

**Simplicity**  
Using all of your senses  
**Tenkara Summits**

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**Managing Your Line**  
**Leave No Flies Behind**  
Tenkara Comic

the official magazine of tenkara usa



@jeremyshehorn

**march**  
2019

## Simplicity

**Philosophy**

It has been said that if you give someone a fishing rod, he will instantly become a philosopher. I am no different. I have gathered two guiding principles about tenkara: the concept of simplicity and the focus on technique rather than gear. These principles are interconnected. Choosing to rely on technique more than on gear means you can leave the unnecessary behind and keep things simple. And, when we decide to simplify and leave things behind, we are put in a position of learning how to use what we have and relying on technique rather than additional gear.

It is worth noting that tenkara's simplicity wouldn't mean much if it weren't also for its effectiveness. In 1890, the British Japanologist Basil Hall Chamberlain remarked in his book *Things Japanese*: "To an English eye the native method of fly-fishing will be rude; but it is justified by its results." I like to think "rude" is another word for simplicity here. It is undeniable that tenkara produces results.

It is often said that tenkara teaches people to fish, rather than to use gear. I have found this to be very true. When we have fewer pieces of equipment to focus on, we are free to pay attention to form, technique, and the environment around us rather than the line wrapped around our legs or the reel that locked up.

**Simplicity**

Simplicity can mean a lot of different things: minimalism, accessibility, ease, fewer moving parts, clean design, and so forth. Tenkara can embody several of those meanings.

Partly inspired by his tenkara practice, Ryan Jordan, founder of Backpacking Light, breaks simplicity into two distinct types:

Practical simplicity is that type of simplicity where I crave not having to fool around with anything, and where everything is just plain easy and effective.

And then there is natural simplicity - that type of simplicity where the process brings you more in touch with the natural world, thus becoming less about the gear and more about the experience.

The combination of the practical and the natural simplicities is what makes tenkara a very elegant and effective way to fish. It is also what makes tenkara feel like a relaxing and unencumbered experience.

It is important not to think of tenkara's simplicity in terms of lacking in things to learn, lacking nuance, or being "simplistic." Yes, tenkara eliminates the complexities that don't add to the experience, but it does not eliminate the need to learn.



*For the simplicity on this side of complexity, I wouldn't give you a fig. But for the simplicity on the other side of complexity, for that I would give you anything I have.*

OLIVER WENDELL HOLMES

I'd argue tenkara is one of those things we can say is very easy and simple to learn but can take a lifetime to master. The pages that fill this book will offer the nuanced knowledge needed to master tenkara. A lot of it is instinctive and just waiting to be activated.

I have come to believe that the best way to keep fly-fishing simple is to look at how the Japanese anglers practice tenkara and learn from them. They are truly masters of simplicity. From using one knot for every part of their rig to keeping their fly choices to a minimum (often one!) to not carrying a bunch of accessories and not having to consult hatch; the Japanese anglers have kept fly-fishing simple, and because of that we can as well.

We must be aware that simplicity is also the buzzword of today's complicated world. Unfortunately "simple" can be deemed meaningless when it is so often used to describe something that is not actually simple. Simple fly-fishing is not so simple when we choose to keep it complicated by using multiple fly patterns, unnecessary elements in our rig, needless casting techniques, or equipment that must be changed depending on conditions.

Simplicity is a choice. It is easy to make many things in life complex, but these complexities don't usually add to our experience. Even when we learn that we don't truly need a lot of flies we can choose to carry multiple fly patterns with us "just in case". We can carry multiple line weights and change them any time winds change.

We can carry accessories to indicate the presence of fish when we could have kept an eye to the line to do that. It may seem like carrying additional items in our fishing kit will make fishing easier or more effective. Often it does not.

Two things will help simplify fly-fishing. First, think back to what the commercial angler would have used to catch fish and ask what you truly need in your kit. Second, know that versatility breeds simplicity. When the angler ties a floating line to the tip of her rod, that line will do one thing well: float. Then, if deeper presentation is necessary she will be forced to change lines or not fish where she wanted. When an angler has a fly that imitates pale morning dun, he may feel compelled to change when he sees a caddis fluttering around.

On the other hand, a lightweight but sinking tenkara line can be kept off the water for presentations on the surface, or it can be lowered into the water for a presentation a few feet below the surface. Thus, just one line needs to be used. And a suggestive fly and good presentation will work as well when the mayfly breaks the water's surface as when a caddis skates across it.

Tenkara shows us there is a different way of thinking about fly-fishing - and often about life too. It shows us we can leave the unnecessary behind. But, we must choose to do so.

This book should take you to the simplicity on "the other side of complexity", that which is unencumbered but produces results.

