

Tenkara Fishing



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Introduction

This booklet has been written to accompany my range of Tenkara equipment. Its aim is to give the first time Tenkara user some basic skills and knowledge on which you can build. The ideas in this publication have been gained over the last few years in which I have almost exclusively fished with a Tenkara rod for trout and grayling in the streams in the Herefordshire Wye catchment area.

The Tenkara way

Tenkara has been practiced since the earliest times in the Japanese mountain streams, as a way of catching fish and feeding the fisherman's family. The fisherman attached a line to a bamboo pole and on the end of that is attached a fly. The flies were made out of materials which were readily available so were relatively crude to modern eyes. The effectiveness of the system relied on the skill of the fisherman and some fisherman could earn a living by fishing. Similar systems can be found in many parts of the world and it was the only way to fish an artificial fly before the advent of the reel. Tenkara in Japanese literally means 'from heaven'. In recent years it has been taken up by sport fishers in Japan, the USA, Europe and other parts of the developed world. The essence of Tenkara is to present a single fly with the minimum amount of line on the water. In practice this means that only the tippet and the tip of the Tenkara line should be on the water. Another important principle of Tenkara fishing is its simplicity. All the angler needs when going fishing is to take the rod, line, box of flies, some tippet material and a net. This can all fit into your pocket.



Dark bodied Kebari



Tenkara flies or Kebari are not designed to imitate a particular prey item but to trigger a feeding or attack response from the fish. This is similar to many of the lures that are used in still

water trout fishing. Many of the Tenkara Kebari have a reversed hackle and then they are known as Sakasa Kebari. The fisherman will have a range of flies of different sizes and colours. This fly design can be traced back to the beginning of Tenkara. The materials available to the mountain peoples were very limited and they had to create their Kebari out of the materials that were available such as sewing needles, cotton, and local feathers. This is also the reason why traditional Kebari are tied on eyeless hooks and loop of silk is used to attach the tippet to the Kebari. The reversing of the hackle is thought to impart more movement into the fly, especially if the fly is fished downstream or given a slight movement to simulate a take. Most Kebari do not have any weight in them but they can be dressed with a small bead at the front of the Kebari.



Tenkara style leader and furlled line

Valsesiana

Valsesiana is another ancient method of fly fishing practiced in the Sesia Valley in Northern Italy. Valsesiana is a method of fishing with a fixed line which is between 3.5 and 4.5 metres long attached to a long rod. Traditionally this fixed line was made of horse hair but other materials can be used. Today the rods are made of carbon fibre but other suitable materials were used in the past such as hazel. The lines are similar to Tenkara lines. There are similarities between Valsesiana and Tenkara and also fixed line fly fishing practiced in the 16th and 17th centuries in Britain before the advent of the reel. The main difference between modern Tenkara and Valsesiana is that in Tenkara only a single fly is used whereas fishermen who practice Valsesiana will use a team of spider like flies. These flies have the hackle pointing forward. This fly also has similarities to North Country Spiders because the flies are sparsely tied.

The Valsesiana fisherman generally fishes upstream, casting the team of flies into all

likely spots. The team of flies are worked to elicit a take from the trout. The alpine streams of the Sesia valley are similar to the mountain streams found in Japan where Tenkara originated.



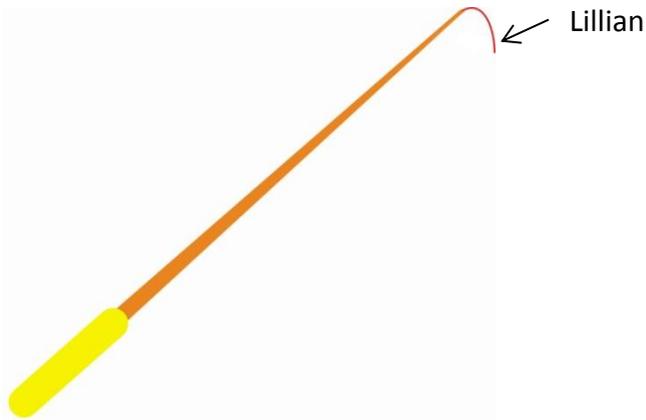
Partridge & Orange
tided Valsesiana style



Valsesiana style leader and furled line

The Tenkara Rod

Tenkara rods are usually about 12 foot but they may be longer. Shorter rods are commonly used when fishing brooks, which are tree lined. All modern tenkara rods are telescopic, collapsing to about 2 foot for transport and made of carbon fibre. This is one of the advantages of the tenkara system that the rod can be easily collapsed when moving between fishing spots and at the beginning and end of fishing session. The tenkara rod can be kept set up between outings.



