

Cinder Hill Fly Fishing

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A GUIDE TO BASIC EQUIPMENT FOR FLY FISHING

Courtesy of Alan Purnell, Licensed Coach, Game Angling Instructors Association

Safety First: A baseball style cap and a pair of eye glasses are essential. If prospective angler does not have to wear spectacles a pair of Polaroid glasses will be ideal. If budget does not run to cost of Polaroid's purchase a pair of clear safety glasses from your local DIY store.

Waterproof outer clothing and waterproof boots or shoes and layers of warm comfortable clothing will enable you to enjoy fishing in anything other than the worst of the British weather.

Remember, there is no such thing as bad weather, it's just inappropriate equipment.

Fishing Equipment:

Rods: A 9ft or a 9ft 6inch Carbon rod AFTM rating of 6/7 with middle to tip action is ideal for most situations. Such a rod will be light enough to let you fish all day and sensitive enough to give you enjoyment when playing a fish. Cost: £45 - £120 will get you a good quality rod.

Reels: The reel is just required to hold the line. Rarely will a game angler play a fish on the reel. Ideally the reel should be just large enough to hold a fly line of the same rating as the rod on which it is to be used plus 75 to 100 yards of backing line. Reels described as "large arbour" are best. Cost: £20 - £60. My recommendation will be to purchase a reel which comes complete with 2 – 4 cassettes or spare spools, as this will give flexibility to carry, floating, intermediate and fast sinking lines to meet every eventuality you are likely to meet on a fishing trip.

Fly Line: Normally, to cover varying fishing conditions, a minimum of three lines will be carried by most anglers – A floater, a slow sink, an intermediate and a fast sink. Cost: £12 - £45 each

Leader material: Spool of Monofilament line with minimum Breaking Strain of 6lbs. Cost: £5 - £10

Landing Net: Collapsible telescopic net (Large Trout) will meet most fishing situations. Cost: £45

Fly Box: A purpose made box to safely hold a collection of flies. Cost: £5 - £25

Priest: A tool to humanely kill the trout. This can be home made but modern priests are relatively inexpensive, circa £10.

Scissors or Clippers: A Pair of short pointed scissors or clippers to cut the loose end of leader material. (Nylon is tough and will easily serrate ones teeth so it is advisable not to get into the habit of biting the loose ends off !). Cost: £5 - 15

Forceps: A pair of artery forceps to aid removal of fly when swallowed by trout. Cost £3 - £8

Towel: Not for use on the trout but to dry ones hands. Old kitchen towel / bar runner ideal. Pound Shops sell microfiber clothes which are ideal

Non Essentials – But useful to have.

Bass Bag: A bag in which to keep your fish and to take your catch home. Cost £5 - £35

Fly Vest: A purpose made vest to hold your essential odds and bobs. Cost £45 -£150

Tackle Bag: To hold and carry your reel, fly box, waterproofs, sun block, sandwiches etc. Cost £20 - £90

Alan's response to observations made & questions raised by participants at courses.

General: Upon arrival at a fishery check the Record Book to see what flies have proved successful for other anglers. Ask bailiff for tips on flies / tactics etc. If fishery has a shop, purchase a couple of flies.

On arrival at water stand and look at the scene before you. Look for surface disturbance; bird activity, wind movement and closely observe the contours of the banks looking for potential hot spots (Erosion from angler's feet) inflows / outflows, fallen trees, overhanging bushes, weed beds, etc.

If you are first at the water don't stomp up to edge and cast fly straight out as far as possible – think of the most likely place the fish will be i.e. right up close to the bank which provides shelter and where insects and invertebrates will need to be to climb out of the water. When first at a water the first cast should be from way back, with just the first 2 to 3ft of leader entering the water.

If you are not catching and other anglers are, take time out and watch how they are fishing – floating line or sinking line, length of leader, type of fly – is it small and light or large/heavy (does it make a plop when it enters the water. If still uncertain, don't be afraid, make contact and ask them what method they are using and what flies they are using, most fly fishermen are a friendly bunch.

