

ALASKA'S WILD RIVER GUIDES

2018 Season Report



August 23rd - August 30th, 2018
Togiak River Fly Fishing Expedition - Season Finale



A group of experienced Bristol Bay anglers assembled in Dillingham for the “Season Finale” in the last week of August.

From the log of August 22nd, 2018

The week prior, our big issue at the beginning of the week was getting everyone into Dillingham before the remnants of a tropical typhoon hit. This

week, we were able to get all our guests in on their scheduled flights. Just when it seems that things are looking up we got another wrench in the gears. The luggage for Chuck, Andy, Ben and Carl was missing. We were able to scrape together a plan to outfit the anglers if it came down to the bags not showing up and the flying weather being favorable. We went through all our pre-trip briefings and shared a few cocktails and a fresh cooked dinner. We went to bed dreaming about our time on the river during peak Coho season and hopefully the arrival of the rest of the luggage.

From the log of August 23rd, 2018



We awoke early and started out with a breakfast of eggs, bacon and English muffins as fuel for a big day. As soon as the 8am flight arrived, we were at the baggage claim, hoping that the bags had arrived. Within the first load of luggage, one by one the bags began to arrive. We had everyone's luggage and we were ready to start our journey. We got back to the house and checked in with our pilots. They had

delayed our start due to weather and fog so we settled in and waited for the call before putting our waders on. Around midday, we finally headed over to the floatplane pond to get all our gear weighed up and plane loads assigned. The fog and winds were not friendly and it was looking like we may not make it out. We knew that if we took the 30-minute drive up to Lake Aleknagik we would be closer to our destination of Pegati Lake. We piled into the van and truck and caravanned up with the first two planeloads worth of gear in case the weather cleared. We also brought along cots so we would be able to set up a base of operations in the Rick's hangar if the weather did not permit us to get



out. There's a time in the day where our worries about not getting out turn into realities. At that point, the cots got put up and guests got settled in and turn their attention to the next thing, fishing. It was late in the day but a few people rigged rods and headed to the Wood River. Chuck got on the board that evening with the First Coho of the trip. Most of the group lined up out on the dock for what



became a beautiful night. We all enjoyed being out there and the feel of the sheer therapy of casting. The more experienced helped the less, and we all just enjoyed each other's company with a lovely evening. We piled on the carbohydrates in hopes that we would need the calories for a big tomorrow. Fingers were crossed as our eyes closed wondering what tomorrow would bring.



From the log of August 24th, 2018

The weather showed few signs of improvement when we woke up but we needed to stay positive and be at the ready in case our pilots wanted to take a shot at getting out. The planes from Mission Lodge across the lake sat at the dock and this was another sign that no other planes in the region were flying. This was a group of

experienced anglers and 5/8 were returning guests. Although we all wanted to be on the river, everyone understood the challenges associated with bush travel. We needed to stay in a holding pattern but luckily we could still fish close by. We fished the bridge and the dock primarily due to its proximity. Ben and Andy caught some nice Sockeye and Pinks from the bridge. For whatever reason, the day prior Andy had developed a reputation for hooking fish in the tail at this point. This stayed with him throughout the

course of the week and he got his fair share of heckling. When a fish was hooked someone would always yell out and question the location of the hook. We ate a late sandwich lunch and it started to dawn on us that we may not get out. As John was getting the rental boat, another bridge mission was underway. Chuck was fishing accompanied by Brian. He hooked into a nice bright Coho that pulled line and flexed his rod before Brian put it in the net. We decided to keep this fish for dinner and Brian humanely put the fish down after giving it thanks. We used the boat to get people out to fish different parts of the river. We shuttled anglers down the river and dropped them in good wading spots accompanied by guides. We had seen a few impressive pods of sockeye while looking down from the bridge but going on the river was a magnified look at thousands of fish spread across vast flats staging to spawn. It was truly a site to see. The Sockeye were crushing streamers and anglers were picking





off Char with the bead as well. Ben and Christine started off throwing streamers and picking up some nice Sockeye. Pink Salmon were mixed in and willing to eat a fly. This was everyone's first chance to get used to fighting powerful Salmon for the week. We spent the afternoon rotating in and out of the boat and catching fish until it got close to dinner time. Brian filleted Chuck's fish beautifully and we chowed down on some fresh caught Alaskan salmon. We once again hoped the weather gods would grant us with the opportunity for safe passage when we woke. Everyone piled onto their cots and went into slumber after a few beverages. We were lucky this group did not snore much because the acoustics in the hangar really amplify the sound. We slept soundly.

