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FLY FISHING

in SALT WATERS

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in the Surf**

**Special Report:
FLATS BOATS UPDATE**

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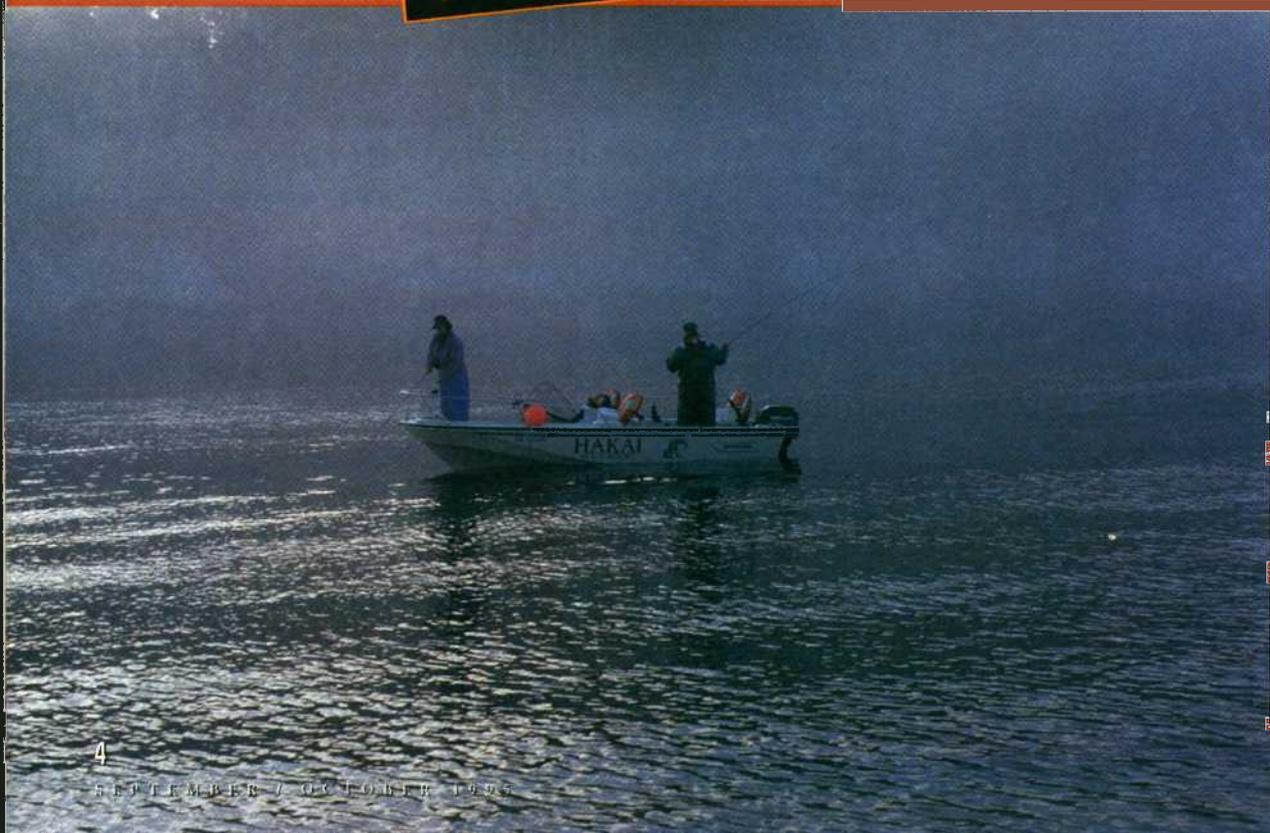
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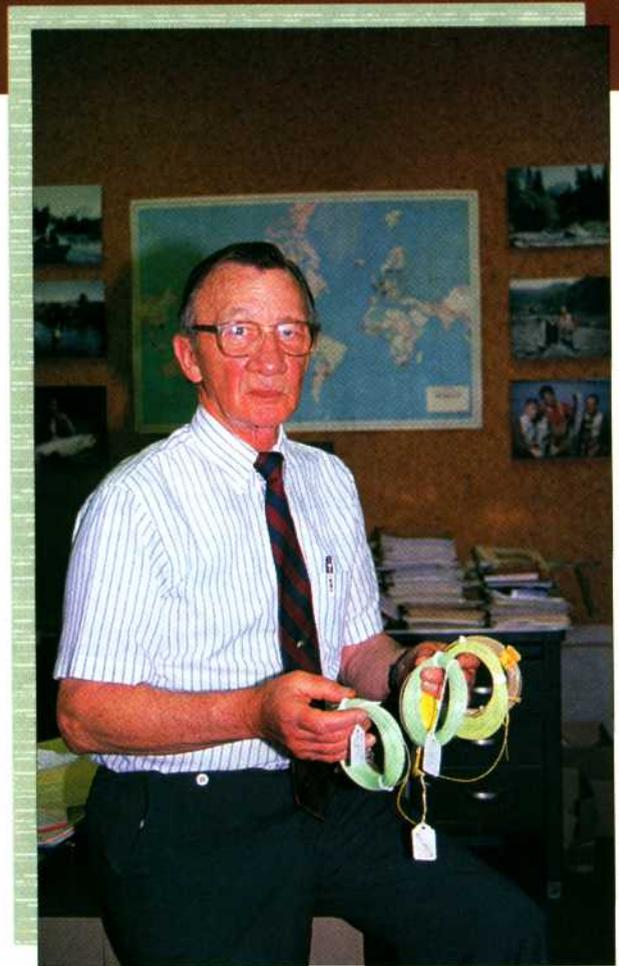
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FLY FISHING *in SALT WATERS*

