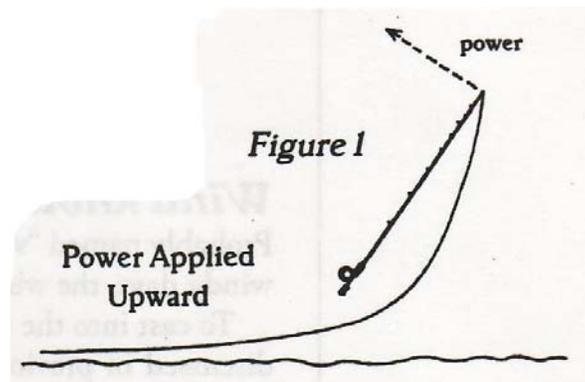


Roll Casting

by Bruce Richards

The roll cast is an important cast in fly fishing. Most anglers use it to make a cast when there's no room for a backcast, but it can also be used to 'roll' a sinking line up to the surface, or to reposition the line on the water to recast; or to quickly and quietly pick up a floating line.

When you roll cast, does your leader straighten out the way you want, or does it usually collapse and fall in a heap? Getting the leader to straighten is difficult for many fly fishers, but it isn't hard to do. You just need to know how to do it.

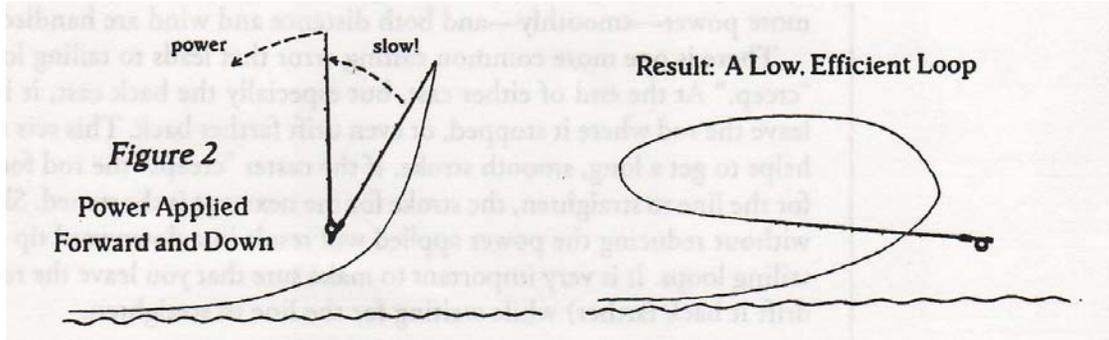


As with an overhead cast, a roll cast travels through the air in a loop shape. If the loop is too big, the leader will collapse and miss the target. Here's how the roll cast works, and how to fix the problem of the collapsing leader.

Start a roll cast with the line extended on the water in front of you. Slowly draw the line back toward you by raising the rod tip to vertical, then behind your shoulder to about a 30 degree angle behind you. Wait for the line to stop moving. Most anglers set up correctly, just as described, but their problems begin with what they do next. Most casters start to apply significant casting power from the 30-degree rod angle.

As you can see in Figure 1, when the rod is powered while at this angle it applies power to the line in an upward direction, resulting in a high, wide, inefficient loop. Just as with an overhead cast, big loops are very wind resistant and usually don't carry enough energy to the leader to straighten it. A minor adjustment is needed to fix the problem.

To make an effective roll cast, the rod needs to be moved slowly forward from the 30-degree angle to the nearly vertical position before significant power is applied (Figure 2). When power is applied to the rod from this more vertical position the rod tip powers the line forward and down, just where we want the line to go, and in a much tighter loop.



The size of the loop created by the roll cast should not be higher above the water than your head. If it is, you are applying the power too early. If the line crashes onto the water in front of you, you may have applied the power too late. A little practice will teach you just where you need to start to apply the power for the best loop.

If the line falls lazily to the water and doesn't straighten to the leader, you need to cast harder. The roll cast requires quite a bit of power as you have to break the friction between the line and the water. And when practicing, remember to do it on the water. No matter how well you perform, it's just not going to work on grass!