Rod actions

There are three main Tenkara rod actions and they are summarised in the table.

Action	Description	Comments
7:3	Seventy percent of the rod is stiff and thirty percent flexible.	This rod has a faster action than the 6:4 which means that it is easier to cast.
6:4	Sixty percent of the rod is stiff and forty percent is flexible.	Good general purpose rod. This is the most common action and approximates to a medium action.
5:5	Fifty percent flexible and fifty percent flexible	Not a common action and only found on short rods. This rod has a soft action.

Tenkara lines

Traditionally Tenkara lines would have been made of materials such as silk or horse hair. Today either a level fluorocarbon line or a tapered furred leader is used. Level fluorocarbon lines come in various weights.

Size	Diameter
Size 3	0.285mm
Size 3.5	0.310mm
Size 4	0.33mm
Size 5	0.37mm

There are also available tapered fluorocarbon Tenkara lines. The furred leaders that I produce have a forward taper which aids casting.

Line storage

There are two main ways of storing your tenkara line and they are a foam spool or an easy keeper. The foam spool can be pushed over the rod and the line wound on when the rod is collapsed. This is particularly useful if you are using a fluorocarbon tenkara line as it will not put a kink into the line.



Examples of foam spools



The other line storage system is an easy keeper. This is attached to the rod and the line is wound it. This system is particularly suitable for furred Tenkara lines and has the advantage that lines could be stored even if the rod is collapsed and stored in the carrying case.



Easy Keeper

Tenkara Knots

Attaching a furled Tenkara line to the Lillian

I find the easiest way to do this is to use a sheet bend.



The knot is formed using the Lillian and is finished tight the overhand knot in the Lillian.

Attaching the tippet to the furled leader

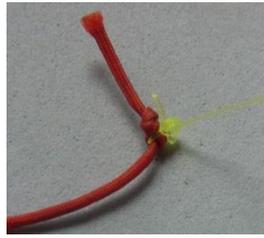
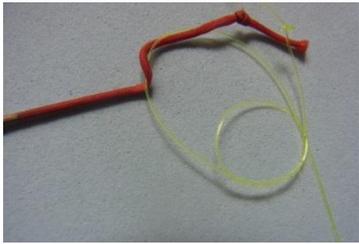
The best way to do this is to use the loop to loop method.



Attaching a fluorocarbon Tenkara line to the Lillian

This is achieved by the use of a knot known as the Lillian knot.

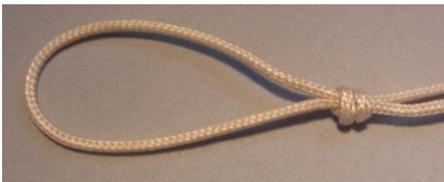
1. Tie a figure of eight knot in the end of level line.
2. Then tie a double slip knot in the level line.
3. Wind the Lillian through the loop.
4. Tighten the knot.



Attaching the tippet to fluorocarbon Tenkara line

This is achieved by forming a double slip knot in the tippet and passing it over the Tenkara line.

1. Tie a figure of eight knot in the end of the level line
2. Form a double slip knot in the tippet.
3. Slip this loop over the Tenkara line and tighten.

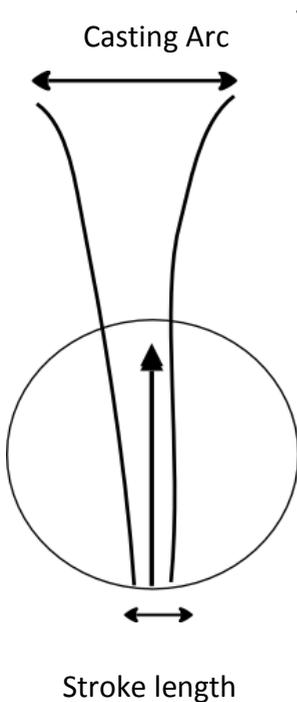


Tippet attached to
Tenkara line

The only other knot you will need is attaching the fly to the tippet and I find the best knot to use is the five turn half-blood knot.

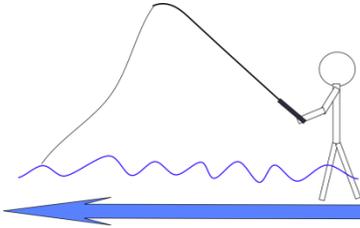
Casting

Casting a Tenkara rod is similar to casting a western style rod but the stroke length is shorter and the elbow should be held in to the side of the body. If you can cast a western you will not have a problem casting with a Tenkara rod.



