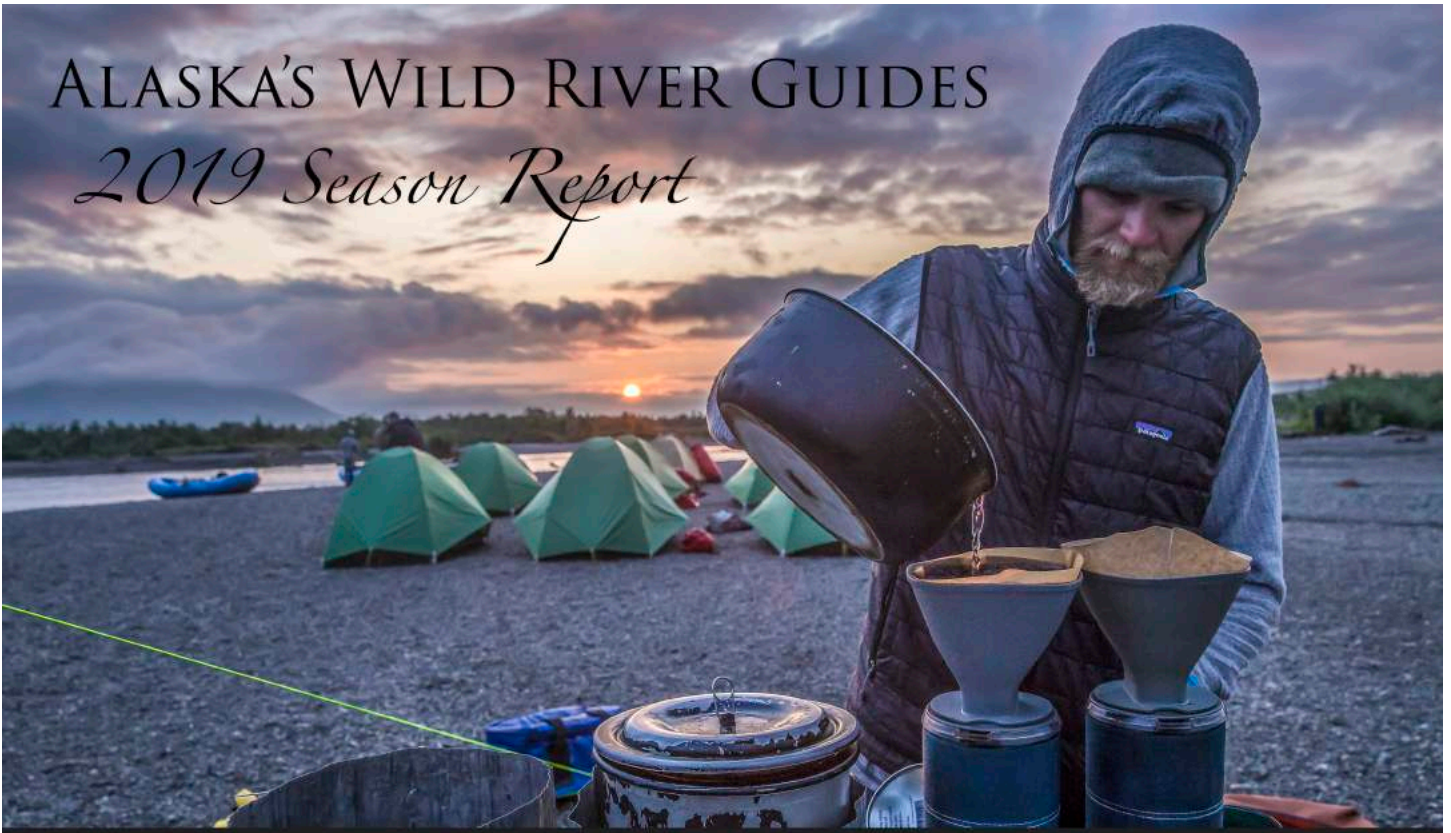


# ALASKA'S WILD RIVER GUIDES

## *2019 Season Report*



July 19th - July 26th, 2019

Goodnews River Fly-Fishing Expedition



### **From the trip log of July 19<sup>th</sup>, 2019**

We spent the previous evening going over our trip briefings and it was safe to say, our group was ready to hit the river. We got an early start and loaded up on a hot bacon and egg breakfast. Our pilot's wife, Denise picked us up in the Van and we shuttled over to Shannon's Pond to weigh our gear loads. Our paneloads were just heavy enough that our Pilots decided to take off from Lake Aleknagik under fair

