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FLY FISHERMAN

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The author tells how and why you should begin to . . .

Mend Your Ways

GARY BORGER

Illustrations by Robert H. Pils

Aerial Mends

Single-Curve Mends

FLY FISHERMEN HAVE A DISTINCT tactical advantage over other fishermen in that the weight of fly line allows us to control, position and reposition line—and therefore the drift of the fly—either while the line is still airborne on the forward cast or after it has landed on the water. This repositioning, called line mending, is particularly important to the dry-fly fisherman concerned about getting drag-free drifts across complex water currents. And line mending can be important to natural wet-fly and nymph drifts.

Changing the line's position while it is still in the air (after the forward cast is made but before the line has fallen onto the water) is called *aerial mending*. Manipulating the line's position after it has fallen on the water is called *surface mending*. Aerial mending can be performed with any type of line. Surface mending can be performed at any time with floating line, while with sinking line it can only be performed the instant the line drops onto the water. Once it has begun to sink, mending is impossible.

GARY BORGER is FFM's Midwest Field Editor.

After the forward cast, while the line is still in the air, twitch the rod tip to the right and then immediately back to its original position. This creates a *single-curve mend* to the right (Figure 1). Twitching the rod first to the left and then bringing it back to the original position will form a single-curve mend to the left. The farther the rod tip is moved from its original position, the greater the size of the curve.

Once the curve is formed, it travels as a pulse down the line and away from the rod tip. Therefore, the longer the pause after the forward cast is made and before the single-curve mend is executed, the closer to the angler the mend will be when it drops to the water. With a little practice, you can learn to make this mend at just the right time to place the curve where you want it along the line.

This is a very useful mend. When casting upstream over a large rock, a single-curve mend drops the fly above

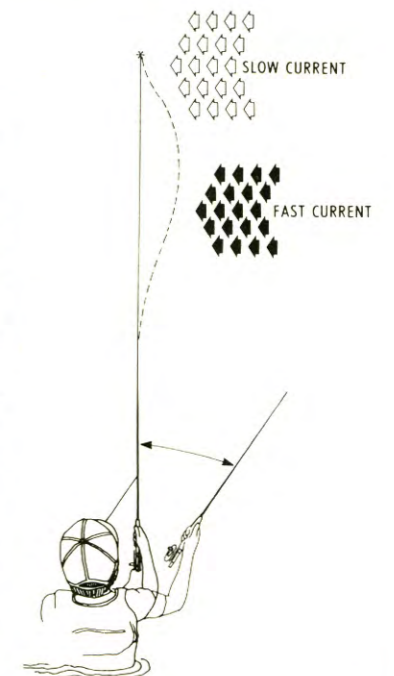


Figure 1. The single-curve mend. The dotted line indicates the mended position of the line.

Aerial Mends

the boulder and puts the line down curving left or right around the obstruction. If the line is cast straight across fast currents into slow ones, the fly will begin to drag immediately since the fast water will pull the line downstream and draw the fly along unnaturally. A single-curve mend that puts a large upstream curve on the fast currents will delay drag. If formed *immediately* after the forward cast is completed, this mend will travel all the way down the line and curve the leader left or right.

S-Mend

This mend is simply a series of right- and left-hand single-curve mends, one made immediately after the other. After the forward cast is delivered and while the line is still airborne, twitch the rod tip right and left several times, making the line drop to the surface in a serpentine pattern (Figure 2). The farther the rod tip is moved to right and left from its original position, the larger the S-curves. Another way to produce the same result

