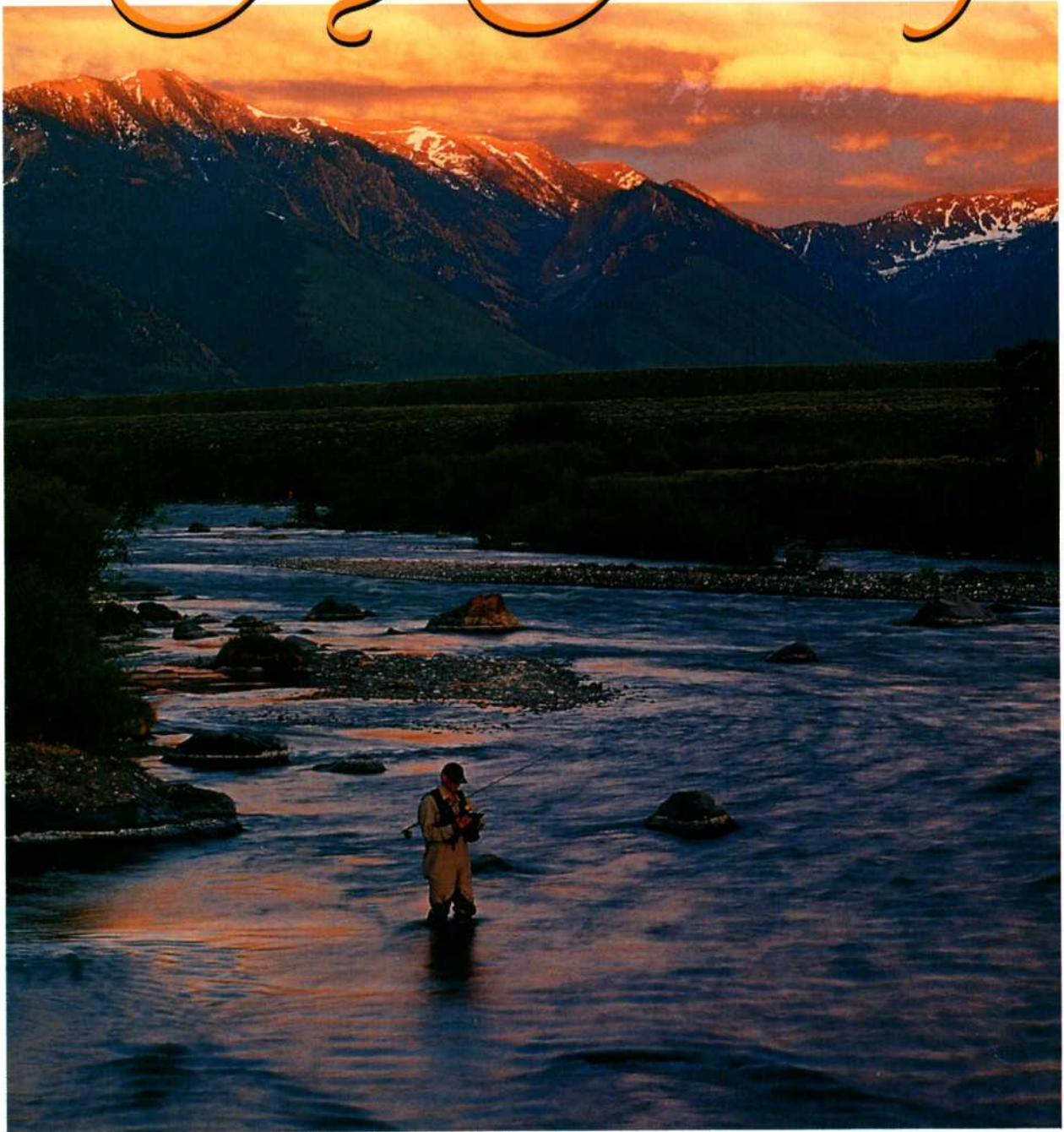


NORTHWEST

Fall 2002

Fly Fishing



\$6.95 U.S. • \$9.95 CANADA



Naden Harbour, BC • John Day River, OR
Powder River, WY • Lower Sacramento River, CA



Page 48



Page 56



Page 30



Page 78

COVER: Evening light falls on the Madison River at Three Dollar Bridge.
PHOTO BY: Mark Lance

