Rodmaker Profile

Wayne Maca, Beaverhead Rods
Twin Bridges, Montana

By

Joe Byrd, J.C. Byrd Rodsmiths

Revolutionary ideas and processes only come around once in a “blue moon”. On one hand we can count the true pioneers in the craft of rodmaking. Names like Leonard, Lew Stoner, Powell, and Louis Feierabend. These trailblazers left us a legacy of things like production processes, hollow fluting, scalloping, and Super Z Ferrules.

Now, there is an emerging name and a force in bamboo rodmaking who, with his revolutionary ideas and construction processes, could set the world of bamboo rods on it’s ear. Trust me my friends; treat this man like E. F. Hutton. When he speaks, listen. One day we will look back on his patent pending procedures and liken his name with those names of the greats that I mentioned earlier.

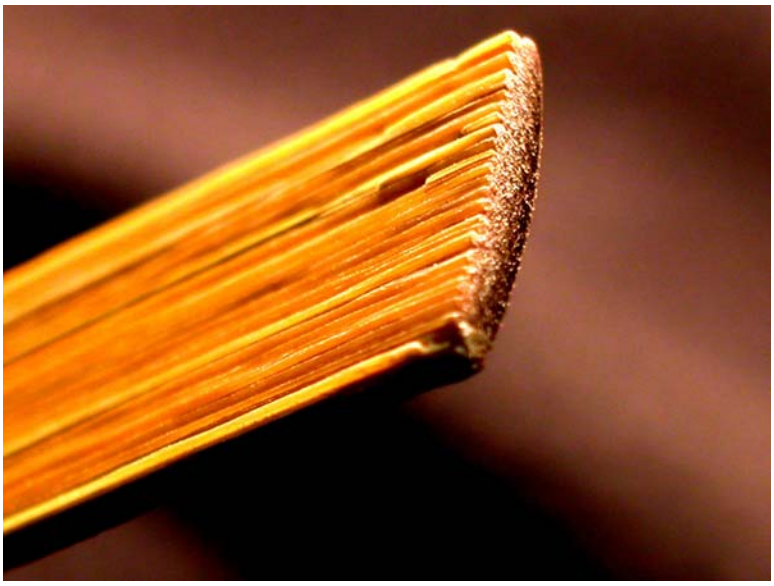
Wayne Maca has spent the majority of his adult life embroiled in the hectic world of snowboard making. This wild and crazy sport demands several things; better and quicker are words most commonly heard. Wayne made a name for himself in this sport by making one of the finest snowboards on the planet. That was until one day he chucked it all, and headed for Twin Bridges, Montana.

Twin Bridges is the modern day mecca for flyfishers. On all three of my trips, I have met folks from all over the world, and having had the opportunity to browse through the guest book at the R.L. Winston Bamboo Shop verifies that when folks think of flyfishing and of bamboo, they think of Twin Bridges.

Why Wayne Maca decided to go to Twin Bridges; I don’t know, but one thing is for certain. The move there was life changing for him as well as inspiring. According to Wayne he had a traditionally made bamboo rod to fish one

season, and after 150 plus fishing days on the Beaverhead, Big Hole and Ruby Rivers flinging it, it had caused severe pain in an already injured arm. That season of fishing spawned the quest for the lighter, and faster bamboo fly rod.

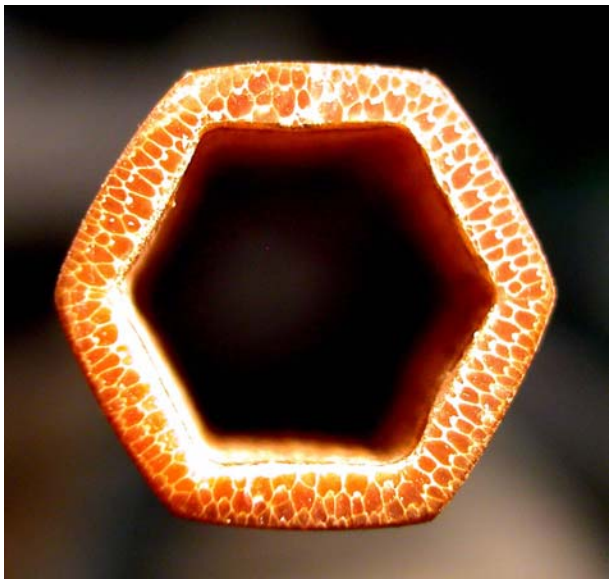
Yes, I know that you are already grumbling under your breath; “why do we need a faster and lighter bamboo fly rod”? If Lew Stoner and E.C. Powell had said, “who cares if the rods are heavy”, or if Louis Feierabend thumbed his nose and said “let them use traditional ferrules; where would we be today?



