

Part 2

The true journey begins once you pick the fly rod up and feel it come alive in your hands, but there are a few key components that you need to know of and consider to fully appreciate the gear's functionality.

ROD



Top Left: As received from the Tackle Shop in its protective travel case. This particular case allows for the reel to remain fitted to the rod in during transit.

Above: As you unpack the rod from the travel case inspect each component for any damage that may have occurred during transit.

Left: Joining the rod from Tip (end of rod) to Butt (where reel is located).

When building the rod it is best practice to work from tip to butt. This allows each section to be aligned and assembled and reduces risk of mishandling the rod and worse case snapping the rod. The only time the rod is placed on any surface is when you are threading the fly line through the guides.



Above: Tip and second piece now aligned and joined firmly, now onto the third and fourth.

Right: Rod is now complete and the person has not placed any part of the rod on the ground, reducing risk of breakage.

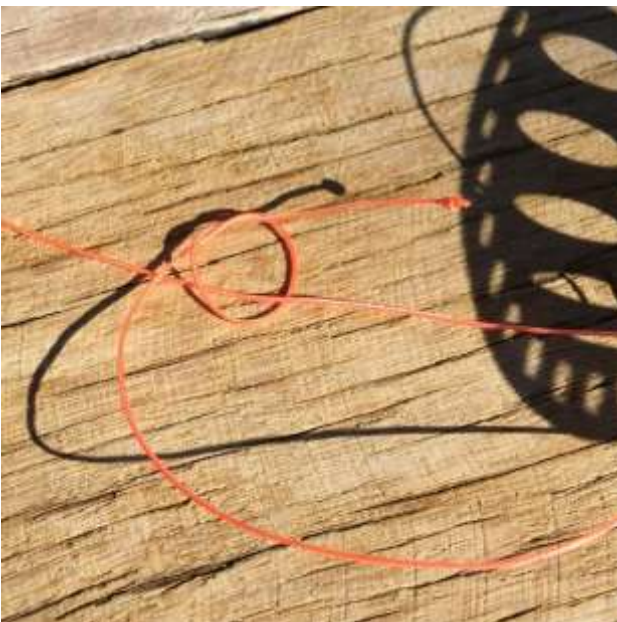
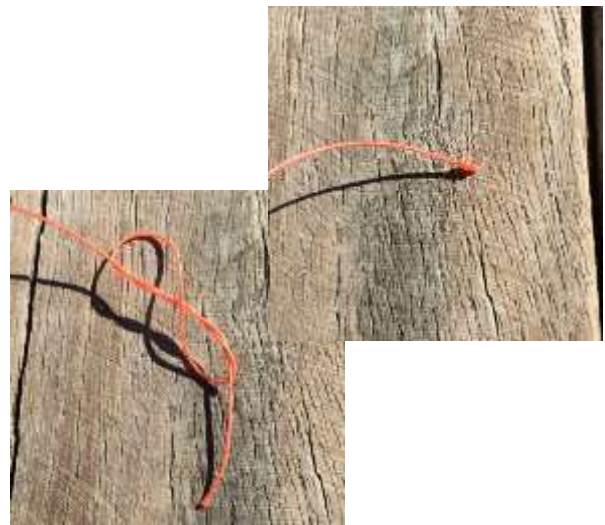
Be very careful when disassembling the rod as the joins can be super tight. Avoid twisting them apart if you find them jam tight as you can break the rod. It is good practice to place the rod behind the back of your knees and by spreading your knees apart you'll find the rod pieces should separate. If you are finding the rod to be very difficult to pull apart there is a wax you can purchase (to wipe on the ferrules before fitting pieces together), but you can use a candle just rubbing a bit of the candle on the male join, or best yet rub the rod in the crease between your nose and cheek – that small amount of human grease is enough to get you out of trouble!

REEL

The backing line is the first line to be spooled onto the reel – it gives you extra line in case your fish does a real runner, plus helps to provide a larger radius surface for the fly line to be spooled onto, meaning less coil in the fly line. There is no hard and fast rule about backing line. The length required ought to be sufficient so that total amount of backing, fly line and leader comfortably fills the spool but does not jam against the reel. If you are also a spin fisherman and have a large spool of 100lb, 50lb or even 30lb braid then use this. It really is no different to the spools specifically labelled as ‘backing line’.

The best knot I have found is the Arbor knot. Google it for the instructions but I believe my pictures paint a thousand words!