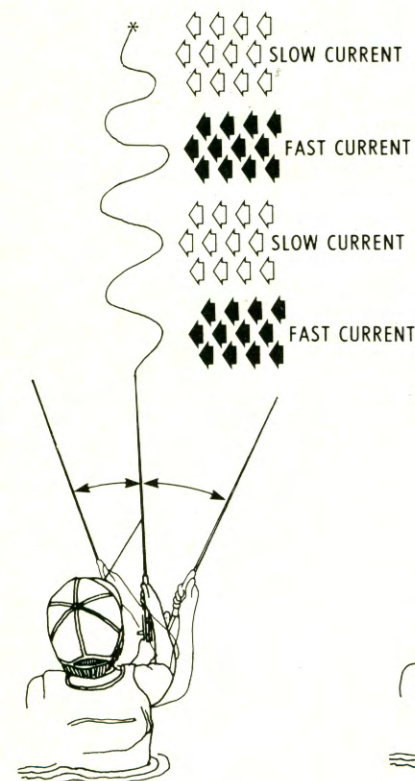


Figure 2. The S-mend.

is to twirl the rod tip as if scribing a series of circles on a wall in front of you. This motion sets up a series of corkscrew waves that travel down the line. When this corkscrew of line falls onto the water an S-mend results. The larger the circles, the larger the S-curves. Waiting until the line is nearly on the water before executing this aerial mend results in S-bends in only the portion of the line nearest you. If the mend is put in immediately after the forward cast is delivered, the entire line and leader can be mended.

The S-mend is used primarily to put lots of slack into the line—a useful and necessary tactic when casting across several current tongues. This aerial mend is also a prerequisite for several on-the-water mends.

Reach Mend

This extremely useful aerial correction of line position is easy to accomplish. From its final position in the forward cast, move the rod tip out to the side (Figure 3). Don't jerk the rod tip sideways;

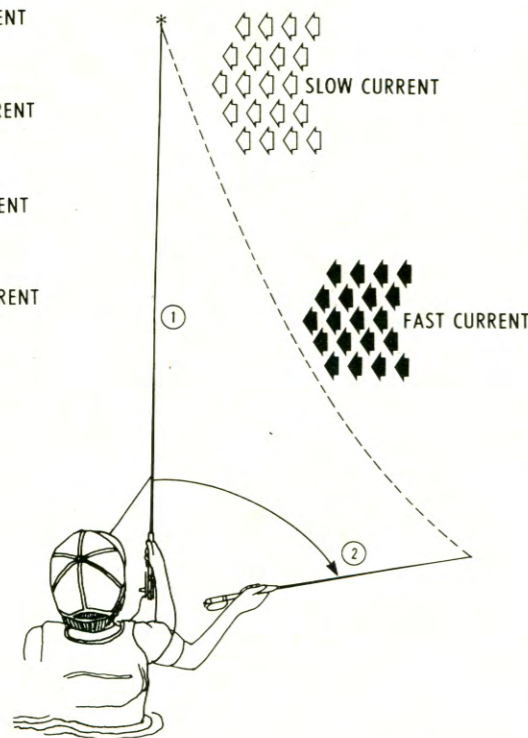


Figure 3. The reach mend. The dotted line indicates the mended position of the line.

rather, pull it smoothly against the weight of the airborne line. Placing the rod tip to your right results in a right-hand reach mend; a left-hand reach mend is made to the opposite side.

The degree of mend in the line depends on how far you move the rod tip to the side and whether you lower it as you move it sideways. If you move the rod tip more than a foot or two from its original position, extra line must be added to compensate for the increased distance from rod tip to target. You can hold this line at the ready and release it as the reach is made, or you can cast beyond the target and then pull back into the correct position as the reach is executed. Here, again, the timing of the mend influences which portion of the line is affected. Regardless of the timing of the mend, however, *the fly will continue to its original target.*

The greatest advantage of the reach mend is that it lets you stand in one spot and drop the line on the water as if it were cast from a different spot. For example, if you're casting straight across-stream and over fast currents to a fish holding in slow water, you can reach-mend the line upstream so that it ends up as if the cast were made down-and-across stream (Figure 3). This mend positions the fly downstream of the leader and throws the line upstream on the fast current—the equivalent of a hook cast coupled with a single-curve mend. And unlike curve mends, the reach mend introduces controllable slack; that is, slack that can be added or removed simply by changing rod tip position. Thus, if a fish takes the artificial you don't need to pull large curves of line off the surface to set the hook.

