

Plus: A Great Day in Whittier

June 2018

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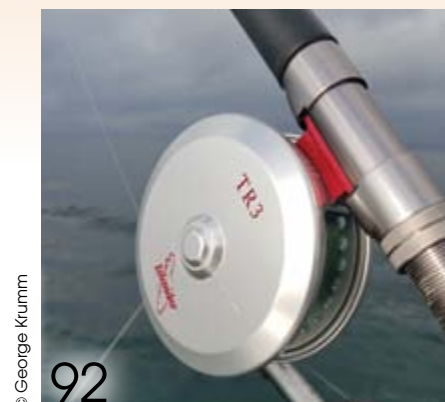
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COVER / Brian Rhodes of Valdez Outfitters with a massive slab of halibut a client caught while chartering the *Lena Claire*. © Brian Rhodes/Valdez Outfitters

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A Great Day in Whittier

Story by Melissa Norris

How cool is it that you can get up super early, drive about an hour south of Anchorage to make the 5:30 AM tunnel to Whittier and be on the ocean by 7 AM? It's a true benefit to have access to Prince William Sound so close to Anchorage.

It was August 26 of last year and my fishing buddy and I were two Melissa's on a mission. About a year and a half ago we hired Melissa Wong to help with graphics and administration and we found one of the sweetest people to ever exist. She's hardcore about fishing and will wake up at any hour to fish for anything.

We made the tunnel with minutes to spare and met with Captain Matt Kopeck, the owner/operator of Whittier Marine Charters and sister company, Whittier Boat Rentals. After our quick greeting, Melissa and I carried our gear aboard the *Sweet' Pea*, a 33-foot, custom twin-diesel charter boat. The warm, cozy cabin promised a comfortable ride ahead, and we soon learned that the *Sweet' Pea* had the distinction of being the first vessel in Alaska to receive a 5-star-rating from the U.S. Coast Guard. Unfortunately, while finishing our pre-departure paperwork, I came to the harsh realization that I'd left my fishing license at home! Luckily Whittier Marine's shop is an ADF&G license vendor and it was easy to get a duplicate so I could still fish.

Just as we were wrapping up, the rest of the *Sweet' Pea's* passengers arrived. We were fishing with Denny Crum, a name many might recognize for his success as the former men's basketball coach for the University of Louisville in Kentucky. He was accompanied by his wife, Susan, and their friends Chuck and Donna, also from Louisville. Denny has fished with Captain Matt for several years now, always ready to harvest saltwater species for the freezer before heading south to the Kenai for salmon and rainbow trout.

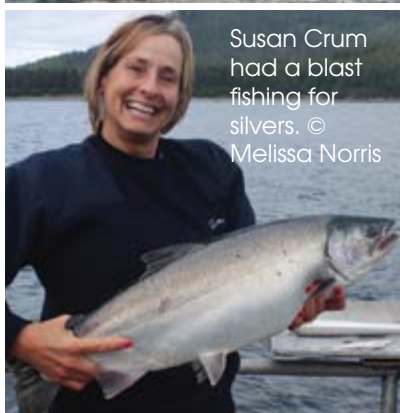
After a scenic cruise across the calm waters of the Sound, we anchored and Matt began to set up the baits. The group agreed that the plan was to fish with a "halibut priority," meaning that once everyone was satisfied with their catch, we would target different species as time allowed. Depending on conditions, Matt uses either salmon or herring for bait, sometimes adding chum to the mix or some flash with a jig. His preferred tackle includes Seeker Alaskan Series rods, which



Captain Matt hoists up Denny Crum's freezer-destined keeper. © Melissa Norris



The custom 33-foot *Sweet' Pea*. © Whittier Marine Charters



Susan Crum had a blast fishing for silvers. © Melissa Norris



Future deckhands for Whittier Marine Charters. © Whittier Marine Charters

are definitely stout enough to stand up to hefty 'buts. Each rod was paired with a 2-speed Avet Pro EXW 4/02 reel with Fins 80-pound braid, making a solid and reliable combination. A set of 50-pound class jigging sticks matched with Accurate Boss reels also stood by for rockfish, lingcod, or those who prefer lighter tackle.

Matt had us drop our lines in about 200 feet of water somewhere off Montague Island. Nicknamed "The Land of Giants," this area has come to be well known for its ability to produce halibut over 100 pounds. The first fish landed was a Pacific cod, not the target species, but a darn tasty diversion. Anyone who fishes with any degree of regularity in Alaska knows these abundant fish are delicious, with succulent white fillets. I'm happy to take some home whenever the opportunity presents itself.

Susan hooked the first halibut, a twenty-five pounder that was enough to make her beam, while Denny followed soon after with one in the high thirties. That turned out to be enough for them. Denny made it clear he wasn't out trophy hunting ... this trip was more about making memories and bringing back great fillets for the table. By this point, Donna had reeled in several in a row, but kept releasing until she caught one in the thirty-pound range. Melissa had the biggest catch of the day, a super-healthy fish around forty-five pounds. I caught mine, while Chuck brought in another fish weighing around thirty-five. Captain Matt shared that harvest reductions taken by both the commercial and charter sectors have seemed to help improve the halibut fishing in recent years. He noted that there definitely seemed to be more fish from older

age classes showing up on the Whittier docks. "There was a time when it was hard to consistently find nice-sized halibut without going to the open Gulf of Alaska. I still have a love for the Gulf, but the fishing is good inside, too." This observation was definitely music to my ears, especially coming from someone whose perspective is founded on many years of experience in Prince William Sound and the Gulf.

Since everyone was happy with their halibut haul, we decided to forgo our under twenty-eight-inch fish and moved towards Knight Island to mooch for silvers. Mooching is great fun and gives anglers a chance to experience some pretty acrobatic silver salmon action. After a short search, Matt found a school of silvers and soon everyone was in on the hunt. Once again, Melissa turned out to be a natural, landing several fish early on and Denny looked like a pro. Time wound down before we could each land our full limit, but no one was disappointed. With the last days of August closing in, it was nearing the end of the silver season. We were just grateful to be taking home some fresh fillets, and mine were destined for a family barbecue. We got back to the harbor right around 6 PM, loaded our gear and headed for the tunnel. It was a long, but satisfying day and nothing beats fresh salmon and halibut straight from the ocean.

Whittier Marine Charters

After graduating from the University of Alaska Fairbanks with a degree in Wildlife and Fisheries Management, Matt Kopeck decided a desk job could wait and began working with a fishing outfitter based in Valdez. He was hooked on the business and soon struck out to start his own company, purchasing his main vessel, the *Sweet' Pea* in 2001. Whittier Marine was born and Captain Matt has now been steadily fishing Prince William Sound for over twenty years. Over time, the business has grown to include Whittier Boat Rentals and a small shop which offers bait, tackle, and ice, as well as a variety of Alaskan gifts and art. In 2014, Matt teamed up with friend and boat builder Jeff Johnson of Peregrine Falcon Alaska to build two new custom boats, each specifically crafted to commercial specifications for Prince William Sound. These vessels offer the right combination of speed, reliability, and range.

The Whittier Marine crew is rounded out with veteran Captain "Too Deep" Ted Raynor, an Alaskan character who was perfecting deep-drop fishing back when it was just called fishing. All shoreside tasks are handled by Greg Clifford, who heads up the office as manager of Whittier Boat Rentals. The newest addition to the team is Captain Julie Adams, who wisely splits her time between the waters of Whittier and

Kona, HI. Finally, Matt's wife, Meagan, anchors the operation with an endless amount of behind-the-scenes work, while raising their two young sons (the company's future deckhands). Together, the group boasts a wealth of practical knowledge about Prince William Sound, from its waters, wildlife, and fisheries, to its geography, local history and current affairs.

What I appreciate and remember most about Captain Matt is the perpetual smile on his face. Looking back through the photos from our trip I saw that the smile never wavered. Even during our discussion about recent fisheries regulation and allocation issues which have dealt Alaskan charter businesses deep cuts, he was calm and easy going, just grateful for all he's gotten to experience so far. The passion for fishing and boating have been in his blood since childhood and he was quick to share: "There's no place I would rather be than on the ocean." It's easy to see why customers return from the way he interacts with people: quiet, easy-going, reliably bringing home his catch and enjoying his time with fellow anglers.

Getting There

With a single lane stretching 2.5 miles, The Anton Anderson Memorial Tunnel connects Bear Valley to Whittier and has the distinction of being the longest

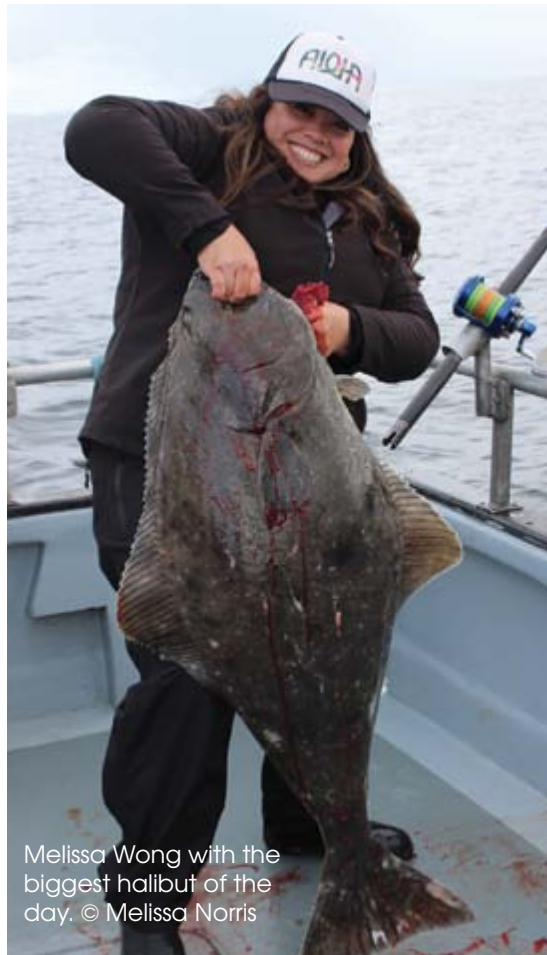
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Melissa Wong with the biggest halibut of the day. © Melissa Norris

combined vehicle-railroad tunnel in North America. Vehicles stage in several lanes, until each is green-lighted for the one-way run. The process is simple: Every hour on the hour visitors can head out of Whittier and every half hour on the hour they can travel into Whittier. While it only takes about 10 minutes to get through the tunnel, give yourself up to 30 minutes for delays if you have a scheduled trip or activity departing from the harbor. Whittier was originally used as a passage by Native Alaskans, before Russians and American settlers arrived, who explored the area during the days of the Gold Rush and sought access to Cook Inlet and the Interior. The city was formally established during World War II by the U.S. Army. In 1945, the Federal Railroad was brought to Whittier as a main debarkation point, leading to the creation of what is now the Anton Anderson Tunnel. Current-day Whittier is home to a little over 200 year-round residents, with the majority of the population living “under one roof” in a building called the Begich Towers. Most of the people are employed as either support staff for the Alaska Marine Highway or the city itself, while others make their living working in local industries like tourism, recreation or commercial fishing.

Whittier Fishing/Hunting Seasons

Whittier Marine Charters starts its season as soon as the weather begins to cooperate, usually in early April. There are plenty of opportunities for specials, including overnight, double-limit multi-species charters or discounted day-trips and boat rentals. The early season often yields great results without having to fight the crowds or pay peak rates. Typically, halibut fishing is consistent from April through October with the very best fishing from May through August. While halibut are the most sought-after species, Matt and his captains are definitely not strangers to lingcod, rockfish, and salmon. Last year, August proved to be an extremely busy and successful month thanks to the strength of an outstanding silver run. When the silvers are close, half- and three-quarter day-trips are offered as well as full-day, multi-species trips.

I asked Matt about shark fishing in the area. Through the early 2000s, salmon shark were quite prevalent in the Sound and Matt was running up to twenty shark trips per season. When shark numbers declined around 2005,

most operators ceased fishing for them. Recently, it seems that salmon shark are showing up more regularly. Matt has been involved in a satellite tagging program and is offering a limited number of trips each July and August.

When not out seeking fish, Whittier Marine Charters also operates as a licensed big-game transporter. Their boats provide water taxi and live-aboard options throughout Prince William Sound, offering hunters unguided trips for spring and fall bears as well as Sitka black-tailed deer.



Rockfish and lingcod are possible on multi-species charters or DIY adventures. © Whittier Marine Charters

Boat Rentals in Whittier

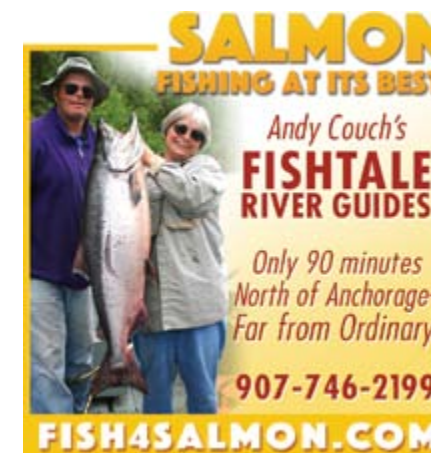
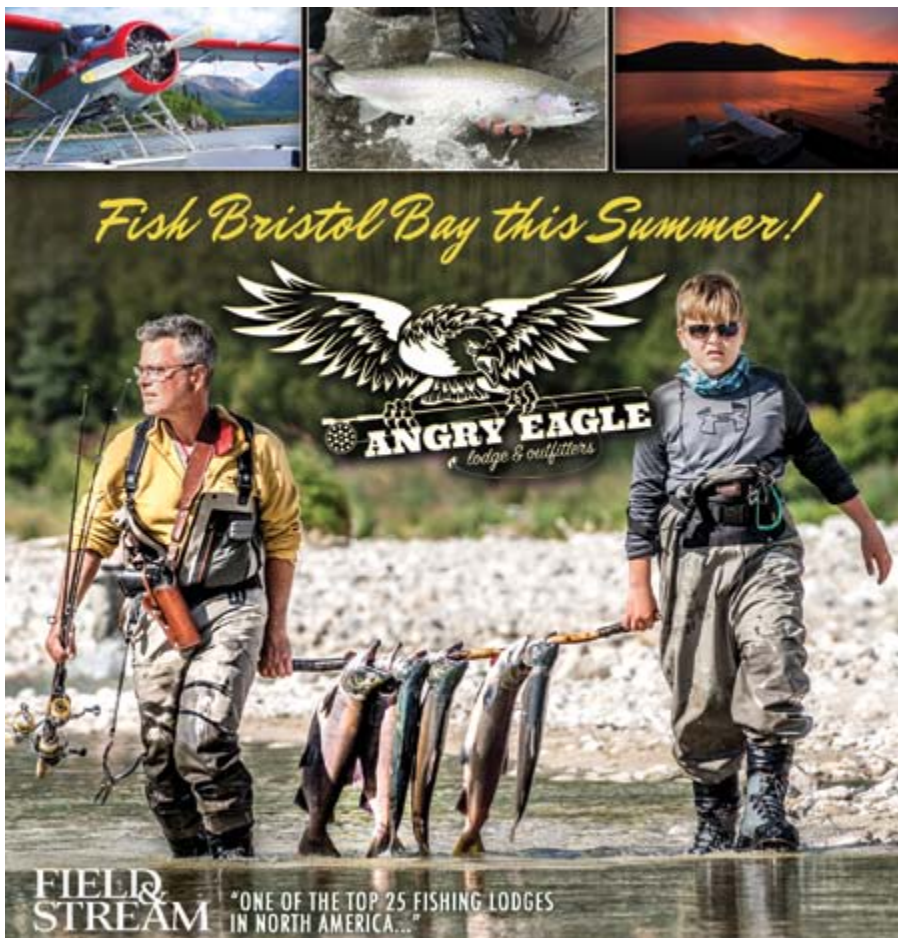
If you are a savvy boater and don't want the expense of owning and maintaining a vessel, renting is a great way to go. Sharing the costs by working with friends can easily take care of several families' fishing needs for the entire year.

Whittier Boat Rentals currently offers five boats for rent including the two Peregrine offshores, two Hewescraft Pacific Cruisers, and a Trophy Pro 2359. Each boat is well-outfitted with all of the latest safety and electronic gear. High-quality tackle and shrimp pots are available for rent, while bait and tackle are available for purchase in the shop.

Whether you want an experienced captain to do all the work and put you on the fish or if renting a boat for several days with friends sounds like the way to go, Whittier is just around the corner from Anchorage. Whittier Marine Charters and Whittier Boat Rentals have the experience and equipment to meet your needs and exceed your expectations. Contact Captain Matt Kopec at 907-440-9510 to schedule your days.

Follow Whittier Marine Charters and Whittier Boat Rental on Facebook to keep in touch with their specials and to see some of the great fish they catch this summer!

Melissa Norris is Publisher of Fish Alaska and Hunt Alaska magazines.





Andrew Ingram with a beautiful, June Deshka River Chinook from a few years back. © George Krumm

[CREEL]

Summer, Summer, Summer Story by George Krumm

Summer is here, no doubt about it. The earth is still tilting, the northern hemisphere angled more closely towards the sun every day. Temperatures, both on land and of the water, are warming. The days are long, and life springs forth at a rapid pace in Alaska during June. Fireweed seems to be an inch taller each day, and buds appear at the top of the plants. The food chain is in high gear everywhere. The mountains began to green up from the bases in May, and by late June they'll be green as high up as vegetation grows. The time of plenty has begun and will continue for a while in the Great Land.

Angling opportunities abound in June. The hardest part is sometimes deciding what you want to fish for, and how or where you want to do it.

The lakes have been ice-free for about a month. The chironomid hatches peak in early June, soon to be overshadowed by the damselfly migration that will peak the second- or third week, and dragonfly nymph migration that will begin in earnest the latter half of the month. Temperatures are optimum early-to-mid month, and

with their metabolisms amped-up, trout will be feeding with reckless abandon. Early June, with the smorgasbord of chironomids, damselfly and dragons, is sublime in stillwater, though trout fishing in Alaska's lakes is excellent all spring, summer and fall.

King fishing will peak in many streams during June, but some are just getting started depending on where in the state you go. Kings are also still available in saltwater at many ports.