skies. The first two planes loaded up and flew west by 9:30am. We passed over a dark patch from a wildfire that had burned in early June. It was incredible to see the fireweed flourishing through the burn and the landscape regenerating in less than two months. We had the full group to the Lake before noon and a early start for our afternoon float.

The four rafts moved down river in unison with virtually no obstructions. Fish numbers were low in the first couple of miles. Temperatures had been higher than average for



the last few weeks and the headwaters were a little shallow. We reached the confluence with a major tributary at 3 PM. The creek injected life into the main river and the fish numbers skyrocketed. We set up camp early amidst a classic Alaska scene amongst thousands of fish, spectacular mountains, and vibrant Tundra. Roughly 80 percent of the school were Sockeye Salmon. The guests cast flies into the pod and immediately hooked up on a wide variety of Salmon, char and Resident species.



The majority of the anglers this week had come on this trip with members of their family. We find that some of the most lasting memories are created in true wilderness with family and friends alike. The average age of our guests at Wild River Guides is over 50 years old and many of them have children themselves. Everyone enjoys sharing the

river with the next generation and it was a pleasure to have a young talented angler like Ben in our group. In the first evening he caught a monstrous golden Jack King, a Sockeye, a Chum and numerous dollies. At only 12 years old, he was completely self-sufficient hooking, landing and releasing his own fish safely.

Gabriel and Ben started out fishing a bead and doubled up non-stop. Gabriel took an excursion up the adjacent Creek and was rewarded with a massive 27 inch Dolly Varden. Jackson landed a nice King while throwing a big streamer around the schools of Sockeye. Dave's first fish of the trip was a pretty Sockeye on a streamer. He also landed a nice 10 pound King that evening. John Moore started with the streamer and caught a large Dolly and a nice Sockeye. Doug had not fly fished much prior to the trip but he found his bearings quickly and caught numerous Dollies and Sockeye. Jim caught a nice big Sockeye and Dollies on at least every third cast. Nick reported catching eight dollies on eight straight casts at one point.

We enjoyed a big Pasta dinner as the group marveled at the vast landscapes surrounding the Goodnews. Some anglers continued to fish after dinner while others preferred to sit back with a beer in hand. Bailey and Justin





hiked up the creek and reported good action on the gurgler for Dolly Varden. Each angler eventually got their fill of fishing and crawled into their tents to recharge the batteries after a great day.



### From the trip log of July 20<sup>th</sup>, 2019

Coffee might have been the first thing on the guests' minds when they awoke but fishing was the second. Everyone started the day with a few fish before coming to the breakfast table. After breakfast, the Guides started breaking camp and Gabby came tight to a 25-pound King on his 7-weight, and had the attention of the entire camp as he fought it for about 45 minutes. Justin

slid the fish in the net and we all got the chance to admire its size and strength. Sometimes we hook a fish that is a little big for our tackle and all we can do is try our best to fight the fish as efficiently as possible and revive it fully before the release.

Jim also started his day with a nice 15 pound King. John Moore switched to a bead and caught lots of char and a nice Rainbow Trout. The water levels were above average for this time of year from snowmelt. The morning fishing was a little slow but the afternoon made up for it. Over one hundred and twenty Dollies were landed after lunch by the anglers. Nick caught a nice 25-inch char and many more after that. Jackson enjoyed himself fishing a top water gurgler fly in the afternoon. Jim caught a huge Grayling on the bead and also enjoyed the Gurgler fishing. This continued to be the best King runs that we have seen in years but many anglers enjoyed the opportunities to target other species.

