

From Angler to Outfitter: Building a Life as a Fly Fishing Guide

With Coleman Savage

D. Roger Maves: [00:00:00] Welcome to Ask About Fly Fishing Internet Radio, your source for learning more about fly fishing in cold water, warm water, and saltwater. Hello, I'm Roger Maves, your host for tonight's show. On this broadcast, we'll be featuring Coleman Savage, and he'll be answering your questions on From Angler to Outfitter: Building a Life as a Fly Fishing Guide.

The show will be 90 minutes in length, and we are broadcasting live over the internet. If you'd like to ask Coleman a question, just go to our homepage at askaboutflyfishing.com and use that Q&A text box to send us your question. We'll receive your question immediately, and we'll try to answer as many of them as possible on the show tonight.

And while you're there, make sure you sign up to receive our announcements so you don't miss out on any of our future broadcasts. Just fill out the form on the right side of our homepage, and we'll let you know when the next live show will be. This broadcast is being recorded and will be available for playback on our website about 48 hours after the show ends.

You can also find it on any of the podcast sites, like Apple Podcasts, Spotify, Pocket Casts, or wherever you listen [00:01:00] to your podcasts. If you have to leave early, you can return to the website or any of these platforms at your convenience and listen to the recording at any time. If you're out and about on Facebook, Instagram, or X, we'd sure appreciate it if you'd share our podcast.

And when you do, use #askaboutflyfishing and #flyfishing. In fact, if you have a moment, do it right now while you're enjoying the show. The content of this broadcast is copyrighted and is the property of The Knowledge Group, Inc., doing business as Ask About Fly Fishing. When we return, we'll be talking with Coleman Savage about Building a Life as a Fishing Guide.

Fly Fishers International needs your support. Its conservation projects at both the national and club level are addressing critical issues of importance to fly fishers. The organization provides grants to help with the restoration of habitats like Wolf Creek in Idaho and Sands Creek in Delaware County, New York, and funds projects that collect valuable data about fish and their habitats, like the peacock bass study in Miami, Florida.

[00:02:00] FFI serves as a strong advocate for fly fishing in all waters for all fish, and to preserve and promote the arts of fly casting and fly tying, and help ensure future generations can enjoy these one of a kind experiences. These efforts won't be nearly as effective without your help. If you're not already a member, we invite you to join Fly Fishers International as they work to cultivate conservation, education, and community within the sport of fly fishing.

Join Fly Fishers International today and help support their fine work. For more information, go to their website at flyfishersinternational.org. Again, that's flyfishersinternational.org.

Before we introduce Coleman, I'd like to let you know about the great prizes we have to give away tonight. For our drawing tonight, we'll be giving away a one year membership to Fly Fishers International and a one year membership to Trout Unlimited.

Now, if you haven't registered yet for the drawing, you can do so now. Just go to our homepage at askaboutflyfishing.com and look for the link under tonight's section that says register for our free drawing. Click on that link and fill [00:03:00] out the form and we'll announce the winners at the end of the show.

We'll also be giving away a book courtesy of Stackpole Books. I have a list of books here that I can give away, and if you are the winner tonight, then, uh, I'll be sending that out and you can pick one. So here's how you can win. You must be the first person to answer the question I ask at the end of the show.

The question will be about something we've talked about during the show, and you must submit your answer along with your name and location using the text box on our homepage. So listen closely, use your best typing skills, take notes, pay attention, and maybe you'll be a winner of a, a Stackpole book.

Tonight, our guest is Coleman Savage. Coleman can say with conviction that he is obsessed with fishing. Spending over 200 days on the water most years through pioneering new fishing techniques, exploring far-off fisheries, and questing for trophy trout, Coleman has become a resident and student of the rivers in Montana. Coleman [00:04:00] grew up in Scottsville, Virginia, and Cherokee Sound in the Bahamas.

Between these two beautiful and spoiled places, Coleman was exposed to remarkable fishing under the tutelage of incredible mentors. It was in his early years that he developed a deep passion for fishing, being on the water, and finding serenity in nature. He got his start in, in the fly fishing business as a young man, teaching casting and fly tying classes at local fly shops before he could drive.

As soon as Coleman finished high school, he packed up and moved to Montana, and after a few summers on the rivers and winters in the mountains, Coleman enrolled in Montana State University in Bozeman, where he would study business and water resource science. Currently, he is enjoying his dream job as a Montana fishing outfitter.

Coleman calls the Gallatin Valley home, but travels all around southwest Montana following the best fishing. If he's not on the water, Coleman is spending time with friends and family, tying outside the box fly patterns, or heading to the hills looking for serenity and deep powder turns. Coleman, welcome to Ask About Fly [00:05:00] Fishing Internet Radio.

Coleman Savage: Hey, thanks Roger. Pleasure to be here, and thank you for that introduction.

D. Roger Maves: Yeah, yeah. Good to have you. And yeah, Coleman and I were talking earlier today and he said things are getting a little chillier up in Montana. How that fall, uh, beautiful weather is, um, probably soon coming to an end, right, Coleman?

Coleman Savage: Yeah. We have been enjoying the last little bit of summer here. It's kinda lingering into October with 75 sunny days, and we're enjoying it while it lasts, but we got snow in the forecast this week coming, so-

D. Roger Maves: Yeah ...

Coleman Savage: All good things must come to an end.

D. Roger Maves: Well, that's true. You brought up a fact, you know, I'm down here in Colorado, and it seems like October is the new September.

You know what I mean?

Coleman Savage: Yeah. Yeah. It- It's really feeling that way. I mean-

D. Roger Maves: Yeah. Yeah ...

Coleman Savage: The past couple years this is sort of becoming the norm. And-

D. Roger Maves: Yeah. Yeah ...

Coleman Savage: Frankly, you know, from a fishing standpoint, we're thrilled [00:06:00] to have that much more of a summer fishing season, so.

D. Roger Maves: Yeah. Yeah, right, yeah. And it's such good weather to fish in too, you know? It's not blistering hot and yeah, very pleasant. Yeah.

Well, let's dive in here. You are a fishing guide up in Montana, and you grew up in Virginia and spent time in the Bahamas, as we talked about in your introduction. Can you tell us more about those experiences and how they helped shape your connection to fishing?

Coleman Savage: Yeah, absolutely. So I, I've been fishing my whole life- in one way, shape, or form. I was born and raised in rural Virginia, in the town of Scottsville on the James River, which is central Virginia, close to Charlottesville, Virginia, kind of the Piedmont region, a lot of slower moving, sandy rivers full of smallmouth bass, and then close to the Shenandoah National Park with lots of high mountain brook trout streams.

So I had those kinda two different styles of fishing available to me. And then my mom [00:07:00] had a family friend who lived on Abaco Island in the Bahamas, and- Through their friendship, my mom went down and visited a handful of times and fell in love with this little community called Cherokee Sound, and my mom had the ability to get herself a little humble two-bedroom beach house that was in our family for a long time, and we would go down for a month or so out of the year to, uh, spend time in this little community.

We were very friendly with all the folks who lived there, a mixture of, uh, Bahamian folks and people from Florida who were there for parts of the year. And for much of my elementary school years, maybe, you know, first through fifth grade, we lived there on and off, and then full-time for a while.

And in this little town of Cherokee in The Bahamas, I spent a ton of time just out putzing around with a hand line and bait or just a [00:08:00] regular spinning rod, walking out in- onto the flats and casting and, you know, walking out to the reef and casting, and going out in the boat. And so I just had this incredible playground to just go out into the wild and throw out a line and see what I could catch.

And then from getting exposed to awesome fishing in both of those places, it was pretty cemented as one of my favorite activities, and it just kind of grew from there.

D. Roger Maves: Yeah. Thank mom for that, huh?

Coleman Savage: Absolutely. Yeah, yeah. Owe her a lot. It was an-

D. Roger Maves: Yeah, yeah ...

Coleman Savage: Incredible, incredible way to get to be a kid.

D. Roger Maves: Yeah. Yeah, really, yeah. There's a lot of adults that are very jealous of you right now.

Coleman Savage: Oh, yeah. Yeah, well, I'm, I wish, I wish I was there now.

