

GUIDANCE AND GUIDES

BUD LILLY AND
PAUL SCHULLERY



*An understanding between guide
and client is essential for success.*



[Internationally known outfitter and guide Bud Lilly has retired from his shop in West Yellowstone, but he has written down a legacy of a lifetime's work in guiding and outfitting in a newly released book. The following excerpt from Bud Lilly's Guide To Western Fly Fishing by Bud, who is now living in Bozeman, Montana and Paul Schullery, describes what to expect from guides and how to work with them to make the most of your fishing trip. The book is available from Nick Lyons Books. See a review of the book elsewhere in this issue. THE EDITORS.]



AS I'VE WATCHED the guiding business over the past 35 years, I've seen a steady improvement in the qualities of the guides. A lot of them learned to fish in the last 15 or 20 years and have been introduced to all the new ideas and methods that have appeared in that time. They keep up on new tackle, many are expert or professional fly tiers, many are college educated, and most are fun, interesting people to be with. Your chances of having a good experience with a Western guide get better all the time.

In trying to find a good guide, it is always wise to talk to people who have fished the area before, and rely on a well-respected tackle shop. If they've got a good reputation, their guides probably do too.

Even if you have talked to someone, be careful about assuming too much based on what they tell you. Their experience may not be the experience you want. For example, if your friend tells you that he fished out of such-and-such a tackle shop, with a guide named Dale, he may insist that you try to get Dale when you go there. That shop may have six or seven guides, and they all are probably specialized to some extent. Your friend may have fished with Dale on the Frying Pan, and you may want to fish Colorado's alpine lakes. Dale may never have hiked a day in his life. By insisting on Dale, you put him, the outfitter, and yourself in a bad spot. It's better to rely on the outfitter to assign you to a guide who can do you the most good with the fishing you choose to do. The outfitter knows his guides best.

HUGH MOSSMAN WATERCOLOR

Guidance and Guides . . .

Your outfitter will certainly be able to give you some solid information about your fishing well in advance. He will be able to tell you what kind of tackle is appropriate, and what special conditions you may encounter. But don't ask him for more than that. If you've booked a trip months in advance, which is the best way, he's not going to know what the weather or water conditions or hatches are going to be like then. A few days before you arrive he will have a better idea, but even then, with those things being so susceptible to sudden change, he can't tell you for sure. That is just a reality of fishing, wherever you go, and an outfitter and guide can't change those unpredictable elements of fishing, though they may be able to react creatively with alternative plans if need be. The smartest thing you can do is relax and put yourself in the hands of the outfitter and guide. Let them use their best judgment. Once you start trying to second-guess the guide, proposing places to fish or trying to overrule his plan, you're increasing the chance that your trip won't work out. If he's a good guide, he'll consult you about any decisions and plans, either the night before or as the day goes along, but don't forget that he's in charge. Order him to go where you think you ought to go and he'll start to lose interest; you are not respecting his professional position, and he'll be inclined to think, "Well, this guy thinks he's so hot, he doesn't need me." You're paying for *him* to make the decisions. Let him. If you're not satisfied at the end of the day, the best thing to do is not use that guide again.

Fishing is exciting partly because it's so uncertain. No guide can or should guarantee you that you'll catch a lot of fish, or even any fish. But a good one will work his tail off for you trying.

Well in advance, you can get a lot of basic information from the outfitter: what size rods you'll need, leaders to bring, fly patterns you ought to tie or buy, and so on. These things are not absolute either, though, and you may need to buy something when you get there. You're starting off on the wrong foot if you are instantly suspicious that your outfitter and guide are trying to bilk you by encouraging you to buy a few flies. The sale of a few flies is not a life-or-death matter for them. You've already spent several hundred dollars getting there and hiring the guide, to say nothing of what you've already spent on tackle. If you are told at the last minute that there's been a surprise hatch of #14 Lavender Wulffs during the last few days and you only have #14 Chartreuse Wulffs, you ought to trust your outfitter that you need a few flies. Your out-

fitters success is your success.

If you are out on the stream and you find that you don't have the right fly, the guide may provide one. The guide often will try to anticipate possible hatches, and he may recommend that you buy some at the shop, or he may choose instead to bring some along and provide them only if you need them. It is customary, if he does provide you with flies, for him to put them on your bill. Unless he tells you otherwise, assume you will be billed for them. Guides often bring flies along because some clients are suspicious and are unwilling to buy enough of the flies they are told they will need. They'll say, "Oh well, I guess I'll take one of these and one of these, just in case," and of course having one of some pattern is almost worse than having none at all; that single fly will last 15 minutes, then it's up to the guide to be ready with some flies or the client's fishing may be over for the day. It's not good manners for the client to "borrow" a few for the day that he can return if he doesn't need them. Few flies that have been shaken around all day in someone's vest are still new, even if they haven't been tied on a leader.

