

# A Guide to...

Clients of  
Scott Canelas



Client of Jon Lockwood

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By JOHN CORRIGAN

*John Corrigan writes a weekly fishing column, ANGLER'S JOURNAL, for the CONCORD MONITOR.*

# Fishing Guides

*Fishing guides can show you the waters, sharpen your skills, and expand your opportunities.*

**A** professional fishing guide can put you within casting distance of a game fish and offer solid advice for hooking and playing it.

It's a service worth paying for if you want to learn a new territory, develop a better appreciation of your local waters, or generally improve your fishing skills. Essentially, if you fish a guide can help you.

Consider the two major trout rivers of New Hampshire's North Country: the Upper Connecticut and the Androscoggin. Local anglers can spend a lifetime learning a mile or two of either river. Newcomers can burn a lot of gasoline driving past waters that range from a small mountain stream to brawling rapids.

It was a cool, drizzly morning in September when Lisa Savard turned off Route 3 onto a very rough dirt road in Pittsburg. She immediately swung to the left, pulling into a clearing where the car couldn't be seen from the highway.

She quickly found a faint game trail that led us to a section of deserted river. I thought it was late in the season for insect hatches, but she offered a brown elk-hair caddis dry fly pattern. She pointed to the seam between the riffles and an eddy, and suggested an upstream cast with enough of a mend in the line to allow the fly to float naturally.

She demonstrated the technique, bending forward and peering at the water with a fly caster's intensity. Her artificial landed perfectly, and a healthy brook trout rose to her offering. I quickly followed her example and watched another brookie rise to the caddis pattern.



*Client of Jon Lockwood*

## **Hidden Treasures**

Savard hid her car for a good reason. A guide's knowledge of local waters is a valuable commodity. During a decade of yearly trips to Pittsburg, I had never discovered her short path to some of the most productive water on a blue-ribbon trout stream.

Clients also pay for a guide's understanding of what fish are likely to be taking as the season progresses. When a guide like Savard is on the river four or five days a week, she doesn't need to see an active caddis hatch to know the trout see enough of them to recognize a familiar food.

If Lisa Savard showed me how to get to a secret place on the river, her husband Tim showed me how to catch trout in one of the most visible places on the river.

The stretch gets a lot of pressure because it is immediately below one of the dams and a very short walk from a parking lot. It seems to breed wary trout.

Tim Savard led me on a brief tour of the section before we began fishing. He pointed out the places that were most likely to hold fish, again providing an expert's perspective on a trout stream.

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## To Become a Licensed New Hampshire Fishing Guide:

Here's how to become a New Hampshire fishing (or hunting) guide.

First, you have to apply to the New Hampshire Fish and Game Department for a guide's license and submit the appropriate fee. You can apply as a resident or nonresident hunting or fishing guide.

Then, you have to take and pass a guide's exam. The fishing guide test covers such topics as fishing rules and regulations, fisheries management practices, fish life cycles, laws covering guides and their clients, New Hampshire geography, flora and fauna, emergency first aid and CPR, and boating regulations.

*Also, to be a guide, you must:*

- ✓ Have a valid hunting or fishing license;
- ✓ Be at least 18 years old;
- ✓ Have successfully completed basic first aid or CPR and submit proof of current certification; and
- ✓ Have a conviction-free record of fish and game violations at least two years before applying. Rules also cover length of time since conviction for misdemeanors and felonies.

Remember, that's the bare minimum to become a guide. To be a great guide, you've got to know the territory – some territory – whether you specialize at bass on Squam Lake or fly-fishing in the North Country. You also need to have a good sense of humor, flexibility in your plans, and be able to market yourself. Lots of guides are now advertising their services on the Internet.

For an information packet on becoming a guide, call 603-271-3127.

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Experience has taught the Savards that tiny bead-head nymphs attract the Connecticut's finicky trout. He pressed a ball of orange bio-strike indicator to the leader, and showed me how to flick the rig upstream and allow the nymph to drift naturally. By my third cast I saw the indicator move upstream as I felt a pull on the line and set the hook.

### *Knowing the Tricks*

Those little nymphs won't work across Coos County to the east. Guide Ray Cotnoir of Moose Jaw Guiding Service in Randolph has learned that heavily weighted attractor nymphs combined with a smaller pattern on a dropper line produces results in the big waters of the Androscoggin.

Cotnoir's clients range from experienced anglers who appreciate the opportunity to get within casting range of the Androscoggin's biggest trout, to novices who use his drift boat as a floating classroom.

A good guide "consistently gets clients of all levels to catch fish," Cotnoir said. "Another great challenge is to develop a sense of what it is that a client is looking for on a day out on the water." That might be improving casting or learning how to nymph fish in pocket water.

Cotnoir was one of the state's first guides to float with the MacKenzie River drift boat, a craft popular with guides on Western rivers. It's a rowboat that a skilled guide can hold steady in heavy rapids, providing stable casting platforms at the bow and stern.