D. Roger Maves: Saying they'd like to go fishing. Yeah, yeah, yeah. Well, um, you know, before you became a professional guide, where did, was there a particular point in [00:09:00] time where you had an epiphany and said, "Hey, you know, I like what I see out there. I think I could maybe make a living at this"?

Coleman Savage: Yeah. I'd say around high school time was when I really went full, full bore on fly fishing, and it became less of just a hobby and more of kind of an all-encompassing lifestyle. I mean, every moment of free time I was trying to go fishing somewhere, some way, somehow, and eventually got a kinda summer job working in the fishing industry, if you will, at a place in town and got to work in a fishing fly shop retail kind of environment.

And through that, talking fishing with people all the time, and teaching these instructional classes, and teaching these little, like, fly tying classes, I just really was loving sharing my passion for the activity, the craft [00:10:00] with other people, and decided, well, if I could do this as a fishing guide and be on the water doing it all the time, that would be pretty cool.

And I had some mentors close by to look up to, you know, people who had demonstrated that this was something you could do as a career. I grew up in the smallmouth bass fishing scene around the James and Shenandoah Rivers. And in my hometown of Scottsville, there were a handful of legendary fly fishing guides, L.E. Rhodes, Chuck Craft, to name a few. Both of them have passed on, but left a undeniable mark on smallmouth bass fishing, and Chuck Craft's flies still, you know, are in the bins of fly shops all around the country and across the world. And so I saw these people who were paving the way, and, uh, realized, okay, this is something that a person can do if they really want to. [00:11:00] And-

D. Roger Maves: Yeah ...

Coleman Savage: Come, you know, the time when it was, when I was looking at, uh, going to college, what I wanna do with my life, I thought, well, I'll go out to Montana, kind of the trout fishing mecca of the American West, and just fish as much as I can as I go through school and see what happens. And, you know, if somewhere along the way I'm lucky enough to get the chance to maybe try out being a fishing guide myself, that'd sure be cool.

D. Roger Maves: Yeah.

Coleman Savage: So that kinda led me this way. And once I was out here, I, um-

D. Roger Maves: Well, let's, let's, let's, uh, rewind here for a second. Go back to that fishing job.

Coleman Savage: Sure.

D. Roger Maves: Fishing, uh... That fly shop job. Did you do any guiding when you were working at that shop?

Coleman Savage: Uh, I did some instruction.

D. Roger Maves: In the shop?

Coleman Savage: So you wouldn't-

D. Roger Maves: Okay

Coleman Savage: Necessarily call what I was doing guiding, but we taught sort of a fly fishing introduction class where we would host, you know, customers of the shop who were interested in learning about fly [00:12:00] fishing, and we'd go over-

D. Roger Maves: Mm-hmm ...

Coleman Savage: Much of the sort of foundations of fly fishing.

D. Roger Maves: Sure, yeah.

Coleman Savage: Starting with, you know, all of the components of your fly fishing kit, your rod, your reel, your fly line, your leader, basic casting.

We'd go over the different varieties of flies and sort of the local styles of fly fishing, bass-

D. Roger Maves: Yeah ...

Coleman Savage: Warm water species, panfish, and then trout, and we'd tie some basic knots. We'd go over some different rigging tips, and we'd basically set someone up with the knowledge that they would need to buy a couple of basic things and go out and try fly fishing for themselves.

D. Roger Maves: Yeah.

Coleman Savage: And then we would do a follow-up class where we would host these same groups of individuals who'd come, and then we'd go to, say, a nearby pond or smaller stream where we could kind of do some low stakes practice fishing. So I wasn't guiding per se, [00:13:00] but it was my, it was the, my beginnings of casting instruction and teaching people the foundations of fly fishing.

D. Roger Maves: Yeah. That for sure paid off when you became a guide because, I mean, what are guides in many, in most situations but, uh, teachers, instructors on the water, real time, right?

Coleman Savage: Yeah.

D. Roger Maves: I mean-

Coleman Savage: Indeed.

D. Roger Maves: Yeah, yeah.

Coleman Savage: Indeed.

D. Roger Maves: And you never know what the experience level of your client's going to be. They could be a master of fly fishing, or they could be their first time ever, right? And anywhere in between. So I'm sure all that paid off.

Coleman Savage: Absolutely.

D. Roger Maves: Jason Sta- Stacy in Kentucky, he said, "When you got started..." So you're out in Montana when going to school, and then Jason was asking, did you have another job when you started guiding? So why don't you pick up there and tell us how that happened.

Coleman Savage: Yeah. So it's kind of a, a roundabout story. I had sort of [00:14:00] a fortuitous series of connections that eventually led to me getting the opportunity to become a fishing guide, but it starts with me moving to Montana, driving across the country, getting here, and working a job at the Campfire Lodge Resort and Fly Shop on the Madison River below Hebgen Lake near West Yellowstone.

I got a job as a dishwasher at their cafe, a wonderful little hole-in-the-wall diner style place overlooking the Madison River, and I thought it would be an incredible job for me to do for the remainder of my summer before college. And I was working at this diner cafe, washing dishes from 7:00 AM to 2:00 PM, and then I'd go fishing for the rest of the day and spend every waking moment trying to learn the nearby water and hone my craft and just, you know, living as a fishing nut as an 18-year-old, just enjoying my summer [00:15:00] before going on to college.

And then I decided that I wanted to defer for a year and take a gap year to get residency to put my way through school on a more affordable tuition. So then that winter, I got a job working at Big Sky Ski Resort and was doing that through the winter. But Through this dishwasher job where I was working at the Campfire Lodge on my first summer in Montana, the next summer I was promoted to work in the fly shop and Jim Slattery, who has House of Hackle out of Idaho Falls, Jim's Fly Co., The inventor of the Stimulator, the proprietor of this place. And so I was working under his tutelage there at Campfire Lodge, and I was working in the fly shop a couple days a week my second summer in Montana. And this is a story that maybe I'll segue into later, but long story short, I got the opportunity to meet a gentleman there who [00:16:00] has become a great friend, mentor, and sort of a surrogate grandfather.

And we became fishing buddies. He was a person coming in for breakfast who stumbled into the fly shop and through chatting, you know, we became friendly. He invited me to come fishing with him one day at his place on the river. We got to be friends and shortly thereafter, he connected me to an outfitter in Bozeman he had been fishing with for a long time.

One thing led to another, outfitter in Bozeman needed some help, and, uh, I had the opportunity to do that. So I kind of was in the position to say yes with a boat and a truck to pull it and a quiver of fly rods and the experience and doing some casting instruction and sort of guiding and fly shop experience.

And when opportunity struck, I said yes. So I had a job in the meantime, but when my dream job was there for me to try out, I said yes.

D. Roger Maves: Well, sounds yeah, life has journeys for sure, right? [00:17:00] I mean, a lot of, uh, parts and pieces that fortuitous in the end for you to get started. That's great.

Coleman Savage: It did.

D. Roger Maves: Yeah. We need to take a quick break here, but, uh, hang tight, folks. When we come back, we're gonna find out what it was really like that first year as a fishing guide. So hang tight, we'll be right back.

The Ugly Bug Fly Shop in Casper, Wyoming, has been serving fly fishers in Wyoming and around the world since 1983. Their selection of top-of-the-line gear and a huge assortment of flies is one of the best in the land.

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You're listening to Ask About Fly Fishing Internet Radio, and we're [00:18:00] talking with Coleman Savage about Becoming a Fly Fishing Guide and Outfitter.

If you would like to ask Coleman questions, just go to our homepage at askaboutflyfishing.com and use that Q&A text box to send us your question.

Okay, Coleman, I always ask my guests at this point in the show, what's going on in your fly fishing world today?

Tell us a little bit about your business and what else is happening.

Coleman Savage: Yeah. So these days I'm the owner and outfitter of Savage Fly Fishing in Bozeman. I am lucky to get to take people fishing on many of the nearby rivers around Bozeman, the Madison River, the Yellowstone, the Gallatin, the Missouri, to name a few, and we are fishing from March through November.

There's great fishing to be had of some sort throughout a very long season, and there's lots of diverse fishing options close to home. So that's what's going on with me. Most recently, I've been fishing the Madison River from Norris to Three [00:19:00] Forks, just 30 minutes west of Bozeman. Fishing's been good.

