



THE NEW  
*Legends*

MEET FOUR HIGHLY ACCOMPLISHED NORTH CAROLINA FLY-FISHING GUIDES WHO HAVE BECOME LEGENDARY IN THEIR OWN TIME.

WRITTEN BY MARTY SHAFFNER



PHOTOGRAPHED BY MELISSA MCGAW

**T**he majority of people who practice a trade or participate in a sport can do so for a lifetime without ever acquiring the skills to rise to the top of their field. A few will acquire those skills and hone them to a razor's edge to be among the best. A very, very few who rise to the top of their field will stand out even among those at the top of their game. These people become legendary for their skills and achievements and, often, for their personalities.

This article started out as an idea to get a few fishing guides to name their two favorite North Carolina trout flies—one a dry fly, one a subsurface fly. I reasoned that to make the article work, the people I asked needed to carry a little weight in the North Carolina fly-fishing community. As I compiled all their accomplishments and their longevity in the sport of fly-fishing, I realized that these gentlemen were legendary in our state's fly-fishing circles. The majority of fly-anglers in North Carolina either know these people or know of them. So this article turned into one more about the people than the flies. Many years from now when people speak of noted North Carolina fly-fishermen such as Mark Cathey and Fred Hall, you can bet some of these gentlemen will be included in the conversation.

I am proud to say that I have gotten to know three of these gentlemen over the years, and they are counted among my friends. I have worked with these men on more than one occasion and they have always conducted themselves in a fair and professional manner. The other gentleman's reputation precedes him in a good way. All of these men have many achievements to their credit, but they all share two things: they're just plain great guys and are respected by others in their field. That speaks volumes, because the respect of your peers is one of the hardest things to earn.





**BO'S fun-loving personality and desire to teach others has made him a fly-fishing icon in the state of North Carolina.**



**Bo Cash sometimes ties on his version of an Elk Hair caddis, the Cash caddis, when fishing streams such as Upper Creek.**

### Bo Cash

William "Bo" Cash was born in Morganton and still lives a short distance away, on top of a wooded ridge looking out at Table Rock Mountain. Bo taught biology, ecology and general science at schools in Cleveland and Burke counties for 28 years, which is a great legacy in itself, but Bo is better known for being a teacher of fly-fishing. He has engaged in many outdoor activities during his lifetime, but fly-fishing has been his passion from a young age. Bo cast his first fly rod at the tender age of 8, which led to a steady progression in the sport from fly-fishing, to fly-tying, to rod building and finally to opening a fly shop he still operates, Table Rock Angler.

Bo has always given back to the sport way more than he has taken. His achievements include having been vice president and president of his local Trout Unlimited chapter, Table Rock TU, and he remains on the chapter's board of directors. He has served as treasurer and vice chairman of the N.C. Trout Unlimited council as well as being associate editor of the state TU newspaper. Bo has volunteered on many stream projects for TU, the N.C. Wildlife Resources Commission and the U.S. Forest Service, along with serving as an adviser to the Wildlife Commission from 1987 to 1989.

With all of Bo's accomplishments, his greatest, in my opinion, has been as an ambassador for the sport of fly-fishing statewide. Bo has introduced countless individuals to fly-fishing and helped many others improve their skills. Bo's fun-loving personality and

desire to teach others has made him a fly-fishing icon in the state of North Carolina. I don't think I have ever been in a group of fly-fishermen anywhere in the state without someone knowing Bo Cash, and they have always had nothing but good things to say about him. That's a legacy that speaks for itself.

**Q: IF YOU COULD HAVE ONLY ONE DRY FLY AND ONE WET FLY TO FISH NORTH CAROLINA STREAMS, WHAT WOULD THEY BE?**

**A:** An Elk Hair caddis would definitely be my dry fly and probably my own variation of a Gold-Ribbed Hare's Ear nymph would be my wet fly.

**Q: WHAT IS YOUR FAVORITE PLACE TO FISH FOR TROUT IN NORTH CAROLINA?**

**A:** Any of the many small wild trout streams that North Carolina has, especially those with gorge sections. I love to fish the plunge pools and pocket water that are created by the rapidly falling water in these beautiful, uncrowded places.

**Q: WHAT IS YOUR FAVORITE SPECIES OF FISH TO PURSUE WITH THE FLY-ROD?**

**A:** Native Appalachian brook trout. They just hold a special place in my heart.

**Q: IF YOU COULD SHARE ONE PIECE OF ADVICE WITH OUR READERS THAT YOU THINK WOULD IMPROVE THE AVERAGE FLY-FISHERMAN'S ON-STREAM SUCCESS, WHAT WOULD IT BE?**

**A:** To learn to better read the water. I see so many people fishing the wrong water or fishing water unlikely to hold fish. Most of the time, your first cast is your best chance at getting a bite, especially on small streams. If your first cast is presented in the right spot it ups your odds tremendously.

