

**T**he Androscoggin, Maine's third largest river, follows a 178-mile convoluted course from the White Mountains of New Hampshire until it joins the Kennebec River in Merrymeeting Bay near Brunswick, about 20 miles from the Atlantic Ocean. The first part of the river is trout water with browns, rainbows, and brook trout from the headwaters until the vicinity of Rumford. The smallmouth bass take over as the river slows, warms and widens. There are a number of places where you can catch bass and trout on alternating casts.

The Abenaki meaning of Androscoggin is said to be "the place where fish are cured," which probably refers to earlier times when the locals processed the alewives, smelt, shad, striped bass, eels, Atlantic salmon and others that congregated on their upstream spawning runs. At one time, salmon went as far as what is now Rumford, but the obstacles posed by dams, pollution, overharvesting, and other man-made afflictions have doomed the once considerable migrations.

The Andro, as it commonly is known, still is polluted, but considerable gains in cleaning up the river have been made by regional, state and federal efforts. And yes, industrial, agricultural and urban pollution is a problem, but now the river is clean enough to offer excellent fishing along its course, and it is the smallmouth bass that are ascending to star status.

#### **The Other Fish**

Bill Pierce, the affable director of



A typical Androscoggin River smallmouth bass comes to net.

## Maine's Androscoggin River Smallmouth Fishing in the Pine Tree State

Story and Photos  
by  
King Montgomery

marketing for the Maine Department of Inland Fisheries and Wildlife (MDIFW), greeted my fishing companion, Lefty Kreh, and me as we approached the luggage carousel at Portland's International Jetport. Bill, who now works for Rangeley Lakes Heritage Trust, had invited us to sample some of Maine's storied smallmouth bass fishing. The Pine Tree State has been long known for superb angling for landlocked salmon and trout, particularly native brook trout. But many of the rivers, especially away from their headwaters, are home to healthy populations of chunky and spirited

smallmouth bass. Mainers have long viewed the smallie as a lesser fish; some called it a trash fish, at least compared with the salmonids. Go figure!

We later met Blaine and Bonnie Holding, who would accompany us on our adventure drifting the Andro. Bonnie is a topnotch Registered Maine Guide—the state has one of the most stringent guide certification programs in the country—and Blaine is a proud member of the Maine Warden Service. He was named the outstanding warden of the year in 2006. Both are avid and "wicked good" fly anglers (to



Maine master guide Michael Jones readies the net for one of Lefty Kreh's smallmouth bass.

use the Maine vernacular).

Bill rowed one Clackacraft drift boat and Farmington guide Michael Jones maneuvered the other, and one day Bill Swan from MDIFW spelled Mike at the helm. We fished the Rumford, Mexico and Dixfield stretches of the river, and although the action was not hot and heavy this early fall, the fish we caught were large, very healthy and gave a good accounting of themselves. We caught enough fish to be quite happy.

"Get that darn trashfish off my line," admonished Lefty with a grin as

Jones moved to unhook the gorgeous 18-inch brown trout that hit a streamer. The Mainers onboard the two boats grimaced a bit as Lefty chuckled as only he can. You see, after bonefish, smallmouth are his favorite fish to catch, and they are his favorite freshwater fish. He thinks very highly of Mr. Smallmouth Bass.

"Here, cast this for a while," said Jones later as he handed me a popper that he'd just as soon I not photograph or describe in too much detail. My weighted streamers, cast on both floating and Teeny MiniTip lines, were picking up an occasional

bass, but it was time for a change.

I took the bug and looked around. It was midday, about 80 or so degrees and the sky defined the color of a bluebird. I didn't hesitate to tie on the fly because I'd been here before—sometimes the best time to throw a surface fly is right smack in the middle of a hot, high-sky day. Sure enough, I took several bass along the bank and rocks, and they averaged close to two pounds. And they smacked the topwater offering with abandon. Lesson: Try a popper, slider, or diver during the middle of the day. You'll be surprised how



Lefty Kreh, renowned fly angler, casts to smallmouth bass on the Androscoggin.

aggressively fish attack it.

Jones, also a Registered Maine Guide, is an excellent angler and caster, and he was pleased when I offered to row while he fished. He caught a bass or two almost immediately, and Bonnie was hooking up now and then from the back of the boat, too. (In the winter Michael and fellow Maine guide Bob Duport run a lodge in Chilean Patagonia, and I had the pleasure of fishing the Las Torres Lodge with them this past March. Another Maine guide and conservationist, Aldro French, who operates the Rangeley area's Rapid River Camp, also was a guest.)