We witnessed vibrant patches of fuchsia fireweed in full bloom that littered the landscape throughout the day. The weather was nice and temperate but the wind ramped up in the afternoon as we were making camp. A few members of the group hiked up river and explored a shallow flat for char with success. Pete



cooked up Fish Tacos that were well received by hungry bellies and well paired with a nice "Sure-Oz" wine. The group all sat out from the cover of the wing and enjoyed the evening sun. The anglers had fished hard all day and went to bed dreaming of what tomorrow would bring.



## From the trip log of July 21<sup>st</sup>, 2019

We awoke to a chilly morning and the guests were a little slow getting out of their tents. A few anglers had enjoyed fishing the gurgler the prior day and word had spread around camp. Ben decided to try the floating fly while we were packing up the boats and landed a nice Rainbow Trout before we left the camp bar. Jackson had gained confidence in Chartreuse flies from his success early in the trip. He stuck with it and caught a nice King Salmon in the morning. Just before lunch we were fishing a long bluff section for Kings and Jim hooked a dime bright Sockeye. The fish put up a nice fight but was no match for his angling skill. After netting the fish and with Jim's permission, we thanked the fish for its sacrifice and kept it for dinner.



While Doug was hooked up on a Chum Salmon, a Bear came out of the brush and crossed the river downstream. He paid us little mind but it made our "hey Bear" calls just a little bit louder that evening. Ben caught five Salmon throughout the course of the day. Nick reported catching the largest King Salmon of the year that he had estimated at 80 pounds. We realized that he might have been embellishing a little and knew we had to keep an eye out for future shenanigans.



The temperatures rose in the afternoon and we noticed something we hadn't seen in the past. We watched the Sandhill Cranes circle above us on the thermals as a raptor would do. This unusual sight had us questioning what sparked this behavior. We reached the camp that we have dubbed as "Swallow Camp" around 5 pm under high sun. There were lots of char at the bar and Kings lining the deep channel. Dave caught a nice Sockeye at camp that Pete helped net. He kept fishing hard and broke his rod on another fish later but Justin selflessly gave him a personal rod to fish for the rest of the week. We enjoyed Jim's fresh Sockeye with a Teriyaki Ginger glaze for dinner and cold Budweiser's. With full bellies, most relaxed in the evening sun. Bailey got back



into her waders and demonstrated her Spey casting techniques for the group. It was a classic warm July Alaska evening enjoyed by all before heading to bed.

### **From the trip log of July 22<sup>nd</sup>, 2019**

Most of the guests woke before Sunrise and were lined up at the table by the time the coffee water had boiled. Although the mornings had been cold, the afternoons were beautiful and sunny. We felt this was a fair tradeoff with Mother Nature. Almost directly out of camp, strong fishing began. We spotted an eagle's nest that had three large chicks in it. We discovered a new channel in the morning and sent a couple of boats down it to explore. It was a neat jungle section of river where Jackson was able to land a few nice Rainbows.

The group reached a nice deep hole in the late morning and caught Sockeye, Pinks, Jacks and Dollies. Jackson finally caught the Pink Salmon that he was looking for and John Moore pulled out a nice King. After stopping for lunch, everyone was ready to get back on the river. Throughout the day we spend much of the time in our boats talking about whatever is on our minds other than fishing. The group was infatuated with the country's current politics and while most of the boat captains rule out political talk on the river, the rule seemed to be overridden this week. We caught our first glimpse of a jet boat at the Togiak Wilderness Boundary. The Goodnews has vast mountain landscapes, so even if jet boats are around the corner you feel as if you're completely alone. Our first jet boat sighting was a familiar face, our friend and local River Keeper, Paul and his dog Mongo who headed down river before we reached them. We would get to see them again later in the week.