From the log of August 25th, 2018

Heavy rain pelted down on the metal roof into the morning hours. We stayed hopeful that the weather would lift but it seemed Alaska had other plans. One of the debilitating factors of staying up at the lake is that even the GCI cell phones carried by the guides have almost non-existent service. We had to rely on the weather reports that friends with Wifi and our pilots gave us to figure out if a chance of same day departure existed. On this day, the heavy wind and rains gave us an inkling that we would not be getting out. The real icing on the cake was that in the late morning Rick and Mike brought the Beaver in the hangar for service. This wasn't the only icing served up this day. Wood River Market had a





freshly baked batch of Cinnamon rolls that we all had to try. Some described them as the best cinnamon rolls they had ever had. With one of our primary aircraft for transport indoors, we had a pretty good idea that the weather today was not going to be flyable. Everyone was bummed to see the Beaver in the Hangar with us, but at the same time it was an incredible opportunity to get up-close and personal with a 1953 DeHaviland Beaver out of the water with a

opportunity that most individuals will never have. We admired the beauty of the aircraft and then orchestrated our boat rental a bit earlier in the day and started getting groups out a little after 12pm. Carl, Chuck and Ben had an adventurous spirit and waded a ½ mile down the shoreline to get into some un-fished waters. The streamer fishing for Sockeye was quite remarkable. Andy and Christine doubled up from the boat on nice char. Ben put a hurt on the Sockeye while wading. Josh got a nice Sockeye from the boat and then showed off his skills as a talented net boy. Carl wrapped up his day with a nice Sockeye that Bailey netted for him. As the day grew closer to the end we needed to start shuttling folks back up to the dock so we could make it to dinner. The Romo's had generously invited us to their home for dinner and we didn't want to be late. As we were pulling our second to last group, we spotted a young immature bear downstream fishing. We putted towards him slowly with the boat but he wanted nothing to do with us and scampered back into the brush. We got out of our waders and walked over the Romo's home behind the Market. They cooked us a lovely meal of fish tacos and fish steaks all harvested from their local subsistence nets. It was a nice change of pace to get out of the Hangar and interact with some other folks. We walked back over to the Hangar while there was still light in the sky. A few guests stayed up and had a few cocktails while others called it an early night.



From the log of August 26th, 2018

We woke up to a sky that was even foggier than the day prior and we knew nothing was happening early because the Beaver was still in the hangar. Many of the guests had made a trend of going to the Romo's for Coffee and a sweet treat as a mid-morning routine. Ben and Chuck hiked down to the river in the morning and Ben caught a nice Coho near the bridge. In the early afternoon Rick and Mike stopped by to pull the Beaver from the Hangar. The weather was still very soupy and we decided that it was the right call to get the boat for the day once more. Andy put a hurt on Char from the boat and caught a nice Rainbow. Andy and Carl doubled and there's just something so



cool about a father/son double. Both Chuck and Christine showed their selflessness when fishing with their families. Neither angler felt the need to fish but simply wanted to watch others catch fish. Margaret and Michael doubled up on Char early in the drift as well. Michael caught a very nice, blushed up Coho that we opted to release and hold out for something brighter. We didn't realize that this task would prove more difficult than we had thought. Christine showed her strength and

swift water wading safety with the help of Kevney and they caught several nice Char from the bank. As it got late in the day we thought we might need a protein supplement for dinner and launched a mission to fish the area where Chuck and Ben had caught Coho in the last 24 hours. Andy caught a Coho salmon that turned into a Pink Salmon...Which we discarded mid river after it showed its true identity. We went on the hunt for another Coho for dinner but the tide had turned and despite the best efforts of Chuck and Bailey, we were unable to find a fish for dinner. Even without the fish, we had gotten reports for decent weather the following morning and spirits were high. We decided to go for another pasta night as fuel for the big day that



hopefully lay ahead. Our decision to have pasta for dinner led to an event we refer to as, "The great pesto incident." While squeezing pesto onto his plate, Michael's sheer

strength caused the pesto to jettison from the tube all over Brian's Simms fleece. Laughs were shared by all including Brian. Margaret was having some pain in her forearm but luckily we had some very qualified physical therapists on the trip with us. Chuck never goes anywhere without his needles and was able to relieve Margaret with his dry needling magic. We went to sleep confident that it would be an early morning.