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A GUIDE TO BASIC EQUIPMENT FOR FLY FISHING (continued)

Setting Up: Several were observed threading the tip of the fly line / leader through the rings which is fine if one's eyesight is good. However the drawback is that the line will fly back down the rod rings if you accidentally let go of the tip / leader. An alternative, and the preferred method, is to pull off several rod lengths of line from the reel and about 2 meters back from the tip, fold the line into a loop and thread the loop up through the rings. If you accidentally let go the line will only fall back to the last ring threaded.

Leader length: For normal floating or sinking line fishing, a leader length of a minimum of the length of the rod you are using is recommended. As casting proficiency increases you will be able to increase leader length if required.

Fly Selection: A quick look at the various fly fishing magazines available, reveals that there are many thousands of flies produced to cover all fishing scenarios, so the dilemma we face is which flies we need to have in our personal fly boxes !

It is extremely rare for fish to become fixated on one food source – an exception being Mayfly time on the Irish Lochs when the trout will gorge themselves on Mayflies for a week or so. Fly selection will depend on the location of the waters being fished and whether they are rivers or stillwaters. In our South East stillwaters, we can expect to find Bloodworm, Caddis, Damsel, Dragonfly, Mayfly, Sedges, Olives, Shrimp, Snail, Corixa, Spiders and Fry etc, therefore it will pay to have flies in your box which represent these.

When we look down on the often very colourful flies in a fly box we need to remind ourselves that the fish see them very differently to us as they will often see them from below. Hold a fly up to the sky and you will note you are seeing it very differently – little or no colour but a definite silhouette. In my experience as long as the fly looks like a food source, the fish will take the fly, especially if that fly is being fished at the depth the trout are feeding at. Once a trout has located a food source it rarely will move up or down to take food, but will happily move left or right.

Our artificial flies may be broken down into four categories – Dry Flies, Wet Flies, Nymphs and Lures and fish can be caught on all the many variations of these, the main ingredients to success being the depth at which the fly is fishing and the movement (or not !) of the fly through the water as imparted by the angler.

Fishing

Firstly, take time to observe the water in front of you. Decide where you think the fish might be circulating and decide on your initial method of fishing.

I believe only one person noted that I set up my rod with a sinking line. That person also set up with a sinking line and caught almost immediately. I very rarely tackle up with a floating line as a sinking line provides the opportunity to quickly explore the water and determine the depth at which the fish are cruising.

Initial casts should be close to bank or obstructions and then subsequent casts should fan out to cover as much water as possible. If no takes or knocks after twenty minutes consider moving to another location, it's pointless repeating the same cast, with the same or similar fly time after time after time.

Fish the fly right back to the bank. The inexperienced and poor casters tender to lift off when they have 3 or so meters of fly line remaining on the water. If the leader is as long as the rod this means the fly is a further 2 to 3 meters further out! Get into the habit of continuing to retrieve whilst slowly lifting the rod until the fly is just dabling up to the surface and HOLD it at that position for 30 to 40 seconds. You will be amazed at just how many fish will take at that point. I have calculated that a good 95% of all fish I catch are taken right in front of my feet. As I use a leader about 2 to 2.5 times the rod length when using a floating line this means that I have barely a foot of actual fly line out of the top ring. To re-cast I put the line back on the water and with my non rod hand feed line forward at the same time as moving the rod tip slowly from side to side. The surface tension of the water pulls the line off and soon there is sufficient to execute a roll cast before moving straight into an overhead cast.

Unfortunately, I was not close to anyone at the time they landed a fish, so do not know if anyone spooned their fish. It's good practice to spoon your fish immediately after it has been humanely dispatched as this will show you what that fish has just eaten and been feeding on, which can help in fly selection.

To conclude I have to advise that the main reason newcomers experience difficulty in consistently catching trout is down to poor casting techniques. Those anglers who consistently catch are always competent casters therefore I would recommend that anyone who wishes to take up fly fishing invests in a lesson or two from a fully qualified Instructor. We appreciate that lessons cost money but when you consider the cost of equipment and the cost of joining a syndicate or the cost of day tickets should you fish other waters, it's money well spent as you will know why things go wrong and more importantly, how to correct them. Details of qualified instructors are available on the Cinder Hill Fly Fishing website.