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# FLY FISHING

*in* SALT WATERS

**Trophy Bones on the  
Flats of Bimini**

**Fish Zihuatanejo's  
Wild Blue Waters**

**Complete Guide:  
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**STRIPER  
STRATEGIES**

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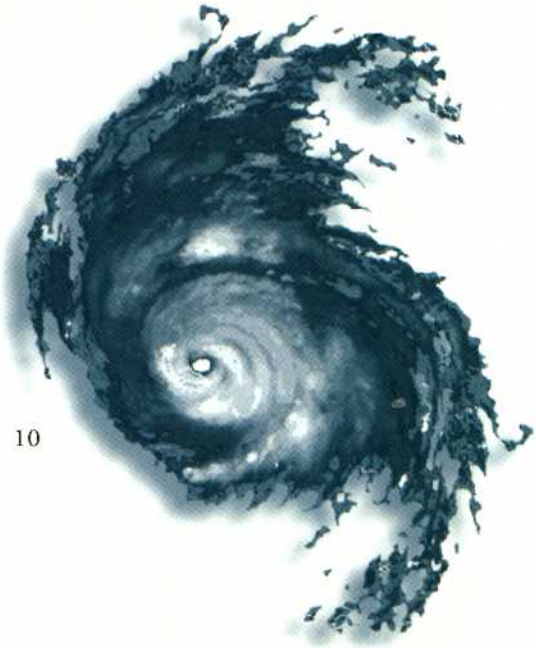
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# SALMON IN

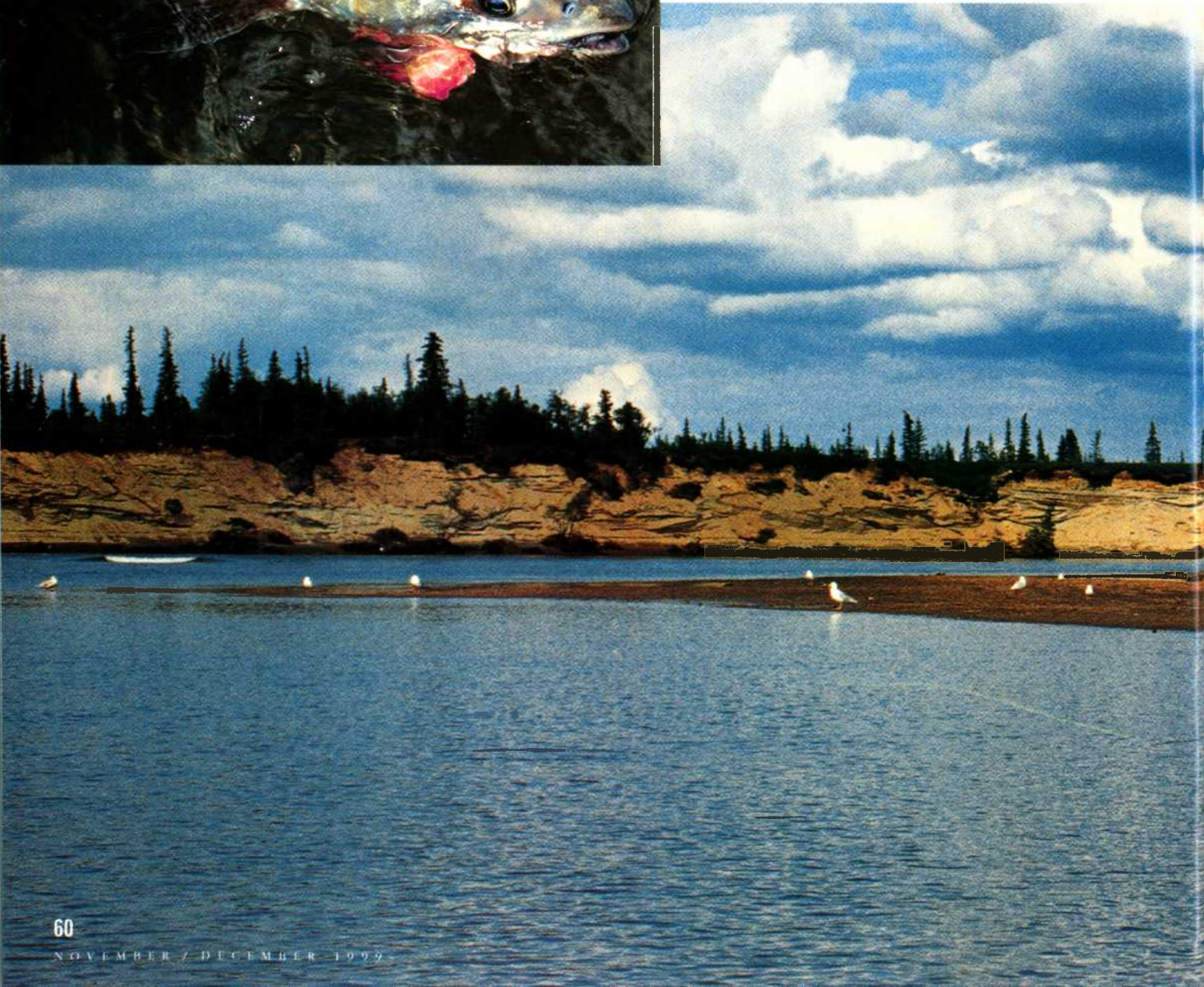
*Sight-Casting to Pacific Salmon on the Flats of Alaska's Bristol Bay*

