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DATELINE: RUSSIA

On-Site Report

All about a Salmon Trip to the Kola River

Editor Note: Subscriber John Lachin, who filed a report in these pages recently about a three-day trip to the Lax-A in Adaldalur, Iceland, is back again this month with a report on a trip to the Kola River in Russia booked for him by the same agent he used on his Iceland trip, namely, Lax-A Angling Club, Iceland. Our hat’s off to John Lachin for sharing what he learned on these trips!

After my 2016 trip to Iceland, which I wrote about in these pages, I decided to finally make a trip to the Kola Peninsula in northern Russia. If there is a salmon Mecca, this is it, I concluded, after reading about catching 20-plus salmon per day on some rivers, some weighing over 30 pounds.

The river I selected, with help from Lax-A Angling Club in Iceland, was the Kola River, about an hour from Murmansk. The name of the Russian operation there is Camp Monika.

I departed Washington Dulles Airport this past June 22 on a nonstop Aeroflot flight, arriving at Moscow’s Sheremetyevo (SVO) the next morning at 7:25. I had a layover until a 3:10 PM departure to Murmansk. The service was superb. The flight to Moscow used a brand new Airbus, I think an A330, with an A319 to Murmansk. The planes were very comfortable and the food and its service were first-rate. Also, my business-class ticket provided access to the Aeroflot club, which was very comfortable with good food and amenities during the layover. The business-class ticket was also invaluable upon my return flight. More on that later.

Upon arrival in Murmansk around 5:40, I took a taxi to the Radisson Park Inn. The taxi was the only expense on the whole trip for which I paid with rubles. My taxi driver did not understand much English, but he made it clear there was no problem paying by credit card. As it turned out, however, there was an ATM at the hotel that accepted my bank card, so I used it to withdraw 3,000 RU, 2,000 of which (about $33) I used to pay him.

The next day I was picked up at noon for the one-hour drive to the lodge, which gave me time for a couple hours of unguided fishing that afternoon, Saturday being the guide’s day off. The lodge was new, having opened the prior winter, and service was excellent. In addition to salmon trips to regional rivers, they also host bear hunts during the winter. It is beautifully situated on a large lake connected to the river some distance away (not within walking distance). The main page of the Camp Monika website has a photo of the lodge, and if you click on the link to “Rake,” there are additional pictures of the rooms. I had a double room booked as a single that was very comfortable. The food was excellent, and beer or wine was available if desired. Lunch and dinner were served buffet style. Dinner included a meat serving with various sides, such as fresh salad, fruits, and desserts.

The daily routine was a hot breakfast around 7 AM with eggs and meats; coffee and cereal/breads were available earlier.
Waders and boots were kept in a room under the lodge. By 8 you were in the van to take you to the river, about a 25-minute drive. We were dropped off at the Junction pool, where the guides had lodging and would meet us with inflatable boats ready for fishing. The lodge packed a lunch for each of us that included a soup, sandwich, fruit (apple), and chocolate, plus the drink of our choice (water for me). Gradually we would work our way to other pools downstream, ending at the Parksa Bridge Pool, where the van picked us up at 5 PM. Dinner was at 7 PM.

My personal guide was Pascha. He’s the young fisherman pictured on the lodge website holding a 40-pound fish. Before guiding on the Kola, he guided other Kola Peninsula rivers for the British firm, Roxton’s. He said you can catch 20–30 salmon per day on some rivers, but all of them are smaller than what is available in the Kola.

The Kola Peninsula is located within the Arctic Circle, and the Kola River flows north to the Barents Sea. South of Murmansk, the Kola flows into the Tuloma watershed, which then forms the estuary on which Murmansk is located. The area we fished was a section of the Kola where the tributary Kitza joins it. The Kitza flows southwest and the junction makes a Y with the northward flow of the Kola. There are rapids from the Kitza joining the Kola. South of this is the large Junction pool, which can easily accommodate five or six rubber boats, each with a single angler, while others cast from the banks. After the Junction pool were the Serious, Pump, Parksa (unfishable due to high water), Green Bank, and Parksa Bridge pools. The day ended at the Parksa Bridge pool, where a footbridge spans the river. The guides sometimes fished farther downstream to the Cemetery and Monika pools, although I didn’t do so.

The first two days (Sunday and Monday) I shared the boat with another fisherman, alternating fishing from the boat or the bank. The rest of the week I had the boat to myself. The week I was there (third week of the season, last week in June), the water was about one meter higher than normal, owing to a heavy snow pack and early thaw. With the high water, it was necessary to stay right on the bank, which was a major drawback of the trip, although in some spots bank fishermen did well because the salmon were also hugging the bank.

The fishing was done with two-handed rods. Some used a Scandi line with a sink tip. I brought two 14-foot rods, an older Sage RPL with a 650-grain Skagit line and an Orvis Clearwater with a 650-grain Hydros Spey line, similar to a Scandi. I mainly used the Sage with a 15-foot section of T-11 with a five-foot leader of 30-pound Orvis Mirage fluorocarbon. The Sage cast the heavy tip quite well. Most of the fishermen were using German Snaelda tube flies in various colors. I had some good-sized tubes and traditional dressings but no Snaelda. Seppo, the fishing manager, lent me a set of flies, and my guide also lent me some to use. We used double “stinger” hooks.

