About Wild River Guide Co.

"My mission is to provide you the best wilderness fly-fishing and raft travel on the most pristine Bristol Bay waters. My expertise is focused like a lighthouse beacon on the sustainable fisheries of the Bristol Bay." *Mark Rutherford.*

Wild River Guide Co. offers fly-fishing trips only on the richest waters and most spectacular landscapes of Bristol Bay. These are raft based fly fishing experiences filled with King Salmon, Sockeye, Chum, Pink, Silver Salmon, Rainbow Trout, Dolly Varden, Arctic Grayling, Arctic Char, Lake Trout, and Northern Pike. Experience all this while travelling across a vast boreal forest and tundra landscape among spectacular mountain scenery and wildlife.

For those who haven't joined Wild River Guides on a Alaska fly fishing vacation, you'll want to know Mark and his guides 3 specialties:

1. First is guiding fly fishers, their friends, and families on remote fly-in Alaskan rivers, seldom fished by fishing lodges or other guides.
2. Second is providing very comfortable raft travel and camps in truly extraordinary wilderness settings.
3. Third, Mark is a retired Alaska natural resource manager with 4 decades as a naturalist in wildest Alaska. Your experiences with wildlife, geology, birding, and photography are going to be dramatically enhanced traveling with Mark and his guides.

Fish Deeper!

Look at the trip reports from prior years trips to get a clear picture of what your trip will be like. Look at **photos**. **Compare the rivers**. Have a look at the Biographies of **Mark Rutherford** and his staff.

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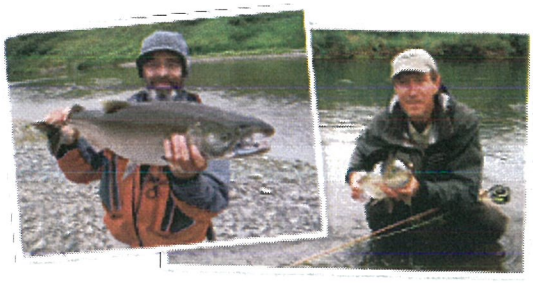

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Mark Rutherford Owner / Lead Guide

With over 34 years of fly fishing experience in Alaskan rivers and a Masters in Education in Alaskan Aquatic Ecology, Mark is one of the most experienced fishing guides in Alaska and the only one committed exclusively to wilderness fly fishing on the creeks & rivers that lodge traffic can't reach.

Education

Masters in Aquatic Ecology Education, 1998
Antioch University – Seattle, WA

Emergency Medical Technician, 1988
University of Alaska – Fairbanks, AK

B.A. Natural Resource Management, 1977
The Evergreen State College – Olympia, WA

Abstract

Born in 1953. Fly-fishing since 1962. Arrived in 1972 in Savoonga, Alaska 2 weeks after graduating from the Athenian High School, Danville CA. 34 years of professional study, exploration, & management of Alaska wilderness. 16 years as a full time professional wild land firefighter in Helicopter operations, logistics, & wildfire management.

Member of the "Alaska Task Force" selecting lands for inclusion in wildlife Refuges during ANILCA including Becharof NWR and Aniakchak Caldera Monument. 35 years piloting whitewater rafts, canoes, kayaks, & jet boats from the Stikine to the Kanektok, from the Grand Canyon in Arizona to unnamed tundra creeks in the Bristol Bay region. Regarded by several authorities as one of the finest boat handlers in Alaska. Specializing in first descents of small wilderness salmon streams and tributaries exploring for rainbows, cohos, kings, & char. Guide Permits from the State of Alaska & Togiak National Wildlife refuge, licensed Alaska fishing guide. Host of the annual "Alaska Extreme Fly Fishing Invitational" wilderness expeditions.

Technical Wilderness Guide skills

- Class V+ Rafter, Class V+ Rock Climber, Grizzly/Brown/Black Bear Safety firearms qualified, Medical Evacuation specialist (Helicopters, first Aid, CPR, former ambulance EMT), Leave No Trace Camp specialist, Camp Chef (American, Thai, Italian, French), Alaska weather forecasting , Long Distance Dog Musher.
- Alaska fly fishing specialist affiliated with Sage, Simms, Tibor, Ross, Patagonia, and Mountain HardWear.

Employment (1985-Present)

- Company Owner, Rutherford's Alaska Fishing Trips & Wild River Guides ltd. Wilderness guiding services for fishermen, families, and whitewater enthusiasts. (1998 – present)
- Company Owner, Extreme Fly Fishing Productions Co. Wilderness media Production Company. (2005 – present)
- Documentary Film contributor, "Trout Grass" David James Duncan & Andy Royer. (2003-2005)
- Logistics Coordinator & Foreman, State of Alaska Department of Natural Resources, Tok, Alaska (1985-2001) (907) 883-5134
  - Supervisor for the support branch of a state of Alaska Tok Area office managing natural resources & wildfire for 9,000,000 acres.
  - Situation Unit Leader for large-scale emergency incidents in the United States and Canada.
  - Supervisor of the Fire Dispatch Center and manager of aviation contracts.
  - Helicopter Manager,
- Alaska Wilderness Homestead. Successful wilderness family homestead at Cathedral Bluffs. (1981- to present)
- Aviation Industry. Ramp agent for winter operations. Continental Airlines, Aspen, CO (11/1992-4/1993)

- Biologist, Contractor. Data gathering and analysis of migratory bird usage of an Alaskan river corridor assessing the environmental impact of proposed military base in Alaska. Alaska
- Biological Research, Inc. Fairbanks, AK (4/1987-6/1989) Bob Ritchie (907) 455-6777
- Biologist, Contractor. Data gathering and analysis of migratory Chum Salmon through capture, telemetry implants, aerial monitoring, and tag recovery. US Fish and Wildlife Service, Tetlin
- National Wildlife Refuge, Tok, AK. Manager (907) 883-5321. Company Owner, Alaska Gill Net Co., Sole proprietorship marketing equipment to Alaska Native fishermen. Tok, AK (1/1984-7/1988).
- Community Service, Emergency Medical Technician. Volunteer on rural Alaskan ambulance squad. Tok Emergency Medical Services, Tok, AK (EMT-I, 1987-1988, EMT-II 1988-1989, ETT 1990 – present)
- Community Service, Chairman, Fisheries Committee, Fish and Game Advisory Board, Alaska Department of Fish and Game, Tok, AK (2/1986-9/1988) Dave Kellyhouse, Director Alaska Department of Fish and Game.
- Community Service, Environmental Education. Environmental education in public schools. (9/1989-present)
- Biological Technician, US Fish and Wildlife Service, Tetlin National Wildlife Refuge, Tok, AK (6/1984-9/1984)
- Ranch Foreman, Milton/ Folsom Ranch Co., Roundup, MT. Ranch management (6/1979-4/1981)
- Tree Planter, US Forest Service, Ennis, MT (4/1979-6/1979)
- Wildlife Technician, Montana Department of Fish and Game, Wolf Creek, MT (4/1978-9/1978)
- Natural Resource Planner, Student Intern, US Fish and Wildlife Service, Olympia, WA (9/1976-3/1978) Jack Van Valkenburg w (208) 344-5243, h(208) 389-9127, acluidaho@aol.com
- Environmental Chemistry, Student Researcher, National Science Foundation, Olympia, WA (3/1975-3/1976)
- Resource Planner, Student Intern, The Nature Conservancy, Portland, OR (9/1972-9/1974)

Publications

Bourgeau-Chavez, L.L., Lasischke, E.S., and Rutherford, M.D. (Fall, 1999). Evaluation of ERS and SAR Data for Prediction of Fire Danger in a Boreal Region. International Journal of Wildfire Management.

References

Mr. Richard & Ms Katherine Voss, Manager- retired 2012, Arctic National Wildlife Refuge, Fairbanks, AK.

Mr. Rick & Mrs. Denise Grant, Chief Pilot- owner, Tikchik AirVentures, Dillingham, AK w(907) 842-5841

Mr. Jerry & Dr. Allison Scoville, PhD, Faculty, Central Washington University, (509) 925-1577

Dr. Steven G. Herman, PhD, Faculty, Evergreen State College, Olympia, WA

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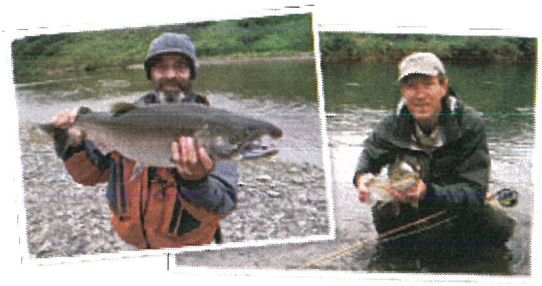

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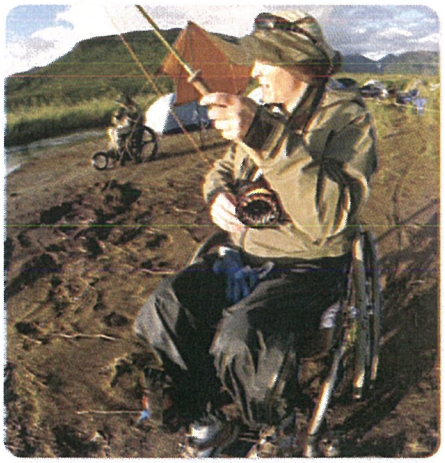
July 9th - 15th, 2011

Multiple Sclerosis Expedition to Middle Fork Goodnews River

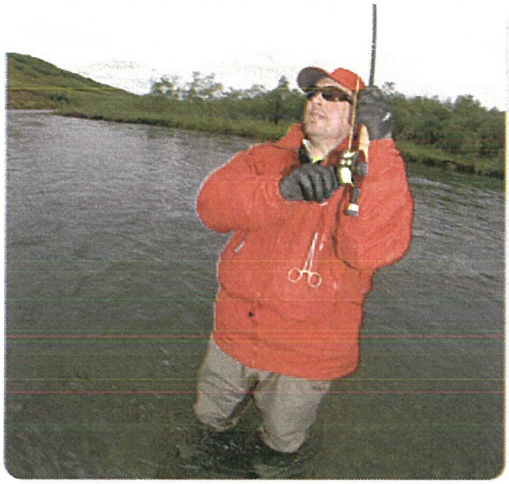
On July 9, 2011 6 participants gathered together in Dillingham, Alaska to launch a fly fishing expedition into the Wilderness of Togiak National Wildlife Refuge. Our goals were much the same as other Alaska wilderness enthusiasts who fly out in small float planes loaded with rafts and camping gear to float and fish wild Alaskan rivers. Our commitment was: "to be prepared mentally, physically, and with proper equipment to be self supporting in the wilderness". We would be dropped off at a lake beyond the tree line to navigate shallow tundra river channels, to float, fish, and camp among the notable Alaskan Brown Bears of the region. Two of the participants were especially motivated by their commitment to live the Alaska wilderness experience to the fullest! For them as each day passes their physical abilities and health are compromised by MS, Multiple Sclerosis. A third participant with a prosthetic leg, Malcolm Daly, co-lead this annual Paradox Sports trip. Karen Daly and Olly Merrill and I signed on as support.



The trip fulfills an ongoing commitment shared by outdoorsmen John Merritt, Malcolm Daly, and Mark Rutherford, to make truly significant, bona fide, Alaskan wilderness expeditions accessible

to significantly disabled campers. We believe that if Erik Weihenmayer, totally blind, can summit Mt. Everest and that Mark Wellman, a paraplegic, can climb El Capitan in Yosemite National Park, that others with disabilities will consider taking on expeditionary challenges. In this case to undertake a self propelled adventure across a vast Alaskan landscape. We undertook the first self propelled Alaska expedition with paraplegic fly fisherman Vijay Viswanathon and angler Malcolm Daly with his prosthetic leg, in 2009. In 2010 we completed a second adventure with 5 disabled participants. In 2011, to honor John Merritt's extraordinary vision we devoted the Alaska wilderness fly-fishing expedition to participants with Multiple Sclerosis. John Merritt has secondary progressive MS and his prior adventures exploring remote Alaskan fisheries are spoken of around many campfires.

We launched from Dillingham in Dehavilland Beaver floatplanes in low weather that could hardly be called auspicious. As we flew west through various mountain passes the marine cloud layer pressed down against the tundra ultimately preventing flight toward our goal, a small inaccessible river requiring a portage. The pilot, Rick Grant turned and asked, "Do you have a plan B?" Our options would be to return to Dillingham and wait, perhaps several days for this storm cycle to pass or alternately to select a different river. We chose to reroute the expedition and go fishing on the Middle Fork of the Goodnews rather than sit in town waiting on the weather.



Keith Terry inspired this trip. He is the leader of a Multiple Sclerosis support group in Bellingham, Washington. An angler since childhood, Keith is enthusiastic about getting out and accomplishing his dreams. His 2010 success, climbing Mt Baker under challenging weather conditions with fellow outdoorsman Ron Parker, left no doubt as to Keith's commitment to struggle past the physical changes MS was forcing on his body. Keith's MS is progressed to the "Relapsing Remitting" stage http://www.nationalmssociety.org/about-multiple-sclerosis/relapsing-ms/relapsing-remitting-ms-rrms/index.aspx

I met with Keith to begin planning the expedition and it took me no more than 5 minutes to understand that he was up to the task of self propelled travel across the outback with a fly rod, a portable camp, and a good attitude. The search for a second MS participant led logically to Ron Parker, Keith's Mt Baker climbing partner, also with MS, but when Ron's ambitious work schedule precluded his participation we continued our search until we found Mike Baxter. Mike lives in

Washington's North Cascade mountains, has MS which is more progressed and less controlled by drug therapy than Keith's yet he was excited by the expeditionary prospect and we were impressed by his unwillingness to submit to the disease at this stage. Mike's MS has progressed to the stage called "Secondary Progressive". http://www.nationalmssociety.org/about-multiple-sclerosis/progressive-ms/secondary-progressive-ms/index.aspx

At a time in his life when many others are mostly confined to a wheel chair Mike Baxter struggles mightily and manages with special trekking poles and an "off road walker" to participate in his adventurous, some might say extreme, outdoors life. In addition Mike is a chef and what expedition can't benefit from great cuisine? Mike and Keith's goals would be to learn to fly fish this week in addition to tackling all the travel and camp logistics! They were both accomplished spin fisherman and eager to take up the fly rod challenge. Can you imagine if you caught your first fish on a fly rod on a wild Alaskan river?

If the flying weather was inauspicious, then the Sockeye salmon porpoising at the lake outlet were inspired. We landed smoothly, taxied to the beach, and began inflating rafts and outfitting for travel in weather best described as "sideways." I've learned from Mike and other disabled outdoorsmen and outdoorswomen that preceded him into the bush that it is somewhat easier to load and unload from a Dehavilland Beaver floatplane than it is from a Boeing 737. In Mike's words "Climbing aboard the floatplane was challenging for me, but the 55 year old Canadian built planes delivered 1200 lb payloads of us and our gear to the lake without incident. On the lakeshore.... We had some lunch and watched our pilots leave, the last people we would see for several days."

For the next three days the river would be completely shut off from the world by weather conditions precluding air travel. The barometer fell, then rose, then fell again, the wind blew and weird teardrop shaped lenticular clouds dominated the sky. We had some more sideways rain. But this is the norm for the region. Our first mile rowing through pods of mint bright Sockeye salmon in the mist served to get us focused on the present moment, the "here and now" and to help erase the travel stress of jetports, luggage, delays and jet transfer awkwardness of the preceding days. We shoved off down river to participate in whatever the river offered.

The first bear eaten salmon carcass lay on the lush damp trampled grass on the left side of the river. The ruby red Sockeye flesh had just recently been stripped clean from the bones. The large Alaska Brown Bear tracks in the mud were crisply delineated, not rained upon, and just minutes old. We then looked at the shrubby riverside Alder and Willow brush with new interest and nervously began to sign, to chatter, to call out "hey bear" and give Brown Bears every option to anticipate our appearance on what is indisputably their river.

Camp 1 in the rainstorm on a small gravel bar of the Middle Fork of the Goodnews River, Alaska.

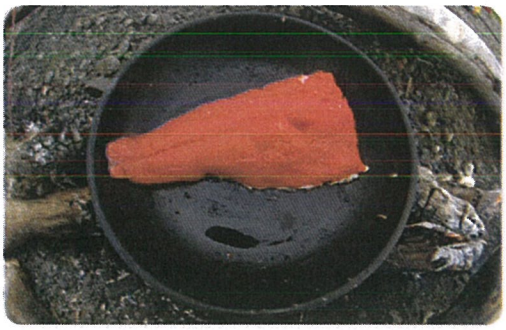
We rowed and dragged three small light rafts loaded with about 800 pounds apiece for seven miles to our first camp. The upper Middle Fork exacted a toll, as wild western Bristol Bay Rivers should. We dragged through shallow water until the river collected sufficient tributaries to carve and maintain a channel. A hydrologist would point out that a vast amount of water flows beneath the gravel of these rivers. Down valley for some miles most of the water flowed underground except when a bedrock canyon forced it to the surface and so we dragged the boats down wide shallow reaches with occasional interludes of rowing. The game plan was for self propelled participants to "nimbly leap" from the bow of the raft into the shallows, grab the lifeline rope and tug rafts across the gravel bars. In truth able bodied participants fairly routinely "face plant" in the river during these maneuvers. After towing raft across the bar one theoretically "hops" back into the raft. Considering prosthetic legged Malcolm and also considering Mike's legs which are severely compromised by MS it was clear that the nimble leaping would fall disproportionally to some other members especially Keith who is so strong in spite of the MS, and to Karen Daly. This is why we came as a group!