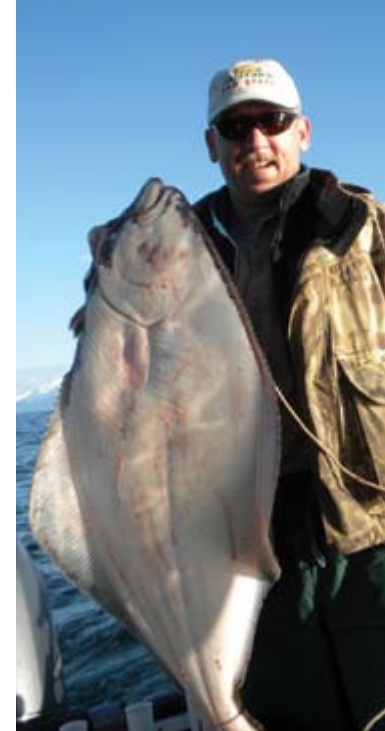
Early-run Kenai reds will make their appearance in the second half of the month. Whether you fish for them in the main stem Kenai or the Russian, late June is a great time to fill the freezer with brilliant red, fat-laden sockeye fillets. Late in the month, Bristol Bay area sockeye will arrive.

In June, halibut fishing will get hotter every day in most ports where anglers target flatfish. Most halibut that spent the winter out along the edge of the continental shelf will have migrated back to nearshore waters. This issue of *Fish Alaska* has three great articles about chasin' 'but, and one about halibut combo-trips. Multi-species trips have become more common over the years, and bottom fishing in general is great in June. Of course, lingcod are off limits until July in some places; be sure to check the regs.

Summer solstice is on June 21 this year. I remember one memorable solstice of days gone by. I'd fished halibut out of Ninilchik in the morning out of my own boat. We limited, including a couple over 100 pounds caught in just 75 feet of water. That evening, we fished the Kasilof for kings and each caught one. The next morning found us halfway back to Anchorage with red-rimmed eyes, staring into the Russian-Kenai confluence where we each caught a limit of early-run reds. That afternoon, we dropped float tubes in Alder Pond near Portage where we caught and released a fair number of rainbows.

On yet another, similar June trip, my son and I launched the boat at Deep Creek and caught several nice halibut and two kings by noon. We processed our fish, took a nap, and launched the boat in the Kenai at Riverbend that evening. We hooked five kings in the 30- to 45-pound class that evening on naked Kwikfish. This cornucopia of abundance and variety is what June in Alaska is all about to me. Go out and gitcha some. I'd write more, but I'm going to follow my own advice ...

George Krumm is editor of Fish Alaska magazine and Hunt Alaska magazine.



The author with his favorite-size flattie. © George Krumm



Chase Breager plays a Cook Inlet, early-June Chinook © Gary Bartelson



Editor George Krumm and son Blake with nice June fish from the Ninilchik area. © Gary Bartelson

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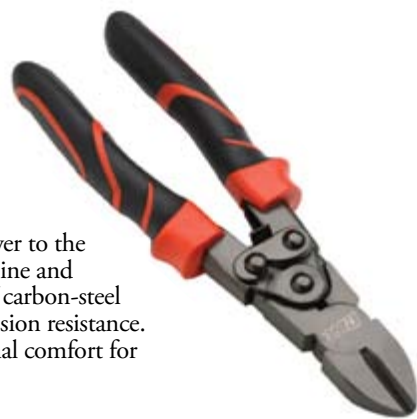
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P-Line 8-inch Compression Cutters

www.p-line.com

The P-Line Compression Cutters feature high-leverage handles for 60% more power to the cutting surface. Able to cut large hooks, line and leaders with ease, the cutters are made of carbon-steel with a nickel-plated finish for extra corrosion resistance. The large, ergonomic grips offer additional comfort for whatever the task at hand.



Caddis Game Changer Stocking Foot Wader

www.caddiswaders.com

Our testers really like this new wader from Caddis Wading Systems. The built-in fly and tackle box is very handy, as well as the two pockets bookending the box. It allowed our testers to be mobile with enough gear to keep them in the water. The breathable waders are comfortable, light and waterproof, and feature reinforced knees and seat, heavy-duty neoprene feet, built-in gravel guards, wading belt and rings on the suspender straps to attach additional gear. Game Changer waders feature CaddisDry technology which produces a 100% waterproof and breathable wader.



SeaArk 1860 MVJT

www.seaark.com

The 1860 MVJT is just one in the line-up of SeaArk's many jet tunnel hulls. Featuring a jet tunnel hull that is designed to be used with an outboard jet mounted so the intake is higher than the bottom of the boat allows for extreme shallow-water access. Built tough and rugged like all SeaArk boats, it is available with a variety of options and accessories, making it the perfect boat for shallow-water applications in Alaska.

Eagle Claw TroKar TK3 and TK4 Hooks

www.eagleclaw.com

The TK3 and TK4 are wide-gap, medium-wire, lancet circle hooks that feature TroKar's faster, deeper, surer, point-penetration. Available in offset (TK3) or non-offset (TK4) versions, each hook features a welded eye and a black-chrome finish for corrosion resistance. TroKar hooks are manufactured using cold-forged, high-carbon, American-made steel and offer the sharpest hook points on the market. Designed and manufactured in Denver, CO, the TK3 and TK4 lancet circle hooks are available in sizes 1/0- to 9/0 and are well-suited for a wide array of target species including salmon, rockfish, and halibut.



Okuma Tesoro Star Drag Reel

www.okumafishingusa.com

Packing all its strength and updated technology into size 10- and 12 reels, the Tesoro Star Drag features 6061-T6 forged then machine-cut aluminum frames, side-plates and spool, as well as a Mechanical Stabilizing System to keep all key components aligned and running smoothly. A silent and smooth carbonite drag system puts out a fish-stopping 22 pounds of drag, while 46 inches of line-retrieve-per-turn helps anglers gain ground fast. We look forward to testing this in the saltwater in 2018.



GOTEM Baits Transformer Series

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This life-like octopus-style bait is made of top-quality silicone and is perfect for halibut, lingcod, rockfish and will probably get bit by most other saltwater fish in Alaska. The bait is eight inches long and comes in two parts allowing for color changes and replacement of parts due to wear without having to replace the whole bait. The complete bait comes with hook assembly, available with either a J- or circle-hook and is offered in a variety of colors, including UV, GLO, and natural combinations. They look really hearty and we look forward to testing them this summer.



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[ONLINE]

Our site is as busy as the anglers swarming to the state's many waterways this time of year. This month's content can help you have a more successful and enjoyable open-water season:

June 2018 Highlights:

➤ Running low on recipes for this season's catch? We're featuring a crab recipe series this month with mouth-watering recipes from Slippery Salmon Bar & Grill! Check back often for more!

➤ We've just uploaded the second blog in our series with Alaska Drift Away Fishing titled *CFS: Water Flow Tips*. Find it online and keep an eye out for additional installments in the coming months.

➤ New on the site is a blog from Scotty titled *How to Use a Downrigger* and an informative video titled *Downrigger Brake Care and Maintenance* to help keep your downrigger in tip-top shape. Check all videos out at www.fishalaskamagazine.com/gear-videos/

➤ Don't forget! Mention their Angler's Special when visiting Birch Ridge Golf Course in Soldotna this month and receive 50% off on golf and cart, or buy two buckets of balls, get one bucket free. Free bucket must be equal or lesser value of two purchased. Must have this offer or printed email when redeeming the offer. May not be combined with any other offers.

➤ We've just posted a new Kenai River destination blog, *Anglers Lodge: Many and Varied Adventures*, by Dr. Wally Balcerzak. Find it all here: www.fishalaskamagazine.com/anglers-lodge-many-and-varied-adventures/

➤ The deadline to enter the 2018 *Fish Alaska* Sweepstakes sponsored by Sportsman's Warehouse is fast approaching! Enter now through June 15th! One lucky winner and their guest will fish out of Togiak River Lodge in the pristine Bristol Bay region for an epic fishing adventure targeting salmon and rainbow trout, plus a \$500 gift card to Sportsman's Warehouse! Visit SportsmansWarehouse.com for entry and contest rules.

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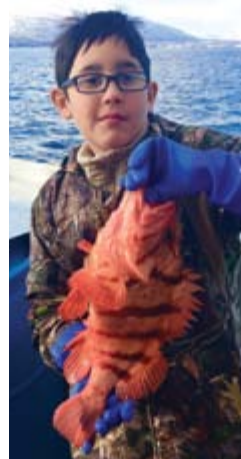
FISHING FOR A COMPLIMENT



Karen Todd beaming with her first winter king salmon of 2018 caught in Kachemak Bay out of Homer, AK, in late March.



Abbey Wilwert of Juneau, AK, with a healthy 15-pound king caught on the first day of spring.



Josean Olivieri with a nice tiger rockfish he caught at Zachar Bay on Kodiak Island in 2017.



Bowman Sidelinger and his son Chase of Halibut Cove, AK, presenting their catch.



Naomi Norris, 9, and Taylee Weiss, 12, size up a nice Whittier halibut in 2017.



Brent McChesney and Cody Herbison landed this beautiful coho on the Inside Passage during their first fishing trip to Alaska.



Brothers Mark and Pete Klover caught these Prince of Wales Island Kings in July 2017.

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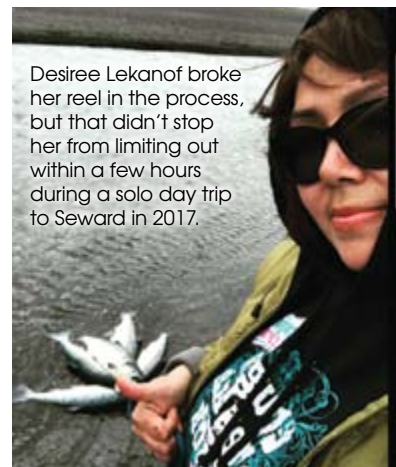


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Cole Baxter was the overall winner of the Valdez Fish Derbies' 2017 Silver Derby with this 15.62-pound lunger he caught with Shark Tooth Charters.



Desiree Lekanof broke her reel in the process, but that didn't stop her from limiting out within a few hours during a solo day trip to Seward in 2017.



Kathie Hoskins Burkell of Mill Valley, CA, showing off her king caught out of Elfin Cove in August 2017.



Lucas Seymour fought this rainbow on the Kenai just below Skilak Lake in October 2017.



Frank and Brent Varriale, both of Idaho, with a matching set of Kodiak Island silvers in September 2017.



Shannon and Angie Bolog of the Mat-Su Valley with a nice silver from Willow, AK, caught in the summer of 2017.

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Dave Phillips caught this blushing 'bow while fishing the upper Kenai River with Randa's Guide Service after his recent move to Kenai in October 2017.



Ryan Wong with an impressive halibut caught out of Whittier last July.

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Kid Fishing That's Easier on the Fish & Adults

Story & photos by JD Richey

Though I'm out on the water nearly every day guiding adult anglers, I love to spend my off days fishing with my kid, his cousins and their friends (all are age 4- to 10). Now, I know what you are thinking: Kid fishing is all about tip tangles (on every cast), wickedly twisted line (spinning reels...ugh!) and gut-hooked trout, right?

Untangle, untwist, cut, snip, retie, unhook...repeat. It doesn't have to be this way, though! I've done plenty of kiddie fishing in my day and have come up with several improvements that make it much easier and enjoyable for everyone. Below are some suggestions.

Kid-Friendly Spinning Reel

Spinning reels can obviously be a nightmare for beginners but my little dude at about age five quickly got tired of the close-faced, trigger-spin reel that I originally bought him ("Dad, you don't use these, I want a reel like yours."), so I had to suck it up and get him one. While online one day, I randomly stumbled onto the Wave Spin Reel website which claimed their reels have "zero tangles and longer casts." If true, it sounded like the perfect reel for the kiddo, so I ordered one. I'm not even sure how they really work, but the basic concept is the outer edge of the spool is festooned with little wave (or shark tooth) shapes that somehow keep the loops out of the line.

Well, it's kinda like magic! Kids can cast like lil' pros with the reel and while I'm not so sure about the "zero tangles" part, these things definitely reduce the frequency of tangles. The company doesn't manufacture those reels anymore but you can still find them online at eBay and Amazon.

Of course, you can go with a standard spinning reel too. Just teach your little ones to pay attention to when loops form on the spool. If you can catch those before they become big snarls, you'll spend more time fishing than doing crochet.

I'd certainly stay away from baitcasting reels in the beginning. Kids can graduate to those down the road but let them get



There's nothing better than watching a young angler catch and release a big trout!

proficient with spinning gear first.

Kid-proof line:

When mini anglers are involved, forget about regular mono. All it takes is a tip wrap and a couple cranks on the reel, winding against the drag, and you've got twist city. Fortunately, there are plenty of new types of line out there.

I've been spooling up little angler reels with light, braided line lately. It's generally limper than similar pound-test mono, and although mono and braid both twist, the twists in braid don't cause nearly the headaches that twists in mono on a spinning reel can cause . . . which is a major plus. When smaller fish are involved, I'll go with 6- or 10-pound braid, which has the diameter of cobweb. This has the added benefit of producing longer casts.

The main downside of braid is that it isn't cheap. However, it does last a long time. Also, you'll typically have to run some sort of leader between it and the hook, which makes the rigging a bit

more complicated. Overall, however, the advantages out-weigh the cons.

Hook Safety

The most important thing you can do to prep for a kid-fishing outing is to smash the barbs down on your hooks. Trust me, at some point somebody's going to get one in the finger or the ear! Barbless hooks, however, can turn an accidental hooking from an ER visit to a minor "boo-boo." On that same note, switching out all treble hooks on lures to singles is also a good idea.

In the early days of "kid guiding" with bobbers and worms or salmon eggs, I started feeling bad about how many fish were swallowing the hook. Small fry anglers don't really have the "feel" for when to set the hook and you often end up having to cut the leader to try to avoid hurting a trout or grayling that's got the worm all the way down its gullet.

I kept messing with hook styles to try to lower fish mortality (we release a lot of the fish we catch on kid outings

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because I think it's important to get them thinking about conservation early on). Eventually, I gave small circle hooks a try and now they are a major part of my mini-angler arsenal.

With a red worm end-hooked on one of these babies, a trout can slurp the bait down for a half-hour and not swallow it, which is handy when the kid becomes distracted with skipping rocks or a peanut butter & jelly sandwich. Because of the way the bobber keeps a little tension on the line, almost every fish is pinned right in the top of the nose.

An added benefit of the circle hook is I am less likely to get one buried in the back of my ear when the little ones are casting. That's not to say it can't happen but the design of the hook is such that I feel a little safer when standing in the firing line. Small circles (I use size 8- to 12) are really small and don't have a lot of shank to grab onto, so be sure to have a small set of needle-nose pliers with you for removing them from fish. Or the odd ear. Try these suggestions and your next kid-fishing mission should go a lot more smoothly!

JD Richey is a contributing editor for Fish Alaska magazine and can be reached through his website at www.fishwithjd.com.



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Need for a Deshka River/Susitna River King Salmon Management Plan

Story and photo by Andy Couch

Most Alaskans involved with salmon fisheries and many visitors already know that since 2007, king salmon returns have declined throughout the state of Alaska. Fishing regulations for sport, personal-use, commercial, and even subsistence king salmon fisheries in various locations throughout Alaska have been more restrictive since 2007.

The Susitna River drainage is acknowledged by the Alaska Department of Fish and Game (ADF&G) as having the 4th largest annual king salmon return in the state, and since the 1970s has supported annual opportunities for sport anglers to harvest the official state fish. Last year, only one of the Susitna River drainage's 13 king salmon spawning escapement goals was met (Little Willow Creek).

After analyzing data collected last summer and developing a Deshka king salmon return projection indicating the 2018 Deshka River king salmon run may not have enough fish to reach the stream's 13,000—28,000 king salmon escapement goal, the Department closed all king salmon harvest, by emergency order, throughout the entire Susitna River drainage for the start of the 2018 season. In addition, the Department also closed commercial salmon netting in the Northern District of Upper Cook Inlet until late June.

These were huge decisions that affected the livelihoods of many Alaskans and non-residents alike. The decisions disrupted employment and vacation plans for both residents and summer visitors, some of whom had already made reservations for air travel, rental vehicles, fishing trips, and lodging in the area. The decisions further cut a significant amount of revenue from ADF&G's own budget, since the Sportfish Division budget is heavily dependent upon fishing license and king salmon stamp sales combined with federal match monies from taxes on fishing gear. When the sustainability of the fisheries is at stake, tough decisions have to be made.

Late-Decision Timing Compounds Problems

Upper Cook Inlet sockeye salmon projections became available to commercial fishing interests in November 2017. Sockeye salmon projections, in combination with management plans developed for the commercial fisheries, provide a much earlier and more consistent level of regulation certainty at the start of each new season than what is currently available for the Northern Cook Inlet sport king salmon fisheries. In contrast, ADF&G's Deshka River king salmon projection, vital to the Northern Cook Inlet sport fisheries, did not become available until March 13, 2018—the very day restrictive emergency orders were issued.

Likely, part of the reason this projection was released more than three months after the commercial-oriented sockeye salmon projections is that there is currently no management plan in place for Northern Cook Inlet king salmon fisheries that provides any regulation certainty based on the Deshka River pre-season king salmon projection. In 2018, therefore, ADF&G did not release the Deshka River king salmon projection until it decided the regulatory package it would use to address that level of projected return. Department leaders have agreed to work toward earlier releases of such critical information in the future.

While the Department has dealt with few pre-season Deshka River king salmon projections coming in below the established escapement goal, ADF&G has been making pre-season regulation adjustments to Susitna River drainage king salmon regulations, by emergency order, every year since 2013. These adjustments have been at least partially based on pre-season Deshka River king salmon projections. Therefore, in order to provide a more consistent and predictable Susitna River drainage king salmon sport fishery, regulation adjustments based on projections should be documented in a management plan.

One advantage for listing standard adjustments for regulations in a management plan is that in future years it would provide the public an opportunity to propose adaptive management changes. Emergency regulations, outside a plan, do not provide that opportunity since they usually expire and are no longer in effect



Mat-Su Valley king salmon are a prized species by anglers from all over the world.

during times they would normally be considered by the Alaska Board of Fisheries. In other words, a management plan would provide more public opportunity to participate in the regulation adjustment process.

Tom Brookover, Director of Sport Fisheries, acknowledges that a Deshka River/Susitna River king salmon management plan would likely reduce some of the Department's management flexibility, and has agreed to work with the public on such a king salmon plan proposal, to be submitted according to the Alaska Board of Fisheries schedule, with the thought that a plan should provide a higher level of certainty concerning sport-fishery regulations. A well-developed plan should also facilitate delivering pre-season emergency regulations to the public in a timelier manner.