The first day, a fellow from France and I shared the boat with Pascha. I enjoyed the first period on the boat in the Junction pool. Not long into the morning I hooked my first salmon. As mentioned, the Kitza flows in from the northeast and turns north with the Kola. The pool was the quiet water south of the merge. My fish jumped a few times and headed downstream into the rapids. Pascha dropped his rope (picked up later) and off we went chasing the fish. At one point it had cleared over 300 yards of running line and backing before I was able to stop the run. We then landed a 7 kg (15 lb) fish that beat my personal best from prior trips in

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North America and Europe. Pascha left the fish on the bank and gave the coordinates to the camp cook to pick it up for dinner. Pascha then grabbed all the gear and put the raft on his head, and we walked back to the Junction pool along a dirt road beside the river.

On Monday I shared the boat with another Frenchman. I caught a nice 9 kg (20 lb) fish in the Pump pool. Then on Tuesday I caught a 5 kg (11 lb) fish in the Junction pool using the Orvis outfit with a type-8 sink tip. All the rest of the fishing was with the 15-foot T-11 rig using the Sage. On Wednesday I caught another 9 kg fish in the Serious pool. Thursday was the best day, with a 5 kg and an 8 kg fish, plus a large fish of 105 cm and 11 kg (24 lbs). On Friday I caught a 3 kg fish, the only grilse, but still bigger than a full-sized salmon in other rivers. My total was eight fish in six days.

As exciting as these catches were, there were other memorable moments. One day I hooked what might have been the biggest fish of the trip in the Junction pool. It made a few nice leaps, so we had a good look, but for whatever reason the hook came free. My most memorable hookup occurred on Thursday morning. Rather than start in the Junction pool, as on other days, we moved down to the Serious pool. Whenever we moved to a new spot I would start with a short cast of 25 feet or so and then make successively longer casts. When I reached my comfortable casting distance, Pascha would then let out about a meter of line between casts. On the very first cast of the morning I hooked another big fish.

Unlike most other salmon rivers in the world, the Kola is open to all kinds of fishing. Occasionally we would see others in a rubber boat or fishing from the shore. One night, two Italian fishermen at the camp Monika website described above has links to the catch reports. In 2015 and 2016 combined, 28 fish larger than 100 cm were caught prior to July 1, all but one in the first two weeks of June, versus four on or after July 1. After July 1 the catch rates go up, but the number of big fish plummets. The big fish are still likely there, but it is perhaps harder to present a fly to them because of the greater number of grilse eager to take a fly.

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After arriving in Moscow and retrieving my bags, I was able to use the Sky Priority lane and was ticketed back to Washington via JFK in New York that afternoon. Had I not had a business-class ticket I might have been in line for hours for reticketing and not returned home until the next day. As with the other flights, the service on the flight to New York was superb.

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It is recommended that fishermen bring a personal flotation device (PFD). I brought one and also brought multiple layers for fishing in near-freezing temperatures. Another recommendation is to bring a dry bag and change of clothes. I bought an inexpensive Cordura 20-liter dry bag from REI that worked well, even after sitting in water in the bottom of the boat all day. My dry clothes only filled half the bag, but that gave me extra space to store outer layers when the temperature warmed. They also recommend felt-soled boots without studs so as not to damage the inflatable boats. However, I had Simms star-shaped (flat) cleats that worked well with no risk of damage. I also brought an eye mask with me: At 10 PM it was still full sunlight and the curtains in the room did not block it out. The eye mask was essential to getting a good night’s sleep.

In closing, I would definitely recommend this trip. I have already booked a return trip in 2018. Enjoy!—John Lachin.

Postscript: John Lachin gives the full cost of his trip as $11,004, including his airfare of $5,605. He says his prime contact at Lax-A in booking his trip was Valderdor Arpadottir, valderdor@lax-a.is, (+354) 531 6100, info@lax-a.is. As for contact details for the Russian operation, he says the web address for the camp is: https://www.campmonika.com/.

Scroll down to the lower left and select Google translate, he advises. The translation is crude but comprehensible. The office director is Nikolai Korotkov, niknorton@yandex.ru. The camp director is Seppo Muttilainen, seppo.muttilainen@pp.inet.fi, 79210338223 or 358503427783. In an important afterword, Lachin points out that the Camp Monika website provides pictures of the new lodge on the lake. They are different from those on the Lax-A website, which at this writing show a lodge that has since burned down but is being reconstructed to open for the 2018 season. Lax-A will be booking trips to both “new” lodges in 2018. The newer lodge will be in the village of La Parksa, near the Parksa and Parksa Bridge pools. Because it’s right alongside the Kola River, with just a short ride upriver to rendezvous with the guides, he says. Lachin says his trip in 2018 will be based at the new (rebuilt) La Parksa Lodge.
The Angling Report

