

Valley Angler
The Joys of Being A Fishing Guide
by Bill Thompson

From the perspective of one who has been doing it a while now, guiding can be down right hard work. I have been told on several occasions by customers how lucky I am to be a fishing guide. Now in all honesty they are right and I really have no right to complain. On the other hand there are days that you do have to wonder why on earth you are doing this.

This past weekend I was fortunate to guide a party that will no doubt go down as one of the best trips ever.

We have a new fellow guiding for us this year at the North Country Angler. He is kinda young, but he shows some promise. He has been hanging around the shop now for a few years. Not that long ago he was a student at the University of New Hampshire. Even back then he was an avid angler, but it was the skiing that kept bringing him back to the "Valley". While attending UNH he was a member of the school's outdoor club. The club is fortunate to have a camp on Iron Mountain which provides a great base camp for skiing and hiking in the White Mountains. The members of the UNH outdoor club have a habit of stopping at Elvio's Pizza which just happens to be right next door to our shop. Which is how we first came to know Nate.

Nate Hill graduated from UNH a couple of years ago and now teaches Freshman English at Kennett High School. Regular readers of this column may remember an article a while back about Nate when he was doing an internship at another high school in Maine. The piece was about how Nate and his mentor taught a segment on a River Runs Through It.

A few weeks ago Nate passed the New Hampshire Guide's test. Janet and I had agreed that once he had passed the test we would bring him on as one of our guides. Nate had his first guide the next weekend with a couple of ladies just starting out in the sport. Teaching trips are fairly low key as our primary objective is to teach the client how to cast. The first trip went well and we immediately booked him for the next weekend for an all day trip on the Androscoggin. I guess I had misinterpreted the true number in the party and when all was said and done we went from three to six. I was quickly enlisted to help out. This unfortunately left Janet all alone in the shop on a busy Saturday. Well, you know what they say: "Someone has to do it". Or as Summer is fond of saying: "A day on the river beats the heck out of a day in the shop". Smart dog.

Our party consisted of three generations of one family. Grandfather headed up the clan of two sons and three grand children. The eight of us met preciously at 0800 hours. Once coffee cups were refilled and Janet's famous blueberry muffins had been distributed we headed north.

The first highlight of the day was spotting a moose as we passed Pontook Dam. It only got better as the day went on. Despite the fact that we were faced with a cold damp rainy day all members of the party caught trout. Now from a guide's point of view this makes any trip an unqualified success. However, like all fishing trips the fish had very little to do with making the day a success. OK, it helps, but as any real angler or philosopher will tell you it is the journey that matters.

What made this trip special were the people. The three young men who were in the party ranged from 10 to I would guess around 17. Any guide, teacher or parent will tell you it is no easy feat to keep a bunch of kids focused. Fly fishing requires a modicum of patience, something that a lot of young people are short on. Our guys turned out to be real troopers. Their perseverance paid off and they all caught fish. The oldest proved to be a fishing machine and do to his willing to take a calculated risk and athletic ability caught far more and the largest fish of the trip.

The youngest, as you might suspect, was the shortest and was at a distinct disadvantage when it came to wading. None the less he hung in there and caught his fair share. Nothing seemed to dampen his sprits.

The middle boy was, according to his father, not an outdoors person and was only happy when glued to his computer. I think that right after his first trout he had a small change of heart.

The two Dads were a couple of great guys. Their father was the commensurate gentleman and the model of the old time sportsman. It was the “old man” who had organized the trip and his goal was to give his boys a chance to enjoy the outdoors and perhaps come a little closer in the bargain. Somewhere along the line I think the mission was accomplished. We have a couple of great pictures of smiling fathers and sons with trout, laughing grandsons with trout and a very happy grandfather with trout.

I am pretty much of a catch and release kind of guy and that is the way I run my guide trips. On this trip I was persuaded to by the grandfather to harvest a few fish for the table. He explained to me that it was important to him that his grandsons to learn what the sport is truly all about. Although I was reluctant at first he made a good case and I went along. In the end it doesn't hurt once in a while to remind ourselves that fishing is a blood sport. When we got together the next day they all remarked on how much they enjoyed their trout dinner.

The other plus to the day was that I got to work with Nate. I had thought that I had established a pretty good relationship with the boys but after they had spent the afternoon fishing with Nate there was no question as to who was the top dog. The oldest boy was so impressed with Nate that he thought he might like to take up guiding as a profession. It may not be too late to persuade the boy to take up something that pays a little better. I must admit that I was impressed with Nate as well. Like I said he shows some promise.

The summer is young and there will be a lot of other trips before we have to stow the rods for another winter. It is a far bet that they will not all go this well.

See you on the river.