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Texas Specs • Mangrove Snappers • Imitating East Coast Baitfish
All About Backing • Cuban Preview • Ten Thousand Islands
Budget Fishing • The Net Ban Spreads.

Printed on  recycled paper

Written by Jack W. Berryman



A BRITISH COLUMBIA COAST

Ok, so maybe the British Columbia coast doesn't rank at the top of the list of the world's favorite saltwater fly-fishing spots. But someday perhaps it will.



The rugged central west coast of British Columbia offers great potential for those married to the fly rod. I know, because I sampled three different locations there last year—Milbanke Sound, Seaforth Channel, and Lama Passage in late July, then Rivers Inlet, Hakai Pass, and the mouth of the Koeye River on the east side of Fitz Hugh Sound in September. I was joined by some of the most knowledgeable saltwater fly fishers and fly-shop owners in British Columbia. Our purpose was to explore these wild waters with a fly rod, and our conclusion was that we had discovered a virtual fly-fishing paradise for Pacific salmon and bottomfish.

You will notice, however, that I did not say a “fish-catching paradise.” It's obvious that more exploring and experimenting must be done before the catching will surpass the casting. But that doesn't mean we were disappointed. We knew catching fish on the “high seas” with a fly would be difficult, but the challenge was met head-on.

I began probing the waters near Shearwater Resort in Bella Bella, B.C., late in July with Brian Babcock, owner of Babcock Fly and Tackle in Coquitlam, B.C. We were guests of his brother, Shawn, vice president of Shearwater's operations and an experienced fly angler who had fished the salt at several locations along Vancouver Island. He had caught ocean-going coho

Along the Rugged Coast the Returning Salmon Run

patterns, and varying our retrieves, all to no avail.

When we examined the stomachs of several coho caught by bait fishermen in the same area, we discovered to our surprise that the salmon had been taking herring of only minnow size, not more than an inch long. We had been using large flies, three or four inches long, so this discovery called for a change in tactics. And just at sunset, Brian caught a frisky coho of about 7 pounds on a smaller fly. But that first salmon was also the last salmon.

Catching the aggressive black rockfish (*Sebastes melanops*) proved a lot easier. We found a variety of other rockfish species, mostly brown (*S. bolina*), copper (*S. caurinus*), dusky (*S. ciliatus*), quillback (*S. maliger*), and China (*S. nebulous*). When our flies got near the bottom we caught small ling cod

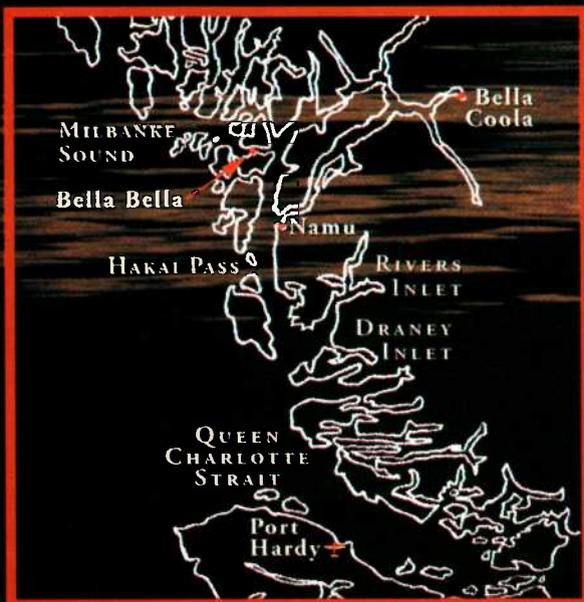
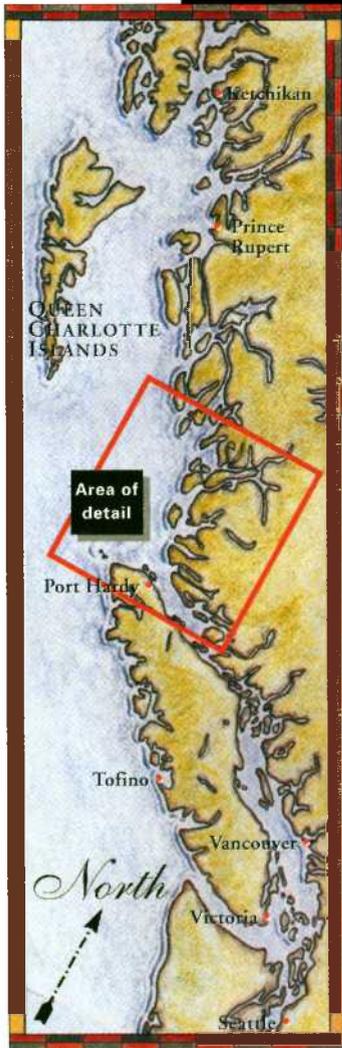
salmon on a cast fly and was optimistic we could do the same.