What inspires this sort of travel supporting disabled participants? For me who is able bodied, the inspiration stems from when as a lad of 17 years old I stayed in the Yupik Eskimo village of Savoonga, Alaska for 6 weeks. Here surrounded by the Bering Sea were hunters of whale and walrus. Among them were quite a number of disabled villagers who seemed to have important roles in the traditional culture. The disabilities that I was aware of ranged from totally blind, to wheel chair dependant, to neurological impairments, and amputees. Yet with a little community support the disabled hunted and traveled by traditional walrus skin boat (Umiak). They sewed waterproof mukluks from sealskin. They traveled to seasonal fish camps and they gathered wild plant food. Some carved magnificent ivory art objects. They harvested seals. They cared for children. Some drummed, sang, and danced. Renowned Alaska Native storyteller Sarah Frank also inspires me. Sarah acknowledges her debt to her "great-grandmother (who lived "pre-contact" in the mid nineteenth century in Alaska's Brooks Range and was) crippled…. She had to be carried on other's backs, especially in the summer months… Such women were considered living libraries and were highly valued". (From "Neerihinjik; We travelled From Place to Place. The Gwich'in Stories of Johnny & Sarah Frank" 2001). I imagine when I close my eyes and dream that we have always travelled with our disabled community as we crossed landscapes as vast as African savannahs, as wild as Alaskan river valleys, or as rugged as the Arctic Tundra.

From the log: “Camp set up for a storm. Rafts set up as windbreaks. A cairn is set up to gauge the rising water level. Just the basics tonight, pasta, pesto, salad and everyone zipped in to tents by midnight. The end of a difficult day of travel in the dim, but never quite dark, and stormy night.

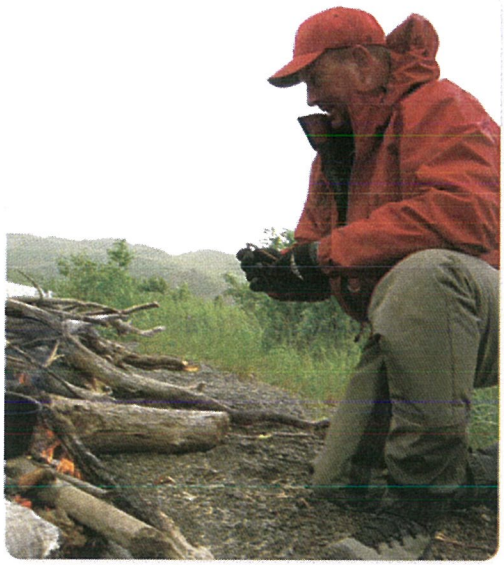
Olly Merrill on right and Mike Baxter kindle the evening fire. Olly organized us into teams for fire starting, tent set up, and to deploy the wing.

The fishing report from the log: “For the first 2 days the Bristol Bay rains dominated our travel and the river level rose about 6 inches in the upper river. The river clarity remained fairly good but the fish were put off by all the cold water and ‘wanted little part of us’. On the fly rods we cast leeches, wooly buggers, attractor patterns, smolt, and worked hard for each Arctic Grayling and Rainbow Trout.”



The way Mike tells it: “The first day that I was in Malcolm’s boat, he was telling me that even a poor cast should be in play, “Reel it in like it’s your best cast”. A moment later, I had an extra loop of line hanging out of the spinning reel... I fed out a bunch of line to clear the loop, and when I began to retrieve, fish on! … It was our first sushi dinner!” Note that chef Mike had thoughtfully brought Wasabi. We had packed Nori and rice. A bit of Sri Racha and a salad rounded out the meal. As the days passed Mike put down the spinning rod, learned to cast a fly and once he mastered the fly he never looked back. He caught and released 3 species of Salmon, Rainbow Trout, and Arctic Grayling on the fly. His first week ever fly-fishing.

We caught and released modest numbers of Rainbows and Grayling in the upper 15 miles and just enough salmon for camp dining. Fine dining too. More than other expeditions the Paradox trips truly depend upon feeding party members with fresh salmon. The trips travel light with a pared down equipment list and the lightest foods possible. The goal is to make the overland portages, and dragging, & rowing rafts more manageable for disabled and able bodied alike. It means we have room in the weight budget for a wheel chair. That means sacrificing some of the largess associated with traditional raft based river trips such as coolers full of ice and steaks for the grill. We face the veritable necessity to land a salmon near dinnertime.



From the log of July 10, 2011: As we fished a pool in the morning two moose charged up out of the riverside willows and over a hill nearby and we watched, amazed, at how much terrain they could cover with their long gangly legs. Caribou tracks. Bear Tracks. Mist. Birdsong.

From the log: We came to rely on Keith for much of the workload building storm-proof camps. Each evening he and the others dragged the three rafts across the bar and set them up as wind breaks before pitching the tents in the lee. In the morning the process is reversed. In all of the camp craft the object is to maintain the tents as dry shelter indefinitely. Keith, thank you!

For three days we travelled through the Togiak Refuge designated Wilderness and didn't see sign that another human had yet passed down the river in 2011. No aircraft overhead and no people tracks on the gravel bars. Each day we learned through experience what our strengths and weakness were and how to share the solitude while making new friends. As it eventually does the Bristol Bay weather pattern turned fair, the rains eased and the fishing picked up as nutrients "bio-accumulate" in the lower river. Each mile got better.

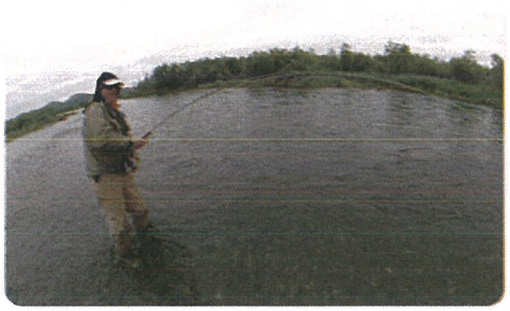
From the log: I noted one of the most remarkable hours in my Alaska fly-fishing experience. It was when fly fishing novice Mike "put it all together" with a fly rod. He was seated in the bow at mid morning working some fly line out on a 5-weight rod when up rocketed a wild Rainbow trout with his fly the corner of his jaw. In Mikes words: "A short time later, Mark and I saw the spotted back of a huge king salmon as it took my fly just in front of the raft. I fought that fish for at least thirty minutes. Mark … coaching me to protect my knuckles by cupping the reel with my palm as the fish ran… Mark was rowing our raft to keep me facing the fish at the right distance and avoiding obstructions in the river. The other two boats beached, Malcolm took photographs and Ollie got ready with a net. Eventually we got hold of the beast, freed the hook from its' mouth, took a picture, and let it go." It was great to watch as hour after hour Mike's competence grew with the fly rod.

From the log of July 13, night 6: "Mew Gulls and Arctic Terns shrieking as they dip their bill for caddis flies from the surface film of the river." What we were seeing was that the same emerging aquatic insects, the caddis, mayflies, midges, and stoneflies so important to resident char, trout, and grayling were similarly vital for sustenance and nesting success to migratory birds. Arctic Terns, Tree Swallows, Bank Swallows, plus myriad warblers, sparrows, and thrushes depended on these most ephemeral of creatures.

The lower river alternated between oxbow meanders and bluff pools. Many Middle Fork bluffs have an adjacent slough created as ground water is forced up by the bedrock bluff and over time floods have scoured a deep pool which sometimes serves as a location for a Beaver lodge. The sloughs sheltered small schools of salmon holding in the quiet water. Everyone hooked fish.

July 14, 2011: "Karen hooked and fought the largest King I've ever seen hooked on a fly rod this afternoon. It was in excess of forty pounds and when it broached it took your breath away". This Middle Fork trip is Karen's second expeditionary trip in support of Paradox Sports participants to Alaska. She is an intermediate level fly caster with a passion for angling and determination to persevere with a smile.

Karen's salmon was fine and bright and strong. She set the hook on something big in mid channel while swinging a bunny strip leech deep on her 6-weight rod. The 3 rafts pulled over to a grass bank where she could stand and position herself. Time passed and Karen agonized. She chased the fish downstream as far as footing allowed and then took a stand. She smiled still. Her knuckles sustained damage. Her arms were cramping from retrieving line as the King made run after run. She retrieved the leader to the rod tip 3 times and we could see the beast just 4 feet from the bank. And then the leader broke. She would have liked to touch that fish….



In the lower river Malcolm Daly could be more relaxed. The weather had moderated. His people, the Paradox Sports participants, were near the floatplane pickup and would all safely return home. He fished more and rowed less. He adjusted his prosthetic leg for better comfort where it was creating a hot spot. Malcolm wades well. One wouldn't know that he has a prosthetic leg, but then he's been doing this for a long time. Malcolm Daly's leadership and encouragement of members of the disabled outdoors community are becoming legendary. You won't go wrong joining him on an adventure in the coming weeks, months, or years. See you there!

Mike Baxter shown writing in his journal "Since my symptoms are more advanced than Keith's… I worry about what condition I will be in by 2012. Already in 2011, I can barely walk unassisted; I use a cane or walker everywhere I go. Each year it is more difficult for me to climb stairs, so predicting my capabilities a year from now is tough to do. Keith called my house one night and invited me to go ... This

excursion would involve flying to Dillingham, Alaska [Bristol Bay] then getting a float plane ride to a lake where we would get dropped off for a week of fishing. It sounded too good to be true."

Lessons learned

From the participants about the logistics of accessible expeditionary travel.
Each year we learn more. In the culinary department kudos to Mike for bringing Pesto in a tube. The tube Pesto brand is 'Amore'. Also he brought sun-dried tomatoes, tabouli, and wasabi, all of which were put to good use in the kitchen. One change we'll look at in 2012 thanks to Malcolm's suggestion is increasing the protein in the Paradox expeditionary breakfasts. There is no doubt that great food is essential for self-propelled sports! The balancing act we are trying to perfect is how to balance the weight budget when various devices like wheelchairs or specially adapted boat seats need to be included. It remains a "work in progress". Gear note: A folding camp chair which took tremendous abuse on the trip and kept working perfectly was made by "Travel Chair". For Mike who didn't have a wheelchair and needed a very sturdy chair for various transfers it was terrific. Finally two last techniques that Malcolm Daly contributed to the camp lore. First, when starting the camp fire in damp weather use the raft pump as a bellows. Second consider how you pack your dry bag? In particular which option you choose to pack the thermarest? Do you roll it tight? Do you compress it and fold it or just stuff it? From Malcolm: "Try the rock climber's 'haul bag' style. Compress all the air out and close the valve then stand it in the bottom of the empty dry bag loosely rolled and let it expand to press outward against the outside of the bag. You will have a nice round, hollow tube left in the middle of the dry bag for items, which will be padded, from the abuses of travel by the thermarest wrapper around the outside.

Going Forward

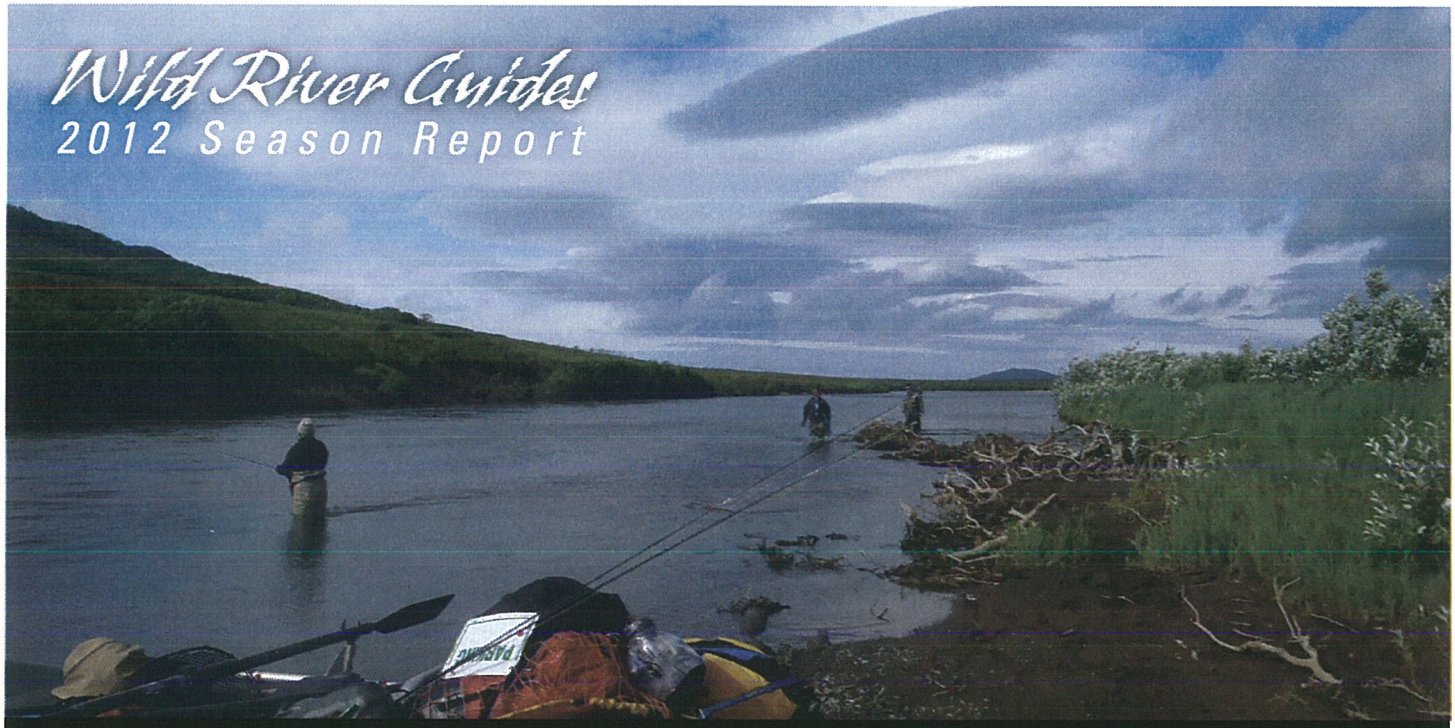
For 2012 we'll plan a Paradox /Wild River Fly Fishing expedition and gather a group of participants with different abilities and disabilities together. Let us know if you can help financially through charitable donation to the Wild River Fish program at Paradox Sports, 501 (C) (3) and please let us know whether you'd like to participate as a disabled expeditionary angler! https://npo.networkforgood.org/Donate/Donate.aspx?npoSubscriptionId=8198

The 2011 expedition was funded primarily by one outdoorsman, John Merritt with secondary progressive MS who makes charitable donations for this purpose to Paradox Sports. His wish is for outdoor enthusiasts with disabilities to get out and experience the Alaskan rivers and travel through the bush while they are able to do so. He was joined by three other generous donors in 2011 to whom we are deeply grateful.

Every participant wants to express their gratitude for the donors who made the trip happen. Thank you John, Tom, Anne, & Ron!

* John Merritt in the early stages of MS loved to travel and fly fish in bush Alaska. His biennial expedition was inspirational to all who accompanied him and helped Mark develop the confidence to continue offering expeditionary support to disabled campers after John was no longer able to participate. John's financial support allows this work to go forward.

** Malcolm Daly is a founding member of Paradox Sports. www.paradoxsports.org. Paradox Sports is a 501(c) (3) organization whose mission is: "Providing inspiration, opportunities, and the adaptive equipment needed to participate in human powered outdoor sports". He is an avid rock and ice climber, rafter, fly fisherman, and a father. Charitable donations to Paradox Sports paid the expenses of the disabled participants.



July 24th - 29th, 2012

Middle Fork of the Goodnews with Whitney, Carlisle, Trinidad, and Wolfe

Brent Whitney returned for another Alaskan fly-fishing adventure with Dolly Trinidad and was joined by Sam Carlisle and Lucas Wolfe.

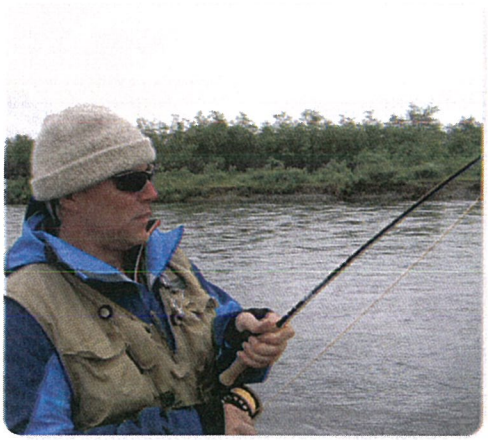
Our first hours on the Middle Fork set a standard that will be hard to "over top" in future years. We gazed at many dozen Sockeye porpoising and resting below a small gravel bar along a seam created by the swift current and the still water. It was a cool-marine layer evening when it felt good to remain in waders and jackets and for Dolly Trinidad, who'd never seen a salmon, it was particularly interesting. For Sam Carlisle, an Atlantic Salmon angler who'd come from Great Britain the abundance was poignant. All through July the numbers of Sockeye salmon have increased as waves of fish entered the river and now they are staged near spawning beds, maturing and beginning courtship. The life cycle was on display but that is common to the Bristol Bay and why we come. The unexpected happened next.