Briefly Noted

Things to Do . . . Places to Go . . . New Developments

There are only a handful of people, maybe only one person, actually, who is known and revered by everyone in fly fishing. I am talking about the generous, kind, and wonderfully talented Lefty Kreh, of course. At 93, Lefty is still in there punching and pursuing his passion, but he is having health issues. Lefty sent out this update on his condition recently to a large list of friends. In case you weren’t on that list, or weren’t copied on it by someone, here is what he had to say in that note. It starts out with the simple heading, To my friends:

I was 92 in January and had a carotid artery operation. During testing the hospital determined my heart was only pumping 35 percent and must limit my physical activities followed by a rest. The industry was extremely helpful and last season was able to attend the shows, clinics, etc.

Several weeks ago, I realized I was developing another problem, which is normal for someone nearly 93. It turns out I have congestive heart failure. My pacemaker revealed there was a series of very rapid heartbeats, which could cause a stroke. Fortunately, a lot of doctor/friends are fly fisherman and worked with me. In summary, I have to give up travel and presentations as in the past.

Everyone produces a certain amount of fluid in the body and excretes the excess. Because of the low heartbeat, my body is not getting rid of all the fluids and I gained weight. My best friend Dr. Mark Lamos put me in the hospital and with two back-to-back procedures removed a liter and a half of fluid from my chest. After five days in the hospital, I lost weight.

A week or so later I starting gaining weight again so it was back in the hospital for the same treatment. They reduced most of the fluid again and I returned home. I determined I was not going to continue back to the hospital. Mark decided to use medicine to control the excess fluid. It’s been a fine-tuning situation but looks like it’s starting work.

This means the schedule I lived for decades is no longer valid and will spend most my time at home. As we get older we learn to adjust to what we can and cannot do. I have a number of interesting computer home projects, and I am busier than a Syrian bricklayer. Because of my lack of energy and stamina, I am having trouble answering e-mails, and I am not talking much on the phone. This is not meant to be unfriendly. I am just learning to adjust to my situation.

In summary, I’m busy and content, but I want you to know I am so appreciative you have shared your lives with me. All the Best, friends, Lefty.

After some difficult seasons recently,

the vast and fascinating river system of the Amazon Basin is producing some great results. The first river we have a report on is the Marmelos River, where Luis Brown of River Plate Angling is again operating one of his floating camps after a five-year hiatus. We are indebted to subscriber Gerry Patterson for a report on a blowout trip to the Marmelos this past August 29 to September 5, booked for him by Rod and Gun Resources (830-792-6800). Patterson writes:

“Our group of five fly fisherman and three bait casters landed 1,720 peacock bass weighing up to 20 pounds. I caught a 20-pounder myself on a 10 wt. fly rod. More than 50 of the fish caught on this trip exceeded 10 pounds, with many of those weighing more than 15 pounds. Our success rate on this trip would have been higher if Rod and Gun Resources owner J. W. Smith and his wife, Dawn, had fished more. They left camp for a three-day, two-night exploratory trip on the upper Marmelos, researching 120 miles of river that has never been sport-fished before. They said they only sight-cast to big peacock bass on sand flats. Dawn landed three 13-pound peacocks in the last two hours of their exploratory, she said, and hooked three others that broke her 40-pound leader. Both said they were very impressed by the number of double-digit fish they saw and caught on the upper river. Luis and Brown and J. W. Smith are currently working on the logistics of flying into this area starting next July.”

The second river we have a great report on is the Rio Marié, an Untamed Angling destination. The Fly Shop (800-669-3474) coordinates all US bookings on this river. The sixth week of this year’s program on the Marié (October 19 to 26) was notable not just for the number of big fish it produced but also for the taking of a mammoth 25-pound peacock bass on a popper. What a crash that must have been! Here are some excerpts from the sixth-week report as sent to us by The Fly Shop:

“The weather during our sixth week was sunny most days, and temperatures were stable, ranging between 86 and 95 degrees Fahrenheit. We had perfect fishing conditions at the beginning of the week with lots of action on flies. Most of the fish were taken around structures on the main river. Lakes and lagoons were not so productive. Due to the water levels, we had the most success fishing with streamers with intermediate and sinking tips. We also had some success using floating lines and poppers. Here are the vital statistics on the trip: Number of Anglers, eight. Number of butterfly peacock bass caught, 545. Number of temensis peacocks caught, 57. Temensis over 10 pounds, 11. Temensis over 15 pounds, nine. Temensis over 20 pounds, three. The highlight of the week was the taking of a 25-pound monster fish on a popper by John Leonard. Three years ago, John caught a 24-pounder on the

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Rio Marié, and he was told by his guide that it would be the biggest peacock bass of his entire life. Well, that has not turned out to be true now that he has caught a 25-pounder!”