WRITTEN BY JACK W. BERRYMAN



PHOTOS BY ELAINE BERRYMAN

THERE WE STOOD IN knee-deep water along the tidal flats of Alaska's Alagnak River, just a few miles from Bristol Bay in southwestern Alaska. We were peering into the shallow water looking for the fish our guide was pointing to. "There's two right there," Jeff said, as he pointed his rod tip into the water not more than 10 feet in front of us. "Look, there's three more," he shouted, as Elaine and I looked at each other in dismay. We couldn't see a thing.



# THE SHALLOWS

"Is he nuts?" my wife whispered.

"Must be some sort of guide's game for the new 'rubes,'" I answered.

Then it all became obvious. Jeff was wearing polarized sunglasses and we were not. An obvious blunder for any angler fishing the flats, to be sure, but here in Alaska with salmon as our primary quarry, we hadn't quite settled into our sight-casting mode.

After a quick retreat to the boat, we hurried back to Jeff's side, where he excitedly pointed to a small school of Pacific coho salmon, or silvers, holding just below a drop-off in the sandy bottom. They were no more than 20 feet away.

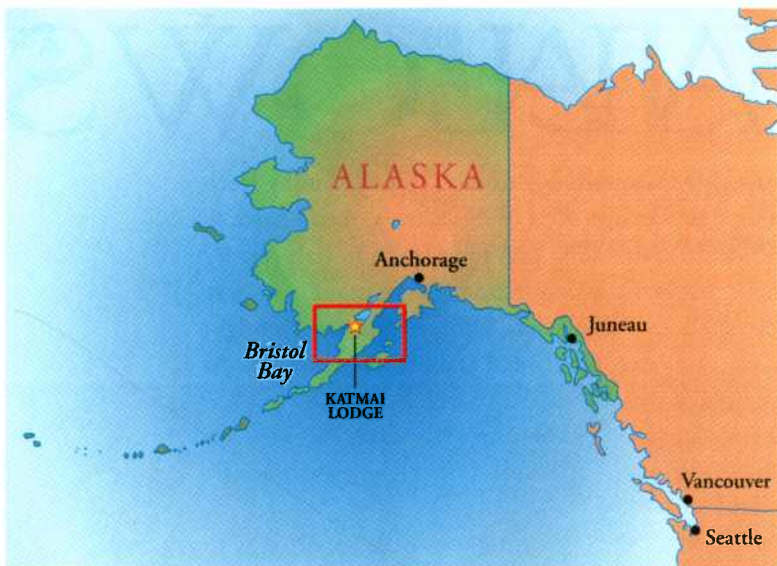
Since Elaine already had her 7-weight rigged and ready to go with a floating line, she was the first to

cast. Jeff instructed her to cast the pink bunny leech about 10 feet upstream of the salmon, mend twice to allow the fly to sink, and then begin to strip the fly back. As the fly swung in front of the fish, Elaine gave her line a few short strips. On the third strip, a bright coho turned on the fly and grabbed it on the run. As the fish cartwheeled and took several sizzling runs, Jeff began to explain his somewhat new and surely unique discovery — the opportunity to sight-cast to Pacific salmon on the tide flats!

