

The Basic Roll Cast

ALTHOUGH THE INFORMATION BELOW RELATES SPECIFICALLY TO SINGLE HANDED FLY RODS, THE MECHANICS FOR DOUBLE HANDED RODS ARE EXACTLY THE SAME. THE ONLY DIFFERENCE BEING THAT YOU WOULD ADD AN EXTRA HAND TO EXECUTE THESE CASTS EFFICIENTLY WITH THE DOUBLE HANDER.



Why do we need to learn how to Roll Cast?

Well here are a few reasons!

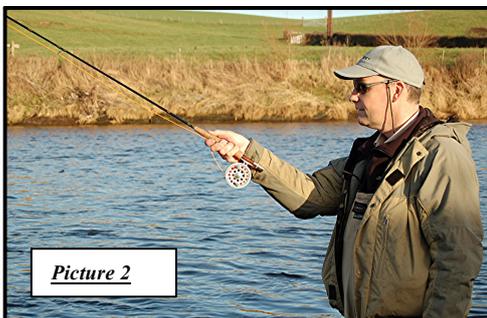
1. To straighten out a line on the water, prior to your chosen cast.
2. Where there are obstacles behind.
3. When fishing from a boat, especially with a boat partner, or in windy conditions.
4. When fishing with a sinking line, the roll cast can be used to roll the sinking line back up onto the surface prior to re-casting, making life easier.
5. As part of a combination cast (*roll cast into an overhead for example*)
6. To strike a fish that has taken the fly (*during a roll cast*) at the point when the rod is tilted behind you and the fly line and fly has been fished out back to the bank, or boat, prior to re-casting. The rod can then be punched forward again into the roll cast, this will draw the fly back into the fishes mouth and hook the fish. "Try it". (*single handed rod*)
7. It is also an integral component of the Spey Casts, which I will cover in the forthcoming articles.

Now that we know why we need the roll cast, let's take a look at the mechanics of this cast.

- Before we start casting, I cannot emphasise enough the importance of eye protection. This will not only protect your eyes from a stray hook, but if polarised lenses are employed, they will also assist with removing the glare from the water surface and give you a visual advantage when stalking, or spotting fish.
- Ok let's get started. Grip the rod handle firmly but relaxed, with the hand you are going to execute the roll cast with, (*this will be influenced by the wind, and where possible casts must always be delivered from a safe position, therefore the wind can often be used to great advantage when casting*). This will become more apparent as we progress through the other casts. Do not deliver any casts if your fly line is blowing into your body during the set up of the cast as this will inevitably result in the fly hooking you.
- Always begin with the rod tip just above the water surface, (**Picture 1**) this allows you to begin the cast with the fly line under tension, therefore offering you the option of loading the rod from the outset. This is not as important with the roll cast as it is with some of the other casts we will cover, but getting into the habit of doing this now will prevent problems at a later date.



Picture 1



Picture 2

- Although several grips are available, let's stick with the "thumb on top" method for now, to avoid confusion. Place the thumb on top of the cork handle, and in line with the rest of the rod. Now make sure that the rod handle, or butt as it is known, is resting underneath your lower arm. The rod is now an extension of your lower arm and can be moved to any position you choose using your thumb as a guide (**Picture 2**).

- Now place the appropriate foot forward, and in the direction you are going to cast, (*in this case I am casting with my right hand, therefore I will place my right foot forward*) this is only a recommendation, as you may not always be able to comply with this in a fishing situation. However, there are several reasons for this recommendation: **(a)** for comfort, **(b)** to assist with balance, **(c)** to give you a firm base when stopping your rod on the forward cast, and the most important reason of them all, and one which will compliment all the others, especially when learning the cast for the first time **(d)** it will help to prevent your body from swivelling around too far throughout the cast, and therefore will ultimately improve your tracking for a more efficient outcome. In the case of a double handed rod the section of cork handle below the fly reel would be supported by the other hand throughout all movements of the cast.
- Next lift the rod tip slowly to approximately 45 degrees (**Picture 2**) (*this gets the line moving and releases a significant amount of it from the water surface, making it easier to move to the next position*).
- Sweep the rod tip and line around and out to the side, (**Picture 3**) (*this keeps the line at a safe distance away from your body*). Make sure that the fly never leaves the water during the set up of this cast.



- Continue to sweep the rod tip (*and line*) all the way around to a position of 45 degrees behind you, (**Picture 4**). This is now a mirror image of the position you created at the front with your initial lift. The 45 degree position allows for the maximum amount of line to be clear of the water, whilst still maintaining the largest D Loop you can achieve with a standing roll cast (*the D Loop is your casting weight and the shape that the fly line creates behind the rod*). Any further back than this and you will drown too much line in the water surface resulting in line stick. Any further forward will result in a smaller less efficient D Loop, ultimately causing you to project the forward cast in a



downward direction, this will also be the case if you raise your casting hand too high on the back cast. Both of these things can be detrimental to any of the Spey casts, unless of course, you wish to drive your fly line and fly into an oncoming wind, in which case this can be an advantage. By referring to the rod positions as 45 degrees, as apposed to 10:0'clock and 2:0'clock, it is easier to identify both positions from either side, preventing any unnecessary confusion.