Still on the subject of Amazon fishing, we also received this last-minute report on a lodge that is completely new to us and will likely be new to most subscribers to this publication. The lodge is a floating hotel called Ecolodge da Barra that is situated in the midst of vast sand flats and other interesting waters where a host of species can be taken, in addition to peacock bass. Here is an overview from subscriber John Lyons, who fished Ecolodge da Barra last summer:

This past August, I signed up through The Fly Shop (800-669-3474) for an exploratory trip to the Jaguar River, a tributary that had never been fly-fished before and was said to offer multiple species of fish, including peacock bass. The trip turned out to be a very rustic jungle experience. Tents, air mattresses, and a resident caiman named Albert were all part of the deal, along with good aluminum johnboats with dual fishing platforms and good motors. A professional head guide oversaw a crew of local guides who knew the river well. All equipment and facilities were provided by a lodge that none of us had heard about called Ecolodge da Barra.

To make a long story short, fishing in the Jaguar River was good, not great. We took a variety of species, but most of us focused on a species of peacock bass that averaged only five to eight pounds. These were decidedly not temensis peacocks that run upwards of 20 pounds. Our host on the trip was from Ecolodge da Barra, and he made it clear from day one he was dying to show us and Fly Shop owner, Mike Michalak, his downriver lodge, which he said was fabulous. So, on day three, with no objections from any of the anglers, including me, we broke camp and headed 150 miles downriver in the johnboats, stopping occasionally to fish. In about six hours, we arrived at a large bay formed by the confluence of three rivers, the Rio Juruena, Rio Teles Pires and Rio Tapajós. They were very different from the narrow, jungle-lined Jaguar River. And so was Ecolodge da Barra. To us unshaven, unwashed, sweaty anglers who had just spent part of a week camping in the jungle, the two-story, 16-room, gleaming hardwood hotel sitting on a barge anchored to the jungle shore rose up like an apparition. We were still in the middle of absolutely nowhere, mind you, when we were greeted at the dock by a white-coated hotel manager with ice-cold caipirinhas. We promptly entered what felt and looked like an air-conditioned Taj Mahal and were escorted to our spacious rooms featuring an en-suite bathroom, twin queen beds, river-view decks and HOT SHOWERS. The best part was we then proceeded to enjoy four days of spectacular fishing, which involved running half-hour trips up the three rivers or wading mile-long sand bars to catch amazing fish such as arowana that swam ghost-like across flats that made you think of bonefish rather than jungle species. The primo species, in my opinion, was the vampire-fanged payara (locally called cachorra) in the 15- to 20-pound class, all with those characteristic fangs so long they fit into holes in the upper jaw. Payara have mouths of iron, so you count jumps (like tarpon) rather than landings; I did manage to land seven, however. Later, we moved to different river and shore areas to catch bicuda, a large and very strong fish that made me think of the barracuda. Peacock bass were everywhere and almost became by-catch. We also caught pacu, tambaqui, jatuarana, matrixá, and piranha, among other. In the evenings, we sat at a delightful bar, ate in a large dining room, and enjoyed superb service. In addition, there was a local village nearby called Barra de São Manuel with a dirt airstrip, which meant our return flight to Manaus was in a land-based Caravan turboprop rather than a floatplane. I have fished exotic fly fishing locations many times over 40 years, and Ecolodge da Barra was the finest lodge I have ever stayed in. The fishing and scenery were fabulous. A plus on our trip was the presence of Gerson Kavamoto, who has to be the world’s best tour manager, head guide, and all-around pleasant person. He works frequently for The Fly Shop, and you will have really lucked out if he is handling your trip. Enjoy!

Postscript: The cost of a six-day fishing trip to Ecolodge da Barra is currently pegged at $4,990. Contact the Fly Shop for more details.

Remember those new flats fishing regulations that created so much turmoil out in the Bahamas last year? They included some good things such as the creation of a moderate daily fishing license fee with proceeds at least partially earmarked for conservation and enforcement. Unfortunately, the release of the regulations was not followed up promptly with instructions on how to acquire a license. For a long time, in fact, the licenses were simply not available in some areas, which scared away anglers who feared getting in trouble with the law. As for the use of the funds generated by the sale of licenses, it has never been made clear by the government just where the monies are going. Worse still, the regulations did some dumb things like ban the use of a boat on the flats for the purpose of fishing by non-Bahamians. The rule poses a huge threat to the vacation property construction industry in the Bahamas and continues to anger current owners of such properties. The worst part of the license brouhaha was the racist rhetoric and violent behavior of some Bahamian guides who pushed the view that foreign involvement in the sportfishing industry was a colonial conspiracy of some sort. Those same yahoos wanted to ban all do-it-yourself fishing. Remember those reports of a burned car and vandalized rental vehicles?
This recap of events is a roundabout way of getting to some good news, namely, the regulations have been officially suspended while a new government studies the situation and presumably comes up with a wiser and better way to regulate flats fishing in the Bahamas. I have that directly from various Bahamian officials who took part in a Bahamas Panel discussion at the Bonefish Tarpon Trust Symposium last month in Weston, Florida. The announcement was a complete surprise to everyone in attendance at the gathering. The tenor of the discussion after the announcement, I’m pleased to report, was all very positive. There is reason to hope that some good (or at least better) rules are on the way. Stay tuned for an update.—Don Causey.

