

I do not pretend to be any kind of writer, but I would like to share my last fishing holiday, when I visited Canada - it ended up being the fishing trip of a lifetime. If anyone is thinking of going to British Columbia - go and I will tell you why.

Over the years I have been on numerous trips to Ireland and Scotland in search of the native brown trout and hopefully the odd salmon. Most of these trips were of a week's duration and we invariably caught more fish in the bar, at night, than we ever did in the boats during the day. Excuse's from the ghillies and local's were always along the lines, the water's too hot, too cold, too high, too low, should have been here last week, should be here next week etc. etc..

With the above thoughts in mind, it was therefore with great trepidation that a friend and myself took it upon ourselves to venture a little further. To travel beyond the distance we could drive meant, that we would be looking to at least seven days fishing, to make it worth while. This jump also meant an increase in costs to at least three times the normal budget, i.e. up to £2,000 rather than the usual £600 - £700, and for a working man like myself this has to include the accommodation, food and evening drinks. This budget may appear [for some] large or small, but to me it was a significant gamble.

However the portents were good, so we decided to take the gamble and go. There are five Pacific salmon, Sockeye, Pink, Coho, Chum and the largest the King or Chinook salmon. My fishing partner, Chris, spent weeks searching the internet to try and find the best period for the various runs, and eventually came up with mid October. This period promised the largest numbers of fish (we need all the help we can get), and would consist of mainly Chum, second in size to the Chinook, with the Pink and Sockeye runs trailing off and the Coho, the smallest salmon, starting up - so we were off.

I will not bore you with the travel details, sufficient to say they all went well and on a clear, if not chilly October morning we found ourselves shaking hands with our young [to me] guide, on the banks of the Fraser river. For our first day he suggested we try the confluence of the Fraser and Harrison rivers. The Fraser is a long and fairly rapid river coming straight off the Rocky Mountains and as such is quite brown, however the Harrison River is fed by a huge lake - no points for guessing it's called the Harrison Lake and as such it is quite clear and green in colour. Our guide sensing our inexperience in this environment suggested we spent a little time jigging. This fishing method is not unlike street pegging, [to me]. You just cast in above the run and let the float go past, adjusting the line, in order to keep in touch. The terminal rig consists of a relatively large hook, weighted with a little lead and a fairly crude piece of purple or red fluff tied to it, suspended from a rather large float. I must say it took a little while to get back into this method of casting, winding in, and then winding out as the float passed by - in order to keep the line tight. There is also a very definite depth at which the fish were travelling. However within a few minutes, Chris, was in. We have always had an unwritten agreement when we fish together, that when one of us catches the other one reels in, until the fish is landed. This theoretically maximises his chances of landing the fish. The other partner also usually lands it for him - after several calls of "what are you waiting for an Oscar?" Not perhaps a rigid protocol, but in this age of must have, at least gentlemanly.



Chris with a Chum salmon caught on the first day.

Even though I was not on the end of the rod I could see why the Chum are called dog salmon; their fight may not start with an explosive run but it was dogged with the fish shaking its head back and fore constantly, the rod tip was just banging away. After some 10-15 minutes of fighting the fish was finally landed and a second reason come to light, as to their nickname, have you seen the teeth these things have when they develop their kype?

I started adjusting the length of my line only to get snagged in the rocks on the bottom of the river. I caught the rocks a number of times before I got the depth just right, during this time Chris was into his second fish - to quote my favourite Stargate hero "oh crap". Still there was always hope, we had, after all, not been fishing for more than an hour on the first day [the royal we that is] and had at least two fish. Thankfully the next fish was mine and after a 15 minute struggle I landed my first Pacific salmon. In this manner the day quickly passed, with the both of us catching fairly frequently. The total for the day was 22 with the heaviest 20lb. It was therefore a very happy pair that entered the Jolly Miller tavern in Chilliwack, that night, to celebrate with a few beers. It may have the clothes or indeed our accents that gave us away, when the pretty barmaid asked "are you guys here for the fishing?" but I suspect it was the very silly grins. I know some people can and will have caught more salmon, but for myself, I had caught more salmon on that first day than I had in my whole life put together.

The second day was, weather wise, quite poor with a constant and very wetting drizzle. After our splendid start we were quite happy to accept our guide's enquiry as to weather we wanted to try some sturgeon fishing. The theory being we could anchor up in the river, cast out, using a ledgering arrangement, then retire under the protection of the awning to watch the rod tip. The key to success we were told was not to strike as the rod tip taps gently, but to wait until the rod registers a constant pull, run to the rod, strike like hell and hang on - Oh yea. Believe me it works, the first few fish were around the 10-25 lb mark, and fought quite hard, which I found surprising, not having fished for this species before I did not know really what to expect. At this point the guide decided we should move and try a different spot. After moving, Chris's rod gave the first indication and he was into a bigger fish, after 15 minutes of hard work he managed to land a fish of around 40lb. The next rod to move was mine, and when I struck I thought I had caught a large log, that had escaped the rafts that you often see being brought down the river. Having discovered that I had had intentions on his freedom the fish took off on a run I had no control of; bearing in mind I had the clutch set very hard

and had 150lb braid on the reel. Even after his first run the fish had no intentions of giving up, every time I managed to gain any line, he would just take off again. After approx 45 minutes of hard fighting the guide managed to haul the 150lb sturgeon into the boat - I was completely worn out. Thankfully it was Chris's turn next and he managed one of almost similar proportions. I later hooked into one which was even larger, the fish launched itself 7-8ft in the air, so at least I could see its was around 7 feet in length, during this acrobatic turn it managed to spit out the hook. I never realised these fish fought with such tenacity, it was like sail fin fishing. Our total for the day reached 12 fish.