With upstream reach mends, the length of line initially dropped onto the water is greater than the straight-line distance from target to angler. As the line floats downstream this slack is controlled by moving the rod to a vertical position at the same rate as the line moves downstream. After the line passes you the slack can be put back onto the water by lowering the rod tip on the downstream side. This slack can also be used for a surface mend if needed. There are many situations where this mend is helpful: Learn it and experiment, you'll be surprised at its usefulness.

Aerial Mends

Parachute Mend

This special version of the reach mend is a spin-off of a cast described by Charles Ritz in *A Fly Fisher's Life*. His method was to stop the rod in a nearly vertical position on the forward cast and then lower it straight down by dropping the casting hand. I've modified this technique to make it easier and to increase the amount of controllable slack. Immediately after the rod is stopped in the forward cast (and the line loop is rolling forward) draw the rod tip back to a vertical position and hold it there until the line has dropped

to the water (Figure 4). Don't jerk the rod back suddenly or you'll make a back-cast. Simply pull the rod tip back against the weight of the airborne line.

This mend results in a straight cast with controllable slack between the rod tip and the line lying on the water. For a cast made across-stream or at any angle downstream, this slack can be introduced as needed to achieve a drag-free float. It's the perfect mend when you're dead-drifting a fly directly downstream. Without a mend, the artificial would begin to drag as soon as it touched the water since the line would be static relative to the moving water. With the parachute mend, the rod tip is lowered at the rate at which the

current pulls the line downstream. Standing mid-thigh deep in the stream and using a nine-foot rod, you can achieve a twenty-foot, drag-free drift with a parachute mend. You can get an additional six feet of drift by raising the rod straight overhead after pulling it back to the vertical position.

Aerial mending is easily and effectively accomplished with a standard overhead cast. Single-curve and S-mends can also be made with a roll cast, but only the line nearest the rod can be mended. With the reach mend the entire line can be mended if the roll cast is thrown into the air just above the surface. The parachute mend is easily performed using the roll cast.