ADF&G Commissioner Sam Cotten, Director Brookover, and Director of Commercial Fisheries Scott Kelley were asked at a March 2018 Matanuska-Susitna Borough Fish

and Wildlife Commission meeting, "At what escapement projection level does the Department believe the Deshka River king salmon sport fishery should be totally closed from the start of the season as a necessary conservation measure?" Commissioner Cotten's responded, "When we project with no fishing we won't make escapement, with our best scientific information, that's when we consider a complete closure."

In early 2018, the Department certainly considered a complete closure for the Deshka River and entire Susitna drainage king salmon sport fishery, based on such a low pre-season projection. However, the Department decided to allow a single-hook, restricted king salmon sport fishery on the Deshka River and Yentna River drainage portion of the Susitna drainage. The Department decided to close all king salmon fishing (including catch-and-release fishing) in the remainder of the drainage. Based on in-season projections, ADF&G has acknowledged it could liberalize or further close the 2018 fishery. It remains uncertain at what run projection levels the fishery could be liberalized or at what run levels the fishery could be entirely closed. Also it remains uncertain at what run projection levels the Yentna drainage portion of the fishery could or might be adjusted. To better inform the sport-fishing public of potential regulation changes, such trigger points should be included in any management plan proposal.

What might happen on the Susitna drainage in 2018: From discussion with ADF&G Area Management Biologist Sam Ivey, I understand there is potential for some liberalization of the Deshka River fishery with a Deshka River weir king salmon count in excess of 3400 fish by June 12th. On the other hand, if less than that number have passed the weir through June 12th there is potential for a closure of even catch-and-release king salmon fishing.

This article was written in hopes of earlier projection announcements, more regulation certainty, more public participation in the process, and better Susitna drainage king salmon management.

Andy Couch has been guiding king salmon fishing trips on Alaska's Little Susitna and Susitna River drainages since the 1980s. He is also a Matanuska-Susitna Borough Fish and Wildlife Commission member and writes a summer fishing column for the Frontiersman newspaper.

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[FLY]

Lefty's Deceiver

Originator: Lefty Kreh

Story and photos by Mike Brown

With this month's magazine being the saltwater issue, I always struggle to figure out a worthy fly to match the theme for Alaska. With the passing away of Lefty Kreh, I thought what better way to pay a little tribute to one of fly fishing culture's most iconic personalities than tying Lefty's Deceiver.

Lefty created the Deceiver in the late 1950s as a streamer that would be easy to cast in the wind and would not foul or wrap around the bend of the hook, like so many streamers before this. The original version was tied in all-white, but as time moved forward, a different-colored wing was added. This allows the pattern to mimic so much more.

Lefty's Deceiver is an easy pattern to tie and can be used in a lot of different areas throughout Alaska. Whether you are casting from the beach in Seward, Homer, along the shorelines around Deep Creek or Kodiak, a stripped Deceiver can put you on a lot of salmon. You could even tie small versions to imitate salmon fry that those hungry trout are foraging on.

Thank you Lefty, for all you have done for us in the fly fishing culture. You will be sadly missed.

Mike Brown is the owner of Mossy's Fly Shop in Anchorage, AK. He is a lifelong Alaskan with a passion for family, fly fishing and fly tying.

MATERIALS:

Hook: Daiichi 2546 size 1- through 2/0

Tail: Four or five Strung Saddle Hackles white

Flash 1: Krystal Flash silver

Flash 2: Polar Flash pearl or medium pearl Flashabou

Body: Veevus Mini Flat Braid pearl

Collar: Bucktail white

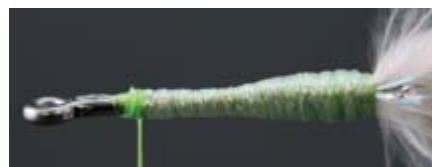
Wing: Bucktail chartreuse

Throat: Krystal Flash red

Thread: Veevus Power Thread 140 chartreuse



Step 5: Wrap the thread back to the front, where you started. Tie in a length of pearl Mini Flat Braid.



Step 6: Wrap the Mini Flat Braid back to the base of the tail and back forward.



Step 7: To make the collar, take a small clump of white bucktail, approximately 1/2 a pencil width. Measure this out to be about half the length of the tail. Cut the clipped ends at an angle and tie in the clump to one side of the shank. Repeat this step for the other side. Before tightening it down secure, roll your fingers and spread the hair around the shank. Tighten down.



Step 8: Take a little bigger clump of chartreuse bucktail for the wing and tie in on top of the shank. You want the wing to be approximately half the length of the collar.



Step 9: Take a few strands of red Krystal Flash, fold in half over the thread, and tie in on the bottom of the shank. Trim the flash at the end of the hook point.



Step 10: Build the head, whip-finish and glue.



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[BOATS]

Compact Saltwater Boats

Story by Troy Buzalsky

The morning starts off perfectly as you finish your first cup of coffee and walk towards your boat, the *Weekend Warrior*. The sunrise delivers a breathtaking, amber-red, cloud-spattered radiance as first light confirms lifting fog with clear skies, and the water at slack tide lays flat—the only ripples caused by active sea otters playing in the kelp beds. Crossing the estuary and heading towards the fishing grounds is nothing short of nirvana as you feel at one with your boat and the vastness and beauty of the Big Blue. Fishing proves excellent, and as you near your catch limits, you time your return trip to sync with the moon-driven flood tide. Wind waves start to build, and before long the waves turn to chop as they grow in intensity. Quicker than a bathroom break, the conditions become intolerable as the wind, the waves, and the coming rain start to pound down relentlessly. It's at this point the *Weekend Warrior* is not only your point of refuge, but also your safe journey home.

Fishing and boating in the saltwater environment is an entirely different animal than fishing a river, lake, or inlet. Boat selection, therefore, is a critical decision, and just because you have a *Weekend Warrior* does not always mean it's up for the task. Hull design, cockpit, dance-floor configuration, power, electronics, fuel supply, and made-for-salt features are all key elements in a made-for-salt boat. Add safety redundancies and a capable captain and you are now ready to travel the salt safe-and-sound, albeit, still subject to Mother Nature, and your traveling partner Murphy.

This column features four of the premier boating manufacturers: Rogue Jet Boatworks, Weldcraft, Hewescraft, and KingFisher, who are making compact ocean-going vessels ideal for those times when the inshore anglers venture outside the inlets, pulling true "double-duty."

Rogue Jet Boatworks

If you're an old salt in the heavy-gauge, all-welded aluminum boat industry then suffice it to say, you've heard the name Bruce Wassom, owner and operator of Rogue Jet Boatworks in White City, Oregon. Bruce has been turning sheets of aluminum into masterpieces of performance for more than 40 years, having designed and built nearly four thousand boats for the general public, as well as law enforcement, fire/rescue departments, and fish and game agencies. Four-thousand boats . . . that's a lot of boats, and a lot of happy boaters!



Rogue Coastal 24-foot. © Rogue Jet Boatworks



Rogue Coastal 22-foot. © Rogue Jet Boatworks

Although the name would suggest Rogue primarily builds jet boats, that's not the case; rather, more the roots of the company. Today, Rogue Jet Boatworks builds about 80% of its custom boats in a non-jet configuration, utilizing outboard and/or inboard stern-drive configurations, including their made-for-big-water Coastal Series. Even so, they still have customers requesting jet-power configurations, especially in the law enforcement and fire/rescue arena.

The Coastal Series is Rogue's answer for that perfect-sized, towable boat that is at home in many of the Northwest's rivers, as well as bays and estuaries, with true offshore capabilities. Available in lengths from 20- to 26 feet, with a standard 102-inch beam and 36-inch sides boasting 32 inches of freeboard, the deep-V design is carefully engineered to be the most seaworthy boat in its class.

The hull is designed and constructed



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Rogue Coastal 23-foot.
© Rogue Jet Boatworks

There are six cabin designs specific to the Coastal Series, including the open with center console, forward windshield, ½-hardtop, ¾-hardtop, and full-hardtop with either a slant-forward or rear-slant windshield. In true saltwater fashion, Rogue compliments the Coastal's interior with twin Bentley Mariner mechanical suspension seats up front to assure maximum comfort in the harshest of seas. The boat's transom offers a conveniently located transom door which works great for netting fish, dragging a big halibut in the boat, or for easy swim-step access. Salty custom features include, but are not limited to, rocket launchers, integrated downrigger bracket mounts, large fuel cells, and super-sized fish boxes.

Being a custom builder, the creativity starts with the imagination of the client, including color selection. To

exclusively with marine-grade 5086 aluminum which is more corrosion resistant and up to 40% stronger than 5082 alloy. The hull features a variable deadrise which cuts through water like a warm knife through butter with its 50-degree bow entry while offering a stable smooth ride with its 18-degree V at the transom. Outboard versions receive an integrated offshore outboard bracket that provides additional bottom surface at the boat's transom increasing wetted surface while providing better overall performance. All Coastal Series boats feature fully-welded (not stitch-welded) box girder floor framing with heavy-duty bulkhead cross members, ¼-inch bottoms, and 1/8-inch sides. When coupled with the welded, slotted chine and rub-rail construction, the boat's structure is as true as it is strong.



Weldcraft 220 Maverick. © Fish Marketing

Made for extreme shallow water performance, SeaArk's extensive line-up of tunnel and jet tunnel hulls. Over built, with strength and durability to handle even the toughest situation. These impressive boats will get you into hard to reach areas, that those without a tunnel hull can not access. The additional options and accessories that can be added make these boats the perfect choice for your shallow water needs.

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provide the highest quality possible, all Rogue Coastal Series Boats receive powder-coating treatment from the gunnel and throughout the interior, including the hardtop or top framing . . . even inside the fish boxes and rod lockers. The exterior of the boat gets dressed with custom 3M vinyl which can be a simple color match or graphics from mild-to-wild, or anything in between.

Rogue is also one of the few manufacturers who custom builds the trailer to perfectly fit the boat. The Guardian Trailer features 100% fully-welded aluminum construction, LED lights, four-wheel surge disc brakes, and oil-bath hubs, all guaranteed to provide years of reliable use. Oh yeah, and the obvious bonus, these trailers are beautiful. For more information go to www.roguejetboats.com.

Weldcraft

Fifty years is not only half of a century, it's often a time to celebrate and remember. The year 2018 serves as Weldcraft Boat's 50th anniversary as a premier boat builder in the heavy-gauge, welded-aluminum boating world.

From a pioneering standpoint, Norm Riddle started Weldcraft Boats almost by chance. In 1965, Norm and a friend slogged by boat into the Hells Canyon Wilderness and up the menacing rapids of the Snake River. The larger-than-life adventure got the wheels of innovation turning in Norm. This adventure was ground zero for Weldcraft.

In 1968, Norm started Weldcraft Custom Boats, which quickly and successfully earned a reputation as the area's elite boat builder. Norm designed his trademark vessels to safely navigate into the depths of Hells Canyon and its many classified and boulder-strewn rapids. It's fair to say Norm Riddle and Weldcraft have helped shape the all-welded, heavy-gauge boating industry as we know it today, and Renaissance Marine Group is dedicated to picking up where Norm left off. Crafting boats from 17- to 30 feet in length, Weldcraft Boats has a platform for the true boating enthusiast, including those salty dawgs that enjoy inshore and offshore adventures.

For the weekend warrior, outdoor enthusiast, and hardcore-fishing zealot, the Weldcraft Maverick couples size and performance synergistically for maximum on-the-water enjoyment. The Maverick is available in the 220 and 240 versions which are 24- and 26 feet respectively, measured from bow tip to off-shore bracket (the same measurements that the USCG utilizes) and can be configured

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Weldcraft Maverick 220. © Fish Marketing



KingFisher 2325. © KingFisher Boats

with outboard power options up to 350 horsepower. With a 102-inch beam and 39-inch sides, fishing is safe and pleasurable.

Weldcraft's parent company, Renaissance Marine Group, has taken hull design to the next level, and the Maverick's hull is engineered with an 18-degree transom with a 28-degree forward deadrise, and a 32-degree bow deadrise. The bottom is manufactured with 3/16-inch, 5052 marine aluminum and utilizes Weldcraft's signature reverse chine. This hull design allows for quick on-step performance with a smooth ride through chop.

The Maverick Series is available with a standard softtop or optional hardtop for complete year-round comfort. Bow access is made easy with the five-piece, walk-through windshield, and the under-bow is treated with sound-deadening foam, a big perk when pounding wind waves and swells throughout the day.

A lifelong trademark of Weldcraft is attention to detail and true craftsmanship. For more information go to www.weldcraftmarine.com.

KingFisher

KingFisher is the fastest-growing designer, builder and marketer of welded, heavy-gauge sportfishing boats in North America,

distributing 33 models and supported by a 50-dealer network strategically located across the United States, including two in Alaska: Boat Shop Inc. in Fairbanks and Alaska Mining and Diving in Anchorage.

Each KingFisher Boat is built one at a time by hand at the prestigious KingFisher Center of Excellence near Swan Lake in Vernon, British Columbia. The facility has earned the reputation as being the most modern, technologically advanced and greenest facility for welded, heavy-gauge aluminum boats in the world, and serves as spawning ground for KingFisher innovation; with five new models coming to market in 2018.

The KingFisher Coastal Series features advancements in engineering that allow for the production of hulls with clean lines and ride performance matched with style, strength and durability. The KingFisher Coastal Series boasts five models ranging from 22- to 28 feet, designated as the Escape Hardtop with its aft-sloping cabin, or the Coastal Express with its forward-leaning, pilothouse-style cabin.

If you're an avid saltwater angler it will be obvious that the design team at KingFisher fishes, too. For starters, the weather-tight cockpit is ergonomic and spacious, with minimum ceiling heights of over six feet with multiple seating options available including bench seats, cooler seats, bed conversions, and even flush-toilet upgradability.

The rear fishing deck is wide-open and features twin, super-sized in-floor fish lockers with a transom cutting board and fish locker. The hardtop is equipped with a series of rocket launchers to keep your rods conveniently up and away, and the full-width outboard bracket literally extends the boat two additional feet. The transom also features a KingFisher-exclusive folding transom step-through door, making on-boarding, off-boarding, and loading supplies a simple task. For those long days on the water, an 85-gallon fuel cell comes standard. Both the Escape and Coastal Express can be configured with single- or twin-outboard power and can be ordered with a convenient rear steering navigation station.

To assure outstanding offshore performance, the Coastal Series is designed with a variable deadrise between 16- and 18 degrees depending on the boat's length coupled with a water-slicing bow entry, and an engineered, full-reverse chine which deflects water away from the hull offering a dry and stabilized ride. The hull bottom is literally an engineering marvel, manufactured from a single piece of material with no underwater seams or welds, reducing the potential for leaks or



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crevice corrosion. The boat bottoms are reinforced with compound-angle box stringers, while the sides feature formed, box beam-shaped gunnels for superior strength and seamless construction.

KingFisher's exclusive Pre-Flex technology makes traditional hull design concepts obsolete. The KingFisher hull is built on a jig system, forming the hull with "Pre-Flexed" components. Pre-loading the hull components prior to welding forms a hull with unparalleled strength, impact-resistance, and the comfort of sound-dampening. Once completed, the hull is removed from the jig, remaining in the shape the engineers intended and creating a safe and reliable boat that will last a lifetime.

KingFisher is known for its style, beauty,

and uncompromising craftsmanship. Utilizing the highest-quality PPG coatings and available in 11 colors, all boats receive specialized marine-grade prepping before being coated—gloss for exterior applications and textured speckle coatings for the interiors. Upholstery can be color-coordinated, and all canvas is made from Top Gun fabric. KingFisher boats have not only evolved into pieces of art, but also into family heirlooms, to be treasured and enjoyed.

Kingfisher boats have earned their reputation with the elite in the industry. They are built tough, smart, and safe . . . and guarantee maximum sportfishing versatility for years. To learn more about Kingfisher Boats go to www.kingfisherboats.com.



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Hewescraft Sea Runner.
© Dewey's Cook Inlet

Hewescraft Boats

Back in 1964, Dean and Melinda Dewey started Dewey's Cook Inlet selling inflatables, sailboats and outboards. The business prospered over the years and adding aluminum boats to their boating line-up was a natural progression, which included Hewescraft, the number-one selling heavy-gauge aluminum boat in the state of Alaska and throughout the Pacific Northwest.

For Dewey's Cook Inlet, the term "Time Tested" was a powerful force when selecting an aluminum boat for their dealership, and Hewescraft had the standing to back the statement. Bob Hewes charted an unlikely path when he, a few fishing buddies, and his brother Ralph built their first all-aluminum fishing boat in 1948. Hewescraft, out of Colville, Washington, has been passionately building boats since those first-generation crafts, perfecting their design. Today Hewescraft produces ten different series of boats with dozens of options ranging from 16 feet up to and including the fleet's newest launch, the 29-foot Hewescraft Adventure.

Seventy years of boat building have garnered Hewescraft a reputation that includes a fish-friendly platform, sturdy hull construction, and excellent value. Hewescraft is also highly regarded as a big-water boat that is designed around safety. Each model exceeds U.S. Coast Guard floatation requirements, and is validated by physically swamping new models to prove their sea-worthiness. Also, every hull is water-tested in the factory . . . something too few boat manufacturers perform.

The Sea Runner Series is Hewescraft's solution for a compact saltwater fishing machine. Available in 19- and 21-foot models, and available as a hardtop or softtop, the Sea Runner is engineered to

do just that . . . "Run the Seas," and do it well. The 21-foot Sea Runner is a full 23 feet, 8 inches from bow to outboard bracket and features an 8-foot beam, 78-inch bottom width, 32-inch sides, and accepts outboard configurations up to 225 HP. The hull is engineered with a variable deadrise that is 16 degrees at the transom, 23 degrees midship, and 35 degrees forward, and the boat's bottom incorporates a newly-designed chine for improved cornering.

Like Hewescraft, the Sea Runner has evolved with a plethora of game-changing improvements. The new Sea Runner boasts a wider footprint which provides a faster hole-shot and a more stable, less-tippy fishing platform. For construction consistency, Hewescraft engineering designs are downloaded to their computerized plasma cutter for precision cuts and repeatability in construction. The bottom and floor assembly is an integrated system comprised of Hewescraft's exclusive thick-channel supports, box-beam construction, and proprietary "Blade" hull stiffeners incorporated with a marine-grade, 5052 alloy, 3/16-gauge bottom.

When you journey out into saltwater fishing for salmon, halibut, or toothy lingcod, it's nice to know that Hewescraft all-welded aluminum boats have been time-tested in the waters of Alaska, so you can confidently concentrate on your mission rather than worry about your boat. Light in weight, fuel-efficient, Hewescraft boats can get you to the fishing grounds and back, safely and efficiently. Check out the Sea Runner at www.hewescraft.com or at www.deweysmarine.com.

