



A MONTHLY NEWSLETTER

# THE ANGLING REPORT

May 2011 Vol. 24, No. 5

**DATELINE: NORTH CAROLINA**

**Discovery  
This “Trout Trail” Has  
a Little of Everything**

*Editor Note: A few issues ago we mentioned briefly that a “Trout Trail” offering an intriguing variety of fishing had emerged in western North Carolina. This month, occasional correspondent Jim Casada weighed in with the full story. Enjoy—and file a report if you go!*

**W**hen it comes to diversity of opportunity, arguably no area east of the Rockies offers more to the trout fisherman than the Great Smoky Mountains in western North Carolina. Within the compass of a handful of counties, you have top-drawer tailwaters (portions of the Nantahala and Tuckasegee rivers), immensely popular delayed harvest streams that are heavily stocked by the North Carolina Wildlife

Resources Commission, the fly-fishing-only, catch-and-release trophy program operated by Cherokee tribal authorities on Raven Fork, plus hundreds of miles of wild trout streams in the Great Smoky Mountains National Park and the Nantahala National Forest.

Given all this potential, it’s prob-



ably not surprising that someone developed the concept of a “Trout Trail” in eastern North Carolina. The men behind this trail are adventurous fisherman Bobby Kilby, who claims to have caught trout in more than 1,000 streams in North Carolina, and local

guide Alex Bell. Ballyhooed as the first trail of its kind in the United States, it features a bit of everything. There’s the delayed harvest fishing available on the Tuckasegee River, a tailwater that can be waded when the gates upstream are closed, though it requires a drift boat or raft when the water is “on”; the Tribal Enterprise water, Raven Fork, on the nearby Cherokee Indian Reservation; a number of hatchery-supported trout streams; and finally, several smaller and generally remote creeks that receive relatively little pressure and boast naturally reproducing trout, including, in some cases, native specks (brook trout).

A fine example of the latter is Pantherthorn Valley, in the headwaters of the Tuckasegee River. Those led there blindfolded would be convinced that they were in another world. The terrain, the vegetation, and the stream in no way resemble what is typically encountered in the Smokies and Blue Ridge. The stream resembles blackwater rivers found at lower elevations across the Southeast and seldom can you see deeper than a foot or so. Yet it is home to a fine population of speckled trout, and they are as vividly colored as those you will find anywhere. One caveat: either go with a guide or do plenty of map research, because the area is a maze of trails, and it is easy, as locals sometimes put it, to get “temporarily misplaced.”

Altogether, there are fifteen “stops” on the North Carolina Trout Trail, and those interested in fishing any of them can obtain details by visiting [www.FlyFishingTrail.com](http://www.FlyFishingTrail.com) or calling 800-962-1911. Several local guides and outfitters are available to help you enjoy the trail. They include AB’s Fly Fishing Guide Service ([www.abfish.org](http://www.abfish.org); 828-226-3833), Brookings’ Cashiers Village Outfitters ([www.Brookingsonline.com](http://www.Brookingsonline.com); 828-743-3768), Hooker’s Fly Shop and Guide

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Service ([www.hookersflyshop.com](http://www.hookersflyshop.com); 828-587-4665), and River's Edge Outfitters ([www.flyfishcherokee.com](http://www.flyfishcherokee.com); 828-497-9300). If you want to try the trail on your own, the map available for the trail includes fairly detailed access information. For the remote, walk-in destinations, however, you will want more complete information such as trail or topography maps, perhaps supplemented by the North Carolina Wildlife Resource Commission's excellent publication, *North Carolina Trout Fishing Maps* ([www.ncwildstore.com/troutfismapb.html](http://www.ncwildstore.com/troutfismapb.html)).

Trail visitors will find plenty of accommodation and dining options nearby. These range from cabins along the Tuckasegee River to motels and bed-and-breakfast establishments, along with RV campgrounds and weekly house rentals. Full details are available on the local chamber of commerce Web site, [www.mountainlovers.com](http://www.mountainlovers.com), or by calling 800-962-1911.

The Fly Fishing Trail is only part of the western North Carolina trout story. Nearby lies the North Carolina side of the Great Smoky Mountains National Park, with its half million acres of pristine wilderness and scores of streams holding wild trout. Here, there are all sorts of fishing options, from easily accessed streams, such as the lower reaches of Deep Creek and Noland Creek, to storied streams that empty into the north shore of Fontana Lake and that can only be reached by boat or lengthy hikes.

These are my home waters, the

streams where I caught my first trout. In my studied opinion, the Great Smoky Mountains National Park offers the finest wild trout east of the Rockies—with the emphasis on *wild*. No trout have been stocked in any of these streams in decades, and most feature a mixture of browns and 'bows, with some headwaters home to specks. The best way to sample and savor these waters is by camping in designated backcountry sites, although day trips are certainly a possibility. For two of the streams that empty into Fontana, storied Hazel Creek—the most famous of all park streams—and Eagle Creek, there is a shuttle from the marina at Fontana Village that will take you (and your gear if you are planning to camp) across the lake and then pick you up at a specified time. The round trip is \$50 per person, and you can obtain details or make reservations by calling 828-498-2129 or by visiting [www.fontanavillage.com](http://www.fontanavillage.com). Incidentally, Fontana Village, which was originally created to build Fontana Dam during World War II, has been totally updated and offers a variety of dining and lodging options.