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Table of Contents

Features

Naden Harbour, BC <i>Wet, Wild, and Wonderful.....</i> By Jack W. Berryman	34
Lower Sacramento River, CA <i>Caddisflies in Caldwell Park.....</i> By Chip O'Brien	40
John Day River, OR <i>Twickenham to Clarno</i> By Terry W. Sheely	48
Middle Fork Powder River, WY <i>Burning Muscles and Hot Trout.....</i> By Greg Thomas	56

Departments

From the Editor	4
Notes, News & Reviews	6
Innovative Fly Tier <i>David Tucker</i> By John Shewey	24
Conservation <i>Hogan's Coastal Coho Decision</i> Doug Rose	28
Exposure <i>A Northwest Fall</i> By Mark Lance	30
Pioneers & Legends <i>C. James Pray (1885-1952)</i> By Jack W. Berryman	62
Readings <i>Richard Said That</i> By Mallory Burton	66
Northwest Fly Tying <i>Furled Spent Hopper.....</i> By Dave Kruss	78
Fish Tales <i>Why I Like Liver</i> By Alan Liere	80



PHOTO BY STEVE PROBASCO

Naden Harbour, BC

Wet, Wild, and Wonderful

By Jack W. Berryman

As our 17-foot Whaler-style boat left the protected waters of Naden Harbour, rounded George Point, and entered the open waters of Virago Sound at the northern end of Graham Island in British Columbia's fabled Queen Charlotte Islands, Steve Probasco and I were "majorly pumped" for some saltwater fly action. That morning, we had driven from Seattle to Vancouver International Airport's South Terminal, boarded a chartered Pacific Coastal Airline flight to Masset, and then ridden the Samson Lodge guest boat from Masset Harbour to Naden Harbour, almost a two-hour trip. We were greeted by Bob Meneice, owner of Samson Lodge, assigned rooms and boats, given the proper licenses, and, after an introduction to the lodge facilities, dock procedures, and boating safety, we were given the green light to start fishing.

Fly fishing for Pacific salmon in the open ocean is a relatively new aspect of our sport, compared to the long

history of fly angling for Atlantic salmon, albeit in their home rivers rather than in the Atlantic Ocean. Atlantic salmon have always been viewed more as game fish. Pacific salmon have had a reputation as more of a food fish. Consequently, the active targeting of Pacific salmon by fly fishers has a fairly short history.

Pioneer fly fishers in the Northwest such as Letcher Lambuth of Seattle (the Lambuth Herring and Lambuth Candlefish) and Roderick Haig-Brown of Vancouver Island, British Columbia (the Coho Blue and Coho Golden) experimented with Pacific salmon flies and techniques in the 1930s, but converts to this style of fly fishing were few and far between. A cohort of serious saltwater fly fishers developed slowly from California up through Oregon,

Washington, and British Columbia from the 1940s and into the 1970s. In the 1980s, Seattle-area fly fishermen Bruce Ferguson, Les Johnson, and Pat Trotter published their landmark book, *Fly Fishing for Pacific Salmon*. Since



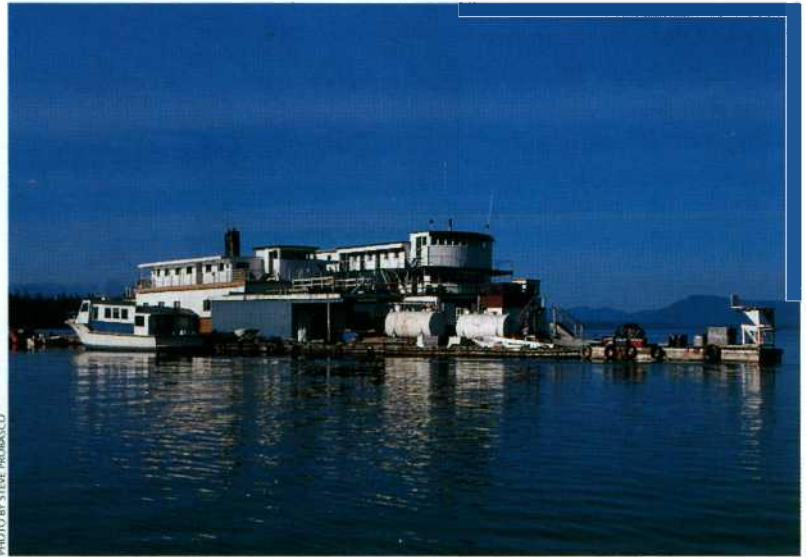
A happy Jack Berryman with a saltwater-caught chinook salmon (above). Another Naden Harbour sunset viewed from Samson Lodge (top).

then, several more excellent books on the subject have been published, as well as numerous magazine articles. By the 1990s, up and down the West Coast, fly fishing in the waters of the Pacific Ocean had finally come into its own.