Troy A. Buzalsky is a contributing editor for Fish Alaska magazine and writes the Boats column in each issue.



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[SALTWATER]

Pliers, Cans and Salmon Bellies

Story and photo by Terry W. Sheely

Needle-nose pliers, rocks, beer cans, spark plugs, cell phones, license plates—if it sinks in saltwater there's a decent chance that somewhere, sometime a halibut ate it.

But that doesn't make aluminum cans and fluttering cell phones top hallie baits. When it's time to catch a fish that will bless the in-laws' table with sauce-drenched wedges of succulent white meat you might want to offer bait that the entrée-intended find irresistible.

Top bait choices for halibut are multiple—natural, surprisingly fresh and oozing.

A lot of baits could meet these standards but I've narrowed this column to half-a-dozen that I consider top shelf.

But first a preface: Forget that old timer's argument that the only good 'but bait is a smelly, rotten bait. Not true. Yes, halibut will eat rotten bait, not because it's

A circle hook loaded up with salmon belly and herring make for an effective hallie hooker.



rotten but because they are opportunists with less than discriminatory tastes and Old Rotten is leaking a scent trail that shouts "food."

Like all predators halibut prefer fresh and live if they can get it. And with today's available array of super gels, smears, squirts, marinades and infusions of scents, natural, laboratory-concocted

and juiced creatively, any bait—live or freshly dead—should be juiced up to lay down a scent line that runs from Ketchikan to Kodiak.

My advice: Repeatedly slather whichever bait you choose in supplemental scents. Halibut have a hyper-sensitive olfactory system and sniffing out prey is how they track down food. Mix fresh bait, oozing

scent with bait movement and sonic vibrations and you've got the fixins for dinner. Bear in mind that halibut will rise to the occasion and track down baits dangled 10- to 20 feet off the bottom, which can eliminate a lot of bottom-feeder nibblers.

What flavor and texture of scent you pick is up to you. My preferences are the super gels that can be caked onto the bait, hook, line and lead and will leach for hours. As for flavors: Garlic and anise always win, but bloody tuna, krill, sardine, herring and salmon egg have permanent spots in my boat.

Less messy than gels but still very effective are oils that can be injected directly into the bait. There are a zillion recipes on the market, but I lean toward natural fish scents (if you haven't experimented with walleye pollock, do) like sardine, squid, shrimp and tuna, and of course, herring. If it's a Northwest fish—especially halibut—it will always eat herring.

Here's my six pack of hot halibut hookers, in no particular order.

Octopus tentacle: Hallies will swim long ways to crunch octopus. I caught a 30-pounder near Dixon Entrance that coughed up a 10-inch, undigested tentacle. Reasoning that if one halibut will eat it,

another will too, I skewered the tentacle onto a J-hook and caught three more halibut, including a 53-pounder that went in the box. Advantages of octopus are toughness and longevity. I've never used a tentacle that I didn't have to cut off the hook, and halibut seem to stand in line to chew one down. Tentacles are even more productive when marinated overnight in a mix of salt brine and fish oils. A sliver of octopus hide enhances any bait and you have the assurance that if a sneaky quillback sucks off the main bait your rig is still baited with octopus. Don't be surprised to come up with a big ling, though.

Salmon belly: This could be my all-purpose favorite. Loaded with fat, tough, and wriggling with attraction, fresh salmon bellies are a natural. Cut a 1½ -inch-wide strip of belly that includes the pelvic fin, skin and scales. I like strips 6- to 10 inches-long that wiggle. A circle hook won't shred out if imbedded in the tough fin cartilage from the scale side in. With a J-hook I like to start the hook point on the scale side, push it through, then turn and run it back through the flesh side and out so the point is protruding through the scales. Rigged this way the hook and salmon belly will stay intact until chewed off. This bait kicks out lots of scent, sound and action.

Salmon heads: Big bait, big fish and this is why salmon heads are on the list. Use the smallest big head you can find: pinks are perfect, small silvers and resident kings work too. Leave the gills in the head (all fish slobber over gills), run a large circle hook through the nose and both lips to hold the mouth shut. Make sure the hook point is exposed. When a hallie bites give it a lot of time to chew, and resist setting the hook until there's a solid, hard pull and decisive movement. Salmon heads attract halibut big and small but the small ones can be discouraged by the large bait, along with bottomfish bites.

Herring: This could be the most popular halibut bait of all. It's a proven producer, always available, with a body cavity that begs to be injected with scented oils.

I prefer huge herring, horse herring, the size of planter trout, and whenever possible will jig up a batch with a herring ganglion or sabiki rig. Herring are soft and should be toughened, if possible overnight, in scented marinade or brine. Horse herring can be split head to tail, skin and scales on producing two wriggling baits per baitfish. Impale on a two-hook rig, mooching-hook style. I favor fillet strips over whole herring for the fact that I get two baits per fish and

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benefit from the added scent trail that the exposed meat produces. But in truth: I've also caught a lot of hallies on whole herring. Pin the mouth shut with the top hook pushed through the top of the nose and out the bottom jaw. Either impale the bottom hook above the tail or let it dangle just beyond the tail. Halibut rarely waste time inhaling herring so you don't need the patience that bigger, tougher baits demand. But on the downside, every creature crawling or swimming near the bottom will lick your hooks clean. Load it with scent.

Live Naturals: Perhaps the most overlooked hot 'but bait is live bait. The biggest drawback is that live, natural bait is almost impossible to buy and takes time to catch. But if you have the time, a live kelp greenling, flounder, sole or tom cod is just amazing. Check regulations on what fish are legal to use for live bait. I hook them (depending on size) under the spine, at the tail or through the nose and lips on a 15- to 24-inch leader knotted into the mainline with a three-way swivel (or spreader bar) a couple of feet above a substantial weight. Heavy sinkers are preferable for anchoring struggling baitfish. Paint the bait, swivel and weight with scented gels, preferably something different than its natural odor, to double the attraction. Don't strike until there's serious movement. Halibut will often pounce on a live baitfish and pin it to the bottom for several minutes to subdue it before eating it. If you snag a hallie in the belly this is why . . . and if you've ever fought a belly-hooked halibut you won't want to do it twice. A sweet-smelling, floundering, struggling, live bait is impossible to pass up. You will also catch ling cod and rockfish.

Sandwich: Best of all worlds. Load your hook(s) with a buffet. Salmon gills on top of horse herring, octopus with salmon belly, steak of true cod topped with shrimp and squid; pasted, gelled or drenched with ode' de bloody tuna, scent of sardine or infusion of krill. When halibut sniff and look for something to stuff into their cavernous bellies, more is always better, and a buffet feast that offers more of everything is never ignored.

That's my six-pack of hot halibut hookers. If one doesn't work, another one will and if that doesn't work—move; there aren't any halibut under the boat.

Terry W. Sheely is a contributing editor for Fish Alaska magazine and can be reached through his website at www.tnscommunications.net.

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[STILLWATER]

Leader Knots and Thoughts

Story & photo by George Krumm

I was seven when I got my first fly rod and reel for Christmas. My first fly line was a level, floating line. It was in the days before the current line-designation system, and it was poorly matched to the fiberglass fly rod. When Dad was teaching me to cast, he had me attach a length of six-pound mono to the fly line as leader, and tied on some dry fly with a clinch knot. He put a paper plate out on the lawn about 30 feet away and instructed me to try to get the fly to land on the plate. With the poorly matched rod and line, and an un-tapered leader that didn't want to turn over, it was a frustrating experience at best. I found I could get some semblance of turnover if the leader was short, but with any leader over about four feet, turnover didn't happen—the fly and leader just landed in a pile near the end of the fly line. Avid fly anglers of the time were building their own tapered leaders by joining different diameters of monofilament together with blood knots. This provided good turnover, but things really improved for the masses with the production of tapered, monofilament leaders.

My, how things have changed. Nowadays, we have the aforementioned tapered leaders in both nylon monofilament and fluorocarbon, weight-forward fly lines (and other tapers), superior tippet material selection, and of course, a wealth of information on good knots to use to put the system together. For my stillwater fishing, I use specific leader types for specific lines. I use specific knots for specific purposes, too. Let me be clear—I don't use the same type of leader regardless of fly line type.

There are three knots I consider essential to attach leader-butt to fly line, tippet to leader, and tippet to fly. They are the double surgeon's loop (leader-butt to fly line), the triple surgeon's knot (leader to tippet), and the non-slip mono loop knot (tippet to fly).

It's not my intent to teach you to tie these knots in this article; rather, to explain where I use them. Following are my thoughts regarding knots and leaders for the most common stillwater lines I use.

When I use a floating fly line in stillwater, most of the time I'm using it with an indicator. I may be fishing the fly four feet below the indicator, or 12. Whatever the case may be, I typically do not use a tapered leader while indicator fishing. Instead, I use a length of eight-pound monofilament or fluorocarbon plus a fluorocarbon tippet (usually 3x but sometimes 4x for flies size 14 or smaller, or for finicky fish). To make this leader, I take 12 feet of the monofilament or fluorocarbon (sometimes more if I'm fishing deep; sometimes less if I'm fishing shallow) and tie a double surgeon's loop in one end of it. I slide the double surgeon's loop over the existing loop at the end of the fly line, then feed the end of the leader through the fly line loop and pull all the leader through, forming a loop-to-loop connection.

At the end of the leader, I use a triple surgeon's knot to join three feet of 3x fluorocarbon tippet to the leader. Then I attach an indicator at the depth I wish to fish, and tie on my fly with a non-slip mono loop knot. Since the leader is not tapered, don't expect the elegant turnover you get while using a tapered leader. You aren't going to get it. However, the slight weight of the indicator will usually carry enough momentum to turn over the leader satisfactorily. I have found a tapered leader isn't necessary for most of the indicator fishing I do in stillwater. What's more, the tapered section of the leader tends to not sink quickly to depth. The un-tapered section of eight-pound mono will.

For my intermediate lines, I most often use a 9- to 12-foot, tapered, fluorocarbon leader. I tie a double surgeon's loop in the butt end and use the aforementioned loop-to-loop method to connect it to the fly line. At the end of the leader I attach a three- or four-foot section of 3x fluorocarbon tippet, which makes the total leader 12- to 15 feet long. I then tie on my fly, again with the non-slip mono loop knot. Fluorocarbon leader sinks slowly, similar to the intermediate fly line. Nylon monofilament sometimes doesn't want to sink. When it does sink, it does so very slowly. This can result in the body of the leader being higher in the water column than both your fly line and your fly. Since things aren't straight, your presentation will be hindered, and you may not feel some bites. That is why I use tapered, fluorocarbon leaders with my intermediate lines.

For full-sinking lines of type III and greater, and sink-tip lines where the sinking portion is type III or greater, I most often use a four- to five-foot section of 3x fluorocarbon for typical



We use different line types for different situations. Each of these calls for a specific type of leader to work to their full potential.

'buggers in sizes eight or 10. For larger flies, especially dragon fly nymph imitations, I'll usually use 2x. I tie a double surgeon's loop in one end of the leader and loop it onto the fly line with the loop-to-loop method. I tie the fly onto the leader with a non-slip mono loop knot. You may wonder why the leader is so short for sinking lines. The reason is because I want the line to take the fly down to depth expeditiously. If you were to use a 12-foot leader, you will have a big balloon of line that is higher in the water column than your faster-sinking fly line. The result is the line to your fly will not be straight; presentation will suffer and you will miss bites.

That is how I do it for most fly lines, which tend to come with a factory-installed loop on the end of the fly line. However, some lines don't have a factory-installed loop. Depending on what the fly line is made of, sometimes you can weld, or get your fly shop to weld, a loop in the end of the fly line. If that isn't possible, I'll nail knot a 12-inch butt section of 30-pound mono or fluorocarbon to the end of the fly line. I'll then tie a double surgeon's loop in the other end of this butt section, and attach my leader of choice to the butt section using the loop-to-loop method. Everything else is the same as described above.

Using the right length and type of leader, and using reliable knots within your leader system, are essential to your ability to present the fly where you want it, to get more bites, and to ultimately catch more fish. The leaders and knots I described above are the culmination of many years' experience and if you haven't settled in on your own leader methodology, implementing those described above is a very good starting point.

George Krumm is the editor of both Fish Alaska and Hunt Alaska magazines. He's hosting a trip to Jurassic Lake Lodge in April, 2020. He can be reached at george@fishalaskamagazine.com.



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The Right Hook

Article and photo by Greg Brush

Many years ago, the Alaska Department of Fish and Game released the findings of an extensive, multi-year investigation titled, "Hook and Release Mortality of Chinook Salmon in the Kenai River Recreational Fishery." This landmark study, conducted by biologists Terry Bendock and Marianna Alexandersdottir, dispelled many misconceptions about the effects of the growing practice of catch-and-release, not the least of which is the total mortality rate of released sport-caught Kenai River kings. In the latest report published in May 1992, it states, "The average mortality was 7.6% for all experiments combined, and they ranged from 10.6% in 1989 to 4.0% in 1991."

Bear in mind that this study was published nearly thirty years ago. Where this gets really interesting is when one considers that the study was conducted with bait and multiple hooks.

While this study provides the most accurate information that we have, there is little dispute that a few small adjustments by conscientious anglers brings present day hook-and-release mortality even lower, whether fishing the Kenai or other Chinook streams.

Consider ditching the bait. While it may give you a mental edge in regard to inspiring confidence, the plain truth is that thousands of giant kings have been caught with no bait.

Next, take conservation into your own hands by switching all your winged-bobbers (Spin 'n Glo or Cheaters) and large diving plugs such as Kwikfish to a single hook. Drop that single hook back just a bit, with multiple beads on your Spin 'n Glo or by adding a swivel to the tail of your plug.

Choose a larger size hook with a bigger gap, for more bite. A bigger single hook will line up with the meaty part of a salmon's jaw far more often than a smaller treble or single hook, which means they have less probability of ending up in the delicate, highly-vascular tongue or gill rakers.

To facilitate a fast, smooth and successful release, some catch-and-release anglers like to pinch their barbs, creating the perfect compromise between a true barbless hook and a fully-barbed hook that can sometimes be difficult to remove. While you may lose a few more salmon during an epic leaping, twisting, and direction-changing battle with a pinched barb, the fish you do land can be "popped off" with incredible ease, minimizing the stress produced by increased handling time.

By making these little changes, you can rest easy knowing that you did everything within your power to ensure fish for the future.



This platinum Chinook whacked a K-16 Kwikfish rigged with a single, open-eye siwash hook.



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This 70-pound halibut required teamwork to catch and land when fishing unguided.
© Brian Woobank



Landing BIG HALIBUT Unguided

Story by George Dennis

Fishing for halibut unguided in southeast Alaskan waters can be thrilling, challenging, and sometimes outright dangerous. If anglers are comfortable with operating a small vessel in salt water and understand some fundamental safety issues when catching large, powerful fish, then there are definite benefits to being one's own captain when fishing for Pacific halibut.

I would be remiss to not emphasize the importance of becoming familiar with the fishing as well as safety equipment on board the unguided vessel before trekking off in pursuit of big halibut. Reputable guide services that rent unguided vessels take time to educate fishermen on how and when to use their equipment. No fisherman should step foot in an unguided vessel without first wearing either a float coat or a life preserver. Under the best of conditions, it's easy for a fisherman to end up in 45-degree water, and even with short exposure to cold water, hands become useless to a struggling fisherman. Hypothermia sets in shortly after. Knowledge about how to use a compass, depth finder, global positioning system (GPS), marine radio and a tide book are all essential skills that can save lives in an emergency and should be studied thoroughly before embarking on a southeast Alaska halibut adventure. Perhaps just as important, designing a plan for how to proceed if and when that 200-pound halibut bites your lure is a must.

The North Pacific Fishery Management Council meets annually to set charter halibut rules which can include size, bag and annual limits for sport anglers to keep them within their overall allocation. The rule for halibut retention in southeast Alaska in 2018 allows guided anglers to retain one fish 38 inches or smaller or one 80 inches or larger per day, but unguided anglers can retain two fish per day of any size. When anglers on a guided charter vessel catch their first halibut, they're still allowed to retain a second halibut of any size the same day, but only if they fish unguided.

Consequently, several lodges in southeast Alaska are now offering their guided guests the opportunity to fish with powered skiffs or sea kayaks after their guided charter for their second halibut. The benefit of fishing unguided is there's the possibility the fisherman is going to hook a giant halibut. The challenge, of course, is how

When fishing unguided for halibut, choose a sturdy skiff with plenty of freeboard.
© Doc Warner's Alaska Fishing



to coax this monster fish to the surface, as well as how to put it in the boat or get it home without losing equipment or breaking arms and legs.

First and foremost, I've found that any size halibut will meet the resistance it receives from the fisherman with equal force. In short, the harder the fisherman pulls the fish off the bottom, the more resistance the fish will give. Once I've determined that my guest has a very large halibut on the line, my instructions are to gain inches at a time for each time they pump the fishing pole. My mantra when they're reeling in the fish is, "Go slow and easy." Over several decades of guiding guests, I've helped novice fishermen land 200-plus-pound halibut using 40- and 50-pound-test braided line while they were really targeting black rockfish and lingcod. The secret is to have patience and not put excessive force on the fish. In one instance, I had a fisherman break our lightweight rockfish rod at the butt while gently pumping a monster halibut to the surface. I outfitted this fisherman with sticky gloves and had him gently lift the fish several inches at a time while another person reeled in the line. Granted, it took an hour or more to bring the fish 100 or more feet off the bottom, but I've

witnessed this technique multiple times, and it definitely works.

Hauling a fish off the bottom with maximum pressure may get the fish to the surface, but there's a good chance the fish will be sufficiently aggravated and will make several deep runs before it gets exhausted or breaks strained line. One such event comes to mind. Many years ago I had an assistant football coach from the University of Washington fishing on my boat. Steve told me he made this trip to southeast Alaska so he could put a 200-pound halibut in the boat. I anchored the boat on a nice shelf close to a chum hatchery in Behm Canal where we fished for nearly two hours without a bite.

About the time I was going to pull anchor, a hungry halibut hit Steve's bait, and after a whopping hook set with his Ugly Stik, he began doing deep squats and reefing on the fish for all he was worth. Clearly Steve was worked-up, sweating, groaning, and testing the strength of his huge body frame . . . in a state that I would equate to buck fever. I explained that the pressure he was putting on the fish would eventually break the line or the leader, so I loosened the drag in hopes line would slip off the reel when he pulled up with great force. After Steve's 40-minute struggle



This is an example of a skiff used for unguided fishing in Southeast. © George Dennis



A shark hook is an integral part of safely landing a big halibut. © George Dennis

with this large halibut, I took my place outside the transom of the boat on the swim platform and was prepared to shoot the fish in the head with a 9mm hand gun and then gaff it.