You can help the outfitter and the guide, and increase the chance you'll have a good trip, if you make clear in advance any unusual problems or circumstances they should know about. There is nothing wrong, and a lot right, about telling them if you have a bad knee and can't wade fast water, or that you have never mastered distance casting. You don't need to say too much about it; once the guide has been alerted to it, it's his job to watch and see just what you can and can't do. He'll ask you before undertaking any adventurous wading, or he'll check your casting the first place you stop to fish, and judge his options from there. He may well coach you on improvements. The best guides are good teachers, partly because they have seen every imaginable fishing problem.

It's also very useful to let them know what kind of fishing you favor. Do you favor dry flies, or hate streamers? Do you prefer quiet waters where hatch-matching is important, or fast pocketwater where a big nymph is best? This gets even more important if you're bringing your family, and your nine-year-old son wants to fish (or you want him to fish, which is an entirely different thing from the guide's point of view). If you want the guide to concentrate on the son, make it clear and mean it. Of course the outfitter must be forewarned of how many people will be along, and how the guide should divide his time.

Any kind of problem—dietetic problems, sun prob-

lems, anything—should be brought to the guide's attention before you go out.

You also should consider any special interests that may require the guide's expertise, such as photography. Many guides are enthusiastic photographers, and will happily take some pictures of you and your fish, but they are not expected to. If you want to have good pictures and are not equipped to take them yourself (or to bring a camera for the guide to use), let the outfitter know what you want.

Customarily, transportation is the guide's responsibility. If you want to use your car for some reason, that's fine, but you're paying for transportation either way. On float trips, the outfitter is usually responsible for picking up the trailer and arranging the dropping off of the car at the end of the trip.

Going Fishing with a Guide

DON'T BE AFRAID of the guide. If you lack experience, or confidence, or skill, don't worry about it. The guide has seen it all before and has fished with people 10 times worse than you. All he needs from you is that you pay attention and do the best you can. He is used to accommodating his fishing trip to the needs, strengths, and limitations of the people he's guiding on any given day.

On the other hand, don't treat the guide like a lackey. He isn't just a servant you hired. If he's a good man, he's a professional in the fullest sense of the word. He's devoted a major part of his life to learning the craft of guiding, and he almost certainly does it because he loves rivers and fly fishing.

On this same subject, it isn't his job to try to impress you with his fishing ability. If he's a good guide, he can catch a lot of fish, and he has no need to prove that to you. He wants you to catch them. If things are going well, you should feel free to encourage him to go ahead and fish too. If you're new to the area and feel that you're getting the hang of it, maybe you'll want to send him off up the river to leave you alone for a while; it does make some people nervous to have someone constantly hanging on their shoulder, no matter how helpful he may be. Feel free to ask for some solitude if you get in that mood. If a guide fishes too much and doesn't give you enough help, you've got a lemon and may have to remind him that he's the guide. But he should do enough fishing to help locate the fish, see what they're feeding on, and get you into the right spot with the right fly and coach you as needed.

Every now and then you may get a poor guide, who is either unable to communicate with you, or simply doesn't know what he is doing; but people like that don't stay in business long and usually can't find outfitters to associate with them.

You don't hire a guide necessarily just to find the good places so you can return to them later. A good guide has much more than that to offer, in hints on reading the water, fly choice, and a hundred other things. What you want to learn from him is not so much where all the good spots are, but how to fish the water. It's a mistake to think that if you hire a guide for

a few days, you will learn what you need to know about fishing the area and will never need to use a guide again. Perhaps a few days is all you can afford, and you have learned enough to get in a lot of good fishing. But remember that the guide has been fishing the area every day for years and knows which spots become good at which water levels, which spots are affected by a sudden storm that muddies the water, and all kinds of other things that only can be learned from that depth of experience. If you were fortunate enough to be able to afford a guide every day of the season, then you would get some idea of just how much he has to know to do his job right.

The length of the fishing day is also a matter that you'll almost certainly have reason to wonder about. It isn't a clear-cut thing, but there are some general rules.

There are clients who, at about 5:00 in the afternoon, announce that "I'll bet it will be good this evening." The guide has already put in an 11- or 12-hour day, starting very early to get the boat ready, get the lunches together, and so on, and he's getting cross-eyed from wrestling the oars. What happens next is up for grabs.