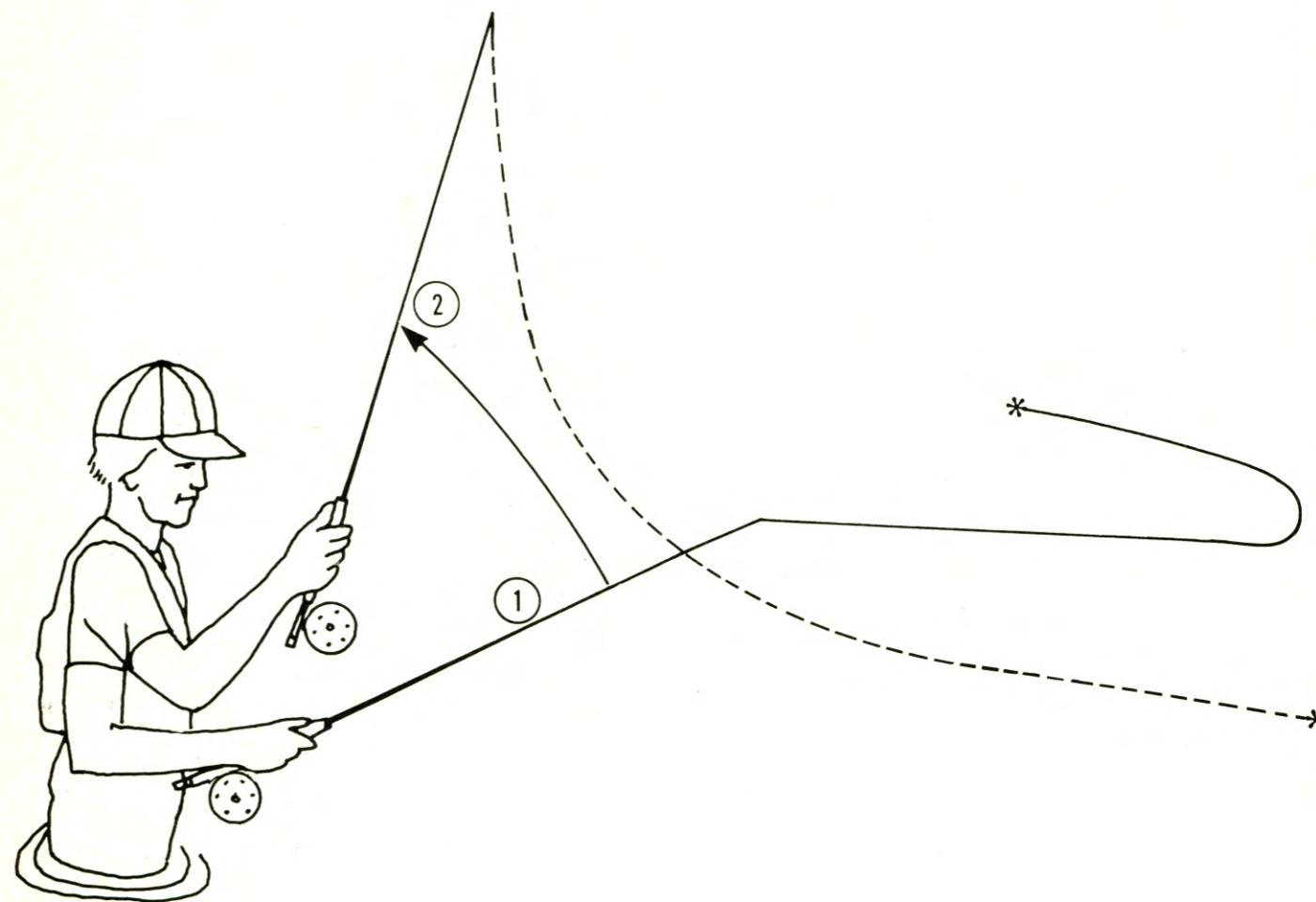


Figure 4. The parachute mend. The dotted line indicates the mended position of the line.

Surface Mends

Upstream or Downstream Mend

This surface mend requires slack introduced with an aerial mend or with line pulled from the reel and added as the mend is made. A line cast across a strong central current with an aerial, single-curve or S-mend will eventually belly downstream and cause drag. Before drag occurs, lift the belly of the line from the water and flop it into an upstream curving mend (Figure 5). When lifting the line, keep your rod hand close to your body. As you make the mend, push the rod out in front of you and simultaneously flip it upstream. These combined movements help make the mend without disturbing the fly's drift.

