

ALASKA'S WILD RIVER GUIDES

2019 Season Report



July 30th - August 6th, 2019

Kanektok River Fly-Fishing Expedition

All the bags and guests arrived into Dillingham on time. We transported the group back to the Kingfisher House and went over map and safety briefings while enjoying a fresh Salmon dinner. Their arrival day was both Bailey and Laura's Birthdays and we made sure the event was properly celebrated. Both are big fans of Ice Cream cake and one might think that procuring one in Dillingham would be a difficult task but with a little perseverance anything is possible. After enjoying food and beverages with family and friends we went to bed with full bellies eager for fly out day.



From the trip log of July 30th, 2019

Fly out morning came early as we went through the typical chaos of eating breakfast, making sandwiches, trying to get everyone's personal gear bags packed and ready to go, and, coordinating with the Pilots. Denise picked us up in the Van and we headed over to the Shannon's Pond around 9am. We would be flying in two Cessna 206 loads, two Beaver loads, and a Cessna 185 gear load flown by Rick's Kiwi Pilot friend, Doug.

The gear was weighed and divided up, the planes were loaded, and after a sunny flight the first group touched down on Pegati Lake at 11am. The first planes saw a Brown Bear fishing in the nearby river surrounded by vibrant Red Salmon. Laura had



been hearing about getting a headset in a bush aircraft for a number of years from Pete. Her dreams were fulfilled when Rick handed her one on the flight. It was a perfect day for flying and the entire group arrived at the Lake by 1:30pm. The boats were quickly loaded up and ready to depart the landing zone by 2:30pm. We rowed out of Pegati Lake and into the Kanektok. We moved downriver for three and a half hours, stopping only for Jason to photograph schools of splashing Sockeye Salmon. Pete, Laura and George saw another bear in the lead boat. All the boats made it to a island camp bar by 5:30pm. The group set up the wing and Pete got a pasta dinner going. Dick sat back and relaxed with a glass of wine and kept Pete company. This was his first week of three on the river with us and he knew he would have plenty of opportunities to catch fish over the next month.

George and Laura got a taste of Alaskan fishing and caught the first Char of their lives at camp. Frub and Junior caught the first Sockeye of the week. Jason caught a few dollies on the bead and then decided to take some photos. His lifeless body wrapped in a bright orange dry suit drifting down river provided comic relief for the rest of the group. A new nickname was formed for him on the first evening of the trip: "Scuba Steve." It was a long travel day and we filled our hungry bellies with pasta and a dessert of homemade cookies Laura had brought from Colorado. Don still had the itch to fish after dinner and he hooked and landed several nice Rainbow's. Brian was convinced that the discarded pasta left over from dinner attracted the fish but we may never know if trout secretly love simple carbohydrates. Although it was a great first day, we got in our tents thinking about the spoils the river would deliver in the morning.

From the trip log of July 31st, 2019

We awoke 10 miles from the Lake under partly cloudy skies. The first breakfast on the river always gives you a chance to observe the surroundings with fresh eyes while you eat. We had helpful hands and camp was broken down by 9:30AM. We gave our safety, fishing, and travel briefings for the day and set off on the river.



The upper river's vast landscapes and dramatic mountains are incredible to look at but the fish can be a scattered. Many of the Salmon spawn in tributaries of the main river and when we intersect with them, the fish numbers generally increase significantly. Fishing for the first twenty-five minutes was slow until a major tributary joined the river. Every raft pulled off and all of the anglers caught Char to start the day. Ben also caught a Sockeye and big Jack King.

Don spent the morning fishing the gurgler and catching Char and his first Grayling ever. The gurgler can be one of the most fun and visually appealing ways to entice fish and you never know what you are going to catch! Jason was participating in the Western Native Trout Challenge and one of the species he was looking to catch was a Rainbow Trout, which he accomplished in the first few hours of the day.

Laura was in competition with both Ben and George had to make sure she caught bigger and more fish than both of them. She caught her first Jack King in the afternoon. Dick landed a nice 25" colored up Char with a beautiful orange belly and speckled pink spots. Brian's boat saw a small 3 to 4 year old Bear off a hillside. He spooked down a small flood channel into the brush and out of sight. While exploring another side channel with a deep emerald pool, Dick and Jason both hooked more Rainbows.

