

FISHING GUIDES I HAVE KNOWN

(Including some I wish I hadn't)

Story and photos by Jim Gourlay

THE GOD'S HONEST TRUTH is I don't like fishing with a guide; never did. My ultimate (however self-ish) preference is to fish in solitude 100 miles from the nearest human being – and I have, but unfortunately not very often.

But we quickly confirm our opinion that guiding is an honourable profession.

Over the years I have enjoyed the company of dozens upon dozens of guides and some of those relationships have blossomed into friendships of longstanding. The dynamic between guide and sport

can be fascinating – and the diversity of talent in the profession mind-boggling.

In fact, the question arises: what are the qualifications/requirements for becoming a good fishing guide? Is this written down anywhere? Is there a credible test to be written anywhere? Could such enigmatic credentials be plausibly tested?

And so we reach back to personal experience for the measuring sticks – personality, resourcefulness, communication and service. Who most impressed, and why. And who didn't, and why.

Let's start with the latter - folks who were, shall we say, at the low end of the tipping scale.

That would include the fool who charged a per diem for accommodations and guiding, then added \$5 a head for transportation to and from the river each day – then fished down the pool ahead of his sports (I was not among them). Not much repeat business there.

Or the bright spark who arrived at 8 a.m. every morning to take us fishing in bright sun and 90-degree heat knowing full well no fish could be taken after 6:30 a.m. – then threatened to report me for going fishing on



Christopher (Topher) Browne

the final day in desperation at 6 a.m. sans guide. I got my salmon and left town before the gendarmes arrived.

Or the young fella I invited to fish (having noted his rod in the boat) while I enjoyed a celebratory cigar after landing a nice one – only to have to beg him to let me fish again an hour later.

And there was the experienced guide to whom I extended precisely the same invitation for precisely the same reason – only to have him kill a grilse then announce there was a camp-enforced two-fish boat limit and we were done for the day – at 8:30 a.m. And the know-it-all who berated me and cursed my single hook fly and

rifle hitch knot in extreme low water – until we had hooked into six fish and landed four when there hadn't been one taken in camp for almost a week...

But then there are the champions, the Oscar winners, the prima donnas of the profession – people who have clearly found their niche. I have met only a few of the many who are out there.

My personal category winners then:

PERSONALITY

My old friend **Perry Munro** of South Mountain in Nova Scotia who so regales his guests with wisdom and insight and stories and his depth of knowledge and understanding of all things natural that they rebook for the experience almost regardless of how the fishing was. Self-taught, but having spent a lifetime learning, when no-one's looking, I swear this man talks to fish. He is also invited to talk to people - at fisheries seminars and conventions from one end of the continent to the other.

RESOURCEFULNESS

Christopher (Topher)

Browne, whom I only met last year while at Camp Bonaventure, on the gorgeous Gaspé, watched me struggle in a gale, wading deep with a high bank tight behind and the toughest of casts across a fast rip into slow water. I snapped the tip of a new Sage rod seconds after whacking it with the fly.

“Back in a minute,” says he; returns to his vehicle, and presents his crestfallen charge with – a replacement Sage rod.

Originally from Concorde Mass, now living in Durham Maine (when not off guiding somewhere) the man’s credentials are interesting:

A decade in the L.L. Bean fly shop; two years spring creek guiding in Livingstone, Montana; has fished all major salmon streams in Canada plus steelhead on the U.S. west coast, as well as Iceland and Argentina; consorted with Steve and Tim Rajeff and threw 190 feet in the U.S. fly casting championships; tutored by Jim Vincent and former British champion Simon Gawesworth in Spey casting; mentored in conventional fly tying by Warren Duncan, and in classics by Bob Veberka and Ron Alcott. He is also, I discovered in conversation, quite a student of classic angling literature...

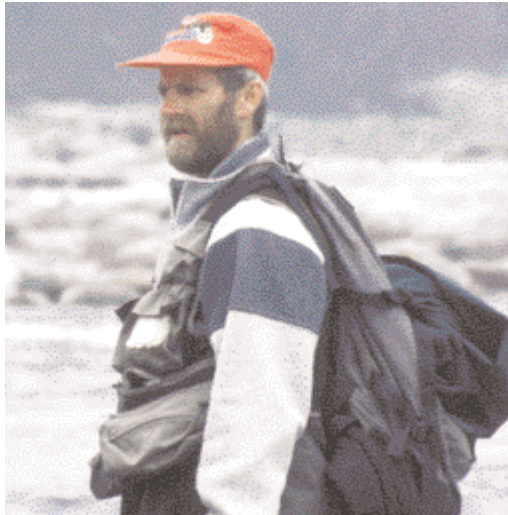
...And, besides, he hooked me up with a rather large fish in rather tough conditions.

COMMUNICATION

Camp owner and guide **Tony Tuck** of Grey River Lodge in Newfoundland is an absolute master of the interpersonal skills so critical to good guiding; the ability to unobtrusively bridge that gap between guide, coach and friend. Tony can teach without coaching and direct without offending. This soft-spoken man has the usual river knowledge that is required of a guide, but can also demonstrate an understanding of salmon and their habits that borders on mysticism.

SERVICE

Many moons ago, the Chant clan from the



Tony Tuck



Janice Sweetland

Newfoundland outpost of Lapoile were our hosts on the river of the same name. Commercial fishermen during the winter months, the boys guided summer long up the river. But this guiding involved long, long hikes up and down a river with no roads or vehicles (save an old tractor), cooking, cleaning, wood chopping, Black bear-chasing, and just about everything else.

My Oscar nominee for ultimate service in unfavourable circumstances is **Sid Chant** who escorted us one day to nine-mile pool, so-called because that is its distance from camp. No roads or even real trails, remember: just bogs and river rocks that move under your feet and frequent river crossings. Sid carried a heavy load of lunches, beer and odds and ends in one of those old Czechoslovakian backpacks that chafe the shoulders and punish the spine and he had the purple welts to prove it by the time we arrived. He also wore the typical black, feltless thigh-high rubber boots of the Newfoundland guide and, upon arrival upriver, removed them to reveal

common nylon socks with the heels worn out – and blisters so deep they bled.

Not only did this man fail to utter a word of complaint, he promptly undressed to his Y-fronts, donned a snorkel mask, and commenced to peer underwater to spot fish for his sports.

Then he walked back nine miles.

AESTHETICS

Had I not travelled to Newfoundland last year to be hosted by **Barry** and **Janice Sweetland**, a husband and wife team who operate Where-ya-wannabee Lodge outside Corner Brook, there would be no such category. This is a very comfortable operation in every sense, especially for couples – and Janice is far and away the most attractive guide I’ve ever encountered.

Jim Gourlay is the Editor of the Atlantic Salmon Journal