Unknown to me, Steve had cinched the drag tight, and with the fish flat to the surface ten feet from the stern of the boat, it did a radical head-butt while idling in the current and snapped the 100-pound-test stainless-steel leader. Everyone on the boat began yelling at me to shoot the fish,

but why in the world would I shoot and kill a fish that we could never reach? To say the least, Steve was furious that I didn't kill his fish, despite the fact that it would have sunk well before we could have pulled the anchor to retrieve it. And he didn't appreciate me telling him he lost the fish because, contrary to instructions, he over-tightened his drag.

The lesson for the unguided fisherman is to stay cool after hooking a big fish. Pulling the fish off the bottom inches

at a time, not three feet at a time, works like a champ. I instruct my guests to be satisfied only retrieving six- to eight inches of line at a time. Experience has taught me that staying cool and working slowly wins the day when retrieving big halibut. Suffice it to say, needless pole jerking or using an excessively heavy drag is counterproductive.

Once the halibut is at the surface, the angler must decide whether to keep or release the fish. There are certainly

good reasons to release a 150-plus-pound halibut as these are the breeding females that will perpetuate the species. In addition, these big halibut can be stringy, tough, and hence, not considered premium table fare. I have learned from experience that it's a bad idea to attempt to put my hand inside the halibut's mouth to extract the lure. Even with good gloves, a large halibut's teeth can do serious damage to an unwanted hand in its gullet.

Several decades ago a longtime fishing

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Quality halibut like this are possible for anglers who execute a well thought-out plan.
© Brian Woobank

friend, Gary, got too excited and put his gloved hand in a large halibut's mouth to take out a 16-ounce lead head jig while the fish was alongside the boat. The fish clamped down on Gary's gloved hand and began thrashing wildly. By the time he got his hand back, Gary had several wicked lacerations that required multiple stitches. From that day on, I have only used fish pliers to extract hooks that are in and around a halibut's mouth. Perhaps the safest way to release a big fish is to merely cut the leader and let the fish keep the hook in its lip or jaw. Most hooks will rust out in days and won't be an impediment to the fish's well-being. If an angler is determined to take a giant halibut home in fish boxes, the next issue is how to safely tame the fish to bring it aboard a small craft.

Again, staying cool and collected wins the day, as well as having a well thought-out strategy in mind before the fish is at the surface of the water. How to proceed next depends on whether the boat has been outfitted to implement the well thought-out strategy. Does the boat have a harpoon and flotation bag? Is there a shark hook aboard? A sturdy stainless gaff? A formidable size butcher knife? Gaffing a "hot" halibut is perfectly safe with fish up to 40 pounds but the fisherman needs to react quickly. An angler has several seconds after sticking a gaff

in a halibut before all hell breaks loose. When I gaff a fish, I use a 24-inch stainless gaff, not a wooden salmon gaff, and my fish is in the boat within seconds.

If a fisherman is in a 16- to 20-foot open skiff with only 20 inches of freeboard, it's foolish to even think of sinking a gaff in a halibut that exceeds 100 pounds to get it aboard. Not only will a large halibut easily jerk the gaff out of an angler's hand, such action can possibly fatally injure the fish after it swims away. In the remote chance an angler is capable of boating such a large fish with a gaff, there's a good chance the fish will begin breaking everything in sight (including arms and legs) as it begins to thrash about on the deck.

Another technique that is ill advised is to attempt to lift the head of the fish out of the water by the fishing line and bear it to death with a heavy club. This will ignite the fish, possibly break the line, and possibly injure the person who is holding the line. Do not attempt to club a hot halibut that is in the water! Won't work.

If the angler who has hooked an 80-plus-inch halibut on my boat insists on retaining the fish, I will use my Bond Arms Snake Slayer .410 stainless-steel derringer with buck shot to kill the fish before boating it. I prefer using the handgun because I can place the firearm close to the fish's head to ensure a one shot kill. A single shot placed behind the fish's eye will instantly tame even the largest of halibut. Through experience I've learned that buck shot may not penetrate a fish that's four- to six inches under water. Ideally I want to position the fish so it's flat to the surface of the water with the head right at the surface.

Another technique for taming a big halibut is to use a harpoon with a flotation buoy attached to the end of the line or the line attached to the cleat of a boat. A harpoon plunged just behind the head and gill plate will effectively contain the fish while it wears itself out. Using a harpoon successfully is a tricky maneuver because the harpoon tip must go all the way through the halibut. Glancing blows with the harpoon only aggravate and injure the fish. Once the fish is worn out, it can be brought to the boat with the harpoon line, safely gaffed to be brought aboard, and the harpoon tip removed.

Anglers who want to better understand the technique of harpooning before their fishing trip can find YouTube videos that demonstrate the use of the device. This past summer an unguided angler at Pybus Point Lodge who obviously didn't

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Three nice halibut taken while skiff fishing unguided at Pybus Point Lodge.
© Jerry Price

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understand the anatomy of a halibut, attempted to bury his harpoon in the middle of the back of a monster halibut. He reported that the harpoon bounced off its back and the fish swam away after breaking his line. That big, strong back bone is the wrong place to bury a harpoon tip.

Finally, a large, stainless-steel shark hook buried in the upper jaw of the fish with 15- to 20 feet of 3/8-inch line tethered to a cleat will contain a big, powerful fish. Once hooked, the big fish will thrash about for minutes, wearing itself out.

Again, it is suggested to study the anatomy of a halibut to discover how to bleed it. The operculum, or gill cover, is a strong protective shield for the fish's gills and the fish is not about to tolerate an angler trying to open the operculum to insert a knife. A slice of the knife behind the gill cover in the throat area will effectively permit the halibut to bleed out. Through experience, I've discovered it will take a surprisingly long time for a big halibut to completely bleed out and be safe to drag aboard. Be patient before attempting to boat a dying halibut.

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For fishermen who are contemplating booking an unguided vessel in southeast Alaska, the entire crew should acquaint themselves with the equipment on board the boat and have a well thought-out strategy for what to do if the big 'buts' decide to bite their lures. For the first-time halibut fisherman, there are two preferred options for getting started in the world of unguided halibut fishing. First, the novice angler might do some research and find an unguided fishing venue that offers substantial training before the angler steps foot in a vessel. If anglers don't choose to spend time doing their own research, I would suggest booking a guided trip first,

choosing a lodge that permits after-hour fishing for halibut in power skiffs. This way the angler can pick the brain of their boat captain and gain valuable information for how to successfully play and land these large fish. Who knows, if you're lucky, you might catch smaller halibut that are much easier to handle.

Captain George Dennis has operated charter boats out of the Columbia River and in southeast Alaska for over four decades. He currently operates a 30-foot Koffler boat out of Pybus Point Lodge. See his full biography on LinkedIn.

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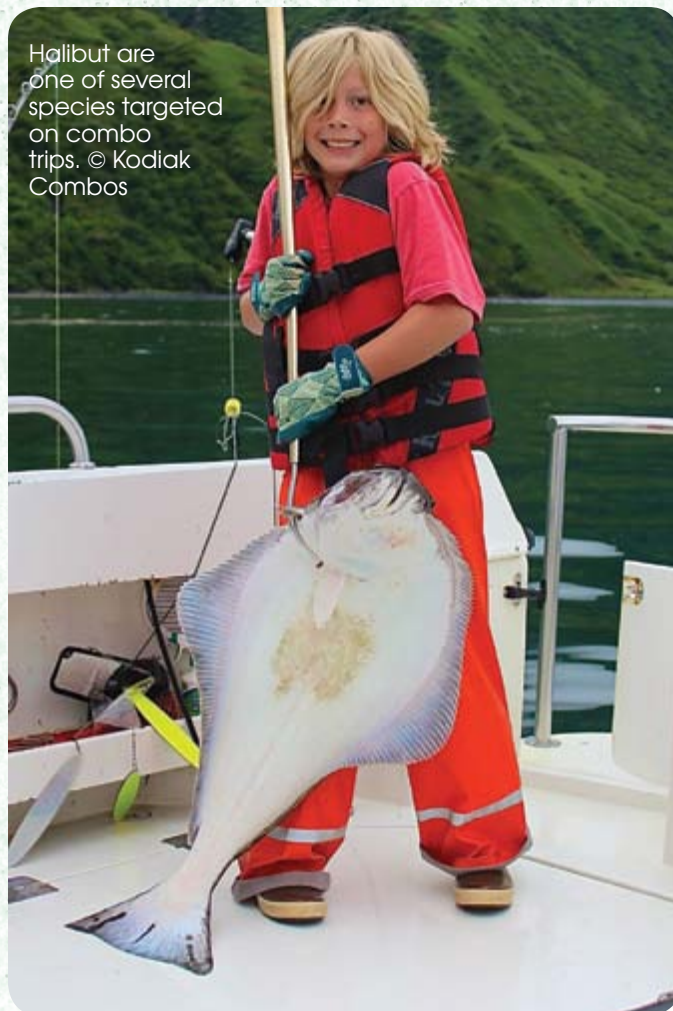
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Halibut are one of several species targeted on combo trips. © Kodiak Combos



This fine eating-size halibut was caught while fishing with Kodiak Combos. © Kodiak Combos

Whenever I crewed for a buddy on his boat out of Kodiak, the same scenario repeated itself on nearly every trip. As clients reeled in their line to check bait for the first time, there's an anxious awareness, an exhilarating tension that pulsed throughout their entire body. The bending rod, the straining line—no doubt about it, they were sure they'd hooked into the legendary monster—a gigantic Alaskan halibut!

"I got one! I got one!" they'd shout in excitement as they wrestled with the reel, straining to crank up their envisioned barn door-sized fish from the depths. Twisting and jerking as they reeled frantically, their eyes strained as their gaze followed that narrow strand of hundred-pound-test line down into the dark, slate-colored ocean depths.

Past experience had taught me proper halibut diplomacy towards clients aboard a charter. It's important to break the news gently, to turn down the flame of excitement gracefully. Taking a quick spell at relieving the angler, I immediately felt the resistance along the line. "Nope, it's not a halibut," I'd tell them respectfully, "just the current playing with your weight." It wasn't until they'd see that cannonball weight break the surface, followed by an empty hook, that their faces flush with the realization of what it would be like when they actually caught something that could easily weigh as much as they did—or more!

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HALIBUT HOTSPOTS

Story by Tom Watson

—from the southeast panhandle to the heart of the Aleutians, opportunities to charter fish for halibut abound.

The nature of halibut fishing on charters in some locations has changed over the years to become part of a broader, more opportunistic offering. Combo packages include combining halibut with king or coho salmon, as well as lingcod, yelloweye and other rockfish. A big reason for the broadening of charter package offerings is a result of the constantly changing commercial and sportfishing halibut regulations that affect the number and size of halibut that can be harvested by a charter operation. Closures and size limits force charters to offer alternative sportfishing options in order to offer alluring packages to their clientele throughout every day of their season.

2018 charter vessel regulations have changed slightly from 2017. Here's a summary of some of the 2018 regulations for the region covering most of southcentral Alaska (3A) and the southeast Alaska region (2C):

“CATCHING HALIBUT, THE WORLD'S LARGEST FLATFISH SPECIES, RANKS AS ONE OF THE LAST FRONTIER'S MOST QUINTESSENTIAL ALASKAN SPORTFISHING EXPERIENCES, SHARING TOP HONORS WITH OCEAN-RUN KINGS AND RIVERS TEAMING WITH DIME-BRIGHT SALMON.”



This haul of halibut was landed while fishing with Whittier Marine Charters. © Whittier Marine Charters



An incredible day of halibut fishing was had by the anglers aboard this Alaska Northern Outfitters charter. © Alaskan Northern Outfitters

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Area 2C (southeast Alaska)

- One fish daily bag limit: Charter vessel anglers may catch and retain one halibut per day.
- Reverse slot limit: Retained halibut must be less than or equal to 38 inches or greater than or equal to 80 inches in length. This reverse slot limit allows anglers to keep halibut less than approximately 19 pounds and greater than 208 pounds, after the head and guts have been removed.

Area 3A (southcentral Alaska)

- Two fish daily bag limit: Charter vessel anglers may catch and retain two halibut per day.
- 28-inch maximum size limit on one fish: Charter vessel anglers may keep one fish of any size per day and one fish that is no more than 28 inches in length. The 28-inch maximum size limit allows anglers to keep a second fish that weighs approximately seven pounds, after the head and guts have been removed.
- Trip limit: Charter vessels may only take one trip during which charter vessel anglers retain halibut per day.
- Charter halibut permits may only be used for one charter halibut fishing trip per day during which charter vessel anglers retain halibut.
- 4-fish annual limit: Charter anglers may catch and retain no more than four halibut in a calendar year on charter vessel fishing trips in Area 3A. This annual limit does not apply to halibut

caught while fishing without a guide, charter fishing in Area 2C, or halibut caught as Guided Angler Fish (GAF). Anglers are required to record halibut caught on charter vessel fishing trips in Area 3A on the back of the fishing license or harvest record card.

- Wednesday closure: Charter vessel anglers may not catch and retain halibut (except GAF) on Wednesdays.
- Tuesday closure: Charter vessel anglers may not catch and retain halibut (except GAF) on six Tuesdays in 2018: July 10, July 17, July 24, July 31, August 7, and August 14.

Guided Angler Fish (GAF)

Charter vessel operators who choose to participate in the GAF program may offer their clients the opportunity to harvest up to two halibut of any size per day. GAF may also be used to exceed the 4-fish annual limit and to charter fish on Wednesdays in Area 3A. Special regulations apply for GAF halibut.

All these regulations affect the opportunities to charter boat fish for halibut in Alaska.

The popularity of combo packages—those expanded target species trips—besides being a response to the latest rules, also targets more clients hoping to simply enjoy a rewarding Alaskan experience, one that pairs the thrill of catching fish with the vast beauty of the coastal scenery and being out on the water.

Those whose quest is for barn-door,

trophy halibut or for filling the freezer still rely on charters, but more and more families and groups of friends are simply booking halibut charters for a broader, memory-building Last Frontier experience.

The similarity among packages and programs offered by charters throughout coastal Alaska all assure ample options for a rewarding fishing adventure, the characteristics of the location all coming together to give each charter region its special edge in attracting clients and prompting the successful charter operations to tailor their marketing to appeal to this broader audience.

Here's a sampling of what's unique among several popular Alaska hotspot halibut regions:

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Known as the Halibut Capital of the World, charters heading out beyond the tip of the world-famous spit are offering the epitome of the classic halibut packages being offered throughout the industry.

"Although sizes have been larger, people who've never fished in Alaska are happy to catch 20- to 30-pounders where they were catching 150-pounders in the past," is how Todd Strand of Bob's Trophy Charters sums up his typical customer. Strand credits "generally good weather and not being exposed to the entire Gulf of Alaska; less subject to swells," as appealing conditions for a comfortable and rewarding Homer charter boat experience.

Time spent traveling to fishing grounds can be a deal breaker, too. "Unless we are on a long-range trip, it's only one to one and a half hours to the fishing grounds." Another factor is Homer's location on the Kenai Peninsula, a four-hour drive from Anchorage that makes a long, but manageable, day-trip experience even more appealing to the casual charter customer.

NINILCHIK

Up the peninsula in the Kenai/Soldotna area, Felecia Baker of Afishunt Charters says their challenge is operating in Cook Inlet. "Because of the really big tides . . . we fish the slack tide." Baker explains, "This means that we leave at a different time each day to catch the water when it's either high or low tide. There's a unique aspect of this tidal influence that clients might find especially appealing, and yet another example of the uniqueness of this halibut destination. We launch daily off a beach by tractor, and retrieve the same way."

Halibut abound in this part of Cook Inlet, but on the days that fishery is closed, Baker assures, "We also offer lingcod, rockfish and salmon charters. Four rivers within a 25-mile radius offer great salmon



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Big halibut can still be targeted from many ports in Alaska. These were caught on a trip departing from Homer. © Bob's Trophy Charters

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Above: Cook Inlet's tides make it critical to fish around slack tides for halibut. © Afishunt Charters
The rewards of a good day targeting halibut are the memories of catching the fish as well as the great table fare. © Afishunt Charters
Right: Young anglers stand a legitimate chance of hooking a halibut that weighs more than they do. © Alaska Northern Outfitters

and trout fishing." This provides the Kenai Peninsula with even more appealing options for anglers considering a range of opportunities beyond their halibut charter.

SEWARD

As Alaska Northern Outfitters' skipper Sean Carlin explains, the waters and the formations along the ocean floor play a big role in the success of the halibut charter industry in the Resurrection Bay region of the Kenai Peninsula. "The entrance to Prince William Sound (PWS) channels an abundance of nutrients, making the underwater structures on each side of the entrance (Seward is on the west end of PWS) some of the most opportunistic areas in all of Alaska for ambush predators—especially the giant Pacific halibut."

Like all coastal communities, tides influence all marine activity in Seward. "Halibut feed on the tides and locate prey via smell," explains Carlin. Seward's

15-foot or less tide fluctuations means less volume, allowing predators to better utilize smell to find prey. "The tides in areas like Homer and Cook Inlet can be over 25 feet...that's a bit overwhelming," he says. "There are times when a 5-pound weight cannot reach the bottom in just 60 feet of water because of the current created by the tides. Seward halibut anglers use smaller weights and fish through any tide," added Carlin.

In addition to standard combo packages, Carlin offers a "Companion/Shared Pole" option that lets a full-priced client share the hands-on, halibut-catching experience with a partner for just a portion of the cost. It's all part of the expanded offers within the halibut charter industry.

WHITTIER

Nestled into its hideaway corner on the western edge of Prince William Sound, Whittier is an emerging halibut destination, a short, 45-minute coastal drive and passage through a mountain tunnel to the western side of Prince William Sound.

"The fleet has grown to maybe eight full-time, serious charters," Says Matt Kopec, who runs Whittier Marine Charters. Kopec says the fishery is doing fine both despite and because of regulations. "The challenge to attract clients," says Kopec, "is that it's hard to advertise trips due to all the changing regulations annually," and adds, "at least the local industry hasn't been



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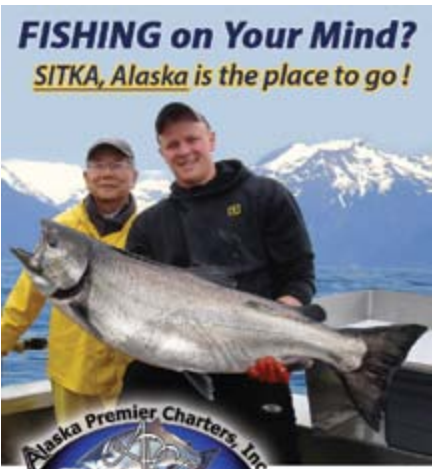
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Above: A halibut like this puts up a solid fight and lets an angler stockpile meat for future meals. © Alaska Northern Outfitters

Right: Massive halibut can be found in the waters of the Gulf of Alaska and Prince William Sound, among other places. © Whittier Marine Charters

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over capitalized yet." Like other charter operations, Kopec clarifies his menu of combo packages: "There's no such thing as a "halibut" trip anymore!"

