

I took the opportunity to go fishing in Alaska the third week of July 2004 with Dave, a friend from my ward, and three of his friends. Dave has been to Alaska a dozen times and could be a fishing guide if he lived there. He really knows what he's doing when it comes to fishing. Dave's son just made the Jr. USA Ski team. Unfortunately, for those of us who know him in Eagle, he is moving to Middleton this month to buy more land for all of his toys. Thanks for the great trip, Dave!

We fished all over the Kenai Peninsula for Halibut, Sockeye, Coho and King Salmon. We flew into Anchorage with a population of about 250,000 and several moose. I found the floatplane airport to be unique. In the summer, planes float on it and in the winter when the water freezes they put skis on the airplanes. I also saw a few Dahl Sheep just outside Anchorage as I traveled along the bay where the low tide divulges miles of mud flats. I heard there have been a few vehicles lost when people were out mudding and they didn't get out before the high tides came back in. It's a good place to see Beluga Whales. We rented a motor home for 9 days and stayed at many different locations.

Homer – We left the Homer Spit for a day of chartered Halibut fishing and cruised about 50 miles south of Homer. I ended up keeping a 55 lb and 35 lb Halibut. The limit is 2 per day. I ended up catching 10 and by the end of the day I did not want to reel in another Halibut. It was a blast but my back and arms had no energy left in them (Yeah! I know, rough times). The captain caught several Sea Bass and Lingcod and we saw several Humpback Whales and cliffs with colonies of sea birds and the scenery was unbelievable.



My 35lb and 55lb Halibut with the large 120lb Halibut that our boat caught

Soldotna – We fished for Sockeye on the Kenai River under the bridge right in town. Sockeye fishing is different than any other fishing I had done. Sockeye swim up the sides of the river with their mouths opening and closing while they swim. They do not actually bite the fly, so you are actually trying to snag them in the mouth. You throw your line out with enough weight to touch the bottom with about a four-foot leader and a large fly on the end of your line. You try to run the line across the bottom until you feel a fish and then yank. The idea is to get the line in their mouth and then yank and hook them in the side of the mouth because you can't foul hook them.

I found this type of fishing to be an art and after a lot of frustration I finally hooked a fish, only to lose it in the current. I new that it was luck because I didn't feel any fish, I just heard my reel go *ZZZZZZZZZZZZ*. Did I also mention I was fishing with lots of other fisherman. I had about 10 feet of breathing space on both sides of me.

After a couple hours of fishing, Dave gave me a few tips and handed me his fly rod. I have this thing for fly-fishing and really wanted to catch an 8-12 lb sockeye on a fly rod. I still didn't have a feel for it, but I ended up landing 3 sockeye that evening on a fly rod. That had to be the highlight of my trip. My first fish was a 12 lb Sockeye and there's nothing like catching it on a fly rod. Can I just tell you that I love fly-fishing. I also hooked several 20" plus Rainbow and Dolly Varden, but it wasn't even a fight with the Salmon pole I was using.



My first Sockeye – 12lb Sockeye on Fly-rod

Kenai – The Kenai River is a world-class fishery that boasts the largest King Salmon in the world and the main reason why I wanted to come on the trip. I wanted to catch a big King. Dave’s goal was to catch a 50 lb plus fish and my goal was just to catch a decent sized King. We fished the late-run that offers big fish but you won’t catch the numbers of fish like you can during other times of the year or on other rivers this time of year. We fished for 2 1/2 days and between the 5 of us caught 2 Kings. A 35 lb and 25 lb. It was somewhat disappointing not catching a fish but I still had a great time. I enjoyed seeing all of the Bald Eagles on the shore feeding on Salmon carcasses. I couldn’t believe the number of boats on the river. During the week I was there, I had heard of a 90 lb, a few 70 lb and several 50 + lb Kings being caught. There was a boat next to us that landed a 72 lb King. It was massive. I believe the record for the river and world record is around 96 lbs. There have been larger Kings caught in the ocean.



