

# ALASKA'S WILD RIVER GUIDES

## *2018 Season Report*



July 19th - July 26th, 2018

Goodnews River Fly-Fishing Expedition



**70 miles of Rainbow, Char, Sockeye, Kings, & Wildlife.**

**From the log of July 19th, 2018**

We departed from Dillingham at 11:30 am with our first two planes, shortly followed by the third plane. Three bears were spotted from the plane but they were primarily still up in the hills grazing on berries. It's a special opportunity that we get to move through Brown Bear country and view these animals at a safe distance. A big moose was also spotted in the next drainage over. As soon as we entered the

headwaters of the river we were met by a big pod of spawning Sockeye with some large Dolly Varden mixed in behind them. With the high water in the river, our push

down to camp took just a little over an hour at fishing speed. We took several, rainbows, Grayling, Dolly Varden and Sockeye on our 3 mile float down to the first major tributary that enters the river where we made our camp. Luke and Michael, armed with bead rigs, caught Dollies hand over fist until the sun got low. Several fish they caught were over 23". Bailey entertained the group when she caught her first Alaskan Salmon ever! Dick was a returning guest and he knew the fishing was only going to get better so he limited his fishing that afternoon. Steve had also fished with us in the past but he was eager to catch a few nice Dollies and one particularly large Chum before heading to the wing. Steve was full of jokes and had the ability to keep the whole group entertained for nearly the entire week. It was incredible how many different jokes he had stored in his mind and the variety was impressive. Following a big pasta dinner the group sat down and enjoyed a lovely evening with beverages of choice in hand. In rainy Bristol bay, sometimes you just need to enjoy those nice nights and sit back and smell the roses. Especially with more fish on the way...

### **From the log of July 20th, 2018**

After a hearty breakfast and our morning safety briefings, we packed up the rafts and hit the ground running. The fishing was hot nearly the moment we pushed off the bar and every boat was hooked up in a matter of minutes. The North Fork of the Goodnews is not known for having incredibly strong numbers of Rainbow trout and the ones that we do see are generally a bit smaller. That being said, Luke started his morning off with a very nice 18" Rainbow taken just below camp. The group caught several dollies and Grayling initially but then things really got hot. At a long bar we dubbed, "Swimming Bear" bluff our rafts and the migrating Dollies collided resulting in some incredible fishing. The four anglers boated over 40 Dollies in this one stretch. Luke caught a nice fish in the 25" range. We departed and worked our way ½ mile downriver where we viewed a nesting pair of bald eagles and 3 large chicks that sat in the nest. Dick caught several nice fish in Bailey's boat while they waited for John's boat to catch up after a rod malfunction. The bug life on the river remained strong. Stoneflies, caddis and even green drake's were viewed on the







river. We found a pod of Kings at a spot we know as “5 Doors”. Michael had a large jack King come up and look at his indicator and dive back down and crush his bead. It was a proper battle on his 6 wt and we have only seen this behavior out of Kings a handful of times. We fished our way down to the second major tributary where we ate lunch and continued to catch

some very nice Char. At the convergence of the tributary, large numbers of mixed salmon congregated and Dollies held just behind them, keyed on the egg drop. Steve took several nice fish out of this spot. After the tributary we worked our way into the canyon stretch, which is essentially devoid of gravel bars big enough to camp on, especially in the high water level. Just as we were entering the top of the canyon stretch, John’s boat with Michael and Luke spotted a young bull moose before he went crashing back into the willows. We pushed through most of the Canyon and when we reached the end we “re-opened the fishing season” at a small creek that entered the main river. Dollies were stacked up below the creek and every rod in the group was bent. We found a pocket of Grayling where Luke managed to land two in two casts. Steve was fishing to a pod of kings in Pete's boat caught an eager rainbow came out and ate his fly. After a long day of rowing we finally arrived at camp to get settled in for the night. We enjoyed fish tacos on the river and exchanged stories from the day. Everyone fell asleep with full stomachs.



### From the log of July 21st, 2018

We broke camp early and hit the river just before 9:30. The morning fishing started out slow and the King salmon did not seem to be in their traditional holding water. This may have been due to the high water conditions but they



seemed to be particularly lock jawed on this day. High winds were a hindrance, especially when casting heavy flies to the King Salmon holding in deep water. The char fishing was strong and we fished to several pods of mixed salmon and caught a variety of fish.

