

ALASKA'S WILD RIVER GUIDES

2019 Season Report



August 11th - August 18th, 2019

Goodnews River Fly-Fishing Expedition



70 miles of Peak Coho Fishing, Sea-Run Dollies and Great Species Diversity

Three of our guests (Frub, Junior and Dick) were with us for the second consecutive week and after a few days of rest were eager to get back out on the river. Our five other guests: Jerry, Gavin, Charlie, Alex and Nora arrived in the afternoon and we got them up to speed quickly. We prepared a fresh Salmon Dinner, got everyone repacked and went over safety briefings and guests went to bed early to get some rest. The forecast looked good for the morning but the weather is always subject to change in Alaska.

From the trip log of August 11th, 2019

We were confident when we woke up that we were going to have favorable flying weather and got breakfast started at 6am. Everyone loaded up on eggs and bacon and packed the final items in their personal gear bags. Guests made their own sandwiches, grabbed granola bars, put waders on, and we were ready to go! Denise

and Sue showed up in the truck and van around 8:30am and we piled in. Rick and Denise's yellow lab, Finn, greeted us with infectious energy at the floatplane dock. The atmosphere was positive as we weighed the gear in the warm morning sun, and loaded it into the planes and trucks. The planes flew out from Lake Aleknagik because of the longer runway.

We landed on Goodnews Lake under sunshine but clouds soon overtook the sky. When we take off from Dillingham, we never know how different the weather will be at the headwaters lakes. The first three planes landed within 15 minutes of each other and we got the gear unloaded quickly and efficiently. The pilots left to pick up the remaining guests. A single angler in a small raft rowed past us and we exchanged hand waves before he continued on his journey. While waiting for the second half of our group, the guides built up rafts while the guests ate their lunch and rigged rods. Gavin threw a bead and landed the first fish of the trip, a Sockeye Salmon.



It was mid-August and the seasons were changing around us. The days were getting shorter, the leaves beginning to change, and the Coho were running hard. We rowed down the upper three miles of the river with rolling hills lining the banks and dramatic mountains in the distance. A group of twenty Mergansers pushed down river in front of us for several miles. They perceived us as a threat to avoid at all costs. The mother bird faked an injured wing to distract us ("the predator") from the young.



We reached our first camp at 3pm and the fishing began. A big pod of mixed Salmon sat in front of the camp bar, primarily Sockeye, with Chum and Kings mixed in. The char were abundant and ready to eat. They were so ravenous that they would attempt to eat the bead out of the mouth of a fish that was already hooked. Everyone did phenomenally well and it was estimated that the group

caught over 150 fish that afternoon. Nora positioned herself on the drop-off of a shallow flat and caught char at will until it was time for some wine. In addition to many char, Alex caught a Coho on a bead, Frub caught a big red male Sockeye, Junior caught Chum, and Dick caught the first Coho of the year on a gurgler fly. Gavin and Jerry caught lots of Char on the bead, and Charlie caught Char, a Sockeye on the

streamer, and a nice golden Jack King. The fishing and species diversity was incredible.

Pete got our Pasta dinner going early and the Dinner bell was powerful enough for everyone to lay down their rods to come together and eat. The wine flowed freely and smiles were seen on everyone's faces that weren't covered by a bug net. It was August and the *no-see-ums* had arrived. When the weather cooperates and we are able to get to the river on the same day it is always a small victory. Several anglers continued to fish after dinner and others decided to get into their tents after a long day.

From the trip log of August 12th, 2019

We started our first full day on the river with a balanced breakfast of coffee, granola, steak strips, and of course breakfast cheese. The guides broke down camp while the guests fished and caught many char and Salmon and Charlie landed his first Coho. We went over safety, travel and fishing briefings and pushed off our gravel bar. The fishing was strong out of camp and every boat doubled up in the first quarter mile. Alex caught the largest Rainbow from the Goodnews of the year on the bead. The 23" fish made a hard run and circled around a woody obstruction to try to entangle the line. He was able to control the fish as the boat drifted away from the snag and found a spot where the fish could be successfully landed. It was a memorable moment from the intimate upper river.



Several minutes later, Dick, Nora, Frub and Junior had a good viewing of small bear walking along an elevated bluff just above the river in a spot we call, "swimming bear Bluff." The Dolly fishing was nothing short of spectacular in the miles below camp and dozens of fish were caught in each boat. Jerry was hooked up on a nice fish while another hungry char attempted to eat his indicator. Alex slapped his gurgler down in front of the aggressive 24-inch fish and it crushed the fly. A light rain fell but through the mist we spotted a Great Horned Owl tucked back in the willows.



