



PHOTO ILLUSTRATION BY KATHLEEN RUDELL; ISTOCKPHOTO

FOR A LIFETIME OF SAVVY SPORTSMANSHIP, TAKE A LESSON FROM INSTRUCTORS AT PRESTIGIOUS SCHOOLS FOR FLY-FISHING AND SPORT SHOOTING

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HEN I WAS A KID, it was easy to learn to hunt and fish. I had a constant supply of adult mentors who showed young kids like me the ropes, rarely bothered by the mistakes we made as we tagged along.

Once we learned our lessons, we had a tremendous amount of freedom to explore. Fishing was by far the easiest to practice. We'd dig worms in the backyard, grab some lures and a fly rod and be gone for the day.

Hunting was more complicated but not by much. We'd log some time at a shooting range under adult supervision. When we proved that we had mastered gun safety, we'd carry unloaded weapons through the woods with our mentors. After that, we'd get a handful of bullets or shells and shoot when appropriate.

The icing on the cake came when we were awarded the opportunity to hunt on our own. We'd buy a license, grab a 20-gauge and a pocketful of shells, bell a bird dog and head out into the woods.

While we live in a different world today, many folks still have an interest in learning to fish and hunt. To satisfy the demand, a number of fishing and shooting schools are flourishing throughout the country. They're open to anyone with an interest, and they're owned and operated by some of the biggest and best names in the outdoor industry.

Annie, get your gun. Let's go for a ride.

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Casting techniques as well as entomology and knot tying are part of the program taught by Barry and Cathy Beck.

FLY-FISHING SCHOOLS

BARRY AND CATHY BECK

Location: Benton, Pa.

Nearest cities within a 4-hour drive: Philadelphia; Washington, D.C.; New York; Baltimore.

Info: barryandcathybeck.com

The Becks are well-known throughout the fly-fishing industry for their schools, their writing and their photography. Their program covers gear and how to assemble it, a variety of casting techniques, entomology (the study of insects), knot tying and more.

Some of the class is taught on the grass. When students master the basics they move on to casting on one of the private ponds.

Students also have the opportunity to tie on flies to catch trout, bass or panfish, and that's when the fish fighting instruction begins. The class can be extended for an on-the-stream experience.

The Becks also teach proper fly presentations, how to achieve a drag-free drift and how to use flies such as dry flies, emergers, streamers and nymphs.

"We see so many people who wait until bad habits are established before getting instruction," Cathy Beck says. "Students can save time and frustration and start to catch fish sooner if they learn the right way from a good casting instructor."

Cathy's Tip: Students should practice when the course is over. "The more students practice their casting and spend time on the water fishing, the quicker they improve."

COURTESY OF BARRY BECK

"THE CASTING STROKE IS NOT AN ARC; THE PATH OF THE ROD TIP SHOULD BE IN A STRAIGHT LINE PARALLEL TO THE HORIZON."

—VAUGHN COCHRAN

BLACKFLY FLY-FISHING SCHOOL

VAUGHN COCHRAN

Locations: Abaco, Bahamas, and Jacksonville, Fla.

Nearest major cities within a 4-hour drive: Miami, Ft. Lauderdale and Tampa, Fla.

Info: blackflyfishingschool.com

Dealer's choice is the theme of Vaughn Cochran's program. Since his time as a member of Jimmy Buffett's Coral Reefer Band, the painter/fly-fishing industry entrepreneur has established schools that take unique fly-fishing conditions into account.

"Casting is easy to learn, and once you get the basics down it's a lot of fun," Cochran says. "One cast is never the same as the last one."

He's teamed up with co-owner and native Bahamian Clint Kemp to offer a destination school at their Blackfly Lodge on Abaco in the Bahamas.

Kemp teaches students how to fly-cast for bonefish, largely considered the holy grail of saltwater fly rodders. The school is oriented toward all ages, which makes for a perfect family getaway.

Cochran's Blackfly Outfitters school in Jacksonville, Fla., targets tarpon, redfish, snook, bonefish and permit. And a new Blackfly Outfitters freshwater school is being built in the stunning countryside of Charlottesville, Va., where anglers will learn about fly-fishing for trout as well as bass, bream and panfish.

Kemp's Tip: "The casting stroke is all about timing and (has) little to do with strength. I try to have all my students feel the rhythm of the cast with the pull, wait and push."

Kemp's casting exercises feature a piece of yarn on a pencil "to get the student to feel the rhythm and dynamics of the cast. By the time they pick up the rod we are

over halfway there. Some even practice at work."

Cochran's Tip: "Understand that the path of the rod tip is critical to the path of the fly line. The casting stroke is not an arc; the path of the rod tip should be in a straight line parallel to the horizon in order to throw a tight loop."

THE FLY SHOP

MICHAEL CARANCI

Location: Redding, Calif.

Nearest major cities within a 4-hour drive: San Francisco; Reno, Nev.

Info: theflyshop.com

The mountains of north-central California are home to some of the state's best trout fishing, and kids and families who want to take advantage of this can check out The Fly Shop's summer FishCamps.

All facets of fly-fishing are covered in the program, which operates out of the Antelope Creek Lodge near Mount Shasta, Calif.

FishCamp is a five-day/four-night class just for kids that includes daily casting instruction, seminars on reading the water, entomology and knot tying. Instruction on moving water and fishing take place on Antelope Creek, a private 1.5-mile-long river. Anglers can walk to the river with their instructor and have excellent opportunities to catch rainbow and brown trout.

The Family FishCamp follows a similar curriculum but is for the entire family.

FishCamp director Michael Caranci's Tip: "Some students can feel the line tug the rod on a backcast and know that is the signal to move the rod forward for a forecast. For those who are visual (learners) I shift their foot to the side so they can turn and watch what the line is doing."

"When they see that the line is straight they know to come forward. Either way works, but matching the technique to the student is the important part."