As we drifted down, Pete alerted the other boats to a bear he had seen walking up the river. The boats all got an opportunity to observe him

fishing as he worked his way up the bank looking for fish. Just ten minutes later, Bailey and Pete's boats had another encounter with a sow and two cubs. We hauled off the river and viewed them from a safe distance before they disappeared over the bluff towards Canyon Creek. We began moving down the river towards the bluff and two Great Horned Owls came out of the trees on the bluff and flew across the river towards the brushy cottonwoods. We came down to the confluence of Canyon Creek



where we hauled off the boats to fish. Dick caught a Jack King and several big Chum Salmon out of this pocket. By the time we left the creek, a strong headwind had developed and was creating white caps on the surface of the water during our final push towards camp. Michael and Luke hadn't gotten their fill of fishing for the day and departed to the river while camp was set up. Michael caught a half dozen fish before coming to join the group for appetizers. He also landed a nice Sockeye which Luke netted for him even though his waders were already off. The fish would have been perfect table fare if it wasn't Pizza night. We enjoyed a variety of different pizza combinations and a fresh salad. Our bellies were full and we needed the energy reboot after a day of heavy wind. We enjoyed watching Bailey Spey cast in the evening sun as some therapy for our tired eyes to close out the day.





From the log of July 22nd, 2018



We poured a few extra cups of Coffee with heavy winds and clouds in the morning. We departed camp and started fishing the bead in the morning with very strong success. Several nice fish were landed immediately. Michael and Luke got into a few Pink salmon in this stretch. We saw our second large eagle nest with several larger chicks in it. The adults cackled loudly to let us know that our

presence was noticed. Just below the nest we popped into a large slough that had good numbers of Sockeye, Chums and Jack Kings. Luke took a nice Jack King out of the top section, Steve caught a large Sockeye and Dick caught a nice Chum from this hole. John's boat with Luke and Michael stopped at a big pod of Char and had to get a taste of some topwater action. Armed with the Gurgler, all three of them caught very large Char in the 22"-24" range. It is tough to find a cooler eat then a big Char "sharking" after a floating fly. Dick and Pete were not far away from the Char side channel targeting Sockeye and managed to get a nice one for dinner. It was unclear who caught the fish and who netted it but the important thing was that we were all thankful for them providing fresh fish for dinner. Luke caught a nice blushed up Sockeye just before lunch that gave him a good tussle on a 6wt rod. While the Char, Chum and pink fishing was quite spectacular, the Kings were a bit more lock-jawed then usual and the high water disbursed them to uncommon holding water. The group was able to hook good numbers of Jacks, but finding big fish that were willing to eat proved to be challenging. We made camp at a traditional bluff camp and were able to enjoy an incredible view of the surrounding landscape.





From the log of July 23rd, 2018



We enjoyed a hot oatmeal breakfast in the early morning rain to warm our bones. We chased Kings for a good portion of the morning but also had some great Char numbers. We stopped a lunch spot just above a small tributary creek where the Char were thick. Dick and Steve caught over a dozen fish in matter of 12 minutes! As we were wrapping up lunch, the River Keepers from the village of Goodnews Bay pulled



their jet boat up on the gravel bar to chat. Our Yu'pik friends, Paul and Billy along with Paul's dog Mongo visited with us for over 30 minutes while we caught up about the winter and the condition of the river. They continued up river as we continued down to find a few bluffs with strong king numbers. John and Dick explored a new side channel after lunch that typically didn't have enough water to float and found some very large Dollies in deep orange spawn colors. These were some of the first fish of the season that we had seen to exhibit darker spawning colors. All boats found good numbers of fish and several large pods of mixed salmon where many chum were landed.

We noticed a lot of guide boats in the

upper river and thought this might be an indication that the lower river wasn't fishing great for the lodge. We hauled off on a bar just a ½ mile above our traditional camp and found incredible numbers of Char. Steve and Dick arrived first and caught as many fish as they wanted. Pete disappeared to the lower part of the bar with a rod in hand. The water erupted with a bright Sockeye and John rushed down with a net to make sure that fish would become dinner for the group. Our traditional camp had been blown out by the high water and the river had blown across into an adjacent tributary. We made camp just a





½ mile down on a bar with a large pod of mixed salmon sitting right in front of camp. The lower part of the bar showed signs of life and moose, wolf, and bear tracks. The evening rain threatened the anglers and kept them under cover of the wing until dinner was finished. Luke, Michael and Steve all caught large Chum Salmon right in front of camp as a after dinner treat.