Generally, when fly fishers have the opportunity to hook Pacific salmon in the salt, it is in deep water. Or, in some situations, such as in Washington's Puget Sound, anglers can catch salmon casting off beaches into a drop-off. Rarely, however, do West Coast fisher-

*The author casts onto the tidal flats of Bristol Bay for pink, coho and (opposite) chum salmon.*





## PLANNING A TRIP

Getting to Alaska's Bristol Bay region in the summer can be a problem because the area is so popular and is served by only one large airport at King Salmon. You should make reservations to Anchorage and then book with Alaska Airlines, Reeve Aleutian or Yute Air to King Salmon.

Since Katmai Lodge began shuttling guests from Anchorage to King Salmon on a chartered Merlin Metro 3 two years ago and is currently working on direct flights from Anchorage to the lodge, make your travel arrangements directly through Katmai Lodge. They also provide air transportation from King Salmon to the lodge on their 10-passenger DeHavilland Otter, in their Beaver or in Yute Air's five-passenger 207.

You should bring warm waders and a set of layerable clothing since the summer weather can be variable. Rain gear, gloves, several hats, sunglasses and lip balm will make your trip enjoyable. Insects are not a problem on the water, but some repellent comes in handy around the lodge grounds in the evening. Be sure to bring your camera and plenty of film. Katmai does have a small store and gift shop that carries some basic supplies.

For pink salmon, a 6-weight rod is ideal. If you plan to catch coho and chum, you should have a 7- or 8-weight. A 9-weight will feel great fighting some of the large and stubborn chums. For kings, you want nothing less than a 10-weight. Most of your fishing can be done with a floating line, but a few different sink tips can help in fast water. Bring several reels and some spare spools, but make sure all have sufficient backing since most of the Alagnak fish will take you there.

Licenses are issued through the lodge upon your arrival. A non-resident 14-day sport-fishing license costs \$30. A three-day tag for chinook salmon costs another \$15, or a 14-day costs \$35.

men find a situation in which large numbers of salmon are holding in shallow water. We all knew this and were excited to be in one of the few areas where this unique opportunity was possible.

### Getting in the Flow

The Alagnak, one of the many tributaries of Bristol Bay, originates high in the Iliamna Lake region with its headwaters in Kukaklek Lake and Nonvianuk Lake. It flows about 74 miles through Katmai National Park and Preserve before entering the ocean near the towns of Kvichak and King Salmon. Congress designated the

*Elaine Berryman releases a nice coho caught on a 7-weight.*

upper 66 miles Wild and Scenic status in 1980.

While most fly fishermen who visit Tony Sarp's Katmai Lodge fish higher in the river for salmon, grayling and rainbow trout, we headed as far downstream as we could go in search of fresh chum, pink and coho salmon. The lodge is located about eight miles above tide water and approximately 23 miles from the Bristol Bay waters, so generally we traveled about 20 miles each day to fish. We were there in mid-August, peak time for bright coho and chums, and since it was an even-numbered year, an abundance of pink salmon also made themselves available.

Our daily strategy was to arrive at the lowest tidal reaches at high tide and then wait and watch. Typically we would see the telltale signs of migrating salmon as they moved onto the flood tide — splashing, porpoising and jumping. Then, as the tide began to ebb and entire islands of sand appeared, we waded along the shore looking for drop-offs, pools and depressions. As the tide reached its lowest point (this area is known for its fluctuations of 20 feet or more), we specifically searched for finning fish or "nervous water" and made casts to sighted fish.

Equipment for this type of fishing is a 7- or 8-weight rod and a floating line. You also need a reel that can hold an ample amount of backing and has a good, smooth drag. Our most productive patterns were leech styles in rabbit or marabou tied on 1/0 hooks. Pink and red, with some silver, out-fished every other color,



JACK BERRYMAN



Since we could wade throughout the flats fairly easily, long casts were unnecessary. Here, stealth and accuracy took precedence over distance. Our tip-pets were usually about 7 feet and averaged 8- to 10-pound test. It became evident that a rapidly stripped fly was more likely to attract a coho, whereas a dead-drifted fly generally picked up a chum or pink.

