



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.



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.

## Ollie Smith

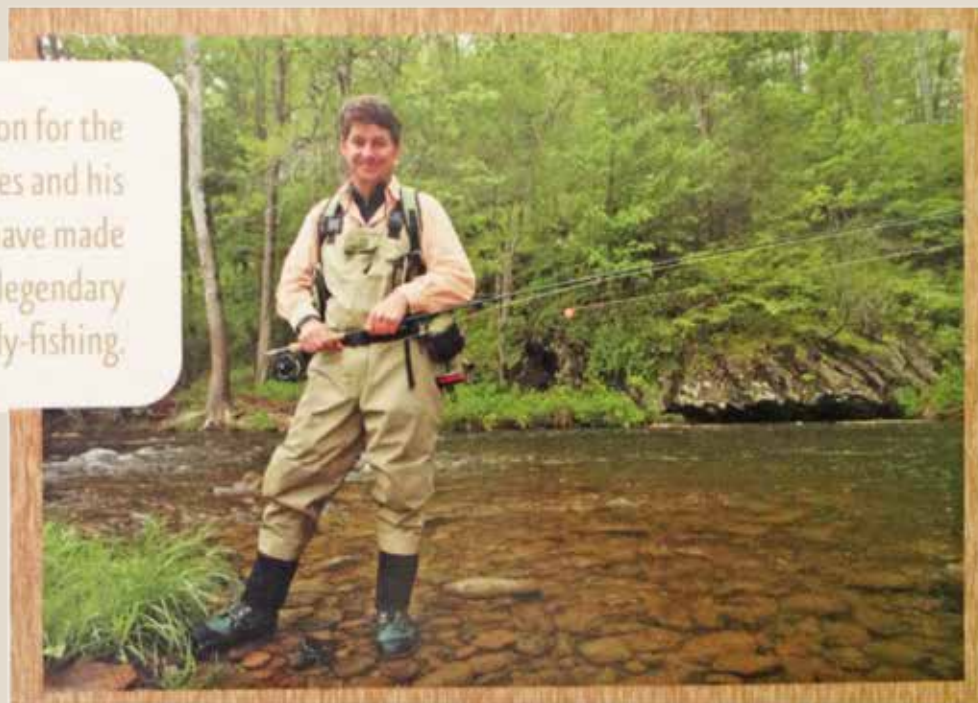
Oliver "Ollie" Smith may not have been the first fly-fishing guide in northwestern North Carolina, but he is definitely the most colorful and one of the best. I learned a long time ago that to be a good guide you not only have to get your clients to catch fish, but you must be a comedian, storyteller 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

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 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. ➔

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