Ben and Jim caught nice Kings in the afternoon before arriving at a camp we had used in the past. We historically set up tents on the lower section of this gravel bar, but the high waters of the previous fall and spring had reshaped the bar. Gravel generally sorts from largest at the upriver section to smallest down river but in this case the gravel at the top of the bar was much finer than at the bottom. So we took advantage and made our

home at the upper end. A big pool with a fine beach had developed at the top of the bar and Nick fished it hard and took a couple of nice Sockeye.

Pizza night at camp is a favorite meal but the guides felt the pressure when Nick exclaimed that he was of pure Italian decent and would be judging the Pizza accordingly. While John was doing his best to craft pies that would live up to Nick's standards, Pete was telling a story about an Elk hunt he had been on several years earlier. Those present were completely enthralled by the description of Pete's hunting trip in the Bob Marshall wilderness area. The pizzas came out over the course of an hour and we are pretty sure we got Nick's stamp of approval. It was another gorgeous evening and we all stayed up a little past our bedtime enjoying the sunset accompanied by libations.



### **From the trip log of July 23<sup>rd</sup>, 2019**

The small gravel and warm sleeping bags helped everyone rest well. With clear skies the prior night it wasn't surprising the morning started off chilly. We got onto the river early and found both char and staging Chum to start the day.



Gabriel caught a nice Dolly on the bead and everyone reported good fishing for Dollies before lunch. We loaded up on meats and cheeses with the addition of Goldfish, a lunch favorite for many.

Jackson caught several more Pink Salmon that are synonymously called "Humpys". He and Justin commemorated each catch by singing the lyrics of the late 90s Digital Underground hip-hop song called "The Humpty Dance". This became a theme for the rest of the week and anytime that somebody hooked a Pink Salmon people would talk about doing the "Humpty hump." This brought a positive connotation to the idea of catching Pink salmon. Generally they aren't the most desired fish to catch because they are the smallest of the five species of Pacific Salmon and aren't the best eating, but this week everyone wanted to catch one!





Ben hooked a few very nice Kings throughout the day that put up great fights. The largest, estimated to be between 25 and 30 pounds was battled with expertly over the course of 20 minutes. Just before we could get it into the net, the King pulled the hook. It was a tough battle for Ben on his 7-weight but sometimes it's the fish that gets away that you remember most and gives you a deeper motivation to return to Alaska. Ben had a phenomenal day and caught Char, Sockeye, Rainbow Trout and Kings but he was still looking for his Pink Salmon...

We descended down the river towards a beautiful tall Peak. Our friends from the Village, Paul and Billy (The River Keepers) stopped on their way down river to talk to Pete in the chase boat. They offered to bring us some native food the following day. Pete's boat asked about the big mountain we'd been eyeing and inquired what the locals called it. "Tall Mountain," is what Paul replied before making his way down river. We always enjoy our interactions with Paul and the Goodnews Bay Villagers.



Nick was working hard to catch the Sockeye we needed for dinner and refused to give up. Pete decided to give it a try and made one cast that resulted in a hook up to a bright Sockeye that tail walked across the water. With Nick's permission, Pete was allowed to keep the fish he had hooked for dinner.

As the remaining boats were landing at camp, Ben decided to take advantage of being first on the bar and made a few casts. Swinging streamers into the wood, he caught two Rainbows before we could unload the boat. The anglers pulled a few more fish from the shoreline. John filleted Pete's fish and we cooked up fresh Salmon with bowtie pasta, topped with pesto and pine nuts. Following dinner, a few of the anglers went looking for a little extra adventure. Jackson, Dave, Nick, and Gaby



waded across the river to fish a tributary. Dave and Jackson reported that many fish were caught including some very large Dollies.



### From the trip log of July 24<sup>th</sup>, 2019

After breakfast while the guides were breaking down camp, Jackson and Jim waded across to the Creek from the prior night. Jim reported catching fifteen Char before we had even started floating for the day. John Moore started the morning sight casting with Bailey and landed a nice 12-pound King. Jackson's goal for the day was to target Rainbow Trout. He threw streamers to the wood and caught a few nice fish up to 19 inches. Overcast skies and rain started around 11:30 AM. We saw a big bald eagle perched on a cliff that we were able to observe closely before he took off. We set up lunch on a small bar below the cliff where a school of hundreds of small Char were staged. Jim and Doug managed to catch about twenty fish in ten minutes.