Before spooling, you need to decide if you are going to reel with left or right hand – so that you spool on in the correct direction – the reel may also need to be adjusted to match your decision (ie to provide drag as a fish pulls line **off** the reel).



Fly line

Now that you have connected the backing to reel and wound on the length of backing to the reel, attaching the fly line to the backing is the next step. Be careful here as I have seen quite a few people unwind the fly line off the spool and attach it backwards! Generally the fly line will have a little sticker that says something like 'this end to backing', if it doesn't unwind the line a few wraps from the spool and inspect the taper. Worst case you put it on backwards, you unwind everything and start again – Good practice right!?

Many lines have a loop at the backing end of the fly line. Tying a large loop knot in the backing means that you can tie loop to loop to the fly line and will allow you to easily exchange fly lines on that spool/reel. (With a large loop knot in the backing you can insert the loop into the fly line loop then pass your reel through the exposed backing loop to complete the loop to loop knot – similar in reverse to remove.)

If there is no loop and you decide to tie your backing to the fly line there are two options in my opinion which are most efficient and effective: the Albright knot or the Nail knot. One is no better than the other it's just what you either know or the quickest and easiest learn, -your choice.

I personally like the nail knot. Avoid reading the instructions on the web it'll only confuse you! Do yourself a favour and buy an 'Innovator Nail knot tool'. There are other nail knot tools attached to nippers and zingers, but the Innovator is just damn simple! Making the knot is so quick and easy and the knot is slick through the guides should you be taken to the backing line during a fight.

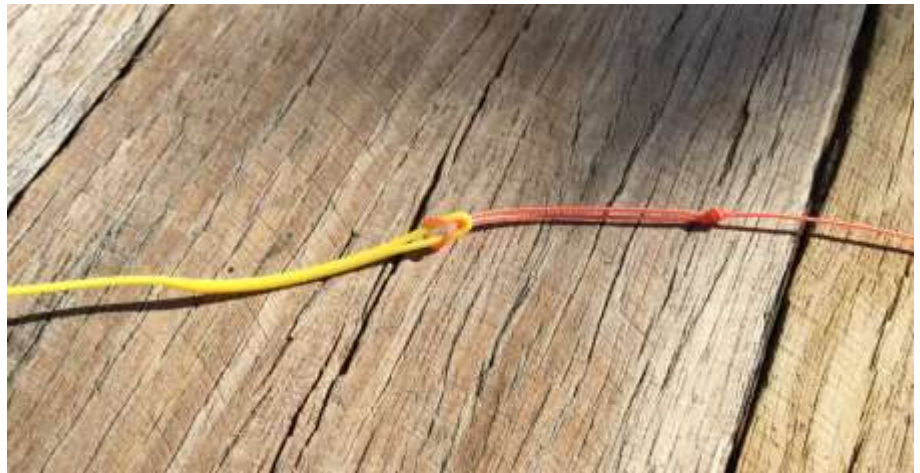
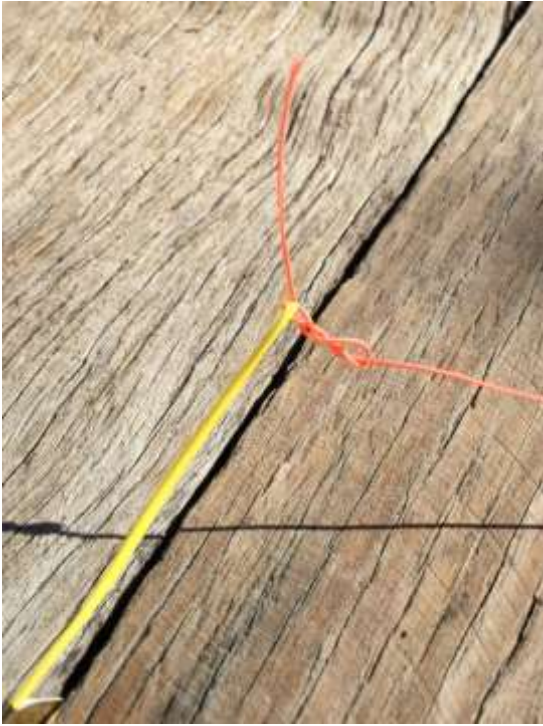


A good point to remember is that most fly lines have a typical breaking strain of 30lb give or take. It is likely you'll break the tippet or leader before breaking fly line but be cautious if you decide to tie in a 50lb leader to target much large species.