The amazing drama was a pair of adult brown bears mating in our view. Brent who'd travelled with me among Brown Bears on a previous trip passed his binoculars around. The bears were not just

courting one another and sharing pre nuptial affections but they were consummating the affair as we watched. Alaska always has surprises! We were awestruck. Afterwards they slowly moved off grazing and meandering side by side quite blissfully oblivious to the world around them.

From the log of July 25, 2012. "The middle fork is so sublime flowing through the tundra hills below the Ahklun Mountains. The water level has apparently dropped one foot this past week but is still higher than normal. The mating bears were seen again mid afternoon on river left, aware only of one another. Skies were grey with misting rain and small low clouds scudding by across the hill tops. A pair of Long Tailed Jaegers behaved defensively as we passed by in the raft and Sam was keen to see the species for the first time." The fishing was not easy in the high cold flows but 8 Grayling, 5 Sockeye, some Chum Salmon, and 3 Rainbow Trout were released.

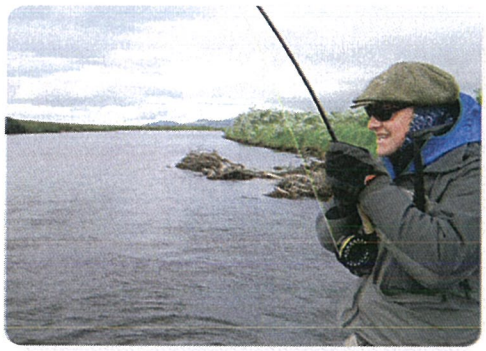
As the river gathered tributaries the fishing got stronger mile after mile. We camped on a gravel bar on July 26'Th distinguished by the presence of spawning Chum Salmon and then the sun broke out for dinner and was brilliant. Some very large Char associated with the salmon were taken including the largest Dolly Varden so far this season by Dolly Trinidad. Dolly, at the time, was working on her casting, putting together the rhythm of the cast, and the drift, then lifting to recast. She set the hook in an exceptional large male Char and eventually brought it to the net. She'd come to Alaska for the first fly fishing trip of her life and was making progress now!



July 27, 2012. "More and more Chum Salmon Spawning every mile. Quite astounding the fecundity of it all." A great many Char were released today and some really fine Rainbow Trout, although once again you had to be named Dolly Trinidad to take the largest Rainbow of the day. Like yesterday the marine layer burned off in the late afternoon. The joy is to travel with a diverse group of people sharing the experience of the wide tundra, the bear tracks, and the young Ravens learning to fly. Sharing conversations which might begin "When I was a young girl growing up in the Philippines", or "the landscape reminds me of a river back home in Scotland."

The gift of a trip by raft like this is that over the course of hours and days we conversed about all the subject matter of importance. As we cast for Char and Trout and Salmon, watched wildlife, while the tundra hills scrolled by we compared stories of growing up and of careers and family. One remembers these discussions in association with the landscape and the shrieking Arctic Terns as they plunged into the river water.

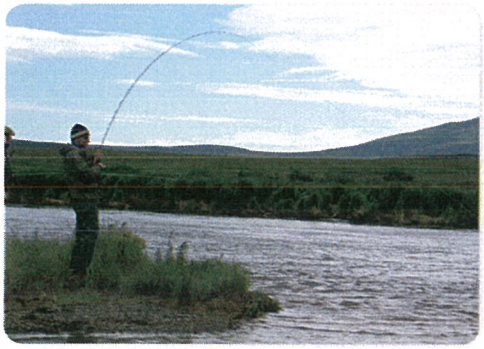
"Lumbering unsteadily across a shallow slough and up a steep gravel bluff, a young Brown Bear limped on 3 legs". He was likely 4 years old and probably had been shot in the foreleg recently. I wish it wasn't so, but in truth it happens. Brown Bears living around coastal Alaska get shot at and it's not unusual at the end of an adult bears life, many years later, to find an old healed over rifle wound(s). From a really beautiful camp on an oxbow with a bluff extending in an arc partly around us we watched the hurt young bear move off.



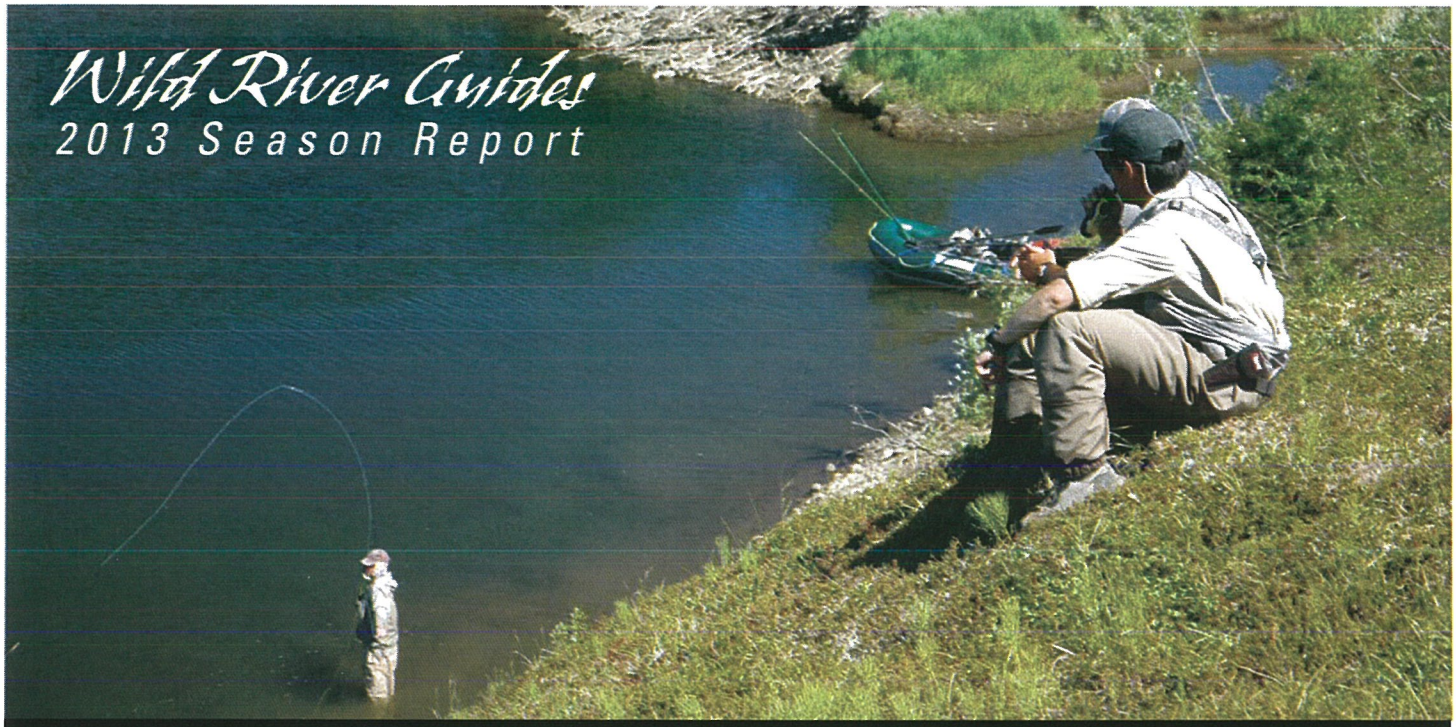
That camp where we saw the crippled Brown Bear was where "biological clock" of the Salmon cycle and river morphology came together for us at the peak of the Chum Salmon Spawn. Above camp there was a spectacular spawning channel loaded with Chum and Char. We fished the "Chum Beds" as we rafted into camp and then walked back from camp and fished again.

For every trip down a major salmon river in the Bristol Bay there comes a point where your raft intersects the peak of the spawn or perhaps the vanguard arrival of the salmon run. That point in time and space where the peak will occur can't be precisely predicted. So the challenge is for you to find that place and the only way is to float the river searching with fly rods, and observing where the fish are arrayed.

Some spectacular Salmon fishing occurred as we finished up our trip. Sam Took a tremendous fish in front of a beaver lodge in the lower river. It was very dramatic. The backdrop of the ragged grey sky, the ancient looking Beaver lodge which was the creation of many, many generations of Beavers. Other salmon were hooked and lost there. It was all quite wild. And then the wind really began to blow down from lenticular clouds and race down the slopes of the mountain.



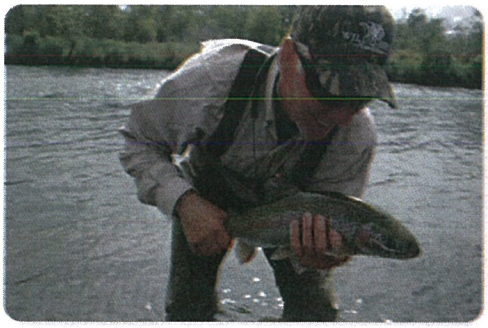
We built camp in an intense wind and rain squall a couple miles upstream of the confluence with the North Fork of the Goodnews to be out of range of the tidal influence. We chose a lee behind willows and rigged both rafts as wind breaks. It was one of those affairs, which required at least 4 sets of hands to hold and stake out each tent. But a comfortable camp was created. Fresh salmon cooked with fettuccini and pesto made a nice supper for our last night. A glass of wine. It was perfect.



July 20th - 27th, 2013

Middle Fork of Goodnews River - The Heat Wave

We started fly-casting mid afternoon the day we flew out. The flying weather that morning was fine and the barometer was high and rising. We were excited to be on the river. The upper river is shallow with some pools, which held small numbers of Chum and Sockeye Salmon, Grayling, Whitefish, and just a scattering of Rainbows. 3 experienced anglers began casting streamers, and dry flies, searching and working slowly down river toward camp. Dano McGinn from Northern California released a spectacular trophy Grayling taken on an olive Stimulator pattern. Tom Payne form Oregon took several of his Grayling on size 12 Mayfly patterns. Meanwhile upriver Michael Malone, of the DC beltway, had words with a Brown Bear who was sharing the fishery with him. Both the bear and Michael agreed find other water.



Each of the anglers had lots of prior experience. Dano brought dry fly tactics from the high Sierras and the Great Basin. Mr. Malone grew up sight fishing for largemouth bass with wooly buggers in Northern Wisconsin, and Tom Payne swinging flies for Steelhead in coastal Oregon. Still they each had to adapt their technique to the conditions they found on this river. This

week we found Gin clear water and schools of salmon staged in quiet water below islands. But at least initially the Grayling, Dolly Varden, and Rainbows were scattered. It was not so easy finding fly patterns that worked consistently, nor locating fish in the lovely but shallow headwaters but the challenge gave us a focus.

We were searching with casts and experimenting with flies from the raft and while wading. We were hunting for knowledge as much as anything. Throwing weighted streamers, dry flies, and egg patterns we searched to understand where the fish were located. Were the Rainbows in the deep channels or near the salmon? Had sea run Dolly Varden migrated up into these headwaters yet? Was the Grayling distribution coherent? The first day ended with our camp set on a fine gravel bar with Sockeye porpoising nearby.

We had overnight rain showers, which cleared at breakfast, and by mid day we were sweltering, overdressed, shedding layers. By the end of that second day we'd answered some of the questions about fly pattern effectiveness and where the fish were distributed. Tom took a notably fine Leopard Spotted Rainbow trout on the second morning swinging a streamer much as he would for Steelhead. As we waded the gravel bars we saw pairs of nesting Least Sandpipers and were screeched at by Arctic Terns defending their nests.

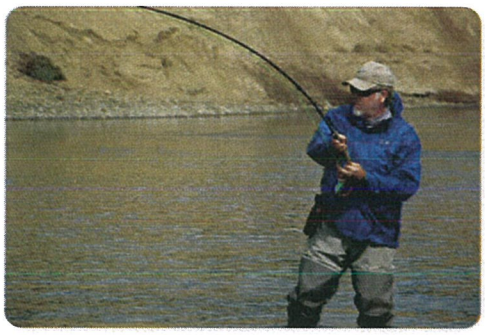
Dano, Tom, & Michael determined that the Dolly Varden Char migration had progressed well upriver since they took a few large fish on streamers, then discovered that what the Dollies really wanted was a single egg. The Char really craved a pearlescent or pinkish color trout bead drifted near Chum Salmon. At camp the second night the fishing was excellent for Dolly Varden but I think what we all remember most about that spot was the hour we watched a Brown Bear graze on the hillside right above camp. Dano, a professional big game hunting guide, passed his binoculars around. The light was perfect and the bear was aware of our presence, but she had enough spatial separation that she felt comfortable and so did we. By the end of the third day we'd seen 7 individual bears under fine conditions.

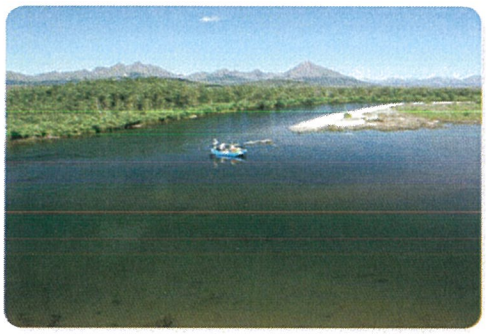
With the bears it's common to oversimplify their salmon fishing behavior and even the importance that salmon play in their diet. Many of us imagine that large bears and small bears, sows with cubs and big the males, as well as adolescents spend the summer at the river, scooping up a salmon and repeating as often as necessary until autumn and the onset of winter denning season. If we give the bear's lifestyle any more consideration it is mainly about our personal safety. What you learn by observing them over the decades is that the fishing is not that easy for them and they remain very dependant on grazing grasses, sedges, and other herbs most of the summer. True during the peak of the Salmon run from mid July through high water in mid August they take several salmon per day and the cubs scavenge many spawned out carcasses, eating mainly the fatty brain. But throughout the snow free year the bears are consistently seen grazing.

In the mid river the fishery changes from a relatively sparse resident Grayling and trout fishery to a richer nutrient laden aquatic ecosystem. On day 3 we passed through several "living shoals" where hundreds of Dolly Varden staged in pools and flats awaiting the Chum and Sockeye spawn. The mid river water flows slow down and the river alternates between bedrock bluffs with long rocky pools and oxbow meanders. The gravel size in the sinuous meanders is ideal salmon spawning substrate.

To fish the mid river effectively can require 2- or some prefer 3- fly rods. A 7+ (7-9) wt. rod rigged with big streamers for Kings, Chum, Sockeye, or early Coho. A 5-6 wt. rod dedicated to Dolly Varden, Grayling, and Rainbow with a trout bead for efficient catch and release. A third rod, a 7 wt. might be rigged for Rainbow Trout with an attractor pattern such as

an egg chasing sculpin or large bunny strip leech. The idea is to regularly change rods and flies as the habitat changes. In our case as we passed from salmon pools into the shoals of Char we put down the big rods and cast beads and then among the meanders we searched for Rainbows with streamers. Tom released a 30-pound King Salmon taken at lunch swinging a fly with his switch rod.





From the log of July 23, 2013: "As we floated we saw Brown Bears, fresh Wolf tracks and a Moose. If you weren't paying attention you would pass by without noticing the carcass of the first naturally spawned out Chum Salmon of the season being eaten by a Raven." This carcass was different from the other "bear caught and partially consumed" carcasses that the Ravens and Gulls had been scavenging after the bear departed. This carcass floated down stream as the fish expired post-spawn, and came to a final rest on a gravel bar where a Raven family tore it apart. The appearance of this expired spawned out carcass marked the beginning of the peak of salmon spawning which every Alaskan angler is seeking. The fishing was about to change from excellent to mind-boggling.

The size of the Sea Run Dollies in 2013 was noteworthy. The number of fish greater than 22 inches was remarkable. Tom lost track of the number of Char he landed on day five after counting 30. We stopped at the tail of a long pool with a vast array of Char, Grayling, and Trout oriented around spawning Chum. The sight casting was as strong as anything one could hope for on a trip to Alaska. Rainbow trout were taken but only when you made a cast that a Char did not intercept first. Toward evening Michael used his prized Tenkara rod to take some lovely trout and char. We camped there and had one of the most extraordinary evenings of the summer.

As we floated and cast down into the lower river at the end of our week we passed beyond the prime Char and Rainbow water and the fishery was given over to salmon staged in great pools near Beaver lodges. We'd rafted and fished more than 40 miles and took time now, to sit and look across the landscape toward the mountains we'd come. We beached the rafts and gazed into the salmon rich pools and watched migrating Dolly Varden Char move steadily upriver.

The week ended at a camp in the lower river where the river water was a comfortable temperature to swim in but was too warm to hold fish. We celebrated with a meal of fresh Coho Salmon. Dano hooked and landed that fish, his first Coho/ Silver Salmon in a classic pool defined by a large Beaver lodge out on a truly vast Alaskan landscape. A spectacular week ended.