Shearwater is located on Denny Island near the famous Inside Passage that extends from Vancouver to

Southeast Alaska. These waters are known for large chinook and plentiful coho salmon, and because of their remote location we experienced uncrowded fishing in protected waters within a few minutes of the lodge.

On our first day we fished in McLoughlin Bay and around Napier Point, both on Lama Passage just around the corner from Shearwater. Schools of herring were milling around in 12 to 18 feet of water and hungry coho shot in and out of the schools, feeding on the frenzied bait. The conditions seemed ideal, but we still had a difficult time getting the salmon to take our flies. We tried fishing at different depths, using different colored

Inside Passage and coho salmon: BRIAN O'KEEFE



Early rising anglers were treated to a brilliant sunrise over Seaforth Channel near Image Island and the entrance of Spiller Channel.

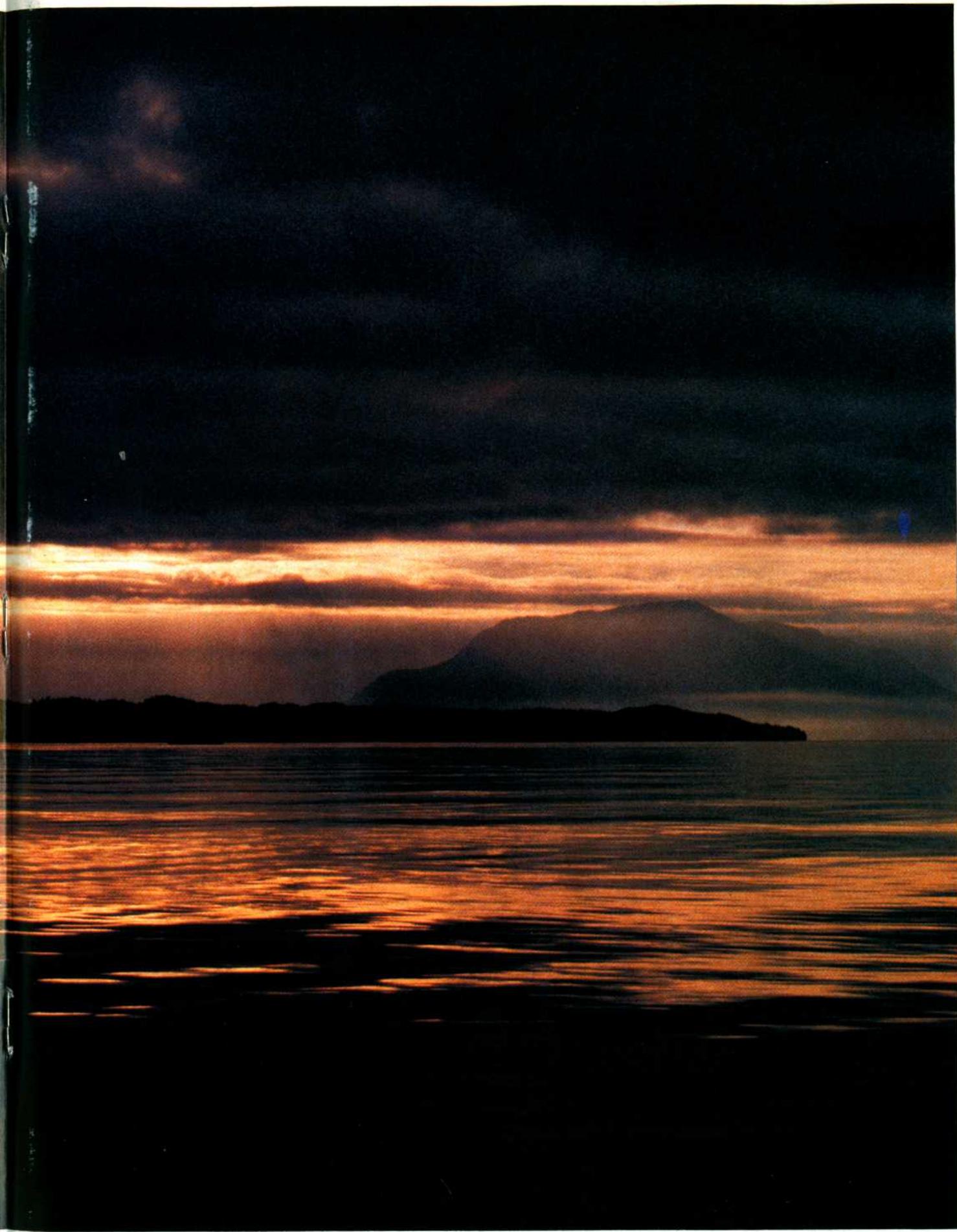


Photo: ELAINE AND JACK BERRYMAN

Bonsai-like trees and rocks near Stirling Island at the northwest corner of Hakai Pass.

Elaine Berryman with one of many black rockfish hooked on a skipped surface fly.

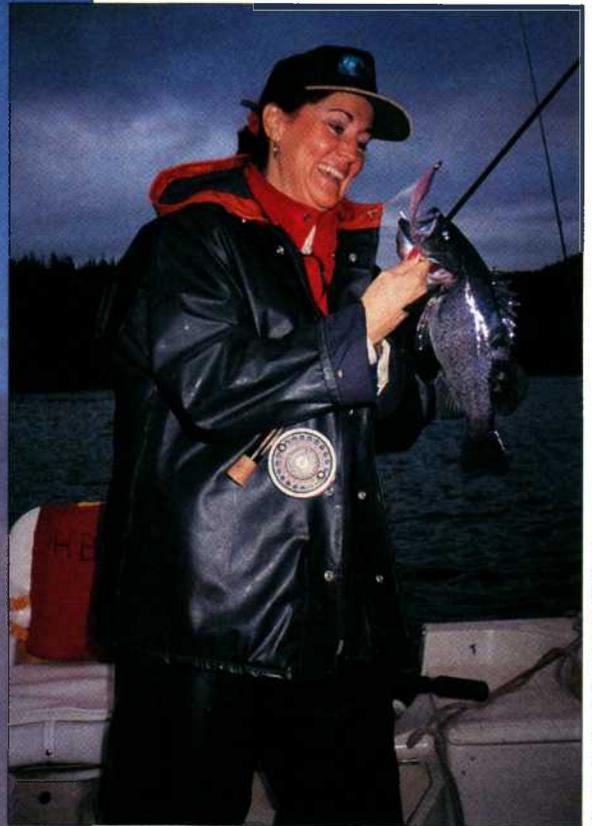
(*Ophiodon elongatus*) and kelp greenling (*Hexagrammas decagrammus*). Action was fast and furious as we tied our boats to kelp beds and cast 10- or 20-foot sink-tip lines into the ebbing tide. Once the fly got close to the bottom, the slightest twitch or quick retrieve resulted in a savage strike. Off one rocky point, I caught four different species of rockfish on consecutive casts.

We used 9- and 9½-foot rods matched to 7-, 8-, and 9-weight lines, both sink-tips and shooting heads with different sink rates. Leader lengths varied from six to nine feet with 8- to 15-pound-test leaders. Our reels held at least 200 yards of 20-pound-test backing. For

flies, we alternated between herring and Pacific sand lance imitations, some tied on tubes and others on hooks from size 1 to 2/0.

Shearwater offers its guests a multitude of good fishing locations. Many salmon heading to Bella Coola, the Dean River, or Rivers Inlet pass through this area, and there are salmon runs in several local streams. Last year, Shearwater guests landed more than 400 tye (chinook salmon weighing more than 30 pounds), with 54 pounds the largest. The heaviest coho was 23 pounds. Favorite spots are Idol Point on Seaforth Channel, Image Island at the entrance of

Action was fast and furious as we tied our boats to kelp beds and cast 10- or 20-foot sink-tip lines into the ebbing tide.



Photos: ELAINE AND JACK BERRYMAN

Spiller Channel, Cape Swaine and Welch Rocks on Milbanke Sound at the entrance of Seaforth Channel, and Robb Point on Ivory Island. For halibut and large ling cod, anglers tend to focus on the waters around Susan Rock in Milbanke Sound.