Fishing for King’s on the lower Kenai River

Seward – All of Alaska was beautiful but I think Seward takes the prize with Mt. Marathon in the background and the harbor in the forefront. I was amazed at the beauty I saw while fishing for Coho out in the coves of Resurrection Bay as I watched Sea Otters, Bald Eagles and colonies of Puffins and other sea birds. I missed seeing the Orcas and Sea Lions. There were huge cruise ships and scenic glacier/wildlife tour boats out in the harbor. I saw several glaciers that flowed down from the Harding Icefield in Kenai Fjords National Park. I also took a short side trip out of town and walked up to Exit glacier.



One of the fishing locations in Resurrection Bay



Exit Glacier near Seward

Anyway, back to fishing. I caught my limit of six Coho Salmon (silvers) and a few Sea Bass. Fishing from the boat for Coho was a highlight but you don't get the same fight you get when fishing for them in the rivers as I discovered on my trip to the Olympic Peninsula last fall with my Uncles Lynn and John in the record breaking rainfall that flooded the rivers. I lost several Coho in those currents. Don't get me wrong; fishing for Coho in the bay was a blast!

We jigged and used a downrigger using mostly Herring and other stuff I can't remember the names of, like Hoochies? I learn something new every time I go fishing with Dave. I think Dave got a kick watching me fumble around with the downrigger and getting Herring to stay on my line and get it under the water before the Seagulls could gulp it up. I was lucky, because the weather was great. The other group that went the next day was forced off the ocean due to the large waves. But they did get to see a tour boat that somehow got a huge leak with 150 people on board. Nobody was hurt but they got to see the Coast Guard in action.



A portion of Coho Salmon that we caught in Seward



A Coho Salmon

Kenai/Russian River confluence – This location is grand central station and the definition of “combat-fishing”. It was crawling with people. It was literally shoulder-to-shoulder. I fished an entire frustrating day at the beginning of the week here without catching a Sockeye. I was given a tip at the end of the day about 15 minutes before leaving that totally turned my Sockeye fishing experience around. I was told to slightly pull the line toward me while the line was drifting. I immediately started feeling the fish and hooked one before leaving.



Looking down the Russian River close to the confluence with the Kenai River

I returned to the Russian River on the last day of the trip further up stream where the stream flow had been drastically reduced. I was very curious to find out if I had mastered the art of Sockeye fishing. You could easily see the fish in the clear, shallow water and the fish from the June runs were red. This was the only place that I could actually see the fish in the water. Every decent hole was taken so Cal (one of the others I came with and the Director of Law Enforcement at Idaho State University) and I continued to walk down river. There was a mob of people down stream and we soon realized what all the commotion was about. A Grizzly was feeding on dead carcasses and was near the best fishing hole that I had seen to this point. This Grizzly was a rare exception, because it was in the midst of many people and pretty much ignored the people standing 20 yards away. It didn't have a fear of humans and it was soon to be moved to another location. I enjoyed watching it destroy a tackle box.



A young Grizzly enjoying a Salmon on the Russian River

After taking a few pictures, we continued downstream until we came to the confluence where we had fished earlier in the week. It was packed. Cal moseyed out into a shallow part of the river where there was a small channel and nobody else was standing. He instantly began having success and a new line instantly formed along the small channel. He saved me a spot and I ended up having the time of my life. I caught Sockeye after Sockeye and just that afternoon made the whole trip worth it. To my dismay, I noticed that Cal and I were the only ones slamming the fish in the vicinity. I actually had people asking me what the secret was. It felt really good after the frustrating day I had had earlier in the week. It was a good day to end the trip on. I found out why so many people fished here. It was fun but I need my space when I fish. It would be worth taking a plane out to a remote spot to fish if you're feeling rich.

I could tell you some other funny/embarrassing stories we had among the group, but you know the saying, "What happens at the fishing hole stays at the fishing hole", or something like that.

I don't know when I'll make it back to Alaska but it was a trip to remember. I would love to go back and spend a few days in Denali, see the glaciers in Prince William Sound and ultimately, fly-fish for Kings on Kodiak Island where I hear you can catch 20-30 fish a day if the largest Grizzlies in the world don't get you first.