- OUTFITTER CRITIQUES -

The Good, the Bad, and the Ugly

This section of The Angling Report is based entirely on subscriber-written Fishing Trip Report Forms. Our policy on these forms is to publish excerpts in the newsletter of Angler Network Forms as received without censorship. Agents, guides, lodge operators, and/or outfitters who disagree with anything said about them in this section are free to submit a rebuttal. As a subscriber, you can help extend the reach of this program by filing a Fishing Trip Report Form yourself. You should find one inside this issue of your newsletter. Alternatively, you can file a report online by going to our website, www.anglingreport.com, and clicking on “File a Report.”

Subscriber Jim Aylsworth has checked in with a fact-filled report on a trip he took to Colorado this past August, where he fished for brown trout in the Gold Medal waters of the Arkansas River. He writes:

I’ve just returned from another great fishing vacation in Colorado. This time, I wanted to travel to good freshwater trout fishing closer to Texas than the usual place I visit, Vail Valley. After some deliberation, I settled on a plan to fish the famous Arkansas River in the area of Salida, Colorado, with the guides from ArkAnglers Arkansas River Fly Shop in Salida. The plan was to fish mostly for brown trout. Why the Arkansas River? you ask. Why Salida? Because this particular stretch of river has up to 5,000 trout per mile!

The Arkansas River, a major tributary of the Mississippi River, was named Colorado’s most popular fishery in a recent Division of Wildlife survey. It is also listed as a Gold Medal fishery, indicating it is among the state’s highest-quality publicly available streams. The river begins in Colorado, flows through Kansas and Oklahoma, and eventually joins the mighty Mississippi in Arkansas.

As a trout fisherman, my interest in this river is limited to its first 102 miles, beginning in the Rocky Mountains near Leadville, Colorado, where it is fueled annually by snowpack melt in the Mosquito and Sawatch Mountain Ranges. The stream plunges over 4,600 feet through the Royal Gorge and then flows on to Pueblo, Colorado. Over that distance, it takes a turn to the south and flows through a high alpine meadow before dropping through steep canyons of granite boulders and some scattered Ponderosa Pine. Subsequently, it heads east and meanders through a high desert canyon. In each section, there are populations of wild brown trout and some rainbow trout. They feast on a cornucopia of fish food such as caddis, stoneflies, drakes, pale morning duns, and occasionally terrestrials.

The Arkansas River in Colorado is a steep, fast-flowing freestone river created naturally from melting snow and rain in the high country. There is no large dam controlling water flows and temperatures. So, unlike tailwaters that have consistent temperature and controlled flow, the Arkansas River has a certain volatility. You’ll rarely be fishing a stable 1,000 cfs over a prolonged period of time on this type of water. Rather, you’ll see flows rise and drop on a weekly or even daily basis based on what kind of moisture the feeder streams are pumping in. When I was there this past August, the big challenge was finding water that had not been tainted by mud from rain runoff. This points up the importance of hiring a guide on this river. You need local knowledge to catch a lot of trout here.

I spent my first day on the Arkansas with a guide named Scot Bealer, a former airline executive in his 50s who has successfully adjusted to the more casual lifestyle of a fishing guide. He took me walking and wading the upper portion of the river in Hayden Meadows, an eight-mile stretch of water that flows through high meadows downriver from Leadville. This stretch is just upriver from Lake Creek and Twin Lakes. We simply drove up the river looking for a turnout or parking lot that was empty to insure we would be the only ones on that particular stretch of water. We found beautiful water that was flowing at only about 400 cfs. Later in the day, Scott took me to Brown’s Canyon and Hecla Junction farther downstream. The fishing was slow here, but the setting was beautiful. We caught about one trout per hour.

Earlier, when we first met at the fly shop, Scot had asked me if I wanted big fish or lots of fish, and I had replied that I wanted to see new water. So that is exactly what we did. We moved twice to see new water and to avoid the mountain thunderstorms roving in and out of the
Brown trout are ambush-style predators currents in the middle lanes of the river. Here are not typically found in the faster success or lack thereof. The brown trout is often the most important factor in your this one the type of water you are fishing access to this river is a breeze.

Medal portion of the river. In general, The latter follows along the lower, Gold Highway 285 and finally US Highway 50. US Highway 24 follows much of the on this water if you go during the week. will often find you are the only fisherman in addition to fishermen, this river attracts a lot of floaters in kayaks, canoes, float tubes, boards, and so on. Fortunately, the vast majority of visitors just want to float the rapids. As for fishing pressure, you will often find you are the only fisherman on this water if you go during the week.

I find that in a freestone river like this one the type of water you are fishing is often the most important factor in your success or lack thereof. The brown trout here are not typically found in the faster currents in the middle lanes of the river. Brown trout are ambush-style predators that lie in the soft pocket water and around structure. They usually move into feeding lanes only to attack prey such as insects and small baitfish. My focus here was on the side of the river. As my guide put it, "People often stand where they should fish and fish where they should be standing."