Fall weather is in full bloom with, you know, crisp mornings and beautiful afternoons and changing colors, and we're having fun and catching fish. If anyone is ever interested in getting ahold of me online, uh, my website is savageflyfishingmt.com, and you can find me on Google by simply searching up Savage Fly Fishing, and you'll see me in Bozeman, Montana.

D. Roger Maves: Great. Great. Well, thanks for sharing that, and, uh, I'm sure people will be interested in searching you out there. So let's continue on here, and your first season as, quote, "professional fly fishing guide," quote, right?

Coleman Savage: Mm-hmm.

D. Roger Maves: It was. What, what was it really like? I mean, what surprised you the most about the job?

Coleman Savage: Yeah. You know, that's a great question, and I think it's especially relevant because There's [00:20:00] going fishing, and there's taking someone fishing, and then there's being a fishing guide, and being a fishing guide is a whole host of subtle soft skills beyond just knowing how to yourself catch fish. In the way that we do most of our guided fly fishing trips around here, it's a lot of fishing from a drift boat, and knowing how to row a drift boat for the sake of fishing, not just for the sake of getting down the river, is a skill that takes a little while to build up.

Knowing how to adapt to be a competent communicator, be someone who is jovial and friendly and able to make conversation with all different kinds of people. Knowing how to, of course, figure out the fishing each day, decide where to go between a half a dozen rivers with hundreds of miles of different sections to choose from, factoring in weather and all of the other [00:21:00] conditions that as fishermen we all deliberate over all the time.

Sort of the all-encompassing matrix of considerations was maybe the biggest surprise in my first year of guiding. Because ultimately, it's up to you to decide how to provide a great experience, a great day on the river, and a lot more goes into that than just the ability to go catch fish yourself one day.

That may be somewhat vague, but I would say just sheer amount of considerations was maybe the most surprising to me when I first started.

D. Roger Maves: Okay. Yeah, well, I can imagine like, okay, you have two really nice days on the river, weather's great, and then the third day it's howling wind, you know? How do you handle that with your client, right?

And then two days later it's pouring rain. How do you handle that situation? So I can see how all these different weather situations, you have to learn what to do and how to keep everybody [00:22:00] happy and try to keep people still catching fish. And so, yeah, I mean, and that's just, you know, just the weather factor of things, um-

Coleman Savage: Yeah, so what you've described there is one of numerous factors in the decision of how to approach a day on the water.

D. Roger Maves: Right.

Coleman Savage: Of course there's weather, but there's river conditions. Have rivers risen or fallen as a function of rain or snow melt or a release from a dam causing a tail water river to rise? You know, what is the right style of fishing for someone if they've fished everywhere or if they've never fished before?

What river's going to be, you know, the, the right combination of convenience, of scenic value, of solitude, right? It's just, um, sort of trying our best to provide the best version of the experience as we see it on every given day.

D. Roger Maves: Yeah, yeah. I got a question here [00:23:00] on the internet from Joyce Deming in Golden, Colorado, and she said, "How would you describe your ideal guiding client? Any client horror stories you can share? Ha ha."

Coleman Savage: Um, you know, this is a funny question because this is something I get asked so frequently, both ends, what is the perfect client and what is the horror client. Frankly, I am so excited to fish with anyone who is excited to go fishing. It really comes down to that.

My greatest joy is to share my passion for the activity with someone who is excited to learn, excited to maybe try new technique, excited to fish for, whether it's a shorter half day or a longer full day, you know, maybe driving 20 minutes, maybe driving two hours. Anyone who is really excited to go fishing and excited to learn, whether you're someone who's fished all over the world for countless species of fish in [00:24:00] far off destinations, or you've never even held a fishing pole, let alone caught a fish.

I've had incredible experiences with the full spectrum of fishermen, and I think, you know, it's hard to say what a perfect client is other than just someone who's excited to go fishing. I think with a positive attitude and an enthusiasm for learning, it's hard not to have fun out there. And I haven't had many horror stories, frankly, because my one, I had a good friend in high school who worked at an ice cream shop, and my buddies and I always kinda joked with him that he worked at an ice cream shop.

I d- I don't know why, we just, we thought it was funny and we liked to make fun of him for it. And he said, "You know what? No one's in a bad mood when they come to get ice cream." And, uh, I think about that-

D. Roger Maves: That's right ...

Coleman Savage: In, uh, in my line of work because we're going fishing. We're going out on a river and we're trying to catch trout, and it's [00:25:00] a great time. It's hard not to have fun. Of course, you know, sometimes expectations are hard to meet or weather makes for a less pleasant day on the water or what have you. There's always things that can make for an easier or harder day on the water for all parties. But I love what I do, and we have fun pretty much all the time.

So no crazy horror stories to report yet, knock on wood. But, uh, you know, there's still time.

D. Roger Maves: Well, I'm, I'm sure there were some difficult people, you know. I mean, I sure met a few out there when I was fishing. But, uh, I would think anybody that's anxious to learn, it sounds like you're a great teacher, so, um, if they're ready to learn, you're there for them, and yeah, let's go fishing.

Let's see here. I thought I had another question here. Yeah, in fact, Phil in Kentucky wrote in. He says, "I wonder about the [00:26:00] intersection between the skills of teaching and those of guiding. What do you think?" That's kinda what we were just talking about. I think those two intersect, you know, a lot. From what I've seen in the guides that I've been with have all been great teachers and are willing to show me and others what needs to get done. 'Cause many times you're going to a place where you haven't been before, and you don't know what works there, and for me, it's like I'm all ears, you know, whenever I get in that situation, so. I imagine you run into the same kind of thing with many different anglers.

Coleman Savage: Yeah, that's a great question. I think teaching is inseparable from guiding, but what amount of teaching can be different day by day.

One day I may be teaching someone how to hold a fishing rod and how to cast a fishing rod, maybe teaching them the whole notion of hooking a fish from a blank slate. Another day, I may be teaching someone who is an [00:27:00] incredible expert fly caster and maybe an incredible expert trout angler. I may be just teaching them a different technique than they've done before.

And so teaching is a very important skill, but it's a sort of a continuum of how you approach your instruction because, one, coaching someone versus teaching someone can be two different things, and the way that we all learn, the way that we receive instruction is different. And so being adaptable in order to best communicate your guidance to each individual is really important because I may be able to put things in terms that make sense to me, but won't really resonate with someone else, and I have to be able to meet them where they're at.

And, you know, if I have an analogy or a, a little trick that I think works really well, and then all of a sudden I'm really relying on that and that's not [00:28:00] really clicking for somebody, I gotta be able to figure out how to convey whatever I need to, to that person. You know, instructional ability, coaching ability, very important.

It's equally important to be able to sometimes be able to read the room. Sometimes you can over-instruct, and that can kind of get in the way of what you're trying to accomplish. Sometimes you never quite get where you're trying to get with your instruction and feel as though you haven't really imparted the ability or technique or understanding that you sought to.

And that's just one facet of going out fishing for a day, is being able to instruct the person fishing to the point of executing what we as a fishing party are trying to execute, right? And then in guiding, there's so much more than just the instruction. As far as the intersection between guiding and instructional ability, the two are inseparable, but [00:29:00] guiding just involves so many more soft skills that you really wouldn't consider until maybe you've been in the middle seat of the boat, so to speak.

D. Roger Maves: Yeah.

Coleman Savage: I could say much more about that, but I'm sure we'll get the chance.

D. Roger Maves: Yeah, yeah. And I mentioned this before on one of my shows, but went fishing in Chile last spring with my son, and every time I'm out with a guide, I learn something new. I mean, it may be something very little, but I always learn something.

And one day we were on this small lake, and we were, we were just fishing streamers into the bank by structure and so forth, and we were catching a lot of fish, and then I... kind of a dry spell, and my guide says, "Well, here, give me your line." So he took my line and clipped it off, clipped the fly off, and tied on a girdle bug, or some people know it as a Pat's rubber legs.

And he goes, "Start fishing with this and strip it just like a streamer." And I said, "What?" I said, "I've never fished like this before," you know, a girdle bug like that, you know, before.