### **From the log of July 24th, 2018**

The morning started under cloud cover. Steve caught a few nice Char and a nice Rainbow Trout to start his morning. Notes from the log state: the Char fishing was consistent for almost the entire day. We came into a large flat below a big bluff and where the entire group was able to get into good numbers of fish. Steve fished the lower end of the flat with John where they were able to hike up and sneak up on a pod of fish. Steve sight nymphed to each of these fish and landed over 8 fish, the largest being around 25"! Fishing with Pete, Luke and Michael leap frogged Steve down to a lower bar and couldn't keep the fish off their lines. We noticed a drop off the in the number of kings in this center section of the river as we descended down to our traditional camp six. The fishing for Char remained strong but the salmon became sparse and that wasn't the only problem. It was sushi night. As the day got later, we worried if we would find good enough numbers to be able to catch a salmon for dinner. As we arrived at our traditional camp, we saw several strings of sockeye pushing up near the bar. Before





Johns boat was even unloaded he grabbed his rod and made several casts up to the fish to no avail. On what was claimed to be his last few casts, his line came tight and a bright sockeye shot out of the water. Pete returned the favor from the night prior by netting John's fish. Sockeye sushi would be on the menu for dinner. After the sushi was rolled, eaten and stomachs were full, the bugs became quite heinous. The group started a fire to help keep them at bay. The fire served double duty to roast s'mores as a messy after dinner dessert. Once the fire became small, we scurried away from the bugs into the protection of our tents.

### **From the log of July 25th, 2018**

We began our last full day on the river quite early to make plenty of time to fish. The day started strong and the Char were hungry. Luke landed a very nice Char while wading a bar just a mile below camp. We came down into a big deep run we dub the "Carousel" for the way we generally fish it. We fish our way down, then row or drag our rafts up the opposite bank before floating it again. It can be pretty extraordinary fishing. Several bright pink salmon and Chums were hooked out of this pocket. On the third pass, Luke hooked a hot 10lb king that was brought into the net minutes later. Still in awe of the power of the fish and talking about how cool the experience was, Luke and his father continued to fish side by side. Several hundred yards below the place where he landed his king, blind casting to a bank, Luke's line jumped out of his hands again. He was attached to another king Salmon. This one was slightly bigger then the last and even brighter. The fish put up a strong fight but was eventually brought to the net and photographed quickly before being released. Spirits were high going into lunch, but the real salmon fishing began after lunch. Steve caught







several very nice Chum salmon on his hand tied flies. Luke and Michael both got into some super nice bright Chum as well. Dick has been almost exclusively targeting Kings for the entire day and had been fishing hard. In one of our last King holes, dubbed as “Swallow Bluff”, Dick hooked into a monster, that ripped line off his reel and darted all over the river. Him and Pete had a waltz with the fish as they chased it down river. They eventually put the fish in an inadequate net and snapped a few photos of a fish in the 25-30lb range. Dick was satisfied and opted to sit and relax and enjoy the scenery for the rest of the day. We arrived at our final camp and Michael was not quite done fishing. He landed 3 species of salmon in camp alone! A Chum, Pink and King Salmon. Pete crafted up his salmon curry for dinner and we ate our fill. We each

enjoyed our preferred adult beverages as we recapped the week, and what a week it was.

### **From the log of July 26th, 2018**

We departed the gravel bar early in the morning and rowed past the lodge as they fired up their jet boats in the early hours. We pushed down to the floatplane pick up and awaited the planes as the tide ripped in. A few curious seals made an appearance, bobbing up and down and checking us out as we rowed past. We broke down our gear and thought back on the week we had just completed through the Togiak National Wildlife Refuge. It was full of fish, wildlife and solitude in one of the most pristine fisheries in the world. The floatplanes arrived mid day and we piled in to our respective plane loads. The tide was high and we had to be careful while loading up. We all made it back to town and figured a burger night was in order after a week of a heavy fish diet.

