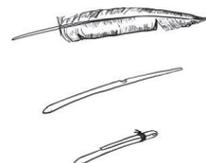


Cast into the wilderness

A monthly series following **Rob Cowen** and **Leo Critchley** as they reconnect with the simpler things in life



Part 5
Fashion a fishing rod

You may be under the impression that fishing is an exclusive sport, requiring high-end equipment. But with only a couple of pounds spent on shop-bought items and a bit of knowledge, you can create an effective – if basic – rod and tackle.

A fishing pole is best made from a thin, standing-dead hazel sapling – lighter than green wood but less likely to be rotten than fallen branches. Snap or saw the tallest one you can find close to the base in order to maximize the overall length (ideally around three or four metres). The length allows you to lower bait in specific areas, and reach the best “swims”. The odd kink here and there doesn’t matter, but remove any twigs or burs.

Now find a large feather to make a float – goose or swan are best. Trim away the feathers so only the central quill remains and cut off the thinner top end so the whole thing measures 15cm. Hold this up to the light and you will see the air chamber at the bottom. This gives the float its buoyancy. In order to attach this to a line, you need to fold the solid top third of the quill over on itself.

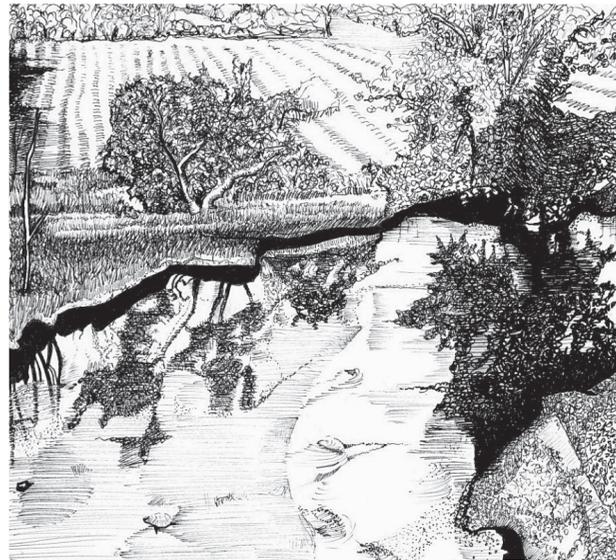
Do this by hollowing out a centimetre-wide groove at the fold point, being careful not to work all the way through. Bending the top third over should then form an “eyelet”, which your fishing line can be fed through. If it does, tie the folded end down. If not, hollow out more until you see the hole.

Nylon fishing line, a hook and a couple of small weights can be bought cheaply in any tackle or outdoor sports shop. The length of line required depends on the depth of the river, but you want a metre between rod tip and float and then whatever will leave your hook about 7cm above the river bottom. Attach the weights so they are equally spaced between the hook and the float.

We tried our homemade rod on the river Teifi in Wales, which wound its way through the terrain like a ribbon, the bright morning gleaming across its polished surface. Wading through grass, comfrey and nettles, we negotiated a crumbling bank, our hazel rods handily doubling as walking sticks.

Our best bet lay on the margins where the water was still, beef-stock brown and ruffled only by a gentle eddy bobbling back upstream. We swung out our bait, a worm dug from the adjoining meadow, and settled down to wait.

Fishing requires total silence. Amid this calm, time starts to slip away downstream. Hours fly by as if minutes, our eyes drawn to the hypnotic movement of a float drifting at the whim of



Go with the flow: fishing doesn't require high-end equipment ROB COWEN/LEO CRITCHLEY

Places to test your tackle

Fishing in saltwater is free, but anglers need a rod licence for freshwater in England and Wales. Day (£3.75) and seasonal licences (under-12s free; 12 to 16 £5; adults £27) can be bought online at environment-agency.gov.uk; the money is reinvested in protecting our river ecosystems.

■ **The Maltsters Arms, Tuckenhay, Devon**
Keith Floyd's old pub is a wonderful place to try out your homemade rod. Overlooking Bow Creek, a tributary of the Dart, the banks are rich with flora and fauna. Owner George Welsh is happy to point out the spots to catch red mullet and sea bass. Should you return empty handed, he

will entertain you into the wee hours with conciliatory pints. B&B from £85. www.tuckenhay.com.

■ **Bullock Farm Campsite, Somerset**
Close to the coastal, countryside village of Kingstons Seymour near Bristol, this campsite lets you roll out a tent pretty much adjacent to its five freshwater lakes for just £5. Brimming with fish, this angler's idyll was recently voted in the top 50 fisheries in the UK by both the *Angler's Mail* and the *Angling Times*. bullockfarm.co.uk.

■ **Sleningford Watermill Caravan & Camping, Ripon, Yorkshire**
Spend peaceful nights under canvas in the beautiful surroundings of this old

watermill and wildlife hotspot and long days on the picturesque stretches of the River Ure, which weaves majestically nearby through verdant countryside (pitches from £17). sleningfordwatermill.co.uk

■ **Bartles Lodge B&B, Dereham, Norfolk**
In the sleepy village of Elsing, Chris and Jane offer cosy bed and breakfast accommodation situated in 11 acres of beautiful grounds. Wander with your DIY rod to any of the three well-stocked fishing lakes. A little farther away, the river Wensum winds its way through villages and countryside where there are also day ticket stretches available. B&B from £62. bartleslodge.co.uk.

the river's time. Breathing becomes deeper, the muscles relax and the mind empties. Fishing is meditation, even if we don't realise it. The rod a conduit for the angler's skills and knowledge, an extension of ourselves that allows us to commune with the water and its banks. The more personal it is, the closer we get.