MOUNTEN

two

zine



Get out those sharpies and save the date for our next Tenkara Summit  
July 27th 2019

The Tenkara Summit is our gathering of the tenkara community with the purpose of sharing knowledge about tenkara and provide an opportunity for everyone to meet and fish together. Although this will be the 7th summit we've held, this year will be extra special in that we're also celebrating the 10th Anniversary of Tenkara USA!

We'll be gathering at the Millennium Harvest House hotel in Boulder, Colorado and we're gearing up for this to be our best summit yet. Last year we had over 300 people attend and we hope to make this one even bigger. Everything you could possibly want to learn about tenkara style of fly-fishing will be taught. We will have some great presentations, and as requested, we've added more time for clinics. In the evening we will have a fun fly-tying event where everyone is encouraged to show off their skills and creativity.

We are also very excited to announce we've secured Takénobu to provide live music for us while we tie flies. We've been a huge fan of his music, and we've been honored to feature some of his heavenly tunes in our videos over the last ten years. This will be a real treat.

You can check out his music at:  
[www.takenobumusic.com](http://www.takenobumusic.com)

Whether you are already an avid tenkara fisherman or are simply interested in tenkara, you should make plans to come to this tenkara gathering. There will be something for everyone at this event, and we hope you'll share this special day with us.

We expect to open registrations and have more items finalized by April 1st.

More details will be posted at [tenkarausa.com/summit](http://tenkarausa.com/summit) as they are confirmed.



**27 August 2011**

The first “Tenkara Summit” was put together by Tenkara USA in West Yellowstone. Over 120 people attended, including Dr. Hisao Ishigaki who flew from Japan for the event.



**28 July 2012**

Tenkara Summit 2 was hosted in Salt Lake City, with special guests from Japan.

**11 May 2013**

Tenkara USA and Mossy Creek hosted the 3rd Tenkara Summit out in the Mossy Creek homewaters of Harrisonburg, Virginia.

**27 August 2014**

The 4th Tenkara Summit was hosted in Boulder, Colorado. Nearly 200 people from across the US attended the event, which featured tenkara master Dr. Hisao Ishigaki.



**19 September 2015**

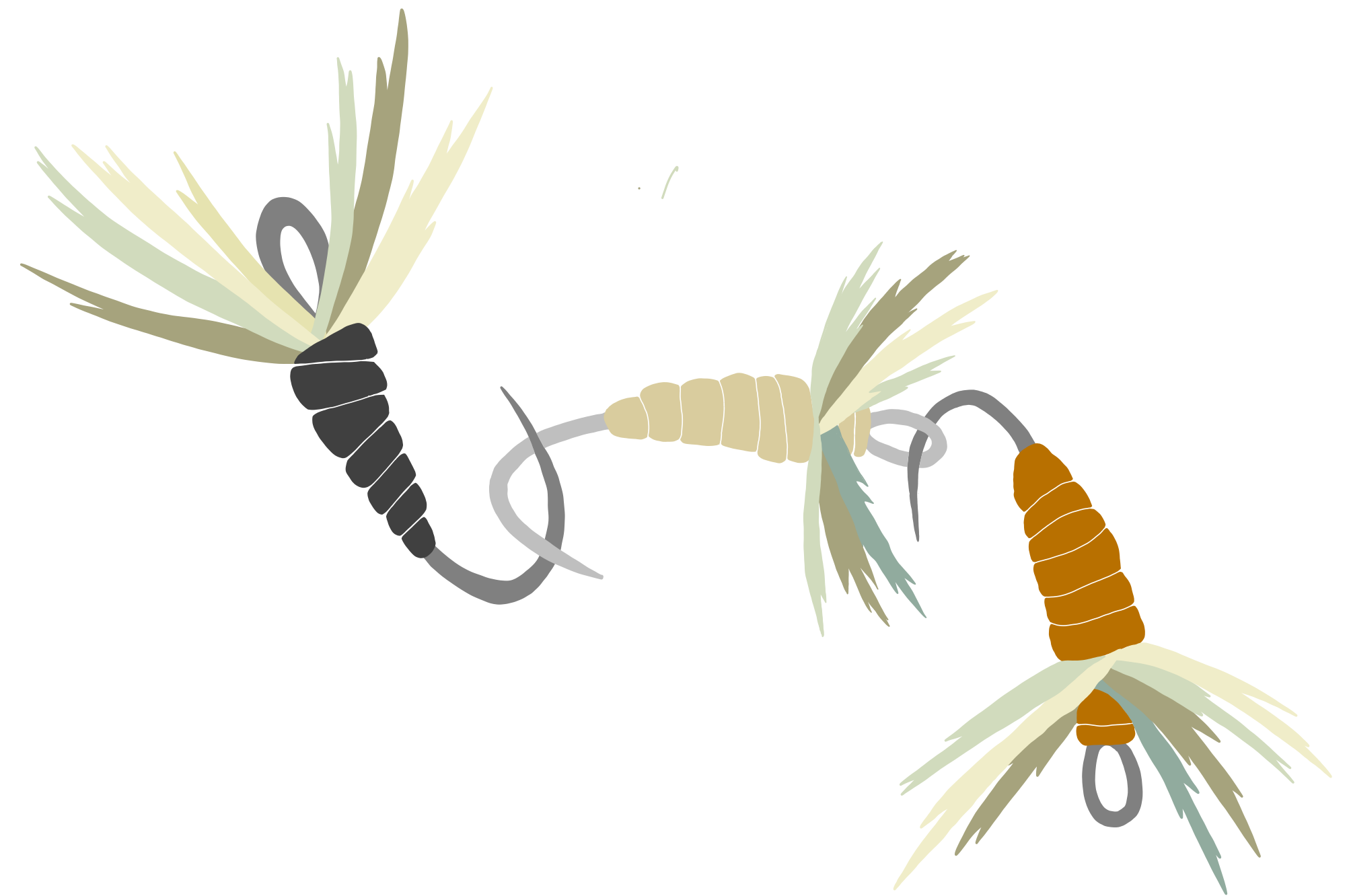
The 5th Tenkara Summit was hosted in Estes Park, Colorado. We counted on the special participation of Mr. Yoshikazu Fujioka and Go Ishii who came from Japan to share their knowledge.