While Whittier charters can go out into the Sound, fishing the waters on both sides of Montague Island, that 2-hour-plus trip can be supplanted by working the inner, protected waters of Whittier. "We don't have to run across the Gulf if we don't want to; we don't have to run in open water," says Kopec. "It's the same fisheries, but in more protected water."

SOUTHEAST / CRAIG

Halibut sports fisheries in the panhandle region of Alaska are affected by a different set of regulations (Area 2C) than those in other reaches of the Gulf of Alaska and the Bering Sea. "[They've] been restrictive in the past several years but it has led to improved abundance," says Larry "Captain Mac" McQuarrie of Sportsman's Cove Lodge. "It's pretty easy to get a limit of halibut of decent size within the reverse slot limits imposed by those regs," adds McQuarrie. Such restrictions

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Pacific halibut are the largest of the flatfish species and can reach enormous proportions. © Happy Hooker Charters

are augmented by opportunities in these Southeast waters to target salmon to round out a day charter.

As a component of their lodge's fishing opportunity, Sportsman's Cove offers a wide variety of options. "All the species are in our front yard," says McQuarrie. "Normally it's only 20- to 30 minutes out to our first stop on the Twenty Fathom Bank for halibut," he says, in reference to the proximity to choice fishing grounds. "Lighter-weight gear and depths of 150- to 180 feet are common, and seldom over 12 ounces of lead and rarely over 250 feet," says McQuarrie.

KODIAK

Clients aboard Michael Ensley's Happy Hooker Charters also share an abundance of targeted species during a typical Kodiak halibut trip. "Depending upon which way the wind blows, we can get out," says Ensley. The average fishing depth in these waters is 130- to 140 feet. Several honey holes in different directions enable Ensley to choose hotspots along Kodiak's myriad islands and rugged coastline that are protected from the wind, and depending upon water conditions, all within a short distance from Kodiak's harbor.

Ensley admits that the island is off the beaten path but cites fewer charter boats, plus the option for anglers to also enjoy fishing along the coastal roads and its river systems as additional attractions to

consider a Kodiak halibut charter.

OLD HARBOR, ALASKA

Even more remote is the village of Old Harbor, 50-plus air miles south of the City of Kodiak. Kodiak Combos skipper, Jeff Peterson, is quick to offer several reasons to choose his village as a base for halibut charters. "I'm not having to run up to three hours to get to the grounds; they are only 45 minutes from the village," he explains. That protection from being exposed to the North Pacific means there are no open ocean swells to contend with while fishing.

Peterson says clients are always commenting "Where are all the other boats?" and that they express surprise at the short runs to the fishing grounds compared to other locations. Those uncluttered waters also offer a bounty of species to target, as well as using lighter gear. "We've never been just a halibut charter operation," he says. "We can fish in waters only 20- to 90 feet deep for all species."

Perhaps the biggest attraction to the Kodiak Combos style of halibut charter is the location. "People are mesmerized by the mountains," says Peterson. "They can't believe they are catching all these halibut in the ocean and looking up at the mountains." He quickly adds, "They enjoy spending all day catching rockfish just so they can enjoy the scenery," says Peterson, "and they've paid a lot of money for halibut!" One of Kodiak Combos' clients

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Jeff Peterson of Old Harbor and a happy angler. © Kodiak Combos

summed it up best when he described halibut fishing in Alaska: "It's like deep sea fishing in the Alps!"

The regulations affect Peterson's operation in another way beyond those imposed on his 3A zone. "We are on the edge of 3B where regulations are different so if there's a conflict or option, we can run south a couple of hours to 3B for fishing." Running further down to the southern tip of Kodiak Island puts Peterson into zone 3B where there are no size limits. "It enables me to keep my options open," he says.

This is not meant to be an exhaustive discussion of all the ports that offer excellent halibut fishing. Others to consider are Valdez, Yakutat, Sitka, Ketchikan, and multiple locations on Prince of Wales Island, just to name a few.

Reliably, every charter operation along Alaska's coast will put its clients on halibut or other popular species; they all use similar gear with proven baits and techniques. Each works the waters and landscape to their best ability and for the safety of their clients. Choosing the best halibut charter in Alaska is a win-win situation all around. When you're planning your next halibut adventure, consider one of those mentioned above.

Tom Watson is an award-winning freelance writer and contributor to Fish Alaska magazine.

Pacific Halibut- Member of the Flounder Family of Fish

AGE:

- Halibut can attain a lifespan of over 50 years.
- Most sports-caught halibut are five- to 15 years old.
- Halibut age is estimated by counting growth rings laid down in the fish's otolith, a bony structure in the inner ear.
- Halibut spawn at depths of 600- to 1,500 feet from November through March.
- First hatched from the egg, they swim upright and have one eye on each side of their heads.
- At five weeks of age and one-inch in length, one eye migrates over the top of the head so that both eyes are on the upward or top side.
- As halibut grow, the top side becomes a mottled, darker variation of colors resembling the sea bottom, and their body flattens into an oval shape: a flatfish.
- Virtually all halibut are right-eyed, meaning both eyes are found on the upper, dark side of the body. Left-eyed halibut are rare; one report suggested a ratio of about 1 in 20,000.
- Halibut tagged in the Bering Sea have been caught as far south as the coast of Oregon, a migration of over 2,000 miles.

SIZE:

- Halibut are the largest of the flatfish species.
- The males can weigh up to 100 pounds and the females range upward to about 600 pounds in weight.
- Female halibut grow faster and are typically larger than males of the same age.
- The official Alaska state record sport-caught halibut is 459 pounds.
- The maximum reported size is over eight feet in length and over 500 pounds.

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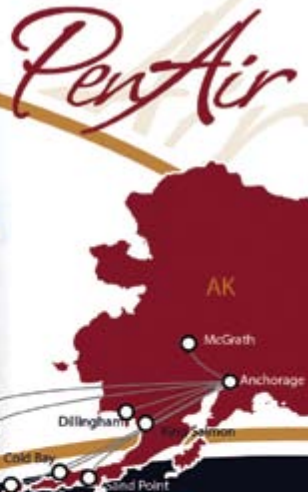
- Fish make up a large part of their diet. Large halibut eat octopus, herring, crabs, clams, cod, rockfish, salmon and smaller halibut; as well as anything else

they can catch.

- The most popular rigs use circle hooks baited with herring, fished on the bottom with cannonball weights up to 5 pounds.
- Jigging with J-hooks baited with octopus or whole herring, or with lead-head jigs or other artificial lures works well.
- Good catches are made from mid-May through mid-September throughout Alaska.
- Many believe the best fishing is just before, during, and after high slack tide.
- Total weight of skin-on fillets should be 50- to 60-percent of the weight of the fish.
- Don't forget to remove the cheeks, they're great!
- Halibut do not have a swim bladder and do not suffer severely from changes in water pressure.
- The survival rate of halibut caught on sport gear and released in excellent condition (not gaffed) is believed to be at least 95-percent.



Halibut and salmon are on the menu when fishing in the saltwaters near Prince of Wales Island. © Alaska Sportsman's Lodge



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WHAT YOU NEED TO KNOW To Hook 'But

STORY & PHOTOS BY TERRY W. SHEELY

Thirty-eight percent of my daily protein requirement is grinding my belly into the iron railing, ping-ponging my lower back and setting both biceps on fire. “Probably too big to keep,” Stan says. “You’re tying up the boat,” Mark complains, “get her in here or cut her off!”

Green-eyed supporters; my favorite kind.

When they’re chirping I know I’m into the halibut of the day! And this bruiser is a ‘but kicker, pun intended, and probably too big to keep. Any hallie over 100 pounds is a spawner female that I routinely kick back to spawn again. On a plate, I favor the tender white flakes of chicken meat.

THIS HALLIE IS A GOOD 130 FEET CLOSER TO THE SURFACE WHEN IT DROPS ITS NOSE AND THUMPS BACK INTO THE DEPTHS. LINE CHUGS AND JERKS OFF THE REEL, AND BENDS THE BLACK ROD TO THE WATERLINE. WHEN THE BIG FISH RAMS BOTTOM, IT SETTLES IN, WOBBLES THEN RUNS . . . HARD, FAST AND FARTHER THAN I EXPECT. I HOLD ON, GRIMACE AND BANG ALONG THE RAILING.

For most saltwater fishermen, Alaska has three fish: salmon, halibut and everything else. With kings and silver salmon skittering through a tough patch the last couple of years, halibut are moving up the popularity ladder. And with good reason. They’re reasonably plentiful, tough, aggressive,

and big enough to wedge a freezer with prime white meat that’s high in protein and vitamins and low in calories and fat—until drizzled with melted butter or buried in rich cream sauces.

With 40,544 miles of halibut coastline, most of it between Ketchikan and Nome including Dutch Harbor in the Aleutians, Alaska has no shortage of flatfish habitat, most within range of sport boats, some as close as the beach. Sportfishing opportunities start at the shoreline and run offshore into water too deep to fish with rod and reel.

The one that’s banging me around this morning picked up a foot-long ribbon of salmon belly in 215 feet of water, about average depth for many halibut hunters, but certainly not the only—or ideal—range of depth.

In late summer hallies are caught by anglers casting from beaches at river mouths targeting slabs that are following and gorging on spawning salmon. At the other extreme I once cranked a ‘but up from 700 feet on the edge of the Continental Shelf. That deep-water extreme was an early-May adventure targeting halibut as they make their way out of the wintering depths (over 2,000 feet) and migrate shoreward into sportfishing range.

Cranking 40 pounds of flat halibut with 2½ football fields of water on its back with a single-gear reel is not something I’ll do twice, nor is it necessary. From June into August some of the best halibut fishing in Alaska is in 50- to 150 feet of water near Southeast sportfishing hubs, along the remote shore of the Gulf of Alaska and



Left: This boat is all smiles sorting through a hot halibut bite. Above: Quality flatfish are the norm in Alaska.



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These are perfect-sized halibut for the table.

encircling Kodiak Island. At Dutch, it's not unusual to have hallies nose into beaches where surf-casters reach them.

This fight is about over. I've finally pulled the stubborn hallie's head up on an angle higher than its tail and with slow, steady turns of the reel handle have it planing toward the surface, docile but heavy. Experience has taught me that if I can get a halibut on plane and don't jerk the rod, the fish won't kick up a snit and power to the bottom—again. Stan and Mark are leaning over the railing, staring into the depths, watching for "color." Mark's holding long-nose pliers with side cutters. Stan has his thick wrestling gloves on for handling the leader. The long-handled gaff and harpoon remain racked. We already know this fish—too big to keep—is going back. If I can get it in.

Finding halibut is not the same as catching halibut.

For a gluttonous scavenger/predator with the scientific handle of *Hippoglossus stenolepis* possibly named after one of the biggest mouths on the continent of Africa, halibut can be frustratingly close-mouthed at times. At other times, the good times, they seem to be stacked like shingles



Breathtaking scenery is an added bonus of saltwater angling across Alaska.



Chicken halibut put up a strong fight and are some of the best fish to eat in Alaska.

waiting for anything that might be food. (Read this issue's *Saltwater* column for the half-dozen hottest halibut baits and how to fish them.)

Like most saltwater fish, halibut hunt when the hunting is easiest and that means mild tide exchanges, or a couple of hours either side of slack. Forget fishing on extreme, hard-running tides when most hallies are hunkered and holding. During even the mildest tides, hallies will pick feeding areas out of the current; bottom depressions, behind reefs or rock formations, inside bays, and on the calm-water side of peninsulas and points. These fish are big, lazy and efficient. The less body resources expended hunting for food, the more resources are retained for survival.

Gearing up is the first order. A typical halibut rod is stout, 5½- to 6 feet long with the flexibility of a flag pole. I have one of those stubs. I use it for flying flags. My pick is a rod 7½- to 8 feet long with a stiff backbone and uniform bend. One-piece if you can find it. The length provides something that short rods can't, and when you're playing a halibut the fight should be smooth and boring. Lift the rod-tip, reel down, lift, reel, lift and the longer the lift

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If you're spooled with one of the new ultra-thin, braided lines, and you should be, I recommend rods with ceramic line guides. Roller guides are fine for thicker braids and monofilament but can catch and pinch the ultra-thins.

Reels? In Alaska's shallow halibut range a smooth drag system is more important than line capacity. I want a conventional, light, saltwater reel with a drag that can be cinched down to not slip when I lift, but can be instantly adjusted to release line smoothly when the fish spooks and plows to the bottom. I've caught halibut to 60 pounds on a spinning rod and reel, but I wouldn't advise it. Get a reel with a clutch, lever drag or star drag and if you're really flush or favor deep water invest in a two-speed model.

Line capacity is only a consideration when fishing a couple of hundred feet deep or more—say at Homer. Spool size and gearing, however, are important. In a deep-water retrieve a big spool or fast (7:1 gear ratio) is worth the price if it takes up a yard of line on every crank of the handle.

There's good reason to spool with the strongest, thinnest ultra-braid line you can afford. Kevlar, Spectra, Dyneema—something on that order in at least 100-pound-test. The justification is that thin lines have less surface area for moving water to push against than thick mono or old-style braids. Thin line offers less resistance, goes deep faster and holds on the bottom longer in running current. Fat line flies like a kite with a pound of lead for a tail when caught in a tide push.

Old-style monofilament is tough and resists nicking better than braid, and a couple of feet of 80- to 120-pound on the terminal end works for leader material. Halibut, however, aren't the least bit leader shy and any leader you can force through the eye of a 10/0 circle hook will work. As a mainline though, mono kites and stretches, twin no-no's when it comes to keeping the bait on bottom and controlling big fish.

Hallie hooks come in two styles—circle and J—and one size: big. If J hooks are your choice, then 8/0- to 12/0 or larger is what you're looking for. Circle hooks, which I prefer, range from 8/0- to 16/0. Select according



An assortment of baits is common for anglers targeting halibut.



Various baits are effective halibut attractors including cod and greenling.



Big circle-hooks are the preferred rigging when targeting halibut with bait. Well-used hooks like this are ready to be replaced.



Big tides are common in Alaska so anglers are often required to use large weights to hold bottom.



Plastic hoochies and squids are excellent halibut attractors.

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to the size bait used. A strip of salmon belly will accommodate an 8/0 but a 12/0 or larger might be necessary to poke through a salmon head.

The bigger the hook point the more critical it is to stroke it with a sharpening file. 'But mouths are tough and built with gristle. It takes a sharp hook to penetrate and hold. When using bait, I position the weight, up to five pounds depending on depth and speed of the tide flow, below the hook. A spreader bar or dropper leader tied into a three-way swivel a couple of feet above the weight works perfectly.

The shiny flash and fall of a diamond jig, scampi lead-head, Point Wilson dart, or butterfly jig is dynamite on halibut, especially in water less than 100 feet deep where there is enough light to reflect. But the best chunk of metal will work even better with fresh bait tacked onto the pointy end or slathered in scent gel adding smell to the attraction of flash and crash.

Halibut hunt primarily by smell, especially in deep, dark water, frequently following scent trails more than a mile, according to biologists.

Any heavy lure that produces flash and a sonic vibration will also attract halibut, but add a chunk of salmon belly, herring or a thick coating of artificial scent gel and you triple the attraction. The deeper the



During even the mildest tides, hallies will pick feeding areas out of the current; bottom depressions, behind reefs or rock formations, inside bays, and on the calm-water side of peninsulas and points.

water, the less light is available to reflect flash and the more important a good scent trail becomes to putting halibut fillets on the table. Laying down a scent trail may actually be the most important element of successful halibut fishing.

These fish spend most of their time in blackness where they must hunt with their noses. Top halibut boats take advantage of the halibut's fine-tuned olfactory system and rather than drift and search for halibut, they anchor on a proven flat. A mesh bag of



Succulent and delicate fillets are what you'll get from halibut this size.

squished fish parts or a chum tube packed with seafood goes down with the anchor and the hunters lean back and wait for the fish to find them. I'm not above soaking a piece of towel in herring or shrimp oil and tucking it into the chum container with the rest of the goo. The saturated towel will

leach strong scent for hours, and it might take an hour or two for halibut to sniff the waft of fresh chum and track it back to baited hooks.

With minor variations there are three styles of halibut rodmanship at anchor: 1) bounce, 2) suspend, 3) soak.

Bouncers work the rod, jiggling up and down pounding the weight against the bottom, creating the sound of a feeding fish. This technique combines the three main attractors: action, sound and scent of a meal. I'm a bouncer.

Suspenders drop bait to the bottom and

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Monster halibut still roam the waters in Alaska and part of the thrill is the knowledge that the next bite might be it.

retrieve 10- to 20 feet of line suspending the bait off-bottom, and away from the slew of small bait thieves that live there. Halibut have no problem rising to their next meal or detecting suspended bait. Good suspenders hold onto their rods, steadying the tip to detect the slightest bite.

Soakers free-spool to the dirt, take one turn on the reel handle and wait for a bite. Soakers prefer placing their rods in holders so as not to interfere with coffee and donuts. This technique, albeit a bit laid back, works surprisingly well, because it gives fish time to work the bait and develop it into a serious takedown while the angler squares away the coffee cup, moves to the rod and wrestles it out of the holder. It's an ideal method for slowing anglers who have prematurely fast strike reflexes.

Speed, after all, will kill the nibble in all three situations. With halibut the hook up is all about patience. Give the fish time to sniff, nudge and chew. Don't set the hook until the fish moves several yards, and then rely, not on muscle power, but on the sharp hook to sink home. The wait-and-wait tactic is important with all hooks, but critical with circle hooks. With circles give the fish time to swallow. It won't. But it will have the hook deep enough so that when the fish moves off the hook slides out of the gullet and sinks into thick gristle at the corner of the mouth.

The exception to the w-a-w rule is when yinging and yanging metal. If your jig rod hammers down, ram those hooks home immediately, before the fish figures out it's eating a license plate.

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If you're in a halibut hunting posse suggest that each angler try one of the three rod techniques until you can determine how 'buts want to be caught that day.

