

ALASKA'S WILD RIVER GUIDES

2018 Season Report



August 11th - August 18th, 2018

Togiak River Fly-Fishing Expedition



Peak Coho Fishing, Big Rainbows, Strong Arctic's and True Alaskan Weather – “The Week of Shan Shan”

From the log of August 10th, 2018

All guests were due to arrive on flight 166 from Anchorage. Due to heavy wind and fog, the plane made two attempts and was forced to head

back to Anchorage.

From the log of August 11th, 2018

The first attempt to get the jet in the day prior was unsuccessful but 24 hours later we were able to get everyone in. Chips, salsa and beverages were consumed as we went over our pre-trip briefings. Word had spread about the remnants of a tropical typhoon that was headed our way, named “Shan Shan”. There was speculation to how intense the system would actually be but the forecast was nothing short of heinous. We



briefed the group for the worst, while hoping for the best and rested our heads for the night.

From the log of August 12th, 2018

We had a bit of a late start to the morning as forecasted high winds picked up. We piled on a hearty breakfast of bacon, eggs and English muffins. We waited around for most of the morning, waiting to get in our waders until we got the call



from our pilots. When we finally got word, they basically said we wouldn't be going anywhere but we could go to the pond to get planeloads weighed up and divided. We have never seen the float plane pond with such intense winds that waves crashed on shore. White caps littered the surface as 40+ mph winds gusted into our faces. In that moment I think we all realized that these were very unsafe flying conditions and we would be more comfortable

under a roof for the evening. The lodging options in town were limited and we decided that we were going to head up to Lake Aleknagik. Our pilots generously offered their hangar for the night to keep up warm and dry for the night. It was late in the day but folks were itching to fish. We took a walk down to the nearby Wood River Bridge where we could access both sides of the river and comfortably fish 6-8 anglers from the shore. The jagged rock made the wading treacherous but we were able to get people on the water. The storm surge from Shan Shan brought a huge tide with it. The current was moving upstream at 5 + Mph and we were over 15 miles from the ocean! It was very bizarre to see. Zane caught a Pink Salmon and a sockeye on a streamer. Dex caught the first Grayling of his life from the opposite bank. We





headed back to the Hanger in time for dinner. The guides prepared a big pasta dinner as a carbohydrate load for a busy day. We set up cots to get everyone off the ground and we all made ourselves at home in one of the nicest airplane hangars any of us had ever laid eyes on.

From the log of August 13th, 2018

When we awoke the weather was still pretty darn nasty but that wasn't going to keep our group from getting out

and fishing. A few participants had identified themselves as snorers and Zane was even so kind as to sleep in the boiler room as not to disturb the rest of the group. He was not the only offender, and a chorus of snores still rang out throughout the night. A group wandered down to the bridge while we were on hold from bush travel. In the first 20 minutes of fishing, our anglers had some company. A young male brown bear wandered down to the river to feed on salmon carcasses. He eventually spooked into the trees but it was a good reminder that we were still in the wild. After he departed, we continued to fish. Jack caught the first Coho of the week down in the low bridge hole with Bailey. His appreciation for the beauty and strength of the fish was perfect. Zane and Nate both caught Sockeye and Pinks fishing around the bridge. We made lunch in the hangar. After lunch we got the call that the winds were going to remain too strong to fly in today. The group took a walk to the Romo family store to get some sweet snacks and coffee as an afternoon pick me up. After the store, Zane, Tim, Aubrey and Pete led a mission to twin lakes to try to hunt for pike in treacherous winds. We were able to get our hands on a boat and Capt. John shuttled people down the Wood River to fish from the boat and see some different water. On the first run Dex caught a Sockeye and Pink, Anthony caught a Rainbow and Dolly, and Nate caught 2 Dollys. We swapped out anglers at the narrows and took another boatload of guests down. While fishing the narrows, Anthony caught a nice Arctic Char. On the second boatload,





Mike caught a Dolly and a Sockeye, Jack caught a Coho and a 20" rainbow, and John caught a Sockeye and a Pink Salmon. Tim and Zane returned from a tough Pike mission and they were eager to fish the river. Zane caught a Pink and a Sockeye and Tim caught a big bright hen Coho. It was a great day despite not being able to fly out. Fish Tacos were on the menu at night and moral was high. It was nice to be sleeping in the comfort of four walls with the nasty weather we had outside!

