

Winter Dry Fly... *And A Close Look At Fly Lines*



By getting the balance of fly line and rod spot on, Andy is able to present his single fly to rising fish that are feeding hard on buzzers.

Andy Smith highlights the joys of catching 'off the top', and a chance encounter on the bank allows him to get a monkey off his back regarding fly lines.

Now it's truly the end of the season and, with winter upon us, we've gone beyond what is often described as the 'back-end' fishing, so snatching any opportunity for a few hours on a water is gratefully received, and especially when it's a water I haven't fished before.

Situated in the heart of the Worcestershire countryside, The Lenches Lakes is a real find for those looking for very natural surroundings. The lakes are beautifully landscaped and thoughtfully maintained to enhance wildlife and make for a glorious fishery. Fantastic tree-lined banking means that pretty much whatever the weather, there are always going to be some nice

sheltered spots to be found on either lake. That said, the fishery has a nice 'back to nature' feel about it.

The Lenches comprises two well-established spring-fed lakes with fantastic water clarity, each having easily accessible yet very compelling fishing spots all over. Fish are regularly stocked at an average well above 2lb with a fair few two and three times larger.

At this time of year, with little action to speak of, my fishing takes on a far more sedate approach – just glad to be out there, as it were, and not that worried about carefully stalking, or even so much about catching. It gives you time, should you get a fairly calm day, to be more relaxed and to think a bit more

about things, experiment a little with leaders, take time to cast well, focus on your presentation and even play around with flies that you wouldn't normally use or consider.

With daily temperatures still keeping up and no signs of hard frosts, my thoughts for the day are still to use a floating-line setup, assuming that small hatches of buzzers will still be present and making their way to the surface. After making a point to stop and chat with some of the other anglers to find out what was happening – had anyone caught fish earlier in the day, what flies are working and what they thought of the fishery (which, incidentally, was a unanimous thumbs-up) – it's time for a walk around

the first lake.

Spring Lake has open views and wonderful natural reed beds full of wildlife; for me it's now about looking for movement in the water and hopefully seeing a fish or two at the surface. It's about carefully watching for the odd rise, and it isn't long before I'm rewarded with some gentle surface movements in the ripple, just downwind from a lovely sheltered bay right by the fishing lodge.

At this time of year the food supply isn't going to be that plentiful, so you can expect quite long pauses between these rises. The trout are likely to remain there if you have already seen movement, but during these lulls it can often mean just casting out and leaving it. Then, just as you

take your mind off things and get distracted in some way, a fish comes up to take your fly out of the blue.

Once I see that fish are on the surface again I cast just ahead of the activity, letting the fly drift into the area where they are rising and have my first action, a missed take, to a black sedge pattern that one of the other anglers insisted I use before I tried anything else. It seems a bit of an unusual choice for this time of year, but given that he'd already had three fish earlier it had to be worth a try. After several swirls and misses to my first few casts the fly works, with the result a seriously plump rainbow that takes off like a train, fighting all the way

in the gin-clear water. Spot on, a trout off the top and I've only been fishing a few minutes!

As expected, the trout are there rising one minute then gone the next, and it's a good 30 minutes before I see one up again. The large sedge is certainly getting the attention of a number of fish, but they just keep missing it – its

buoyancy in the water seems too much, so I change over to a small black Klinkhamer, selecting one with very little of the white indicator post that keeps it floating, so that the fly still stays afloat yet becomes more waterlogged and thus hangs deeper in the water.





Although the rods may well be the same rating and length, it doesn't mean they will perform the same with the same fly line!



When teaching, Andy takes along a whole host of lines – it's crucial to choose the one that suits the rod and the angler.



Adding a marker 10 yards from the tip of the line indicates the loading point; this amount of line out of the tip ring should be able to load the rod ready to cast.

After a few casts with it I get a really positive 'up and over the fly' rise! A solid pull on the line and I'm in, and another good rainbow is swiftly netted. Floating line, fishing off the surface and dries; it's winter – fantastic!