Left: The spool of line as received from the Tackle Store. Note the loop at outer end for the backing and the line taper – thin near backing and thicker away.

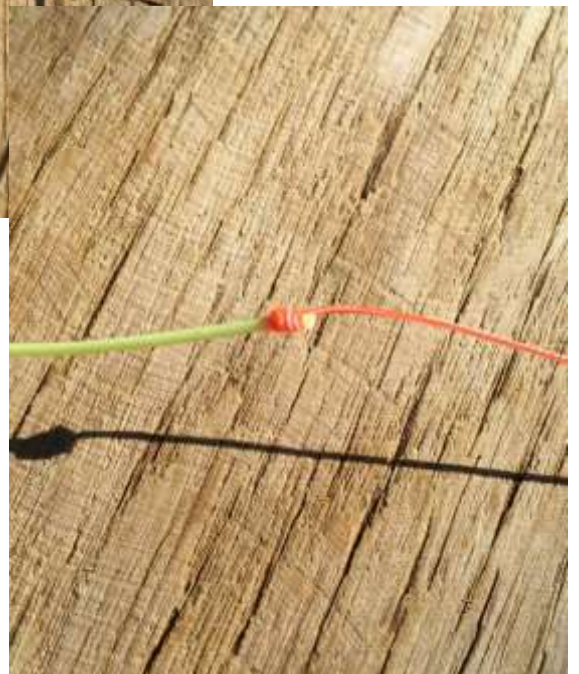
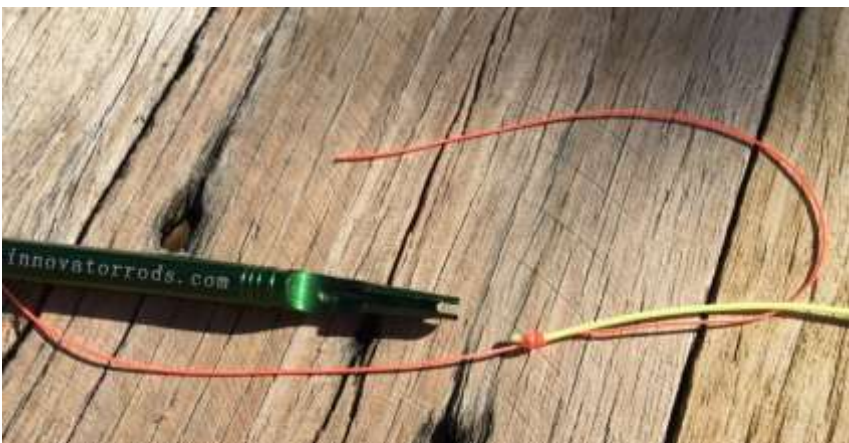
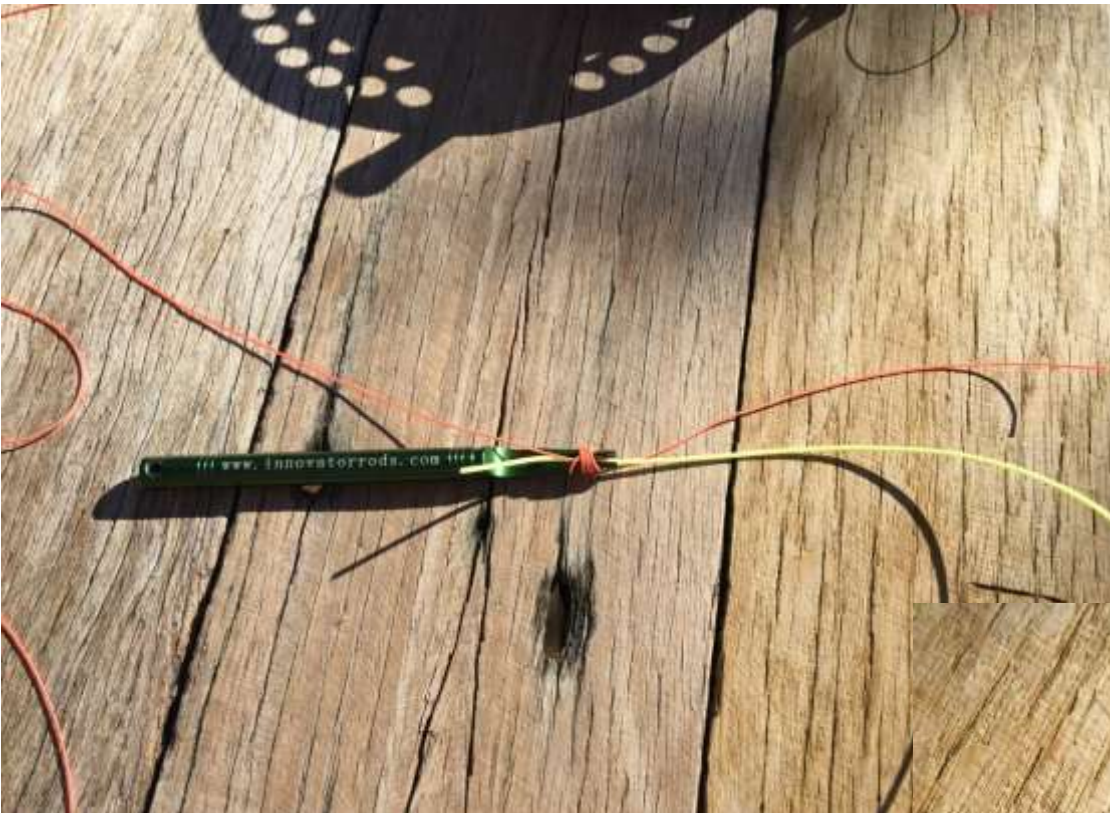
Above: Notice the little sticker advising 'Attach this end to Backing'!



