

A tuck cast performed with the rod to either side will result in a curve cast – great for delivering under overhangs.

I'M NOW CERTAIN THAT FAR MORE FISH ARE SPOOKED BY LINE SHADOW THAN BY LINE COLOUR OR LINE FLASH WHEN CASTING.

Wiggle, Pile & Tuck

Photographs by Brad Harris

Carl McNeil delivers more casts that catch fish.

The goal in fly fishing is to present an artificial fly in a manner that mimics the natural as closely as possible. The problem is that naturals don't have a 12-foot leader and 30 feet of fly line attached to them, and therein lies the challenge. If we are attempting to imitate a terrestrial or emerging insect, one thing likely to give us away is drag.

In moving water the varying currents pull and manipulate the fly line, which in turn affects the movement of the fly. It's virtually unavoidable,

and it is this unnatural dragging/skating movement that in most cases will spook fish and put them down. Fish, and particularly trout, feed best when they are relaxed and not on alert.

Another important thing to avoid is line and leader shadow. Having filmed more than a few fish on high-speed video I've been astounded to see the impact the shadow creates on the surface and riverbed as line or leader move with the flow. The explosive V-wake shadow tearing across the water looks more like that of an Exocet

than a fly line, and while fish don't care much about ship-seeking missiles they're familiar with the shadow cast by an approaching bird of prey—it's been hard wired into them over thousands of years. That aside, big black things falling from above tend to put the bejeebers up just about anyone.

I'm now certain that far more fish are spooked by line shadow than by line colour or line flash when casting. The lesson here is to always place your cast on the down-shadow side of your fish.

BRIGHT IDEA

I've fished with bright lines for a few years now and it's made fishing easier rather than more challenging. The line used when photographing the casts in this series is a bright orange instructors line from Scientific Anglers—and yes, I've been known to fish with it. My regular trout lines are from Airflo and are every bit as bright. This summer I've been using a hot pink line; it's terrific. Coming from the land of the camo' fly-line, some find this surprising. But the proponents of dull lines seem to have forgotten that when fishing rivers the quarry tend to be pointing up and away from us, so how they ever manage to see a fly line from 25 feet

behind is beyond me. Fact is, a lined fish is a lined fish regardless of what colour you manage to dump on it.

If you really want to improve your casting skills get a bright coloured fly-line. Casting one is like launching tracer rounds into the sky, and will reveal, often with humbling clarity, exactly what your loops are doing. It's also an indispensable marker showing exactly where your line is on the water and what the surrounding currents are doing. Think of it as a 30-foot strike indicator.

DRAG FREE PRESENTATIONS

If you're going to deceive a fish into taking your fly, it not only needs to

look like trout food, it needs to be placed accurately and behave like trout food would.

I fully realise that some still find the concept radical, but how a fly is presented and subsequently behaves on, or in, the water is far more important than what it actually looks like. An artificial only needs to be a rough facsimile of the natural, but it absolutely must behave like a natural. By 'behave' I mean its depth and posture in the water column, its movement (or lack of it) and the speed at which it moves in relation to the current and, of course, the fish.

Presenting flies drag free is not always necessary—tight line nymphing

The wiggle cast will work whichever plane your rod is travelling in, but overhead is easiest.

DESPITE BEING A SLACK LINE CAST, THE WIGGLE CAST HAS THE ADVANTAGE OF GOOD CONTROL EVEN WITH MODERATE WIND

Wiggle, Pile & Tuck

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and pulling streamers immediately spring to mind. However, there are also a few fairly clever casts that employ slack line techniques that make nymph and streamer fishing more effective, one of which we'll tackle shortly.

How do you go about presenting and controlling an essentially weightless fly and make it look like it's totally untethered? The short answer is, you need to get some slack into the system and get that fly behaving as if there was no line connected to it at all. And while we'll never be able to do this perfectly, particularly with small flies, we can go some way to disguise what we're up to by applying as little direct tension on the fly as is possible.

One way to do this is by employing long fine leaders. When dry fly fishing, a complete turnover and straight line to the fly is far from desirable. A collapsed tippet and a nice pile of slack is what you're after. Long fine leaders certainly go a long way towards achieving this, but they also have their disadvantages. Very long leaders are difficult to control and have a mind of their own in the wind. If it's accuracy you're after, an 18-ft leader is a hell of a thing to cast with any consistency, and a long leader and weighted fly are a recipe for disaster. By all means go with the longest leader you can cast accurately, but if you're a lazy angler like me you'll probably prefer to modify your cast rather than stop in the middle of a hatch and tie in another three feet of tippet.