Coleman Savage: [00:30:00] Right.

D. Roger Maves: Fishing a lake. And he goes, "Just try it. Just try it." And it wasn't but about five casts later and I was hooked up. You know, I go, "I just learned a whole new technique I can take almost anywhere," you know? Um-

Coleman Savage: Yeah.

D. Roger Maves: And

Coleman Savage: Yeah. Yeah, absolutely.

D. Roger Maves: Yeah, so I think if you-

Coleman Savage: So whether it's, you know, whether it's a new fly pattern or a new knot or a way to improvise your cast to fit a situation, or maybe something more philosophical in the way that you approach a day of fishing or the way you approach a fishing spot or, you know, any number of things, I think the second, you as a fisherman, whether on the guide or the client or the hobbyist side, you know, the second you as a fisherman think you got it all figured out, you need to remember you can learn something every day from everyone, no matter whether they're newer to the sport or have been doing it forever. You're always learning.

D. Roger Maves: Oh, yeah, yeah. And I suppose you as a guide, like you say, the [00:31:00] river's changing all the time. I'm sure you're learning every day as a guide being on the river, looking for

changes, new spots to fish, and, oh, I, you know, I never thought we'd catch fish there before, but now I know fish are lying in that fly, uh, things like that. So I'm sure you're in a-

Coleman Savage: Yeah, that's exactly right ...

D. Roger Maves: Yeah, a constant learning process. Many anglers imagine guiding as spending every day fishing. Of course, we know it's not really that way. You get very little fishing done, right? But what's the reality of being a guide from what people imagine it to be?

Coleman Savage: Yeah. So before the fishing starts, there's a lot of preparation. I need to make sure that my truck and my boat are clean and organized, and that all of my tackle is as it needs to be, that I have a full kit for the day of all the rods, reeled with the appro- you know, rods I need spooled with the appropriate lines, have everything we need for the day, all of the flies, all of the tackle, [00:32:00] whatever other extraneous supplies we may need.

I communicate with the people I'm fishing with to decide where we're going to meet, handling the logistical plans, uh, making plans for lunch, making plans for where we're going to go, what seems like the best fit for the day. So there's a lot on the front end in that regard. Once you're out there, maybe some days you are just going fishing.

I do really enjoy the days fishing with folks who are either experienced anglers or folks I've fished with before who've... You know, we've kind of developed a rapport. We kind of know what we're setting out to go do. We're on the same page. Because on those days, it really does just feel like going fishing.

I'm just the one rowing the boat. Other days, when we're starting at the very beginning, teaching someone who's never fly fished how to cast. Maybe it starts off with a little bit more serious instruction, more of a lesson, but before too long, we are still fishing. Really, what it is, is [00:33:00] I am half of the fishing equation.

I'm rowing the boat, I'm teeing up the shots, I'm telling someone, "Hey, cast here. Oh, mend it like this. Oh, angle your cast this direction." So I'm fishing vicariously through the individuals that I'm fishing with, and it is still going fishing, and it's a blast, and is so much fun that I can't get over it.

But there's, like any job, there's things g- that go on behind the scenes. The, uh, you know, how the sausage gets made, so to speak. But at the end of the day, I am still in a boat, on a river, putting fish in the net. So I consider it pretty darn close to going fishing, and, uh, hadn't gotten old yet.

D. Roger Maves: Yeah, and I, likewise, I've been with guides that I swear at times they're more excited about me catching a fish than I am. You know?

Coleman Savage: Yeah. Yeah.

D. Roger Maves: They're carrying on and going, screaming and yelling, and you know, it's like, oh my God, yeah. Yeah. [00:34:00] So, um, yeah, many guides have just as much fun watching people catch fish, and sometimes more. But I can see what you're saying. You'd say, "Okay, well, cast right to that spot over there," and then, then he or she does, and they hook up, and you're like, "Yes, yes," you know? Uh, I-

Coleman Savage: Yeah, it's very satisfying. And fishing from a drift boat, so much of the fishing success is dependent on the positioning, the drift of the boat itself. We're fishing moving rivers-

D. Roger Maves: Yeah ...

Coleman Savage: from a moving vantage point, and if the boat is not in the right place or moving at the right speed, it's much harder for the angler to execute the cast, the drift, the hook set, what have you, to be successful.

So it really is a team sport fishing from a boat, whether it's me fishing with a fishing buddy, a customer, anything, we're fishing together. And when I'm fishing in a guiding scenario, I may not be the one holding the rod, but I've chosen what flies to use, and set up all of the rigging, [00:35:00] and made the decision of where to go fishing, and made the decision of where to put the boat, and made the decision of telling someone where to cast. And through doing all of that, I am very much fishing, I'm just not the one making the cast or reeling the fish in. But it's-

D. Roger Maves: Yeah. Yeah ...

Coleman Savage: It's a lot of fun nonetheless.

D. Roger Maves: Yeah, and many times a lot of work. I tell you, the... Got a good friend down in Belize who's my fishing guide down there, and- watching him, you know, you talk about positioning a drift boat, and just like down there, you've got a flats boat that your guide's poling.

And I'm telling you, those guys work really hard down there poling those boats. That, you think about doing that all day long, um-

Coleman Savage: Yeah ...

D. Roger Maves: Incredible.

Coleman Savage: Yeah, it's, it's a feat of effort and skill to be not only doing it, but doing it well. No doubt.

D. Roger Maves: And just what you said, because I've been in both places, on a drift boat and on a flats boat, and, and you know you've got a good guide when, when the boat [00:36:00] positioning and the poling and positioning on a flats boat, where you don't even notice it's happening. You know what I mean?

Coleman Savage: Right.

D. Roger Maves: It's just-

Coleman Savage: Yeah ...

D. Roger Maves: You're focused on your fishing, and it's all perfect, right? And you're not even thinking about-

Coleman Savage: Absolutely ...

D. Roger Maves: the guide and what he's doing, no matter how hard he's working to get you in that right drift or get you going across that flat or whatever. But, and that's when you know everything's just really working at 100%, is when you don't even notice all that going on. You're just there fishing. So anyway, just personally-

Coleman Savage: Absolutely. Yeah. Yeah. That reminds me of a day I had on the Yellowstone River earlier this summer, and early in the season on the Yellowstone, the longest undammed river in the country, the water's really high coming out of the spring snow melt season.

During runoff, the water gets really high, and then throughout the summer it recedes. And as it recedes, it clears, and as it gets lower and clearer, it comes into its prime fishing season. [00:37:00] Sort of on the front end of that prime fishing season when the water's still very high, the fish are mostly on the banks, and there's very little question of where you need to fish. It's more so just, can I keep the boat at the right distance from the bank at the right speed, and can you cast it there? And we had a wonderful day of fishing where we, we caught a... We lost count. We caught a ton of fish, all on the bank. You know, we weren't changing flies at all. We had a rig that worked from ramp to ramp.

And I got a compliment from the gentleman I was fishing with that really meant a lot. He said, "You know, there wasn't one time today when I couldn't make the cast I needed to, to make, because you had me in position the whole time." And that was a really nice recognition of the work that I was doing throughout the day, where sure, we're just floating down the river, but it's the micro adjustments of keeping things moving just how you need it so that, as you said, it just, you don't notice what's going on. You're just fishing because the fishing that [00:38:00] is there to be done is just right there in front of you-

D. Roger Maves: Right, right ...

Coleman Savage: The result of the person poling the skiff or the person rowing the drift boat or the raft. Anyway.

D. Roger Maves: Yeah, and a good guide will, uh- There's all the back rowing and stuff that has to ... Unless you've rowed a drift boat or a raft or any, any watercraft down a western river, you don't know how difficult that can be.

But guides that recognize, oh, well, this person can't cast all that far, I need to position the boat a little closer, and then somebody else that's a great caster, oh, I can keep them a little further out, and recognizing the skill sets too, I think is important on your end.

Coleman Savage: Absolutely. Yeah. Yeah, I mean, just figuring out through the, uh, various abilities of the people you're fishing with, what is the appropriate rig for us to be fishing? What is the appropriate water for us to be fishing? Absolutely.