We made camp at a favorite bar we had named "Pete's Peak" for its lovely views of a Mountain that Pete had hiked on a Veteran's Trip a few years earlier. Luckily the Arctic Turns that were nesting on the bar a few weeks earlier had since moved on. Even after a strong day of fishing, Junior decided he wanted to continue and stuck several more char on the shallow flat in front of camp. The species diversity at camp was strong and Grayling, Rainbows, and char were all landed. Pete cooked up fish Tacos for dinner and we enjoyed them under the wing while trading stories. Everyone gathered around the fire in the evening and we had S'mores for dessert, which was a favorite of both Laura and Bailey's. After dinner



we watched Bailey cast a gurgler in front of camp as fish continuously exploded on her foam fly. It was a nice end to our first full day on the river.

From the trip log of August 1st, 2019

After coffee and breakfast we broke down camp and the boats were loaded by 9:45am. During morning briefings we spotted a Sow and Cub grazing on the hillside. In August we see signs of bears everywhere but if they catch our scent or see us they typically run away. These bears were up wind and occupied by the berry patches and paid us little mind. We had a great viewing as they moved across the green hillside and down to the river before seeing us and moving away.



In early August you can fish using different methods depending on your preference. Many anglers choose to fish with a bead rig but Don and Dick decided to fish streamers all day with Bailey. They reported incredible numbers of Rainbows, Grayling and Dollies and the fishing blew them both away. George caught a nice 20” Rainbow on a bead to start his day. Laura and Ben were fishing with Brian and both

hooked King Salmon while throwing beads and streamers for Rainbows and Dollies. Junior was also chucking the streamer in Pete’s boat and caught a beautiful 23” Rainbow before lunch.

The river changes each time we float it and we are constantly figuring out the best channels for navigation and fishing. With the mid-season low water we faced a “jungle tour” to find the best channel after lunch. We explored tight braided channels with overhanging willows and corridors that were not much wider than the rafts but we enjoyed the lush scenery during the float.



By August, the numbers of char in the river can be truly staggering and we have days where a single angler can catch over 50 fish in a single day. This was one of those days. Frub and George fished the bead after lunch and had non-stop Char action for two and a half hours. It was difficult for John to make oar strokes because the two couldn't stop catching fish. Frub also landed a nice 22" Rainbow in the late afternoon before camp. He described the day as one of the best fishing days of his life.



We pulled into a slough that leads to a gravel bar we have named "Falcon Bluff" because of the rock face overlooking the camp where raptors nest. The channel at the base of the bluff had slow moving water that passed into a deep green pool full of fish. The sun came out just as we

floated into the channel and illuminated the bright red Sockeye preparing to spawn. We observed the char moving around below them and it felt like looking into a wild aquarium.

We unloaded the boats and Jason, Ben and Laura hiked up the bluff to enjoy the views and shoot some photos. When they returned to camp Pete, Ben, Jason, Laura and George decided to hunt for firewood. We wanted a campfire but our bar didn't have wood on it, so they rowed down river, and returned 20 minutes later in laughter with a raft full of dry firewood. Upon return, "Scuba Steve" got in his dry suit and set out to photograph the huge pods of Sockeye.



It was pizza night on the river and the group gathered under the wing to enjoy dinner. Pete and Ben put their Eagle Scout skills to good use and started a fire down bar. Bailey took a quick hike up the shallow channel and encountered a small Bear looking for Salmon carcasses. When the fire began to burn down and the wine ran dry, the guests headed for the comfort of their tents. The group was exhausted from catching fish and slumbered hard.

From the trip log of August 2nd, 2019

We awoke to a beautiful Rainbow cascading over the camp in a light mist. Not long after a civilized breakfast the winds picked up aggressively. Over the night, we turned the calendar from July to August, and in Alaska that means that autumn is upon us and harsh weather can strike at any moment. Gusts up to 30 mph made breaking down camp a sporty activity, but the entire group pitched in to help with the hard work.



The wind died down mid-morning and made fishing easier. Dick and Don committed to pink and purple streamers for the morning and found some good fish. Both of them caught a few nice Rainbows, Dollies and Chum. This time of year is a special time for species diversity and a dedicated angler can catch half a dozen different species each day. It was a good day for catching Rainbow Trout and Laura and Jason caught several nice ones.