British Columbia's Queen Charlotte Islands are an area ripe for catching most of the popular saltwater species. The region has a history that anthropologists have dated back to at least 2500 B.C. These islands, including Moresby (the largest in the southern part), Graham (the largest in the northern part), and Langara (the northwesternmost piece of land in British Columbia), are part of an archipelago consisting of more than 150 islands. They are approximately 75 miles from the west coast of mainland British Columbia and are also known as Haida Gwaii, the historic home of the Haida Indians. Their neighboring bands are the Tlingit in Alaska, the Tsimshian on the British Columbia mainland across Hecate Strait, and the Kwakiutl to the south. Haida means "the people," and Haida Gwaii means "the home of the Haida."

Our home away from home, Samson Lodge, was originally a B.C. ferry—the *Samson*. In 1987, Bob Meneice converted it into a floating lodge with all of the amenities one would expect. Rooms with two single beds and a private bath are shared by two guests. Since Samson Lodge prides itself on personal attention, the maximum number

of anglers at any given time is 16. All of the bedrooms are on the carpeted first floor, which is very quiet. The up-



An old B.C. ferry—the Samson, now Samson Lodge—is securely anchored in the calm waters of Naden Harbour.

per deck houses the kitchen, dining room, game room, and lounge, all with picturesque views of the harbor and surrounding forests. Meals are served family-style and are scheduled not to conflict with prime fishing times. The docks, tackle shop, and fish-cleaning station are connected to the lodge along the east side, sheltered entirely from any prevailing winds. The 17-foot Whaler-style boats are equipped with 50 hp Honda outboards and are a dream to cast from—stable, low to the water, and no obstructions. Each boat is equipped with a depth finder and VHF radio, as well as all required safety equipment. The radio is monitored daily by Samson staff for guests' safety and convenience.

The Fish

The waters of Dixon Entrance and its various bays are home to a vast array of resident bottomfish species such as rockfish, lingcod, and halibut. This area also boasts a plethora of transient salmon. All five species of Pacific salmon come through these rich waters as they move south and east toward their home rivers. At any given time, chinook salmon up to 60 pounds can be found here. During our stay in mid-June, one of the Samson guests landed a 47-pounder. Coho reach the 20-pound mark, and the smaller pinks and sockeye average about 6 pounds. Chums can reach the upper teens, but most are about 10 to 12 pounds. Halibut also get large here, with some specimens going over 200 pounds. However, there are an abundance of "chickens" in the teens and 20-pound range that are perfect for the fly rod. Black rockfish tend to travel in massive moving schools and can be readily caught on the surface



when they are actively feeding. Other common rockfish, such as the quillback and the China, tend to be territorial and hold in more permanent locations. They are aggressive feeders, usually grabbing anything near them that moves. Sea-run cutthroat trout are abundant in Naden Harbour itself, as are immature coho salmon. Both make great sport for the fly rod. Accordingly, the potential for a lot of fish as well as big fish is always present around Naden Harbour.

The Feeding Zone

Les Johnson has referred to the waters around Naden Harbour as “Pacific Salmon

Central,” because the habitat produces such huge schools of sand lance and herring, perfect for attracting and holding migrating salmon. Just about all salmon that leave the waters of the North Pacific and hit the continental shelf for a final feeding frenzy before heading to their natal rivers appear in the waters of Dixon Entrance between Langara and Masset. Here, at the peak of their strength and maturity, the salmon have an unmatched source of their favorite foods: herring, anchovy, sand lance, squid, and euphausiids (krill). Salmon coming south from Alaskan waters, on their way to rivers in British Columbia, Washington, and Oregon, pass through here on a daily basis. Some stay a day and others stay for weeks, depending on their biological clock and final destination. The bottomfish eat the same foods, and compete with the salmon on a regular basis. Because of these rich food supplies, all of the fish here grow rapidly and can put on a few pounds in a matter of weeks.

