

Tight Lines 2009 Guide's Year in Review



Bart Landwehr

At the end of another great season, I have been asked to share my thoughts on the summer.

So here goes...I have to first say that, from a guide's standpoint, the weather this year was awesome. We had consistent mild weather, which allowed for less angler fatigue, and seriously reduced beverage costs. Nice. It also allowed for the dog to appear each day, well the days that she didn't take herself out of the equation via injury. Weird year that way. A couple of run-ins with clam shells didn't agree with Marley's pads. Thanks Hunter for helping out with the late-night superglue sessions!

Speaking of Hunter, this season saw his introduction into the Tight Lines "family". While skepticism will always loom at first, I was more than impressed with Hunter's work ethic both on river and off. More than once when it was my turn to make the grocery run, Hunter offered to ride shotgun to keep me company. Nice.

The crew held tight once again with Tim, Nate, Hunter, and myself sharing quarters. And it was nice for Marley to find a new camp friend in Hunter's dog Sage. Nelson also made some key appearances at camp, wish they'd happen more, but with a wife and new child at home, we'll take whatever we can get.

This year also brought our buddy Todd Polacek into the mix a bit more to help out with overflow. I have to say, some of the greatest times of the summer were had during Todd's stays. Just a bunch of fish junkies sharing a beer and berating each other like siblings.

As for the fishing, come on, we work on arguably some the greatest smallmouth water in the world. Many great days were had, and I have to say that exploiting some more of the "headhunting" possibilities definitely got my blood boiling. Sight fishing to huge bass with trout patterns on a dead-drift, need I say more?

Some highlights:

- Cindy Finesilver making a perfect shot to a goliath fish that was sighted and had her completely unnerved. Named a spot after you on that one Cindy--way to go! Did I mention she connected with the fish on her first cast with a long leader, small bug, and a tough down and across with tricky currents? Yeehaw!
- Russ and Sue jacking a pair of sight-fished monsters at a spot called "Henry's Fork". All I had to do was set up anchor, spot the fish, and enjoy one hell of a show.
- Jon McMahan nailing a beast on a dragon fly pattern on a day that ended with us ducking for cover from a ferocious T-storm. Yikes.

There are so many more things I could rant about, but only so much space for my thoughts. Bummer. Thanks to my clients, my guide family, Charlie for never failing to come through when we need something done, and Tim and Sarah for keeping the ride going. Been at this for a decade now and I'm not even close to slowing down. See you all in 2010!

Best,
Bart and Marley



Nate Sipple

One word comes to mind when reminiscing on the 2009 smallmouth season; weird. It wasn't the customers, the fish or the food that you sometimes find when you're in extreme northern Wisconsin. It was the weather. This was the first summer that I can remember using the heated seats in my truck in August. We had frost advisories in late June, when it should have been muggy and in the 80's. A good number of July and August mornings started with a light fleece and a cup of coffee, instead of flats-style shirts and lots of bottled water. And the fishing sometimes reflected the abnormalities in the weather. Just ask Charlie how the carp fishing was (unless he looks grumpy). On the days that it didn't feel like summer, the fish were sometimes very tough to come by. Poppers ruled the majority of the summer. Every once in a great while, one of the other guides would come back to camp and proclaim that they'd gotten a fish on a Murdich or Barteaux. We'd laugh about it because that shouldn't be shocking. The pre-spawn trips definitely yielded some of the biggest fish of the summer, including a handful over 20" and two over 21". It was also a tough year from a water standpoint. There was a good amount of gel-coat left on the tops of rocks in the river. Some mornings you'd show up to float a stretch and you'd hardly even recognize it because they were holding so much water back at the dams. I'm serious Timmy, next year I'm guiding out of a Hover Craft. I wonder if they're as loud as a jet boat.

And if the summer hadn't already been strange enough, we got ants. Lots of ants spread out over lots of days. Some came in late July, some in early September. A couple of the days were epic and after a while, I think the fish just got sick of them. I particularly remember the day with Winston. He had been hearing about the ants for nearly a decade and the day he was in my boat the ants were blanketing the water in certain spots. But apparently on that day the fish could have cared less. We chuckled about it and about how he was going to go back to the shop and tell Tim that he was full of it. The next day there was 1/10th as many ants and the fish were gorging themselves on them once again. And kudos to my group from Tennessee, for I have never in my life seen more smallmouth put in a boat over a two day stretch.