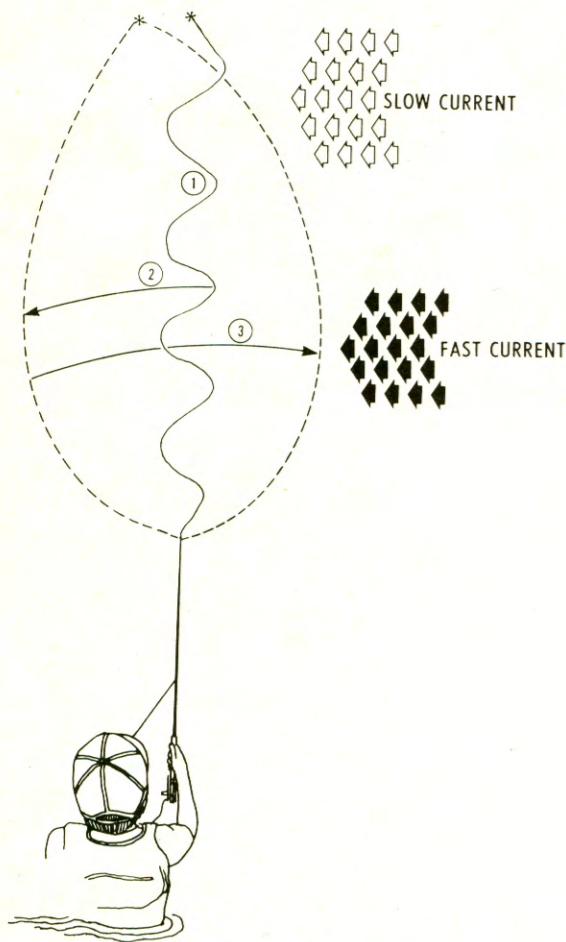


Figure 5. The upstream surface mend. (1) the initial cast made with an S-mend, (2) the line is bellied downstream by the currents, (3) the angler mends the line into an upstream curve.

If the fly is cast across quiet water into fast currents, the slow moving line impedes its progress, causing drag. A downstream mend, made similarly to the upstream mend, corrects this problem (Figure 6).

Joe Brooks's broadside float technique was designed to keep streamers riding at right angles to current flow. Surface mending (upstream, downstream or both) is used to keep the fly correctly oriented and drifting at the same speed as the current.

Skating a wet fly on a riffling hitch calls for surface mends to induce just enough drag to pull the fly to the surface and make it skim along slightly faster than the current.

The upstream mend is very useful to speed the sink rate of a fly. Deliver the cast with a parachute mend. As soon as the line drops onto the water, pitch the slack into a strong upstream mend that repositions the line into an "L" shape. The fly is at the toe of the L and downstream of the leader and line (Figure 7). As the fly sinks, it passes through progressively slower layers of water. The leader and the front of the line ride downstream against the slower moving fly and quickly force it to the bottom. A well-executed, single-curve mend made in the air will accomplish the same drift.

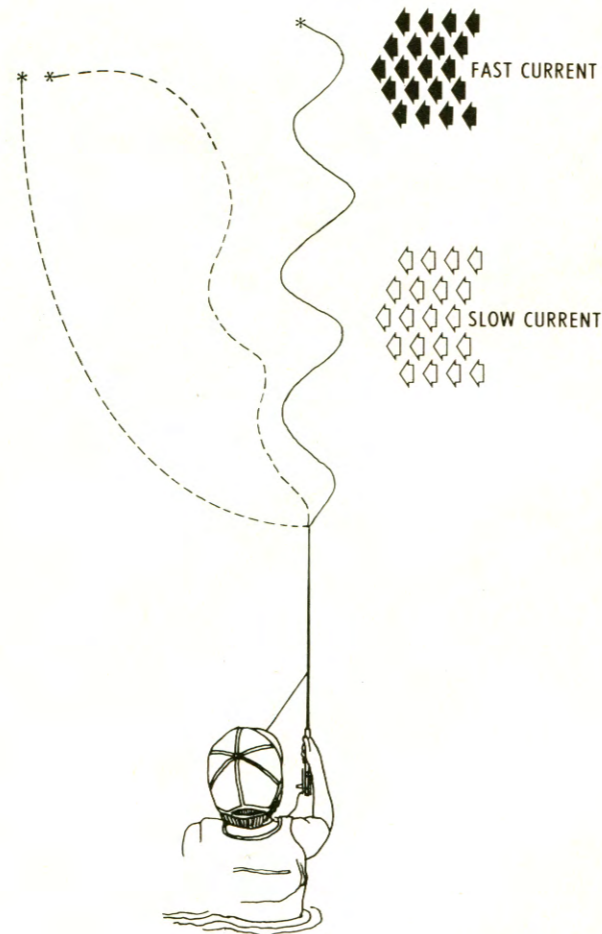


Figure 6. The downstream surface mend.

