

**TIE THE  
PULLING  
SEDGE**

A loch-style fly  
in nine steps

# TROUT & SALMON

THE VOICE OF GAME-FISHING SINCE 1955

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Discover club fishing on a little-known Rutland stream

## Duffer's guide to dapping

Trusted tactics and  
flies for stillwaters

31  
QUALITIES  
OF THE  
MODERN  
GILLIE

## Trout at the coalface

The River Ebbw's  
incredible revival





# A SPORT DIVIDED

Split's the word, writes Simon Cooper, who doesn't spare the rod



**W**HAT ARE THE GREAT DIVISIONS OF our age? Those issues that set one person against another. Beliefs often visceral rather than logical. The topic that you lob into a conversation just before stepping back smartly to avoid collateral damage. Lady Diana, saint or sinner still plays well in that respect. As does Brexit. Closer to home for us fly-fishing folk, I thought nymph versus dry was such a topic, but I have learnt recently such a debate is mild mannered compared to the merits (or not in my belief) of split-cane rods.

For those of you who are not aware, I write, with my Fishing Breaks cap on, a biweekly blog. It is not just a marketing spiel as, like in this column, I range over topics that I hope will, in the broadest Reithian sense, educate, entertain and inform. Recently, having been kindly gifted a split-cane rod of 1980s vintage to add to our Dermot Wilson museum here at Nether Wallop Mill, I penned a piece titled, "Why do we pretend split-cane rods are any good?" Oh dear, I forgot to step back smartly — the collateral damage in the form of email and social-media posts was painful.

The tenor of my piece was that the day I see Roger Federer walking out to play Wimbledon with a wooden racquet is the day I'll go back to fishing with split cane. I really had no idea how much and how many of you love split cane. One famous split-cane rod-maker wrote to say thank you for trying to ruin his business. Would that my writings have such power, for he will never be short of customers as split-cane aficionados are passionate, almost cult-like in their adoration of this cast from the past.

If you fancy delving into the history of the fly-rod, it is really worth visiting Dr Andrew Herd's [fishingmuseum.org.uk](http://fishingmuseum.org.uk) In essence, rods were historically made of all sorts of woods — ash, deal, juniper and yew, to randomly select four of the 14 he

mentions. However, when fly-rod making became an industry in itself in the mid-to-late 1800s, the materials coalesced around greenheart and bamboo. I must admit I always thought I knew what greenheart was, but for the purposes of this column I checked: it is from the teak family, often used in shipbuilding, desirable for its strength and water-resistant properties, so much so that it was used to sheath wooden ships, famously the Fram and the Endurance, used in the polar expeditions of Amundsen and Shackleton, to prevent them being crushed by the ice.

These two materials held sway until immediately after WWII and the advent of glass fibre, which allowed for mass production and lower prices but not much in the way of improvement in weight or casting efficacy. Nineteen seventy-three was the game-changing year when the first carbon-fibre rod was made by Fenwick in the USA, a material incidentally invented by the Royal Aircraft Establishment at Farnborough. Such was the impact of these new rods that by the end of the decade glass fibre was no more and split cane had become a decided also-ran.

So, why is it that, 170 years since the first production split-cane rod and the 50th anniversary of carbon fibre next year, so many people still cleave to split cane? My inbox talks of beauty. Flex. Rhythm. Touch. Tradition. I don't hold to these beliefs myself, but I'm told a similar debate takes place in the cycling world with steel versus carbon. In music, there has been a revival in vinyl. I guess there is no harm in being different. ■

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