Left: Half Blood Knot from backing to fly line loop

Above: Loop to Loop connection – a larger loop can assist with swapping lines

Below: Author's preferred method – Nail knot with tool



Next is to wind your line onto the reel.



From here you're only left with installing a leader.

Leaders

Leaders come in various lengths, materials, diameters, colours and strengths. 9ft is generally the most common length but can vary from 6ft all the way to 12ft. The leaders are manufactured with a gradual taper from around 20lb (butt end) to various end breaking strains and are typically store bought. You can purchase them in monofilament or fluorocarbon depending on your application. Another common option is a furred leader this leader is made of a very fine and long level line and is 'plaited' to create the leader. These leaders are very good for turning your flies over in the cast and have a very good amount of natural stretch.



Far Left: Purchased Tapered Leader 9ft

Left: Purchase tapered leader. Leader is manufactured flat not like conventional line, added benefit- turning over flies.

There are other types of leaders available (Camou – French leader, poly leader and braided), but best leave those discussions for when you wish to explore and pursue those styles of fly fishing.



Left: Purchased Furred Leader



Right: Camou French Leader
9mtr long

Most fly lines are now manufactured with a pre-welded loop, meaning there is a loop at the end of the line. This loop allows you to make a quick loop to loop connection from your fly line to the leader. You may wish to cut the loop off and nail knot the leader on. Another option is to purchase a braided loop connection and add this to the end of your fly line. It is very similar to the pre-welded loop but there is argument that it is stronger than that of the manufacturer's.

Keep in mind there's no right and wrong way it's all personal preference and opinion.

Here are some ways you may wish to tie in your leaders



Above: Loop to Loop utilising the manufactured 'welded' loop.

Above right: A loop to loop off an added braided loop connection.

Right: Nail knot



If you cut off the pre-welded loop and would like to go back to one, and a braided loop option isn't taking your fancy, there is a way of building your own welded loops and it's pretty effective and easy.

You'll need a length of heat shrink tubing (6-8cm) the width of being able to reasonably fit a fly line doubled over on itself, a heat gun, lighter, stove top flame etc, and pair of pointy sharp scissors.

Start by inserting the fly line into the heat shrink. Form a loop and insert the fly back through the heat shrink keeping the loop approx. 1.5cm. The heat shrink is to be about 1.5cm from the end of the loop. Apply heat to the length of heat shrink, do this in short intervals. The fly line coating will begin to melt (bind) together and the heat shrink maintains the newly joined fly line coating in the neat tubing. Once you have allowed the heat shrink and fly line to cool use your pointy scissors to cut away the heat shrink from the fly line, being careful not to cut into the newly formed 'welded' join.

It's prudent to note the welded loop is only as strong as the 'welded' fly line connection. This being the strength of the fly line coating and its ability to bond together and then maintain strength against such forces as a fish and snag etc.