Wild River Guides
2015 Season Report

July 10th - July 15th, 2015

Middle Fork Goodnews River Fly Fishing Expedition.

Fly-fishing and solitude. A spectacular week with the Rogers family, Steve and Chris Hammer, Feike Postma and John Loudon. The first anglers of the year on the Middle Fork.

From the trip log of July 10'Th, 2015: We flew outbound in the floatplanes with our rafts, camping gear, and fly rods. Each of us very excited to be underway. It was a lovely day to fly with moose and sow Brown Bear with cubs seen from the air and with the beauty of Kukaktlim Lake where our plane dropped us off. The guides inflated rafts and stowed the gear while anglers rigged rods, explored the lakeside, and took in the beauty of the setting in the volcanic cones of the Ahklun Mountains. The last floatplane departed and we were alone.

In my boat Josie and her daughter Juliana were all eyes and ears as we pulled away from the shoreline. A Red Fox made an appearance just yards away then crested the adjacent ridge while the river current tugged the boats and we started downriver. I knew I was lucky to have the two

Roger's women in my boat! It is my everlasting good fortune to be able to introduce guests to the Alaskan landscape and when conditions are fine as they were for us, it is magic! The wildlife was novel, and the wildflowers were ablaze in the early summer evening light. We were passing through an alpine landscape with cliffs, and mountain peaks and the riverbanks were alive with birdcalls. Those hours were near perfect.

The Brown Bears were fishing in a riffle just below the lake outlet where over the years we've consistently seen bear activity. The bears fish the riffles by spotting salmon and chasing them across the shallow flats, spray flying. This afternoon they moved away from us uphill into cover. Across these same riffles we oarsmen struggled across shoals among awkward channel choices while anglers cast at pockets of resident Trout & Grayling in the very, very skinny water. The headwaters of all the Togiak Wildlife Refuge rivers were low in 2015. We fished and travelled for 4 hours until we found a fine camp on a gravel bar with great views of the mountains and river valley.

I'd forgotten how scenic the rock formations above the river are. We passed below rocky escarpments marveling at cliff shapes and at the orange and green lichens adhered to the rock. 2 Immature Ravens sat bluff top and naively watched us pass. Mother ducks protected their broods by luring us away with a broken wing routine. The sandbars were pocked with Caribou tracks. We enjoyed the landscape as it scrolled past.

Jim took a nice Rainbow and a couple of notable Grayling. Steve and Chris took a handful of Rainbow trout and Grayling too. Feike & John took Grayling consistently on dry flies. The first day's journal entry ends with "After an afternoon of fishing and rafting we had a big pasta & Sockeye dinner. We followed that with another fly fishing session until near midnight." Guests and guides turned in to the tents late under the midnight sun.

On day two we pushed downriver fishing and travelling through the alpine tundra landscape.

I fished and floated with Jim and his son James and enjoyed their father son bond. Like his father, James has a passion for fly-fishing! They cast and retrieved, they critiqued each other, and they netted for one another. They commented on the fish taken and released. I looked around and saw the other rafts likewise scouting for fish, hooking up, and taking photographs. Each of the rafts took enough Arctic Grayling and Rainbow Trout to keep it thrilling.

By days end Jim & James had released nearly 20 Grayling, a handful of leopard spotted Rainbows, and 5-dime bright Dolly Varden. Other rafts had similar success and some released King and Sockeye Salmon as well. The fly patterns that produced the highest numbers of fish were trout bead /egg imitations. For the larger fish, streamers took the trophies. Each boat averaged several dozen fish released this day.

John & Feike found a pool mid day with a great school of salmon staged as if waiting for them. It was comprised of Sockeye, Chum, and King in that order of abundance. Holding below and behind the salmon were some very extraordinary Char. John was casting the big streamers that he favored. As our raft passed by he hooked an arm length Dolly Varden Char that I'm sure he'll remember for his entire lifetime. It was truly a spectacular fish and he radiated the most amazing smile as he focused on getting the grand fish to the net. That Char was developing the characteristic hooked

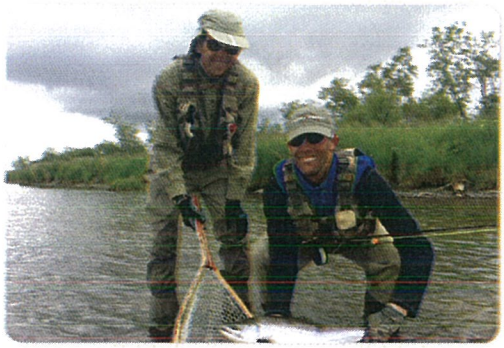
jaw of the adult male. It had creamy white pectoral fins but was otherwise olive backed with pink spots on chrome silver sides. It was fresh from the salt and as large as any Sockeye Salmon. It was magnificent.

The headwaters of the Kukaktlim Fork like all Bristol Bay rivers has a relatively steep gradient, and shallow while the river forces it's way through the relic gravels of ancient glacial moraines. For the angler the headwaters have a paucity of deeper holding water and little or no woody debris for cover. The upper reaches are nutrient deprived with neither little streamside vegetative biomass nor much animal biomass and so we must travel through them until the gradient tapers off and where sinuous river meanders develop and then a more robust fishery develops. However, and this is the big caveat, the upper one third of the river is the trophy Grayling fishery and holds enough large rainbows to be worth the effort. Raft based fly fishing must be choreographed to be efficient at moving through the upper river while sampling the Grayling and Rainbow trout fishery and then slow down to loiter in the mid river sweet spot of fishery abundance, and finally to pass into the low river salmon water.

From the log came this observation: "All 4 rafts took double digit numbers of Grayling, Trout, & Char while it made no difference whether anglers were in the lead boat or bringing up the rear in boat number four". That reflects the strength of the fishery and the lack of angling pressure that even in gin clear / low water conditions the fish weren't spooked or put down by the passage of the rafts.

We passed a bull Caribou and later had a sighting of a fast trotting cow Moose who was "eating up the landscape" with her long legs racing toward the east. She was in a major hurry to put some miles behind her, yet gave no indication that she was aware of us. We hadn't spooked her. One had to consider whether she'd been the object of a Wolf pack or Brown Bear's unwelcome attention? We passed down the river considering what we observed in the tundra and perhaps comparing it with the lives we lead at home.

Fishing in Pete's boat Josie and Juliana had a fine day. In the planning stages Josie told me that she wanted to be here to share the family adventure and like Juliana she was a bit ambivalent about the fly-fishing. But then as the miles of spectacular tundra scenery passed Josie and Juliana worked on their casts and the magic of the Wilderness fishery worked on them. Their casts grew more confident, their flies stayed in the strike zone longer and the fish were willing! I saw some great smiles while fly rods were rods arched in their boat… and this was only day 2.



Chris Hammer killed a fine Sea Run Dolly for supper. The Char fillets were rich with ocean-derived fats and the flesh was lush pink-orange color from the months it spent feeding on Smelt, Capelin, and Sandlance in Goodnews Bay. The bay, estuarine, and ocean nutrients contributed the orange and pink Keratins that color the flesh. A nice cheerful dinner party ensued under near perfect evening weather. We had a bit of a breeze/ so no insects. A fine dinner. A nice glass of wine. Life was sweet.

In the later evening, half the group climbed the bluff above camp for the expansive view. They got the view in spades and reported good sightings of an uncommon bird, the Longtailed Jaeger, a predatory arctic bird that breeds in tundra landscapes like this.

From the log of Day 3, July 12'Th, 2015: "Dr Steve Hammer & Chris Hammer began searching with streamers as pocket

water and channels presented targets right out of camp. Over the course of the morning they took great Char and Rainbows" and then the fishing fell off midday as gusty winds were followed by rain showers. Jacket hoods then were cinched tight and they continued fishing.

The fishing in mid river changed from a fishery dominated by Arctic Grayling and Rainbow to one dominated by bold, bright, Sea Run Dollies and Rainbows with small pods of Sockeyes. The 2015 salmon run began!

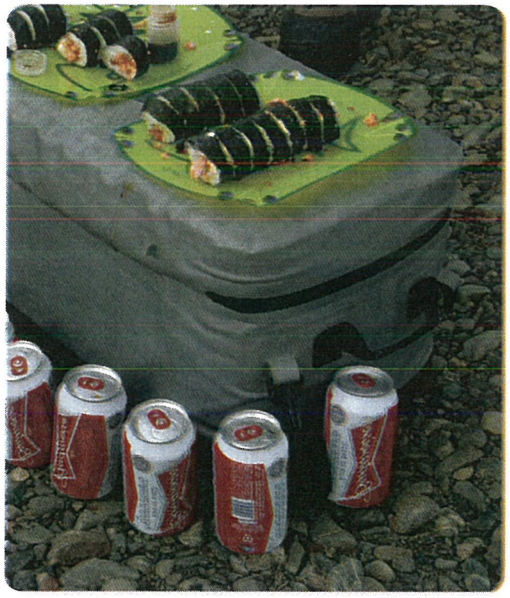
Wildlife sightings in the mid and lower river shifted from occasional sightings of big game like moose and caribou to birdlife and smaller mammals like Beaver & Mink & Fox. In part this is a function of geography and in part of wildlife population density. In the headwaters the valley is narrower and the large mammalian wildlife is much easier to spot on the hillsides adjacent to the river.

As the valley broadens we are less able to see through the riverine willows to spot wildlife on the flatter ground unless we climb the hillsides and look down into the valley floor. Geography enhances bear and caribou sightings in the headwaters / alpine environment yet the mid-river geography favors the angler where trout hold near the root-wads and salmon rest in the pools.

From the trip log of Day 4, July 13'Th, 2015: If I were to choose my most memorable afternoon it was with James and Juliana on day 4 when they began to rack up success with big shouldered Dolly Varden. Admittedly their guide, me- didn't do well putting them onto fish in the morning but in the afternoon the fish gods smiled on us. The guide managed to find fish, both anglers "were on fire", and we netted some terrific fish. After that afternoon they individually built on their success hour upon hour for the rest of the trip.

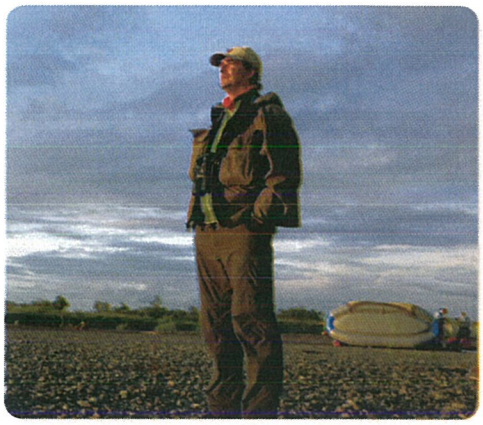
Rafting downriver the fishing stayed strong through the mid river and then tapered off in the low water levels with high water temperatures of the lower river. Our catch rate fell off. The data show that bulk of the migrant Char was centered in the 2 dozen miles below the confluence with the true Middle Fork.

From the trip log of July 11, 2015: " In the zone where the Kukaktlim Fork is joined by the true Middle Fork the river begins to develop more channel structure and some long sweeping bends are overhung with Willow and Cottonwood and tangled undercut root-wads collapse into the river. The woody debris creates Rainbow Trout cover and also salmon fry rearing habitat and the fishery becomes substantially more diverse.



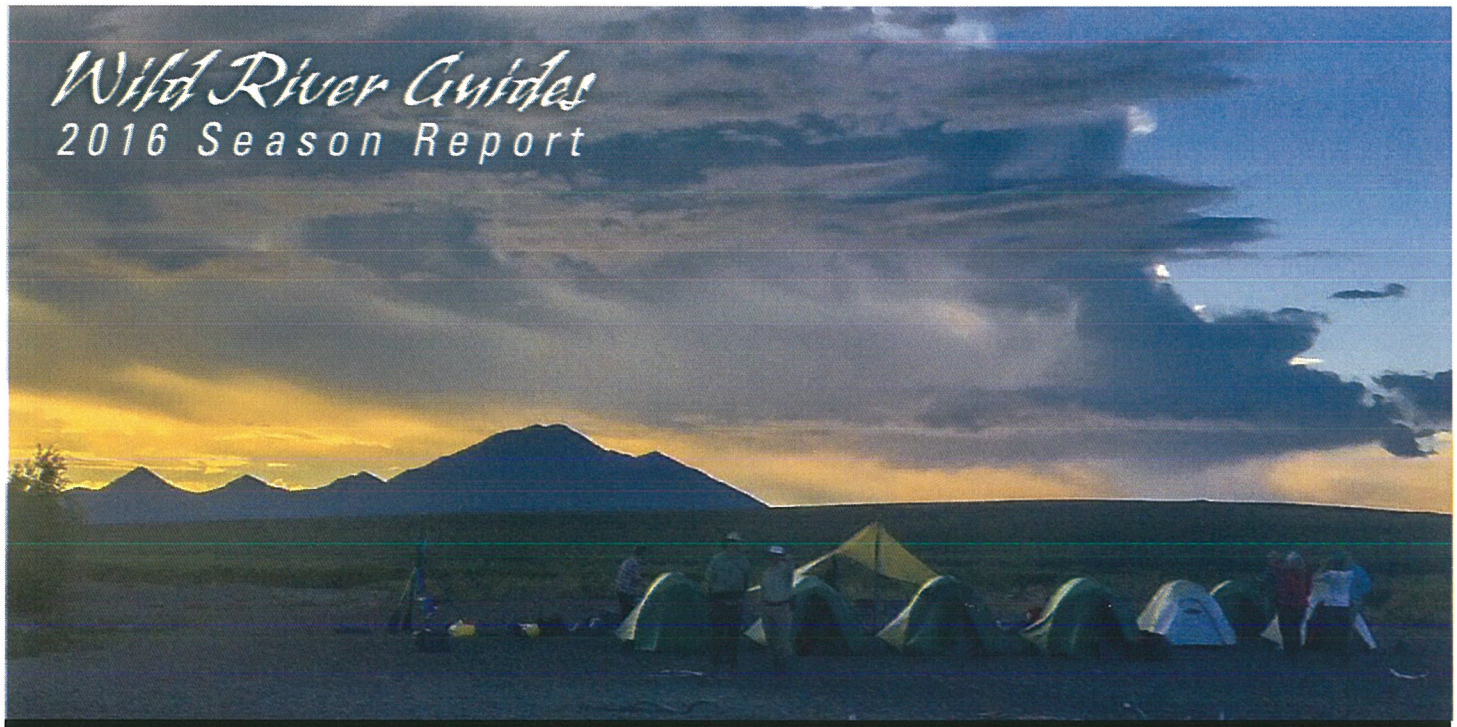
Guides Brian & John steamed the rice, lightly steamed the Sockeye, then rolled Sushi. Sushi on the river is such a treat. As you know the fish must be perfect. Sushi, the way we serve it is to celebrate the fish.

The experience of a full week on the river deepens one's understanding of the fish and wildlife and also of one's connection to the planet. From time to time we talked of the challenges facing the planet and I must be frank. There were long pauses as we considered the possible outcomes.



The river current in the lower river slowed and developed huge meanders and ox-bows, with backwater sloughs. These last dozen miles to the takeout are without strong current. How does the lower river fish? Paradoxically the largest Rainbow Trout are caught here on streamers, slowly stripped. Also anytime there is a push of salmon it's worth your time to cast. Just ask Chris Hammer who fished hard right up until the floatplane arrived at takeout! He said he had the best day of the trip at takeout!

We watched the river recede behind us when we climbed in the airplane, took off, and returned to civilization. Did we really leave the middle fork behind? Isn't the river right where we left it awaiting our return.



July 10th - July 15th, 2016

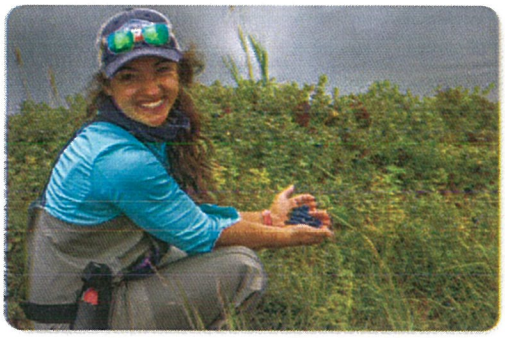
Middle Fork Goodnews River Fly-Fishing Expedition.

A week of solitude on the Middle Fork River with John Moore and his grandson Charlie, and Michael Diciano, Jim Walt, Kaylen Walt, Lynn Fuller, Bruce Osterlye, and Richard Voss.

From the log of July 10, 2016

We lifted off Lake Aleknagik under fair skies and warm temperatures. At Kukaktlim Lake, where we began the float trip, we were met by a Brown Bear sporting a full blond coat. She allowed us all a proper viewing at a respectful distance thanks to Lynn Fullers' binoculars. A few mature bald eagles graced us with their presence while we inflated the rafts, loaded our gear and made our way downstream under seasonally low water conditions. Guests and guides worked together navigating shoals and gravel bars down through the first few miles until the channel deepened. Everyone participated by hopping out and helping to drag the rafts.