A third alternative to drifting or anchoring is the halibut mooch. It's a good technique, especially if halibut are a bit off-the-bite or scattered. Insert a large, rotating flasher between the spreader bar and bait. Use a leash a foot or two long between the flasher and spreader bar, and then to a leader of a few feet to the bait. Steer the boat down tide with the current at a dead-slow troll, popping it into and out of gear. In gear, the weighted bait rises 10- to 20 feet off the bottom then falls on the shift. On a smooth bottom skilled halibut moochers will bang the lead in the dirt, kicking up clouds of debris and creating noise that imitates an attack. The flasher adds action and visual attraction. It's a good technique for locating, attracting and provoking halibut otherwise off-the-bite.

Even pea-brain halibut have ways they want to be caught and that might mean anchoring-up, drifting or mooching. If the preferred way to catch a halibut isn't working, good halibut hunters give it up and look for the way that halibut want to be caught.

I don't think this one wants to be caught at all. Mark shouts 'color' and points to the deep where a dark blob is planing toward the boat. I lower the rod and pull gently but determinedly toward the waiting pliers, loosening the drag just in case. The quickest way to enjoy a halibut-gone-crazy and maybe a rod in the air is to pull a big hallie's head out of the water. She slides to the boat, pushing a small bow wave. Stan grabs the leader, Mark twists the pliers and wrenches the circle hook out.

She hangs there for a second, big eyes unblinking, a back the color of ocean bottom. Then she tips and slides away into the green.

"How big?"
"Big!"



Terry W. Sheely is a contributing editor for Fish Alaska magazine and can be reached through his website at www.tnscommunications.net.



The author, right, and a fine southeast Alaska halibut.

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That Guy

by Melissa Norris



A halibut, rockfish and lingcod day trip from Valdez

"Let me know when you see color," Captain Brian of Valdez Outfitters called out in his thick Rhode Island accent. He was a one-man show, acting both as captain and deckhand while simultaneously making me laugh. We were aboard the *Lena Claire* drifting in the Gulf of Alaska near Wessels Reef. Captain Brian had just settled us on a ledge that was producing first yelloweye then halibut. They were hitting hard on the Full Killer custom halibut rigs they make and sell at Valdez Outfitters.

Ben, the youngest on board, caught the first fish of the day which turned out to be a nice yelloweye. Then his dad Dave followed suit with the first halibut—a dandy 40-ish-pounder, the perfect fish for the freezer and he elected to keep it as his any-sized halibut.

Photo above: The sun rises above the Valdez harbor. © Brian Rhodes Photography. Left: This group of Alaskans were there to fill the freezer with Valdez Outfitters last summer. © Melissa Norris



Wayne Norris with a nice lingcod taken out in the Gulf.
© Melssa Norris

We were on a family trip to Valdez staying in our motorhome at Eagle's Rest RV Park, visiting with friends and family, and celebrating Maizie's birthday. My husband Wayne and I also saw it as an opportunity to book a day with a reputable charter company to stock up on white fish for the freezer. As it happened, a group of four from Fairbanks, Dave, his two sons and buddy Rich didn't mind if we joined them. We were a typical group you'd find out with Valdez Outfitters—Alaskan families from Fairbanks and Chugiak hoping to fill our freezers with the finest table fare for the upcoming year. Some might assume it's all tourists on these charter boats, but that's not the case. There is a mix of locals and visitors who rely on the sportfishing fleet to feed their families. As much as it was a meat-mission, it was also about loved ones spending time together. Father and sons, husband and wife, brothers, and friends. That's another common theme among the clients of Valdez Outfitters and many fishing businesses across the state.

Big brother Jake got in on the action with a small halibut. Then Rich brought in his first fish—a yelloweye. Every member of Team Fairbanks was on the board before Team Norris could get it together. Then Wayne showed up (like he always does) and brought in a nice lingcod. Meanwhile *Fish Alaska's* Publisher hadn't caught any fish yet. I started to get a little antsy. In addition to an article, this was a meat-finding mission and I really wanted my halibut . . . and for Wayne to get his halibut. I'm a pescatarian whose meals primarily start with salmon, halibut or shrimp so it's super important to me. During the rest of the year, fishing is about having an enjoyable time. I love to fish any which way anywhere. It is about being outside with people I enjoy and convening with nature to take away life's stresses. Unless . . . I am in salt water on a meat-finding mission in the middle of July and I haven't filled the freezer yet. Then the pressure is on.

About that time Captain Brian noticed I hadn't caught anything. He knew I was on a quest for the next 365 days' worth of meals and he could tell I was stressing. "Melissa," he said, "Don't be THAT GUY." I don't want to be that guy I told him, I just want fish. All around me rods are

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going down, bait is getting chomped, fish are coming on board, bonkers are going bonkers and gills are being bled. Still nothing.

Just then Wayne showed up again, this time with a bigger fight on his hands. 20 minutes of hoping, praying and crossing all my limbs transpired while he and Captain Brian brought a nice 45-pounder on board. Yes! That's a lot of dinners for my small family of three. "I love you," I told Wayne, since the ability to catch fish makes Alaskans more attractive to each other. "Good job, guy," Brian said.

Captain Brian is one of six captains who work for Valdez Outfitters, owned by Tim and Diana Bouchard. I am sure their other captains are fantastic but with Brian I can check all the boxes that I need in a saltwater fishing guide. He is smart, ridiculously funny, able to find fish, a little bit rock and roll with just enough rough-edge saltiness to be authentically Alaskan (with a Rhode Island accent). Working with Tim has been extremely pleasant as well. He is very professional and they run an organized outfit. In addition to the *Lena Claire*, a custom North River boat, Valdez Outfitters operates the *Sea Hunter*, *Nunatak*, *SeaQuester*, *Sea Duck* and *Castaway's*. Many of the veteran charter captains had been exiting the business, leaving an opening for a budding charter company to make their mark and Valdez Outfitters filled that spot. Tim has been chartering in Valdez since 2007 and established Valdez Outfitters in 2012.

In addition to the 12-hour, full-day combo trips like the one we were on, Valdez Outfitters provides half- and full-day salmon charters for silvers. New for 2018, Valdez Outfitters is offering boat rentals with their new 21-foot Hewescraft Hardtop Sea Runners with Yamaha 115hp 4-strokes for folks to embark on self-guided fishing and sightseeing adventures in Prince William Sound out of Valdez. The rental boats include electronics and safety gear and fishing gear is available for rent as well. It's a great option to self guide on the restricted charter days as the same rules do not apply.

Guided duck hunts and big-game hunts are on the menu and Valdez Outfitters also offers sightseeing and photography tours. Captain Tim Bouchard and Captain Brian Rhodes are both superior photographers. You should check out Brian Rhodes Photography on Instagram. You'll be impressed enough to want to follow him and love his gorgeous Alaska scenics and more.

After a little while the bite died down a bit and Captain Brian wanted to try another spot. It's their protocol to move

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around to find fish instead of staying in one spot all day. They have several good locations on the GPS if one isn't producing. I still hadn't caught a halibut but I had hopes.

"This is usually a good ledge for lingcod and yelloweye," Brian said, "Come on, guy, you can do this," he said to me. Soon everyone's rods are getting tapped by Alaska's fine bottomfish. Unexpectedly, Ben stumbles into a silver salmon. It's early yet for silvers on this third week in July and everyone hopes that means they are going to come in strong this year. Ben certainly seemed caught by surprise as his rod doubled over. He pumps the reel a little too much and jerks his rod up as the silver takes flight near the stern of the boat, then snaps off. "What, are you flying a kite?" Brian asks. "Geez, guy."

"Have you caught anything yet?" He says walking over to me.

"Yes, I caught a lingcod."

"Guy."

"I know."

Everyone had their one any-sized halibut except me. We had the lingcod limit and enough rockfish to call it quits and we were all conscious of preserving an easily over-fished resource. I dropped a jig to the bottom and played it for all it was worth. I felt a tug as a fish ate the jig



We like to add these marvelous yelloweye to the fish box—just a few per season to help maintain the resource.

© Melissa Norris

and I finally brought a flatfish on board. Thank you Valdez Outfitters! We have our two halibut just before the day is done. It's a couple hours of full throttle back to the port in Valdez. Our daughter, Maizie, is back at the RV Park with her grandparents and we are happy to cut bait and head back to our girl and prepare for

her Cars-themed third birthday party at Eagle's Rest.

Life is good. I am still cool in Captain Brian's eyes. I have fish for the freezer ready to bring to my buddies at Fish Central for processing. And the rest of the summer will be nothing but fun because the pressure is off . . . except for salmon!

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This is how you make your wife extra happy.
© Melissa Norris

Valdez Accommodations

We've been fishing in Valdez a long time and highly recommend a few places to stay. We adore the owners of Eagle's Rest RV Park, Jeff and Laura Saxe, and find their cabins clean and comfortable and the RV Park overall to be centrally-located, clean and chock full of amenities. Their amount of repeat clientele speaks volumes to the quality of the business they run.

If you prefer a hotel, then check out The Totem Hotel and Suites that has recently been rebuilt. Connie Ballow and Mike Williams are the owners of the gorgeous new hotel which now includes an indoor pool and fitness center. Choose from the Chugach suites, cabins or new hotel rooms with two queen beds or one king-sized bed. They have a breakfast buffet and tons of other amenities.

We also like the Best Western located right on the Harbor front. I stayed there for years when fishing the Women's Derby and always found their location and the hotel's comfort to be great.

Valdez Halibut Fishing Regulations

While regulations have been tightened for charter fishing in Southcentral's unit 3A which includes Valdez, anglers still have the ability to catch two halibut. One can be any size while the other has to be less than 28-inches long which amounts to about 7 pounds of fillets. We didn't target the nursery fish because it's more trouble than it's worth. It might seem like it is strict but my family gained over 70 pounds of various fish fillets on this fine day of fishing and we know exactly where they came from and how they were cared for. Wednesdays are closed to halibut fishing on charters in this unit and new for 2018 there are six Tuesdays where charter

guests cannot retain halibut—July 10, 17, 24, and 31, and August 7 and 14. Charters are still available for lingcod, rockfish and salmon (if available) on those days, just not for halibut.

The Valdez Fish Derbies

Derby tickets can be purchased on board any of Valdez Outfitters' charter vessels when you head out from the port or at many of the local businesses. From May 19 through September 2, the Halibut Derby takes place in Valdez. Last year's winner, Frieda Wiley, took first place with a 374-pound halibut caught on August 6 which netted her the \$10,000 grand prize. Prizes for the halibut derby also include a \$3,000 cash award for 2nd place and \$1,500 for the 3rd place winner. Weekly prizes are awarded and everyone who buys a derby ticket is entered to win a \$5,000 cash prize which is drawn at the end of the season.

In the third week of July there is a free, one-day Kids' Pink Salmon Derby featuring prizes for kids in four age divisions—5 to 7, 8 to 10, 11 to 13 and 14 to 16. There is a BBQ and awards ceremony with lots of prizes, all free to the kids and families who participate.

The Silver Salmon Derby commences on July 21 and runs through September 2. Like the Halibut Derby, the Silver Derby features a \$10,000 cash Grand Prize for the largest silver, \$3000 for second prize, and \$1,500 for third. Last year's winner took first place with a 15.62-pound silver caught with our friends at Shark Tooth Charters.

A special one-day-only derby for the Women's Silver Salmon Derby includes an opening ceremony, tons of door prizes, a single day of fishing and a closing awards ceremony. The women who enter this derby on August 11 this year are also entered in to the overall Silver Salmon Derby to compete for that grand prize. First-, second- and third-place are awarded in the Women's Derby.

Fish Alaska magazine has been a sponsor of these derbies for as long as we can remember and we appreciate all of the great people and sponsors that volunteer to put on these fun events for the locals and visitors to Valdez.

Visiting Valdez is fun no matter when or how you go. Any way you decide to do it we suggest booking at least one day with Valdez Outfitters and buying your derby ticket so you don't end up being THAT GUY.

Melissa Norris is Publisher of Fish Alaska and Hunt Alaska magazines. She can be reached at fishalaska@acsalaska.net.

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by George Krumm



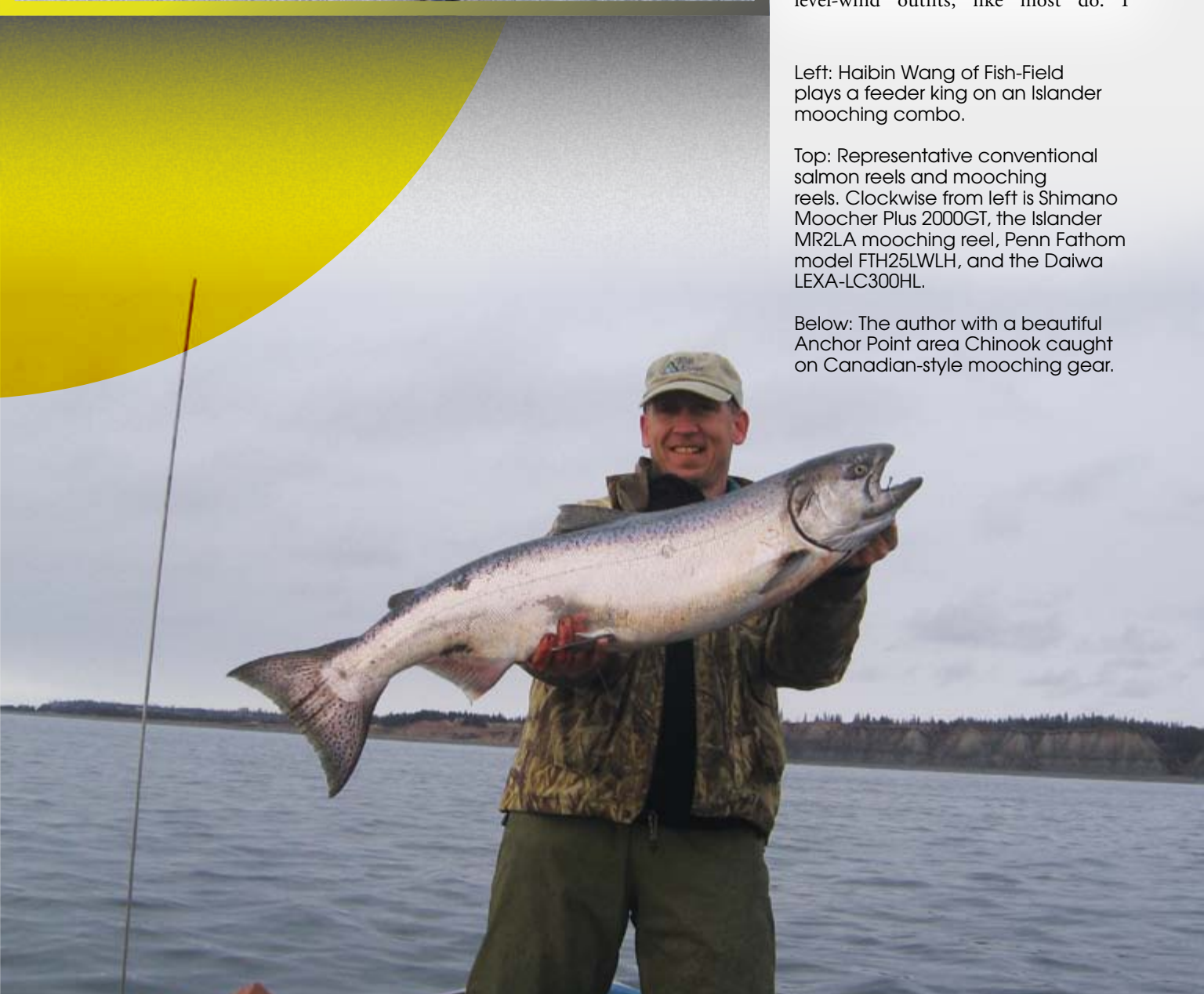
Several years ago, Andrew Ingram, Troy Hill and I launched via the tractor at Anchor Point and headed west to a trough in 110 feet of water. The plan was to sit on the hook to catch a limit of halibut, then head southeast to motor-mooch for kings along the beach. We got a nice limit of halibut ranging from 18 to maybe 30 pounds and finished two hours before high slack. We pulled anchor and I followed my GPS to the area I hoped would hold maturing kings destined for Cook Inlet streams. The evening was unusually calm, so much so that I could easily see current seams on the surface. The plan was to motor-mooch plug-cut herring behind four ounces of lead in water from 20- to 35 feet deep. As the incoming tide slowed we deployed blue label plug-cut herring that had been brined in Pro-Cure Brine 'N Bite, and dyed blue with Bad Azz Bait Dye.

Troy and Andrew used conventional level-wind outfits, like most do. I

Left: Haibin Wang of Fish-Field plays a feeder king on an Islander mooching combo.

Top: Representative conventional salmon reels and mooching reels. Clockwise from left is Shimano Moocher Plus 2000GT, the Islander MR2LA mooching reel, Penn Fathom model FTH25LWLH, and the Daiwa LEXA-LC300HL.

Below: The author with a beautiful Anchor Point area Chinook caught on Canadian-style mooching gear.





The Islander TR3 reel was designed with trollers in mind. It doesn't have the traditional free-spool lever.

had recently built a Canadian-style mooching rod and planned to use it along with a Shimano Moocher Plus 2000GT mooching reel. Our game plan regarding tides, timing, location and execution were on the money. Soon, both of my friends had kings in the box in the low-to-mid-20s. They retired their rods and began organizing gear for the trip back. I continued to zig-zag along the structure, throwing the motor in and out of gear to raise and lower my bait in the water column. It had been a great day so far; the only question remaining was whether or not I'd get to test my new mooching rod and reel on some Cook Inlet chrome...

There is something to be said about the smooth, silky operation of modern, high-quality conventional salmon reels. A tremendous feat of engineering and evolution has gone into the efficient reels of today. Most salmon anglers use them for most, if not all, of their saltwater salmon fishing and much of their freshwater fishing as well. After all, this efficiency helps put fish in the boat. They're so good, sometimes it makes landing fish seem rather easy.

Our neighbors to the south tend to

angle their salmon a little differently. For many decades, Canadians have used single-action reels in pursuit of salmon. For those unfamiliar with the gear Canadians often use, it looks quite a bit different than the conventional, level-wind setups and trigger-handled casting rods we usually employ in Alaska. Rods along the British Columbia coast tend to be a little longer, in the 10- to 10½-foot range, with shorter rear grips and longer fore grips. The guides are on the bottom of the rod, similar to a spinning rod or fly rod. In fact, the whole setup looks more like a big fly rod rig than a spinning or casting outfit. The reels they use look much like a large fly reel. These reels are often referred to as Canadian-style mooching reels, or just mooching reels. What they really are, no matter what you call them, are single-action reels.