**16 September 2017**

Our 6th Tenkara Summit was held at the Estes Park Convention Center. This was by far the biggest Tenkara Summit we’ve had yet and was well attended by over 300 people.





Don't Leave Flies Behind  
from **tenkara the book**

Several years ago I was fishing on the Fire-hole River in Montana's Yellowstone National Park after our annual Tenkara Summit. It was getting late in the day and I had moved away from the group to fish on my own for a bit.

As I turned a bend in the river I noticed something hovering 20 feet above the water. It was flapping its wings and moving erratically up and down. I realized it must have been a bird so I moved quickly to get closer to it. It was a Clark's Nutcracker.

**The poor bird was stuck in fishing line!**

He was a bit too high for me to reach, but I had an idea for how to free him. Using a technique I had created to retrieve my fly on a few occasions, I put the tip of my rod over the branch where he was stuck, with the line on the other side of the branch. I brought the rod down leaving only my main line over the branch. By pulling the strong line I was able to bring the branch down a few feet.



The nutcracker had a small nymph stuck in his beak, tippet was wrapped around his feet with a small fly also caught on his foot. I can only imagine the nutcracker had seen the “insect” dangling in the air and tried to eat it. Unfortunately he got caught in fishing line and barbed flies.

The bird continued to struggle for a few seconds but I was soon able to catch him and hold him. I untangled the tippet and removed the flies, cursing whoever left those flies there and feeling awful for occasionally leaving flies and tippet behind too.

Once free the nutcracker flew to a branch 10 feet away and puffed up as if trying to get warmer. I stayed there watching him for several minutes, a bit shaken, reflecting on our collective impact on birds and other animals when we break off tippet and flies.

The sun was down and darkness was not far away. Had I not come around that bend just when I did, the nutcracker would have likely died an agonizing death. Ever since that experience I have tried a bit harder to get flies from snags, my own flies and others that I see left behind too.



Don't leave your flies behind

## Using All Your Senses

Written by TJ Ferreira

During my lunch time I enjoy watching fly fishing shows that I have recorded on my DVR. One of those shows is Fly Rod Chronicles with Curtis Fleming. Often this show has coverage of Project Healing Waters events and the show I watched today included an elderly war veteran that went blind after a car accident 6 years ago. The nice thing about Project Healing Waters is this group helps veterans fly fish even if their accident was not during combat or when they were enlisted. What a great group supporting this noble cause.

As the story unfolds, this blind gentleman greatly enjoyed fly fishing, but after his accident was unable to fish because he no longer has eyesight. The show moved me as I watched this gentleman enter the water with assistance and start fly fishing. I must admit a few tears trickled down my cheeks as I saw the smile on this gentleman's face when he hook set and landed a trout.

After the show I started to think about how tenkara has already been working its way into Project Healing Waters events and many veterans are getting to enjoy fly fishing once again or even for the first time. Not only are they fly fishing and catching fish, but they are doing so despite their disabilities.

In the case of the episode mentioned above, by using all his other senses this blind gentleman did not have to use indicators or anything special to catch fish. As Darth Vader would say, “use your senses Luke.”

Tenkara is a fairly simple way to fly fish and there really is no need to over-analyze or complicate the way we enjoy fishing. I see posts of folks adding floatant to this and that, adding weights to the line, using multiple flies. To me, all these things over-complicate fly-fishing and tenkara. Why not try to perfect our techniques and use every available senses we have to catch fish?