Following his lead, I did most of my fishing upstream, along banks and pocket water areas.

Like all fly fishermen, I like to match the hatch, but insect selection here was not the end-all to my success. I found that the trout here would eat stonefly nymphs, caddis larva, Blue-Winged Olive Emergers, Pale Morning Duns, Red Quills, and Yellow Sallies if presented properly. First thing in the morning, and late in the afternoon, I would go to a two-dry-fly rig. Midday, from around 11 AM until 3 PM, I used a two- or three-fly/nymph rig—a large stonefly nymph as the lead fly, trailed by a Caddis Larva or a Blue-Winged Olive Emerger. Both variations helped me land nice trout. Whenever the action slowed down, I would drag a streamer and always catch a nice-size brownie sooner or later.

There were a few areas that had a lot of grasshoppers on the shoreline. There, I actually got some dry fly action in by using a Chernobyl Ant or Grasshopper. Any time I can go with a dry fly, I do it. There is just something special about seeing a take on top of the water. God, I love this sport!

My second day of fishing here was one for the permanent memory bank. I went on a float trip in a raft with a steel frame guided by Mark Richardson. He grew up guiding in the Florida Keys for tarpon and bonefish, he told me, but now fishes Colorado in the summer and the Patagonian region of Chile during the winter. He was an excellent instructor, and he knew every hole we floated from about six miles upstream from Salida to our take-out about three miles downriver from that town. Mark worked hard on the oars to make sure I was close to the premier spots on the river. Covering water was the key.

So, what was it about that Wednesday fishing with Mark that made it one of the best float trips of my life? Well, let's face it, catching a trout about every ten minutes is a lot of fun! With all due respect to Thoreau's famous quote, "Fishing is not about catching fish," it sure does add a lot of fun to the whole experience. It is also fun exploring new water, especially when it has some Class III rapids. We had great weather, my casting was spot on, and the instruction from Mark was perfect. If I just could have gotten my hook set right, the catch rate would have been even higher!

A nine-foot six-weight rod was perfect for this river. When I was swimming streamers I used a sink-tip line with a 3X tippet, but when I was fishing with small dry flies, I went to a weight-forward floating fly line and a 6X tippet with a nine-foot leader. I mostly used a three-fly rig, which usually consisted of a large Stonefly floater or Grasshopper, a Girdle Bug with rubber legs under that, and a very small nymph at the end. Mark

An Update on Our Website
by Seth Fields

Many of you have reached out to us about our website and its on-again/ off-again functionality. Rest assured we are working diligently to make The Angling Report online experience easy and user friendly. As this issue goes to press, we are very close to ironing out all of the kinks and errors. We appreciate your patience with the problems. One part of the website that is working well already is the button that allows you to file Trip Reports. Simply go to www.anglingreport.com and click on File a Trip Report and type away. It is not essential that you fill out every line of the online report form. Just include information that will help fellow subscribers understand your experience and be able to replicate it if they want to. The core of the report is the narrative we hope you write about the Highlights and Problems of the trip. Importantly, we are now able to use photos in connection with Trip Reports. You can share them with us either at the time you file a report or afterward by clicking on the ShareYour Photos button on the Home Page of our website. We plan to use shared photos in the newsletter, on the website banner, and in our social media accounts. You can check out some of the photos we have already posted by clicking on the View Photo Gallery menu option. If you have questions about the new site, submitting photos, or any other general inquiry, feel free to contact me, Seth Fields at: seth.fields@morris.com.
would often tell me to “make the hopper move on the water, twitch your fly to get their attention.” He wanted me to make a strong line mend, so as to move the fly. This tactic proved deadly.

Mark said he prefers fishing farther downriver in the canyon, but it was just too muddy to fish that section on that day. I told him not to worry: the section we fished was my favorite section. I caught more than 40 fish. If my count is correct, I caught 38 brown trout and six rainbows. Mind you, it wasn’t just the fishing that made the trip phenomenal. The landscape, the wildlife, and the guiding were equally impressive. Fly fishing truly takes us to the most beautiful places on Earth. The more I fish, the more I understand the famous English/American poet, W. H. Auden who said, “Water is the soul of the Earth.”

Postscript: Aylsworth highly recommends his experience to fellow subscribers. You can get more information on the guides he fished with at: www.arkanglers.com/fly-shop-salida. He says the daily guide fees he paid were $330 for walk/wade and $415 for a float trip.

Subscriber Kenneth Spint has lots of good things to say about a trip to Reel Action Lodge on the Kanektok River in Alaska this past July, booked for him by Vince Tobia of Cattaraugus Creek Outfitters (www.cattarauguscreekoutfitters.com). He says he was inspired to go on this trip by some guides he met in Patagonia who also guide in Alaska. “They really spoke highly of the fishing opportunities in Alaska,” he writes. “I had never been there, but they convinced me to give the state a try. I found the experience overwhelming. The Kanektok River is a veritable fish factory. I have never seen and caught so many fish of so many different species. In all, I caught seven different species. I even caught sockeyes that were not supposed to be catchable then. You could fish almost 24 hours a day, too, because of the long periods of sunshine at that time of year. My largest king salmon weighed 40 pounds, and that was 13 pounds lighter than the largest caught in camp while I was there. Most of the rainbows we caught measured 16 to 20 inches, with the grayling and dollies averaging about 16 to 18 inches.”

