

Refining the Spey

The “D” Loop

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One of the most critical yet overlooked components of Spey casting is the “D” loop, the semi-circular loop of line that forms behind the caster just prior to the forward or delivery cast. The D loop is to Spey casting what the back cast is to overhead casting. Expert single handed casters know the importance of the back cast; in fact many will tell you that the back cast is even more important than the forward cast. I believe that the same holds true for the D loop. Let’s take a look at how attention to your D loop can improve your Spey casting.

The D loop serves several key functions:

1. it provides the line weight to load the rod for the forward cast
2. it establishes the final position of the fly/leader/line combination, known alternatively as the “grip” or “anchor”
3. its size and dynamic qualities determine the technique and effort required during the forward cast
4. its positioning determines the direction of the forward cast

Many of the difficulties casters run into involve something to do with the D loop. A line that won’t pick up off the water; a line that collapses in a heap a few yards in front of the caster; a line that crosses over itself and tangles up the leader during the forward delivery—all and more can often be traced back to a problem with setting up or managing the D loop.

Refinement of the D loop gets more critical as you add line to your cast. As we have all seen, virtually any method will allow a caster to put out 50ft – 60ft of line. For these shorter casts the size and shape of the D loop, while important if one is aiming for efficiency, are not as critical as when the caster tries to put out over 100ft of line. The ability to reach one’s potential as a Spey caster begins and ends with one’s ability to vary one’s D loop at will.

As with their forward loops, skilled Spey casters can vary the size, profile and dynamic qualities of their D loops to achieve specific ends. In a driving headwind, for example, a low, flat D loop made with a sidearm back cast allows you to minimize the parachute effect a large D loop will have during your casting cycle and sets you up for a sidearm delivery cast that will allow you to deliver the fly under the wind, achieving fishable distances other anglers can’t reach. If you experience a wind from behind blowing towards the river an arrow shaped D loop combined with a sidearm back cast will allow you set up a D loop that will effectively load the rod and avoid it crashing into your back during the forward stroke.

As I mentioned in a previous issue of the newsletter, the D loop is important for achieving a tight loop on your forward cast. The larger the D loop, and the more line you have off the water and moving backwards and up just prior to the start of the forward delivery, the tighter your forward loop will be. Here's why:

In the line drawing below (fig. 1) notice the positioning of the D loop. The rear curve of the loop is positioned fairly close to the water and significantly below the rod tip. The weight and energy of the loop in this situation is being directed backwards for certain but has the effect of drawing the rod tip back and down. As the rod comes forward to make the delivery cast it must overcome the backwards and downwards deflection before it can move the line in a forward path. This positioning of the loop will cause the caster to have a wider loop; as well the caster will loose efficiency and distance because of the amount of energy required to raise the line prior to moving it forward.

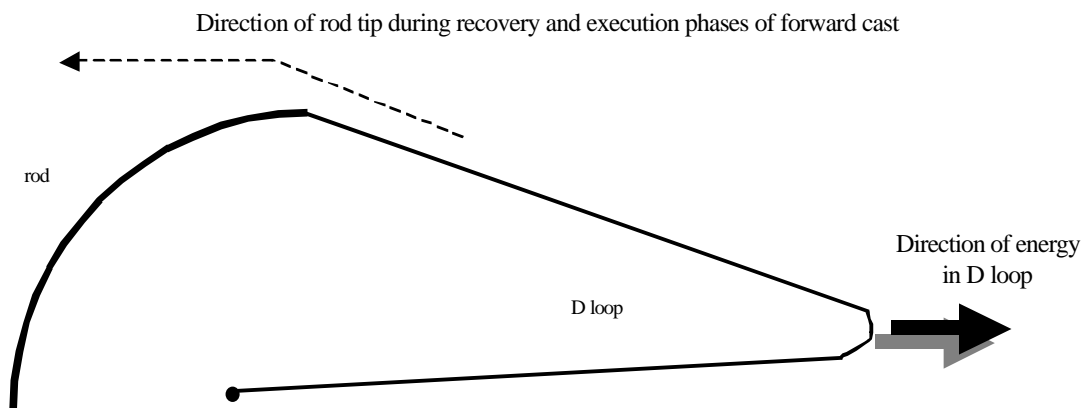


Fig. 1

Now have a look at the second drawing (fig. 2):