From the log of August 27th, 2018

The weather finally improved enough for us to get out to the river. As our float time decreased we were constantly talking to the Refuge manager and augmenting the river we would end up on. We touched down about 20 miles down the mighty Togiak just above the confluence with a major tributary. The guests were ready for the field and operated like a cohesive unit while unloading the planes. The first



loads arrived and got boats pumped up but we still had some time before the pilots could reload, refuel and return with the rest of our group. Everyone rigged a rod almost immediately and began fishing. Josh went to explore a side channel while a few others started fishing right where the planes had landed. Margaret and Andy both started strong and hooked several Pink salmon in as many minutes. Margaret



hooked a hot bright Coho salmon and we realized that we had arrived on the river at the height of the Coho run. We got the rest of the group in to the river and wasted no time getting the rafts built and loaded up. It wasn't long before we began to find great numbers of salmon. The water levels had dropped significantly from the week prior and the fish were holding in more traditional water that made it easier to target them. We started catching Coho right away and Chuck and Andy drew first blood on a double with a couple of 12 lb bucks. Margaret and Josh followed suit and pulled some nice fish out of the same hole. We came down a bit further past the confluence of the Ongivinuck and the river split. Brian and Keveny's boats both went left and John and Baileys boats went right. The radio chatter was full of boats finding fish in every nook and cranny of the river. John and Bailey's boats came into a slough that provided each angler with a fish on the first cast. As the boats moved further into the slough,



they saw something they had never encountered. A pod of about 100 Coho were finning on the surface with the sun glistening off their black tails. The fishing in that pocket was absolutely mindless and Andy caught a absolutely enormous Coho that weighed about 17 lbs. Eventually we had to move on but just as the boats were exiting that slough Chucks line came tight as he tussled with a 23" rainbow that we brought to the net and quickly released. We pushed our way down a bit, but every good-looking pocket we explored, held great numbers of fish. Kevney's boat with Michael and Ben found a soft seam on the river left and they absolutely annihilated big fish. Carl and Christine weren't far behind in Brian's boat and hit the same seam with great success. We ended up pushing at the end of the day to make a couple miles and get camp up at a decent hour. Coho were caught at the lower end of the bar in addition to good numbers of Pink salmon.

The sun stayed high until late in the day and we enjoyed pizza for dinner. Most guests congregated around the fire and roasted S'mores in the evening. We had an absolutely spectacular moonrise that we sat and watched until it disappeared into the clouds. With sore arms, and full bellies, we wondered what tomorrow might hold.

From the log of August 28th, 2018

It was refreshing to wake up in the bush, fire up the camps stoves and get the Coffee water going with a touch of chill in the air from a clear night. It was almost as if we felt like we accomplished something by making it here. We were able to prove that not only could we find a good time while staying in a airplane hangar in Dillingham, we also proved that we could form a team and work together in just a few short days. Our trips attract people who are likeminded and typically get along pretty well, but being a part of the team while we're in the field gives you a sense of family. We fish together, eat together, and camp together for the entire week. As we drank our coffee that morning and ate our breakfast, most of the guests and



guides alike were giddy like children. The fishing we experienced the day prior was incredible but it was just a taste, and these anglers were hungry. Little did we know that we were about to experience one of the most epic days of fishing of the season.

The morning was consistent and almost every boat doubled up at a high rate of frequency. John, Michael and Christine worked there way down to



a great looking slough, and just before they entered it, the drone of the distant floatplane became close. It circled once before landing and their boat stayed glued to the shore. As they landed and departed, a familiar face was recognized. They rowed over to chat with a buddy of John's he guided with in Montana. Small world in big country.

We stopped for Lunch at Kemuk creek that came in on river right. There was a seam just

on the edge of the soft water and the fast water where Ben, Josh, Michael and



Christine all waded out. At one point all four anglers were hooked up at the same time. Kevney was guiding for his first week in Alaska as a fill in for Pete and had never caught a Coho before. Chuck selflessly called him over to a lower seam he was fishing solo and put Kevney onto his first Coho of his life and even netted the fish for him! This is a prime example of how there is truly no sense of mastery in Fly Fishing and everyone can improve. No guide is above being a student.