Let's say that you fished all day and caught nothing. The mosquitoes were bad, you got soaked in three storms, and you dropped your sandwiches in the river. All of a sudden, about the time you're thinking of quitting, the sun comes out and there's a great hatch and the fish are feeding everywhere. If at that point the guide wants to walk away from it, he's a jerk. He is obligated to stay in there and see to it that you get some good fishing.

But let's say you've been fishing all day and have caught some good fish and had a lot of fun, and it's getting late. You are getting tired, and you can see that the guide is too. If at that point you don't quit, you're the jerk. Be reasonable.

It's easier to judge what is a complete day of fishing when you float a river, because the guide can judge how long it will take to fish from the put-in to the take-out. But if the guide meets you at the river at 10 A.M. and you're home by 4 P.M., you really haven't had much of a day. A reasonable day is from about 8:00 in the morning, when you leave the place you meet, until about 5:00 or 6:00 in the evening. Then you'll be back at the meeting place by 7:00 or so, and nobody will be exhausted.

A river is sometimes a dangerous place. Most outfitters have some firm rules about anything that endangers either the client or the guide, and perhaps the most frequent risks are because of drinking. Hard liquor is a bad idea on a fishing trip, especially on a float trip. If you want beer in the cooler, you should not expect the guide to pay for it, though you can arrange with the outfitter for it to be provided. A beer or two is a welcome refreshment on a hot day, and some wine with lunch is also popular. Excessive drinking is not only dangerous, it is probably a violation of the guide's insurance.

If you want something out of the ordinary in the way of food, let the outfitter know. The normal lunch is some sandwiches, fruit, potato chips, cookies,

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SHIRLEY CLEARLY ILLUSTRATION

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cheese and crackers, chocolate, and other picnic-type items. If you want more, you usually will pay for it. Some outfitters specialize in cooking lunch, which takes time from fishing but can be a wonderful break in the middle of the day. A cooked lunch may use up an hour and a half or two hours.

Guide-Client Etiquette

IF YOU'RE GOING to fish with a guide for several days, try not to eat up all his time by having breakfast with him ev-



MICHAEL SAKAMOTO ILLUSTRATION

ery day or inviting him out to close the bars with you. If you do it thinking that you might wheedle a few extra secrets out of him, he'll see through it right away.

If the two of you really do hit it off and want to spend more time together, that's fine too. But respect his privacy. The best thing to do, as a rule, is meet him for fishing every day and maybe buy him a dinner at the end of the trip. If you overimpose yourself on him, or get too chummy, you can get tired of each other or lose that barrier of professionalism that protects both of you. As long as the relationship is a professional one, the guide feels an obligation to do the very best job he can. Once you're buddies, some of those responsibilities lose their clarity.

Keep in mind also that the guide is doing this every day all summer. He isn't just doing this for a week and then falling into a hospital somewhere, and he may not like a series of 18-hour days.

Tips on Tips

IF YOU'VE HAD a good day and are satisfied with the trip, it's customary and expected that you will give the guide a tip. The tip money is what keeps the guide's car running. The regular fee is pretty much taken up in his expenses

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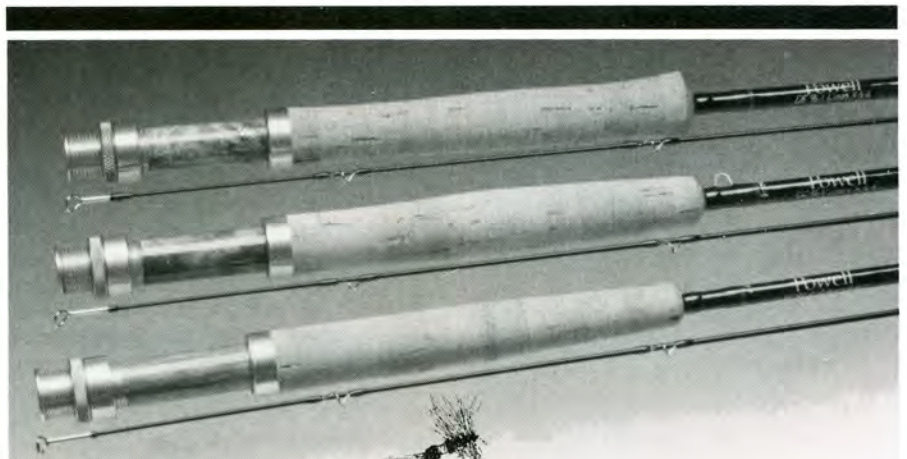
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involved with the boat, licenses and insurance, and his labor.

