



DANIEL PIERCE

## TENKARA+ BOULDERING

If you have fished tenkara, most likely you have discovered, as I have, that tenkara fishing goes well with any number of other various activities. Since making tenkara-style fishing a part of my life, and thus far in my Tenkara+ experience, my favorite activity to pair with fishing is bouldering. Bouldering is a form of rock climbing where the climber stays close to the ground and does not use ropes or gear. Like tenkara fishing, bouldering is centered around controlled, fluid motions, balance, and grace.

During my early adult years, I spent countless hours walking up and down streams in western Maine searching for prized river boulders to climb. While searching for rocks that had been shaped and smoothed for years upon years by one of the thousands of winding mountain streams in Maine, not often did I think about the silky fish that may be lurking deep in the cold pools below.

After my marriage in 2007 and a move back to central Maine and away from my climbing spots, fishing began to interest me once again. I grew up on the edge of the Belgrade Lakes in central Maine. I spent long summer days fishing off the point and cold winter mornings ice fishing

there. I hadn't picked up a rod since my childhood. It felt great to be getting back to my roots.

Small streams and brooks are everywhere in Maine and you don't have to travel far to find perfect tenkara water. A short walk through my five-acre field, down a steep wooded bank will leave you standing in Tingly Brook, which boasts a few feisty wild brook trout. I had been fishing an ultra-light spinning set-up, then I found tenkara. The lightness of the equipment and the speed of the set-up was what drew me to that style.

My new passion for tenkara brought me back to the streams of western Maine. I had searched out boulders on each bend of the many mountain rivers and streams and now had endless spots where I wanted to fish and climb.

It was very nostalgic to be back in my old stomping grounds reminiscing about my search for the polished rocks, a search that I shared with my oldest and dearest friend, Tim, who now lives in Vail, Colorado. Tim, a Maine native, has continued his climbing journey in Colorado, Wyoming, Utah, and California. Just spitting dis-

tance from his flat are some of the best waters I've had the privilege to fish, especially Gore Creek in Vail.

In the late summer of 2013, Tim and I had our first Tenkara+ bouldering outing when he vacationed in Maine. We headed directly for Carrabassett Valley. After a good climbing session, there were a few pools I wanted to fish. While making our way along the rocky shoreline, I encouraged Tim to try casting my tenkara rod. I was happy to hear him say yes, not only because I was excited about his proximity to world-class waters and the potential to fish them, but also because tenkara is a great way to unwind from intense physical activity like bouldering. He watched me cast a few times and I showed him the "perfect dead drift," then he gave it a shot. He enjoyed the peace and tranquility of the stream and the almost therapeutic quality of casting the line and watching it drift gently through the short runs.

When Tim traveled to Maine again this past summer, his purpose was twofold. First, he came to meet our first child, our five-month-old son Forrest McGrath, and second, he wanted to climb the river boulders on the Sandy, a spot we had only climbed once, more than 10 years earlier. My purpose was clear: I wanted to get him hooked on tenkara, which he tried the previous summer and is a perfect fit for his minimalist, outdoor lifestyle.

We finally found the narrow dirt road that led to the first boulder. The first boulder is basically a one-move problem, something that is not entirely uncommon in bouldering, especially on river boulders. There is only one feature on the face of the rock to hold, and nowhere to put your feet. You start by grabbing the only handhold on the rock, a feature shaped somewhat like a French baguette, with both hands, sticking your feet to the smooth, flat rock and tensing all of your muscles at the same time while stepping up with one leg and trying to smear your feet, propelling you upwards. Once you have made some progress vertically with your feet, you can reach up with either hand to find the perfectly round and utterly frictionless top of the rock. This is the perfect one-move boulder problem, falling somewhere right in the

middle of the easy-difficult rating scale. The boulder was worth the effort to find not just because it is a beautiful rock, but it is in a beautiful location right on the edge of a crystal clear stream.

While we worked the boulder problem, I eyed the first pool, which was about 20 feet wide and 4 to 6 feet deep with the area around the boulder closer to 10 feet deep. In terms of fishing, it did not disappoint.

Tim crossed the river and headed upstream to the next boulder. About twice the size of the first boulder, this one would take him multiple moves to "send" to the top. I headed upstream as well, but chose to fish a small but productive pocket instead of attempt this boulder. This was one of the most relaxing fishing experiences I have ever had. I cast upstream and watched as my fly drifted down through a crystal clear pool, and wild brook trout fought over my Maine turkey feather *kebari*. Watched as my best bud, a true master of climbing boulders, made his way slowly but confidently up the boulder.

The morning my friend left to return to Colorado and Gore Creek, I gave him his first tenkara rod, which had been my first, the Tenkara USA Iwana. Two days later he sent me a picture of his first fish on tenkara, his first fish in Colorado, and his first fish in 20 years: a beautiful 14-inch brown trout that he had caught on a barbless hook and Maine wild turkey feather fly. I am not sure who was happier or more excited, he or I. After that first picture, they just kept coming. The Iwana has now been with him on a number of climbing trips in a number of different states.

Thinking back to that day on the Sandy River, and remembering my fly drifting through the water, it is clear to me that both tenkara and bouldering are true art forms, and when mastered are beautiful to watch. This day of Tenkara + bouldering not only deepened my love for fishing pristine and untouched mountain streams, it also relit my passion for bouldering.

DANIEL PIERCE lives in Readfield, Maine, with his wife, Maria, and son, Forrest. He is working towards becoming the first tenkara-specific fly-fishing guide in Maine. (mainetenkaraguide@gmail.com)