It was also different having our new guide in camp, Hunter. There was that strange "getting to know you" period, kind of like being in college and rooming with a complete stranger in the dorms. At first it was kind of awkward, but halfway through the summer the ball was rolling just fine. Hunter's dog, Sage, was a great girl to have around camp, even if she did sometimes make my bed look like Chewbacca by the end of the day. You were thrown into the fire, but you did a great job, Hunter.

In closing, it was a strange, but once again awesome year. Even if I got hooked three times in the head by a popper, lost a half-dozen flies, fought twenty mile per hour head winds and got stung by a hornet, there was solace in knowing that I got to go back to camp to laugh about it all over beers and a burger with the most awesome group of guides....anywhere. If there was ever a year that we guides really had to work our tails off, sometimes just to put a small handful of fish in the boat, this was that year. Bart, Nelson, Tim, Todd and Hunter, you guys are the best.

Thanks again for a great summer and I can't wait for next season!

-Nate



Hunter Dorn

This has really been a great year. My summer with Tight Lines started when I was standing waist deep in the Baraboo River in June. It rained all day that day and was about 46 degrees. Fitting as I had scheduled a river clean-up. I got the phone call from Tim, promptly quit my desk job, and packed my boat and truck full of gear. My dog, Sage, got situated somewhere in the mix for the move.

This was my first season guiding for the Tight Lines team, and I wouldn't have traded it for the world. This summer re-affirmed why I love rowing a boat. We had extremely low water for most of the summer, and by the time I left in late September, it had gotten a little lower. Some of these fish, no matter how low the water got, still wanted to sit right along the bank, occasionally with their backs out of the water. They would wait for your unexpected Boogle Bug to float (not pop) past them before they slid over and sucked it down like a trout on the Henry's fork. Then the fireworks would start. I can't tell you how many times I heard WOW in my boat this summer.

Out of the 40 some trips I guided this summer, countless huge smallies made their way to hand. The river and the other guides made this a truly unforgettable summer for Sage and I. I can only hope for many, many more.

Catch you on the water,
Hunter



Charlie Piette

What a year to fish the Driftless Region! This was the best fishing I've seen in Southwest Wisconsin by a fair margin. It was quite interesting to see how the rivers had changed after the severe flooding of the past couple years. Yes, some of the rivers were beat up pretty badly, but even in those cases, the fish were typically still around. The flooding, or at least high water, had a positive effect on many of the creeks. In the simplest terms, there were lots of clean riffles that were thick with bugs.

It was the season of hatches and I got to fish a bunch of them with clients. The crop of BWO's was particularly thick. It was almost a given that on any day from the end of March into early June that if there was cloud cover, there were going to be fishable numbers of Olives. The number of BWO nymphs in some of the riffles was almost unbelievable. Rocks in April were absolutely coated with bugs. Flies representing Olives accounted for more fish than normal for me throughout the season.

The other hatches were also very good. Ninety degree weather in April brought on some of the thickest clouds of Black Caddis I've ever seen. Some days I witnessed caddis hatches of western proportions.....the kind where they're all over inside your waders and under your sunglasses. The bugs were particularly interesting one day. It was very warm and hazy. There were some caddis coming off early, but every so often, the sun would break through the clouds and the bugs would explode until the sun was covered again. This went on for a while until the clouds cleared for good and the river completely erupted. It seemed like every fish in the creek was temporarily rising with reckless abandon. This was one of the most exciting hatches I have seen to date. The sustained 25+ mph wind was a huge hindrance that day (remember Tom and Don?), but we did our damage none-the-less.

The fishing after the always bountiful March through May stretch remained exceedingly good this year. On a more typical year, the fishing will slow a bit in the heat of the summer, but that was not the case this time around. The temps were so mild that the creeks stayed cool and the fish were active. Terrestrial fishing from July on was great. Ants and beetles took most of my terrestrial fish, but I did get into some excellent hopper fishing in September. There were a few hopper eats that still make my heart accelerate when I think about them.

In the end, I got to spend a little over a month on the Spring Creeks this past season. I had a bunch of great trips with a lot of wonderful people. I'd like to extend a huge thank you to everyone who fished with me this year. You all made my trout season better than I probably deserved. I hope to see you all again next season. If you are down there in April, feel free to stop by my "house" and say hello. It's the permanently wet light blue tent at the West Fork campground.