From the log of August 14th, 2018

Mike started his morning before everyone else was awake and headed down to the dock. Before long, he had his first fish of the day, a nice bright Coho. Every season a few guests bring there own coffee

mugs and that lets the guides know that these individuals are serious about their coffee. Anthony was one of those people. After breakfast and Anthony's dose of morning coffee, he took a walk down to the bridge. He wrangled up a couple bright Pinks with the caffeine still in his system. The day moved on and the weather showed few signs of improvement. Guests rotated to take trips to Wood River Market, fished the bridge, the dock, and kept themselves entertained. We continued to keep the group well fed and ready for a chance to get out into the field. Once it got



late enough in the afternoon, we organized another boat rental and began doing drifts on the river. The overcast skies turned the bite on the river. It's always special when we can get parents out with their kids on the river. John and Jack doubled up on fish and two of Jack's fish were rainbows over 20". Anthony and Zane



also doubled up together and caught some a nice rainbow and had some great char action. Everyone got their turn and had an enjoyable day. As the day got later, we began to think about dinner. The Romo's had invited us to join them for dinner so we got the group out of waders and walked over to their house with cold beverages in hand. The weather had improved greatly and the wind was still present but the sun tried its hardest to come out. It was a team effort to prepare dinner and the Romo's and Wild River Guides worked together to roll up fresh Sockeye Sushi. Tim tied up flies, as dinner was prepared. It was nice to get out of the bubble that had become our Hangar home. The evening sun was a lovely treat and we got some entertainment as Dexter and Zane went paddle boarding on the pond in front of the Romo home. A big bonfire was built and we all gathered around as the sun set. Blaine set off a few fireworks to return some of the lost light and color to the sky. It was a lovely eventful evening and everyone was back in the comfort of their cots by 11pm, dreaming of flying out in the morning.



From the log of August 15th, 2018

Our positive hopes for flying out were dampened by heavy fog that blanketed the sky in the morning hours. This coastal fog is quite common in the autumn months and we remained optimistic that we would get to the refuge by the end of the day. We stayed at the ready and the weather did eventually break up. We decided that with our condensed timeline to float that we should make our way down a shorter river and the Togiak was perfect for this



amount of time. We ended up going in with five planeloads and we had the last plane on the water by 2:15pm. We inflated the rafts and ate a late lunch on the mighty Togiak Lake before beginning our push. Once we got to the outflow of the lake and the beginning of the river, we began fishing. The Grayling fishing started off strong and both Nate and Mike caught Grayling close to the outflow. Both Arctic Char and Dolly Varden were caught by almost

every angler but surprisingly; the Arctic's outnumbered the Dollies significantly. Many anglers fished beads and the action was almost non-stop for several hours. More Sockeye were caught on this day than any other day of the season, almost 20 sockeye were caught and released. Nate caught two large Coho Salmon on a large bead that was slightly surprising. We had underestimated the high

water and as we worked our way down river, we noticed that very few of our traditional camps had any exposed gravel. We decided that we needed to go rods up and push our way down to find a camp that could support our group. Nate managed to catch another large Arctic while we had a temporary fishing opening for bathroom breaks. It wasn't until 8:20pm that we made our camp at a bar that had traditionally been our Camp



Three 18 miles from our start. While the guides started getting dinner going, the guests spread out and fished the bar, finding incredible fishing. Tim and Jack both caught rainbows over 20". It was tough to pull the group away from the water to get some dinner. We enjoyed pizza on the river and spirits were high that we had finally arrived in the wild land we had set out to reach 3 days earlier. The evening sun was beautiful and the sky erupted with natural fireworks as the sun illuminated the clouds.