*So grizzly bears and their cubs contribute to the beautiful backdrop anglers visiting Katmai Lodge (bottom) will enjoy during the 20-mile run to the flats.*

though blue and silver “flash flies” did well for coho. We also fished the “wog” surface fly on a few occasions but did not have as much luck with it in the shallow water conditions.

sandbars and their drop-offs. Then, while the tide was still in, we anchored on the edge. This put us in a perfect casting position to reach fish holding in somewhat deeper water as the tide receded. Having the extra height

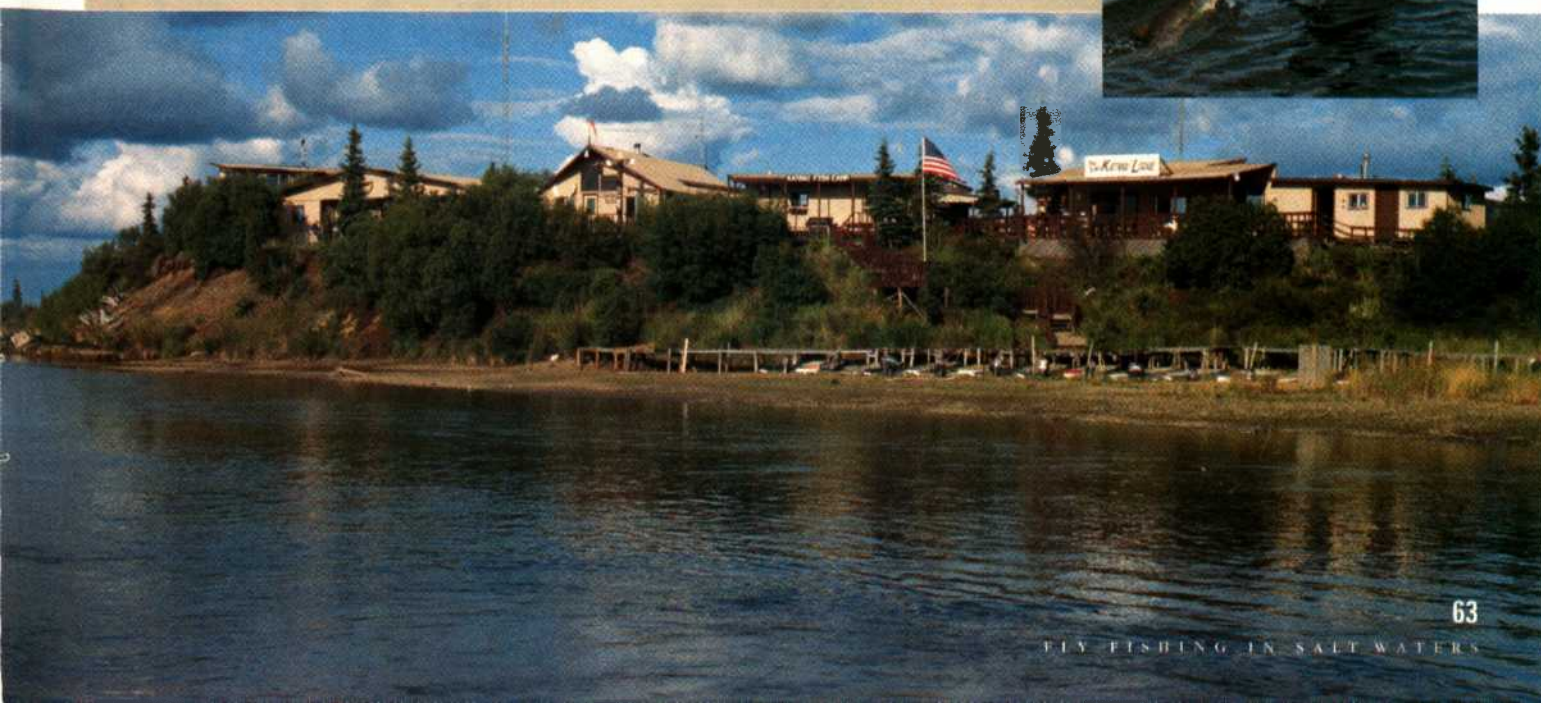
## ABOUT THE LODGE

Katmai Lodge has been in operation for 20 years and over that time has been expanded into a large and spacious complex. It has its own airstrip, a main lodge, dining room and numerous guest cabins with indoor plumbing, electricity and heat. The delicious meals are served buffet-style. Since more and more couples are enjoying fly-fishing and the wilderness experience, Katmai Lodge is adding several new rooms with baths and remodeling some of the guest cabins to better accommodate families.