D. Roger Maves: Yeah.

Coleman Savage: I'm making those evaluations [00:39:00] kind of early on and then throughout the day and just-

D. Roger Maves: Right ...

Coleman Savage: Trying to make sure we're doing the right things for us.

D. Roger Maves: Yeah. Hold tight here, just give me a, a short break here. We'll be right back and we'll talk more about What It's Like Being a Guide out on, in the Montana rivers. So hang tight.

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You're listening to Ask About Fly Fishing Internet Radio, and we're talking with Coleman Savage about What It's Like to Build a Life as a Fly Fishing Guide. If you'd like to ask Coleman a question, just go to our homepage and fill out the form there and send it in and we'll try to get it answered.

Well, Coleman, I did get a couple of questions come in here on the internet.

Treg up in Moscow, Idaho wrote in, "How do you feel about dogs in the boat?" He says, "I have had great boat dogs, and now I have one that I have to keep on the leash as we float." Is that something you allow in your boats?

Coleman Savage: Yeah. I don't have a dog myself. I don't end up with dogs in the boat terribly often, but I will say having fished with some very, uh, cool, calm, [00:41:00] and collected boat dogs and some more, more, uh, rambunctious boat dogs, it depends. I think that having a dog in the boat that is able to kinda chill there with you and be a part of the adventure is such a blast.

I mean, I love animals. I love dogs. I love to have one aboard. Gonna have a dog in the boat with me and a customer here very soon, and I'm really looking forward to it. But you gotta think about fly fishing. You're managing slack line. You're having slack at your feet. We all know how much fly line already gets caught to-

D. Roger Maves: Oh, yeah

Coleman Savage: You know, the gravel guard on our waders or the belt buckle on our sandals or this or that. The dog that's running all around the boat and, uh, stepping on this and that and maybe kinda getting in the angler's grill a little bit, I've been there, too. I love a dog that can tag along, but it takes a little bit of practice to get 'em there, for sure.

D. Roger Maves: Yeah. Yeah, for sure. Treg also wrote in. He [00:42:00] said, "My first guide, John Hirtzer, impressed me with a container full of peanut M&Ms. What's your favorite lunch and snacks that you bring?"

Coleman Savage: Ah, peanut M&M's, that's a good one. That's a good one. Um, I like that. Lunch is one of those things that sometimes we will stop and kind of work something up shore side. Sometimes we'll grab some delicious sandwiches from the deli, and a bag of chips, and some fruit, and a well-stocked cooler, and we're kinda m- more just there for the fishing.

It sorta depends on the day and how much of a production or not we want lunch to be. You know, I see every type of person, some who want to, who are looking forward to the lunch break as soon as we get started, and some who scarf down a sandwich in a minute or two to get back to fishing as, as quick as possible.

D. Roger Maves: Right. Yeah.

Coleman Savage: Um, I'm sort of in the camp of keeping it [00:43:00] simple, healthy, delicious, sandwich or wrap, a side maybe, some chips. I love to have a variety of drinks in the cooler. I love to have some snacks. Some fresh baked goods to bring along are always nice. During the cold season, maybe bring in a thermos of hot soup or hot chili or something like that to have something warm.

But I'm doing less of the, uh, the white tablecloth action and more of just a simple, quick, delicious lunch to, then get back to fishing.

D. Roger Maves: Yeah, yeah. When you were starting, I know you had mentioned you had some great mentors back in Virginia, I believe, and but what about out west? Did you work as a, an apprentice at all, or were you just, did just one day they said, "Okay, you're guiding today. Here's your two clients and off you go." W- was there a transition?

Coleman Savage: Yeah, so it's n- good that you come about to asking that. [00:44:00] A typical entree into becoming a fishing guide may be a two or three or four year process. Maybe you get a job at a fly shop that does some outfitting, and work in the fly shop, and spend every moment you can fishing.

You meet the guides, you kinda see the way the business works. You save up, you buy a boat, you learn how to row the boat. Maybe second year you get to teach some classes, not really guiding, just kinda learning how to teach. Maybe third year you start to get to do some introductory walk wade trips, and then maybe third or fourth year you get to take some float trips, and you kinda build up to it gradually.

Maybe you pay to attend a guide school, where you learn a lot of the important skills, and then following this program, you're placed with a guiding job somewhere nearby or in a destination place such as Alaska, where there's a lot of lodges and a lot of opportunity. I had sort of a unique

[00:45:00] opportunity to kinda jump right into the pool, and I knew how to swim, but I, I wasn't an expert by any means.

My first season, I was kind of tossed right in, and I think this was based on having a rapport with the outfitter that I was working for and him placing a lot of trust in me to perform. And he was sending me out with customers who were paying the same rate that they were to fish with him, and obviously I had less experience in every aspect of the fishing, but you gotta start somewhere. It's kind of like any field, and there is no qualifier per se of, oh, you have to complete this course beforehand, you have to have this certification to prove that you're this or that. I mean, it's sort of at the discretion of who's hiring you, whether they think that you're a safe, professional, competent fishing guide.

And I was fortunate to kinda get to cut to the chase, [00:46:00] and sink or swim, I swam, and things all worked out, and had some slower days of fishing or some mix-ups and learning curve along the way, but figured it out and here we are.

D. Roger Maves: How long did it take you before you began to feel like a really competent professional guide rather than simply a good, a good angler taking people fishing?

Coleman Savage: Yeah. So a little funny-

D. Roger Maves: Or are you still not there? ...

Coleman Savage: Saying.

D. Roger Maves: I'm just kidding.

Coleman Savage: Hey, hey, I would say I am finally there, but a funny saying in, in our business is, uh, the only thing worse than a first-year guide is a second-year guide. And, you know, I think first year you're kinda nervous and unsure of yourself and don't have all the skills, and second year maybe you start to think you're a real hotshot, but you ain't there yet.

Having been doing it several years now, it's, it's really clicking and I feel like every day it... I'm kinda going out with an [00:47:00] expectation of what we're going to accomplish, and we seldom fall short of what I'm hoping for. There's rarely a day that we get skunked or we get caught in bad weather or we get caught in a river condition that I didn't foresee.

Having the years under my belt and being on the river every day, you get an edge, and once you got it, so long as you're staying out there, keeping a finger on the pulse, you keep your edge. And I'd say I'm there now, but I'm learning all the time.

D. Roger Maves: Yeah. Yeah.

Coleman Savage: And as we said earlier, every day I go out, I may catch a fish in a spot that I hadn't caught one before, and oh, all of a sudden I'm gonna- Plan on fishing there or-

D. Roger Maves: Right

Coleman Savage: All of a sudden I realize, oh, oh, I really like this section of river at this time of year, where I rat-fished it as much this time of year before. Or, oh, I can do this little trick with my instruction or this or that or the other thing. You're always learning, but I'd say the confidence and the ability to go out there and execute a good [00:48:00] day on the water has definitely improved with time.

D. Roger Maves: We've got a, um... This is kind of not a guide related question, but not about guiding. But we got Kevin Rhode in here from Oklahoma, and he said, "If you were approached by a small fishing product company with a new trout product that had already been proven on the water, what would you need to see, hear, or experience before you would trust it enough to recommend it to your clients?"

And how would you approach the first five guides?" So I'm assuming Kevin has some kind of product he wants to begin marketing and wants to get some guide feedback and maybe some testimonials or something from guides. So do you wanna talk to that and how you feel about that?

Coleman Savage: Yeah. I think there's a lot of products in the fishing industry. There's a lot of new products coming out all the time. There's a lot of really clever innovation that takes one fishing paradigm and totally uproots [00:49:00] it. I, I can think of a handful of products in my area here around Bozeman that have come out of our neck of the woods that have totally changed up the game in terms of strike indicators or ways to repair fly line or what have you.

I think if you have a fishing product that you're trying to get off the ground, guides are a great sounding board because we can do a level of product testing that's just infinitely greater than someone who has maybe just a weekend to go fishing. We're out there every single day. I think if you're interested in getting some really meaningful feedback about your product, getting it in the hands of guides is a great way to do it, and the return on investment of giving out a couple of free samples is gonna be pretty substantial in, in figuring out if there is a real value add or how great that is or what tweaks or improvements could be made or if things are good the way they are.