We saw a few spawning Pink Salmon above our lunch spot. Justin boat joined us on the bar and Ben caught wind of this and he was on his way up river with a rod in hand. While the rest of the group began eating, Ben was coming tight to his first Pink salmon. He exclaimed, "I'm doing the Humpty Hump!"

The entire group watched the event and his

positive energy was infectious. Ben caught a nice King in the afternoon while fishing with Justin and Gaby. Late in the day we watched a DeHaviland Beaver Floatplane land on the river from Mission Lodge. The boats rafted up together on the shoreline at the top of the landing zone and relaxed as we waited for the plane to depart so we could float the river uninterrupted. We floated the long stretch of river and picked up Chum, Kings, Sockeye and Char. The fishing was worth the wait.

Once again, Pete provided dinner for the group by catching a Sockeye late in the day.

Sockeye was an important ingredient because it was Sushi night and everyone knows that

Sushi is better with fish! The group was hungry from a big day and the rolls vanished





quickly along with the Joe-Joe Oreo style cookies for dessert. We moved into the lower river and the landscape was changing from Mountains to an alluvial floodplain. The cobble was getting smaller and we slept well on very comfortable fine gravel dreaming about our final full day on the river.



### From the trip log of July 25<sup>th</sup>, 2019

We awoke to a cloudy day and ate a hot breakfast to warm our bones. We had the boats packed and were getting ready to depart when we received visitors traveling upriver. Paul and Billy stopped in camp along with Paul's dog Mongo. Paul provided us with a display of a few Yupik hunting tools. He showed us how his rock-loaded hunting sling worked in addition to a double weighted bird-hunting tool. We had fun chatting with them and enjoyed watching Mongo chase after beavers that he couldn't seem to catch.



In the early morning Dave caught a beautiful bright Sockeye. John rowed the boat towards the shore as Dave gripped the handle tightly with the net draped in the water. They thought the "dinner" fish was in the bag but it miraculously disappeared and was gone. After examining the net several times, we realized there was a hole that was just large enough for the fish to escape.

The wind ramped up in the afternoon and fishing became difficult. At times the headwinds were so aggressive that they were blowing the boats upriver. The rain started before lunch and we hunkered down behind a natural willow windbreak. It was



apparent that anglers were getting cold and raingear was being tested. The guides and anglers agreed that the priority was to get downriver, make camp, and get warm.

We went rods up and pushed down towards our final camp. We decided to drag the rafts upriver up a tributary to a desirable camp that we had used in the past. The wind died down and the rain stopped as we reached the camp bar. We were still looking for a dinner fish and

the guests lined the shore with rods in hand to do their part. The fishing was quite phenomenal at camp and there were times when four anglers were hooked up at same time. Lots of Chum Salmon were caught. Ben caught a nice bright Jack King to help complement our 'Riverside Salmon Curry' with couscous and naan. It was our last night on the river and it turned into a beautiful evening. The guides even made a few casts and joined in the fun. We had a small fire on the bar and fished off the wine before heading for our tents.



### **From the trip log of July 26<sup>th</sup>, 2019**

Another gloomy start to the day made us wonder if our pilots would be able to successfully pick us up. We broke down camp early and pushed down 45 minutes to our takeout zone. Most anglers had put their rods away but Dave continued to fish and

got one more Chum Salmon. We were able to get all the guests and Pete out to Dillingham on the first two planeloads. Justin, John and Bailey remained on the bar. Justin had been working for three weeks and still had not seen a wild bear in Alaska despite several sightings over the past few weeks. Just as Mike landed to pick up the guides with the rest of the gear he pointed out a Brown Bear downriver fishing. The bear was observed for a few minutes and then the gear was loaded up and the group reunited in Dillingham to recap a great week.