The second leg of my "B.C. Odyssey" came in mid-September at Salmon King Lodge, located halfway up Rivers Inlet, a

30-mile-long fjord about a half hour's flight from northern Vancouver Island's Port Hardy. Rivers Inlet has been one of B.C.'s best-known fishing destinations since the 1950s and has a reputation for producing plenty of big chinook and large wild coho.

The lodge, situated on the site of the former Good Hope cannery, was built in 1895 and remodeled in the 1980s. It sits "high and dry" on 121 acres of beautiful forest overlooking one of the most picturesque sections of the Inlet.

Lodge guests were catching cohos up to 18 pounds on trolled herring within sight of the dock, so Martin Knutson, the lodge manager, and I began casting earnestly in this area. However, milky glacial runoff severely limited visibility in the top layer of water, which we estimated at 18 to 25 feet. The trollers were getting their fish below that depth, so we experimented with ways to sink our flies and keep them moving at the same time. A full sinking line using a countdown method did the trick, as did sinking the line as we drifted over it. Both methods provided a way to get the fly below the discoloration and permitted a window of fishable water on the retrieve, but we decided it would be more fun to try some different tactics at other locations.

Following the shoreline toward the entrance of Draney Inlet, we nosed the boat into Draney Narrows and were met by a river of water flooding out of Draney into Rivers Inlet as the tide was receding. Just inside Draney, we watched a small band of sea lions feeding on bottomfish along the kelp beds. Taking this as a cue, we began casting to the edge of the kelp. Almost instantly, my 7-weight rod

bowed to an energetic brown rockfish. On repeated casts, we caught coppers and quillbacks. Crossing to the opposite shore, we caught small blacks on every cast. After tiring of this, we rode to the end of Draney to look at the Lockhart-Gordon River.

The Lockhart-Gordon has a beautiful grassy estuary, and as we motored through it and into the lower river we began to see small groups of salmon darting into the shadows. As I began casting to these fish, I realized they were

Al Belhumeur and Kathy Ruddick are escorted by a Pacific white-sided dolphin.

B.C. LODGES & FLY SHOPS



HAKAI BEACH RESORT

The following lodges, guides, and shops participated in the exploration of the fly-fishing potential of the British Columbia Coast (for a complete listing of lodges and other accommodations, write for a free copy of the British

Columbia Accommodations Guide, B.C. Ministry of Small Business, Tourism and Culture, 1117 Wharf St., Victoria, B.C., Canada V8W 2Z2).

Lodges

Rivers Inlet: Salmon King Lodge, P.O. Box 1237, Delta, B.C., Canada V4M 3T3; telephone (604) 943-2333 or 1-800-665-0613. Unguided rates: four days/three nights, \$1,495; seven days/six nights, \$2,695.

Bella Bella: Shearwater Resort, 5455-D4 Airport Road South, Richmond, B.C., Canada V7B 1B5; telephone (604) 270-6204 or 1-800-663-2370. Unguided rates: five days/four nights, \$1,650; four days/three nights, \$1,495; three days/two nights, \$1,295.

Hakai Pass/Calvert Island: Hakai Beach Resort, 4360 Agar Drive, Richmond, B.C., Canada V7B 1A3; telephone (604) 231-3721 or 1-800-668-3474. Unguided rates: four days/three nights, \$1,435; five days/four nights, \$1,435; guided rates: four days/three nights, \$1,795; five days/four nights, \$1,795.

Guides and shops

Brian Babcock, Babcock Fly and Tackle Ltd., No. 110 1140 Austin Avenue, Coquitlam, B.C., Canada V3K 3P5; telephone (604) 931-5044.

Malcolm and Kathy Ruddick, Ruddick's Fly Shop, 3726 Canada Way at Boundary, Burnaby, B.C., Canada V5G 1G5; telephone (604) 434-2420.

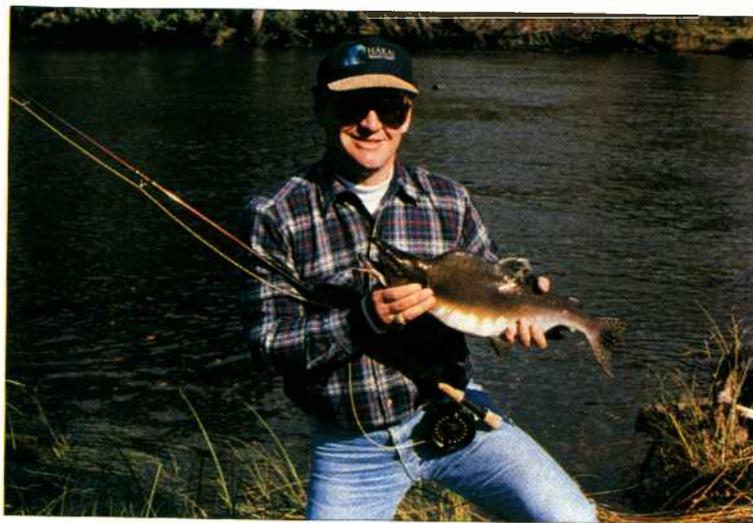
Rick Steen, Ravensun Marketing, 5389 Indian River Drive, North Vancouver, B.C., Canada V7G 1L3; telephone (604) 929-8930.