I'm someone who has a lot of stuff and is trying all the time to pare it down to just what I [00:50:00] need because fly fishermen love doohickeys, and the fly fishing industry-

D. Roger Maves: Yeah ...

Coleman Savage: Loves making doohickeys, and we have all got a lot of them, but I have a lot of them that are sitting in my garage that haven't been used in a long time.

I think if I s- find something that really adds value in my day of fishing that I find myself coming back to, I am thrilled to share it with my customers. I really love Skwala Fishing Products. They're a somewhat new to the scene fishing soft goods producer here in Bozeman. They make waders and jackets and all this stuff, and I'm a very firm believer in their products, and I promote them to my customers all the time.

So if I believe in something, I'm more than happy to promote it.

D. Roger Maves: I c- I'll, uh, get on the bandwagon with Skwala. Again, when I was down in Chile, we had rain for five out of six days, and when I first got there, I had two rain jackets I was layered up

with a puffy jacket underneath. [00:51:00] When I came back at the end of the day, I was soaked from the waist up all the way to my skin.

And I mean, this is how much rain was coming down. And one of the guides had an extra... He was the head guide there, and he had an extra Skwala rain jacket. And he says, "Here, try this. What you've got on is just crap." I thought, "Ah, yeah, I'll try anything." Man, I put that jacket on and it kept me toasty warm and toasty dry, and so I'm a big fan of Skwala

The price is not cheap, but, but, you know.

Coleman Savage: Yeah, it's, uh, it's serious fishing stuff for serious fishermen.

D. Roger Maves: Yeah.

Coleman Savage: No doubt. Yeah. It's priced accordingly. But, you know, I think there's something to be said for fishing in a pair of shorts and a T-shirt sometimes. But sometimes-

D. Roger Maves: Yeah ...

Coleman Savage: You need really-

D. Roger Maves: You need the gear

Coleman Savage: The best gear.

D. Roger Maves: Yeah.

Coleman Savage: And, uh, we fish year-round here. I do a lot of fishing throughout the fall, winter and spring, and you're only as good as your equipment because if you're not [00:52:00] comfortable, you're just not gonna enjoy your day of fishing. You're miserable. You're not gonna fish as hard.

D. Roger Maves: Yeah.

Coleman Savage: You won't be out there as long. So good gear-

D. Roger Maves: That's right ...

Coleman Savage: I think is worth its weight in the fishing scene.

D. Roger Maves: For sure. And it's just like here, we don't get the rains that they have down there, where, I mean, it's raining all day long.

Coleman Savage: Yeah.

D. Roger Maves: I mean, that hardly ever happens in Colorado.

Coleman Savage: Right.

D. Roger Maves: You know what I mean? I think they say we get, Colorado, we get 360 days of sunshine every year, where the sun shines.

Coleman Savage: Yeah.

D. Roger Maves: And I think like in places like Indiana or something, it's almost the reverse or something anyway.

Coleman Savage: Wow.

D. Roger Maves: No, probably not that bad, but, uh, certainly down there in Patagonia, it was wet. But, you know, you also, you know, stated the fact that most fly fishers are gear heads, right? So we always look at something and try something new.

And so, uh, Kevin, I think you just need to reach out to some people, don't you think so too, Coleman, and, uh, see what connections you can make.

Coleman Savage: Absolutely.

D. Roger Maves: Yeah. Yeah.

Coleman Savage: Yeah, yeah.

D. Roger Maves: [00:53:00] Go down to the local fly shop.

Coleman Savage: Kevin, you know...

D. Roger Maves: Yeah.

Coleman Savage: Yeah. Go to the local fly shop. You got a fishing club near you, and you can get something in people's hands and let them see what it does.

And if you, you wanna start by getting your product in some, a fishing guide's hands in Montana, please feel free to reach out.

D. Roger Maves: Yeah. And just I being in the marketing business and digital marketing and have worked for a lot of fly fishing companies, you know, a little small widget this or that is sometimes hard to market because, um, you don't have a lot of budget to work with. I mean, you're not getting a lot necessarily for the little device or whatever, so it, it can be a struggle. I've seen a lot of people go through that. Yeah, if you ever wanna chat with me about that, I can maybe give you some insights as well.

Gary Kaufman wrote in and said, "Do most guides prefer that clients bring their own rods, reels, and flies, or use guide-provided equipment?"

Coleman Savage: Uh, that's a- another case of it depends.

D. Roger Maves: [00:54:00] Mm-hmm.

Coleman Savage: I think if you have a rod or, you know, an, an entire outfit that is special to you that you enjoy fishing, bring it. If you have a rod that you have really found is your favorite thing to fish and you think you're gonna fish as effectively as possible with that rod, bring it.

I don't require it. I have my own arsenal of, of rods and reels and certainly flies that I have sort of decided are the best tools for the job, and oftentimes someone will bring their own equipment and fish it for some of the day and fish mine for some of the day. I've, I've turned folks on to, uh, s- to maybe some different lengths or weights of rods, or different styles, you know, tapers of fly lines, or different styles of leaders, because in my trial and error of fishing, you know. 200 days a year, I've refined my system to best suit the needs of the day, [00:55:00] and sometimes what you use that works well for you and your approach to fishing may not be the best tool for the job of what we're doing at the day.

So I always encourage people to bring their own equipment if they're excited about it, and if they don't care to, aren't attached to the notion of fishing their own gear, or are just curious about trying what I've got, we always have our own equipment, and it's made up of things that we have found do the best job for the task at hand.

D. Roger Maves: Yeah. You know, in my experience, I think it's wise as a client, as a customer of a fishing guide, is to call ahead and find out those things, because, you know, my experience in, like, Rocky Mountain region is most guides expect you to bring your own stuff. They might have the flies, but they expect you to bring the rods.

Down in Florida, fishing the salt down there, a lot of guides want you to use their equipment, because they don't wanna be messing with [00:56:00] stuff they don't know about. You know what I mean? Like, they've got it dialed in. Just like you said, they got, "No, I know this rod, this weight, this... And I can switch you up quickly and stuff, so here, just use my stuff."

And then you go down to some place like Belize, and you gotta bring your own gear and bring your own flies, because they have nothing down there. I mean, there's no fly shops down there. Right. Unless you're at a lodge that might have a little fly shop in there. But, uh, if you're working with guides that aren't a- associated with a big lodge, they just don't have the stuff down there, or access to the stuff.

And many times I've been told, "Yeah, bring your rod, but bring an extra one too in case you break it," you know?

Coleman Savage: Yeah.

D. Roger Maves: Because-

Coleman Savage: No doubt ... because- well, I, I think the, I think the, uh- ...

D. Roger Maves: I may not be able to get another one. Yeah.

Coleman Savage: Yeah, absolutely. I think the best answer to that question is ask your guide what they would prefer, because as you said, sometimes it's expected for you as a customer to have your own equipment.

In my area, the norm is that all guides and [00:57:00] outfitters have a full arsenal of equipment to provide for a customer. There is no requirement to bring your own, your own gear. Now, rod and reel is one thing, because oftentimes someone will show up with equipment that they're excited to fish, but it's not necessarily the best tool for the job. And then I'll have to put on a different leader, and then it's a lot of... a little bit of extra re-rigging when I already have six rods rigged up with everything I want. Now all of a sudden we're combined to the fishing, confined to fishing this one rod that's maybe not best suited to the task at hand, but we'll do it anyway. What, what is maybe a little different is, uh, bringing your own flies.

I would never ask that someone bring their own flies, and frankly, I kinda think of bringing your own flies as, uh, packing lunch and then going to a restaurant and bringing your own food. Part of my specialty is my choice in what fly to make. I tie all my own flies. [00:58:00] I have designed several of my own patterns.

I take a lot of pride in what I'm tying onto the end of the line, and it, it's all very specifically crafted for the task at hand. And if someone is a, themselves a fly tying enthusiast and is really excited to fish their own flies, by all means. But generally speaking, I'm going to suggest that you try something of mine that is very specifically catered to the task at hand.