- By sweeping your rod tip back to 45 degrees you have now presented yourself with a nice long casting stroke for the rod tip to travel through during the next part of the cast, allowing you to bend (*or load*) the rod to more effect as it is moved forward (**Picture 5**).
- Prior to the delivery of the cast, tilt your thumb, and therefore your rod tip slightly out from your side, this will not only keep the cast safe, but it will also help you to maintain a straight line path of the rod tip throughout the forward stroke. Drop your casting arm down and into your body to a nice comfortable position. Remember, if you wish to deliver a nice high forward cast, it is much easier if it starts from a low position at the outset. You are now ready to deliver the roll cast. Before you do though, take a look at it, you have all the time in the world, especially when using a floating line, **(a)** Make sure you are at 45 degrees, **(b)** make sure you have created that nice big D Loop behind the rod, and **(c)** check that your fly line is always under tension (*no slack line on the water*). "Don't be in a hurry".
- Everything prior to the delivery has been done in slow motion; however it is worth pointing out that the fastest part of any casting stroke should be toward the end. This means that the delivery should start slow into a progressive acceleration, with the fastest part of that delivery being at the conclusion of the forward stroke. It is at this point, (*as with most casts*) that your thumb should make a definite stop. Imagine this process as if you are progressively stretching an elastic band, that you are about to snap at the end of the stroke.



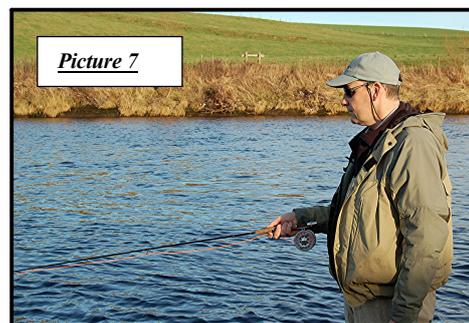
- Using the rod as a lever in this way, (*over the required stroke length*) will allow you to transfer the energy (*as the rod tip unloads*) to your fly line much more effectively, rather like a spring unloading. If this is done progressively, the cast will be fine. If you start the cast too fast, too early in the stroke, you will not be able to smoothly and progressively build up the compression in the rod efficiently, and it will therefore load and unload too abruptly before completing the forward stroke causing the rod tip to take a concave path and resulting in a casting fault known as a tailing loop. One of the biggest giveaways with this fault will be the noise that the rod tip makes, e.g. a good cast can be almost silent, only making a very short noise right at the end of the stroke (*sh...*) a less efficient cast will produce a very long noise (*shhhhhhhh...*) often resulting in a poor outcome. A tailing loop can also be identified by the (*sh...*) occurring at the start of the cast as opposed to the end. Listen for these sounds as they are very good indicators of the efficiency of your cast.



During this forward stroke, keep the thumb travelling in a very straight line, as if running along an imaginary diving board, stopping the rod tip high on the final delivery. If your thumb falls off the end of the diving board it will travel towards the water with the rod tip and fly line following behind, not only creating a mess on the surface, but also causing any self respecting fish to dart for cover (*there are alternative ways of executing this cast, but let's keep it simple for now*). When using the double handed fly rod, it is at this point that the bottom hand can be pulled back to increase tip speed at the end of the forward stroke, which in turn will increase line speed and assist with creating tighter loops (*where required*) for a more efficient forward cast.

- Leaning your body forward during the forward stroke can also cause some of the problems mentioned above i.e. projecting your fly line down towards the water, and in some cases can also contribute to the possibility of a tailing loop as you will tend to creep your rod tip forward as a consequence of this, therefore shortening the stroke length available to you. So think of your body as a fence post, stay relaxed, but do not bow to the water. The best delivery is the one that unrolls above the water, not the one that hits the water with a splash.
- Stretching your arm too far forward is another one to look out for as this can cause your thumb to travel in a downward direction, so don't try to reach for the other bank, stop your casting arm so that it finishes up in the shape of the letter V, (**Picture 6**) this will do two things, it will make sure you stop your thumb high at the end of the forward stroke, (*approximately 45 degrees*) and it will also allow you to feel the flex of the rod to better effect.

- Finally, after the stop at the end of the forward stroke, lower your thumb, and therefore your rod tip, at the same speed as the line leader and fly begin to fall, so that they all land together in a straight line on the water surface for a good presentation. This lowering of the rod must only be done after your thumb stops dead at the end of the forward stroke, otherwise the rod will not have been allowed to unload or "spring forward" correctly, making the forward cast very weak and untidy. You should now be back in the position you started from at the outset, (**Picture 7**) thus placing you in a relatively good position should your quarry decide to take your fly at this point (*rod angles will differ depending on the type of fishing you are doing*). You have now successfully completed the roll cast.



- When Salmon fishing with the double handed fly rod, you may or may not (*at this stage*) want to have a small amount of fly line hanging below your fly reel, which is readily available to be drawn away by the Salmon when it takes your fly. This is a personal preference and has long been a great topic for debate over a pint in the pub.
- In the next article I will be explaining how to make the roll cast much more efficient, and introducing you to the **Jump Roll Cast**.

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