After several years of fly-fishing, I considered my casting skills to be adequate. Then I spent an afternoon in Errol with



*Tim Savard, left and above, shows a few tips to a Japanese client.*

Cotnoir. A student of the Lefty Kreh approach, Cotnoir quickly pointed out that my wrist was flying open during my back cast. He also showed me a number of tricks in fishing the Androscoggin's alder fly hatch and in making flies visible and effective in the murky depths.

### *Winnepesauki's Bass*

The two-tiered fishery of New Hampshire's largest lake presents a different set of challenges to anglers. After the early-season shallow-water trolling season for landlocked salmon fades into late spring and the fish retreat to the deepest waters, fishing picks up for smallmouth bass.

River anglers have some chance to read the water and figure out where the fish are likely to hold. The superficial view of Lake Winnepesaukee's vast reaches doesn't offer many clues.

Bass anglers put a lot of stock in finding bass-friendly



*Ray Cotnoir of Randolph knows the subtleties of the Androscoggin River.*

structure. Whether it's rocky shoals, submerged weed beds, or sudden drop-offs, bass seem to like some variety in their environs. A good bass guide knows where to find it, sometimes a daunting task if most of the lake bottom is featureless muck.

Guide Jim Brown of Manchester calls himself the "bass harasser." He has spent nearly two decades looking at bottom profiles on the screens of two electronic fish finders. He also hones his skills by regularly competing in bass fishing tournaments.

Brown recently traded in a big bass boat driven by a high-powered outboard for an even larger boat equipped with an engine with extra horsepower. It also features a glittering metalflake decor popular with bass anglers.

I was impressed when his old boat reached interstate highway speeds on the wide-open expanses of the lake. Hold onto your hat if you decide to hire him next summer. His theory is that less time spent traveling to a fishing destination allows that much more time for fishing.

### *Knowledge of the Water*

If you're looking to hire a guide, Brown suggests that you make sure it's "someone who has the knowledge of the water. If he is supplying tackle, it should be in good working condition. An adequate or more than adequate boat – that should be a priority. I have been with someone down south who would scare you."

A good guide "should know what he (or she) is fishing for, what their

habits are," Brown said. In different seasons, fish react differently. A good guide "should know where exactly and when to look for what you are fishing for."

For a guide, the biggest challenge "is to be sure the people have a good time," Brown said. "Some (clients) just enjoy the day. Some want to catch numbers. Others want to catch big fish. Usually we talk to them before we meet, so I have an idea what they're looking for."

Even the best guides know that there are some days when the fish just don't bite. "You know they should, but they just don't," Brown said. Anyway, few clients complain about it, and Brown is tougher on himself than the clients are.

### *A Few Tips for Clients*

If you want to hire a guide to help you improve your skills while learning local waters, here are a few tips gleaned from several trips with the professionals.

1. Above all, treat your guide with respect. Be honest about your skills and what you are hoping to learn. Your goal is not to impress your guide or show off your skills. A guide's job is to put you in the right place and help you improve, not to be amazed at what a great angler you have become.

2. If you are uncertain about what the guide fee covers, ask about it. Sometimes the guide fee for a full day on the water includes lunch or other snacks. Find out about this in advance. You may have to pack your



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*Jim Brown, who often guides anglers on Lake Winnepesaukee, knows where the lake's smallmouth bass are.*

own or go hungry. Also, don't ask a guide to spend more time that you have paid for. If you do spend some extra time because the fish start biting at the end of the day, be thankful.

3. Understand that a guide is a regulated professional who is responsible for your safety. If a driftboat guide tells you sit down through a heavy set of rapids, take a seat. If the guide wants to get off the river when a thunderstorm approaches, don't argue. A graphite rod will act as a lightning rod.

4. Be prepared to pay a premium fee for a boat guide. It takes a lot of money to purchase and maintain either a high-powered bass boat or drift boat.

5. When appropriate, especially if fishing alone with a guide, invite him or her to fish with you. Many won't cast a line unless invited because they have so many other responsibilities. When a guide catches fish, you know you have been taken to prime water.

Most guides are independent professionals who earned the license because they love fishing and want to pass it on to others. They also need to be compensated for their time and investment. Hiring a guide can be a worthwhile investment in your own fishing future.

*For a complete list of New Hampshire fishing guides, visit [www.wildlife.state.nh.us/fishing\\_guides.html](http://www.wildlife.state.nh.us/fishing_guides.html).*

### **Guide's Creed:**

- 1. I will do all in my ability to fulfill what is promised to a client.**
- 2. I will be aware and sensitive to all of the necessary things I must do to make a client's trip worthwhile and a happy experience.**
- 3. I will honor my client's wishes above my own.**
- 4. I will practice good sportsmanship and a sense of responsibility at all times.**
- 5. I will abide by all New Hampshire Fish and Game laws and rules.**
- 6. I will avoid the use of alcohol while working.**