Have a great off season,
Charlie Piette



Tim Landwehr

Another smallmouth season has come to a close. Looking back on the 2009 guide season, many different things stand out. First, as I am sure you can tell by the other guides' reports, it was a strange summer, the second coldest summer on record in fact. I can recall many mornings of looking at the truck thermometer as I picked up my customers and it registering 43 degrees. On August 28th, I scraped my windows. No kidding! A very hard frost required me to dig around in my truck to locate the ice scraper. Nothing says a great day of smallmouth fishing like a really hard frost! Our water temps finally reached 75 degrees on September 14th. I was not sure each day if I should apply sunscreen or wear a stocking cap and chopper mittens.

Cold weather and all, I have to say we had a great year. I think the challenging cold conditions made all of my guides even better. It made us all dig really deep into our bag of tricks to **make** the fish eat. Our fly selections were totally different than in years past and our stripping and popping techniques were modified. I think we boated more trophy fish this season than ever before. Talking to other anglers on the river, I got the impression that many struggled. This was not the season for just moving down stream and banging banks with poppers and streamers. This was a season of knowing the address of many fish and continually knocking on their doors. After the guide season, Bart and I discussed how much sight fishing to cruising fish we did. The bass were not the aggressive fish of the warm years past. They needed to be convinced of your fly and presentation.

We had another addition to the Tight Lines guide crew this season. Hunter Dorn joined our staff of guides on the river. I have to say Hunter did a great job for us. He rowed most every day and took great care of his customers. All the guides gave him the proper hazing and he still wants to come back next year. After a meeting with all the guides, we are very happy to announce that Hunter will be with us for years to come.

All in all, 2009 marked another fantastic year. It was a season of big fish, tons of fun, new adventures, and constant learning. I can't thank our customers enough for sharing all those days and memories on the water with us. You guys are what keeps us going. It is interesting how it works. I might not see a client for an entire year, and the minute I pick them up, it's like we never missed a beat. We are just like old friends. Finally, I want to thank the guys in the shop and our guides. The guys in the shop keep it all together. They schedule, keep us posted on new trips, and keep us all in flies and leaders. They are the glue that keeps the shop and the guide program together. All the guides that I work with are top notch. I don't think that there is a better group of guides in the Midwest. All these guys work seven days a week, live in small quarters, and still get along like brothers! It is a great job when your best friends are your co-workers and roommates. Thanks again guys for everything you do for Sarah and I.

Tight Lines,
Tim Landwehr



Todd Polacek

2009 marked my 4th year of working with Tim and the Tight Lines staff. This season I took on a good number of trips and I must admit I always have “summer delusions” of big fat copper bass smashing poppers in the hot Wisconsin sun. Windy, cold, drizzly, and rainy all sound like words you might want to hear when gearing up for a couple of days of steelheading, or a weekend hunting divers, but not bass fishing. That is what we encountered through July and August.

When preparing for July trips, I heard that Nate closed out the 2008 season catching smallmouth well into October when the water hovered in the 50's. I also learned that Tim and others were catching fish already the first week of May on poppers. May was unseasonably cool and that is very unusual. Though few guides will come out and say this, there is always a nice and cordial admiration and respect for “what the other guide's program is”, but it is a veneer that masks streaks of competitiveness among us. You can see right through the veneer when the fish shut off and one guide is doing well as others struggle. I have deep respect for the Tight Lines group. It is unique how the group is always trying different approaches and push one another while still maintaining such a great atmosphere as professional “keepers of the sport” of fly fishing. Although I wonder if more than one of us has imagined how big of a salt-plastic Senko worm you can throw on an 8 weight. This forced me to try new tactics and strategies that 10 years ago, if someone explained them, I would have said “You're going to do what”? I am always learning from these guys and a Brown Beadhead Crystal Bugger on a mile of 4X saved my guests from seeing “man tears” from me on one of my outings. When the weather did cooperate, it was poppers moved slow, but I really enjoyed the “slam and grab” when fish took a well-presented Murdich Minnow.

I owe a special thank you to Sarah and Tim, Bart, Nate, Charlie, Nelson, and Hunter for teaching me and accepting me into this group. I have had a full-time career now since I closed Madison Outfitters and remarked to Tim that I would “almost pay to do this”. I would also like to thank the anglers I had in the boat this year, many of whom are career anglers. I learned much from them. And, finally, I would especially like to thank my wife, Christine, who supports me on these endeavors.