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# Remembering SPECIAL SMALLMOUTH BASS

by Marilyn Black

photo-Rod Bates

Anglers of all ages love listening to and telling tales of special fish they've landed. Six fishing guides licensed in Pennsylvania share fascinating stories of distinctive Smallmouth Bass that their guests caught in Pennsylvania. So, settle into a comfortable chair, imagine sitting around a crackling campfire with these fellows, and enjoy their reflections as told in their own words.

## Rod Bates, Koinonia Fishing Guides

"The impairment of the Susquehanna River is well documented, but this river continues to be an incredible Smallmouth Bass fishery as well as a fantastic catfish fishery. The Smallmouth Bass density may be down from 15 years ago, but the quality is exceptional. It is common for our clients to catch 17- to 18-inch bass, and there are many 19- and a few 20-inch bass taken every year as well. Debra Winberg, age 12, caught an Angler Award 19.25-inch Smallmouth Bass that weighed 4 pounds, 6 ounces. This fish was caught in November 2015 on a tube."

## Pete Cartwright, Smallies on the Yough

"Being a guide can be tough, but the pressure mounts when you're guiding a well-known client. My first celebrity client was Pittsburgh Steelers Tackle, Alejandro Villanueva, Pittsburgh. It was a slow start on that chilly, spring 2015 morning wading in the Allegheny River, but once I heard his drag move, I knew that his cast with a tube from 401 Bait Company caught a lively one. This 18-inch pre-spawn hog was no match for my 6'9", 340-pound client. That fish let



Alejandro Villanueva caught this 18-inch Smallmouth Bass while wading in the Allegheny River, fishing with a tube in the spring of 2015.





Ken Varilek caught this 4.1-pound Smallmouth Bass from the Delaware River in February 2016.

photo: Chris Gorsuch

me finally relax. I knew that I had done my job getting him on fish, and I was glad that I was able to make his first time fishing for river Smallmouth Bass as exciting as it should be.”

### Destin DeMarion, Big Fat Guide Service

“From fishing and guiding on Lake Erie, I have a very good understanding of how much the weather can affect our time on the water. After scheduling my September 2015 trip with Michael Kelley, Clarks Summit, and his brother Jim, I was looking forward to putting them on some Lake Erie gold, or bronze in this case. We were greeted with fairly rough water conditions in the morning. After assessing the situation, we hit the water and proceeded to have one of the most fun guide trips I have experienced. Michael and Jim both proved to be good anglers. Michael boated the biggest fish of the day—a 21-inch long lunker.”

### Chris Gorsuch, Reel River Adventures

“It was late February 2016, yet mild enough to melt the ice that was on the Delaware River just days earlier. The Delaware River can be stubborn and finicky. With the Susquehanna River fishery just west of us, it took some arm twisting to get my guide partner Ken Varilek, Slatington, to the Delaware River, where 4-plus-pound bass are far less common. I could see some doubt on Ken’s face, but his whole demeanor changed when the first four bass of the trip were 10- to 21-inches long, including his first Angler Award Smallmouth Bass of 2016, a 20½-inch long, 4.1-pound lunker that was caught on a Tsunami Tube from Wacky Worm Tackle.”

### Mike Gurreri, Mega Bass Guide Service

“On April 4, 2012, I had the pleasure of guiding 11-year-old Noah Adcock and his father David. The day started out as a typical cold, spring morning with a few fish early. Then, we had to work for our bites. We keyed on a deeper area close

to a shallow flat hoping that the big bass would eventually move up to the flat to feed. As Noah was working his green pumpkin Mizmo tube on a jig along the depth change, we noticed a submerged log. Noah made a cast along the top of the log, and fish on. After several jumps, he coaxed the big bass to the net. It was a fish of a lifetime—22½ inches long, 6 pounds, 3 ounces.”



photo: Mike Gurreri

Noah Adcock caught this 6-pound, 3-ounce Smallmouth Bass while fishing a tube in April 2012.

### John Joivell, No Slack Guide Service

“In early October 2015, I had the opportunity to fish with my friend Ben Filson, Hesston. We were actually fishing for stripers, which I have been guiding for on the lake for over 30 years. Ben and I noticed some topwater activity, and Ben picked up the bass rod that he brought along. Ben made several casts with a Rapala jerkbait into the area where we had seen the swirls, and he caught a 6-pound Smallmouth Bass. The area of the lake that we were fishing was around the 12-mile marker; the fish was released as soon as we took a photograph.”

From these first-hand stories, you can understand why many bass anglers consider Pennsylvania “The Bronze State.” ☐