A limited supply of fishing gear, boots, vests and rain gear are available for emergencies. I broke my 6-weight the first evening of a seven-day trip last year and was pleased to know Katmai Lodge had a spare for me to use for the remainder of my trip. A large and well-equipped fly-tying room is set up for the guests, and generally a professional tier is available on staff for demonstrations and instruction.

Complimentary drinks, hors d'oeuvres and popcorn are served every evening in the main lodge before dinner. A nice library and great supply of fishing videos are also available for guests. Many pleasant evenings are spent sitting in the lounge around the wood stove. Guides join the guests, swap stories and make plans for the next day's fishing.

For more information, contact Katmai Lodge, 1515 Pacific Avenue, Suite E, Everett, WA 98201; 425-337-0326. (Other lodges offering fly-fishing services on the Alagnak River include Alaska Rainbow Lodge, 800-451-6198; Anglers Paradise Lodge, 907-243-5448; and Alagnak Lodge, 800-877-9903.)





*On even-numbered years, colorful pink salmon bring grand-slam opportunities to the Bristol Bay flats.*

advantage assisted us in spotting the salmon and at the same time allowed us to see the fish actually attack our flies. In the clear water, this was indeed a thrill!

On any given tide, waves of salmon entered the estuary waters and gradually moved upriver. Some days the coho dominated a run, and on other days we couldn't find one. But there were always some fish ready to take our flies. The chum or dog salmon at this stage of their lives are strong, bright and aggressive. They are good biters and even better fighters. Whereas the coho will leap and take long, rapid runs, the chum will slowly and

methodically bore into the sandy bottom while taking you into your backing. Pinks, too, are formidable opponents, especially the larger males. The coho averaged 10 pounds with some reaching 16, the chum were generally 7 to 9 pounds, and the pinks ranged between 5 and 7 pounds. Bigger fish were around, though, as proved by a 17-pound chum and an 11-pound pink, both aggressive males caught by Elaine.

### Top-Notch Fishing

All fishing at Katmai Lodge is done with a professional guide. Owner Tony Sarp and manager Les Jacober recruit top professionals from Washington, Oregon, California and the Great Lakes area. These fishermen come with a strong background in salmon and steelhead fishing and work with their clients the entire trip. Guides prepare the boat for fishing each day, pack lunches or cook a shore lunch on a gas grill, assist with equipment and share their knowledge of tactics based on the angler's specific interests and abilities. In addition to a fleet of 18 jet boats and numerous prop-powered sleds, the lodge has two DeHavilland Beaver float planes for fly-outs to

## From the World of Shallow Water comes the Ande Monofilament IGFA World Record update for Bonefish, Permit and Tarpon.

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**BONEFISH**

M-2 lb.	11 lb., 12 oz.
M-4 lb.	13 lb., 1 oz.
M-6 lb.	13 lb., 15 oz.
M-8 lb.	15 lb., 12 oz.
Tippet 8	13 lb., 8 oz.
W-2 lb.	10 lb., 0 oz.
W-4 lb.	12 lb., 6 oz.
W-8 lb.	14 lb., 4 oz.
W-16 lb.	12 lb., 14 oz.
W-30 lb.	6 lb., 0 oz.



**PERMIT**

All Tackle	53 lb., 4 oz.
M-2 lb.	25 lb., 7 oz.
M-4 lb.	44 lb., 12 oz.
M-8 lb.	42 lb., 8 oz.
M-16 lb.	46 lb., 4 oz.
M-30 lb.	51 lb., 8 oz.
M-50 lb.	53 lb., 4 oz.
Tippet 2	9 lb., 12 oz.
Tippet 16	36 lb., 0 oz.
W-2 lb.	19 lb., 4 oz.
W-12 lb.	42 lb., 0 oz.
W-20 lb.	46 lb., 0 oz.
W-30 lb.	42 lb., 0 oz.