While at the fishery, I have a chap ask me to help him cast as his rod "just didn't work properly." I help, of course, but it was this chance conversation that made this feature change for me. I have wanted to highlight this for some time, so here goes...

I was able to show someone the idea of marking up your fly line with a permanent pen. It's something that can help people with their casting as it stops the process of bringing in too much line before making the next cast. Essentially, as many experienced anglers will

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already be aware, a good rule of thumb for the ever-popular weight-forward trout line is that their individual weights are measured purely in the first 10 yards of the line, which is normally hanging out of the end of your rod. So, no matter if you are using a 5, 6, 7 or even 8-wt line the weight is achieved on or around this 10yd position. In simple terms, if you try to cast with only five yards of line out of the rod tip – as often happens when you retrieve your fly too far in – the effect is that when you cast, your line will now weigh less, maybe

two or three lines lighter, than it should, and therefore fails to load the rod. As a result it will be difficult to get the line to go out.

Conversely, try to lift 15 or more yards off the water to make a cast and your line is now too heavy; the rod now bends too much and the cast usually ends up in a heap.

Line Choice

During any typical season I get to try, test and use countless fly outfits of all makes, models, sizes and weights through my work with rod manufacturer G Loomis, at dealer events,

trade shows, and in my own fly casting classes and guiding sessions. It's a fortunate position to be in and one that regularly brings its surprises, both positive and negative, about many fly fishing outfits on the market.

You'd be amazed at how many people struggle with their casting and essentially they just have a bad fly rod and line combination. I've even come across situations where people have bought new, more expensive versions of the same rod they already have, thinking it would help them to cast further, only to find their line was at fault.

Some will argue that on a good rod, the line won't make much difference; believe me, it does. Any line ill matched to a specific rod will result in pretty uninspiring results, whether used as part of an entry-level



When rises are scarce, keep your eyes peeled for fish feeding just below the top – they will create small swirls at the surface.

outfit or a top-end rod. The right line on even a fairly low-cost rod can bring a smile to most people's faces.

It's all about loading and how much the rod is caused to bend by the weight of the line as you cast. How much line the individual angler actually aerialises when casting can determine a preferred line choice, whatever the brand they feel best suits.

Specifically, there are some rods within a manufacturer's range that will only perform at their best with exact line weights, yet there are others that only seem to come into their own with lines that you could almost say were far too heavy for what they are supposed to take. This, over recent years, is where some of

the best line manufacturers have cleverly tweaked both profiles and line weights to appeal to the widest range of uses.

It's difficult to generalise as each rod manufacturer within its rod ranges often has unique actions, but if we look typically at the more powerful 'distance' rods, which people rightly buy in an effort to punch out long lines, these can actually be a hindrance to some.

Distance rods are stiffer; they are faster-acted and will not actually reach their ultimate performance peak until the caster has a really good amount of line in the air to bend it.

On the other hand, there are some wonderful light

5-wt rods on the market that load easily with minimal line outside the rod tip (as they are designed to do), yet with the right line choice they can deliver a fly at a distance far in excess of what you'd think.

So get the line right and it can transform things for many, and in some cases turn what is already a top-class performing rod into one of those setups that, when cast, truly delivers an "oh my god" moment.

Visiting an experienced

APGAI or AAPGAI fly-casting instructor will also have you making the right selection.

If you do have the opportunity to try the same rod with a number of differing line brands, the results can be an eye-opener and regularly prove informative, often amusing, but glaringly obvious that for most the choice of line can and will have a real effect on what an individual finds pleasing to use.

I believe that 2015 is going to see several manufacturers offering fly lines with a new core design, which I'm confident will add yet another dimension to what we already have... watch this space. 

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Shared knowledge from the friendly locals ensured Andy was able to catch off the top on what was a fairly difficult day.