Al Belhumeur, Al Belhumeur Agencies, No. 36 1235 Johnson Street, Coquitlam, B.C., Canada V3B 7E4; telephone (604) 942-5467.



Opposite: The author leads a pink salmon to the beach at low tide in the Koeye River estuary.

Here, with the pink salmon just before release.



chum or "dog" salmon. I hooked one in the tailout of the river's first pool, but after three jumps the salmon threw the hook. We scouted the perimeter of the pool for further casting opportunities by following grizzly bear trails, but had to depart on short notice or be left

1/0 hook. When this was ignored, I tried a sink-tip line and still got no response. In desperation, I tied on a large four-inch-long blue-green herring pattern, cast out, and asked Martin to troll toward the mouth of the McNair. As the fly skipped across the surface of the estuary, a large coho hit it on the run. After a dramatic series of cartwheels and acrobatics, we brought the 12-pounder to the net. But that was the only one; more tries with the same method failed to raise another fish.

Later, we found many more salmon near the mouths of the Kilbella, Chuckwalla, and Wannock Rivers at the far end of Rivers Inlet. Without a doubt, these rivers are the destinations for most of the chinook and coho salmon entering the inlet. To protect spawning populations, boundary lines have been established to prohibit fishing close to the mouths of the rivers, but it is still possible to find fish beyond the boundaries.

The final leg of my B.C. coastal "odyssey" was arranged by Warren McIntyre and Lisa Winbourne of Hakai Beach Resort. They invited a group of fly fishers to assess the potential of the area near the resort and introduce saltwater fly fishing to some of their guests in mid-September, when nearby waters are usually teeming with large northern coho. Among the guest fly fishers were Malcolm and Kathy Ruddick, owners of Ruddick's Fly Shop in Burnaby, B.C.; Al Belhumeur, a guide and sporting goods manufacturer's representative from Coquitlam, B.C.; Rick Steen, a guide and former resort manager; and my wife, Elaine. The Ruddicks arrived with enough 8- and 9-weight outfits for half the resort's 20 guests and more flies than most well-stocked fly shops.

Hakai Beach Resort is "a park within a park," situated on 214 acres of private waterfront in the middle of the 303,928-acre Hakai Recreation Area, about 80 miles north of Port Hardy. Established in 1987, the Hakai Recreation Area includes some of the

PLANNING A TRIP TO THE B.C. COAST

Fly fishers planning a trip to British Columbia coastal waters should take their own tackle and flies and expect to do a lot of experimenting as lodges seldom have fly rods, lines, flies, or other fly-fishing tackle available for guests. Each lodge may have one or two guides who have done some fly fishing, but the lodges cater mainly to bait fishers. Nevertheless, the guides are still the best sources of information on places and times to catch fish.