John Moore, who has many Alaska fishing trips under his belt and his grandson Charlie were in Brian's lead boat, when John spotted an amazing fish. A trophy Rainbow trout was holding in just 6 inches of gin clear water. John presented his leach pattern and the trout turned and crushed it. John



set the hook, handed the rod to 12-year-old Charlie, and the fight was on. The battle was coming to an end as I rounded the corner to see Brian sliding the head of a 25" leopard rainbow into the net! It was a spectacular fish that was well fought by the young angler.

We floated down picking through the shallow water and finding deeper pools that were teaming with bright sockeye. As we came through the pools, the energetic fish exploded around us in their attempts to continue up river. It was far better than any aquarium we had ever experienced.

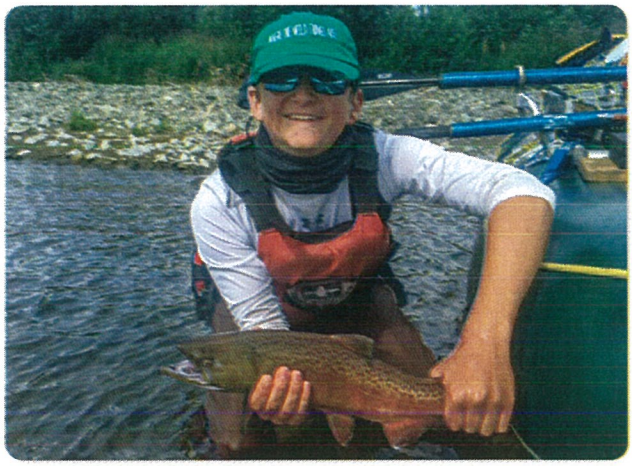
Jim Walt cast mouse patterns and released several Grayling before we made our first camp. Then after we had our fill of a large pasta dinner and enjoyed a cup of wine, Mike Diciano provided camp entertainment and casting demonstrations while fishing late into the evening. Young Charlie took up the challenge of learning how to fish a trout bead effectively and several rainbows and grayling were taken. Then we all turned in to our tents under the midnight sun.

From the log of July 11, 2016

Day two started off strong with all the anglers fishing with great intensity and eager to see how the fishery would change as we travelled downriver by raft. John and Charlie Moore both took several sizeable Rainbow trout on Streamers and Beads. Our 4 rafts worked down through the meanders with anglers casting streamers, mice, and egg imitations past the sunken root wads that give the intimate Middle Fork its character. The root wads, overhanging willows, and narrow channels are a challenge to raft navigation while providing a huge benefit to all the fish that seek cover and refuge in the woody debris. Grayling, Dolly Varden Char and Rainbow Trout were caught in increasing numbers keeping everyone engaged. Late in the day, not far from what would be our second camp, Charlie caught the first King Salmon of the trip. And that got everybody excited!

We made our second camp early in the day which gave us plenty of time to wade and fly-fish in the mid summer sun. This day yielded some of the most productive char fishing many of us had ever seen. Several fish were taken that were over two feet long. We watched Lynn Fuller go through a

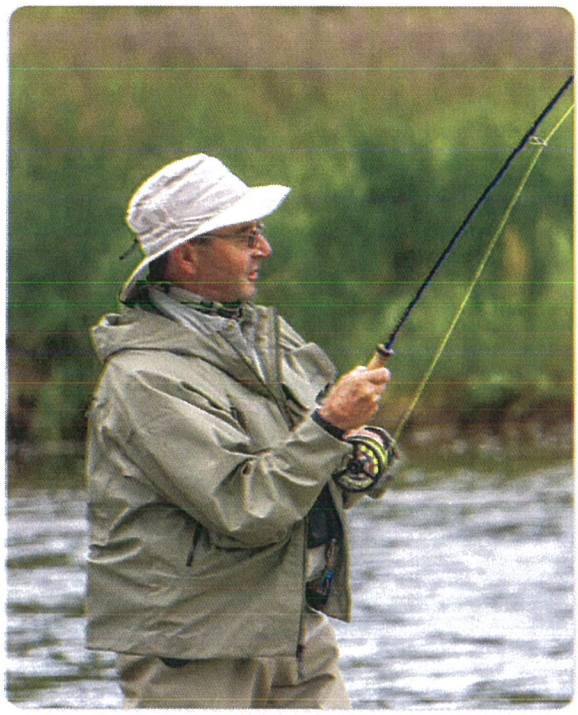
dramatic transformation in 48 hours from beginning fly-caster to becoming a serious threat to any Dolly Varden char in her domain as she mastered fishing egg patterns/ trout beads. Bruce Osterlye commented: “The Rainbows were all inches from the bank. I hooked a trout of about 24 inches and it leapt up out of the water over a horizontal branch and broke me off.” Richard Voss fished just up stream swinging streamers and dead drifting beads, landing good numbers of healthy dime bright char just in from the estuary. Some anglers put sink tips on heavier 7 and 8 weight rods, focusing on the Kings holding in a deep seam. We had a great meal of Dolly Varden that was expertly filleted by guide Aubrey Romo. What a great day! The logbook notes, “more than 60 Dolly Varden released today. Many were trophy sized”



From the log of July 12, 2016

By the 3rd day everyone had settled in to the migratory Dolly Varden Char fishing and mastered how to effectively dead drift a trout bead. Lynn Fuller started off very strong and she and Richard Voss landed more Char than JJ could keep track of in his raft. Everyone was working together in 2 angler/ per raft teams helping one another net fish. The average size of the Dolly Varden Char in the middle fork would turn out to be notably larger then any other river we fished in 2016. We fished slowly and thoroughly in the morning releasing a couple dozen Rainbows and in excess of one hundred Char plus a smattering of Arctic Grayling, and King Salmon.

The day after day of solar radiation (nearly 24 hours of daylight) was taking a toll on the anglers and we all pitched in each afternoon to erect a sun shelter aka “Wing” as soon as we got into camp. Then we enjoyed a reboot of electrolytes in the form of tang and Gatorade. A beer tasted particularly good after a long day on the river. Several of us swam in the river to cool off. It was Pizza night and Pete’s riverside pizza was perfect. Later Mike Diciano brought out his switch rod to demonstrate a different way to fly fish and provide some fine entertainment. From the log “most of us called it an early night”. Another a great day!



From the log of July 13, 2016

We awoke to another morning of blazing sun, a rarity this close to the Bering Sea. With each mile the river grew in volume, the pools deepened, and the salmon holding water increased exponentially. Kaylen Walt capitalized on these opportunities and released a fine king salmon taken on a bead! Just before lunch the rafts convened along on a deep stretch of water where Chum, Pink, Sockeye, and King Salmon were staged. That was a fine sight! Salmon all stacked up.

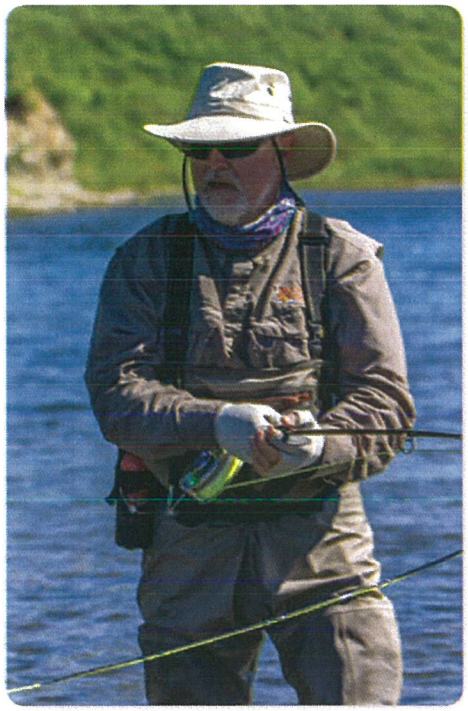
Michael Diciano took an acrobatic Sockeye that provided a brilliant aerial display, and later on, was our dinner. Jim Walt tied into his first king salmon that severely tested the limits of his 8-weight rod. Kaylen followed up her father's fish with a big 15 Lb slab of a Chum salmon. The log records that " Numbers of Char taken started to drop off by lunch and most of the anglers switched to casting streamers to Salmon. Lynn Fuller caught her first Pink Salmon on a fly at lunch. Kaylen released two King Salmon at lunch and Michael roped a Chinook of his own. Pink and Chartreuse streamers were the hot tickets for King Salmon.

We headed down stream and Kaylen Walt spent the rest of the afternoon relentlessly pounding the bank with a mouse pattern, which yielded a fine trophy Rainbow. The log records 13 Kings released this day. At camp Aubrey proved that she is the most skilled individual any of us had seen with a fillet knife preparing the sockeye that Michael had landed earlier. She filleted with a methodical, meticulous method that attracted a crowd. An amazing Sushi dinner followed and then we viewed the sun setting behind a single large cloud to end the day.

From the log of July 14, 2016

"The steep alpine headwaters gradient down which we had rafted was now gone and we were out of the mountains starting to enter the coastal plain". The Middle Fork by now had picked up tributaries, widening, slowing, and meandering. It remained a relatively intimate and peaceful river, but the fishing became more challenging. We found King Salmon mixed with Pink Salmon right

out of the gates in the morning. Several Kings where hooked but they were difficult to bring to hand. Bruce Osterlye landed a couple of large bright Pinks as we descended toward the estuary. John Moore was rewarded for the long hours casting a Kilowatt pattern streamer and released another trophy rainbow.



As we approached the weir, we noticed the numbers of Sockeye dramatically increased. It was getting late in the day and we were still looking for a dinner fish. We noticed one of the biologists filleting a fresh sockeye for their own dinner, which was as a subtle reminder for us to "get on our game". The weir, staffed with fishery biologists, is a fish counting station (with a regulation that we cannot fish within a 300yds of the weir) but we had another form of entertainment there while our fly rods were stowed. The weir dog, a black lab, was quite the swimmer. Her owner would toss a metal filled piece of PVC pipe into the water and she would bound down the bank and dive down 12' to retrieve it. Kaylen Walt got a phenomenal underwater video of the diving dog in action.

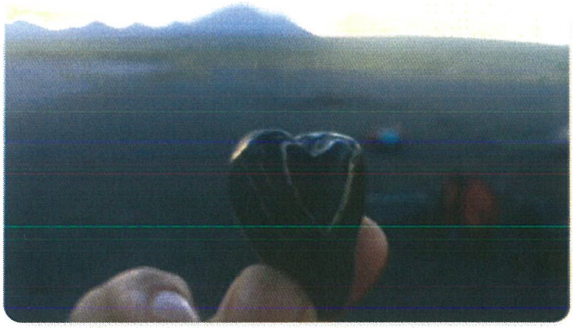
Richard Voss released a nice bright king about ½ mile below the weir and the hunt for a dinner fish continued since that was too large for our group to consume. The lower river was chock full of Rainbows and everyone fishing a streamer caught a good number of these 12-14" cookie cutters. We made camp and continued to hunt for dinner as the guides set up. Anglers released several bright Chum and Pinks that put up a great fight but were not the Sockeye or bright Dolly Varden Char the chef was hoping for. However in consultation with our guest Bruce Osterlye who is a talented Chef in his own right Pete made the executive decision to keep a bright Pink salmon. Aubrey filleted it masterfully then Chef Pete worked it into his signature salmon curry. Alerted by the enticing smells, a young Red Fox wondered into camp to sniff around a bit.

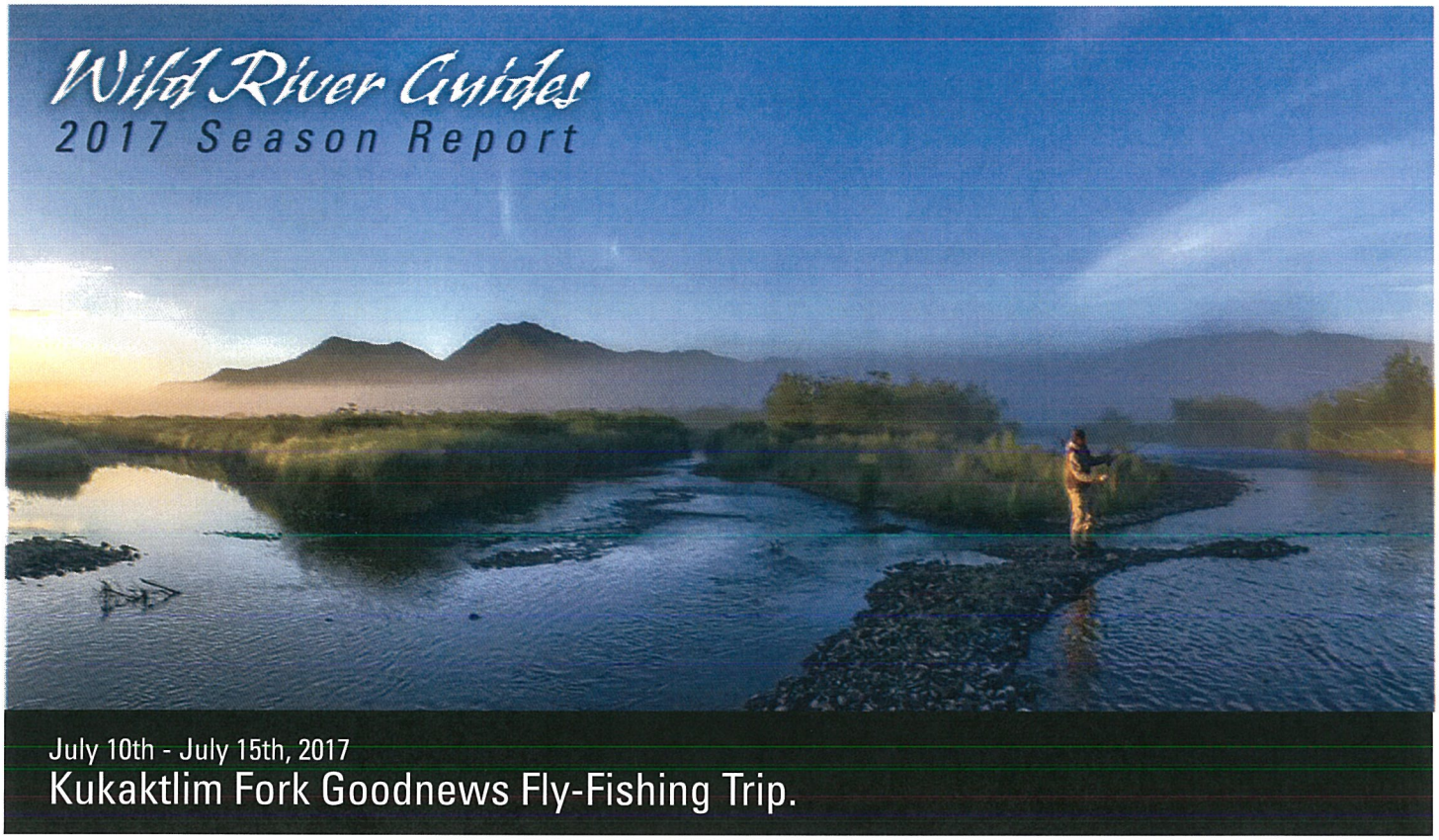
From the log of our final evening, "Richard managed to rope into something more ferocious

then the fresh Chum and Pink Salmon we had been catching all day. This fish pushed the limits of his 8wt and he had to give chase down river. The fish when brought to hand, was a beautiful, bright 20lb King Salmon. A fine fish to bookend the trip on!

From the log of July 15, 2016

The Row to take out was peaceful in the early morning hours. We finally left the mountains behind us and reflected silently on the week we had just been through. It was one of the hottest weeks of the summer and in untraditional fashion, we hardly used our raincoats the entire time. It was a beautiful experience that we all felt went by too quick. However there's always next year.



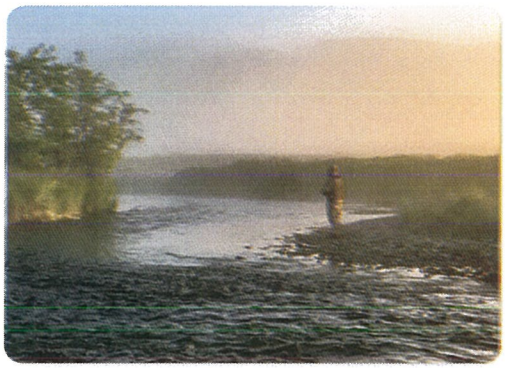


50 wild miles of Rainbow, Char, Sockeye, Kings & Wildlife.

From the log of July 10th, 2017

Showery weather but flyable. From time to time the mountains were partly obscured by rain showers as our Pilots, Rick Grant and Mike Hink picked their way through the mountain passes toward the Goodnews. It was fun to contrast the stories that Ralph Steven's family has of their many years flying in the African Bush with this flying. We saw a Moose below us and hundreds of lovely streams and rivers, all of which looked exceptionally "fishy".

We set up rafts and shoved off downstream. What followed was very exciting even for seasoned Alaskan travelers. The outlet and first several miles of the Kukaklik Fork were loaded with migrating Sockeye in chrome condition. The water was rarely more than 6 inches deep and everywhere you looked were explosions of water as the salmon "spurted" up though the shallows or conversely rocketed downstream to the last deep pool. The water was in constant motion as thousands of powerful salmon blasted past our rafts with their dorsal fins exposed and churning whitewater with their tails.



