

## An Alaskan Adventure by Bob Randall

Ron Ward, Mike Kidd, my son Craig Randall, and myself went fishing in Alaska from August 17 through the 23<sup>rd</sup>. Technically, the address of the Katmai Trophy Lodge where we stayed is King Salmon, AK. It's quite a way from town, such as it is. King Salmon was a military base during WWII and still has an Air Force and Coast Guard presence. Gasoline was about \$7 per gallon; one of the guys bought an 18 pack of beer for about \$38; I bought a package of trail mix for about \$5. It has a bank, a bar and grill, a "grocery" store, and a liquor store. King Salmon is on the Naknek River which is a tributary to Bristol Bay, the foremost salmon fishery in North America.

It's a long, long plane ride just to get there and the trip back is a red-eye out of Anchorage. I recommend getting a seat with extra leg room. On the flight back try to get a window seat. Not that there's anything to look at but you can lean your head against the window to try to get some sleep.

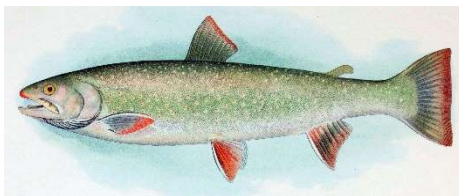
The water was unseasonably warm and low. [A warm Alaska June was followed by the hottest month ever recorded in the state. The average temperature in July was 58.1 degrees, 5.4 degrees above the historical average with records maintained since 1925.](#) There was much talk in the lodge and amongst the guides about how the big silver run hadn't happened yet. Still, everyone caught salmon, silver, pink, chum, and, at least, a couple of small kings. The Naknek River is famous for its trophy rainbows that grow large on salmon eggs. The biggest take of trophy bows is in the fall. Still, bows in the 20 to 25-inch range were caught.

There are several places to choose from for fishing: the Naknek River, King Salmon Creek, Big Creek, Brooks Falls, and anyplace you can land a float plane within an appropriate flying distance that fits your wallet.



We flew into Contact Creek, about a 25-minute plane ride. The pilot landed on a postage stamp size lake. From the air I couldn't believe he was going to try it. He did. I thought there was no way he would get stopped before we hit the other side. When the pontoons settle into the water they act like a brake. We unloaded and he took off. Without the weight of six of us (2 guides were with us) and our gear, he cleared the edge of the lake by at least 4 feet. I wondered how the hell we were going to get back at the end of the day. The answer was several miles away at a bigger lake.

A short hike of a quarter mile or so brought us to the creek. After sliding down the bank to the creek, I danced in the water for just a moment before I went down. Trying to act in a dignified manner, I made it about 100 yards before I danced in the water again, went down hard (really hard) and spent a while trying not to limp or complain. No water in the waders except for possibly a little moisture if I peed my pants. Not sayin' I did. Out came the wade staff. Downstream we found a gravel bar and using large indicator above an articulated streamer (only one hook, the front one was cut or simply tied on a device without a hook) we nailed them.



They called the fly a dali lama and it was tied in olive, brown, and black/white. Ron also used a leech pattern in brown or olive. Dolly vardens were the fish of the day. Dollys have a look of brown trout with white on its fins. Maybe its the look of



brook trout with white on its fins. Well it has spots and it has white fins and some red. On another day a different guide insisted that the fish I was catching were arctic char. I couldn't tell the difference. Anyway they are some sure 'nuf nice fish. ["Although many populations are semi-anadromous, ... it is considered by](#)

[taxonomists as part of the \*Salvelinus alpinus\* or Arctic char complex, ... Dolly Varden trout and Arctic char overlap.](#)” There were some white fish, char, and other fish taken, too. Then we switched to grayling. Mike



caught four. I’m not sure about Ron, but Craig and I each caught one. They were hitting on dry flies but the hit was really light. I missed the big one I was going for until the guide switched my fly to a weighted nymph. The grayling took it and I had to be satisfied with one really nice slab of a fish. No, I didn’t keep it. It’s still there waiting for you to catch it.

After the 3 or 4 or 5 or 6 mile hike to the fly out lake, we had to wait for the plane. He was 20 minutes late, so he didn’t get his \$20 tip. It had drizzled on us all day but at the lake during the wait, it turned to rain and the wind picked up. This is testimony to the value of layering with polypropylene underwear, wool shirts, and a good rain/wind jacket. What would have been 20 minutes of shivering was really not a problem.