Surface Mends

Roll-cast Mend

This surface mend employs a roll cast to reposition the line. Because the roll throws a great deal of energy into the line, I've found this mend most useful when fishing a sinking-tip line or a floating line with a weighted fly or a very large fly with great resistance in the water. Deliver

the cast with a parachute mend. After the line tip or fly has sunk, make a roll cast to toss extra line where needed. The sunken fly or line tip acts as an anchor, allowing the rest of the line to be mended. A normal roll cast can be used to throw slack near the tip of the line, permitting the fly to sink rapidly. A side-arm roll cast will make a strong upstream or downstream mend in the tip of the line.

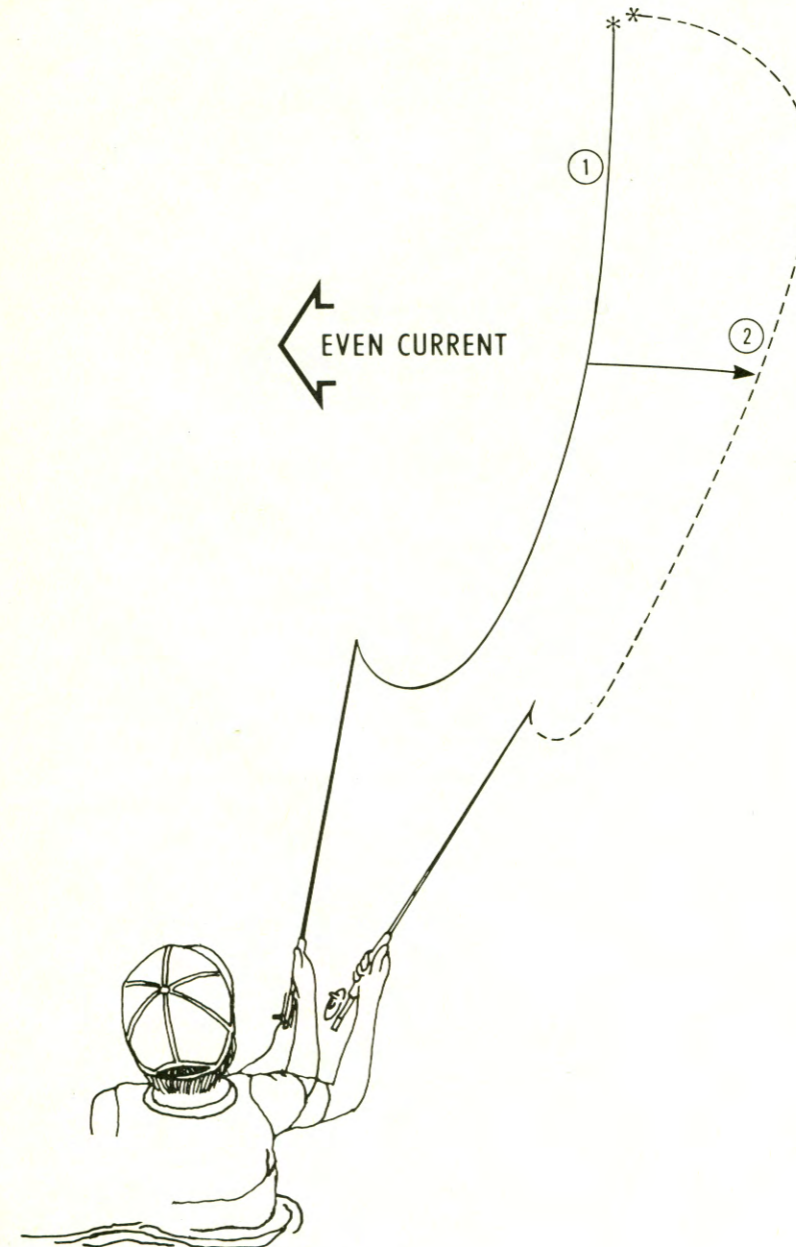


Figure 7. An upstream mend to aid the sink rate of the fly. The dotted line indicates the mended position of the line.

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