We watched 2 immature Bald Eagles land and perch on the prominent rock walls of a diminutive canyon as we passed by. An Ouzel, or more properly an "American Dipper" was spotted at close range, plus several Green-winged Teal, a dozen Mergansers, and 2 Harlequin ducks. Then in early evening we unloaded the rafts and set up our first camp on a gravel bar with a long vista of the alpine tundra terrain. That evening anglers took Arctic Grayling and Rainbows and Geoff Stevens landed a really extraordinary trophy Rainbow Trout. Perhaps the fish of a lifetime!

From the log of July 11th, 2017

The moist weather pattern we'd flown through cleared overnight and the morning was cold with patches of fog, which typically is a fair weather indicator of higher barometric pressure. We rafted and fished down stream through thousands of migrating Sockeye with a sprinkling of King and Chum Salmon. It was noted that some of the Chums were paired up over clean spawning gravel, which marks the beginning of the salmon-spawning season for 2017. Jim Busick took the first Sockeye, Paul Eldrenkamp released the first King Salmon of the season, and Mike Wyant retained his Jack King Salmon for dinner.

The day fished really well, the scenery was spectacular and a fine bull Caribou crossed the river at a good range for observations. Another observation was of a single American Robin. One wonders if they are extending their range into the tundra as the climate and vegetation change in this region?

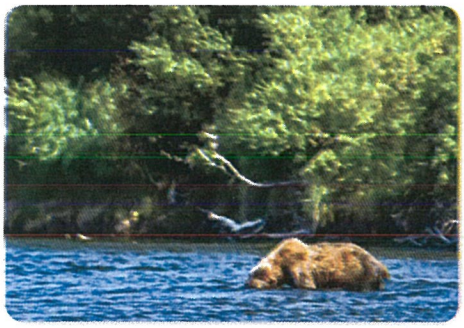
Amazing Rainbow Trout fishing! Enough King hookups to keep it interesting. The biggest run of Kings that I've ever seen on this fork and really strong Grayling numbers including 3 very large fish taken in the heavy standing waves of a King Salmon spawning reach. They were athletic Grayling!

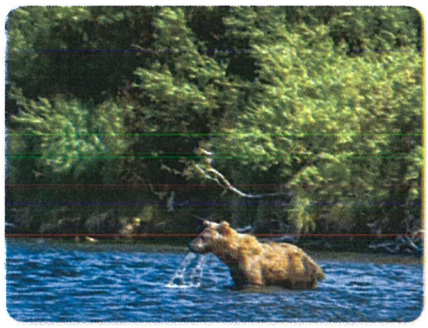
By days end we'd travelled 20 miles since our aircraft drop off yesterday and we camped on a lovely gravel bar. The water clarity was perfect, gin clear. We were a happy camp.

From the log of July 12th, 2017

Sunny and mild with querulous Magpies scolding from the riverside Willows. A Red Fox spotted across this narrow stream from camp. Other wildlife included 1 Northern Harrier, which is a raptor common to this tundra environment plus two Brown Bears seen today.

An interesting Brown Bear sighting was one that Dan and Ralph Stevens and I watched fishing for 10-15 minutes. It was a juvenile bear, perhaps 3-4 years old stalking along and then down a high bank looking intently into the river for salmon, then entering the river, submerging and fishing using a strategy we call "snorkeling".



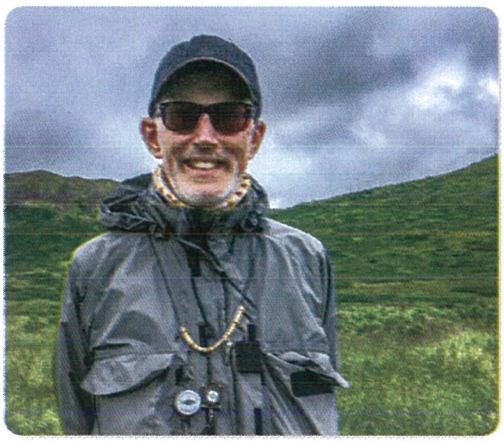


The bear peered underwater moving about the channel and pursuing fish but was unsuccessful, which is not uncommon in deeper water, early in the season, and especially for the younger less experienced bears. We got good looks at the bear from a safe distance. From Geoff and Pete's boat we likewise heard of a good Bear sighting on a high bank along the river.

Fishing was strong right out of camp! Dan took a 26" chrome Dolly Varden, fresh from the salt. I had to take my sunglasses off and peer closely at it to discern the tiny incipient pink spots. It looked like a Sockeye until closer examination of the pink spots and was in perfect condition. This fish will be one of the dominant spawners this coming October, I'm quite sure! After that fish we released 2 more large healthy Char. The numbers of Sockeye continue to be staggering and this is surely the largest Chum run in the past 5 years.

The gravel bar fauna is mainly nesting migratory birds such as Arctic Terns and Greater Yellowlegs and that is no doubt why Red Foxes frequent the bars. The flora is

Willow, Grass, Equisetum/ Horse-tail, Dock, River Beauty but not Arctic Poppies, which interest me. Arctic Poppies are quite common just one watershed to the west, (the Kanektok watershed) but not found on the Goodnews. One wonders at this range discontinuity?



This day was extraordinary for Paul Eldrenkamp. He fished the mouse all day with JJ on the oars and took a great many fish. Plus Paul reported that he saw a Mink in camp this evening.

From the log of July 13th, 2017

The fishery has changed from a resident Rainbow Trout and Grayling fishery to an anadramous / migrant fishery with salmon in all the pools, the deeper runs continuously pushing upriver past the gravel bars. The strength of the run is staggering. Mike Wyant released a fine 25# King Salmon and others were hooked up to Kings also. Some "Bruiser" Chum Salmon caught and released as well!

As the day went on the wind became a significant force and ultimately took its toll on everyone. The fly casters had their casts collapsing against their shoulders and whacking the back of their jackets, and the oarsmen fought to keep the rafts on course and to make forward progress. The wind knots were magnificent.

At days end it was nice to get out of the wind in camp! To shrug off the waders, and perhaps have a beer. The menu changes daily but one element remains constant, extraordinarily fresh salmon. Whether Char Fish Tacos, Jack King steak appetizers, King Salmon curry, or Sockeye sushi.

The first Ravens seen this week and the first squadron of Glaucous-winged Gulls occupied a gravel bar below a King Salmon spawning run where it appeared that a fly out lodge had a fish cleaning station. This seems quite consistent with the needs of these larger bodied birds for a dependable source of carcasses for their early summer food.

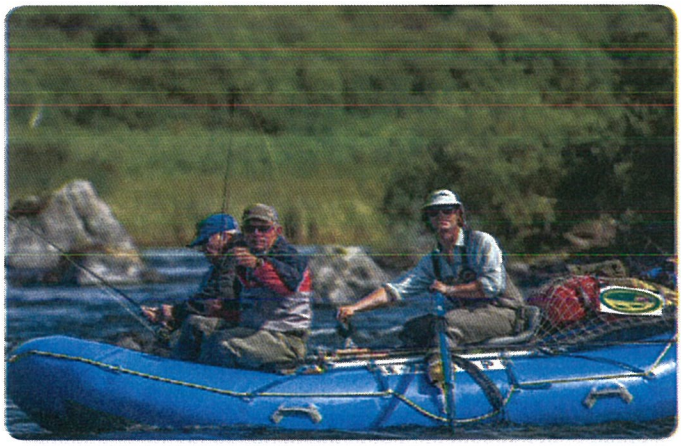
A Red Fox came through late in the evening sniffing at grass tufts as well as near our dry bags of food. The most productive flies this day included the purple egg sucking leech and a trout bead pegged on the leader above a Copper Swan.

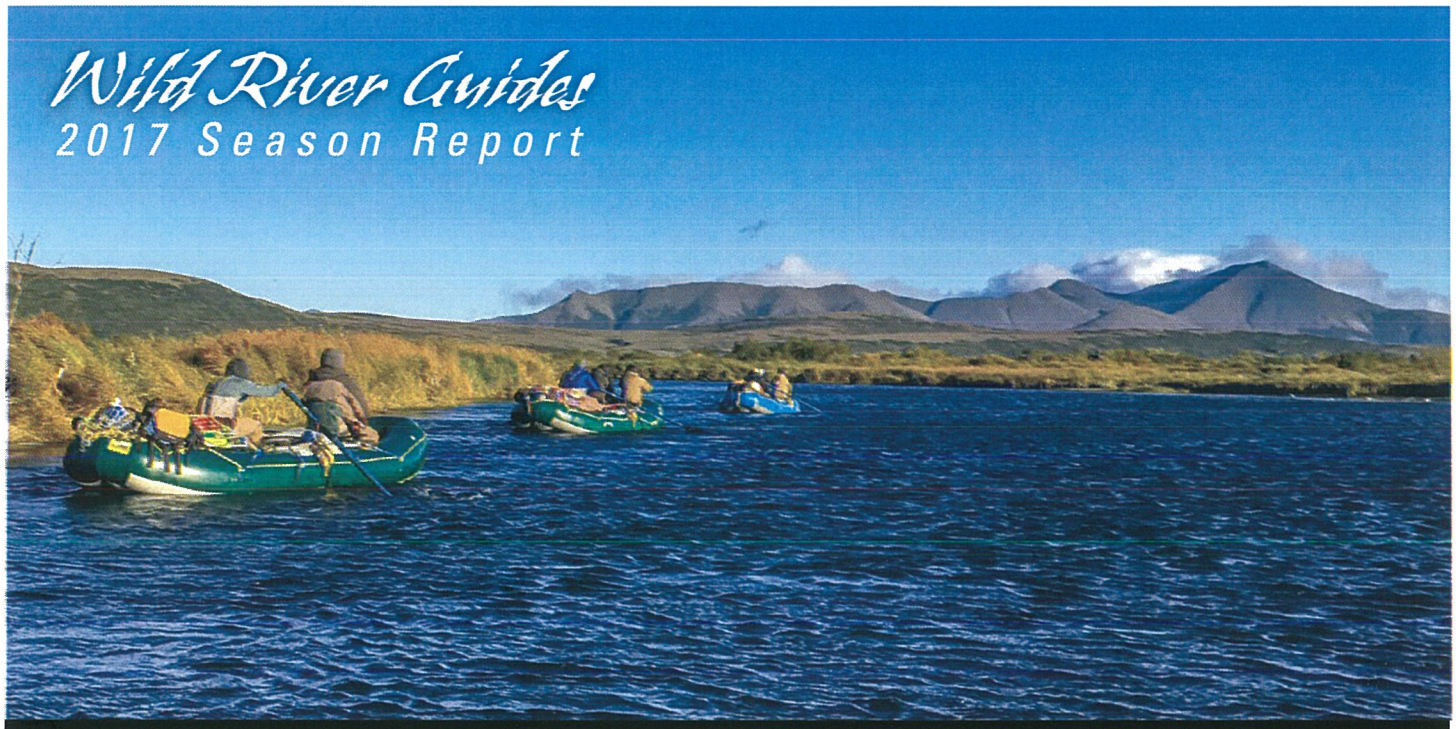
From the log of July 14th 2017

Last day of travel and we awoke to drizzle beginning at 5:30 am". With coffee brewing and Biscotti distributed our view of the world gradually brightened and as we broke camp a cow Moose grazed nearby. We loaded our rafts for our final day of fishing while an adult Merlin (falcon) passed overhead and then off we launched downriver. In my raft Ralph Stevens fished a trout bead for Rainbows, taking some and a fine Chum salmon as well. I looked ahead to Brian's lead boat and saw them release several nice Rainbows.

At the most classic and iconic salmon pool in Middle Fork of the Goodnews river on river left, there is a long straight bluff run where Kings hold in very heavy water. Ralph cast the large weighted Chartreuse and White streamer for all he was worth. He must have cast 500 times this afternoon and then as if cued up by the fish gods at the last possible moment a 40 pound class King rocketed out of the channel with Ralph's fly lodged firmly in the corner of it's mouth. Word's were spoken to the effect "Oh My God! As the fish leapt clear of the water". It is so improbable to see something trout shaped, seeming the size of a fire engine. Not the familiar 16-inch trout of Montana home waters.

A battle raged for 20 minutes and 3 times the magnificent fish was close enough that the net was readied. And 3 other times we chased the fish downriver by boat or afoot. Finally the hook straightened out and the fish pushed back out into the current. We were all drained yet elated by the spectacle. We rafted back out into the current toward our final camp taking and releasing more Kings and Killing 2 Jack Kings for our Salmon Curry dinner. A great week with terrific anglers. Thank you!





August 23rd - August 30th, 2017

The Kukaktlik/ Middle Fork Goodnews at it's Peak.

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 23rd & 24th, 2017

We waited on flying weather at Lake Alegnagek for 2 days while the cloud deck was at ground level and no aircraft could pass through the mountains to the west. We entertained ourselves reading and playing cards, with lots of napping and gazing at the rain clouds scudding past.

From the log of August 25th, 2017

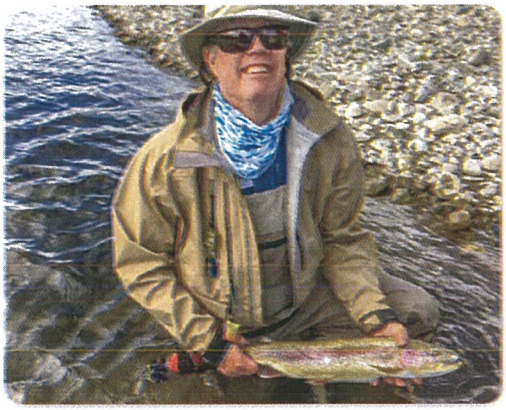
We flew outbound through autumnal rain showers, profoundly glad to find our way through the mountain passes to Kukaktlim Lake, the drop off lake for the Kukaktlik River. We'd burned up too much time on prior days waiting for flying weather to fish the Kanektok and opted for the sublime Kukaktlik, also known as the "Middle Fork of the Goodnews".

Conditions were lovely as we assembled rafts and rigged fly rods. Sunshine and a freshening breeze at the lake, no biting insects. We pushed off and started downriver eager to see what lay ahead. I travelled with Jed Marshal and Judy Pauwels. The three of us last shared a week together on the North Fork of the Goodnews 2 years ago. We recollected those adventures and anticipated more to come.

Rafting down river through the alpine hills and diminutive canyons and bluff sections angler Steve Kurian spotted a bull Caribou as it crested a ridge to the south. His ability to spot animals was a wonderful thing and paid off with lots of sightings over the course of the week.

At camp anglers caught and released a mixed bag of Dolly Varden, Rainbow Trout and Arctic Grayling. Nothing exceptional but a good beginning. Mice were skated, trout beads drifted and streamers swung. The egg imitations did the lion's share of the catching.

From the log of August 26th, 2017

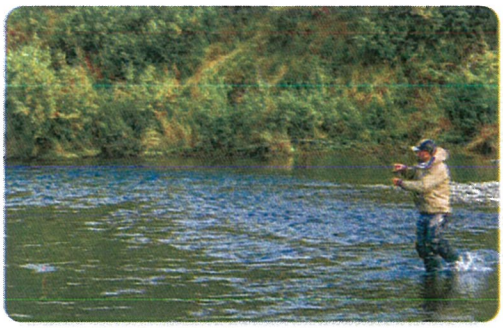


The morning barometer was steady overnight and for the first time in 3 days we passed a night without rain. Jed, Tom, Judy and I saw some interesting birds including a Wandering Tattler, Kingfisher, 3 skeins of Cackling Canada Geese winging south bound, a handful of Northern Harriers, a few juvenile Greater Yellowlegs, and Wilsons Snipe, then at days end a Black Turnstone.

John Jinishian fished with Matt Luck while watching a Bull Moose. Matt took the first 3 Coho of the trip as well as the resident Rainbows, Grayling and anadromous Dolly Varden. We all took nice numbers of Char, each mile more productive than the last.

With the rafts together on a gravel bar for some fishing and lunch we watched 2 Brown Bear moving across and down a small ridge angling toward the river. We really did have some good observations in good light and yet we were never sure of their age or sex. One was quite large and so the question is: was the slightly smaller bear her 4-year-old cub or an extremely well nourished 3 year old? Or was the smaller bear a female in the company of a boar, which would be unusual at this time of year? We speculated and took photos but could not be sure.

In camp that night we experienced a terrific rainstorm, a true downpour during dinner. All the guests and guides were undercover in the wing except John who carried on the Chef's duties creating a dozen personal pan pizzas with his rain jacket hood up. When the rain passed there was 1 inch of rain in the coffee cups on the counter. After dinner the low sun lit up the tundra ridges with golden light.