Whichever method you choose and assuming you've now tied in your leader, it is best practice to tie in another piece of line, and we refer to this as tippet. Tippet is the sacrificial and last bit of almost invisible transition to the fly. Fly fishers use the strongest tippet with the smallest diameter depending on the situation at hand. Tippet comes in forms of 30m spools but there's nothing stopping you from purchasing similar line in 300m spools.

Joining your tippet to leader is simple with the two easiest being the surgeons knot and the blood knot. If you were fishing heavy rigs (50lb+) you can tie in opposing nail knots (google fishing knots)!



Left: Various spools of line for making of leader or tippet. See the variety of brands, sizes and the different properties ie Fluorocarbon and monofilament.

Rather than purchasing a tapered leader, you may wish to make your own leaders and save some money. Below are some formulas I have used over time with great turn over success. Please keep in mind some fly fishers work off the diameter of line, not so much of poundage.

Fly line – 100cm @ .57mm, 33cm @ .47mm, 33cm @ .37mm, 33cm @ .27mm, 100cm @ .17mm – All purpose

Fly line – 100cm @ .57mm, 33cm @ .47mm, 33cm @ .37mm, 30cm @ .27mm, 100cm @ .15mm – Small Fly

Fly line – 100cm @ .57mm, 50cm @ .47mm, 35cm @ .37mm, 35cm @ .27mm, 50cm @ .18mm – Larger Flies

This is a general guide and I add more or less to the tippet or middle section of leader depending on the situation.

Tying your own leaders is fun and can be challenging. It enables you to understand the performance of your fly setup. By changing various diameters and lengths to the line system you will see the effect as you cast out your fly.

Whether you decide to buy premade leaders or tie them up yourself, the choice is yours.

Note: Please understand the leader is only as strong as the lightest breaking strain line. Knots too have their limits and can further reduce the breaking strain of the overall leader system.

It should be noted that like any other fishing line the line degrades over time and you may not wish to be fishing a 3-5yr old line in fear of dropping that fish of a lifetime. Fresh is always best and avoid purchasing a spool if you experience what appears to be old stock, or one that sits on a shelf and is lit by natural sunlight light from outside. Extended exposure to UV will dramatically change its effectiveness to maintain strength.

To assist you in building your own leaders I have compressed a number of charts available over the internet into one table (below). The chart contains tippet size to lb to diameters and rough hook sizes.

This is merely a guide as a lot can change between brands. Always best to check the label on the spool.

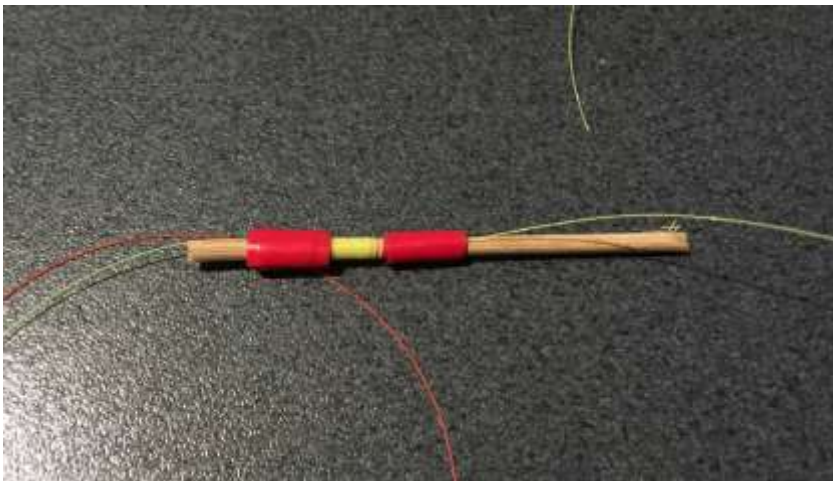
Tippet Size	Pound	Diameter	Inches	KG	Fly Size
8x	1.2 lb	0.0762 mm	0.003	.544 kg	24,26,28
7x	2 lb	0.0101 mm	0.004	.907 kg	20,22,24,26
6x	3 lb	0.127 mm	0.005	1.360 kg	16,18,20,22
5x	4 lb	0.152 mm	0.006	1.814 kg	14,16,18
4x	5 lb	0.177 mm	0.007	2.267 kg	12,14,16
3x	6 lb	0.203 mm	0.008	2.721 kg	10,12,14
2x	7lb	0.228 mm	0.009	3.175 kg	6,8,10
1x	8.5 lb	0.254 mm	0.01	3.628 kg	2,4,6
0x	10 lb	0.279 mm	0.011	4.535 kg	1/0,2,4
x1	12 lb	0.304 mm	0.012	5.443 kg	2/0,1/0,2
x2	14 lb	0.330 mm	0.013	6.350 kg	3/0,2/0,1/0,2
x3	16 lb	0.355 mm	0.014	7.257 kg	5/0,4/0,3/0,2/0
x4	18lb	0.381 mm	0.015	8.164 kg	6/0,5/0,4/0,3/0