Equipment and Flies

Rod weights, lines, and fly patterns vary dependent upon the species of salmon or bottomfish targeted. For chinook and coho salmon, I prefer a 9-weight rod. Probasco used a 12-weight to fish his 1150-grain shooting-head down to depths of 60 to 70 feet. Fished on running line, this was great for halibut. He attached a large herring pattern to his 20-pound tippet that proved deadly for all species of bottomfish, especially lingcod. My favorite line was a 22-foot Type VI Sink-Tip. It is a line I typically use for steelhead, and it casts well. Since most of the salmon were feeding in 30 feet of water or less, it was a perfect match



PHOTO BY STEVE PROBASCO

A saltwater chinook falls for a Clouser Minnow (above). The rugged shoreline of Graham Island is perfect habitat for bottom species, as well as for migrating salmon (right).

for depth, as well as for casting and stripping a Clouser Minnow tied on a size-1 hook. I also had several good outings with my 5-weight and a Muddler Minnow, casting to rising cutthroat along the gravel beaches of George Point and other spots inside Naden Harbour. An 8-weight is perfect for casting a floating line into kelp beds and protected bays for black rockfish and salmon. Any large arbor fly reel with a lot of backing and a good drag will work for all of the species discussed.

Where and When

The most productive way to catch salmon in the open waters of the Pacific Ocean is to hunt for them in a fairly aggressive manner. Look for feeding fish and look for spots where you know they will be feeding if they are present. One way to do this is to be on the look for jumping baitfish that are being chased. Salmon swirl and splash as they attack the bait. Binoculars help locate seabird activity, especially gulls and diving birds, which also feed on a variety of baitfish. They push the bait into “balls” as they feed and often are joined by salmon feeding on the sides and bottom of the baitfish massed together for protection. Schools of baitfish also produce “nervous water” when they are just under the surface. Kelp beds attract baitfish and, as the food chain progresses, salmon and bottomfish as well. Generally, fish the inside edges of the kelp on the flood tide and the outside edges on the ebb tide.

Protected bays and certain structures, particularly points of land or rock islands, are also prime locations. Flood tides tend to push baitfish in against the rocks and into small bays, and the larger fish will follow. Also, as the

tide is flooding, eddies are produced on the down-tide side of points and are usually filled with baitfish. Remember that all species of salmon and bottomfish are opportunistic feeders and will move to easy prey. Chinook especially, referred to as "sea wolves" by those who know their feeding habits best, are often hooked in 15 to 25 feet of water as they search kelp beds, rock piles, and inner bays for an easy meal.

Coho are often found farther offshore in tide rips, where converging currents and riptides tend to accumulate baitfish and make them easy prey. Here, too, bait is usually within 6 feet of the surface, and actively feeding fish can normally be seen. Halibut are most often found on the large, sandy flats in 60 or more feet of water, and farther offshore. Nevertheless, I have caught them in very shallow water near the surface as they were feeding on herring along with the salmon. Black rockfish also tend to be mobile as they follow the baitfish and could be along a kelp bed or a mile offshore. When you do find one, you will usually find hundreds. The other popular bottomfish in the area, most notably lingcod and other rockfish species, tend to live near permanent structures, especially large kelp beds and rocks.

As with any type of fishing, you need to be at the right place, at the right time, doing the right thing, with the right water conditions. The area around Cape Edensaw can be very good during the last hour of the ebb tide and through the tide change. Similarly, in the little bays and kelp beds such as Doan Kathi Bay and Grizzly Bear Bay. The western shoreline as you leave Naden Harbour always seems to fish best on the flood tide. Bait is pushed up against the rocks at Cape Naden, Bird Rock, Snake Rock, and Shag Rock, as well as deep into the bays such as Hanna and Yats. This is also the time to put your boat right in the openings of kelp beds and cast a weighted fly on a floating line. Do not be afraid to go inside the kelp and fish on the beach side as well. In the more open water around the points and rocks, look for birds and fish chasing bait.

Techniques

You must use several different techniques to present your fly to the targeted species. For fishing in deep water, cast your shooting-head or Sink-Tip ahead of the boat in the direction you are drifting and pull off line as the boat moves over your line. This will give your fly time to sink adequately before you begin the retrieve. Use erratic strips, alternating speed and length of strip from 6 to 12 inches. Here, the idea is to mimic an injured baitfish. Some takes will shake your arms, while others will be just a tap and then slack line. Being in touch with your fly at all times is paramount, since these latter "slack line bites" are caused when the

fish swims in the same direction as your retrieve. They are difficult to detect. When this happens, point your rod tip at the fish, strip vigorously until you get a tight line, and then set the hook. In this type of fishing your rod tip is generally underwater most of the time. This is also when you can most effectively use shooting-heads on a small-diameter running line.

