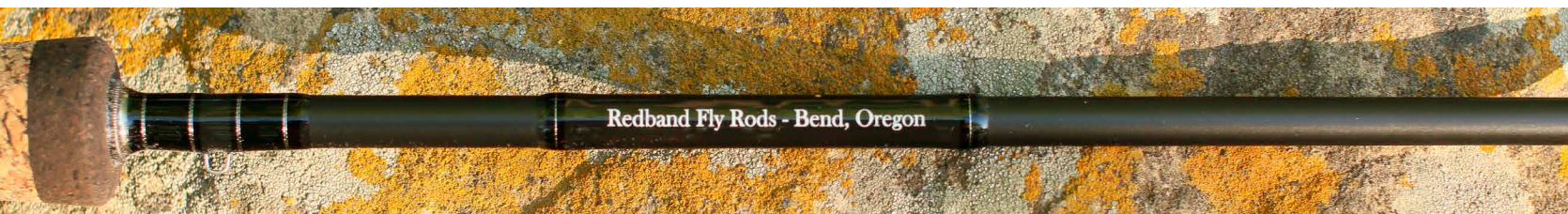




REDBAND FLY RODS

Review by Brian Clark; photos by Dave Kilgour and Brian Clark

We keep stumbling across great things coming from Bend, Oregon. In our last issue (Spring / Summer 2024), we explored the extremely active microbrewery scene; this time it's Redband Fly Rods, a boutique rodmaker focusing mostly on the trout spey game.



Although the founder and chief rodsmith at Redband, Dave Kilgour, grew up in New England where he learned to fish from his father using a classic LL Bean fly rod, he's been exploring the wide range of fisheries on the West Coast for over a decade. Never quite satisfied with the rods he was finding in the shops, he got serious about building his own.

Eventually he ran across a 7'9" 3wt blank that he thought might be perfect for the 12-15" trout common in one of his favorite smaller rivers. He built it out with a beautiful wooden reel insert and created exactly the reel grip shape he wanted, and the first time he fished it was magical: exactly the action and responsiveness needed for a small stream rod with aesthetics that hit all the right notes.

That experience lit a fire, and he began to research other fly rod types and explore the blanks available from various manufacturers. After a fair bit of experimentation, he found that rods based on blanks made in New Zealand by CTS were among the most popular, and he started Redband Fly Rods as a vehicle to market and sell custom rods built to his and his customers' exact specifications using premium components.

For last spring's OTFM trip to Chilean Patagonia, I test drove two of Dave's trout spey rods, a niche which has become his specialty. One rod was built on a CTS Affinity blank, the other on a North Face Composites blank. Build quality on both was top notch; the components he chose were classy, and I appreciated the care he took to match the colors in his thread wraps to the beautiful reel seats. His handle shapes are distinctive and comfortable. Solid work.

Although we're spoiled for choice in the fly rod market today, there's something special about custom rods. Whether you're trying to maximize some particular performance strain or looking for a unique aesthetic touch, or both, the process of selecting components and contributing to the design makes the end result very sweet to fish.

Dave's willing to work with anyone to build the rod of their dreams, whether that's a 6'6" 2wt fiberglass creek stick or a 17ft 12wt graphite two-hander, he's game. He also maintains a small stock of finished rods available for immediate purchase, configurations that he's honed for performance.

In Dave's own words, "For us, rod building is a blend of science and art. From the science angle, it's about choosing exactly the right blank for the angler and their intended fishing applications, designing the grip, guide size and spacing, and refining the feel. On the artistic side, we tie it all together with threadwork that appeals to the angler and creates a cohesive overall look. We really enjoy working with our customers to build a high-performance rod that they'll thoroughly enjoy on the water."

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