Why not tap more into our sense of touch, sight, taste, smell, and hearing when we tenkara fly fish? Now I am not telling you to go lick a fish or anything, although I am sure many of us have taken that magic picture of kissing a fish we have caught, and you sure know uncooked trout does not taste that good. But... I feel we can work on better using the light touch of a tenkara rod to detect that very slight take when a trout is going after our fly; or work on better using our sight to see the rise of a fish going after or taking your kebari.



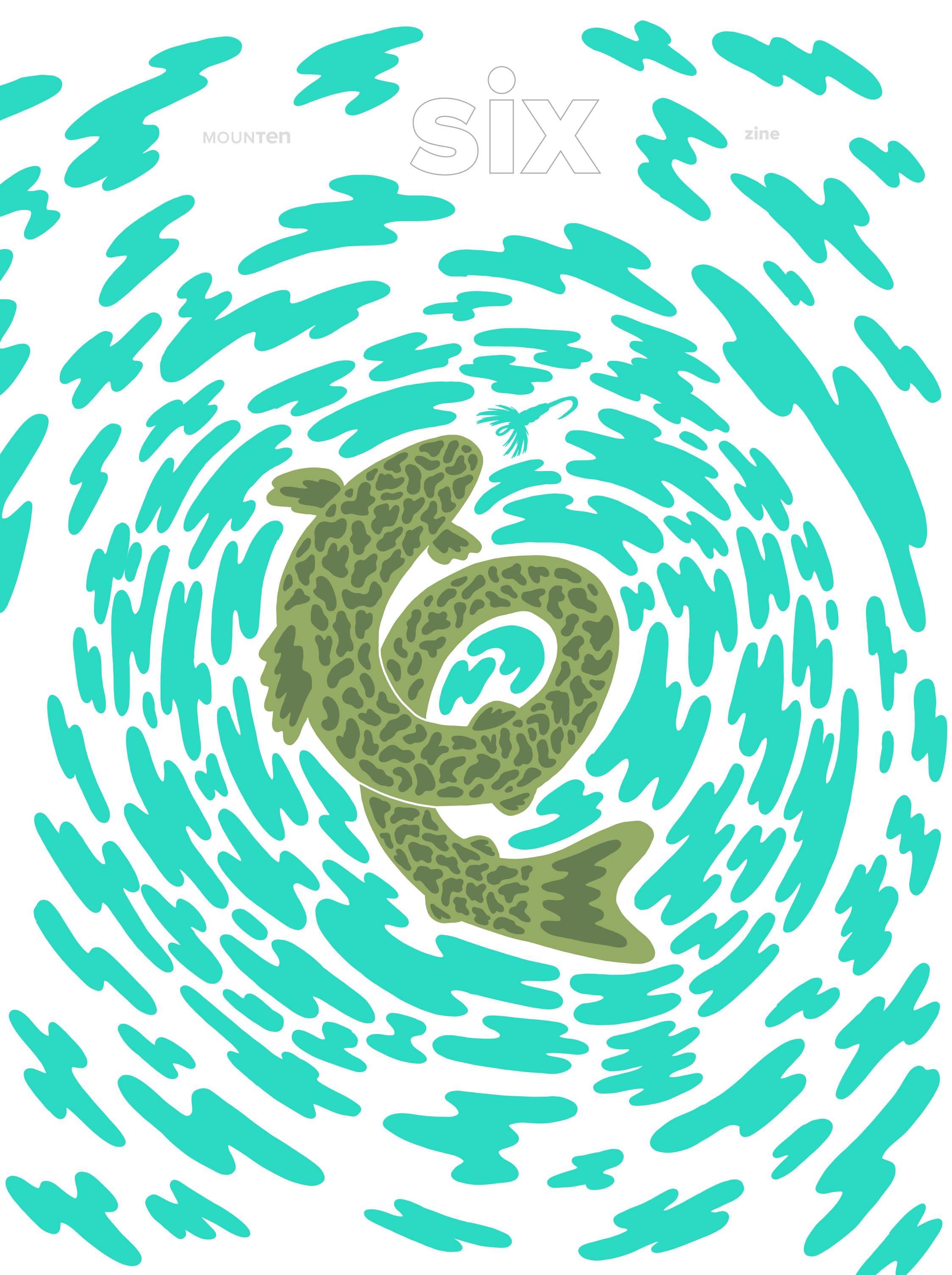
We can also envision the great taste of a hard-earned fish in that camping trip. And, we can sense the smell of victory after landing that larger-than-expected-trout in our small 9inch net. And, of course, hearing: hear that rise away from where you're looking, or later hear your own voice telling great fish stories to your buddies around the campfire.

