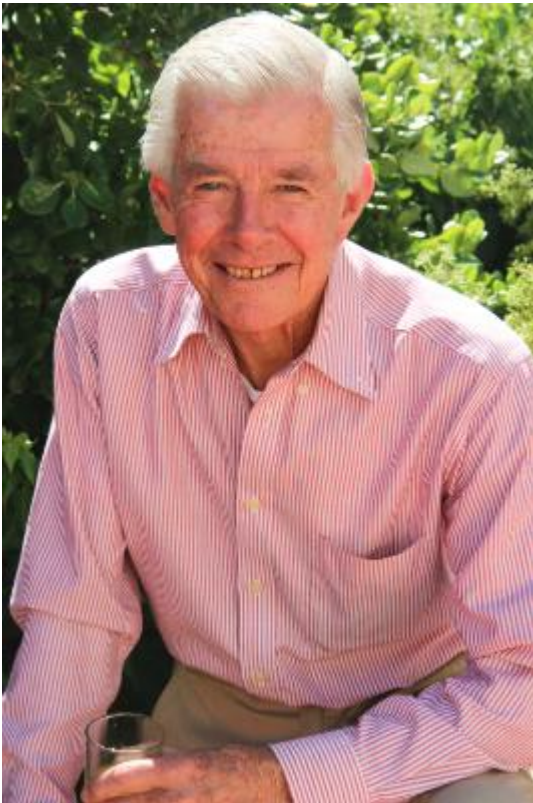


A gentleman's guide to the art of trout fishing

By Jolyon Nuttall

part 4 in a series written for Field and Tide 1966



I am told that some golf professionals will not allow their charges on the links for a minimum period of three months. Instead, the trainees spend their time on the practice tees, perfecting their swings, or beating up the lounge carpet at home, perfecting their putting.

I would not advocate quite so drastic an approach to trout fishing. This is partly because most people - unless they belong to the P.I. (Private Income) group - don't have three months to spare to learn how to cast a fly, and partly because it's only when you are face to face with the real thing that the lessons sink deep.

The supreme test of whether a man has the tenacity, the gumption and the heart to become a genuine trout fisherman comes when, for three casts in a row, he has tangled his fly in a tchi-tchi bush. Either he breaks his rod into little pieces and takes up bowls, or he climbs up into the tchi-tchi bush three times and disentangles his cast, and makes sure it doesn't end up there again. But there are certain steps a man who thinks he might become a trout angler can take before he ever sets foot on a river bank, and what better time to try them than during the winter closed season.

For instance, to revert to a time-honoured but classic method of learning how to cast, find yourself a tennis court and a bottle. (A large tract of finely mown lawn will do in place of the tennis court, but don't compromise on the bottle.)

Place the bottle firmly under your right arm, pick up your rod and, having ensured that the net is down, take up your stance at one or other of the baselines on the court.

Grip the rod firmly with your thumb extended along the butt and draw off enough line from your reel to be able to control with your left hand.

Then make as though you were Izaak Walton. In other words, flick the rod back over your shoulder with a smooth but firm action, pause - two - three for the line to straighten out behind you, then bring the rod forward, exerting an equally smooth but firm pressure so that - in theory the tail fly settles on the surface of the tennis court first, with the rest of the line gently touching down after it.

If the bottle falls from under your arm, pick up the pieces, and find a replacement. Only when that bottle remains firmly gripped in the pit of your arm can you claim to be casting in the traditionally accepted fashion.

For the first five dozen (minimum) casts, your line will either hook up in the wire netting behind you (if this continues, move to the service line) or will end up in a limp little heap in front of you. Should you find yourself becoming discouraged, have a sip from the bottle, replace it under your arm, and keep trying. Sooner or later, the rhythm of the casting action will come to you and - like having learnt to ride a bicycle - you'll never forget it.

At the start of a fishing trip, you will probably find that your rhythm has lost some of its flow, and you will undoubtedly spend many years aiming at perfection, but once you have it, to a degree, half the battle is won, and your chances of catching your first trout improve from minimal to possible and, even, probable.

For the past four paragraphs, I've left you with your cast in the water, so to speak. How do you get it out, ready for the next cast? Draw the line in with your left hand, attempting if possible to have the dropper fly dancing on the surface of the court (and, eventually, the river) to attract the rising trout.

When a manageable amount of line is left stretched out before you, flick back the rod, pause again - two - three, and then bring the rod forward for the next cast. (I'm sorry if I sound as though I am teaching you ballroom dancing, but the pauses while you count three are vital.)

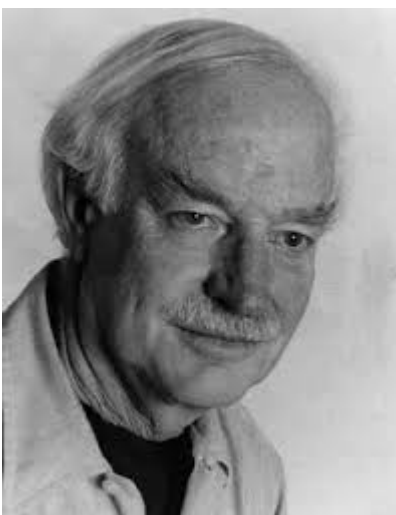
In the evening, after a hard day's practice, inscribe the following do's and don'ts of trout fishing vocabulary on your brain:

- NEVER say you had a bite: trout don't bite. Instead, say you raised a trout, or you touched a trout.
- NEVER say you threw a little trout back. Say you put it back. Trout fishermen don't "throw" their fish back.
- NEVER, but NEVAH, say you used such-and-such a fly as bait. The word bait and trout fishing don't go together. Nor, for that matter, does lure.

Learn these lessons well and, come the Spring, go with confidence, a-angling.

Laurence - I loved Bob Crass's letter to the editor of Field and Tide, as follows:-

CASTING - AND THE BOTTLE!



MR. JOLYON NUTTALL'S ARTICLES, "A Gentleman's Guide to the Art of Trout Fishing", have been both instructive and amusing. But why tell the innocent beginner that he must place a bottle under his right arm when learning to cast a fly?

Bottles, or their contents, may be considered a necessary part of a fisherman's equipment, but not when used deliberately to hinder the caster's action.

Truly, one must not fling one's arm about in an uncontrolled manner, but I am quite sure that Mr. Nuttall himself moves his elbow well out from the body as he lifts his rod. Certainly his father does, as one can see clearly from the photographs that accompany his June article.

When making a long cast, it is necessary to swing the whole arm upwards and outwards from the shoulder, but even when making a short cast, the elbow should move away from the side. Excellent illustrations of effective fly-casting technique appear in T.C. Ivens' "Stillwater Fly-fishing", and M. Ivens makes the point that any attitude which is uncomfortable must be wrong. It is difficult to imagine anything more

uncomfortable than a bottle in one's armpit.

No, Mr. Nuttall, the place for a bottle is in the hands with the cork out and the elbow raised?

R. S. CRASS.

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