### **Divide the Terrain**

The Androscoggin is pretty wide in the Dixfield area, presenting a lot of water to fish. So the logical thing to do is break up the river into the parts likely to hold bass. We concentrated on the shoreline, which can drop off sharply to deeper water; rocky points and rock walls, which draw bait and smallies; grass and weed beds are always a good bet; and natural and man-made structures such as old rock and log cribs, and various old and newer bridge pilings and abutments.

Rods for a 7- or 8-weight line are my weapons of choice, and both floating and sinking tip lines can be used. You could use a lighter 6-weight, but I don't care to stress fish, particularly in very warm water, and it's easier to cast big bass flies with the heavier rods. The new bass-specific rods by Sage and Temple Fork that cast lines up to 330 grains are excellent. I use FrogHair knotless tapered leaders in either monofilament or fluorocarbon from Gamma Technologies.

Flies include the usual suspects: hard-bodied poppers that create a good commotion; the ubiquitous weighted woolly bugger in dark colors; Clouser deep minnows in brown/white and chartreuse/white; and large terrestrial patterns drifted and skittered close to the banks.

Lefty and I had a great time on our



Master Maine guide William Clunie hefts one of the author's Androscoggin bronzebacks.

The Jordan Grand Resort Hotel near Bethel



Maine smallmouth adventure, and look forward to returning to the Andro and perhaps other rivers that hold one our favorite gamefishes. We caught plenty of fish but this trip, more so than many others we've shared, was as much about the people we were with as it was about the fish. We both love Maine—I consider it my soul home,

and my wife Elizabeth and I hope to live there in a few years—and it is the solid, friendly, and sincere people who help make it so. The superb fishing is just icing on the cake.

Yes, Maine still has excellent fishing for trout and landlocked salmon in its many lakes, ponds, rivers and streams; and striped bass, bluefish and other salty quarry ply the Atlantic coast and bays. But it is the smallmouth bass fishing—along with a lot of other fine things like lobster, whoopie pies, saltwater taffy, clean and cool air, rocky coastline, and much more—that keeps me coming back. And the Androscoggin River is a fine representative of Maine's really good smallmouth bass waters.

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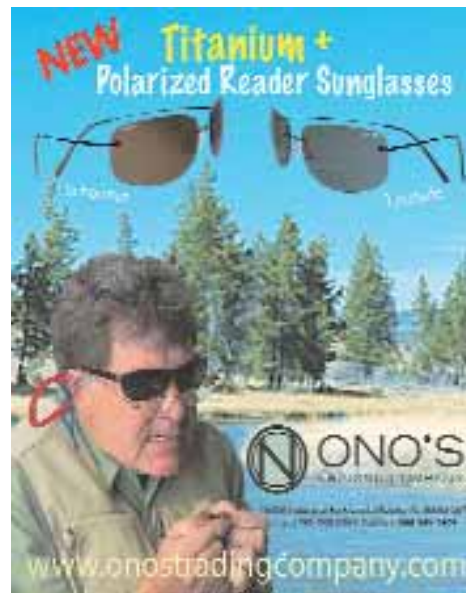
### Maine Information

**Maine Department of Inland Fisheries and Wildlife**, (207) 287-8000, [www.mefishwildlife.com](http://www.mefishwildlife.com). Licenses/permits available online. Informative Web site.

**Appalachian Mountain Club Androscoggin River Map and Guide**, (617)523-0636, (603)466-2721, [www.outdoors.org](http://www.outdoors.org). The best map for river info including launch and access points.

**Rangeley Lakes Heritage Trust**  
Bill Pierce (207) 864-7311, [www.rlht.org](http://www.rlht.org). Protects natural and historical heritage of the Rangeley Lakes region.

**American Angling Adventures**  
Michael Jones, (207) 491-9898. Las Torres Lodge (Chile) [www.lastorreslodge.com](http://www.lastorreslodge.com).



### Rapid River Camp

Aldro French, (207) 392-3333, [www.rapidriverflyfishing.com](http://www.rapidriverflyfishing.com).

### Sun Valley Sports

Rocky & Lisa Freda (877) 851-7533, (207)864-7311, [www.sunvalleysports.com](http://www.sunvalleysports.com).

### Mooserock Guide Service

William Clunie (207)562-7564, [www.mooserock.org](http://www.mooserock.org).

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