

# THE NORTHERN KENTUCKY FLY FISHER'S, INK

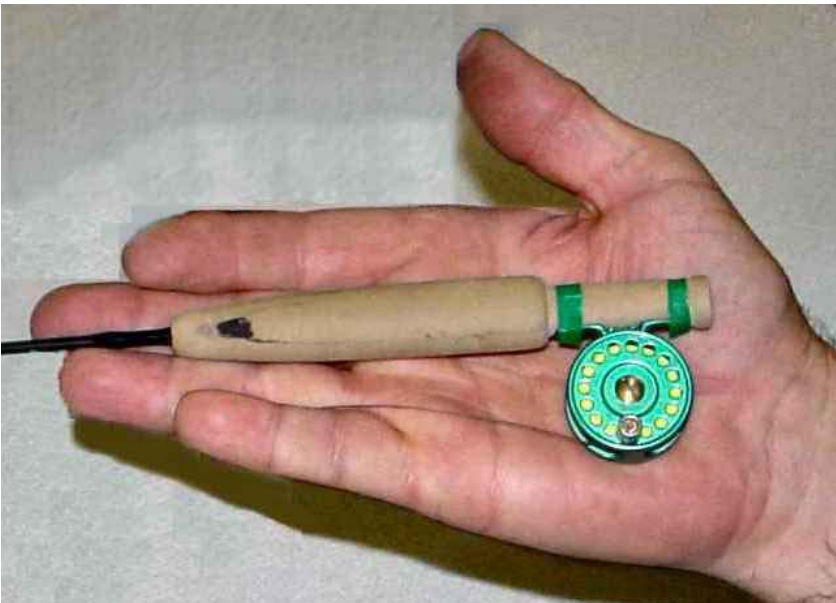
## Hal Burch and His Apogee Tip Fly Rod



Hal Burch

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**Yes, it does catch fish!**



**By Mark England**

If you've been to many NKFF meetings, you've probably seen Hal Burch. He's the one casting with a group in the parking lot or at the first table as you come in. Hal's custom fly rods always draw a lot of interest because they are so small. We're talking really small – 4 ½' long with a tip tapering to 1/32".

I asked Hal if these were serious fishing rods. “Definitely very serious fishing rods,” Hal said. “They have an application for any small stream.” Hal easily makes 50' casts with these rods, far enough for any of the small, local streams. He has landed three pound bass on his rods and they work well for panfish and trout. Hal's rods are graphite or fiberglass and flex from tip to handle, a slow action. The key is the “apogee” tip, as Hal refers to them. The tips are as small as 1/32" and are “fast” in the sense that they will turn over

a #8 Sneaky Pete or Wooly Bugger, common flies on the local streams.

Slow action with a fast tip? “Think of it this way,” said Hal. “When you cast a fast action 9' rod, how much of the rod do you use? It flexes maybe halfway down or 4 ½', the same distance as my full flex 4 ½' apogee rod.”

The point, Hal continued, is that these rods will turn over most #8 size flies on a 50' cast, perfect for the conditions and most of us fish.

According to Hal, a Japanese company began making apogee tip rods in the 70's. In the US, South Bend made a version, and then Mitchell, and finally Zebco made one in their Quantum line. All the companies experienced the same problem. People would lift fish by the rod with the tip vertical and the tip would break. Eventually, all three manufacturers discontinued the rods. “I've

owned nine of them and sold five to club members.

To my knowledge, only one ever broke,” says Hal, “and that person will admit it was his fault, not the rod's design.”

“Fly rods are levers – that's all they are. All of them were designed as spinning rods. With most of them I left the spinning guides on

and added guides. They can be used for spinning or fly casting with the sliding ring handles. Or you can strip them down completely and turn them into regular fly rods.” According to Burch, the rod needs extra guides for two reasons. When setting a hook with only four guides on the short rod, the line takes a “short cut” from guide to guide instead of following the curve of the rod. With more guides, Hal says the rod moves more line on the hook set. More line movement – better hook set. The second reason is the cast. With more guides, the rod loads more evenly along the length, resulting in a longer cast.

Burch usually buys a 90' 4 wt. double taper line and cuts it in half. Hal puts on backing, 45' of fly line and a leader the length of the rod. This all goes on a tiny reel to match. Currently, Hal favors a Crystal River #0001 reel with an adjustable drag that's 2 ½" in diameter.

At the February meeting, Hal showed off a 31" rod with a reel made from a novelty tape measure sold by Orvis. It looks ridiculously small, but Hal says another member, Jerry Benson, landed a crappie over 12" with the tiny outfit.

Next time you're in a creek overhung with tree branches and you're trying to untangle your fly from a branch, think of Hal's rods and think small.