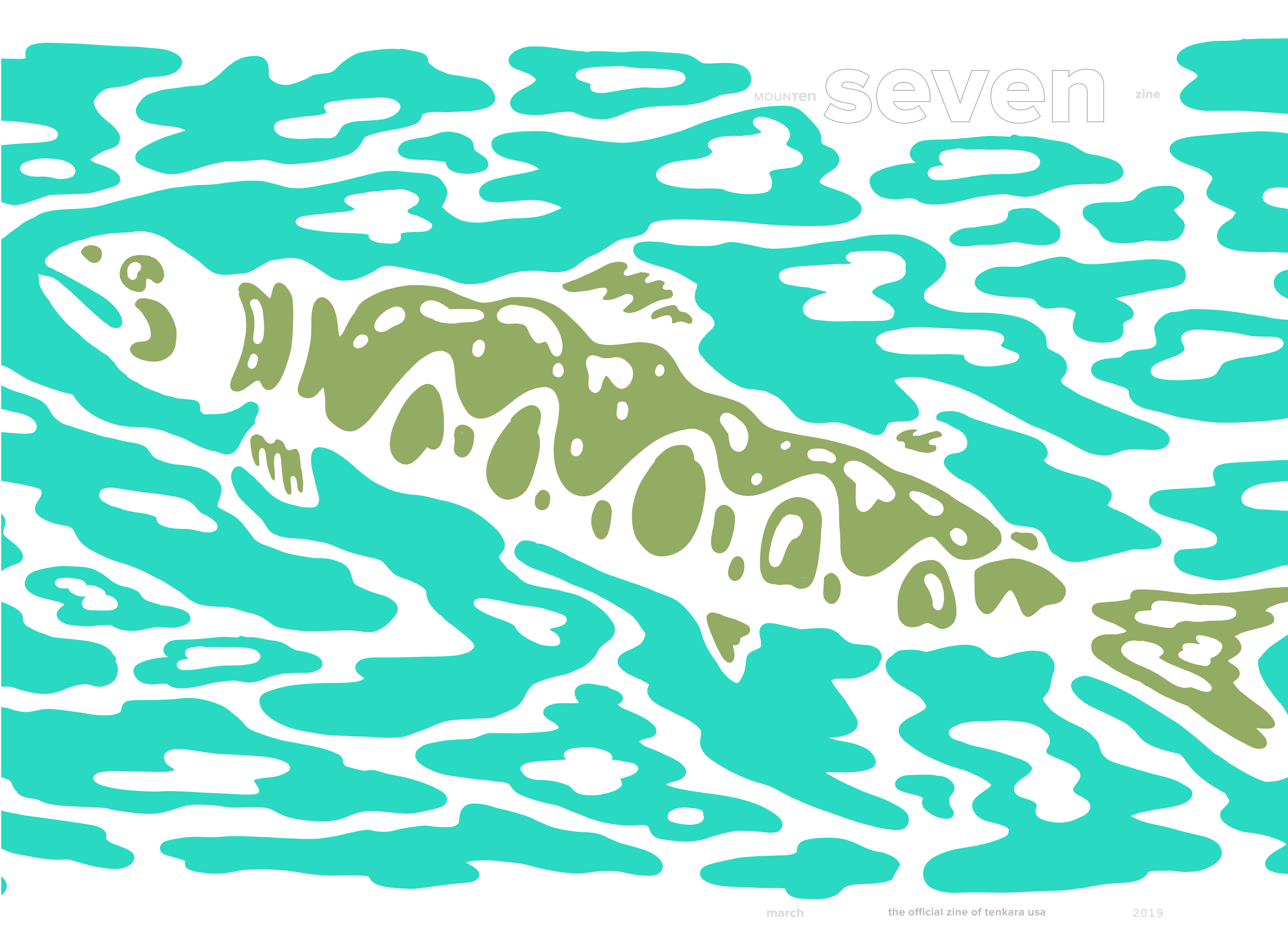
Here is a little exercise to try out this season. Try to fish with your eyes closed for a few casts. Line yourself up at a target, close your eyes, and ever so briefly try to feel what this gentleman on Fly Rod Chronicles was feeling. Enjoy feeling a tenkara rod in your hand, using a very soft touch while casting a line, feeling and hearing the rod work for you rather than overpowering the cast, feeling the fly drifting. Hopefully during the drift you will get a strike so you can feel better with your hands that subtle take of the kebari.

Try to listen for the flow of the water to sense how fast the water is and how far the fly should drift. Hopefully your other senses will kick in and help you fish this way, even if it's for just a little while.