When salmon are jumping and chasing bait near the surface, cast near them with your Sink-Tip line or sinking line and begin your retrieve once the fly has sunk only 2 to 4 feet. If you are following a bait ball being attacked by birds, get just close enough to cast ahead of the birds and to the edges. If not, you will spook the birds and the bait will dive deeper and disappear. Try to judge the depth of the bait and allow your fly to sink just underneath that level. It is here that salmon and other fish will be intercepting baitfish that are wounded and stunned by the birds or by other fish that slash into the bait, swing back around, and feed on those herring, anchovy, or sand lance that cannot keep up with the school.

Pink and sockeye salmon feed regularly on various types of krill, as well as on crab and shrimp larvae that move with the tides, sometimes in large clouds. Kelp beds generally hold krill, and when feeding fish are present all you will usually hear or see is a slight sipping sound or dimpling of the surface. Occasionally a head or nose will briefly appear. In this situation, a gentle presentation with a long, light leader is mandatory. Any of the usual



euphausiid patterns are good, but if you do not get a take in a few casts, go to a different color quickly. Depending on the krill, you may need pink, orange, red, or even a rusty brown color. A very slow retrieve on a 10-foot leader and floating line is the best combination.

When coho are present and actively feeding in later summer into September, try running offshore and doing some

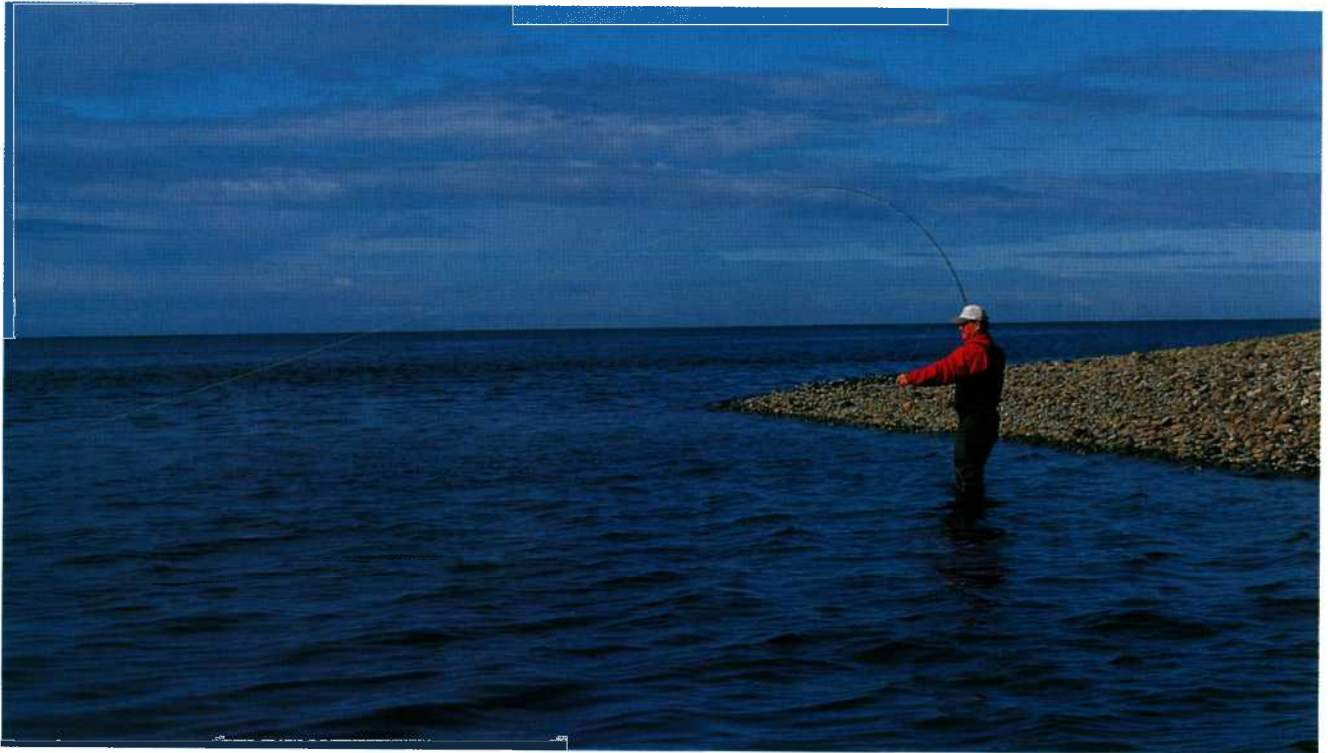


PHOTO BY STEVE PROBASCO

Jack Berryman casting to cruising salmon at the entrance to Naden Harbour (above). Marine wildlife abounds in the Queen Charlotte Islands (Notebook).

