines have been developed for two-handed rods that allow the fisherman to fish dry flies with a floating line on the surface, or fish nymphs and streamers with sinking lines of various densities that can reach to various depths.

In the next four articles about two-handed fly rods, we will discuss the selection of size, length, action type, guides, handles, reel seats, and selection of reel sizes. If you have any questions or suggestions, please contact me at larrylee@L3rods.com or telephone (916) 962-0616.