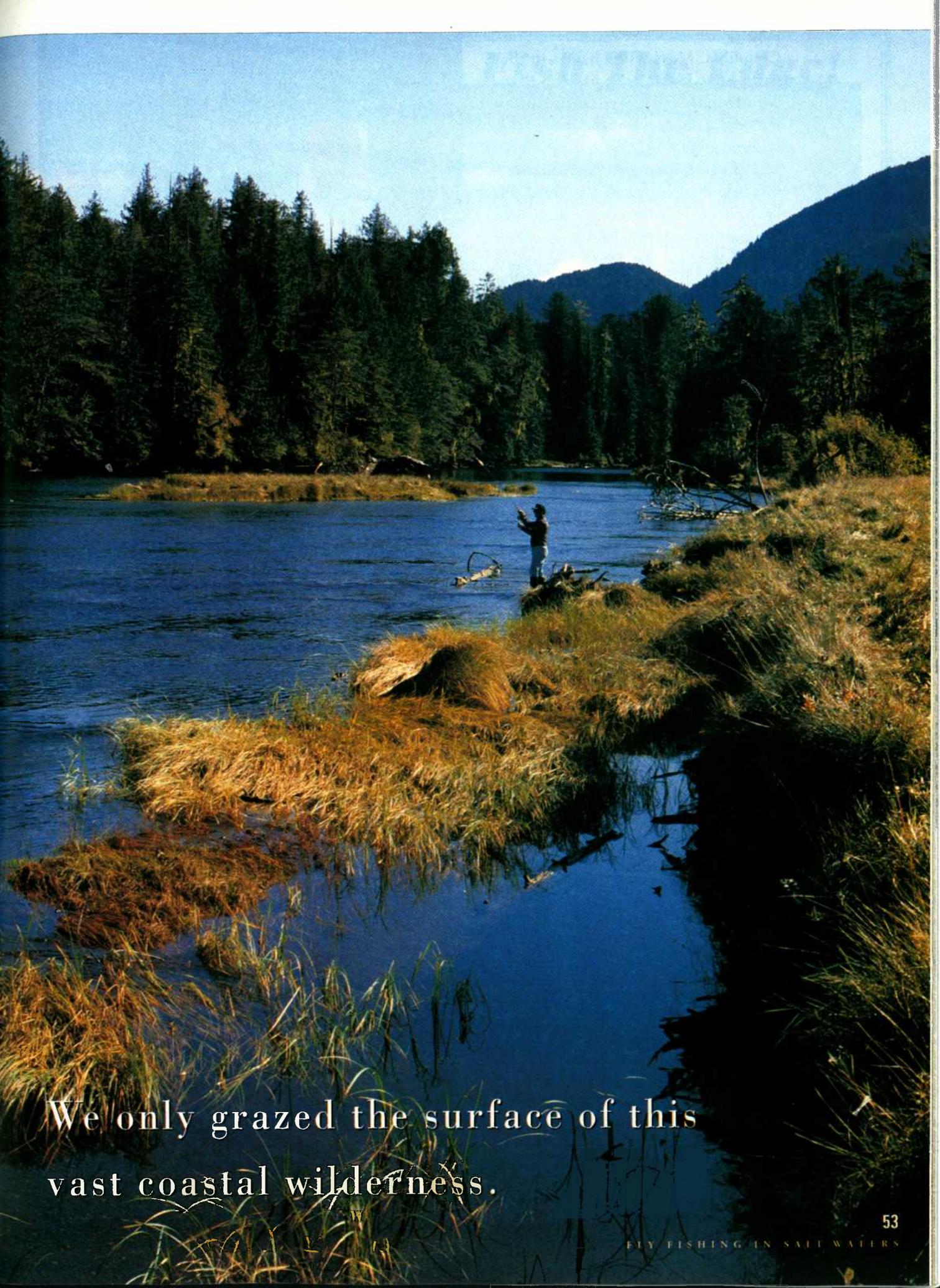
Most lodges provide all meals and bedding, as well as rain gear, boots, and float coats. Generally they furnish one boat for two anglers, although if you make prior arrangements you may be able to have a boat to yourself. Be advised, however, that the resorts frown upon clients going into these waters alone.

The lodges use 16- or 17-foot fiberglass boats equipped with 60-horsepower outboards.

Tide books and navigation charts for nearby waters are usually available at the lodge. A weather radio is a nice thing to have, as is a hand-held VHF radio. In these waters, wind and fog can come up quickly, so you need to be aware of changing conditions.

Navigation charts also can be ordered from the Canadian Hydrographic Service, Department of Fisheries and Oceans, in Sidney, B.C., telephone (604) 363-6358. For Shearwater, charts 3720, 3728, and 3787 will be helpful. Charts 3932, 3921, and 3931 are best for Rivers Inlet, and charts 3727 and 3784 are good for Hakai Pass.

Remember to take a camera, lots of film, and sunglasses. These waters are rich in sea life. We photographed humpback whales, Pacific white-sided dolphins, eagles, and Orcas (killer whales) in close proximity to our boat.



We only grazed the surface of this vast coastal wilderness.

