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# The Loop



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*"Memories Of The Steavenson River" - painting by Bintoro*



# Europe's Power Couple

*Silja Longhurst CI, THCI and  
Lasse Karlsson MCI, THCI, CBOG Emeritus,  
Level 3 Examiner and EDP Faculty Member.*

By Sekhar Bahadur, MCI

*The statements and views in this article do not necessarily reflect the official stance of the FFI*

Silja and Lasse run BalticFlyFisher in Copenhagen, Denmark, a family business that imports Tim Rajeff's Echo fly-fishing tackle and OPST-Skagit products into Europe. They also run their own flycasting school and offer a guide service for avid coastal and river flyfishers in Denmark, Ireland, Scotland and elsewhere. They have been married for ten years and have two children.

**Q:** *Silja, how did a German-speaking lady with a very proper English surname wind up living in Denmark?*

**S:** Love. I grew up in Germany with a German mother and an English father in a bilingual home. My dad was always a keen fly fisher, and ever since I was small he would take me fishing. He was in the process of escaping the computer business for a full-time entrepreneurial career in the flyfishing business when I went with him on a fishing trip to Sweden. Lasse was one of the guides. That was that, as they say, and I soon moved to Copenhagen.

## Tailing Loop

*continued ...*

**Q:** *Silja, I understand you gave up your day job to work full time in the fishing business as a guide and for your family's BalticFlyFisher business. Was that a difficult decision and how is it going so far?*

**S:** I couldn't be happier. I was working as a barista in a coffee shop, and I really loved it, but between the kids and juggling that job, the family business (which started importing Echo products and has now added OPST), on top of guiding and teaching just became too much. Now I can rebalance a bit by selling more equipment in the winter and spending more time on the water when the weather is better. Fortunately, our equipment business is doing well and growing steadily.

**Q:** *Lasse, tell us about your day job.*

**L:** I'm a painter, doing both commercial and residential work. It gives me a lot of quiet time to think about things like flycasting, and it helps me practice movement and body control as well as building a strong core!

**Q:** *Lasse, in what language(s) do you speak to each other? The kids?*

**L:** We speak mostly Danish and German with the kids, but Silja and I usually choose neutral territory and speak to each other in English!



## Europe's Power Couple *continued...*

**Q:** *Silja, you are very well known as a two-handed competitive caster, guide and teacher, but you also have a CI qualification. Tell us about that journey.*

**S:** I have a master's degree in dance and also taught it professionally in Germany. But when I first moved to Copenhagen, I needed to learn Danish before I could teach. So that left me a lot of time to work at my fly casting. A while later, I heard Mel Krieger was coming on a trip to Europe, and I contacted him about becoming certified. He tested a few of us in a park in Berlin, and so, I have the great honour of being certified by Mel.

**Q:** *Silja, after your CI you went for a THCI qualification and not an MCI. What was your thinking?*

**S:** I will do my MCI at some point...

**L:** She better, and soon!

**S:** ...but two-handed casting is my real passion. My dance training emphasized being in the center of an icosahedron, which is a 20-sided shape, and moving our bodies in three dimensions. While single-handed overhead casting can be a bit two dimensional for me, I find two handed casting just like a 3-dimensional dance from my training, and I just love it.

**Q:** *So who is the best two-handed caster in the family?*

**L:** Silja is. She has a real passion for it, while my passion is for single-handed casting.

**Q:** *Lasse got his THCI before you did; did he help you get ready for yours?*

**S:** Not really. We worked together maybe three times, but otherwise I pretty much stayed away from him and did my own thing.

**L:** Teaching a spouse flycasting is a bit like teaching your other half driving or swimming; it usually doesn't end well!

**Q:** *Speaking of throwing lines around as a team, do you fish together often?*

**L:** No not really. Firstly, our interests are different. I grew up fishing for sea trout on the coast and for pike and other lake fish, and Silja has always been a river person. The other practical issue is the kids. Someone has to look after them, so we can't both be fishing at the same time that often. So when we do fishing trips, they are actually often separate "me time." Hopefully, when the kids are a bit older, we can all fish together more.

**Q:** *Bucket list?*

**S:** British Columbia for Steelhead!

**L:** I would also love to catch a Steelhead. But there is also something to be said about not freezing in leaking waders, as often happens at home here. Although I have done some warm water flats fishing, I'd love to do more. I really like the idea of rolling out of bed and going fishing with just a pair of shorts on!

## Europe's Power Couple *continued...*

**Q:** *Speaking of false truths, Lasse you are well known for stirring the pot with your “myth busting” demos at fairs. What are some of the misconceptions you encounter most often?*

**L:** One of the things I hear a lot about is rod loading and its derivatives. “The rod works as a spring and the objective of a good cast is to load the rod”

A fly rod actually works primarily as a bendy lever. A small rotation at the handle gets converted to a much bigger movement at the tip, in the same amount of time. Rod load is the consequence of accelerating a bendy rod –even without line it will bend quite a lot. What many people forget is that the tip of a bending rod is initially slowing down compared to that of a rigid rod, and that a bent rod is a shorter (and therefore less speed-amplifying) lever compared to a longer rigid one. All else equal, the tip of a rigid rod should have a faster average speed between rod straight positions than that of a bendy rod, as the rigid rod’s tip is travelling through an arc between two points, while the bendy tip’s straight line path describes a shorter path connecting the points.