From the log of August 16th, 2018

We got a late start on our day of floating only because the fishing from camp was simply too good. On the lower part of the bar Tim caught a 28" Dolly Varden and Dex caught a Rainbow over 24". The morning started strong right out of the gates. People



were excited to be out of the Hanger and sleeping in the comfort of a tent. Just $\frac{3}{4}$ of a mile from where we had set camp, we came up on a big slough that had hundreds of spawning Pink salmon with Coho mixed in. Zane caught the first Coho of the day and Dex caught the second shortly after. The fishing throughout the day was consistent and the group caught some big Coho up to 12 lbs. We had some good high



sun and Zane fished a mouse through some very fishy water with poor results. The Pink salmon fishing was quite strong and fish were abundant. We passed a group of anglers at the mouth of the Ongivinuck River who had been floating for the last 7 days. We posed the question of how intense the weather was during the storm. Their faces told a story of suffering in unpleasant

weather and for the first time in the season, I think we realized we were all better off in the comfort of the hangar than out in the field. We found a nice bar a few miles down from where Bristol Bay lodge had stashed a few jet sleds. While we were still scoping the bar to see if it was well suited for camp, John and Zane both caught Coho. We decided shortly after that this would be a fine place to make camp.



Fresh wolf tracks lay on the bar just a little ways down from where we made camp. Mike caught a bright Coho that Aubrey filleted as our dinner fish. We rolled sushi for dinner and everyone ate their fill. Mike, Aubrey, Pete, Jack, and Tim all caught Coho from camp. Bailey caught her first Coho ever from the camp bar, which was an exciting moment. Pete got a big fire going using a raft pump to help bring some oxygen to the fire. The log states that John is banned from putting wood on the fire! We had s'mores for dessert and the evening sky and weather cooperated to give us another beautiful sunset. All had a truly great day on the river.

From the log of August 17th, 2018

We were blessed with another sunny morning fresh out of the gates in the morning. We fished the slough just below our camp from the boat and Jack hooked a bright Coho that broke his line. The fish jumped six times with the fly still in its mouth. Jack's infectious laugh echoed on the river. The high water levels dispersed the Coho and spread them to places that they generally didn't hold in. Most of the fish seemed to be



moving through and not holding. High water levels can have this effect on migratory salmon species. John found a nice bucket for Arctic char where he caught a handful while exploring the water with his

streamer. We had lunch at a non-suspect spillway with strong developed seam. John, Jack, Anthony and Nate all pulled Coho out of there. We kept fishing our way down and came to the confluence with a major tributary. This was the true start of the high Coho numbers. We pulled eight fish out of the confluence pocket and a log jam that lay just up in the mouth. More Pink Salmon were caught on this day than any other day of the season, over 60 pink salmon were caught and released. We encountered a Yu'pik family that was having a fire and catching fish on an old campsite we used in the past. We waited for them to depart up river and then Aubrey's boat with Tim and Zane checked out the back slough on the bar and hooked over eight Coho in a short period of time. We eventually decided to push a little and find a camp that was a bit more protected and closer to our projected LZ. The camp options were scarce and we ended up pushing past our original LZ plan to find a location that would be easier for the planes to park. We spent an hour moving down and found a nice bar with some incredible Char fishing at the top. Mike and Anthony stood at the top of the bar



and caught cookie cutter Dollies until they were satiated. Pete prepared a lovely salmon curry with fresh Coho. The evening was warm and sunny and it lulled us into a false sense of security. We slept well with confidence we would be flying out in the morning.