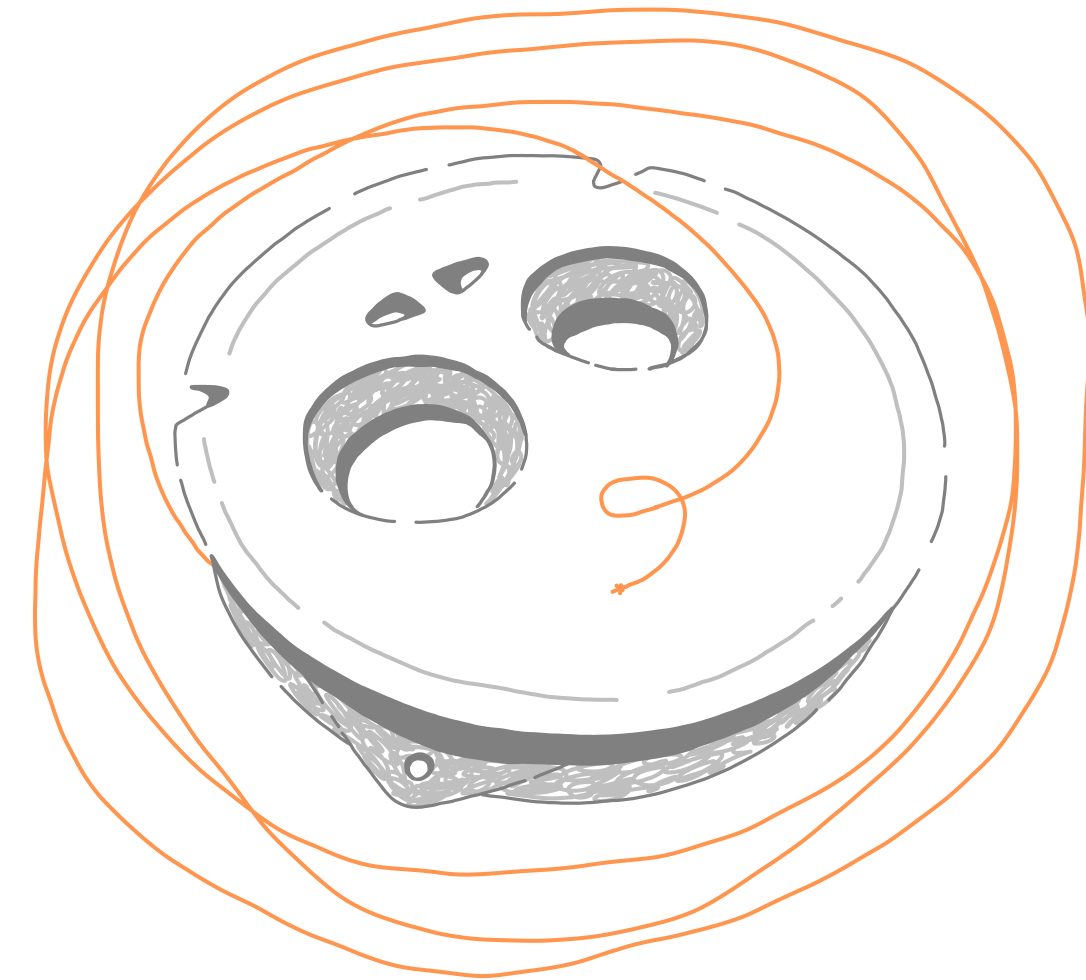
The goal of this blog post is to just make sure you try all your own 5 senses to their full potential before resorting to "add-ons" that supposedly make it "easier" to fish. I would have to say, don't make it easier with doodads on your rod and line, but practice using all of your senses instead in hopes you become a better fly fisherman using the very basic tenkara gear.

Soak it all up and make sure to use all your senses while tenkara fly fishing and I am sure you will go home feeling great joy even if the fishing was not great that day. I know I will!









