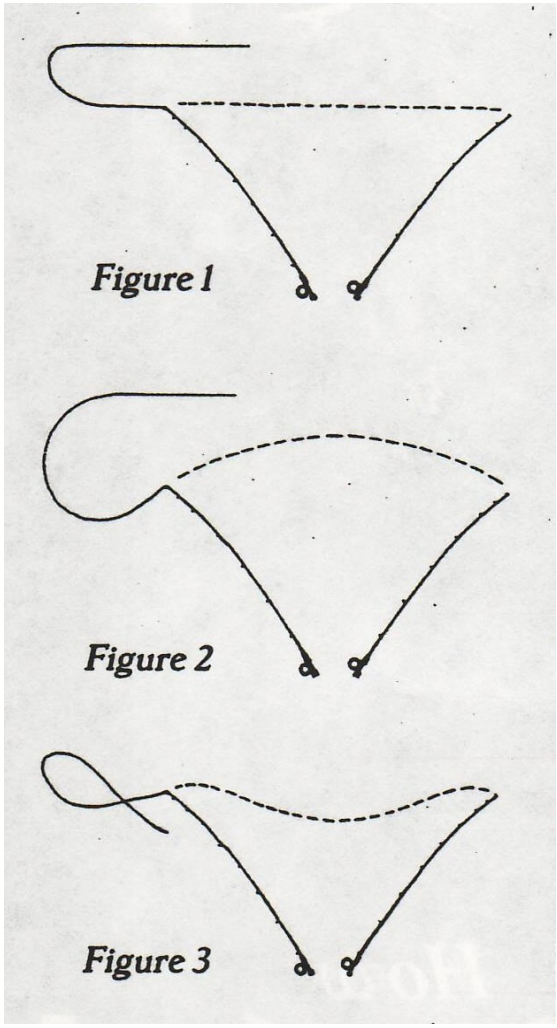
Rod Tip Path

Its Effect on the Cast

by Bruce W. Richards

The tip-top guide of a fly rod is the direct connection between the caster and the line. The path that the tip of the rod takes during the cast determines what the fly line will do and understanding this relationship can be very helpful in understanding your cast.

The line goes where the rod tip goes, and if the tip travels in a straight line (Figure 1) so does the fly line, resulting in a small, tight loop. What happens when the tip doesn't travel straight?



The most common "alternative" tip path, especially among beginners, is what I call a convex, or 'domed' path. (Figure 2). When the rod tip travels in an upward arc during the cast it tends to throw the top of the loop high, and the bottom of the loop low. Loops with high tops and low bottoms are, by definition, wide, inefficient loops. This usually

happens when an angler bends his/her wrist too much during the casting stroke. Controlling the bend of the wrist causes the rod tip to travel in a straighter line which makes the loop smaller.

Another common non-straight tip path commonly seen is the concave or downward arc. (Figure 3). When the tip travels in this down-then-up path it drags the line with it… down, then up. When the line follows the tip back up it will necessarily cross itself and form what is called a tailing loop. Tailing loops cause 'wind knots' and can make your fly hit the rod. While there are several ways to make a rod tip travel in a concave path, 25 years of instructing experience leads me to believe that 99+% of all tailing loops are caused by an abrupt application of power.

When a rod is stroked smoothly it bends (loads) smoothly as the weight of the line is accelerated. If power is applied abruptly, the rod tip cannot keep up with the butt of the rod because of the resistance of the weight of the line. When this happens the rod 'overbends' which can only result in the rod tip momentarily dipping below the straight path. Beginning casters often have this problem until they realize that a smooth stroke is important. Soft, slow actioned rods are prone to throw tailing loops in the hands of less experienced anglers, as they require an even smoother stroke to prevent 'overbending' and tailing loops.

The above examples all dealt with the vertical component of tip path. What happens if the rod tip doesn't travel straight horizontally? I'll address this potential problem in a later article discussing accuracy.

By understanding and analyzing your loops you should now be able to determine what rod tip path you are throwing, and make any necessary corrections to improve your casting.