Wayne has gone into details about the construction process with the idea of besides making the rods lighter and faster, but also to make them stronger. He is doing some high tech sound wave studies on the cane, which allows him to determine with accuracy, which strips are good for use, and those that aren’t. By detecting the damping in the cane, and because cane is it’s own composite, he is able to predict weak points in the cane, thereby increasing the possibilities of building a rod without a spine.

What’s more exciting is that Wayne’s rods are hollow built. Not fluted, not scalloped, but 100% hollow. His process removes all of the pith from the strips, then tapered, and finally coated with a special resin to increase the strength. His wall thickness is .030 to .070 through both butt and tip sections. Weight problem is solved, and the strength is inherent.

While visiting his shop in Twin Bridges a few weeks ago; I watched a video where Wayne took one of his rods and bent it in a complete circle. After about 8 tries, the rod finally failed. Ironically, the rod didn’t fail in a glue joint, but the cane itself delaminated. The glue joints all remained intact.



Other non-traditional processes are practiced in the Beaverhead Rods shop. Vacuum sealing the rod sections after glue up, and heating at the same time to insure straightness of the rods, and to assist the special epoxy in setting.

I had the grand opportunity to spend quite a bit of time with Wayne in his shop, and got to interview him over lunch (courtesy of Jeff Walker, thanks Jeff). Below is a transcript of that interview.

What was your inspiration for wanting to make a lighter and faster bamboo rod?

I guess because it hadn't been done. I am kind of obsessed with trying to build a better mousetrap. Plus a heavy bamboo rod blew out my elbow. One of the first rods I built after I moved to Montana. When I first moved here, I was basically retired. I fished over 150 days that year. I was using this rod, throwing big flies, a size 4 3X under my Serial Killer pattern. My elbow froze up and hurt so bad that I couldn't bend it.

Using the carbon composite ferrules, strays from tradition. Why did you decide to do that?

It was a necessity, because nickel silver weighs too much. It created a bulky weight in the center of the rod. The rods I made got too light for the nickel silver ferrules. The tip rebound was off because the ferrule was moving at a different weight than the rest of the rod.

Were you ever concerned how your contemporaries in rod making would receive your thoughts and ideas?

No, does the Anti-Christ worry? I don't. I really didn't give a damn. I'm not out to impress other rodmakers, I'm out to impress myself. That's what I've got to do to know that I am doing something better.

You have traveled to several trade shows, demonstrating your rods. How has John Q. Flyfisher received them.

Actually, it's been really really good, except with hard-core traditionalists that think a bamboo rod has to be slow. Everyone else is impressed with it; even Glenn Brackett is impressed. Because Winston has received pretty much every make and model bamboo rod in for restoration repairs, or evaluation, Glenn has seen and cast almost every rod that has been made. Hardcore traditionalists don't want to see change. My thought on this is "why don't you take a horse and buggy to work each day?" That's the same problem they had with the horseless carriage back in that day.

Other bamboo rodmakers have seen and cast your rods. How have they reacted to them?

Initally they hate what you're doing, then they pick it up and cast it. Then they go "wow, this is really different". Right off the bat, most of them try to attack you. Glenn Brackett, Jeff Walker and Jerry Kustich have been the most supportive. Without a doubt. When things were getting tough, or if I got off track a little bit. Those three would challenge me, kind of give me a kick in the pants. Also Jack Howells. He's a traditional rodmaker, and he liked it. Per Brandin liked my 4 weights because they were just a tiny bit slower than the 5 weights. Howells said in his inscription to me in his book. "To Wayne, who is knocking the rest of us into a cocked hat – God Bless him."

You have recently filed a patent application on your construction process. Why did you do that?

Because they are so radical, part of it is that the whole concept of the rod is that it is synergistic. The sum of the whole is greater than the sum of the parts. You have to put the whole thing together as one big complete process. The ferrule is a perfect example. It screwed it up when it was nickel silver. It had to be changed to make it work. You would have the same problem if you put a nickel silver ferrule on a graphite rod. You have to balance everything to get the right results. If I crowd the guides on my tip, it throws the action off. When you start getting into real

light weight just the least little change will throw everything off. My 5 wt weighs the same as a 5 wt. Winston graphite.

With a heavy rod you can screw up with your guide placement and it will still work, but with a light weight rod any little change makes a big difference. That's why you're not seeing many changes in the world of graphite.

What is so revolutionary and new about your process that you feel it should be patented?

The end results. It throws such a tight loop compared to anything else, it's tough, you've seen it bent, and it doesn't weigh much. It's strength to weight ratio blows other rods in the weeds. That's my way of being traditional. Powell pushed it forward in such a way by patenting his scalloping process. Stoner took it a step past that, and he patented his hollow fluting as well. Patenting a new thing in bamboo is more traditional than some guy going back and re-creating a Garrision. That was the old guys way of going forward.

If you've got a good idea and you patent it, it frees you to develop it as you see fit. It prevents people from taking your idea and bastardizing it.