After lunch we passed over a standing wave where the weir usually sits. The weir was disassembled and stacked on the riverbank because there was no commercial season in the village this year. Ben was showing some signs of fatigue from a late night and was napping on gravel bars when Brian hauled off to wade fish. Ben had developed a love for targeting Sockeye during his time in Alaska and in-between cat naps he threw a streamer and caught a few nice Kings and a large red Sockeye. Junior fished the gurgler most of the day and did well connecting with a variety of species including some big Char.



The wind kicked back up to 30 mph in the afternoon. It made casting more difficult but luckily it was a tailwind pushing us in the right direction. Dick ended his fishing day with a nice Rainbow. We eat fresh fish the majority of our nights on the river but first we have to find a high quality fish for Dinner. Laura landed a bright Sockeye that we enjoyed that evening. We made camp on a new gravel bar, which was protected from the wind with a natural willow windbreak. There were good numbers of Sockeye

pushing up the bar but luckily we already had a fish for dinner. The tailwind was useful for swift travels and we were able to make camp early, with beverages in hand by 4pm. Driftwood littered the bar, and after a windy day the group was ready for a fire.

Preparing a new Mushroom Rice recipe to accompany Laura's Salmon, we ate our fill and everyone hunkered down by the fire for the rest of the evening. Just after the final sticks were thrown into the fire and most of the group was asleep, Pete, Laura, Ben and John saw a Sow with two cubs a few hundred yards up river from camp. We watched the Sow catch a fish and then disappear into the brush. Just as everyone was comfortable in their tents, a squall came through.

Twenty mph gusts and rain pelted the camp, but we slept well in warm sleeping bags and dry tents, our personal shelters from the August weather.



From the trip log of August 3rd, 2019

It's always a little tougher to get up at the crack of dawn when you can hear the pitter-patter of rain on your tent. No matter how hard it is raining, the tent fly amplifies the sound to make it seem worse than it actually is. Breakfast was later than usual but it

gave the guests a chance for some extra sleep. We carefully broke down camp keeping everything as dry as possible but the rain continued throughout the morning.



George and Laura both started the day catching Rainbows. Later in the morning while exploring a side channel they doubled on Rainbows and it was reported that Laura's was larger. Today marked the first day of the season where we began to catch Coho. For some reason wet weather and good Coho

fishing go hand-in-hand. Ben caught the first Coho of the 2019 season, which is always a noteworthy title. Junior also got in on the action and landed several Coho. Between the two anglers, they landed a total of five before lunch. Frub stayed dedicated to the bead in Brian's boat and constantly hooked up throughout the day. Frub hooked a Rainbow that jumped several times before jumping directly into Brian's boat! They made sure to release it quickly unharmed. Laura caught another nice

Rainbow before lunch and a King Salmon in the late morning. John stole her rod just before lunch and caught a nice 22" Rainbow.

The rain continued into the afternoon but we found many Trout in the wood. Some Grayling were caught, but the numbers were starting to taper off. The size of the char decreased but the numbers remained strong. Jason enjoyed taking photos throughout the day with his underwater housing. It's always a pleasure to have a National Geographic photographer on the trip so we can all learn what goes into getting the professional shots we see in magazines.



We estimated that we received two inches of rain throughout the day. While some people may view this as a negative, we had a positive outlook that it would increase flows and bring more Coho into the River. As it was getting late and we were without a dinner fish, Pete caught a Sockeye just

across from our camp bar but it was too small to feed the entire group. We found a storm camp that we had never used that was well protected from the wind and rain. There we found a sign of the Rockies in the form of a full non-alcoholic Coors washed ashore. Jason and Ben helped with camp chores and thankfully made the work easier for the guides. The team built an awesome storm camp as we used three of the boats as windbreaks to keep tents protected. After camp was set up Ben was tasked with finding another bright fish for dinner. He hiked down river and returned 30 minutes later in triumph with a second fresh Sockeye that Brian quickly filleted. We ate our fill of fresh Salmon and shared some brown water cocktails to warm our bones.

Everyone headed to their tents early to stay out of the rain and warm up.



From the trip log of August 4th, 2019

Rain persisted throughout the entire night and we estimated it was falling at a rate of 1/2" per hour for 6 to 8 hours. We noticed that the river had risen a few inches over night. We broke down the tents under the wing and the guides did all they could to keep the tents as dry as possible in the downpour.

This was a strong group with Alaska experience and they were ready to battle the elements without complaint.