Single-action reels have a 1:1 gear ratio. This means that for every revolution of the reel handle, the spool revolves one time. Single-action reels designed for salmon commonly have drags made of cork or synthetic materials, but when a fish runs, the reel handles spin in reverse, hence the nickname "knuckle busters." Typical single-action reels designed for salmon have a free-spool lever, too, which allows line to spill off the spool rather easily. The spool itself is narrow, but the diameter is quite large so they hold a lot of line—a few hundred yards or more, typically. Single-action mooching reels can be used for mooching, jigging and trolling, either with a downrigger or lead.

If modern, level wind conventional reels work so well, why would you want to use an old technology, single-action mooching reel? It's a fair question, for sure. It's really about preference. Before I give you my opinion, let's look at some of the advantages and disadvantages of each.



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CONVENTIONAL REEL ADVANTAGES

- Many price points.
- Many choices regarding brands, sizes and models.
- Multiplying gears result in rapid line retrieval.
- Sophisticated, extremely capable drag mechanisms.
- Level wind models make line management a non-issue.
- For most saltwater salmon fishing applications, they're easy to use, even for beginners.
- Line-counter versions are available.

CONVENTIONAL REEL DISADVANTAGES

- Lots of parts that can break, such as level-wind pawls, worm gears and bearings.
- Small-diameter spools (compared to mooching reels) allow significant line memory (coils) to form in monofilament.
- Complex in design; more difficult than mooching reels to repair or maintain.
- They tend to go out of production rather quickly.

SINGLE-ACTION MOOCHING REEL ADVANTAGES

- Simple in design; easy to maintain or repair.
- Durable; few parts to break or go bad.
- Large spool diameter results in almost no monofilament line memory problems.
- Little change in production schedules; a given model tends to be available for years.
- Simple but effective cork or synthetic drag materials.
- Available at several price points.
- The fun factor (more on this later).

SINGLE-ACTION MOOCHING REELS DISADVANTAGES

- Not as efficient as conventional reels due to 1:1 retrieve ratio, resulting in a slower maximum retrieve speed compared to conventional reels.
- Fewer choices of brands, sizes and models.
- Sometimes called "knuckle busters," most do not have an anti-reverse mechanism. As such, the reel handles revolve whenever the spool is turning. Anglers must let go of the reel handle when a fish runs or pay the price—either rapped knuckles or a broken line!

Lael Johnson (left) with Steve Rennalls of Islander Precision Reels with a feeder king landed with a single-action reel and mooching rod combo fished off a downrigger.
© Lael Johnson

A collection of Blue Fox Candyback Vibrax fishing lures. The lures are shown in various colors: orange, green, purple, pink, and blue. Each lure has a silver-colored body with a translucent candy finish on the interior. The lures are arranged in a grid-like pattern, with some showing the side profile and others showing the front view. The Blue Fox logo is visible on the side of each lure.

Candybacks Are Oh So Sweet.

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BLUE FOX
Nothing outfishes the fox.
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An advertisement for Onyx Inflatable Life Jackets. The image shows a man in a blue jacket and a cap, smiling and holding a large fish (likely a salmon) on a boat. The background is a blue sky and ocean. The Onyx logo is in the top left corner, with the tagline "Keeping you there." Below the logo. The text "Onyx Inflatable Life Jackets" is written in large, bold letters across the bottom, with the tagline "We focus on safety, so you don't have to." below it. The website "www.onyxoutdoor.com" is in the bottom right corner.

Onyx
Keeping you there.

Onyx Inflatable Life Jackets
We focus on safety, so you don't have to.

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Back to the question. “What I have works great. Why would I want to try something that is arguably old technology?”

In the last 50 years or so, maybe longer, the evolution of tournament fishing has resulted in tackle improvements to help anglers fish more efficiently, and thus land more fish during a typical tournament of limited duration. Stronger, better-casting reels, with high-speed retrieves, drag-capacity and so-on have ramped up so much that much of what was once challenging is now mundane. Playing fish on conventional reels sometimes seems mundane, too, partly because the gear we use today is so much better than it was when I was a kid. I like mooching reels and I use them for salmon whenever I can. The main reason? The fun factor.

Using single-action winches adds a dimension to the battle that is missing with modern conventional reels. You have a much more active role in fighting the fish. You have to let go of the handles when the fish runs. You have to crank like hell when a fish runs towards you since the retrieve ratio is 1:1. You feel the fish through both hands, and the best way I can describe the feeling as that of being more connected to the fish. On a

hot fish, I feel way more out of control using a mooching reel than I do using conventional gear. Everything that fish does is transmitted to both hands, and I have to control both of my hands to effectively play the fish. The result? Skyrocketing blood pressure, a double shot of adrenaline and excitement beyond what I normally feel while fishing conventional.

This is the fun factor. That out-of-control feeling that I used to get when I was young and hooked up to a nice Chinook or tail-walking coho—a feeling that has been diluted through the years by thousands of fish caught. This is why I like to fly fish for trout, and it’s why I often use mooching reels for trolling with downriggers, trolling with sliding lead setups, and of course mooching. It’s a funner fight. It’s more challenging.

I’m not necessarily after the biggest or the most. Quality of the experience has become much more important to me than it used to be. Quantity, not so much. I want to catch them my way; the way that is most enjoyable to me. Mooching reels satisfy that longing for quality.

Several manufacturers make mooching reels today. Some of them are Daiwa, Shimano, Abel, Okuma, Abu-Garcia, and

Islander. They vary in price from around \$80 for the Daiwa to as much as \$1000 for the Abel. I’ve used a few of them, including Shimano, Daiwa and Islander. Of those I’ve used, my Islander MR2LA has been my favorite. I also very much like the Islander TR3, which I had the opportunity to use this winter trolling for feeder kings. The TR3 lacks the free spool feature of the MR2LA; it’s designed to function as a trolling reel only.

However, it’s upgraded in many ways, including a fluoropolymer and stainless-steel, sealed-drag system, and corrosion-free ceramic bearings which together minimize maintenance. Though all the mooching reels I’ve used have been easy to use and functional, the quality and aesthetics of the Islander reels, in my opinion, are second to none. They are machined out of bar-stock aluminum, anodized and polished to a mirror finish. Tolerances are precise, and the overall effect is a reel that is essentially an heirloom-quality work-of-art.

Andrew and Troy had finished stowing gear and were patiently waiting for me to do something. I explained that it was now slack tide, and if I was going to get one it would surely happen within the



Islander’s TR3 reel and mooching rod are a well-matched combo.

next 45 minutes or hour. They explained 45 minutes would be better. A few minutes later my rod tip dipped towards the surface once, twice and then buried. I pulled the rod out of the rod holder as the king slashed through the surface. No bueno. A good bite, but I came up empty. I quickly chirped, “We won’t stay more than 30 more minutes.” My friends chuckled at this. With a limit of ‘buts and a king each in the boat, and with sunny, calm conditions, they were feeling good and didn’t give me too much grief.

I re-baited and sent my bait down about 30 feet and resumed my meandering path south towards Homer. I reminded myself to be a little slower on the draw if I got bit again. It didn’t take long. The rod did its dance for a few seconds, then bent deeply towards the surface as the king turned with the bait. The reel handle was already spinning rapidly, the clicker screaming, as I pulled the rod from the holder. Adrenaline kicked in. The fish stopped running, and trembling slightly, I began to gain line with a gentle hold on the reel handle. Several times I had to let go of the handle as the fish torpedoed towards the horizon. A few minutes later, Andrew slipped the mesh around the final king of the day and hoisted it into the boat. I was pleased to have caught that fish my way, on traditional mooching gear. A quality experience for sure, and I’ll take quality over quantity any day.

George Krumm is the editor for both Fish Alaska and Hunt Alaska magazines. He can be reached at george@fishalaskamagazine.com.

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[RECIPE]

Alaska Sockeye Salmon with Cranberry-Onion Jam, Brussels Sprouts and Butternut Squash Puree

Recipe by Drew Johnson,
Kincaid Grill

Ingredients

2 tbsp olive oil
4 pieces Alaska fresh-frozen
sockeye salmon fillets
1 lb brussels sprouts
1 tbsp butter
Salt and pepper to taste
Cranberry-Onion Jam (see below
for preparation)
Butternut Squash Puree (see below
for preparation)

First, prepare the Cranberry-
Onion Jam and Butternut Squash
Puree.

Cranberry-Onion Jam

Ingredients

2 tbsp olive oil
4 julienned white onions
1 cup brown sugar
1 cup apple cider vinegar
1 cup whole cranberries
Salt to taste

In a heavy-bottomed sauce pan
add olive oil, onions, and brown
sugar then simmer over low heat
until the onions are very soft. It
is very important that you keep
the pot stirred to avoid scorching.
While the onions are cooking, add
the cranberries to a food processor
and pulse until the cranberries
are minced. Add the minced
cranberries to a pot of cold water
and stir, this step will separate
the cranberry seeds from the
cranberry pulp. Using a strainer



skim the cranberry pulp (which is the part that
will be floating) and reserve. Discard the remaining
water and cranberry seeds. Next you will add the
vinegar and the cranberries to the pan of onions
and continue to cook over low heat until most all
moisture has evaporated. Cool to room temperature
for serving. Cranberry-Onion Jam will keep in the
refrigerator for up to a week and can be prepared
in advance. Serve this sweet and tart jam with your
fresh-frozen sockeye salmon.

Butternut Squash Puree

Ingredients

1 butternut squash
8 ounces butter
Water
Salt to taste

Peel and dice butternut squash. In a small sauce pan
add enough water to cover squash. Bring squash to
a boil over high heat. When water has begun to boil
turn the temperature down to bring the squash to
a low simmer. Cook the squash until fork tender.
Once the squash is tender remove from the heat
and strain. Reserve some of the liquid to add later.
Let the squash cool to room temperature then put it
and your butter into a good quality blender. Be very
careful when blending hot liquids! Start blending on
low speed until it begins to become smooth. If too
thick, add a small amount of reserved water to the
blender. Finished product should be a smooth, silky
texture. Finally, add salt to taste. Serve this as your
sauce with the sockeye salmon.

#eatalaska



Preparing the Recipe

The fresh-frozen sockeye salmon can be
thawed ahead of time in your refrigerator.
Place the salmon into a pan lined with paper
towels and cover with plastic wrap. You can
thaw the fish overnight before you prepare
your meal.

After you've made your Butternut Squash
Puree and Cranberry-Onion Jam, bring a
pot of water to boil over high heat. Once
boiling add the brussels sprouts and cook
until a bright green color develops, about
five minutes. Once the brussels sprouts are
cooked, strain and reserve for serving with the
salmon. Season to taste with salt and pepper.
Toss them with the butter at this time.

Over medium heat, add the olive oil to a
cast-iron skillet. While the pan is heating pat
dry your salmon fillets to remove any excess
moisture that may be present from thawing
out the fish. Season your salmon with salt and
pepper. Add the salmon to the pan flesh side
down if the skin is off. If the skin is on add
the salmon skin side down. Cook until flesh
or skin has begun to crisp. Once the salmon
begins to appear crisp and browned, flip and
turn off the heat. The fish should be cooked
to an internal temperature of 120 degrees
Fahrenheit to prevent the fish from becoming
dry or over cooked. Remove the fish from the
pan and serve with the previously prepared
accompanying ingredients. The sweetness
of the Butternut Squash Puree compliments
the rich flavor of the sockeye salmon. The
Cranberry-Onion Jam adds a wonderful tart
finish to this dish. Bon appétit!



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CC 903TG	9'0"	2	10 - 25	1 - 5	Graphite	\$250.00
CC 944TG	9'4"	2	15 - 30	1 - 8	Graphite	\$255.00
CC 944T	9'4"	2	15 - 30	1 - 8	Cork	\$255.00
CC 955TG	9'6"	2	15 - 40	4 - 12	Graphite	\$260.00
CC 1054TG	10'6"	2	15 - 30	1 - 8	Graphite	\$265.00
CC 1054T	10'6"	2	15 - 30	1 - 8	Cork	\$265.00
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An Instrument of Karma

Story by Kelly Pinnell

When a fisherman begins a story with the words, "I swear" one can almost immediately assume they are going to lie. You probably could assume that without those words, but they are your guarantee. Usually, I'll risk it, and maybe by the end of the story you will see that I had nothing to do with it, and therefore need not lie.

I swear this happened exactly like I am going to describe it. It was a fine June day back in 1990 something. I took a solo day-trip to the Russian River to enjoy the weather and start restocking the freezer with fresh sockeye. I made it to the Pink Salmon parking lot and got rigged and ready to go in about five minutes.

There were two guys by a truck in the parking spot next to mine. One was obviously the Alaskan and the other the tourist. You know. I started heading for the river when the tourist stopped me. We shared some idle chit-chat before he asked if he could check out my rig. He was a guy new to this part of the world and wanted to see what the locals did—perfectly reasonable in my mind. So, I showed him. An 8-weight, G.Loomis with a beefy Lamson reel, floating line, 10-pound tippet, a number 5 split shot, and a smolt fly tied on a stout Mustad salmon hook.

I use a smolt fly because it forces me to fish more ethically. I usually fish it through schools of salmon telling myself that I am trying to catch a trout. I often do, but that's not the point. It tends to curb the "sockeye twitch" if you know what I mean.

The Alaskan came rushing over and started telling his friend that my rig was basically crap. "You can't land a sockeye on 10-pound test! Hell, you can't even see your fly and you don't have enough weight to get anywhere near the bottom." I looked at their rigs. Perfectly reasonable rigs for the style fishing they were going to do. Short drifts through schools with a twitch when they see their fly near a salmon's mouth. I've seen a thousand rigs like this and started with similar ones myself.

I shrugged my shoulders and said, "Well, it's what I use." I left them behind and headed down to the river. I crossed right at the bottom of the stairs and walked up a bit above where those big rocks are at the head of the pool. I threw out a few casts to get my drift right and make sure I was ticking the bottom. When everything checked out, I walked a few steps down to just above those big rocks.

I happened to notice my friends from the parking lot coming down the stairs. I smiled at the man's reaction to my gear and then looked in the water. There, between the rocks, sat one, and only one, beautiful, fresh sockeye. I made a cast upstream into the shallower water, giving my lighter weight time to hit bottom before it dropped between the rocks, and hooked the fish. It put up a tough fight, jumping twice before I was able to bring it to shore. I looked around for a rock or stick to stun the sockeye before I dispatched it, but none were to be found. The only thing I could think to do was to hit it with my fist. It sounds a little crazy, but I was only thinking of speed, like with any responsible kill.

I looked up to see the two guys staring at me from across the bank. I laughed to myself realizing what it must have looked like to them.

I walked back up and there was one sockeye sitting in the exact same spot. One cast, another fresh sockeye on the bank. I dispatched it the same way and put it on the stringer. The two guys were still standing on the bank across from me, watching.

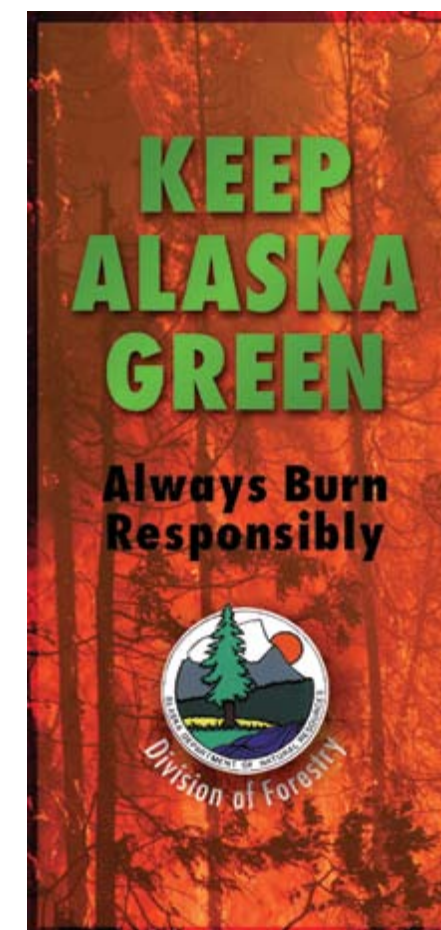
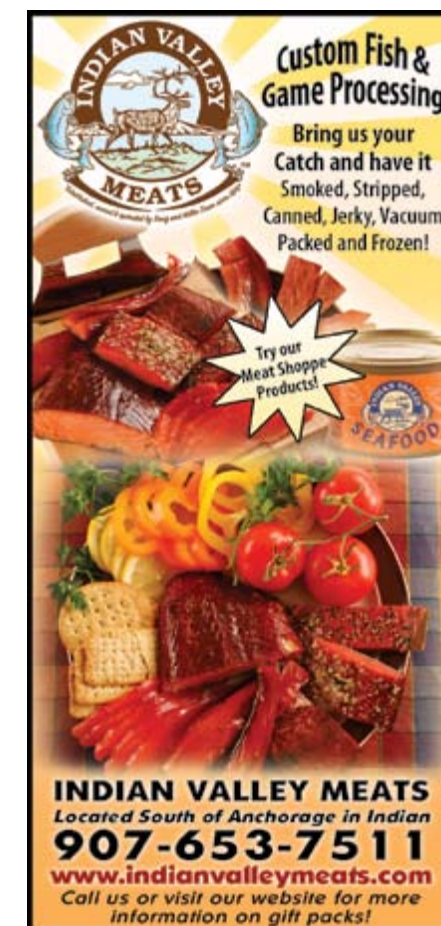
When I waded back up, there was yet another sockeye in the same exact spot. That's when it hit me. I had nothing to do with this. I was an instrument of Karma. The Universe was playing a trick on my Alaskan friend across the river for being such a jerk up in the parking lot. It was using the sockeye and me as pawns in its game.

That was perfectly fine with me. I smiled and made the cast. My limit was full before they had even gotten their boots wet.

I walked across the river toward the cleaning table (they had one there back then) and my friends. The Alaskan started to wander off into the river, but the tourist stayed. He was smiling at me and cheerfully said, "Well, that didn't take long."

I knew my role in this now, so played my part to the fullest. I swung the heavy stringer of sockeye onto the table. The impact of 20 pounds of fresh salmon made the table reverberate with a metallic thud. Those of you that have ever heard me speak know how deep my voice is, but I took it down a notch further as I said, loud enough for all to hear, "Never does."

Author Kelly Pinnell is a long-time Alaskan and fly fisherman. His books include The Dolly Made Me Do It and The ABC's of Reading Alaska's Small Rivers and Streams. He enjoys standing in water and waving sticks at fish.



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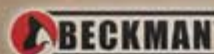
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