Oftentimes the fly boxes that are brought along are something that would be better suited as a mantelpiece or a family heirloom. Lots of-

D. Roger Maves: Right ...

Coleman Savage: dry, rotted rubber legs falling off and hackle that's starting to unturn its way off the fly. But a fellow tying enthusiast or someone who has a thorough fly collection, bring them by all means. But, uh-

D. Roger Maves: Yeah. ...

Coleman Savage: You know, all of us guides have the things that we wanna be using.

D. Roger Maves: Yeah. So let's talk, uh, we've got a few minutes left here. Let's talk about a group that you connected with. [00:59:00] Uh, and I'm not sure when you connected with them, how far in your career you did this, but there's a group called Guiding For The Future.

I just found out it through Fishing Outfitters Association of Montana. What caught your attention about this program, and why did you decide to participate in it, and when did you participate in it?

Coleman Savage: Yeah. So Fishing Outfitters Association of Montana is an industry group for guiding and outfitting in Montana.

They broker liability insurance to fishing guides, which is one of the essential things we have to carry as fishing guides. And then they advocate in the legislature for our industry, for stream access, for conservation initiatives, et cetera. And Fishing Outfitters Association of Montana, FOAM, decided somewhere along the way that it would be worthwhile to design a continuing education course for fishing guides and outfitters.[01:00:00]

So less of guide school, where a brand-new person can learn to back up a trailer and tie a blood knot and teach someone how to cast, and more a course for people who are already practicing professionals to learn more about kind of the greater scope of our business and the playing field that we're operating within, lots of the other stakeholders within the realm of water and rivers and outdoor ecotourism, and trying to give practicing fishing guides and outfitters the opportunity to better themselves, to become better professionals, better stewards, better representatives of our community, our industry.

I found about this course in an email, just a regular old newsletter promoting the program, and I realized that there was this opportunity for me to take this, kind of participate in this program, and this was when I was [01:01:00] in college anyway, so I was kind of on the wavelength of doing classes, doing schoolwork, participating in that sort of thing.

And decided, "Oh, that'd be kind of cool. That'd be a good way to try and become the best guide I can be, is to do that, and sounds like a good way to meet people and learn some new things." And so I, uh, enrolled in that program and was probably the youngest one in there the year I was doing it, and it was a mixture of people who'd been doing it for five years, 10 years, 30 years.

Some participants were probably senior to some of the instructors. Some of the participants, myself included, were more green around the gills and bright-eyed and bushy-tailed and just excited to be there. But it was a great learning opportunity and a great way to meet a bunch of people and learn a lot more about some of the kind of other nuances of our business, and happy to talk about that at length.

D. Roger Maves: Yeah. Yeah. I think, uh, let's talk about that. A couple of [01:02:00] just details. How long was this program? How much time did it involve, did you have to put into it? Was there a certification-

Coleman Savage: Yeah ...

D. Roger Maves: At the end?

Coleman Savage: Yeah, so Guiding for the Future is basically like an online college course. It's actually accredited as an online college course, and if you could get, quote-unquote, college credit for it if you were in college.

It's basically taking an online class for, I wanna say five months or so working through a series of online modules, some of which were focusing in hydrology, fluvial geomorphology, the more hard science behind the subject matter of rivers and streams and what's going on in them. Then some of the more kind of cultural stuff like water law, which in the West is a big deal.

D. Roger Maves: Mm-hmm. Yep.

Coleman Savage: Who gets to use how much water from the river and what for, et cetera. Then things that are more subjective, abstract, like [01:03:00] stewardship, fishing ethics, being a good ambassador for the catch and release- re- catch and release trout fishing community, et cetera, et cetera.

So we went through this online course independently and then had a four-day practicum where we would meet with all of the other 20 or 30 participants, probably about a dozen instructors and staff, and they provided lodging to kind of allow all of us to get together in a place to go through some of this in-person application of what we had learned in the online course, in addition to some meet and greet and shaking hands and doing a first aid certification and getting to see lots of really talented instructors in whatever their particular field was do demonstrations there in person.

And then following this practicum, there was a final exam, and if one passed the final exam, they were awarded Guiding for the Future Certificate of Completion, [01:04:00] and they are then Guiding for the Future ambassadors, which is what I am and a handful of other folks in Montana are, and really cool program, really pleased to have been a part of it, and it's definitely stuck with me in terms of many of the valuable teachings and relationships I've made with folks that I met during the program, so on and so forth.

D. Roger Maves: Did it, um, you said you got involved with it early on in college. Do you think, uh, how much difference do you think it made for your success going forward? If you were to take that out of the equation, what difference would it have made?

Coleman Savage: That's a good question. I think that it's helped me be the best fishing guide I can be just by having been exposed to sort of, um, a more all-encompassing perspective on what we're doing out there every day, all of the other stakeholders involved, all of the [01:05:00] other concepts that go into what is going out on the river and going fishing.

I think it was enriching and horizon expanding. I can't say definitively that I would be further ahead or further behind had I not participated in this program, but I know that it helped me along my way by connecting me with a lot of great people who gave me opportunities, were mentors, who were friends, people who've taught me valuable lessons, who've helped me along my way.

So I think it helped, it helped me gain a lot of perspective, a lot of knowledge, and yeah, I'm very pleased to have done it. It's an entirely elective program, so it's was something that I chose to do out of my own volition, and I think that maybe that demonstrated to some of the outfitters in my... that, that I was working for previous, prior to going out on my own, that I was independently motivated to try and become as, uh, [01:06:00] to be the best guide that I could, and I think that that maybe gave me more opportunity along the way.

But yeah, I mean, I think it's the same thing as going fishing and trying to be the best fisherman you can. Just trying to hone your craft, and really what this course was about is just seeing the other elements of our craft as guides, and the stewardship-

D. Roger Maves: Mm-hmm ...

Coleman Savage: And the professionalism and the ethics and the greater understanding of the bigger picture.

D. Roger Maves: Yeah. One final question here for you. If someone were listening to us today and they're thinking of... and they're a good fly fisher, you know, they've been fishing for a while, they love working with people, and they're thinking about becoming a guide, what are some of the things that they should understand before deciding to make that leap?

I mean, realistic, what are the realistic expectations about time spent? Do you have free time? Is this something that you can do if you're married, or do you have to be a single person? The money, all [01:07:00] those things. What do you think are the most important things they need to understand?

Coleman Savage: Yeah, that's a lot of questions bundled into one. Being a fly fishing guide where I live is, uh, is one thing. Being a fly fishing guide in Florida, in Oregon or Washington, in Texas, in New England, it's different everywhere.

D. Roger Maves: Yeah.

Coleman Savage: There's a lot of different considerations in terms of the living that you can make, which is, of course, one of the major considerations.

There's some pretty serious lifestyle considerations. Where you live, it may be a seasonal job, and it may not be something you can do 12 months out of the year. Where you live, there may not be enough demand for it to be a living that works for you. There may be plenty of demand and you may be able to do it year-round, but you need to consider whether the reality of somewhat long hours doing a, a physical job is feasible for you.

I think more than anything, it, do you have the [01:08:00] personality? Do you like people? Do you like teaching? Are you someone who's going to get really frustrated easily when someone doesn't do what you're trying to tell them? Are you someone that is going to fall to pieces if the fishing is tough and struggle to still make for an enjoyable experience then out there?

I would say this is something that one should seriously consider when thinking if being a fishing guide is for them. When you go fishing for fun- If you don't catch any fish, maybe you're a little bummed out, beat up, not feeling so great, but it's not the end of the day. Not the end of the world. When you are going fishing in a guided sense, when you're taking people fishing, there's some pressure to go out there and provide a good day of fishing, and maybe a good day of fishing is headhunting for rising fish, and if you can make a good cast to a fish and catch a fish or a handful in a day, then maybe that's a great day.

Maybe for someone else, you know, if you're catching less [01:09:00] than 30 fish, it's a letdown. If you're not catching a huge fish, it's a letdown. There's some pressure. So how do you respond with pressure and expectations? That's worth considering before deciding if whether or not you really wanna pursue becoming a fishing guide.

It's an incredible lifestyle. Getting to be on the water every day is a blessing. I love what I do. I love the people that I get to take fishing. I am still so excited about fishing. I still come home and tie flies many evenings. I still go fishing on my days off. I still go fishing the rest of the year.