When the boats met for lunch, all told the same story of incredible fishing. In the early afternoon, we approached a deep slot along a bluff that looked prime for Coho. The anglers switched from bead rods to streamer rods and Charlie, Dick and Nora all caught Coho on streamers. Frub and Junior, in the “Brother Boat” had decided to



focus on catching lots of Char on the bead. Almost every angler fished the gurgler and we witnessed some very intense eats.

Three Merlin were seen throughout the day including two flying together in the canyon. The Merlin is a small raptor that we seldom see on the rivers let alone three in one day. It made us curious to look into their migration paths and schedules. Jerry was a wealth of knowledge

when it came to ornithology. He was able to identify birds by their appearance and calls. It was a pleasure to have him on the boat noticing things that may have been otherwise overlooked.



A group of rafts was camped in our traditional camp two so we pushed to an alternate camp we call “Noel’s Coho Bluff”. The rain fell during our evening push but the guests’ spirits were high from a great day on the river. Both Pink Salmon and Char were caught from camp. We enjoyed Sockeye Salmon fish tacos for dinner with all the garnishes and accoutrements. The fishing stayed strong all day and Jerry reported having the best

fishing day of his life. The rain brought guests into the comfort of the wing to trade stories and share drinks until they were ready to crawl into their tents.

From the trip log of August 13th, 2019

Rain peppered the tents on and off during the night. We began the soggy morning with hot coffee and oatmeal to warm up the group. The solo angler that had passed us at the lake stopped and chatted for a while. It turns out that he had never floated the Goodnews and was looking to set up a morning camp. As we packed up, he asked to claim our site, which we extended to him with open arms. The morning fishing with beads was strong for



Char. We found a large bluff with a pocket of slow moving water, loaded with Sockeye and Coho. Frub, Junior, Dick and Nora all caught two Coho out of the bucket. Alex caught a nice Jack King, Charlie hooked a nice Rainbow, and Jerry caught his first Coho of the trip there.

On our August trips Coho eventually take over the minds of many anglers and their preference is to focus this species over the others. After only two days, some anglers had caught so many Dollies that some decided to fish only Salmon holes. Although



you may have a target species you really never know what you are going to catch. In the afternoon Nora was targeting Dollies with the bead and hooked into a nice Coho. The 6-weight rod was a little light, but after a grinding battle she was able to get the fish to the net. Alex using a pink and purple Dolly Llama at the mouth of a tributary got a surprise when he hooked and landed an 18" Lake Trout. At over 30 miles from Goodnews Lake, our thought was that this fish had come down from the headwater lake that fed the tributary. He also caught a Coho while leaving the tributary with Brian on the oars. Charlie had a fish smash his fly but miss the hook near the same spot. On his next cast another struck, and after a short fight we landed a 12-pound Coho.



The rain stopped in the afternoon and we got to camp before 5pm. Dick, Junior, Frub and Charlie started in on the d'oeuvres as the swallows cruised through the air and perched on the adjacent bluff where they nested. Alex, Nora, Charlie and Gavin hiked up the bar and reported good fishing for Char when they returned for dinner. We filleted one of Dick's Coho with a fresh Teriyaki glaze. While we were eating our dinner, Brian saw two young bears come out of the brush down bar. They snorkeled for fish and moved across the river quickly and out of sight. We watched a big flock of White Fronted Geese fly south over



camp. Their calls are distinct and another signifier of autumn in Alaska. After dinner Pete, Brian and Gavin rowed across the river to gather blueberries for some additional

dessert. The majority of the summer had been very dry and it had taken longer than usual for the berries to ripen but the season was finally upon us. We enjoyed a beautiful evening before heading to our tents.

From the trip log of August 14th, 2019

Grey clouds blanketed the sky in the morning. We enjoyed the fruits of the land from the blueberry harvest the night prior with our breakfast. By the 3rd morning, efficiency was improving and we were able to brake down camp and load boats before 10 AM. Right out of camp, Junior came tight to a nice Char almost instantly followed by Gavin. We floated down to a big Bald Eagles nest with three Chicks. Their cackles filled our ears as an adult Eagle returned with fresh snacks.



Near the nest was a big beaver slough with a large lodge at the bottom of the pool. The pool was so large that all four boats could fish comfortably in it. Nora may be a small woman but when she hooks up on a big fish, she knows how to put the pressure on it. She hooked a nice Coho in the slough and subdued it quickly with her ninja like side pressure. Gavin had switched over to the streamer rod the day prior and was trying for his first Coho of the trip. He hooked a nice male Coho and did a great job landing it.

The boats avoided each other while the anglers battled big Salmon. There is a learning curve that comes with learning to fight big sea-run fish, especially when one is used to catching Trout.