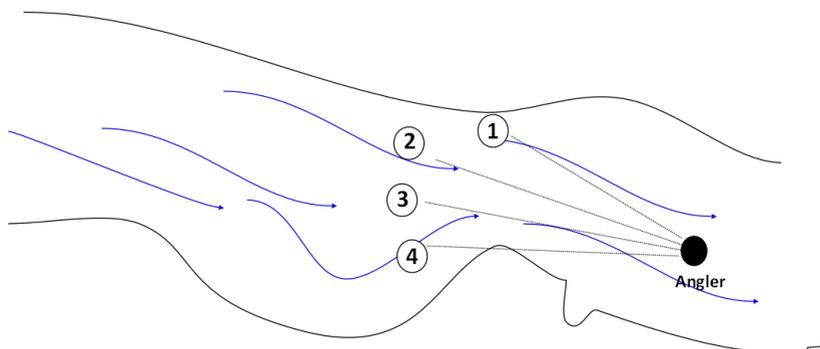
This diagram illustrates the arc and stroke length when casting with a Tenkara rod. Typically when casting with a western style rod the arc will be in the range of 90° whereas when casting with a Tenkara rod the arc is 60° . The stroke length is also reduced from about 18", when casting with a western fly rod, to less than 12". This abbreviated casting cycle results in an efficient and effective cast allowing the angler to place the fly accurately and delicately.

Fishing with your Tenkara rod



When fishing, the Tenkara rod is fished at an angle of about 45 degrees to the water. This enables the line to be kept off the water. This figure illustrates the ideal fishing positions of the rod and the line. The advantage of fishing the rod in this way is that there is direct contact with the fly and there is less of a likelihood of the fly being dragged by the current. This all adds up to a much better presentation of the fly to the fish. This is particularly true if you are fishing 'pocket water' or 'streamy runs'. This enhanced ability to control the Kebari is one of the major advantages of the Tenkara fishing system.

The primary way to fish with a Tenkara rod is to cast a single fly upstream and use very short drifts. These drifts should be no longer than about 3 or 4 seconds. Immediately the fly is cast the rod is raised and the fly can be worked by gently moving the rod tip. The fly is cast repeatedly covering the river in front of the angler. Several casts can be made in one place to simulate insect activity. When all the water in front of the angler has been searched then the angler will move upstream to the next position. Takes usually occur almost immediately after the Kebari has been cast. The adjacent figure illustrates this approach. Because the angler is close to the fish the angler needs to keep his profile low so as to avoid spooking the fish.



Casts 1 to 4 then the angler moves upstream

The Tenkara fly can also be fished downstream. The Kebari is cast downstream and the fly is pulled towards the angler with long sweeps of the rod. Again the aim is to stimulate the fish so that it takes the Kebari.

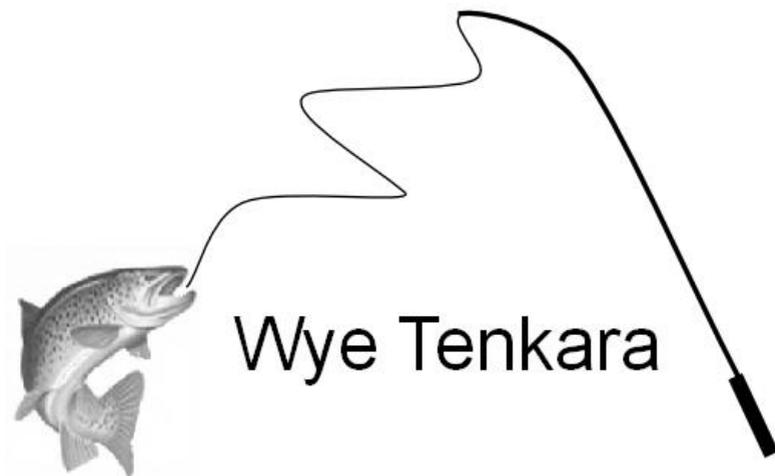
Landing fish

Landing a fish can pose a problem because it is not possible to shorten the line because there is no reel. When the fish is ready to be landed the line is gathered in the other hand and then passed to the rod hand. The fish should then be at your knees and can be easily netted.

A different approach to Tenkara

Tenkara equipment can also be used in a non-traditional way and much of the fishing in the UK uses a tenkara rod in this way. The tenkara rod is ideally suited to a range of river fishing techniques including short or Czech nymphing, dry fly, duo or New Zealand style and also long line nymphing or

French/Spanish nymphing. The advantage of using a tenkara rod is that there is greater line control and it is possible produce long drag-free drifts. Another advantage, because the line is so light, there is less surface disturbance so there is less chance of frightening spooky fish but the angler must practice good river craft to avoid spooking the fish as you will be fishing closer to the fish.



Wye Tenkara

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