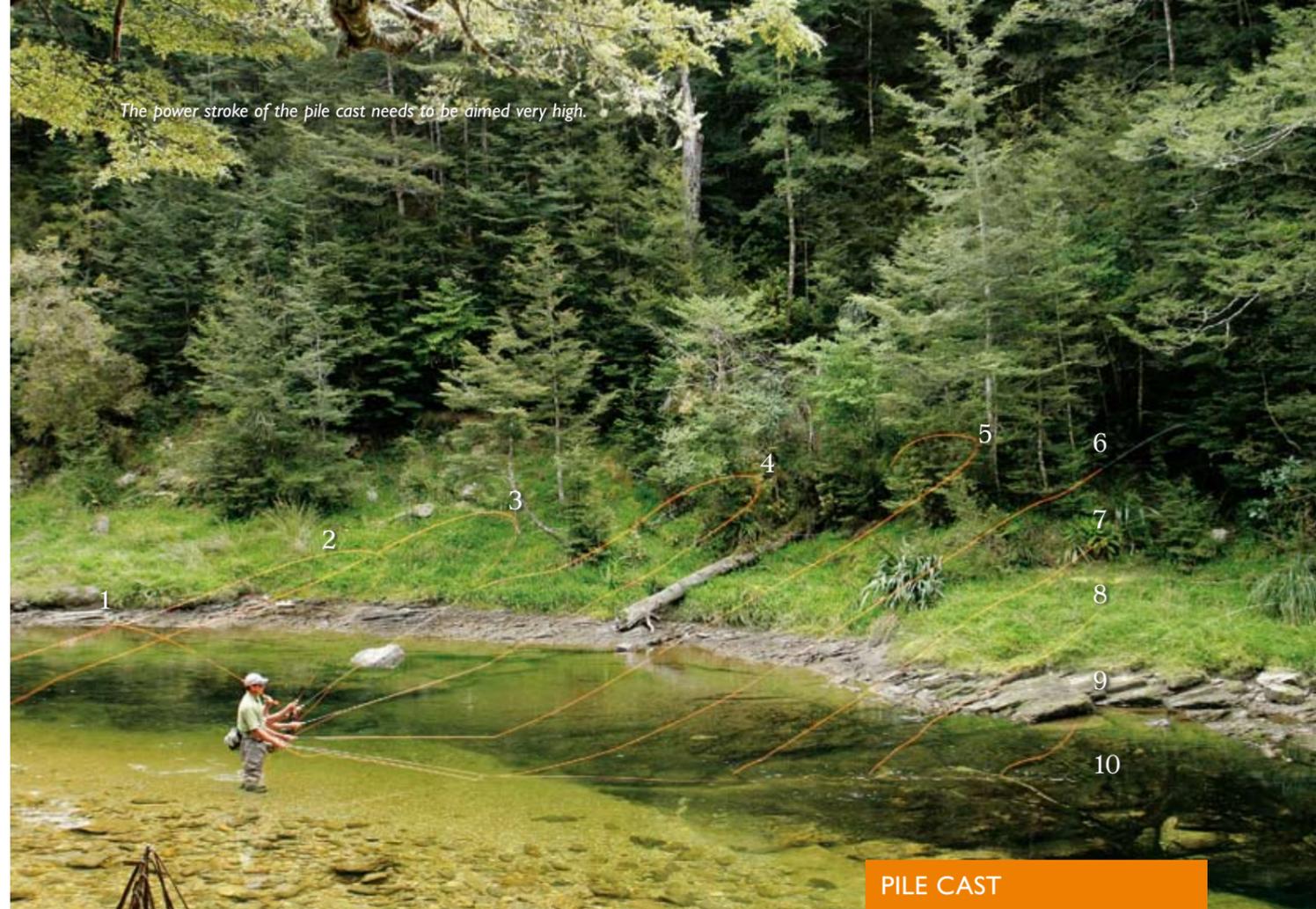
Fortunately there are any number of casts designed to give you bucket loads of slack to help solve this problem (including the aptly named bucket cast). Here are a few to get you started.

WIGGLE CAST

Advantages: fairly simple, reasonably accurate, suitable for complex varying currents, works in moderate wind, very versatile.

Disadvantages: can be difficult to achieve distance and accuracy. Setting the hook can be a challenge.

The power stroke of the pile cast needs to be aimed very high.



PILE CAST

Advantages: Easy to execute, lots of slack close to the fly, great for swirling back eddies.

Disadvantages: Poor accuracy, difficult to control in wind.

the less accurate and wind resistant the cast becomes.

PILE CAST

The most basic slack line cast is the Pile, Parachute, or Puddle Cast. Three different names for the same cast.

The Pile Cast generates a large amount of slack right out at the leader and tippet, and presents the fly in an extremely delicate manner. This is the cast that really does present a dry fly like thistledown. Performed well, an unweighted fly literally flutters down to the water, being braked by the air resistance of its own form and the fine leader below it.