Cliff with a 150lb white sturgeon

The third day started with an hours jigging, just for fun, then we travelled further up the Fraser hoping to spin and catch a King. Unfortunately we not did connect with any of these monsters, but did catch a number of Sockeye and the odd Pink. We also had the pleasure of watching a Welsh lady, to whom we had spoken to earlier on the beach, land a King of around 55lbs after a struggle lasting just under an hour.



The Welsh lady with her King of about 55lbs

Having spent three very happy days fishing, Chris and I decided to do our own thing and try a fly, using the rods we had brought with us. The rod I had brought was an 11 foot 9 wt. I often use to fly fish for pike in Ireland; hopefully just about right for the Chum. Because of the depth at which we found them on day one I tried a sinking line with a fast sinking tippet. I did not appreciate it at the start but this was going to be my red letter day. The guide took us to a small island in the middle of the river and showed us a shingle bank on which we could wade out. The method was to cast at 90 degrees to the current and let the water take the line down and around, then a slow retrieve. Just as the line straightened on my first cast, a sudden bang told me that I had hooked my first chum salmon on the fly. These fish not only fight hard but they also are intelligent and every time I put a little side strain on in order to gain some line he would merely turn his head into the current and take off more line. It took just over  $\frac{3}{4}$  of an hour to get this first fish in. The next two casts produced another two fish, followed by my first Sockeye on the fly, which instead of a straight fight, turned tail and headed off down stream. I must have lost 20 - 25-m of backing before he even slowed. A totally different experience from the dogged Chum. Although more dramatic these smaller fish take less time to subdue and in a little while he was in the net.



Cliff's first Sockeye on the fly.

It was only when the guide shouted at us that lunch was ready did I realise how hungry I was. After lunch the foray continued with fish after fish until the guide called a halt. To be honest I was glad after standing for almost eight hours my back was killing me. Despite the discomfort it was another very stupid grin in the pub. Total for the day, for me was 14 fish = 5 Chum with the remainder made up of Sockeye and the odd Pink. Chris unfortunately did not fair quite as well, because [we think] although he had a sinking line, the fast sink tippet I had, put the line down that little lower in the water.



Cliff with another nice Chum salmon on the fly.

Rather than bore you with more prologue I shall just highlight the last three days. Another day of sturgeon fishing produced a fish of 250lb. When they are this size they can not be brought either up stream or onto the boat. The procedure is to cast off, leaving the anchor line on a buoy to be retrieved later (you loose too much line if time is spent retrieving the anchor) and drift down stream with the fish, making line when you can. Eventually when you manage to exhort some form of control, find yourself a quite back eddy or shingle bank on which you can land on and retrieve the fish this way.

The last day was spent spinning and although I hooked one King salmon it managed to throw the hook, during one of its acrobatic flurries. I estimated the weight to be about 30lb. I should also say that at one point whilst I was casting out and retrieving I saw three fish of around 4 to 4 ½ feet in length pass under the boat; surely somewhere between 55-65 lb. I also caught one of the small Coho that day so I at least I can say that I caught all five species, even though I did not manage to land the Chinook.

The epilogue to this story, is that although we probably could have done it a little more cheaply by ourselves, the extra cost of using a fishing agent more than paid itself in the seamless arrangements. For this trip we used World Sport Fishing - e-mail address [www.worldsportfishing.com](http://www.worldsportfishing.com) I must say the service was competitive and very efficient I personally also like the home from home touch, so we chose a

B & B, and here again we were very lucky. The people we stayed with could not have been more helpful or pleasant. We had the full run of their basement flat, complete with common room and on-suite bathroom – details Betty and Wayne Snerle - email address [riverbendguesthouse@shaw.ca](mailto:riverbendguesthouse@shaw.ca), website, [www.riverbendguesthouse.com](http://www.riverbendguesthouse.com) . Last but no means least was the excellent guiding service provided by Chris Ciesla -

e-mail address [chris@riversportfishing.com](mailto:chris@riversportfishing.com) website, [www.riversportfishing.com](http://www.riversportfishing.com) Before you ask, no I am not getting a tip or back hander from anyone, but all three combined to make this a trip of a lifetime and I believe that good [or bad] service should be passed on.

I would also make one last observation. I have over more years than I care to remember, spent a lot of time, talking to fishermen, who have fished in various parts of the UK and some overseas but I have never met anyone before who has fished British Columbia; so how come when we talked to the guides, they told us that 80% of their customers are Brits ? Is this the best kept secret of salmon fishing ?

I should also state before the purists start shouting, the Canadians insist on single barbless hooks, and all the fish we caught were returned.

Kitson Clifford of the U.K.

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