**TARPON**

All Tackle Tie	283 lb., 4 oz.
M-2 lb.	106 lb., 0 oz.
M-4 lb.	128 lb., 8 oz.
M-8 lb.	147 lb., 6 oz.
M-16 lb.	202 lb., 13 oz.
M-30 lb. (Tie)	283 lb., 4 oz.
M-80 lb.	265 lb., 0 oz.
W-2 lb.	56 lb., 0 oz.
W-4 lb.	134 lb., 3 oz.
W-6 lb.	115 lb., 0 oz.
W-8 lb.	141 lb., 9 oz.
W-16 lb.	166 lb., 7 oz.
W-20 lb.	230 lb., 0 oz.
W-30 lb.	249 lb., 0 oz.
W-50 lb.	225 lb., 0 oz.
W-80 lb. (Tie)	218 lb., 4 oz.

M = Men's  
W = Women's

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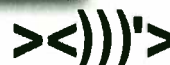
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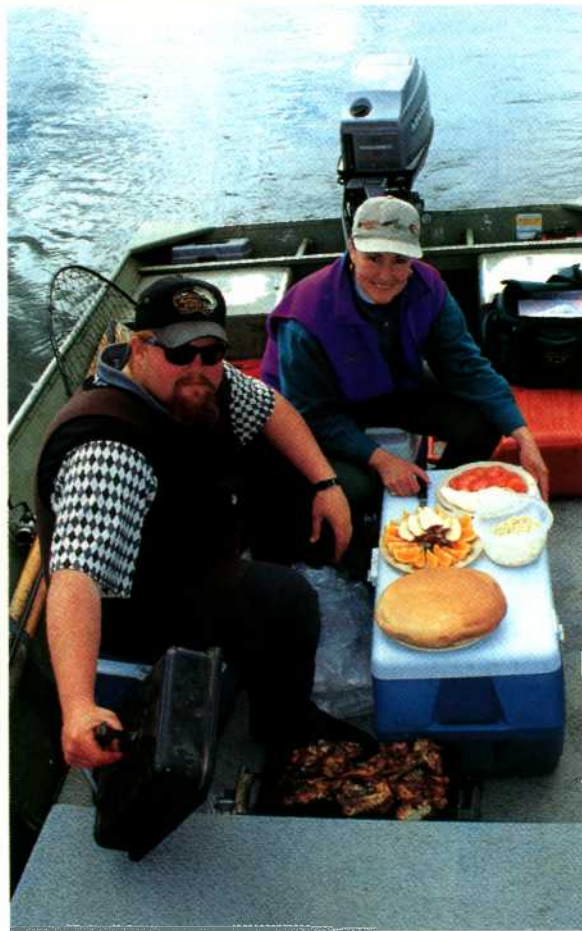
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more remote fishing spots. The lodge requires its angling guests to use single barbless hooks and release all female salmon.

We spent a week at Katmai Lodge and caught as many as 50 salmon a day. In fact, both Elaine and I caught salmon on our first casts of the trip. Our guide, Jeff Topp, was an experienced fisherman from Michigan and assisted us every day. We fished popular spots like "swallow bank," "glory bar" and "I spot 'em, I got 'em," but it was Jeff who took us off the beaten path to side channels and remote flats that no one ever fished. His knowledge of the river and the habits of our quarry made our trip very enjoyable.

Running the river nearly 40 miles each day presented many opportunities to view the abundant wildlife. We watched a sow grizzly bear and her two cubs for half an hour one afternoon, fished with a family of river otters and had the opportunity to see moose, caribou, eagles and a fairly rare sandhill crane. One afternoon our guide thought it would be interesting to hike into an old trapper's cabin near the river. But, after traveling about 100 yards into the bush, our discovery of a 5-gallon plastic bucket chewed apart by a grizzly sent us back to the boat, fully satisfied to spend the remainder of our trip sight-casting to pink, coho and chum salmon. 



*Guide Jeff Topp prepares an extravagant shore lunch during a respite from the day's action.*

JACK BERRYMAN

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