### Kevin Howell

Saying that Kevin Howell's father, himself a legend in North Carolina fly-fishing, gave him a pretty good foundation in the sport would be a huge understatement. By the time Kevin left for college, he had fished in 38 states and two foreign countries. After graduating from Appalachian State University, Kevin returned to the Brevard area and was first a teacher and

then after earning a master's degree in engineering, began designing houses. In 1997 he was offered the job as manager of Davidson River Outfitters (DRO), a job he just couldn't pass up.

With the passing of his father, Don Howell, in 1998, Kevin took over the operation of Dwight and Don's Custom Tackle, a business started by his father and uncle. He continued to manage Davidson River Outfitters, basically running both businesses. In 2000, Kevin was able to purchase DRO, and he combined the two operations under the Davidson River Outfitters name. Since then, he has turned it into one of the leading fly shops and outfitters in the state.

In addition to Kevin, who has been guiding since the early 1980s, DRO has several other guides working out of his shop and stocks a full line of quality tackle for the fly-fisherman. In addition to being a Federation of Fly-Fisherman certified casting instructor and nationally known fly-tier, in 1999 he released a book entitled "Tying and Fishing Appalachian Trout Flies" documenting his family's fly patterns and their important part in the history of North Carolina fly-fishing.

And if all this wasn't enough, in 2005 he placed third in the "Fly Fishing Masters" a national fly-fishing tournament televised by what is now the Versus cable channel. Then he turned around and won the tournament in 2006. Kevin showed that you don't have to live west of the Mississippi or north of the Mason-Dixon line to be a great trout fisherman.

**Q: IF YOU COULD HAVE ONLY ONE DRY FLY AND ONE WET FLY TO FISH NORTH CAROLINA STREAMS, WHAT WOULD THEY BE?**

**A:** My favorite dry fly would be the Yellow Mayfly, an old Appalachian pattern. As far as a subsurface fly, it would have to be one of my own patterns, the Kevin's Stonefly.

**Q: WHAT IS YOUR FAVORITE PLACE TO FISH FOR TROUT IN NORTH CAROLINA?**

**A:** My home waters, the Davidson River.

**Q: WHAT IS YOUR FAVORITE SPECIES OF FISH TO PURSUE WITH THE FLY-ROD?**

**A:** Smallmouth bass. I love fishing the French Broad for smallies.

**Q: IF YOU COULD SHARE ONE PIECE OF ADVICE WITH OUR READERS THAT YOU THINK WOULD IMPROVE THE AVERAGE FLY-FISHERMAN'S ON-STREAM SUCCESS, WHAT WOULD IT BE?**

**A:** I'll have to say two things that go hand in hand

and that is when nymphing, not getting a drag-free drift and not getting the nymph down deep enough. You have to learn how to mend your line correctly to get a drag-free drift, and most people don't use enough split shot or a heavy enough fly to get down on the bottom where most of the fish are.

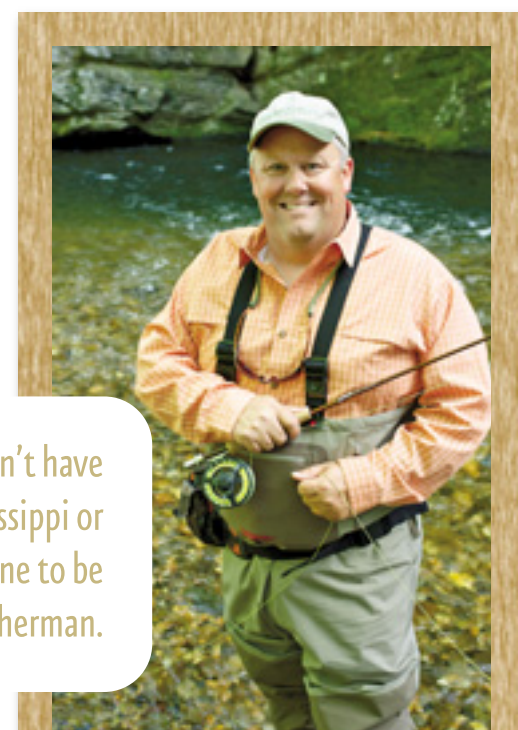
### Roger Lowe

The great Smoky Mountains of North Carolina is an area famous for its trout fishing and trout fishermen. Roger Lowe grew up in Waynesville, in the heart of the Smokies. He spent his childhood fishing and camping on the streams that course their way down the steep grades of these mountains. Roger learned the art of fly fishing from his father and grandfather, both master fly-fishermen in their own right.

