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Blind nymphing

While the origins of fishing with a very long, knotted tapered leader lay in sight fishing, by definition this technique can only be used when the fish targeted are visible. It is thus best suited to limestone streams, or certain very clear freestone rivers. In France, as elsewhere, such rivers make up only a small proportion of all the rivers in which trout are to be found. In other rivers, where the quarry cannot be seen, some form of indicator needs to be present if takes are to be detected.

French competition flyfishermen soon recognised the potential of French leaders when combined with an indicator for blind nymphing. After some controversy in the mid-1990s surrounding permissible techniques, the FFPML, the regulating body for competition flyfishing in France, set out the permitted parameters for nymphing in competition flyfishing. In essence, this ruling prohibited: micro-floats; attaching any weight to the line; and the use of more than one nymph.

Following this ruling, the French national team focussed on developing their blind nymphing technique using ultra-long leaders, typically incorporating short lengths of coloured monofilament into the leader as an indicator. This approach resulted in unparalleled success for the French national team, including seven team World Championship gold medals since 1997. The success of the French team led to widespread adoption of the French leader technique by other national teams, and by recreational fishermen both in France and elsewhere.

Indicator nymphing with a French leader has since evolved to take several different forms. However, the main distinction to be made is between longer distance approaches using an indicator that is designed to float, and short-range tactics where the rod is held high in order to keep both line and leader from lying on the surface of the water.

Why has the French leader become so popular?

Nymphing with a French leader has established itself over the last two decades as by far the most popular flyfishing technique in France. The reasons for this are both positive and negative. On the one hand, in both its sight and indicator forms, nymphing with a French leader has proved itself to be very effective in rivers and streams of all sizes and types, as well as in lake fishing. Once mastered, the method also offers a test of the fisherman's skill that makes it an exciting and satisfying way of fishing for a wide variety of species.

Flies for Nymphing

MAYFLY NYMPH

Hook: Fulling Mill Competition barbless size 12

Tail: pheasant tail

Body: light hare's dubbing

Rib: pheasant tail

Thorax: olive hare's dubbing

Wing Casing: pheasant tail

Legs: partridge feather fibres



JIGGED 20 INCHER (STONEFLY)

Hook: Jig 10-12

Tail: rust coloured turkey biots

Body: Hends Spectra 46

Rib: copper wire

Thorax: hare's ear

Wing Casing: pheasant tail

Legs: partridge feather fibres



PEEPING CADDIS

Hook: Jig 10-12

Tag: glo-brite number 9

Tail Hackle: partridge

Body: natural hare's dubbing

Weight: tungsten bead gold silver or black





Cody Burgdorff keeping a low profile as he fishes a duo in a riffle on the upper reaches of the Big Thompson River in Colorado.

Julien's top tips for nymphing...

Weight: Make sure you have the right weight of fly in order to achieve a good drift. Don't hesitate to change weight of fly regularly.

Tippet Length: Be ready to adjust tippet length according to the depth of water being fished.

Concentration: Stay focussed, as takes are sometimes barely perceptible.

Tippet Diameter: Make sure that tippet diameter is suited to the size of fish being targeted.

Proximity: Position yourself as close as practicable to the fish in order to optimise drifts and to have the best chance of hooking fish.

Single Nymphs: Fish just a single nymph in situations where precision is required, such as when casting under overhanging branches.

Experiment: Choose a fly that you have confidence in, but be prepared to vary both fly colour and weight if fish are not taking.

Animation: Don't forget to animate the fly from time to time in order to induce takes.