Sighters

As the name suggests it's an object that enables you to quickly locate your leader and 'sight' for any sudden changes in the leader's movement, thus indicating a likely take from a fish.

You tie them roughly into the middle of your leader system. A sighter may be that you just tie in a fluoro coloured length of line (6-10 inches), or purchase a pre-made coiled sighter from the likes of Hanak or Hends. Sighters are tied in when fishing a European Nymphing type methods, and aren't required when fishing a dry fly, wet fly rig.

You can make your own and my next few photos will show you how.



So now we have backing, fly line and a leader tied onto our reel. Our rod is built and waiting for us to put our reel into the reel seat. Go ahead now and put the reel onto the reel seat. Keep in mind if the reel is left hand or right hand wind, so you put it on the correct way (left hand wind shown below)!



Once you've screwed the reel seat screws up tight and secure we can pull out some line and thread the rod guides.

It's much easier to fold the fly line on itself and thread it through the guides. We do it this way because if we happen to lose control of the line generally it won't fall too far due to the loop that's created (see below).



Now you've put everything together it's time to have a few casts and get a feel for the rod and line, but before you start tie in a small piece of fluff or cloth to provide the leader some resistance when casting. You'll find too the leader won't 'whipcrack' as you cast back and forth.

Subsequent to JQ preparing the chapter above, Lyall submitted a substantial contribution on knots to our regular 'Tips for Beginners' column in the newsletter. It was felt it provided a valuable supplement to this chapter:

You have just purchased the best fly rod/beach rod/black fish rod and reel from Pratt's Tackle Shop that you can justify to your better half/financial controller and are at Eucumbene/Narooma/Tuross Lake about to rig up (that's another article) and you come to tying on your terminal tackle, be it size 18 Parachute Adams, gang hooked pilchard or cabbage weed. You need to know how to tie it on.

Spending hours on the beach and finally hooking up the Australian Salmon which takes off for New Zealand at a rate of knots only to have the sensation of "fish off" then reel in to find a hog's tail of spiralling fishing line where the hook used to be, indicating my knot somehow unwound, does not make for a happy angler. Trust me, I know.

I recommend making a sub-hobby of learning to tie the knots you will find handy for your preferred style(s) of angling. The Internet is full of knot tying videos, not the least of which is Peter Hayes' Quick Penny Knot for tying on flies and Nathan's favourite fluorocarbon leader to braided mainline knot, the Kaneit (just Google it) so you are spoilt for choice for instructional videos on knot tying.

Practise in front of the television when your financial controller is watching a non-fishing show (...yes, they do exist) and get them down pat. Some knots like the Penny Knot and Davey Knot can be tied by feel in the dark so try that as well for fly casting for the last of the evening rise on the Mitta Mitta River.

I was at Providence Portal on one of our regular Canberra Anglers' Association outings some years ago when I was preparing for the next day's fly fishing and I had to tie a Nail Knot to attach a new tapered leader to my fly line. One of my angling colleagues announced "let's see how good your Nail Knots are". Surreptitiously, I took out my smart phone and looked up one of many knot tying applications available on the Internet. Using the application as a guide, my Nail Knot was successfully tied without having to think too much. The smart phone is a good back-up for new knots and a reminder of those practiced long ago.

Don't overlook knot tying tools which a couple of us in CAA used to tie Nail Knots during our recent NZ South Island trip to Gore. They aid the less nimble handed of us to tie fiddly knots and are an essential tool for the "you have to have every fly fishing gadget team" in which I include myself.

Make knot tying a sub-hobby of angling, alongside stream-craft, ocean reading, rod building, fly tying, lure building and bush cooking ... there is just too much fun to be had in the angling world. Get out there and enjoy it ... I certainly do!!!