And what banks. On this wildlife-crammed stretch of river, blue-tailed damselflies appeared to dance where rays lit the water. Evening fell on a scene so entrancing that neither of us reacted when the rod tip moved. The hazel jumped again and this time we both dived for the pole. A flash of silver near the surface, a flapping jolt and the sapling flexed as we lifted our catch.

Just 10cm long, the young wild brown trout seemed as big as the white whale in our eyes, and we quickly removed the hook from the corner of its mouth. Under his russet flanks and gold spots, a slow heartbeat, surprisingly powerful in the palm. We looked into its unblinking eye before lowering it back into the river. With a splash, it was gone.

Time spent fashioning a rod and fishing brought an important connection. Below the surface, our rivers, lakes and ponds are fascinating places. From pike to rudd, grayling to minnow, dynasties exist in and around these hidden worlds, but ones we rarely get to see. Fishing draws us closer. Although some may feel it is an invasion, we found catching our fish to be a reminder of the importance of their preservation.

Rob Cowen and Leo Critchley's book describing their journeys around Britain will be published in spring 2012 by Hodder. For more information, follow them on their blog at getbackuk.com

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Travel Agenda

■ **TODAY** The waterside setting of Lisbon is celebrated at the Festival dos Oceanos, until next weekend with concerts, late-night museum openings and fireworks (festivaldosocanos.com).

■ **THIS WEEK** The stylish new No 1 Traveller Lounge opens on Friday at Heathrow Terminal 3, offering access to

a spa, mini cinema, games room and bistro for £25 per person (notraveller.com)

■ **IN THE DIARY** Paris's Le Diner en Blanc, at which diners congregate en masse, all wearing their finest white, for an upmarket picnic is decamping to a hush-hush location in New York on 25 August (dinerenblanc.info).

The big six

Indian mountain retreats

BY LAURA HOLT

Shakti 360° Leti Uttarakhand

A collection of simple stone houses gathers at Shakti 360° Leti – a Himalayan retreat so remote that guests have to make an hour-long hike from the nearest road in Leti to reach it. The rewards include spending days reading in one of four cottages – all with views of the peaks; going trekking with a guide and porter; or curling up beside open fires at night as the temperature drops outside. Shakti 360 Leti, Leti, Bageshwar District, Uttarakhand (00 91 124 456 3899; shaktihimalaya.com). Three-night packages start at US\$1,916 (£1,178) per person, all inclusive.



Glenburn Tea Estate West Bengal

A decent brew is guaranteed at the Glenburn Tea Estate. Founded in 1859, it offers eight colonial-style suites above Darjeeling Town. Each has a four-poster bed, embroidered quilts, free-standing Victorian tub and Darjeeling Green Tea toiletries. Spend a day on the “tea tour” watching how leaves are harvested. Or spend a night at the remote Glenburn Lodge & Campsite, which offers barbecues and bonfires beside the River Rungeet in the shadow of the Kanchenjunga mountains. Glenburn Tea Estate, Glenburn Valley, Darjeeling, West Bengal (00 91 98 300 70213; glenburnteaestate.com). Suites start at Rs11,000 (£156), full board.

Ananda - In the Himalayas Uttarakhand

This former Maharaja's palace now functions as a Himalayan spa hotel. Retaining its palatial splendour, reception rooms boast gilded ceilings and richly patterned rugs, while the 75 rooms and suites are located in a more modern building to the back. It offers a holistic approach to wellbeing, with yoga in the open-air pavilion, Ayurvedic treatments in the spa, nature walks and a menu of healthy regional dishes. Ananda - In The Himalayas, The Palace Estate, Narendra Nagar, Tehri, Garhwal, Uttarakhand (00 91 13 7822 7500; anandaspa.com). Doubles start at US\$466 (£286), room only.



Vivanta by Taj Kashmir

India's northernmost state is home to the latest Taj by Vivanta. At 1,730m above sea level, it overlooks the Kashmir valley's dramatic peaks and Srinagar's Dal Lake below. Despite its remote location, all the five-star hallmarks are present. Try yoga in the fitness centre; relax in the outdoor pool; sip Kashmiri tea at the Rhythm lounge; or retreat to your room – all have private balconies – to take in the epic views. Vivanta by Taj - Dal View, Srinagar, Kralsangri, Brein, Jammu & Kashmir (00 800 4 588 1825; tajhotels.com). Doubles start at Rs11,000 (£153), including breakfast.



Serenity at the Kanam Estate Kerala

Prize for the best on-site attraction goes to the Kanam Estate, where guests can spend a day with resident elephant Laxmi and his mahout. Meander through the grounds of this 1920s rubber plantation in the Western Ghats or borrow bicycles to explore the surrounding hillsides. The six bedrooms feature bright terracotta and lime hues and ornately carved wooden beds. Serenity at the Kanam Estate, Payikad, Kanam, Vazhoor, Kerala (00 91 481 2456353; malabarhouse.com). Doubles start at €130, with breakfast.



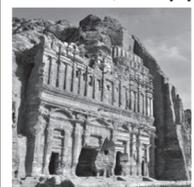
Casa del Fauno Kerala

Food is the one of the main draws at this cardamom plantation, which offers just three bedrooms in a stylish homestay setting. Amid the rolling tea terraces and spice gardens of the Kannan Devan hills, the owner Suni doubles as a chef, helped by a small team of staff. Traditional Kerala curries are served, using home-grown vegetables, meat from local farmers and fresh fish from the nearby lake. After, take in misty views from the veranda. Casa Del Fauno, Peak Gardens, Chinnakanal, Muttukadu, Munnar, Kerala (00 91 484 312 6444; casadelfauno.in). Double rooms start at Rs7,000 (£97), full board.



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