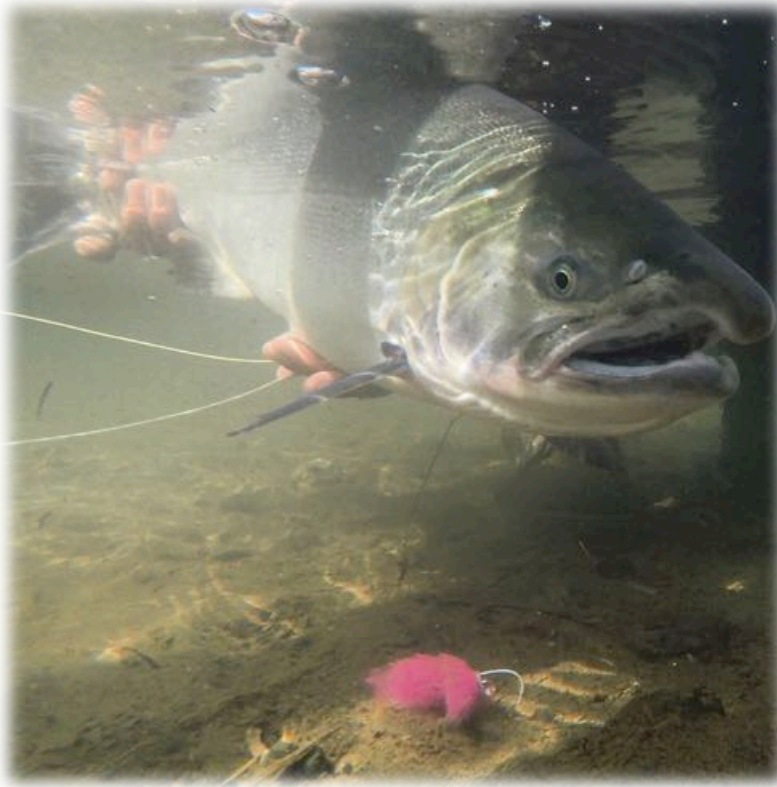
From the log of August 18th, 2018

We awoke early to get a jump-start on the day and the wind howled in our faces. We talked to our pilots and found out that the wind was only meant to intensify as the morning progressed. We got camp broken down and we were off the bar pushing hard by 8:15am. We had five miles to push right into an aggressive headwind. The gusts reached levels in the 20 mph range as our muscles strained to make good headway and attempted to get to the rendezvous point. We didn't know the wind was increasing to the east where our pilots were departing from. A sow with cubs was spotted on the hillside while we pushed our way down to our pick up. We made it down

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to the mouth of the creek we had intended to meet our pilots at and found fish carcasses littering the shoreline. We initially started making noise to ward off the



Brown Bear that may have been feeding here only to find that humans filleted these Salmon. It is not only an eye sore to not properly dispose of carcasses in the heavy flow of the current, it also attracts bears to a place where humans congregate and is seriously unsafe. Jack and John went to work shoveling the carcasses into the river while we touched base with our pilots. We got word that they had been turned around due to heavy turbulence and decided that we would push further down to another LZ we were familiar with that had been used in the past. Jack fished for a few minutes and



caught a nice rainbow in the confluence of the tributary and the main river. As we were getting ready to head down river, we saw another young brown bear across the river running down the shore in the opposite direction. It was a cold down river push into the wind and we stopped a few miles in to do some calisthenics and warm up. John showed us a few of his old football moves before loading back into the boats. We scouted a good-looking bar that had some

decent wind protection. Bailey and Capt. John rowed boats across to a slough where three channels converged into a big pool. Nate, John and Jack all caught multiple Coho out of the far pocket. Zane and Anthony caught several chums, pinks and a Sockeye. We stayed there for several hours before heading back across where Pete and Aubrey had set camp up. Tim and Mike had been fishing at the end of the bar and found some nice Coho and mixed salmon. We had Coho and rice for dinner. Following dinner, Mike and John headed down to the end of the bar where John caught a beautiful 25" rainbow. The winds stayed heavy through the night and we hoped for

better winds the next day. Jack put it in perspective for us and said that we were lucky because we got, “a bonus day.”



From the log of August 19th, 2018

Heavy winds still lingered into the morning hours. We stayed in touch with our pilots and tried to get an idea of timing when we might have a window. We held our hopes for getting everyone out but most people got a good dose of fishing in throughout the morning. Tim and Zane both

caught some nice Coho in the morning hours and everyone realized that we would wait to fly out when it was safe, just as we flew in. We sent two rafts down with all the guests in the early afternoon. The thought was that we would be able to get all the guests out with two guides but not everyone.

Aubrey and John stayed behind and waited until the first plane circled over top before they started breaking down the final pieces of camp. They piled the remaining rafts high with gear and



went down to meet the rest of the group and get them out. The planes got out with all the guests and their personal gear and Aubrey, Capt. John, and Mike waited for Rick and Mike to return several hours later to pick them and the remainder of the gear up. Only Jack was able to make his flight out but the rest of us enjoyed burgers and filled our bellies with beers. So many people were weathered in at town that we had to pack all 10 of us into one house. We were accustomed to our sleeping bags and pads at that point so it was just nice to have heat and a roof over our heads. It was quite an adventure for weather throughout the course of the week. We had a very strong group of guests who worked well together and always thought positively. It was a memorable week of adventure that none of us will ever forget.