The afternoon provided some of the most mind-blowing fishing that any of us had ever seen. Almost every boat doubled up regularly and one big river left seam left all four boats were doubled up. Andy was the first person of the 2018 season to commit and have true success with the pink Pollywog. Fishing with his Dad on Bailey's boat, they caught around 10 fish on the Wog alone. Fishing a small side channel that Bailey and John came into, Christine got into a battle with a true giant Coho. She

landed the fish that was estimated in the 16-17lb range. It was tough to move too far without finding absolutely insane numbers of fish. John led us down a side channel that ended up being more stacked then anything we could imagine. Thousands of fish sat in this channel and every cast that was delivered was rewarded with a fish. This was the world-class fishery we had worked to get to. More Coho were caught on this day then any day of the season, and many anglers caught close to 40 fish in the one day alone. It was a great day and guides and anglers alike where exhausted. We fished our way down and made camp on an island in the middle of Coho country. As the sun got low the fish began to move and the bite turned off. John cooked up salmon curry for dinner and the rest of the group got a fire going in anticipation for S'mores for dessert.





From the log of August 29th, 2018

After an extraordinary day yesterday, everyone knew it would be tough to surpass but the river was loaded with fish. We fueled up on coffee and got ready for our last full day on the river. The river opened up a bit but we found several seams that we rowed around in with extraordinary results. The ladies boat was a forced to be reckoned with. With Bailey at the

helm, Margaret and Christine had bent rods for the majority of the day. In one row around while fishing for Coho, Chuck caught a beautiful 23" rainbow and Josh took a 21" fish out of the same pocket. The Togiak is a river that is certainly known for its Rainbow Trout and their size. Michael also caught a nice rainbow at about 20". It was nice to see some diversity amidst the hordes of Coho. The fishing was still incredible but with the increased size of the river, they were holding in specific seams. When we did find them it was game on. We came into the confluence with a major tributary and everything around it was littered with fish. The fishing was so silly that some guides turned the sticks over to the hands of seasoned and not so seasoned guests. Josh rowed to put Kevney on some bright fish with Andy. Chuck rowed Johns boat for him and Ben. Double hook ups ensued. As we took a break for lunch everyone's minds were continuously blown. After lunch, a new goal was established; time to get some top-water fish. Ben and Chuck stuck to their guns and both pulled some nice fish out of a pick big slough on Wogs. There's nothing quite like it





when you watch a fish push a hard wake towards your fly before a set of jaws punch through the surface and engulf your fly. If it doesn't get you fired up, you better check your pulse. Brian rowed for Michael and got him on a beautiful Wog fish in the same slough. Meanwhile in the lower portion of the slough the girls boat was absolutely crushing big fish after big fish. The action didn't slow and doubles upon doubles added to the chaos as

anglers and guides dived, spun, and contorted to put big fish in the net. John had an aching desire to catch a Wog fish and Ben wanted to make it happen for him. He rowed him onto an absolutely perfect eat that resulting in satisfaction for all.

We made our way down to camp, fishing all the way with constantly bent rods and smiles on everyone's faces. As Brian filleted the fish and prepared the sushi, the rest of the guides set up camp while the guests continued to catch fish. Chuck captained a mission across the river to get into a tasty looking slough that brought a few more fish to hand for the guests. We enjoyed Coho Sushi and many went back out for last licks on fish after dinner. The last day of the season always carries a level of sadness with it. As a guest, that same weight is felt by the last day in a week that has been an incredible fishing experience.

From the log of August 30th, 2018

The weather was a bit iffy in the morning and after breakfast the guide staff debated breaking down camp. It was uncertain if the group would be able to





get picked up. We touched base with the pilots and we were meant to have a weather window in the afternoon. The entire group was still hungry for fish and continued to catch fish until we decided to make the move down to the landing zone and pack up camp. It was still uncertain if we would be picked up or not. We had a call to our pilot's wife and heard that the fog was so intense that

the planes were forced to land on a lake halfway to Dillingham. Everyone was mentally prepared for the long haul but we hoped we would be able to get people out who needed to make their evening flights. Margaret fished the LZ bar and pulled another nice Coho out. Many others broke down their rods, satiated with their success. Miraculously, in the late afternoon, both planes were able to make it to us. We loaded them up with all the guests and Brian and little gear. We knew

the likelihood of them making it back for another pickup was low and getting the guests out safely is always the priority. We loaded them up and John, Bailey, and Kevney prepared for a night on the river. They set up the wing and they at least had a couple fish to keep them company. Everyone returned safely to Dillingham by 2pm the following afternoon, just in time to see the Mangus/Garcia/Fuller group off. The fishing and company was simply world class, and the Alaskan weather showed its power and we granted it respect. It was a fitting cap off to the 2018 season with some best quality and quantity of Coho fishing we have ever seen.