## Managing Your Line

**Keep it simple: Get a Tenkara USA Keeper (a spool-style line and fly keeper)**

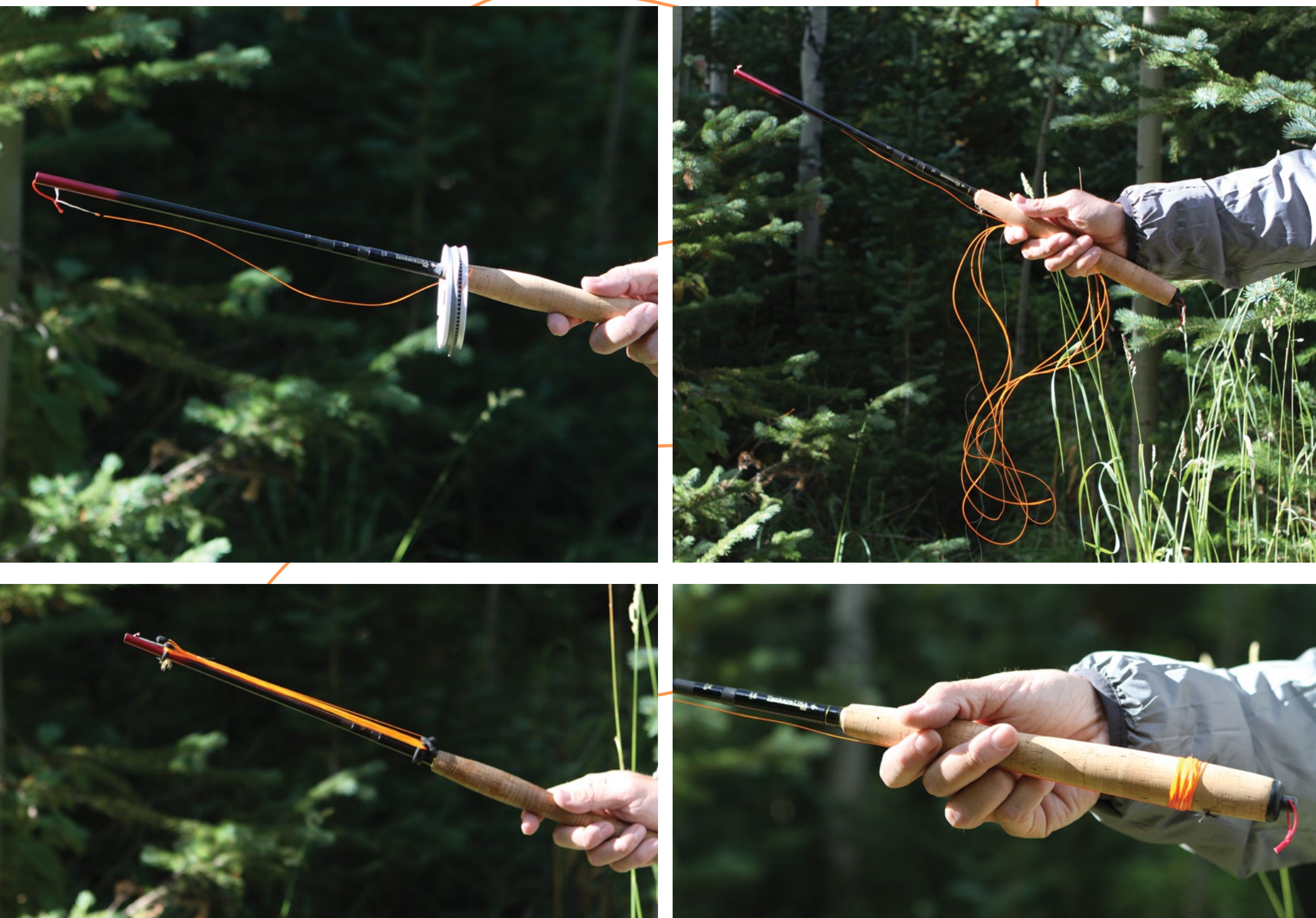
There are many different ways to manage line when one is not using it or while you are moving from place to place. I have tested dozens of ways to manage line over the years including techniques developed by anglers in Japan, myself, and other inventors. I will share only my personal preferences here.

If you'll be moving short distances, or through open terrain, it is most efficient to leave the rod extended and wrap the line that goes beyond the length of the rod in large loose coils around your hand. Then poke the fly hook into the rod handle to keep it from hooking you.

**Tip:** With the line semi-tight make the line spiral around the rod by shaking the rod tip. This will keep the line tight around the rod rather than in a belly under the tip of the rod, and will allow you to go through trees you encounter without the line getting snagged along the way.

When walking longer distances, or going through trees, brush, or climbing rocks, it is best to collapse the rod. At this point several options are available.





### Spools

The most effective way to manage line when moving, as well to store lines, is to use a spool. Spools not only allow you to manage line while moving, but also give you a place to store line if switching between lines or putting your setup away. Because they are round, spools will not kink lines around corners.

After trying many different spool systems, we arrived at the design for The Keeper, which allows for a couple of lines as well as flies to be stored in one spool and has an innovative way to grab the line. A couple of tips on using spools:

Grab the line with your whole hand, in your palm, rather than just using a couple of fingers. This will help push any twisting that happens on the lines all the way to the rod tip, which will eventually spin and get rid of line twisting.

Hold the spool still with one hand and use the other hand to wrap line around it (as opposed to the slower way of spinning the spool to get line around it). Keep your fingers out of the way of where the line will go.

Coiling it loosely on the hand can always be an option. It is quick, you don't need any additional items, and it doesn't create memory but it will often cause the line to tangle.

An "on-the-rod" system allows for a quick way to manage line. By having two opposing "hooks" on the rod, the angler can wrap line quickly to keep it from tangling as she moves around. Care should be taken not to have the line catch branches when moving.

Unfortunately most of the "on-the-rod" solutions cause kinks on the line, and I have found they take a bit longer to undo when I'm ready to fish. The system I like best that goes on the rod are our Rod Ties, which fit easily on a variety of rod diameters. They go in quickly and can be positioned wherever the angler prefers. A third tie is handy to secure the fly wherever it stops.