“bucktailing.” While this means trolling a fly rather than casting it, it is an effective technique and can be exhilarating fun. The larger northern, some exceeding 20 pounds, begin to appear in August and September and will actively chase a trolled or skipped baitfish imitation right into the prop wash of your outboard motor. Surprisingly, some of the best bucktailing is accomplished with a fairly fast troll. Once you find aggressive fish, remember to stop trolling and begin casting to them using a rapid retrieve. Bucktail to find the fish and then have another rod rigged to cast to them.

Weather and Water

This is a wet, wild, and remote part of British Columbia. The seas here demand respect and caution. Needless to say, wear a lifejacket at all times, be conscious of the tide and wind direction, and be observant of rocks, kelp beds, and floating driftwood. Try to follow the usual and accustomed routes to and from the entrance of Naden Harbour, since there are sunken reefs that appear as the tide is ebbing. If whitecaps appear, begin heading back

toward the protected waters of the harbor. In general, fog is rare here in the summer months, but if you are vigilant you can usually see it coming.

Probasco's Herring



PHOTO BY NORTHWEST FLY FISHING

- Hook:** Trey Combs Big Game Hook, size 2/0
- Thread:** White Monocord
- Body/wing:** White SLF Hanks, then pearl Krystal Flash, then blue Krystal Flash, then green Krystal Flash, then peacock Angel Hair
- Lateral line:** Silver Krystal Flash
- Gills:** Red SLF Hanks
- Throat/bottom of the body:** Pearl Lite Brite
- Eyes:** Prismatic stick-on
- Head coating:** Five-minute epoxy

The Challenge

Catching salmon by casting a fly into the vastness of the open seas of the Pacific Ocean is a daunting task indeed. It is a challenge met by relatively few fly fishers. Yet, it can be accomplished. Those who are successful get a feeling of great achievement. There is something very alluring and satisfying about catching wild salmon and bottomfish on their home turf at the pinnacle of their lives. It is vastly different from catching salmon in fresh water as they return to spawn. Persistence, patience, and experience are necessary to be successful, but so is a good location. For hardy

anglers who wish to test their mettle, Naden Harbour is the place to go. 🐟

Jack W. Berryman is a freelance writer and photographer who lives in Kirkland, Washington.

NADEN HARBOUR

NOTEBOOK

When: Pacific salmon are available late May through mid-September. *Chinook:* June, July, and August. *Ma-ture coho:* Same times as chinook, but peak in July, August, and early September. *Pinks:* Available every year (unlike most places that get them every other year); best from mid-June through July. *Chum:* Peak the last half of July and into early August. *Sockeye:* Most of July and the first week of August. Rockfish and halibut are available all months, but they follow the food chain on a daily basis.

Where: Naden Harbour is about halfway between Langara Island and Masset, along the northern shoreline of Graham Island. Visit Virago Sound, at the entrance of Naden Harbour; George Point, at the entrance of Alexandra Narrows; and the various bays and points along the western and eastern approaches to Naden Harbour in Dixon Entrance. Favorite spots along the western shoreline are the Mazarredo Islands, Hanna Bay, Cape Naden, Bird Rock, Snake Rock, Shag Rock, Yats Bay, and Klashwun Point. Along the eastern shoreline, special spots include Doan Kathi Bay, Inskip Point, Grizzly Bear Bay, and Cape Edensaw.