As we loaded onto the plane, the pilot made a cursory speech about where the emergency gear such as life jackets were. Somehow it came across something like this, “If we crash, you die.” Take off and being able to see the area from the air revealed glacial features. There was a U-shaped valley leading down into the lake and a terminal moraine which acted as a dam. Other geological features clearly showed the work of glaciers. Elsewhere in the lower 48 one would say that 15 thousand years ago the glacier melted. This was Alaska and I have no idea when that glacier melted.

We didn’t always fish together so I’ll talk about my own adventure. The Naknek River has rapids or at least, that’s what they called them. I think we would call them riffles. From the outflow at the Naknek Lake, they flow over several submerged gravel bars and this riffle continues for miles down to about where our lodge was. Craig caught a couple of silvers in the lower part



and a couple of caught a 22 incher. My son and I play a than you did”. We eventually lose count straight. Further up near the lake, I salmon. The technique for catching fish weight attached to the middle of a 3-way to a bead that looked like a salmon egg. was threaded through it a couple of hook. The idea is that when the fish took the bead and you set the hook, it came from the side. When you landed the fish, it was hooked on the outside of the lip and the hook was easier to remove.



nice rainbows in the mid-20-inch range. I game called “I caught more (or bigger) fish and track of the size. It’s hard to keep the lies caught a 25 inch bow and a some nice sock eye on the gravel bars was to have a lead wire as a swivel. A long leader about 4 feet was attached The bead had a hole through it and the line times. About 2 inches below the bead was the



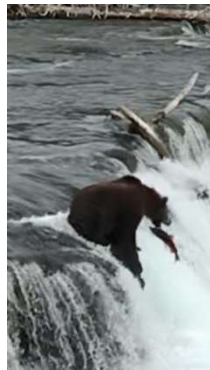
Big Creek was a bust. We could see salmon but we couldn’t get them on the line. The only bites I had were lots of No-See-Ums and a few mosquitoes. I believe the dry weather could be responsible for the surprising relief from mosquitoes.

Interestingly, there were two Austrians staying at the lodge with us. They caught 8 silvers in Big Creek although it was further upstream from where we were fishing. Better guides, I say. Let me digress to the Austrian fellows. They were good guys. They spoke excellent English but we couldn’t understand them through the thick accent. Well, eventually we communicated. They were named Herold and Gerhardt. I screwed up their names when I tried to introduce them to everyone else in the group and finally settled on Harry and Gary.

Brooks Falls is the home of that iconic photo of the brown bear at the top of a waterfall catching salmon. It took us about an hour or



his territory and chased down into the stream.



more to get there by boat. My picture isn't as good as the one you have all seen in magazines. By the way, the bear missed that salmon. He was the only bear on the falls when we arrived.

Another, bigger, older way up to the falls right into a pool came up with a fish. decided that the other the first bear across



bear made his and jumped below and He finally bear was in the falls and



Fishing downstream from the falls, I landed a 25-inch rainbow. Shortly after that catch, another bear came downstream and forced us off the creek for a while. The fishing wasn't particularly good as we didn't catch many, but I'm sure happy with that bow.



As we were heading back to our boat, we saw a mama bear with two cubs down the beach about 150 yards from us. They were headed our way. It was back up the trail to the ranger station to wait until they passed. No problem, good pictures.

The main push for silver salmon was on King Salmon Creek. Mike and Ron pretty much discovered this as the rest of us were out trying to catch salmon where the salmon weren't biting. I didn't get to go to this location until the last day. I didn't bring home as much fish but I'm more of a wiener roast guy anyway. Silvers fight like demons once they realize they are hooked. Feeling the bite is another story. You have to set the hook at the slightest indication. I never seemed to get the hang of that and worked all day long to land a limit of silvers (5 fish) and only two of them were properly hooked. It would have been good to end the week on a high note. I was a little frustrated then, but as I look back at the pictures and relive the fight of a 30 inch salmon in my mind, I savor it all.



If you can get to Alaska to fish, do it. Sell your house, sell your car, steal your grandkids' college fund. Get there, go fish.

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