I'm very much still passionate, enthusiastic about fishing, but many people do find it less exciting as a personal hobby after making it their vocation, and burnout can be a factor in a lot of different fields.

D. Roger Maves: Mm-hmm.

Coleman Savage: It can definitely be in, in this one, so that's another thing to consider as well.

D. Roger Maves: Yeah, that's an important point. I experienced that in my life, not in fishing, but yeah, wonderful way to [01:10:00] end the night. We've gotta wrap it up now, but yeah, wonderful advice there for somebody getting into it. And there's, like you say, there's a lot of things, and some things you don't have to contend with much at all, like fuel prices for boat engines, right, like they do down in Florida. I mean, there's flats fishing-

Coleman Savage: I, I gotta, I gotta contend with it for my, uh, gotta contend with it in, in my pickup truck that I'm driving-

D. Roger Maves: Yeah ...

Coleman Savage: You know, 100, 200 miles a day. Yeah. But yeah, fortunately, the, uh, the rowboat is pretty good on fuel.

D. Roger Maves: Yeah, yeah. Yeah, and this diesel, you know, situation is unfortunate for anybody driving diesel trucks and stuff.

But anyway, yeah, yeah, all kinds of things to consider nowadays.

Well, hang with me here. We're going to, uh, a couple of giveaways here. Um, one-year membership to Fly Fishers International and a one-year membership to Trout Unlimited. I'm also gonna give away a Stackpole book. Stackpole has supported my podcast since 2006, and we've had almost every one of their [01:11:00] authors on here, I think, and interviewed them, and they always give me good books to give away, so I'm gonna give away some tonight. We will do that in just a moment.

The Bonefish and Tarpon Trust works very hard to safeguard the future of our beloved flats fisheries from protecting spawning sites threatened by unsustainable fishing pressure to securing historic funding to, to restore Florida's Everglades and estuaries. Thanks to their members, they've expanded their conservation to the Bahamas, Belize, and Mexico.

There's still much more work to be done and they need your help. With your support, they can ensure that the flats fishery is healthy and sustainable now, and for generations to come. Visit btt.org and become a member of the Bonefish and Tarpon Trust today. Again, that's btt.org.

And just a quick reminder to everyone, before you leave the website tonight, if you can take a minute and give us your feedback about the show, you can find a link on our homepage in the section there of tonight's show that says, "What did you think of this show?"

Just click on that link and leave your comments. We'd [01:12:00] really appreciate it.

So now we're gonna give away a few prizes. Uh, the winners for our drawings are randomly selected from the show's registration database. If you didn't register already for tonight's show, it's too late now, but make sure you do so for our next show so you don't miss out on a great chance to win some of these prizes.

If you're one of the lucky winners, we'll contact you after the show and collect your information so that we can deliver the prize to you. So giving away a one-year membership to Fly Fishers International first, and to learn more about FFI, go to flyfishersinternational.org.

Our winner for that is Sue Horkey. Sue Horkey in California. So Sue, congratulations on you're now a member of Fly Fishers International, and I know you'll enjoy your membership with them.

And now we'll give away a one-year membership to Trout Unlimited. And to learn more about Trout Unlimited, go to tu.org, tu.org, and, uh, another great, great organization to support. They both are. And our winner [01:13:00] for that is Leonard Walstad. Leonard Walstad in New Hampshire. So congratulations, Leonard, and I'm sure you'll be a proud member with Trout Unlimited as well.

And so now we're gonna give away a book courtesy of Stackpole Books, and I'm gonna ask a question here. And the way that you do this is you have to answer the question in that form on our homepage of the website, put in your name, your location, email address, and the first person that answers the question correctly will win a book from a list of books that I'll give you after the show.

So question is, what is the name of the program that Coleman went through, and when did Coleman get involved in it? Was he at the beginning of his career, middle, or just recently?

So there's the question. So Coleman, there's a slight delay before they even hear us, and then they've got to, of course, think for a fraction of a second, [01:14:00] and then type.

So, uh, we have to kind of bear with it till we, uh, we get an answer here.

And okay, it looks like, uh, let me just... I think we have a winner right away here. Close enough, I think, but you tell me. Uh, the answer is Guide For The Future and beginning of his career.

Coleman Savage: There you go. Yeah.

D. Roger Maves: Okay.

Coleman Savage: That'll do it.

D. Roger Maves: I think properly it's Guiding For The Future, right? But that's close enough. So Treg.

Treg's a longtime listener. I think he's listened to every show that I've ever done. Have you, Treg? You can answer that and type back. Yeah, or just about. And, and he answered both parts. I see other answers coming in that only have one part of it. So yeah.

Yep. All right. Yeah, lots of questions coming in that were correct, but Treg was the first one. So Treg, you know, send me your address, you know the routine. I don't save that stuff. And [01:15:00] I'll send that, uh... I'll send... Well, no, I got your email address. I'll just send you the, the list of books in this case, since this is a bit different, and then you can decide which one you want, and I'll send it out to you, so.

All right, well, thanks everybody for participating with that. We got lots of responses tonight coming in. Coleman, thank you so much for being on with us tonight, and it was fun talking to you and learning about the ins and outs of becoming a guide and, and like you said, you're still learning, and probably will be for as long as you're a guide, which is kind of the fun part, too, right? I mean, that's fly fishing. Learning is fun. So, um, I, I hope you enjoy-

Coleman Savage: Indeed, indeed ...

D. Roger Maves: The rest of your career. Yeah. Yeah. Well, thanks for being with us.

Coleman Savage: Thank you very much. Yeah. Thank you for having me. It's been a pleasure to be aboard and talk about fishing and guiding. I love both. I love to get to do it. It's a, a pleasure and a privilege, and thank you so much for, for hosting me, and thank you to, uh, all the listeners for phoning in with these thoughtful questions. Thank you to all of you who've chimed in and if anyone is [01:16:00] ever interested in going on a fishing trip out in Montana, I'm in Bozeman, and you can find me, uh, @SavageFlyFishing. I'm on the internet, and you can find me that way, and you can email me at coleman@savageflyfishingmt.com. Always happy to talk fishing.

D. Roger Maves: There you go. There you go, folks.

Well, hopefully you've all found the podcast archive on our website. If you haven't, just look for the link in the top line of our menu. In the archive, you'll find all of our past shows, over... I think we've got about 450 shows now. You can search them by keyword or keyword phrase, uh, trout, tarpon, Madison River. We've done a couple on the Madison River.

And by the way, uh, Coleman, I did interview Jim Slatterly a while back, and we talked about him moving out from the Catskills to the Madison River, so I don't know if you've listened to that one, but you might be interested in listening to that one.

Coleman Savage: Yeah, I'll have to go back and listen to that. Jim-

D. Roger Maves: Yeah ...

Coleman Savage: Jim's a good friend, and I, I'd like to hear that.

D. Roger Maves: Yeah. Um, [01:17:00] our next broadcast will be November 4th, 7:00 PM mountain, 9:00 PM Eastern Time. On that show, I'll interview Tom Pero and our show will be Salters: On The Remarkable Return of the Sea-run Brook Trout.

Once found in coastal streams throughout New England, sea-run brook trout, known as salters, nearly disappeared as their fragile habitats were altered and degraded. Today, these remarkable

native fish are making a comeback, and author Tom Pero takes us into the hidden world of salters from their fascinating life history and migrations to the Cape Cod streams they call home.

Join us as we explore what scientists have learned about these elusive trout and meet the dedicated river keepers whose decades of restoration work prove that given a chance, wild trout and wild rivers can recover.

Be sure to add this to your upcoming show to your calendar. There's a link right under Tom's picture, and just click on add to calendar and put it in your calendar, you'll be all set.

We'd like to thank Fly Fishers International, [01:18:00] Trout Unlimited, Bonefish and Tarpon Trust, Olympic Peninsula Skagit Tactics and The Ugly Bug Fly Shop for sponsoring our show tonight.

Don't forget to visit our website at askaboutflyfishing.com and make sure you're signed up to receive our announcements so you don't miss out on any of our future live broadcasts.

Thanks for listening to Ask About Fly Fishing Internet Radio. We hope you enjoyed the show. That's it. Good night everyone, and good fishing.