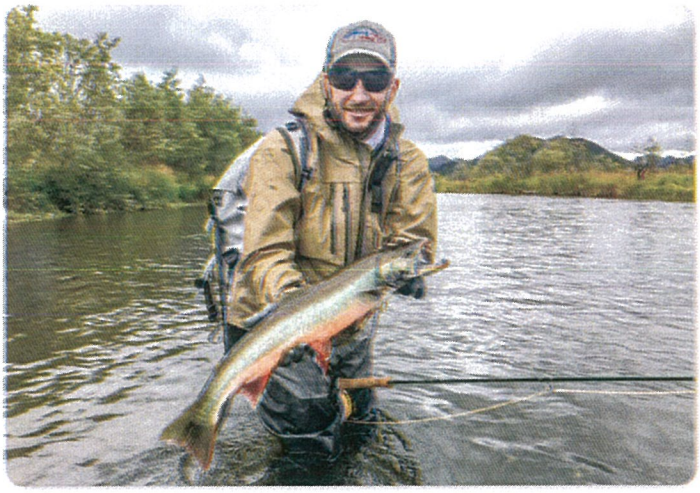


From the log of August 27th, 2017

In the morning we awoke to the sun peaking out below a low deck of clouds, which is called a "marine Layer" around here. Like other waters our fishing tends to be strong in the mornings and taper off as the day passes, however it is strong longer in cloudy weather and tapers off more rapidly in direct sunlight. In any case we celebrate the overcast! Anglers took as many Char as they wanted near camp as the guides loaded rafts. If I had to put a number on the camp Char fishing it would be above 50 with the larger fish in the deep-water channel right off camp.

The Char fishing remained strong throughout the day with trout beads taking the majority. The river morphology changed this day from a small mountain stream to a medium sized salmon river with the addition of several minor and one major tributary. With the larger water flow the river has, over time, scoured out deep pockets of holding water for salmon. In these pockets we switched to heavier streamer rods and gaudy Coho flies. Anglers fished with great intensity sight casting to pods of Silver Salmon.

28 Coho came to hand over the course of the day's downriver travel. The notable fly patterns were Kilowatts, Megawatts, and large weighted pink and purple streamers. I fished with Matt and Steve, both commercial Salmon fishermen who'd wrapped up their Bristol Bay season in July. I especially appreciated their enthusiasm for trying a variety of fly patterns as we worked out which patterns were most effective for Rainbows, in particular.

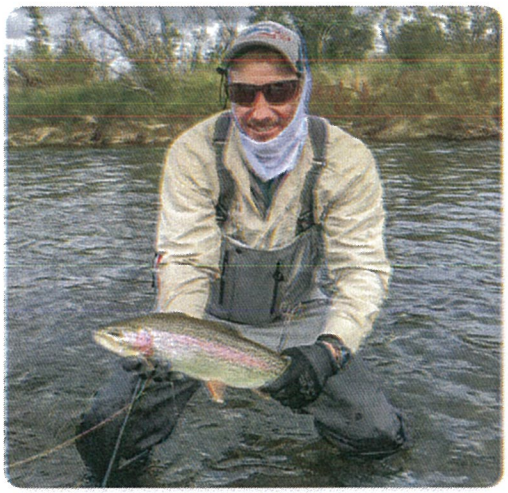


At lunch we approached a large gravel bar awash in salmon carcasses and flushed 100 large Glaucous-winged Gulls off their feed. Gulls open up a carcass going through the eye first and then puncture the gill into the abdominal cavity or open the brain. Every gravel and sand bar is covered with carcasses, likely 1000 per mile or more. The amount of biomass decomposing staggers the imagination and with it the input of ocean derived Nitrogen fuels future stream productivity. From Gulls to Mink. From Bears to Eagles and from Wolves to waterfowl all get in on the feast of salmon flesh. Likewise, we get in on the feast and kill one perfect fish every afternoon for the chef.

Bob Erickson provided a fine chrome Coho for the camp this afternoon and Matt Luck gave an incredible seminar on fish butchery. He taught us a new and creative way to "butterfly" the salmon. Thank you Matt! In our tents later the passing light rain showers added to the river and avian "sound-scape" and a Brown Bear or two splashed in the slough near camp. A rich experience.

From the log of August 28th, 2017

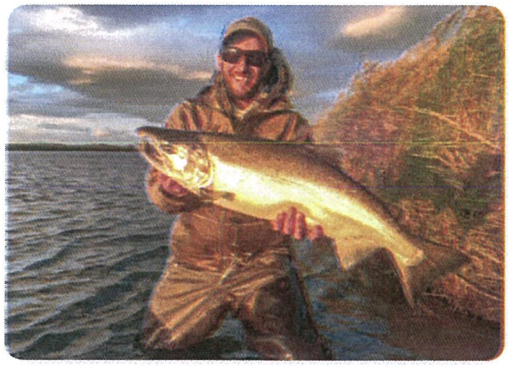
At sunrise a pair of Tundra Swans and 13 Magpies flew past in the pastel light while we made coffee. We held our cups looking across the tundra where wind and rain and frost and the cutting action of the river are the natural forces shaping this land. Steve Kurian alerted us to a Brown Bear running across a nearby ridge and we got our binoculars on it amazed at the speed of the bear. It was covering ground like a racehorse. Then we saw the Gray Wolf behind the bear at a full run and we had a ringside seat as the wolf chased the bear out of the area. This is typical wolf behavior if the bear was intruding into a den territory with pups.



We fished and rafted aware that the Rainbows this week were not in typical bankside and woody debris habitat but rather were most abundant in mid channel among spawning salmon. They were eager to take beads or streamers. This is the autumn pattern and anglers have to get out of the mindset of summertime that the 'Bows are in the "wood".

The Coho numbers built with each mile downstream. Every slough had fish and the rafts went “bar hopping” or leapfrogging downriver, anglers getting out and wading gravel bars and swinging the big streamers.

We camped on a truly vast gravel “Plain” certainly large enough to land a Cessna 185 airplane on. Our view was north toward the Main Fork or North Fork of the Goodnews. Just the one ridge dividing the 2 forks separated us. We call the bar we camped on “Tenkara” from some historic Tenkara fly-fishing antics, which took place here. A Red Fox nosed around camp in the evening light. Some settled in around the campfire while others fished late.

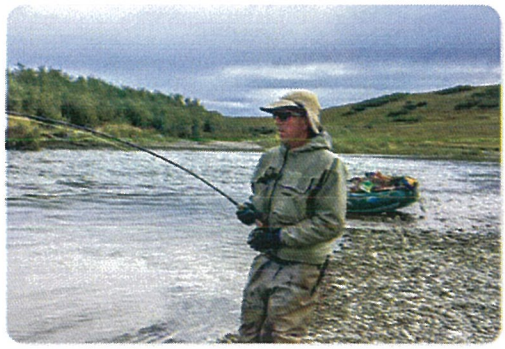


From the log of August 29th, 2017

We awoke at dawn to a stiff north wind and checked the barometer. The pressure fell overnight. Tomorrow is our fly out day and I was anxious about weather changes, which might affect our return from the river. Still what can one do? We adapt to the conditions we find and go forward. There was a brown Bear on the divide ridge to the north grazing on Blueberries. Northern Harriers were passing through the valley in migration. Greater White Fronted Geese fed on blueberries in the tundra and Cranes and Swans passed overhead. Steve and Bob Erickson explored a slough below camp, taking 10 Coho before breakfast.

We broke camp and began one of the best days of Coho Salmon angling many of us will ever experience. John Jinishian fished with Alex, his father. I fished with Bob and Tom Truesdell. Pete fished with Steve and Judy. Brian fished with Matt and Jed. It turns out it’s the rare angler who can definitively recall at days end whether she or he released 19 Coho or was it 39?

We were well past the numerical consciousness/ counting of fish released that occupy an angler on normal days. This highly intense fishing in fact becomes surreal as yet another fish run the line out toward the backing. When the fishing is



this intense one's experience of time distorts. One chooses to fish dry flies on days like this not because one will take more fish on a pink pollywog but because numbers no longer matter. What matters is the pleasure of watching the fish come to the surface, the jaws slowly opening and then closing to crush the dry fly. One has taken enough fish and everything else is gravy. Anglers took as many fish on the surface as they desired.

The winds increased all day rocking the Willow trees. The gusts cause the leaves to roll over exposing the silver undersides. I looked upriver from time to time and saw the father and son boat fishing dries exclusively and trading off. Father on the oars. Son driving casts through the wind into the quiet water of the slough where the Polly Wog is most effective. Then son John on the oars and Alex casting. I watched Judy putting every muscle of her body behind the graphite working fish after fish to the net. It was a very very good day.

The fishing below our last camp was beyond belief. The number of fish pushing upriver was mind bending. It's likely that no one including the guides had ever caught so many absolutely fresh chrome fish in such a concentrated period. It was very hard to make a cast and not take a fish. The salmon competed for the fly for hours.

How many fish was impossible to say. Perhaps a way to estimate the number taken and released is that it likely takes 5 minutes to hook and land each fish. Therefore 5 anglers were releasing 60 Coho per hour. No one will ever know for sure. No angler will ever forget that last night.

From the log of August 30th, 2017

All night the North wind howled. In the morning it was cold and blustery, yet blessedly dry. It took a team effort to maintain windbreaks in the kitchen and keep the camp stove functioning to make coffee. We broke the last camp efficiently, yet not without questioning, "Why were we leaving at the absolute peak of the Coho run?

Alaska Department of Fish and Game

Kuskokwim Drainage Management Area

Fishing Opportunities

Goodnews River Float

Description

The Goodnews River flows west from Goodnews Lake in the Ahklun Mountains to Kuskokwim Bay at the Village of Goodnews. It consists of the South, Middle, and North forks, which are largely separate for much of their flow, but join up near their river terminus at Kuskokwim Bay. The Goodnews River flows within the boundaries of the Togiak National Wildlife Refuge and the upper portion is within the Togiak Refuge Wilderness area. The upper rivers are small and clear, and have excellent fishing for rainbow trout, Dolly Varden, and Arctic grayling. During early and mid-summer, there is also fishing for king salmon and sockeye salmon, and in late summer and fall, fishing for coho salmon. The entire area is wilderness and contains no development. Bears are abundant, and anglers should act appropriately. Access is

normally by floating from Goodnews Lake (North Fork) or Middle Fork Lake to the village of Goodnews (a fly out point), which is about 55 miles, and the float may take up to a week.

Tackle

Fishing with egg patterns is often productive, particularly during salmon spawning. Silver and flashy streamers work well, and sometimes dry flies are the tackle of choice. Rainbows are known for hitting suface flies such as mouse patterns. Anglers using spinning gear will have good luck with a variety of spinners, spoons, and jigs, particularly flashy orange and pink ones, and bucktail spinners.

Getting There

There are scheduled air services to both Dillingham and Bethel from Anchorage and Fairbanks. The Goodnews River is typically accessed by float plane to Goodnews Lake, Middle Fork Lake, or Kukaktlim Lake or one of the forks in the upper drainage. There are air taxi and outfitting services available in both Dillingham and Bethel that can provide transportation and rental of rafts and other gear. The river is all Class I, but there are a number of sweepers which require some boating skill, and there can be log jams that require a portage of some distance. The Togiak National Wildlife Refuge Plan Your Visit webpages also have lots of useful information.

Species

Arctic Grayling
Coho Salmon
Dolly Varden
King Salmon
Rainbow Trout

Regulations

Before you go fishing please check the regulations.

Dates

Begin: May 25
Ends: September 15

Sockeye Salmon

Essay: What We're Fighting to Save in Bristol Bay

Written by: Phil Monahan

Paul Fersen offers a vision of the pristine landscape threatened by Pebble Mine

Photo by Jim Klug

I sat on the edge of the raft, watching the snags slip beneath us. There were thousands in the sixty miles of river, each of them clinging to twisted white bodies like the barbed wire of Verdun. Carcasses lined the shorelines like the aftermath of some apocalyptic battle.

"Pretty amazing isn't it," he said.

I turned to Glenn as he pulled on the oars.

"I can't adequately describe this," I said.

"Precisely why I bring people here. You have to see it to understand it."

***

The ceiling was low and the mountaintops disappeared above us as the ground disappeared below the Beaver, slipping effortlessly through the passes from Dillingham to Kukaktlim Lake. It seemed you could reach out and drag your fingers along the sides of the mountains like a child in a boat with his hand slipping through the water. I sat in the back so Coop, my ten-year old, could ride in the front seat. He constantly turned back to me, that childish grin of wonder never leaving his face. Such fearlessness there is in youth. Nine cylinders of Pratt and Whitney precluded conversation, but his face spoke volumes.

We were headed for a six-day float down the Kukatlik River to the confluence of the Goodnews River and then down to Bristol Bay, as the guests of Glenn Elison and The Conservation Fund, an organization with a refreshing capitalistic approach to conservation that eschews lying in front of the bulldozer for raising money, buying the land, and sending the bulldozer home forever. Glenn is the Director of the Fund's Southwest Alaskan Salmon Habitat Initiative. He runs six trips a year down this river, the King Salmon, the Arolik, and the Kisarolik, with the purpose of enlightening his donors about why they donate. All the slide shows and evangelical harangues pale compared with floating the river you're being asked to save. On the last day, waiting for the plane, I rued my inability to do more.

A sudden steep drop and a precipitous turn around a cliff spread the lake before us–surrounded by the shrouded peaks of the Gechiak Mountains, devoid of docks and houses, devoid of humanity save us. No matter how many times I do this, I always feel relief such places still exist.

Glenn; Travis, his son and a fisheries biologist; and Julie, guide, cook and winter fund raiser stood waiting on the shore along with four rafts and enough food and equipment to fuel Stanley's quest for Livingston. We would pay dearly in the next few hours for such luxury.

Along with Cooper and me were five men from Texas whose substantial discretionary income went partly toward pursuit of game and fish all over the world and partly toward sustaining those resources. True sportsmen they were, and as it turned out honorable and worthy companions whom Coop and I came to regard with great affection.

It took two flights to get us all to the lake, and while we waited Coop made his first foray into the salmon's world.

Coop is obsessed with fish. He will stand for hours over a bed of bream and catch them over and over again, never becoming sated. He now stood in the shallows of an Alaskan lake, surrounded by wilderness, stunned at the sight of hundreds of bright red sockeyes before him. In seconds, he was hooked to a big male, and his fly line ripped the surface. By the time we moved the rafts to the river, he'd hooked four more. Our adventure was at hand.

***

I stood at the edge of the gravel bar, leaning against the raft, chest heaving, legs burning, dripping with sweat. The rain mattered little, as no one would be dry that day.

"Damn," I gasped. Seven of us stood around the raft we had just dragged over 100 yards of shallow gravel bar. Like milers at the finish, we were bent with hands on knees looking at each other with the smiles of shared pain. These were solid 14-foot rafts, stacked like container ships with supplies. Throughout the first day, in the thin upper reaches of the river, we heaved these rafts one at a time over the gravel shallows and then trudged back up to get the next one.

"It's worth it, "Glenn kept saying. "The reason this river is so pristine, this first ten miles keeps out the lightweights."

My early exuberance turned to exhausted silence, and I retreated to my thoughts to get through the work. I remembered Kenneth Robert's great novel of Maine, Arundel, recounting Benedict Arnold's doomed march, pulling bateaux up the Kennebec, the Dead River, and the Chaudiere to assault Quebec from the rear. As we tugged and heaved through the afternoon, I lost myself in remembered passages.

> *Four hundred pounds a bateau weighed – a grievous burden for the stoutest shoulders. The first carry was along a mountainside for three and a quarter miles… By the grace of God we ate well on this carry. The first pond was alive with salmon trout, pink fleshed and delicious, so eager for food that they came into shallow water to take a hook, four and five at a time struggling for bait.*

By comparison, our efforts were puny, yet exhaustion after a few hours led me to the ultimate conclusion that as a race we will eventually drown in our own weakness. I thought of my office and the countless offices just like it, where countless people stare endlessly at flickering screens, only their fingers moving.

Yet at the same time, I stood in a river much like Robert's Maine rivers, surrounded by salmon. Two hundred years ago, the upper reaches of the Kennebec must have been much like this, until civilization and its dams and pollution destroyed its salmon. Though Maine has long lost all but a ghost of her salmon runs, here was a river unchanged for eons with millions of sockeyes thrashing past us on their annual journey toward their spawning lake, their huge red backs often exposed above water, grinding across gravel toward the next pool and a brief respite on their odyssey. Our first day, the salmon we saw were almost home.

Occasionally the water deepened and the rods came out, but at the end of each pool another bar loomed. This being summer in Alaska the onset of evening came late, but it brought no relief. Coop persevered, pushing and shoving good-naturedly with the rest of us, dying to fish, but understanding beyond his years, the need to work as the grown-ups.

By mid-morning of the second day, the worst was behind us, and the best lay ahead in the twists and turns of untouched water teeming with sockeye, king, chum, and pink salmon, with silvers to come in the lower reaches of the river. Behind these schools lay the rainbows, Dolly Varden, and grayling, living off salmon flesh and salmon roe – a virtual conveyor belt of bacon and eggs. Hundreds of thousands of fish and no one to catch them but us.

Coop's obsession with fish was fueled by Travis, a young fisheries biologist born to the Alaskan bush and guiding on this trip. Coop became Travis's shadow, and the questions flowed as endlessly as the river.

"How do they know where to go?"

"The fish know this is their river by the smell. They even know which tributary and even which pool by the differences in the minerals. Every part of the river has a distinct difference in the water, at least to the salmon. They know exactly where they belong."

"What makes some of them look so bad?"

"See those two kings? One is in tough shape and the other looking really bright and strong? They begin to decompose when they hit fresh water, but those that spawn in the lower river decompose faster, and those that need to get further up the river stay stronger until they reach their home. It's how nature disperses the fish up and down the river."