This cast really comes into its own in swirling back eddies; if you're faced with trout sipping spinners in a back eddy, pull out the Pile Cast. It's also an effective cast for presenting downstream dries, but be warned, it's next to useless in the wind.

WIGGLE CAST

Performed correctly the Wiggle Cast produces vast amounts of slack all the way along the line and right out to the fly. It achieves this by creating a number of serpentine waves that give a prolonged drift as the current acts upon the wiggles of slack line.

Despite being a slack line cast, the Wiggle Cast has the advantage of good control even with moderate wind. It is the most versatile presentation cast of all. The Wiggle is useful in upstream, across stream, and downstream presentations. It's also one of the few slack line casts that can cope with multiple and complex currents, something the Reach Mend (FL#60) does not do well.

The cast is relatively simple to learn but takes a little practice to really master.

One of the challenges with this cast comes when you get a take. As with many of the slack line casts, all that slack makes a positive strike difficult. When you get the take, lift purposefully while hauling in the slack. You'll need to execute this move with a fair amount of decorum—remember these are trout, not tuna.

Wiggle Cast Steps:

1. Get underway by false casting overhead as you normally would with good smooth form.
2. Immediately after the forward stop, rapidly stroke or wiggle the rod tip from side to side to send four or five waves down the line.
3. Keep the rod tip high as the wiggles propagate along the line—they have to travel all the way to the end before the line reaches the water.
4. As the wiggles propagate down the line you will have to slip additional slack through your fingers to maintain the required distance and compensate for line being consumed by the wiggles.
5. Follow the cast down to the water while still slipping line. Once on the water, retrieve in additional slack as it appears at the rod tip.

Wiggle Cast Tips:

Long wide rod strokes produce fewer wider wiggles; rapid narrow strokes produce a greater number of narrower wiggles.

The bigger and more numerous the wiggles the longer it will take for the current to straighten them out—but

IF YOU'RE FISHING WITH WEIGHT, THE LAST THING YOU WANT IS A TIGHT LINE ON THE FINAL DELIVERY.



The tuck cast drives a weighted fly straight into the water with lots of slack following behind.

TUCK CAST

Advantages: designed specifically for nymph fishing, easy to execute, good for deeper water and pools, good in the wind.

Disadvantages: average accuracy, more difficult to perform with unweighted nymphs.

Wiggle, Pile & Tuck

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Pile Cast Steps:

1. Using only moderate power, make a low back cast and a very high forward cast. This is really a 'no loop' cast. You'll need to move the rod tip through a very large convex arc in order for this to work.

2. There's really no discernable stop here. After the forward cast, rapidly lower the rod tip to water level. You are breaking a fundamental rule of fly-casting by performing a back cast and forward cast that are less than 180 degrees from each other, the result will be a tailing loop and birds nest if you don't quickly drop that rod tip down and tear the loop open. Think of the biggest ugliest loop you can make, that's what we're looking for here.

3. If you've done this correctly the line should stall and collapse above you causing a 'pile up' along the front half of the line. The furthest section of line and leader should literally flutter down in a heap in front of you.

TUCK CAST

The tuck cast is a great cast for getting heavily weighted nymphs and even streamers down quickly into the water column. If you're fishing with weight, the last thing you want is a tight line on the final delivery. A tight line simply reduces the opportunity for the nymph to sink.

If you could get the nymph to rapidly launch from the sky above with plenty of slack behind it, it would sink much faster and drift far more naturally, and that's exactly what the tuck cast does for us.

Again, this is a fairly easy one to execute. This is a cast where you want to overpower the delivery a little, and by that I mean apply more power and effort than you normally would for a well presented overhead cast.

Tuck Cast Steps:

1. After making a fairly low back-cast execute an overpowered forward cast aimed just above eye level. Be sure to move the rod vertically overhead ensuring both the rod and line are moving through the same vertical plane. (If you use a side arm or horizontal cast here you'll be performing a curve cast.)

2. Stop the rod tip high and very aggressively, making that stop a little

earlier and more abruptly than you normally would. This will make the leader turn over aggressively and kick back around and tuck back under the line. If you've done this correctly a weighted nymph will plummet into the water and you should see a nice amount of slack fall down on it.

3. Now drop the rod tip down and follow the line to the water.

Tuck Cast Tips:

This cast is a potential rod smasher, particularly with very heavily weighted flies. Practice this one with your nymph wrapped in a Band Aid and the hook snipped off—or use someone else's rod.

A short leader will really help that whole tuck motion and, of course, the more weight you have on your fly the better the tuck cast works. **FI**

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