Spint is not as enthusiastic about the lodge as about the fishing. “This is a seasonal camp, with individual tents with wood floors that are taken down in late September,” he writes. “The showers and latrines are in tents, too, as is the dining and fly-tying area. An open-sided tent with mosquito netting down near the slough was called the lounge. Mind you, the latrine was a drop toilet, and I would rate the food C at best, with breakfast and lunch getting the highest marks. My biggest disappointment was the absence of mountain scenery. This was monotonously flat land with no animals to speak of except fish. There were plenty of those, to be sure. Your arm will be sore after a day of fishing here.”

Postscript: Spint gives the cost of his trip, including staff/guide tips, as around $5,000. That does not include airfare.

Subscriber Ted Schmidt is very pleased with a trout fishing trip to the Bighorn River in Montana handled for him this past September by Bighorn Flycatcher Lodge (www.bighornkingfisher.com). Schmidt says he arrived at the lodge by flying into Billings and renting a car. He says he caught both browns and rainbows on this trip by float fishing and wade fishing. He says the highlight of the trip was fishing the trico hatches that erupted on the Bighorn while he was there. “The morning trico hatch was simply amazing,” he writes. “You could see plumes of tricos extending hundreds of yards into the air before falling on the water, where the trout proceeded to chow down on them.” Schmidt gives good marks to his guide, Cha Becker, noting he has fished the river for 17 years. “He knows all the spots and all the tricks.” Schmidt writes. He gives the cost of his trip as $2,500. He warmly recommends the experience to fellow subscribers.

And Finally...

A Withering View of Christmas Island

by William A. Douglass

We were taken to the Captain Cook Hotel after having been told, somewhat mysteriously, that we would be leaving the following morning for Fanning, when that was out of the question. Furthermore, the Captain Cook was also an improbable layover, given that the Kiribati government had reportedly just revoked its license to operate. The place was dark and almost without staff.

Anyway, one of my companions had learned of our plight and quickly found two rooms for us at The Villages—it's only vacant ones. The other two anglers ended up down the road a ways, but close enough to The Villages to take at least some of their meals there. All five of us were given boats and guides daily. In the event, our presence overloaded an already strained situation. There were many Australians and an American with reserved bookings at the Villages for the week—about twelve anglers in all. Plus, the lodge was hosting some twenty fisheries’ biologists. While they spent most of their days in meetings, and took...
their meals separately from us, we were all eating out of a single swamped kitchen. As the week progressed, it ran out of just about everything. First bacon, then eggs, then hot cereal, then cornflakes, then oranges for lunches—you get the idea. Our last few days the appetizers were peanut butter and jelly on bread and our entrees turned on canned Vienna wiener. I describe all this to be fair to both The Villages and to you, the reader, before conveying my impressions of the fishing, guides, and the rest. In short, I was not in a good mood.

I am a Christmas Island veteran, having fished it maybe half a dozen times in the 1980s and 1990s, or the good old days when you might catch ten fish in a day with the smallest being four pounds. Somewhere around 2008 or 2009, I returned to Christmas Island with my dear friend Mike Michalak and his wife, Bertha. The Villages, where we stayed, had just opened, and its staff was keen and enthusiastic, as were the guides. It was a church project designed to provide some of its parishioners employment, so there was a religious zeal on their part to please us. But, of course, there was also an amateurish aura to the operation, and one of its downsides (in addition to the mediocre food) was the constant construction noise from a new building that was going up as part of an expansion. Ironically, in my recent stay a few weeks ago, my room was in that very structure, and I was now annoyed by the constant construction racket of a new building arising next door.

Now to the fishing. Given the overloaded situation, we were not consulted about where we might like to fish. The guides headed out to pretty much the same waters every day and tried their best to stay apart. Nevertheless, on more than one occasion we could not fish an intended flat because there were already anglers on it. We usually had in sight other boats and the specks of their anglers working distant flats. In sum, there are now something like 55 to 60 guides working the waters of Christmas Island. While its flats constitute an enormous area, clearly there is territoriality among the fishing lodges and their guides. None of this complexity is communicated to the anglers. Some veterans in The Villages wanted to fish places such as the Korean Wreck and the Reserve, but they had to overcome low-key resistance and then endure elaborate arrangements to get there. So the days of fishing with relative ease anywhere you feel like on Christmas Island appear to be over. When you add in the fact that there are now 7,000 to 8,000 inhabitants on an island that had maybe 1,500 when I started fishing it, there is obviously considerable pressure at all levels on the local resources. Kiribati continues to “colonize” the island with new migrants from other parts of the country.