A guide in the Smokies for more than two decades and former owner of Lowe's Fly Shop in Waynesville for many years, it is as a fly-tier that Roger is most famous. To watch him at the tying vise is to truly watch an artist at work—he is a master tier. I once watched Roger at a TU meeting demonstrate how to tie a Quill Gordon, a dry fly with split-wood duck wings and a quill body, a very hard fly to tie for most people. Not only did he tie them with the ease and speed that only a true expert can, they were some of the best proportioned and most beautiful flies I've ever seen. Although Roger has many original fly patterns to his credit, he is probably most famous for keeping the old Smoky Mountain fly patterns alive. In a day and age where everyone is looking for a newer and better fly, Roger has reminded us that those old patterns were standards for a reason: They caught fish and they still do!

Roger is also a top-notch businessman with a laid-back style and a confident, easy-going personality. He has written two books on tying the old Smoky Mountain fly patterns

**Kevin Howell prefers his own creation, a Kevin's Stonefly, as a subsurface fly on rivers such as the Davidson.**



**KEVIN showed that you don't have to live west of the Mississippi or north of the Mason-Dixon line to be a great trout fisherman.**



Noted tier Roger Lowe displays a Quill Gordon (left) and his favorite dry fly, a Yellow Mayfly (below).

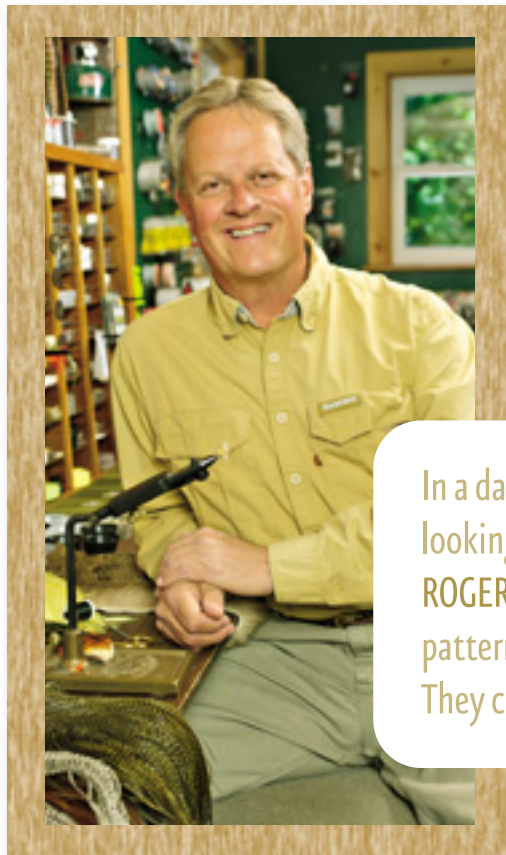


that his father and grandfather taught him, as well as his own original patterns. Roger also has a DVD on fly-tying, showing step by step how he ties some of those same patterns. He was featured on and tied the flies for the poster "Traditional Trout Flies of the Southern Appalachians," published by the Wildlife Commission.

Roger carved out a niche in the fly-fishing business world and has been very successful, but he recently has cut back on guiding to pursue other business opportunities. Roger is at heart just a good old country boy from Waynesville who loves to fly-fish and tie flies. It just so happens that he is one of the best in the state at both.

**Q: IF YOU COULD HAVE ONLY ONE DRY FLY AND ONE WET FLY TO FISH NORTH CAROLINA STREAMS, WHAT WOULD THEY BE?**

A: My favorite dry fly would be a Parachute Adams tied with a pale yellow body. It is a great variation on this old pattern. With all the yellow insects



In a day and age where everyone is looking for a newer and better fly, ROGER has reminded us that those old patterns were standards for a reason: They caught fish and they still do!

we have such as sulfurs, little yellow stones, light cahills and even crane flies, it has been a great producer for me. As far as a subsurface it's hard to pick between a Pheasant Tail nymph and a Prince nymph, but I guess my favorite is a rubber legged, bead head Prince nymph.

**Q: WHAT IS YOUR FAVORITE PLACE TO FISH FOR TROUT IN NORTH CAROLINA?**

A: No question about it, the Nantahala River.

**Q: WHAT IS YOUR FAVORITE SPECIES OF FISH TO PURSUE WITH THE FLY-ROD?**

A: Trout.