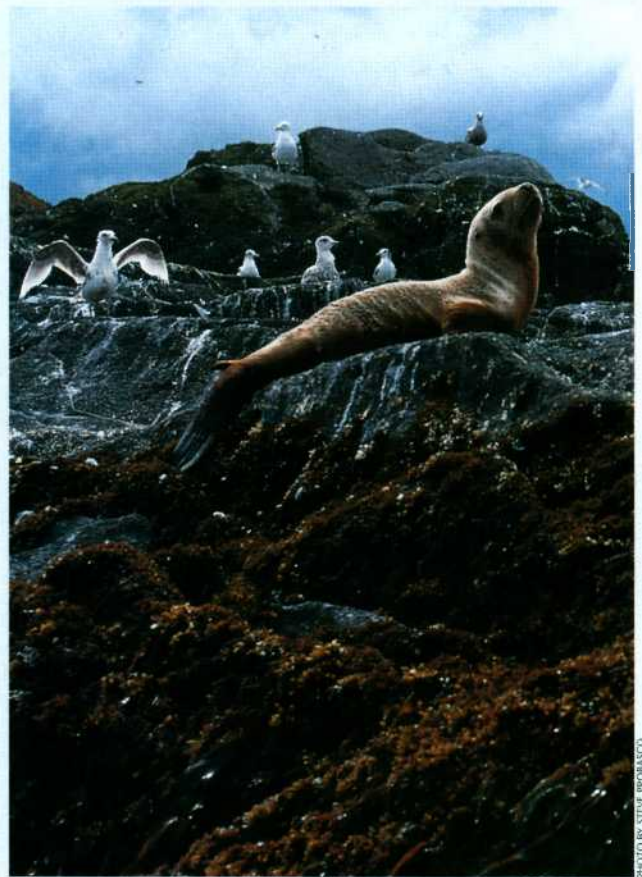


PHOTO BY STEVE PROBASCIO

Headquarters: Jump-off town is Masset, which is serviced by commercial airlines. Private airplanes can also land on the 5,000-foot runway. All services are available in Masset—motels, restaurants, groceries, and general sporting goods.

Appropriate gear: 8- to 12-wt. rods will serve all of your needs very nicely. Sinking lines or Type VI shooting-heads will be your primary lines. Use 5- to 10-ft. leaders tapered to 8-, 12-, 14-, or 20-lb. tippets, depending on the species targeted. Reels with good drags and plenty of backing are a must. If you have room, pack a 5-wt. and a matching floating line for the plentiful cutthroat along Naden Harbour's inner shoreline.

Useful fly patterns: The dominant fish foods in this area are anchovy, herring, and candlefish (Pacific sand lance). Any good imitation will work, including Waslick Sea Bait, Probasco's Herring, Blanton's Whistler, Clouser Minnow, Abel Anchovy, Lefty's Deceiver, Popovic's Surf Candy, Lambuth's Candlefish, the Harris Sand Eel, and Johnson's Sand Lance.

Necessary accessories: Survival suits, rain jackets, floater vests, and rubber boots are provided by Samson Lodge; bring gloves, polarized sunglasses, thermal socks, lip balm, sunblock, clothes that can be layered, camera, and extra film. Luggage is limited to 25 lbs. because of air travel and your return trip, which may include your catch.

Nonresident licenses: \$7.49/1 day; \$20.33/3 days, \$34.17/5 days, U.S. dollars. Licenses available at Samson Lodge. A salmon conservation stamp (\$6.42) must be affixed to all licenses held by anglers wishing to retain any species of Pacific salmon; the closest Fisheries and Oceans Canada Field Office is in Masset, (250) 626-3316; consult the Department of Fisheries and Oceans Web site at www.pac.dfo-mpo.gc.ca.

Lodges/outfitters: Samson Lodge, (604) 241-9885, www.samsonlodge.com; Queen Charlotte Lodge, (800) 688-8959; Peregrine Lodge, (800) 663-0992; Naden Lodge, (800) 771-8933.

Books/maps: *Saltwater Fly Patterns* by Lefty Kreh; *Salmon of the Pacific* by Adam Lewis; *Fly Fishing for Pacific Salmon* by Bruce Ferguson, Les Johnson, and Pat Trotter; *Salmon to a Fly: Fly Fishing for Pacific Salmon in the Open Ocean* by Jim Crawford; *Saltwater Fly Fishing for Pacific Salmon* by Barry Thornton; *Fly Fishing the Pacific Inshore* by Ken Hanley; Chart No. 3892 (Masset Harbour and Naden Harbour) and Chart No. 3002 (Queen Charlotte Sound to Dixon Entrance); "Queen Charlotte Islands/Haida Gwaii" from International Travel Maps, 345 W. Broadway, Vancouver, BC V5Y 1P8, Canada.