

Wild River Guides 2010 Season Report



July 7th - 14th, 2010
A South Fork Adventure



Father and son Doug and Daryl Witmore, and I loaded a week's provisions, some fly rods, and a raft, then flew west an hour from Dillingham. We had packed very light and our gross weight in the Dehavailand Beaver was only 1050 pounds which is 100 pounds below the average. The skies were fair. We landed and we had a cool breeze while we portaged and then lined the rafts to the South Fork. Perhaps we should have spent more time on the portage but Daryl was so strong, the gear manageable and so we pushed fairly hard, likely setting a new overland record for the portage.

Father and son each landed 2 fine rainbows before our first camp at the "Raptor Pool" and Daryl lost a very large "Old Growth Trout". At the raptor pool a pair of large Grayling finished out the day. Our camp below Island Mountain was fine and after all the logistics we had earned ourselves a river!



From the log of July 8, 2010: We had typical Bering Sea "Fair Weather" consisting of a foggy morning, clearing mid day, followed by evening rain showers. At the Raptor Pool I watched an adult Golden Eagle dropping off prey at the nest with 2 chicks. I'd been



watching the nest since Richard Voss and I discovered the cliff in 2003 but I was never able to get a look at the adults. This is the nest that Kenny Gangloff and I photographed last week with an adult ptarmigan laid out for the young to feast on.

Daryl caught a fine Sockeye in the Raptor pool where a mixed school of Chum and Sockeye were staged along with resident Rainbows and Grayling. As we passed down river the log records nearly 40 fished hooked but only

a fraction landed as the guys learned the fishery and the techniques of swinging leeches effectively. As we closed out the afternoon amid towering cumulous clouds we passed through a developing “waterspout”, like a tornado in miniature lifting water from the river perhaps 50 feet in the air. We camped on a pool with Salmon, Trout, and Char.

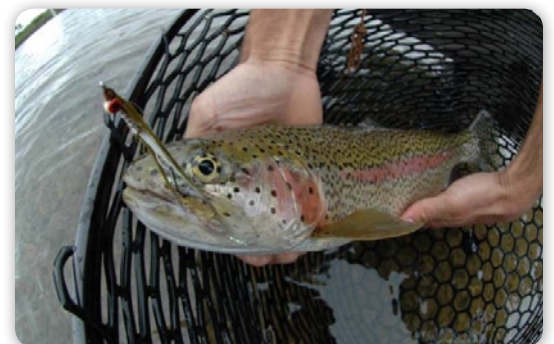


On Day 3, July 9, 2010 we passed below the strangest cloud layer. High winds aloft had formed it to look like warped grey marble layer cake. Then a Gyr falcon tore past with a sound like ripping silk while chasing a shorebird. This all as we left the mountains behind on a big mileage travel day bound for the coastal plain. The fly that fished best today was a “smolt” pattern tied like a Deceiver fished under a strike indicator.

The notes say that the salmon fry we did see are about 1.5-2 inches long and not terribly abundant. 12 Rainbow and a handful of Sockeye and Chum salmon were touched today

Snipe winnowing at all hours of the day and night, and Long-tailed Jaegers hunted past camp. Over breakfast Doug told stories of horse packing, Lama packing, and even goat packing with young Daryl on annual mountain outings. The fishing started out slowly with a trout and salmon or two in the bigger holes and then mile upon mile it got better through the epicenter of all the trout activity to our 4'th camp.

Fettuccine and pesto sauce for supper. The notes from the day close with “an awful lot of trout and salmon hooked today but no Char” and last week on this



river closed out with but one enigmatic Char taken in 7 days. So curious, the Dolly Varden, some years common in mid summer but this year not so far.



July 11'th, 2010. A perfect Alaskan day. Foggy am, burning off by mid afternoon. Many Rainbows to 22 inches, too many Chum salmon, and a couple of Pink and Sockeye Salmon! A notable chrome bright Sockeye for Doug! Daryl cast backhand from the boat as we traveled and has a fine touch with a fly rod. The first adult Dolly Varden Char of the trip was a lovely 20 inch fish quite fresh from the salt, with an empty stomach which we know because we killed it and ate it for dinner.



In the lower river the fishing was exceptional. The log states that “certainly no more than 5 minutes elapsed all day without a fish on. Doug caught a jack King, Rainbows, and Dolly Varden. The morning fog burned off by 8:30 pm! Hard to believe that our Alaska summer is past the zenith. The songbirds are quieter in the evening now. Of the thousands of salmon we’ve seen in the river this week not a single one is yet spawning. A few Chum were seen constructing redds so the “table is set” but the “main course” (eggs) for which all the rainbow and Arctic Grayling are gathered has not been served.

We lay over for 2 days in the lower river which is “dense with fish, Chums in particular continuously porpoising, slapping down hard.” There is widespread speculation about why the Chum jump and slap their side down so hard upon landing. Perhaps, some say, to loosen the skeins of eggs? But I’ve come to believe that it is communication specific to the species, advertising their vigor, to other Chum that here is an exceptionally fit individual to choose as a mate!

We watched with binoculars as a loon (red throated perhaps) flew by with a 4 inch fish crosswise in its mandibles and as a family of Green Winged Teal with downy young fed in the wetland.



On departure day July 14, as coastal fog crowded the mountains, we strained to hear our airplane for minutes and the waiting stretched into hours. Such a joy at the end of an expedition to hear far off, the throb of the nine cylinder Pratt & Whitney radial Beaver engine.