The operations and their representatives claim that a series of new regulations are protecting the bonefishing (it is now technically against the law to kill one) and that the fishing is improving dramatically. Maybe. However, I believe there is still a food fishery (milk fish netting is evident everywhere, as is longlining) and we all know how easy it is to circumvent fishing regulations in Third World settings, particularly when the enforcers are in the position of policing their siblings and cousins. My personal angling experience this time was nearly identical to my earlier stay at The Villages. In a week I caught somewhere between five and ten bonefish daily and a couple of decent blue trevally. My largest bonefish was a four-pounder and my second largest might have been two. There were many bonefish around, and I had dozens of legitimate shots every day. Yet even these little guys were pretty spooky. I had two legitimate casts to small giant trevally. At one point we could not get into casting range of a trio of GTs that weighed at least 50 pounds. I had a lot of fun stalking maybe forty nice triggerfish during my stay, but failed to connect with any. They were the spookiest that I have ever encountered in my dozens of weeks of saltwater angling around the planet. Some blew off the instant I raised the rod to cast; others spooked the minute I moved a still fly on the bottom that was fifteen feet away from them.

In sum, I believe that there is way too much pressure on this resource. The excessive number of sportfishermen and the netting mean that it is impossible to rest and rotate the flats properly, if at all. I would add, however, that the Australians who had prebooked into The Villages, as well as several of the Australians, had greater success than I did. The Colorado native had only fished salt once before, and that was in Belize. By week’s end he had landed a six-pound bonefish, many smaller ones, a couple of decent GTs (25 pounds) and a couple of nice triggerfish. In short, he plans to return and would recommend the experience to anyone. I would not do either.

By way of postscript, I would note that both the Fly Shop and the local Fanning operator, Pegasus, treated us fairly in my view. We were given a substantial refund and an offer of a decent discount should we wish to attempt fishing Fanning in the future. As for this last trip, I have one more miserable entry for my memory bank. Two days after I returned home I was afflicted by the worst diarrhea of my many foreign travels. Four days later I was rushed by paramedics to the emergency room and spent the next two days in the hospital. I was eventually diagnosed with salmonella. I was told that its germination period after contact is four to ten days, so it is clear that I contracted it at The Villages.—William A. Douglass.

Don Causey Note: I elected to publish this very tough report from longtime Angling Report friend and contributor William Douglass in its entirety, unedited, because Christmas Island is in trouble. It’s being loved to death and the angling community at large needs to come together with a plan to save it. Sharp critiques like the one above, I hope, will start that process. These pages are open to anyone with ideas on how to proceed and/or rebuttals to anything in the above critique. I’ll add just one rebuttal myself, a defense of The Villages. There were clearly problems at The Villages during Douglass’s weeklong layover, and the place needs to accept responsibility for them, but we think it only fair to point out how extraordinary the situation was at The Villages. Not only was it fully booked with anglers, but a conference of biologists was on-site. The arrival of unscheduled anglers was
clearly too much for the infrastructure of the lodge. Typically, The Villages does a great job. It is a positive force on the island, and it deserves our support. With that, I yield to Michael Caranci of The Fly Shop for feedback on the Fanning Island transportation failure and some general comments on how he views the situation on Christmas Island:

Michael Caranci writes: William Douglass is right: there was a mechanical issue with the plane headed to Tabuearan (Fanning), which unfortunately precluded the flight that week and effectively prevented the four guests plus a videographer from making the journey over to Fanning. It was the first major issue we’ve had at Fanning, and the rest of the trips have gone off well. The last group of anglers we sent there went in July, and they said their experience was as good or better than their first trip to the Seychelles, better than subsequent trips there in recent years. We have a group on the island as this is written in late October, another group going in late November, and I’ll be back there myself in early January. It remains a slowly developing destination as we continue to work with the Island Council, the villagers, and the government in Tarawa to continue refining and developing the concept of sustainable tourism there, with big benefits for the community. Angling Report subscriber Tim Welch, who helped put this project in motion, is heading over with me in January, and William Douglass is already set to give it another go in February. You can expect to receive some additional reports from these anglers in the near future. As for Douglass’s feedback on Christmas Island and the Villages, while it is generally accurate, I don’t believe the view he presents of The Villages is fair and accurate. The staff there was not prepared for five additional guests that week, which surely played a role in the food shortages and subsequent issues. They stepped up big-time to accommodate these guests in a challenging situation, and I would hate to see them hammered for their extra efforts to take care of these guys. As for fishing on Christmas Island, it is definitely being impacted by overfishing. Bill’s appraisal matches that of many anglers who’ve fished there in the past and remember the “good old days” when they had the island to themselves and big dumb bonefish were milling around. It is interesting, however, to hear feedback from guests who are new to the island. They still love it, and return rates are high. The population of bonefish seems to be great, and there remain few destinations in the world where you can wade the flats and have as many encounters with bonefish in skinny water. There are still big fish there but they have become a challenge. As they’ve become educated, it’s tougher to get them to eat. Want to comment on this report? Write: doncausey@anglingreport.com.
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