



REPORT: ALASKA FLY OUT LODGE



INTRODUCTION



Last month's newsletter discussed a stationary Alaska lodge, a non-fly out experience. In the case of a stationary lodge, location is the primary issue. This month, our focus is on an Alaska fly out lodge. Alaska has 5 or 6 top notch fly out lodges – what we term the “A” lodges. They are expensive and provide a quality Alaska experience with access to a great variety of waters and species daily, weather permitting. These two reports focus on one of our favorites. We give an edge to this particular lodge because of the variety

provided by their fly out, remote, outpost camps. They have two of these stationary tent camps and you spend one night at each providing a “wilderness edge” to their regular quality lodge experience. Like all Alaska destinations, timing is critical in determining the “prime time” for each species.

Excerpts below are from reports on Bristol Bay Lodge by John Gans and Ken Yabusaki. John, accompanied by his son, Henry, and another father-son team (Chris and Will Kirsten) visited Bristol Bay two years ago and this was a return trip for them in a different time frame. For Ken, this was his first Alaskan adventure and a “couples trip” with his wife Ann who just began fly fishing last summer – note that she seems to be learning (Ann and Ken at right with Ann's big Silver salmon)!!



REPORTS

FROM KEN: “The highlights of our Alaska fly fishing adventure were the two outpost camps, Birch Creek and Rainbow.....at Birch Creek, temperatures dropped to about 28 degrees F at night, but the cots and sleeping bags were comfortable and warm.....We started the day fishing for silver salmon and managed to land at least ten fish in a couple of hours. including one Sockeye buck in full spawning colors.....Since we had caught numerous Silvers the day before on our fly out to the Togiak River, we decided to fish for Dolly Varden (dollies) and the famed Leopard Rainbows of this particular river. Our guide took us to a section of the river, after a shore lunch of freshly caught Silver salmon, where large Dolly Varden were jockeying for position behind spawning Sockeye and Silver salmon. We hooked some nice Dollies before heading to another section of the river. We cast a mouse fly to the edge of the banks and retrieved so the fly created a swimming wake across the water - that was the key to entice a large leopard rainbow to suck it in. We managed to land a couple more beautiful rainbows on the mouse. This was a gorgeous river....where we saw a large Grizzly on a gravel bar checking out the salmon.



(photos - l to r: Ken with Sockeye in full spawning dress, Ann w/rainbow, Ken w/Dolly)

Rainbow Camp was a lifetime experience. The camp is unique because Bristol Bay Lodge has an exclusive lease on this section of the river. Rainbow Camp sits at the mouth where two rivers empty into the Bering Sea. The scenery is spectacular....on our arrival, we had about an hour to fish before dinner. Our guide pointed to a section just 200 yards from the camp. The water didn't look that fishy but our guide instructed us to cast across, mend once upstream, and start stripping a pink streamer. On my first retrieve, a silver smacked the streamer and jumped three times before screaming off 50 yards of line. We literally stuck, landed, and lost close to 15 fish in that hour. All the fish were coming out of tide water with sea lice still stuck to them and were bright chromers.

The next day..... we lost count of the numbers of silvers we hooked but on average they were between 13-14 pounds and some were 17 pounds or more. After a shore lunch of fresh silver salmon and potatoes, we fished a pool where large silvers were resting. The result was the same, a fish hooked on almost every other cast.

Our entire fly fishing experience at the Bristol Bay Lodge exceeded our expectations. During our seven day adventure, we fished several different rivers via the float plane. The lodge's "home river," which empties into the lake where the lodge is situated, also provided rainbows, dollys, arctic grayling, char and the occasional spawned out sockeye salmon (by accident). On other fly-out trips, besides the outpost camps, we fished rivers with great rainbow and dolly varden action and silver salmon action mixed in between."

FROM JOHN: (r - photo of group from last trip) "We had a great time and the lodge continues to be run with military like precision. The 7 day river rotation works great. The guides are focused and really invested in the guest experience. The pilots are confident and very experienced. We always felt that we were going to be put on a lot of fish and arrive safely. You fish a different river each day which gives you a lot of variety of casting conditions, depth of water and species. As usual, the number of fish in these rivers is staggering. If you don't catch 15 fish a day, you just don't have your line in the water.



(l to r: Will with nice rainbow, grayling, and Henry with a "small" Silver taken on his greatgrandfather's 1947 Orvis bamboo rod)

The difference with this trip and the trip we took earlier in the summer two years ago was the presence of the Silver salmon. They are fun to catch and fight hard. On the days we targeted the Silver's we caught between 15 and 20 fish a day ranging between 8 and 17 pounds. It is especially gratifying for less experienced fly casters to hook into a fish like that. My son, Henry, age 14, was yelling with joy as he hooked fish after fish. His arms were exhausted by the end of each day, but with some great BBL cooking he was ready for more the next day. The Char and Dolly Varden's were abundant and were in the smaller rivers feasting on the salmon egg drop. Many of the Char were over 20 inches and fought hard. We caught a few Rainbow's in the 25 inch range."



Note about booking Alaska trips: if you want to book a top notch lodge when the Silvers are in the rivers, you should be planning far in advance as these times at the "A" lodges fill very early.

Don Muelrath

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(photo credits: Ann and Ken Yabusaki, John Gans)