We moved down the river and the boats all funneled into a narrow, jungle-like channel. The signs of brown bears were everywhere so we made sure that our "Hey Bear!" calls were especially audible. Not all the wildlife was scared off by our calls. We see a variety of different birds throughout the season and the Semi-Palmated Plover and Greater Yellow Legs were both abundant in this stretch.

Although it was noted that Coho fishing was slower than usual for this time in the season, our anglers still managed to catch plenty of nice fish. We hauled off on the edge of a



shallow spillway where a small Tributary entered the river and Junior and Dick both were able to catch nice Coho out of this spot. Not long after, we stopped for lunch to refuel before returning to the hunt for fish.



The fish were holding in different water than in past years but with some reconnaissance we were able to locate them. Gavin caught another two Coho and Alex caught another nice Rainbow Trout. Right past the Wilderness Boundary we ran into our friend Paul, the Goodnews Bay River Keeper, grilling a freshly caught Silver Salmon. We

cherish an opportunity to interact with Yupik friends and our first two boats stopped to chat. The hunting season was approaching and Moose is an important part of the diet for Alaskan peoples. Paul showed the boats the Moose call he had made out of a coffee can and a piece of string-it really "sounded like a moose!" We said goodbye and moved out of the designated wilderness.

We floated a couple more miles to a camp we had used a few weeks earlier and caught several Coho along the way. John and Bailey stopped at a bar full of firewood and scoured it for dry pieces to load into their boats to bring to camp. Charlie put on a show for the rest of the group while they were eating appetizers and preparing dinner. He hooked a nice Coho at the top of the bar and then his line got wrapped and his rod tip came off but he was able to get everything back together and successfully land the fish. Meanwhile down bar Nora and Alex were on their own hunt for Coho and Nora successfully landed a nice bright fish on their unguided mission.



It was a gray chilly afternoon and we utilized the wood we had collected and got a fire going before dinner. It was Pizza night and as they came hot off the pan, they were hand delivered to the guests around the fire. It was the perfect night for a fire inspired dessert and Bailey led the charge to teach her personal s'more building techniques. Pete, Brian and John dragged a raft down river to do a little recon for the morning to see where the fish were holding and caught a few fish. It was a long day and the fine gravel made a comfortable place to lay our sleeping pads.



From the trip log of August 15th, 2019

The cold morning slowed everyone down a bit but once everyone got caffeinated, they kicked into high gear. As we readied to push off the shore, a jet boat drove past our camp and the noise pollution let us know we were not alone. The fishing started



strong once we left our camp. The Guides' recon mission the night prior provided valuable information on where the fish were holding. The group took four Coho out of the pocket below camp before continuing. John and Baileys' boats explored an inflow where several dozen Coho were concentrated. Alex and Dick did some serious damage and took several fish each out of the pocket. Nora and Gavin hooked quite a few fish out of the same area. Nora was on fire with the Coho throughout the day.



Brian's boat did a drive by and Charlie and Jerry pulled a couple fish off the outside seam. Frub caught a very nice Grayling before lunch.

On many Alaskan rivers we start in the headwaters with big dramatic mountains and flow onto an alluvial flood plane after a couple days. On the Goodnews we are lucky enough to stay in the Mountains for nearly the entire week and this section of river was full of

striking large peaks.

The gloomy morning eventually made way to a nice afternoon. The group observed a curious Red Fox scouring the riverbank for Salmon carcasses that did not appear to be afraid of our rafts. The fish in the Coho pockets were concentrated in the

afternoon. River Keeper Paul was up on a nearby hillside collecting berries when Charlie caught a nice Coho.

Paul's dog Mongo went over to investigate the catch and pose for a photo. Alex was lifting his fly out of the water when a nice Rainbow struck his fly, which he landed quickly on his 8-weight. Jerry and Charlie had several doubles on nice fish and Jerry reported landing eight Coho throughout the day. While



fishing with John, Dick and Alex explored the remnant of a channel that we used to call “Best Day of your Life Channel”. The bright sun beamed down and illuminated dozens of fish. The two anglers cast and watched the Coho charge and crush their flies as they doubled up three times in a row. Frub and Junior put on a show late in the day just above our fifth Camp and caught six fish combined out of the same hole.

Chef Pete cooked up a delicious Salmon creation for dinner that evening. We changed up the Asian style recipe we had planned and went with more traditional fish seasonings with lemon, butter, lemon pepper and garlic powder. Everyone relaxed and drank cold beers on a warm evening. Bailey and Pete rowed across the river to fish a slough in the late evening. They put on a show as they hooked Coho for those still sitting around the fire. We watched the huge full moon come up over the horizon and act as a giant night light for our sleepy anglers.