**Q: IF YOU COULD SHARE ONE PIECE OF ADVICE WITH OUR READERS THAT YOU THINK WOULD IMPROVE THE AVERAGE FLY-FISHERMAN'S ON-STREAM SUCCESS, WHAT WOULD IT BE?**

A: When the fishing is tough to use smaller flies and lighter tippet. A lot of anglers get in a rut of tying on the same old size 12 or 14 nymph with 3 or 4x tippet no matter what the conditions. Under clear low water and/or heavily pressured fish you need to downsize both your flies and tippet size.

### Ollie Smith

Oliver "Ollie" Smith may not have been the first fly-fishing guide in northwestern North Carolina, but he is definitely the most colorful and one of the best. I learned a long time ago that to be a good guide you not only have to get your clients to catch fish, but you must be a comedian, storyteller and philosopher. He is all of these. Ollie was born in Charlotte in 1963 and started fishing soon thereafter, but in 1982 a life-changing event occurred. When he started college at Appalachian State, the fly-fishing bug bit him hard.

He is a self-taught fly-fisherman, going through the school of hard knocks and trial-and-error. He cut his teeth on the small mountain streams around Boone and the tailwaters of east Tennessee. After college, he guided in Wyoming for a couple of seasons and did some commercial saltwater fishing from Alaska to the North Carolina coast. His heart was in the high country of North Carolina, though, so in 1995 he became a part owner of Foscoe Fishing Company, the Orvis store in the community of Foscoe, between Boone and Banner Elk. Then in 2001 he realized, although he

OLLIE'S enthusiasm, obsession for the sport, spinning of tall tales and his bigger-than-life personality have made him both a great guide and a legendary figure in North Carolina fly-fishing.



was the lead guide for Foscoe, that his heart was in guiding and not retail. He sold his portion of the business and still guides independently to this day.

Ollie's biography on his website says "Ollie Smith: Guide/Fanatic. Ollie has spent the last 37+ years catching fish. When not fishing, Ollie likes to talk about fishing, when not talking about fishing, Ollie enjoys thinking about fishing." His obsession with the sport can only be outdone by his enthusiasm for it. As a fellow guide and common friend of ours and said once, "Every time you go fishing with Ollie, it's like the first time he's ever been. Every time he sees a fish rise to a dry fly he is just as excited as he was the first time he ever saw a trout rise."

Ollie is also a pleasure to work with or around. When guiding on a river he always conducts himself in a professional manner. You can't fish with Ollie without his passion for fly-fishing spilling over to you. Ollie's enthusiasm, obsession for the sport, spinning of tall tales and his bigger-than-life personality have made him both a great guide and a legendary figure in North Carolina fly-fishing.

**Q: IF YOU COULD HAVE ONLY ONE DRY FLY AND ONE WET FLY TO FISH NORTH CAROLINA STREAMS, WHAT WOULD THEY BE?**

A: My favorite dry fly, although pretty much just a summer to early fall fly, is a beetle pattern. My favorite subsurface fly is a Zebra midge, I fish it in several different colors, but it is a solid producer especially in the winter.

**Q: WHAT IS YOUR FAVORITE PLACE TO FISH FOR TROUT IN NORTH CAROLINA?**

A: Any water I've never fished before. I love to explore new places that I've never been before. The thrill of not knowing what I might catch next or what is around the next bend is what I love!

**Q: WHAT IS YOUR FAVORITE SPECIES OF FISH TO PURSUE WITH THE FLY-ROD?**

A: Muskie, even though I've never gotten one on

the fly rod. But I'm going to get one this winter ... maybe.

**Q: IF YOU COULD SHARE ONE PIECE OF ADVICE WITH OUR READERS THAT YOU THINK WOULD IMPROVE THE AVERAGE FLY-FISHERMAN'S ON-STREAM SUCCESS, WHAT WOULD IT BE?**

A: Just like the old saying in golf "you drive for show and you putt for dough," most fly fishermen try to cast farther than they need to or have the ability to effectively fish. Short, accurate and soft-landing casts will catch more fish than long casts. Very few people can cast accurately and soft enough at long distances to fish them effectively. It is harder to properly mend and set the hook on long casts also. The short game is the good game. ♡

Marty Shaffner is a writer and fishing guide living in Elkin. He is a frequent contributor to Wildlife in North Carolina.

#### FISH WITH LEGENDS

Bo Cash  
www.tablerockangler.com

Kevin Howell  
www.davidsonflyfishing.com

Ollie Smith  
www.blueridgeanglers.com



Ollie Smith teaches Tara Lynch the technique in fishing a bead head Prince nymph in the Watauga River.