Some fishermen will give the guide some flies, or a book, or some gift of that sort, which can be nice, but the guide can't eat those things. He needs cash. I've been given some gifts that I treasure, and that have lasted a lot longer than the cash I've been given, so I don't want to understate the importance of such gifts. But it's no secret that fly-fishing guides, especially the full-time ones, just barely scrape by most of the time. And buying him dinner is not a replacement for the tip. Most of the restaurants near Western trout streams don't have anything on their menus that costs as much as a fair tip. Nowadays the average guide fee is \$175 to \$200 a day, and the average tip is 10 to 15 percent. If you take the guy out to dinner, then you probably ought to give him \$10 besides, if you want to do justice to the average. Of course, if you've had a great day, and he's done some spectacular work, then you shouldn't hesitate to give him more if you can afford it. The more people who do that, the more guides who will be aware of the likelihood of that extra incentive. He's obligated to do the very best he can, but it's just human nature to work harder when you know it's worth more.

Independent Contractors

THESE DAYS more and more guides work independent of any shop. Some started out by working with a shop, then after they developed a clientele they went on their own, probably for the greater independence and to save themselves the outfitter's commission. If they're good, pretty soon they will be busy just from referrals, and many of these guides are excellent. I've spoken mostly about guides here as associated with shops, and I've done that because that is my experience and because that is the way most guides work. If you find an independent guide through referral, that's great too. For a lot of people, especially those who don't have access to many referrals, the shop is just the easiest way to go. An outfitter with several guides also has an advantage because some of them will be specialists and may be best able to give you the trip you want. But don't rule out the possibility that you may find a superb independent guide. You may even be referred to one by an outfitter who is all booked up; guides can often shift from outfitter to outfitter as needed.

One of the biggest advantages of the outfitter who has a number of guides is that at the end of the day that outfitter will ask all of those guides where they

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went, what they caught, what flies they used, and all the rest. The outfitter who has all that information coming in has the best chance of putting his clients in the right spots the next day. A guide who works for more than one outfitter may actually know very little about fishing an area, because no outfitter is going to trust him with information that may be passed along to a competitor a few days later. The key here is loyalty; the guides who stick to one outfitter, or the guides who have their own independent operations, are the ones who have the best chance to stay informed. The drifter who moves from outfitter to outfitter, guiding here and there, may be so independent because no one really wants him too badly.

Most guides today are hired by outfitters as independent contractors. They are responsible for their own insurance and related business expenses. What they get from the outfitter is the connections with clients, access to the outfitter's network of information sources, and all the amenities of the shop, which are important to many clients.

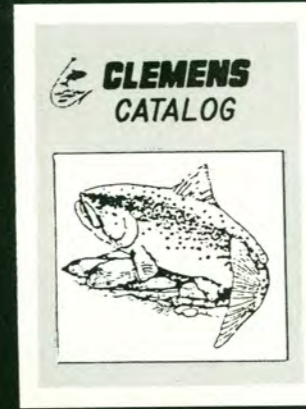
Coming Back

ONCE YOU'RE ACQUAINTED with an outfitter and his guides, you may well want to return and use the same guide or guides again. That's just fine, and often the outfitter can arrange the schedules so that you can fish with the same man year after year. Sometimes clients and guides maintain a professional and yet very friendly relationship for many years, corresponding in the off season.

Fishing with a professional guide can be a rewarding and memorable experience, an important part of a Western fishing trip. For a resident Westerner, even for one who thinks he knows Western fishing well, it can be a revelation. The professional fishing guide fishes more water and sees more of an area's fishing possibilities than even the most energetic "expert" outdoor writer. I'm convinced that everyone who is serious about fly fishing ought to try a guide at least once, and I'm sure there is no better way that the newcomer to an area or the person with limited time can get the most out of his fishing.

BUD LILLY is a veteran Western guide and for many years owned Bud Lilly's Fly Shop in West Yellowstone, Montana. Paul Schullery, whose latest book is *American Fly Fishing, A History*, published by Nick Lyons Books, has worked as a historian at Yellowstone National Park and is currently an associate editor with *Country Journal* magazine.

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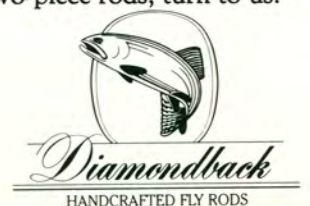
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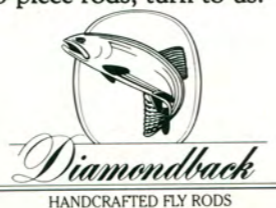
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