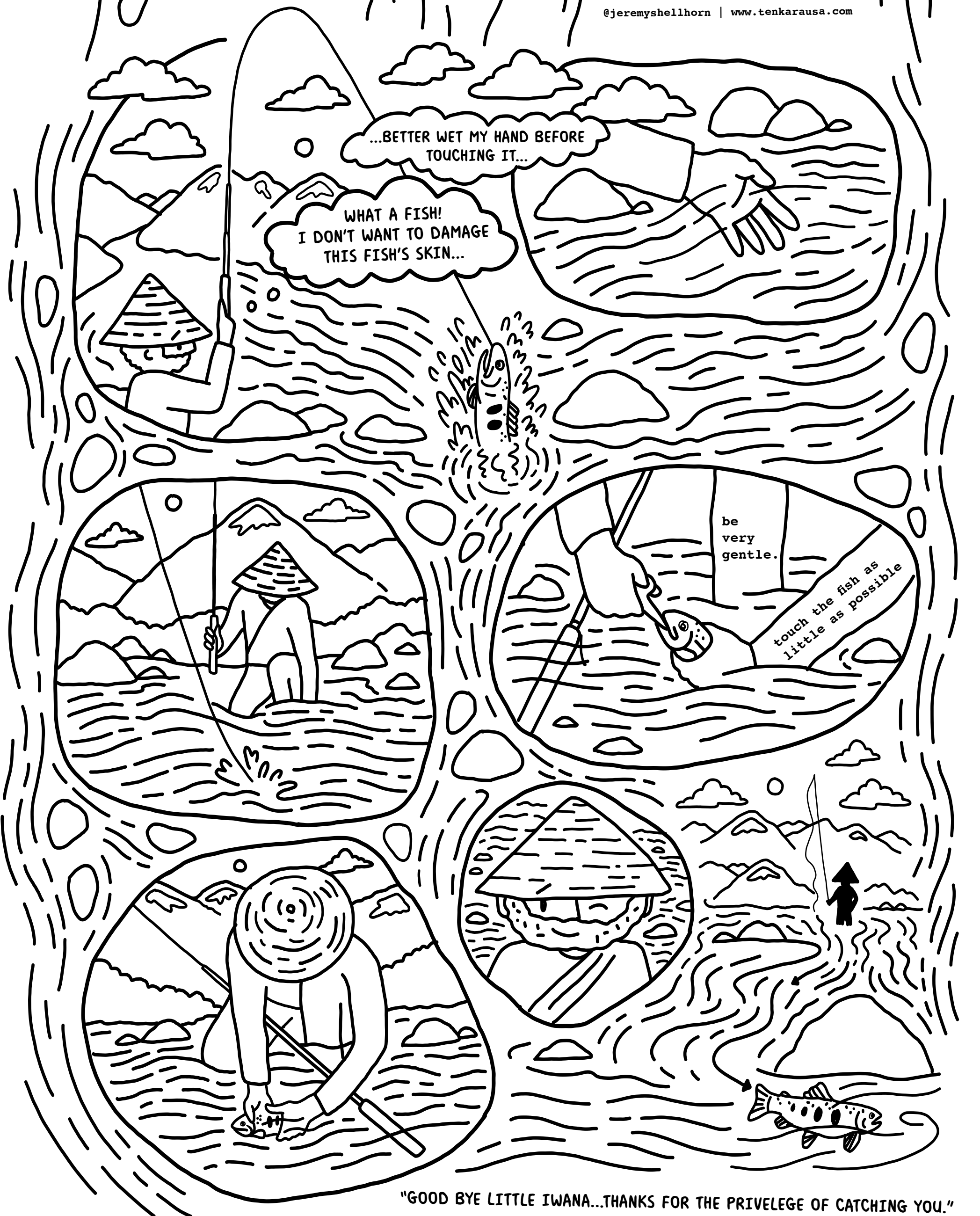
Wrapping it around the rod handle is probably the simplest option. But the thing rod handle diameter will mean it takes awhile to wrap all the line around it, and will cause the line to acquire "memory" in the form of small coils.



# UPTENKARA CREEK

number six:  
landing a fish

@jeremysheellhorn | www.tenkarausa.com



...BETTER WET MY HAND BEFORE TOUCHING IT...

WHAT A FISH!  
I DON'T WANT TO DAMAGE THIS FISH'S SKIN...

be very gentle.

touch the fish as little as possible

"GOOD BYE LITTLE IWANA...THANKS FOR THE PRIVILEGE OF CATCHING YOU."

Mr. Tanaka keeps the fish in the water the whole time. Faces the fish upstream, lets the fish catch it's breath and then he releases it.