Yes, the bent rod speeds up when it straightens, but I have seen no evidence that its tip speed becomes faster than that of a rigid rod for an identical energy input by the caster. We use bendy rods for other reasons: 1) If the rod bends, the tip movement can be in a much straighter line without complicated gymnastics by the caster. And moving the tip in a straighter line is more efficient than going on a detour. 2) A bendy rod also has less impact on our joints, so it is nicer to cast. Stopping a rigid rod can literally hurt you. 3) A bendy rod gives the caster feedback that he or she is accelerating without slack in the system.

If bending the rod (for its spring effect) was the primary objective, bow and arrow casts, which bend the rod far more than just the fly line would, should be the cast of choice for distance casters. Distance casters however don’t use bow and arrow casts, and they actually usually prefer stiffer-than-average rods, as they bend less and have less counterflex that hinders shooting line.

Try this: cast a length of line while observing the bend in the rod, have someone hold the fluff, while you bend the rod by the same amount, then have them let go while you hold the rod still. Watch how far the line travels. You will be lucky if you can get the fluff much beyond your feet.

**L:** Another Common myth I hear: “Hauling works by bending the rod”

Hauling actually works by accelerating the line directly rather than bending an already deeply bent (and in fact unbending) rod further. Yes, pulling on a line with the rod stationary will produce a tiny bend in the tip, but compare that to the large bend already present in the rod when good casters start hauling, and it becomes clear that the part of the rod the haul should allegedly bend is a lot stiffer than the tip. The bend in the rod actually represents a loss of part of the energy the caster imparted to the line with the haul, some of which will hopefully be recovered as this additional bend straightens. When good casters are hauling, the bend in the rod is actually reducing. It is perfectly possible to effectively haul using a completely rigid rod or when hand casting. *Sports Illustrated* reported that Lefty Kreh could cast over 90 feet without a rod, and I am not a bad hand caster either – it is all in the haul.

## Europe's Power Couple *continued...*

**L:** Here's another one: lower the rod to fight big fish to "bend the butt section of the rod"

The advice is correct but the reasoning behind it is not. It represents another misunderstanding of how a lever works. The longer a rod, the more leverage the fish has on the caster. In short, we're literally on the wrong end of the stick (and the fulcrum), if we wanted to do an Archimedes ["Give me a lever long enough and a fulcrum on which to place it, and I shall move the world"]. This is the flip side of the speed multiplying effect of casting a long rod. If we really want to put pressure on a fish, we should remove the rod completely and only pull on the line. This is exactly what we do when we want to stop a fish running for a snag - lower the rod and block the reel. It's to shorten the lever not to bend the butt. This concept is reflected in our tackle; deep sea rods for very large fish are really short and tenkara rods for very small fish tend to be very long. Floyd Franke discusses this concept in *Fish On!* (2003, p. 43-48) as does Don Phillips in *The Technology of Fly Rods* (2000, p. 44-49).

**L:** And lastly: "The Anchor loads the rod"

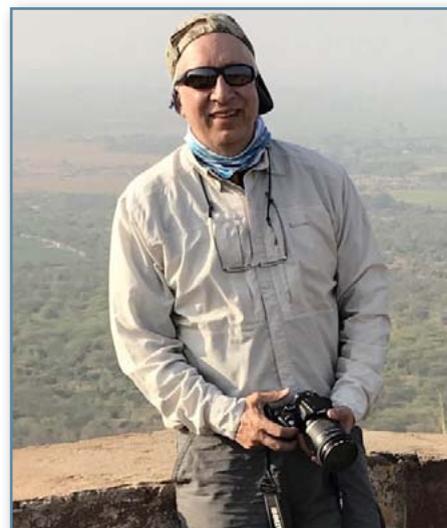
Everything beneath the apex of the D loop is actually slack. Most would probably agree if the line was folded over itself on grass the doubled back line was slack, and I don't think anything changes if the end of the folded-over line is on the water. All the anchor does is keep the fly from ending up in the bushes behind us on both the back and forward casts, and it can act as an aiming aid for our forward cast. If the anchor really helped load the rod, roll casting with the biggest of anchors would be the cast of choice for distance; it should load the rod the most, right? And then there's the whole rod loading thing again.

Try it yourself: set up for a roll cast, have a doubter hold the fluff, walk forward and have the doubter call out when they feel the line being pulled from their fingers. It shows that in a real cast the doubter would not have been able to feel any forward force on the fly until well after loop formation, and thus long after the rod has unloaded.

**Q:** Silja and Lasse thanks very much!

**Silja Longhurst, CCI, THCI** is a Certified Angling Guide with the Danish Sports Fishing Society and a Silver Medallist in both the 15ft and 16ft Spey distance events in the 2018 World Fly-Casting Championships.

**Lasse Karlsson, MCI, THCI** is also an **AAPGAI** certified Single-Hand Master Instructor and a 5-time Danish Champion in Single-Hand Flycasting.



**Sekhar Bahadur, MCI**, also holds an Advanced Professional Game Angling Instructor certification from GAIA.

He is a casting coach for the British Fly Casting Club, where for a brief shining moment he held a club age group distance casting record. He divides his non-fishing time between London and Greenwich, Connecticut.