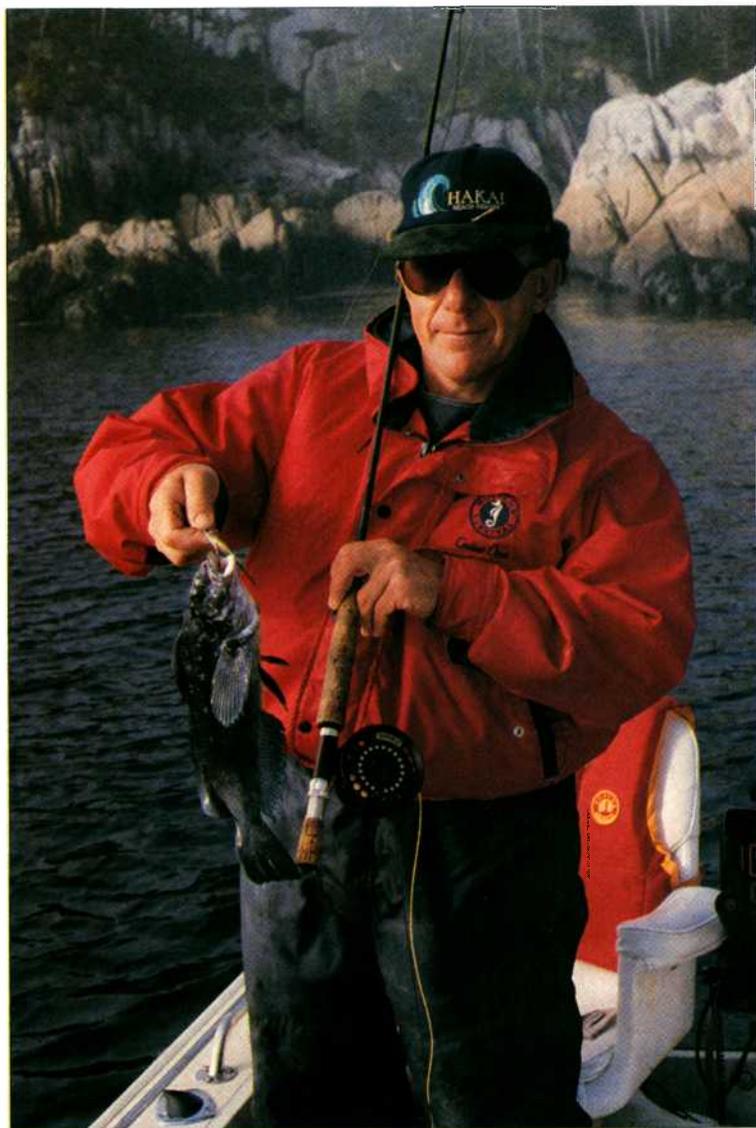
most varied and scenic coastline in British Columbia. Most of the names in these parts—like Hakai (wide passage), Namu (whirlwind), and Koeye (sitting on the water)—are from the tongue of the native Heiltsuk people.

I spent every day fishing with Rick Steen, who helped popularize the wonderful coho fishing in the Tofino area on the west coast of Vancouver Island when he managed Weigh West Resort. Rick had fished with some of the masters of Northwest saltwater fly fishing like Bill Nelson, Art Limber, Stan Stanton, and Charlie Stroger, and knew the techniques necessary to catch our quarry, the northern coho.

We logged many miles in Rick's 17-foot Boston Whaler, and as we fished, we talked. Rick believes saltwater fly fishing for Pacific salmon is the "last great frontier in ocean fishing," but he is concerned about the future of the coho salmon resource. He has been fly fishing for coho since the 1960s and they are still

Malcolm Ruddick, Rick Steen, and author trying to determine which fly will entice a coho.

Rick Steen with a greenling, one of a variety of bottomfish caught on sand lance and herring patterns with sink-tip lines.



Photos: ELAINE AND JACK BERRYMAN

his favorite. "The fun is figuring them out, hunting them, prospecting for them," Rick said.

For the next several days we were both hunters and fishermen, searching for coho, looking for the right signs, checking the tides, sunlight, and wind—but most of all watching for gulls and murrelets to lead us to waves of herring and sand lance suspended on the tide. We soon realized, however, that the coho of Hakai Pass were feeding on large herring about 50 feet down. That discovery made our task much more difficult; we had been hoping to find the coho feeding on sand lance along the beaches or on juvenile herring in the kelp, and we were overstocked with flies to imitate those forms of shallow-water prey. Trying to get down with larger flies was a different story, and we never did hit it right.

We caught numerous black rockfish and other rockfish species and greenling—but no coho. I did take a small chinook on a tube fly cast on a sink-tip line along a rocky drop-off, but our overall success on a cast-and-retrieved fly was poor. After two days of this, we headed east across Fitz Hugh Sound to fish Kwakume Point, Whidbey Point, and the mouth of the Koeye River. As we reached the head of the estuary, we were greeted by a large school of pink salmon or "humpies."

We parked the boat and I began casting to the fish with a pink sparkle fly tied on a size 1 hook. Almost instantly I was into a strong pink. Elaine and Rick began casting below me, and soon we all had fish on at the same time. We continued catching and releasing the pinks until the flood tide pushed them up the river.

I realize now that we only grazed the surface of this vast coastal wilderness. We learned much, but there is more to learn. That knowledge is bound to come, however, as more and more fly fishers are driven by the spirit of adventure to explore these restless and ever-changing seas. 