The fishing stayed good throughout the day and for the anglers who wanted to target Rainbows in the lower river, a bead remained effective. As we worked our way towards the Ocean, the landscape began to flatten and the big mountains began to disappear into the distance. In the late morning we crossed the Togiak National Wildlife Refuge boundary and exited the designated Wilderness Area. Very close to



the boundary while fishing a deep pool Frub caught a nice bright Coho that we kept for dinner. We got lucky and the rain stopped between 11:30 and 2pm and the wind stayed light. We made and ate lunch without the chaos of our food getting pelted by wet wind.

George caught some nice Chum Salmon from “the front of the boat.” He and John had an in-depth conversation and concluded that fish are generally caught in this area. Dick caught his first Coho of the week while fishing with Brian, and Jason caught his first Coho while fishing with Pete. Laura caught her first Chum of the trip. The wind ramped up in the afternoon and we pushed into a strong headwind that held us from getting down river. Frub caught a Pink Salmon for his final species of the Pacific Salmon Slam, which was a big milestone for him. We saw the first of the White Fronted Goose migration during the day, which was another signal that autumn was upon us.

We made another good storm camp where we utilized the natural vegetation to help combat the wind. It had been a rainy day and even though Gore-Tex is a great material, this was the type of week where its limits are tested. Pete cooked up his famous Salmon Curry recipe for dinner with Frub’s Coho, accompanied by couscous and naan. The wind let up in the evening and we were able to eat dinner under the Wing in comfort. After a few ginger snap cookies we retired to our tents dreaming of another day on the river.



From the trip log of August 5th, 2019

We awoke with bittersweet emotions towards our final full day on the river. On one hand, our bodies were tired from fishing hard for 6 days, and a bed and a warm shower sounded appealing. On the other, we had just traveled over 90 miles

through the Alaskan bush, one extremely memorable week with a great group and we were not ready for it to be over. We started off the day with a warm oatmeal breakfast, loaded our gear into the rafts and hit the river. At this point in the trip, it was undisputed that the Coho run was late. The numbers were low and most anglers wanted to catch at least one before the conclusion of the trip. For those who hadn't caught one yet, it was the final of the five species of Pacific salmon to catch.



Not long after we pushed off, Don hooked and landed a nice bright hen Coho. This was his first Coho of the trip and the fight was one of the highlights of his week. Dick was also looking to start his day off with a Coho and took one out of the same pocket as Don. Laura and George both caught their first Coho ever while fishing with Pete. It was another windy day with tough weather and decent rainfall but the group had accomplished a lot of personal goals and they were in high spirits.



Lunch was windy despite our best efforts to find some protection. We moved down past the Alaska West lodge operation and continued fishing. After lunch Ben caught a nice bright Coho that was meticulously photographed and documented by Brian. Laura and George each caught another Coho in the afternoon and the competition between father and daughter continued to entertain the rest of the group. Dick caught a nice bright fish after our smoked salmon lunch that we keep for dinner. We were starting to see more jet boat traffic from lodges that were looking for fresh Salmon in the lower river. We made camp at an unoccupied gravel bar around 5pm.



It was Sushi night and the winds and rain decreased in the evening so Brian was able to roll without the wind ripping the Nori from his hands. He kept the Sushi coming for an hour while everyone ate his or her fill.

We broke out the Joe Joe's cookies for dessert and the rain and wind stopped. Everyone stood outside reminiscing about the week, with bourbon or wine in hand. Pete, Laura, Ben and Jason rowed across the river for an evening mission for a few more Coho. They got back to camp just as it began getting dark to dream about the fish they had caught.



From the trip log of August 6th, 2019

We got to Quinhagak in time for a 10am pickup and shuttle to the airstrip. The day was full of waiting on the Tarmac but Pete used his resources to get a plane out of King Salmon to come pick us up. As the pilot stepped out of the plane the first thing that was revealed was that he was wearing Crocs. The guides clearly had faith in this pilot because Crocs are the official camp shoe of WRG. The entire group loaded up into the Cessna Grand Caravan 208B while Bailey, Brian and John stayed with the gear. The same plane returned for a second flight with a new pilot and we had it loaded by 8pm, ready to head back to Dillingham. Before starting the engine; the pilot turned to the Guides and said, "Smoke 'em if ya got 'em." After a long week it was a funny expression that helped lighten the mood on a weather filled day. We enjoyed burgers and ice cream together in Dillingham and looked at photos from the week before enjoying a good nights sleep in a bed.