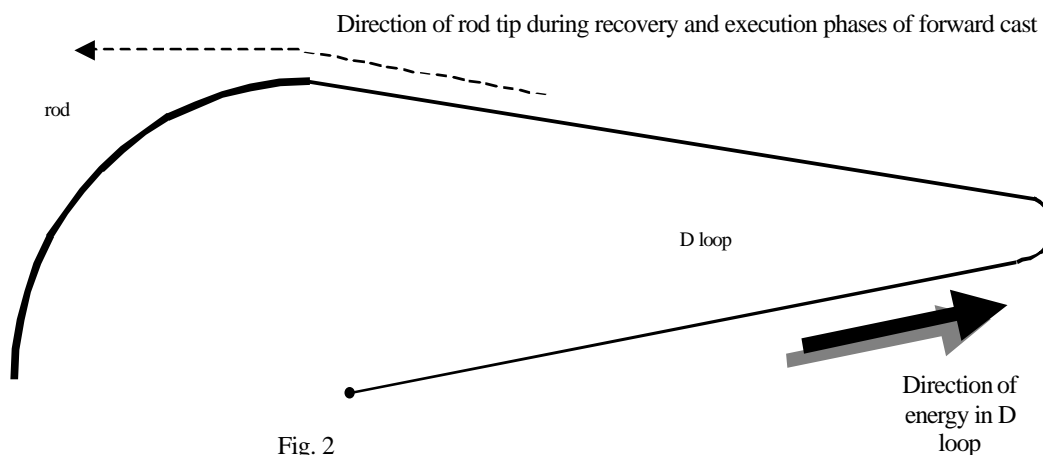
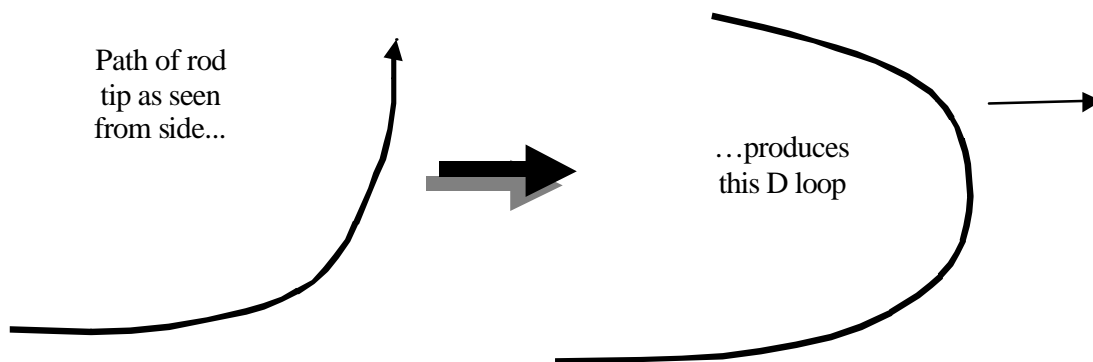


Fig. 2

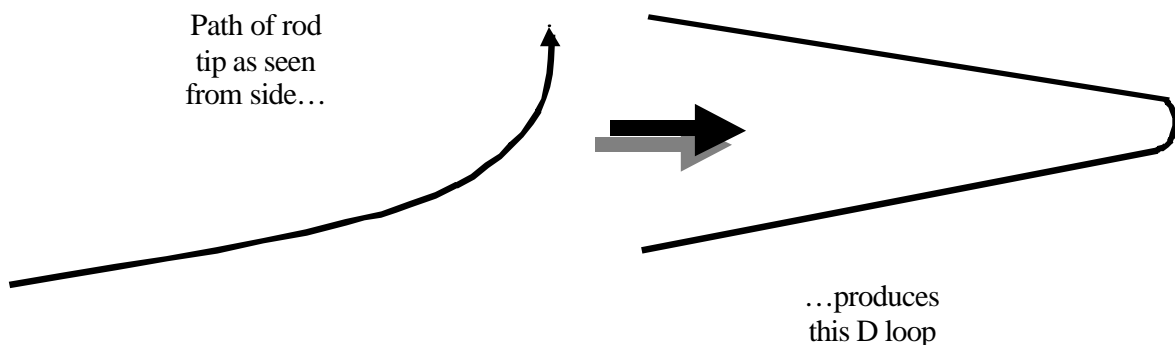
Notice here how the D loop is a little flatter and that the upper arm of the loop is a little more closely in line with the rod tip. This “climbing” D loop is the one that will produce the tightest loops because there is less downward deflection of the rod tip. Minimal recovery is required before the rod tip can move the line in a straight line forward path.

A larger and “livelier” D loop is also important in determining the amount of effort required during the forward cast. If you have seen Simon Gawesworth demonstrate the Snake Roll on the RIO International Spey Casting video you’ll recall him saying to just “kiss” the line forward. The reason for this is that the D loop created during the Snake Roll is very large and dynamic, containing loads of energy. Once the leader lands on the water beside you any attempt to use the effort required when double Spey casting the same length of line will cause the line and leader to pop out of the water with the whole thing collapsing out in front of you. It is the same effect as coming forward too early during either a Spey cast or an overhead cast. The larger and livelier the D loop, the less power you need when executing the forward cast.

Most casting instructors teaching new casters the ways of the single-handed fly rod will tell them at some point that the line will do what the rod tip does, and this is also true in Spey casting. If you want a large rounded D loop have your rod tip describe a large arc throughout the back cast cycle:



If you prefer an arrow-shaped D loop, the rod path must be fairly flat initially and in a straight line before sweeping up to 1 o’clock near the end of the back cast:



A common problem that casters experience is the line crossing over itself during the forward delivery, and this too can be traced to the D loop. The best D loop will be positioned directly opposite your intended target, and the forward cast will be made directly in line with the D loop. Think of the center of your D loop as the leather or rubber patch on which a stone is placed in a slingshot. The center of your loop needs to be 180° opposite your target. On the single Spey and its variations, if you then come forward with your aim too far upstream the line will cross itself as it rolls out; on the double Spey and its variations, if you come forward with your aim too far downstream you will also cross your line. As Derek Brown points out, your best casts will be when you aim just slightly inside the target line, which will maximize your efficiency while minimizing the potential for your line to cross over itself.

A really useful way to practice the fundamentals of D loop formation and control is to use a yarn rod. No need to purchase one of the Wulff versions: simply get yourself an old rod tip and tie a piece of thick colourful yarn to the end of it. You'll need about 6ft of yarn or so. Then practice making D loops of various shapes and sizes so you can see how a line reacts to the various hand and arms movements used as you form the loop.

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