From the trip log of August 16th, 2019

It was a hazy morning with a light chill in the air. We spotted a Kingfisher flying around camp, chirping loudly. After we broke camp, Brian and John’s boats crossed the river to explore a tributary with their passengers. The early morning haze burned off and the high sun revealed several dozen fish moving around a deep pocket. Gavin and Frub landed a few Coho before heading down the small channel to rejoin the main river. Nora and Junior stayed near the deep hole and crushed fish. Nora landed five out of that bucket. Alex caught a big Jack King just a few bends away while fishing with Bailey. A big immature Bald Eagle perched on a rock outcropping and allowed the boats to get a close look before spooking off.



Paul stopped his Jet boat on his way up river and dropped off some smoked King bellies that we enjoyed at lunch. The fatty golden orange morsels were absolutely delicious, and a testament to the Yupik peoples, whose Salmon preparation methods have been developed over thousands of years. As we descended further towards the ocean the river developed larger meanders. The shorelines were lined with the carcasses of deceased salmon, which is not uncommon at this point in the season

when most of the Salmon species have completed their spawning mission. Without a stiff breeze there was a noticeable odor present.

Above a long stretch where Mission lodge lands their floatplanes were a few deep pockets loaded up with Coho and all anglers were able to pull fish from them. As we continued down river we caught many dinner quality Coho and we decided to keep one of Dick's bright ones.



In one of the last pockets of the day Junior hooked a nice bright Coho while wading. Jerry fished the same pocket a bit further down from the boat and caught a nice Coho to end his day. Alex built a fire for the group while the guides set up camp. A Merlin flew through camp in the evening. We filleted Dick's Coho into fresh sushi for dinner and Brian crafted perfect rolls for the group to enjoy. We ate

dessert cookies around the fire and as it started to get dark, we saw another Red Fox across the river. For the majority of the summer daylight stays with us until close to midnight, but by the time August rolls around, we finally start to get true darkness to aid our sleep.

From the trip log of August 17th, 2019

On the start of the final day on the river, the weather was good and the fishing seemed to be improving. Alex and Nora doubled up to start the day in a pocket only a few hundred yards down river from camp. The low water had dried up sloughs and forced the fish into different areas. We fished an area we traditionally called the "Coho Carousel" with success, but we were on the opposite side from where we typically find fish. Gavin and Jerry did well in Bailey's boat and stuck nice Silvers on the inside seam. Nora also caught a couple of fish out of this pocket.

Pete, Frub and Junior took a side channel in an attempt to sneak into an old Coho spot. While they were pushing through the back channel they saw two Great Horned Owls on the side of the bluff. Frub and Junior came out of the brushy back channel in perfect position to target the pocket and Alex and Nora set up 50 yards downriver.

Pete and John held their boats in place and

all four anglers ripped on fish for almost an hour. It is estimated that the four anglers caught over two dozen fish out of the pocket. Downriver in Brian's boat, Charlie and Dick found success while drift fishing an outside bank.



We stopped for lunch at a nice bar and enjoyed smoked salmon with cream cheese and wasabi for lunch. Guests and guides alike were relaxed and laying back on the rafts enjoying the sunshine. Pete tried his luck getting one of the fish pushing past the bar to eat with his bright blue “Light Saber” rod. We had an unexpected interruption as a Drone from the Goodnews River Lodge flew down and hovered over us. It was intruding in our airspace and several comments were made about shooting it out of the sky.



We found a few more active pockets of Silvers in the afternoon and ended up keeping one that Nora caught for dinner. Everyone caught a few more fish and we headed for an early camp we had scouted, but had not used for 6 years. The high water of the previous year had reshaped the bar and it was now well suited for camping. John filleted Nora’s fish and



Pete made his famous Salmon curry. The hot sun drove everyone out of waders and under the shade of the wing to enjoy dinner. Jerry told stories about feral cat hunting that had everyone belly laughing. After dinner Jerry got back in waders and went down river to try for one last fish. He ended up landing a big Rainbow and decided it was a good way to end the day. The guides rowed across the river to fish “Porpoise Flats” in the evening. John broke his rod

and returned back to the fire with the rest of the guests while Pete, Bailey and Brian stuck some nice fish. The last of the bourbon was passed around as everyone told stories from the week.

From the trip log of August 18th, 2019

We woke early and got things packed up quickly. We headed down river for the landing zone and the mist burned off as we pushed. The skies were clearing and we had good faith that we would be able to be picked up. We got to the LZ and unloaded all the gear and rolled up the rafts. We sat on the banks patiently waiting until we heard the drone of the floatplanes emerge in the distance. We don’t generally have perfect flying days like this in August and apart from some wind, the views were absolutely spectacular to cap off an incredible week.