The lessons continued down the river, constantly interrupted by the tug of solid Alaskan fish whose difference in attitude to Lower-48 fish was in line with the difference in landscape.
Though the rivers were full of salmon and we had no compunctions about tying into them, the real targets were the rainbows and Dollies. They were big, fat, and nasty–no sipping rises, no subtle surface dimples. These fish were eating meat, and they tore into our offerings with abandon, the rainbows leaping across the river like tarpon.

I brought five boxes of flies. After the first day, I never opened them. The fish wanted only one thing: the yarn fly.

"These fish aren't looking up," said Travis. "They're hanging underneath the salmon eating flesh and eggs."

I tried a number of egg patterns with limited success, but this simple tuft of yarn attached to a hook with a snell knot was ridiculously productive. At the end of the day, every rod in camp sported a bright orange tuft of yarn. I've never seen such unanimity of choice on any trip, in any fishery. All pride in angling knowledge quickly dissipated in the unyielding fact that this fly was the magic bullet. My only thought was, who had sat by the river and concluded that snelling some yarn on a hook would catch fish? Did he fall in the river and lose all his flies? Was indicator yarn the only option left to him? Whatever the reason, the yarn fly was frighteningly productive.

The river widened as we drifted toward the ocean. The small gravel bars where we camped upriver became huge expanses of gravel stretching hundreds of yards wide and deep. The horizon opened up in the waning days and an endless ring of mountains stretched around us each night.
The night brought rest and spectacular meals, prepared by Julie, a professionally trained chef, who handles her boat and fishes with the best of them. Unquestionably attractive and in these environs startlingly so, her only nod to gender was a string of incongruous pearls. Waders and pearls: an enchanting combination. That she could conjure up scratch chocolate cakes in a Dutch oven and had an ever-present bag of chocolate candy was all Coop cared to know.

***

On the fifth day, on a gravel bar having lunch, reality unceremoniously arrived–the faint drone of an engine, a jet boat moving up from the lower river, the first mechanical sound we had heard in a few days. It was then that we collectively understood the significance of the wild: the absence of man and his conveniences. Disappointed looks passed between us as though we'd been slapped.

The boat passed. It was a couple of guides from Bristol Bay on their day off headed upriver to fish, perhaps searching for what we had just lost. They stopped and talked to Travis, then continued upriver. The river quieted again. We continued downriver, now painfully aware that we were nearing the end.

We fished from the rafts, drifting over pools, stopping intermittently at runs we knew would hold big rainbows–runs that concentrated the flesh and eggs flushing down from the countless dying salmon upriver.

Travis and David were a hundred yards downriver, pulling rainbows from a deep run. I leaned against the raft, with a cup of coffee watching a caribou move through the brilliant lavender fireweed on the hillside across the river. In the eddy next to me, a king drifted slowly toward the bank on her side. She had no fins to speak of, having worn them out clearing the silt from her nest. Her skin was pale and in the middle stages of decomposition. Her eye was cloudy, and she was undoubtedly blind.

An almost imperceptible motion in what was left of her tail pushed her the last few inches to the gravel. I knelt beside her and watched her gills move slowly until finally they stopped.
Seven years prior, she left this river on an incomparable journey to the ocean, dodging predators, nets and swimming thousands of miles in the Pacific, until something told her to come back. She again dodged and weaved her way through countless dangers, wearing away her body on the gravel and ultimately finishing her life in the pool where she was born. Her success: eggs lying in the gravel and flesh to feed an ecosystem containing hundreds of other species. It was a death of Homeric stature.

The following morning, Coop stood in the river searching for a rolling pink or silver. It was his last chance, as the drone of the Beaver was faint in the distance. The tide was moving and the silvers moved with it, beginning their journey up the river, the last of the salmon to come home. I watched him cast here at the mouth of the river and realized he had changed perceptibly in the past six days, exchanging a bit of the boy for a bit of the man. He looked taller. We were finishing our greatest adventure and perhaps one of our last as man and boy. Soon it would be man and man.

He stands at the mouth of his river, his ocean stretching out in front of him. His nets and predators, his long journeys, all lay before him. How extraordinary to be 10 and yet one never realizes it until 50. I have a father's faith that he will do something good on his journey, perhaps step up and work to save what's left.

I've already seen most of my nets, dodged most of my predators. My ocean is behind me and I now stand at the mouth of my river looking upstream.

This story first appeared in Gray's Sporting Journal.

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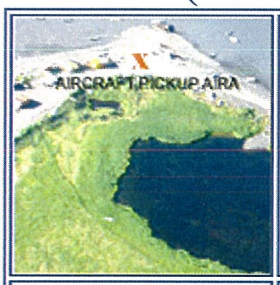
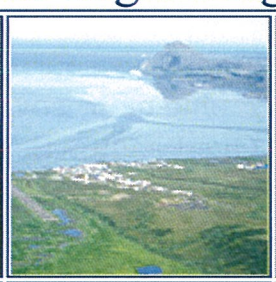
This entry was posted in Conservation and tagged alaska, bristol bay, pebble mine, sockeye salmon on March 26, 2013 [http://www.orvis.com/news/conservation/what-were-fighting-to-save-in-bristol-bay/] by Phil Monahan.

Kukaktlim Lake and Kukaktlik River

(Click on the thumbnails below for larger images.)

				
Break your gear down...	Goodnews Village	Kukaktlik River	Goodnews Bay	The Goose is about 39' long.

Kukaktlim Lake is a forty-five minute flight to the West of Dillingham and is a great alternative to the Goodnews River float. The float is ten floating-hours if you were to just cut loose and go for it. With normal water levels, you can expect to drag your boat on and off for the first third of the river.

Camping on the bank of the Kukaktlim Lake is lumpy and unprotected from high wind, but just down the river good camping sites begin. Depending on the water level, the best camping would be on the sand bars, but in high water conditions camping would still be good on the bank.

There is very little traffic on the Kukaktlik/Middle Fork River. We estimate only 5 to 10 small groups of fishermen float the Middle Fork each year.

The same species of fish can be caught on the Middle Fork float that you would catch on the main Goodnews float, but the river is not as wide or deep and there are sweepers from the cottonwood trees growing along the upper river. The fishing has been reported to us as excellent and, during periods of low to medium water levels, large build-ups of fish can be found in scattered fishing holes along the float.

At the end of the float, the Middle Fork flows into the main Goodnews River giving this location the name Confluence. This is an excellent place to meet your tow boat if you would like a little help getting down the last 5 miles of the Goodnews River. The reason most people prefer to be towed from the confluence to the village is because of the strong tidal influence and frequent, strong on-shore winds that can cause difficulty rowing. The high water times and heights table at the bottom of this page will help you figure out the approximate arrival time of the tow boat.

We encourage you to read the information we have provided about Goodnews Lake and River in order to make a choice suitable for your special adventure.

*Chest waders are recommended for unloading at the lake.

The coordinates of the pick-up location are:
N 59° 07.771'
W 161° 28.843'

Click here for estimated costs.

Note: For topographic maps covering the Kukaktlik/Middle Fork Rivers, order Goodnews Bay Quadrangle - Scale 1:63:360. A-7, A-8, B-5, B-4.

Goodnews River Yearly High Water Times & Heights			
June	July	August	September

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U.S. Fish & Wildlife Service

Togiak National Wildlife Refuge

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Visiting the Refuge

Following is some basic, introductory information for visitors to Togiak National Wildlife Refuge. Much of the information is directed towards float trips. If you do not find answers to your questions here, please feel free to contact us or visit the Alaska Geographic online bookstore. To see a "do's and don'ts" sheet for quick reference, click here.

For specific information on regulations and enforcement, see our regulations page. U.S.G.S. topographic maps are available to plan and enjoy your refuge trip.

Camping
Native Lands
Fishing and Hunting
River Conditions and Rangers

CAMPING:

1. There is a **three day camping limit** on all the rivers throughout Togiak Refuge. After the third consecutive day in one location, the group must move their camp at least one mile.
   *For visitors to the Kanektok River, be aware that there is a one day limit at the outlet of Kagati Lake due to its frequent use.
2. We ask that you please **practice leave no trace** (meaning after you camp in an area, there should be nothing left behind to show other groups that you were there). We specifically require the following practices:
   a. **Proper disposal of human waste:** bury 8-12 inches deep, at least 100 feet from the water, and burn or pack out (do not bury) paper. On the lower portion of several refuge rivers, where the uplands are privately owned by Native corporations, the only way to avoid trespass is to pack out your waste or to get a use permit from the appropriate Native corporation.
   b. **Trash:** Trash that will burn completely, such as paper, may be burned. Make sure your fire is hot enough to burn the trash completely. All trash that is not burned must be packed out. It cannot be buried! Buried trash can attract bears and cause other problems for fellow campers, and is illegal. Be sure to check your campsite for trash just before you leave it; pay special attention to any remnants of aluminum or

other trash in the fire ring. *Rangers will check your campsites after you leave!*

c. **Fires:** campfires are allowed, using driftwood or other fallen wood. To preserve the wilderness experience, we ask that you leave no trace behind: **scatter your fire ring, wood and any other remnants from your fire** and collect any trash scraps left in it. Using stoves for cooking, rather than fires, is more efficient, reliable, and keeps your cookware from turning black as well.

d. **For more detailed information** on low impact camping, please visit the Leave No Trace website.

3. Be aware you are **traveling in bear country**. A large proportion of visitors to Togiak Refuge see bears, especially those visitors on float trips (who tend to travel quietly).
   a. The scent of food, especially fish, is a strong attractant for bears. To avoid encounters, keep a clean camp, boat, etc. and dispose of any fish parts by tossing them into deep flowing water so they are carried away. You may wish to consider storing food scraps in your trash inside a sealed ziploc-type bag, rather than attempting to burn it, which may create a smell of food around your campsite.
   b. Please take time to view some of the following information on bears. Even if you have heard about bear safety before, it is good to have the information fresh in your mind in case you need to respond to a situation quickly.
      - ADFG's "Bear Facts" Brochure has practices you should observe while in bear country as well as basic information on bear behavior.
      - Bears and You is a publication of the Alaska Department of Natural Resources, Division of Parks and Outdoor Recreation which has basic bear safety guidelines as well as tips on differentiating between brown and black bears.
      - Living In Harmony with Bears, produced by the Alaska chapter of the National Audubon Society, takes a more in-depth look at bear behavior and what humans can do to live and play safely around bears.
      - Safety in Bear Country is an ADFG publication for hunters in Alaska which details bear safety in hunting situations.
      - Bear Deterrent and Repellant Products ranging from large, industrial systems through backpacking equipment. List compiled by ADFG.

NATIVE LANDS:

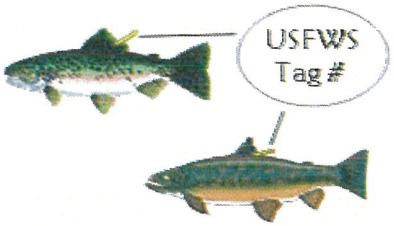
1. Please **avoid trespass on Native lands**. On the Kanektok, Goodnews, and Togiak rivers, signs have been placed on the riverbank to indicate to visitors the boundary between the Togiak Wilderness Area and the non-wilderness portion of the river. On these rivers, all lands along the river below the wilderness boundary are owned by Native corporations. All areas above the high water mark (i.e. all vegetated uplands) are private property. Use bare gravel bars for camping and walking. See our land ownership page for more information.
   a. If you plan to use Native corporation-owned uplands, you must obtain land use permits from the village Native corporations.

2. Another type of Native lands to be aware of are **Native allotments** that belong to individuals. These are scattered throughout Togiak Refuge, *including* within the Wilderness Area. Fish racks, cabins, signs on trees, or any other alterations to the land may indicate Native allotments. Native allotments are private property - no trespassing.
3. **No alcohol** is allowed in, the following "dry" villages: Quinhagak, Goodnews Bay, Platinum, Togiak, Twin Hills, and Manokotak. Any alcohol brought on the trip should be consumed or disposed of prior to reaching a village.
4. You may see local residents using the rivers for **subsistence harvests**; please be respectful. No fishing is allowed within 300 feet of a subsistence gillnet.

FISHING AND HUNTING:

For information on subsistence hunting and fishing, visit the U.S. Fish & Wildlife Service Office of Subsistence Management homepage.

1. Please educate yourself about current regulations and ethical behavior. Visit the links available from our fishing and hunting pages to learn more.
2. You will need a current **license**, available from retailers in Dillingham and Bethal as well as online through the Alaska Department of Fish & Game. You may need a specific tag as well; for example, anglers fishing for Chinook (king) salmon are required to have a current **king salmon tag** (or "king stamp") in addition to their regular license. It is your responsibility to be sure you have all the necessary documents.
3. **Anglers:**
   - Please practice **good catch-and-release techniques**. This will help to conserve the fishery and is also culturally respectful. Many subsistence users do not agree with catch-and-release fishing, since their traditional concept of respecting nature is to make use of a fish that allows itself to be caught. Using the best techniques to avoid unnecessary mortality will help to reduce conflicts and demonstrate your respect for the resources as well.
     - ADFG information on catch & release fishing
     - ADFG information on selective harvest - how to select fish to keep and improve the quality of fish for food
     - ADFG information on angler ethics and respecting cultural values toward fishing
   - Fisheries biologists are conducting several studies on Togiak Refuge that involve tagging fish with both external tags and/or radio transmitters. External tags (sometimes referred to as "t-bar anchor" or "spaghetti" tags) are small plastic tags usually attached near the dorsal fin (see image). Some external tags may be a small plastic disc. Tags may be various colors, and usually contain a code number for the fish as well as the location of the agency office that tagged the fish (i.e. "486327 - Togiak NWR, DLG 99576"). Fish that have been implanted with radio transmitters will have an antenna extending from their belly and possibly an external tag. To learn more about why fish are tagged, click here. We ask that you **report the**



catching of any tagged fish. Click here to link to a printable fish report form. If you do catch a radio tagged fish, we would greatly appreciate the release of that fish. However, if you do choose to sacrifice it, please return the transmitter to Togiak Refuge.
- Accurate reporting on **creel surveys** is essential to fishery managers in Alaska. Creel surveys help managers approximate the impact of sportfishing. Various personnel may survey you during your trip regarding catch and harvest information, or creel surveys may be mailed to license holders. Please respond to and provide accurate information in these surveys!

4. **Hunters:**
   - Game animals are important to Alaskans, many of whom depend largely upon them for food. Respect the animal you are hunting by preparing adequately for your hunt. Be aware that Alaska's meat salvage regulations reflect the high value we place on game meat and that wasting of meat is taken seriously.
     - Hunt Alaska is a comprehensive resource of hunting information produced by the Alaska Department of Fish & Game.
     - Hunting for Trophy Meat will educate hunters who want quality food from their hunt.

   - Some moose, caribou, and other game animals within the refuge are fitted with radio collars as part of long term monitoring studies. Collared animals are tracked from the air, and are important sources of information on life span, calf production, home range, and other life history traits. When hunting, please avoid taking radio collared animalswhen possible. Although it is not illegal for you to do so, it is detrimental to our management efforts, since each collared animal is an ongoing source of data. If you do take a radio collared animal, please return the collar to Togiak National Wildlife Refuge or the Alaska Department of Fish & Game.

RIVER CONDITIONS AND RANGERS:

1. River Rangers patrol the Kanektok, Goodnews, and Togiak rivers during the summer months. Rangers perform a variety of functions, including collecting information for angler surveys and public use data and making sure you're practicing low impact camping. You will probably encounter the rangers during your trip - feel free to ask them questions or stop in at their camp. They are our best source of current knowledge about the rivers. Learn more about the River Ranger program on the Public Use page.
2. Expect **motorboats** on the river, and if possible please yield to motorboats in the area because they are often only able to travel in certain channels and deeper water. Also, rafters can usually hear approaching motorboats giving them time to move to the edge of the river; whereas motorboat operators often do not see rafters unitl they are in close proximity.
3. There is no serious white water on these rivers but there are many **sweepers** - overhanging or fallen trees, etc. - pay attention and be prepared to navigate!
4. For those traveling to the Kanektok River, there is a **weir** across the river (used for counting fish) you should be aware of:
   a. The location of the weir (latitude/longitude) is: 59° 46.212`N, 161° 04.010`W.

b. The weir's hinged design can be crossed by boats and rafts.
c. When you reach the weir, sections suitable for passing over should be indicated with flags. The floating sections of the weir can be traversed.
d. The weir should be staffed during regular traveling hours.
e. The weir is made of plastic, so please avoid standing on it.
f. Fishing is prohibited within 300 feet of any weir, upstream and downstream, unless otherwise indicated.

5. For those traveling to the Middle Fork of the Goodnews River, or the Kukaktlik River (flying in to Kukaktlim Lake), there is also a **weir** on this river.
   a. Located approximately six miles upstream from the confluence with the North Fork of the Goodnews River (latitude/longitude 59° 09.48`N, 161° 23.76` W).
   b. Floating weir design allows boats to cross unassisted.
   c. Weir is staffed by the Alaska Department of Fish and Game from late June to mid- September.
   d. Please avoid standing on the weir.
   e. Fishing is prohibited within 300 feet of any weir, upstream and downstream, unless otherwise indicated.

Last updated: April 25, 2011

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