Another alternative is hooking up with a local guide service for some camping in style. Steve Claxton's Smoky Mountain Adventures ([www.steveclaxton.com](http://www.steveclaxton.com); 828-736-7501) or Ronnie Parris's Smoky Mountains Outdoors Unlimited ([www.smokymountainoutdoorsunlimited.com](http://www.smokymountainoutdoorsunlimited.com); 828-488-9711) are fine choices whether you want a single day's experience or an extended backcountry trip.

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Both men grew up in nearby Bryson City and have fished these waters all their lives. Then, too, if you are fit, like to get away from it all, and revel in seeing few if any other fishermen, a backpacking/camping trip on your own is always a possibility. I've done this in the area all my life and, misanthrope that I undoubtedly am, it remains my favorite approach to fishing in the Smokies. So much the case that I devoted several years and a world of wonderful "field research" to a book on the subject (see the postscript below).

At the other end of the spectrum from the standpoint of ease of access, there are the Cherokee tribal waters on the reservation. They include not only the special trophy section of Raven Fork, where you can cast to monstrous (albeit highly educated) trout, but other streams as well. These waters are a put-and-take situation (mostly stockers, since the tribe has its own state-of-the-art hatchery, but there are plenty of wild fish as well) that draws mostly worm and corn dunkers, but I know from personal experience that they can be highly productive for the fly fisherman who eschews the big pools and works riffles and runs. This is especially true on small Soco Creek. Several years back, I spent a day with Bob Bradley, a local angler. It was a delight from beginning to end, but what was most striking was a couple of hours spent on a section of Soco Creek. Using a dry fly and nymph dropper, I caught between 40 and 50 wild trout. Mind you, none was a foot long, but it was satisfying to the nth degree for me.

Finally, anyone visiting the region for more than a day or two will want to check out the Nantahala River. It actually offers two faces: one is a five or six mile section of delayed harvest water above the power plant; the second is the tailwater section in Nantahala Gorge. The latter is unusual in that portions of it can be waded even when the water is on. The aesthetics when the water is at full flow is anything but ideal, thanks to the fact that this is a world-class whitewater destination with a constant canoe and kayak hatch, but the fishing is extraordinary. In my

opinion, there's no finer trout stream in North Carolina. Local guides such as Steve Claxton and Ronnie Parris mentioned earlier, along with Mac Brown ([www.macbrownflyfish.com](http://www.macbrownflyfish.com); 828-488-8975), who actually does some floats when the water is on, know the stream well. Brown, incidentally, is an expert casting instructor with top-level FFF certification who has written a book on the subject.

I might note that if the task was put to me to catch a limit of fish for the table and to do so in fairly rapid order, the Nantahala would be where I would go. Unlike most southern Appalachian streams, it has major hatches and a prime food base. That translates to more and bigger fish, and over the years I've caught more large fish here than any-



where in the Smokies. The stream has also given me more 50-plus fish days than anywhere in the region, and its different options—from delayed harvest to the tailwater section, not to mention the fact that it is the only trout stream in North Carolina where you can fish at night—make it most inviting. — *Jim Casada*.

*Postscript: Jim Casada's book, Fly Fishing in the Great Smoky Mountains National Park: An Insider's Guide to a Pursuit of Passion covers every major stream in the park in great detail. It devotes a chapter to each stream of note, includes graphs of every drainage indicating waypoints and elevation changes, provides details such as the average monthly rainfall and temperatures, offers access information on each stream, contains an appendix listing local guide services, outfitters, and chambers of commerce, and includes*

*a removable map. The 448-page book is \$24.95 in paperback and \$37.50 in hardback. It can be ordered on the Web at [www.jimcasadaoutdoors.com](http://www.jimcasadaoutdoors.com).*

## DATELINE: AUSTRIA

### **Trip Planning File** **Fishing for Trout in** **Sound of Music Country**

*Editor Note: Angling Report subscriber Bob Peters is so adept at picking good places to fish and then describing them in vivid terms that we couldn't resist the temptation to make his report on fishing in Austria a Dateline Report. Enjoy!*

Imagine breathtaking U-shaped valleys carved by ancient glaciers with granite cliffs cropping out from tree-shrouded canyon walls and achingly blue lakes strung along the valley floors. Now connect those deepwater lakes with crystal-clear streams running through the mountainous countryside of Austria. To complete the picture, add brown trout, rainbow trout, and grayling to those streams. What you get is the amazing landscape and wonderful fishing opportunities available in the lakes region near Salzburg, Austria.

When my wife and I started planning a biking trip for the fall of 2010 to Czech Republic (see my report in the April 2011 issue of *The Angling Report*), we decided to add a weeklong hiking tour in Austria. Along with two other couples from Jackson Hole, we booked a seven-day walking tour in the Salzkammergut region near Salzburg through a company called "Hooked on Walking" ([www.walking-europe.co.uk/Austria/soundofmusic/soundofmusic.html](http://www.walking-europe.co.uk/Austria/soundofmusic/soundofmusic.html)).

The company calls the hiking tour the "Sound of Music Walking Tour in Austria." As it turns out, a great deal of the timeless musical *The Sound of Music* was filmed in this area. Although I know that many discerning music lovers may scoff at the movie, I've always had a soft spot in my heart for it, and no one can argue that the mountain scenery

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isn't spectacular.

Once we booked the hiking trip, I started looking into the possibility of doing some fishing while we were on the tour. As it turned out, the possibilities were almost limitless—we had unknowingly selected a region with a rich history of fly fishing and a wide range of choices for any angler. At times, our walking route would take us along the banks of one of Europe's best-known streams, the River Traun.

Once I knew that fishing was a very real option, I started an online search for information about my choices. I e-mailed several hotels, information of-

fices, and a couple of fly shops I found on the Internet. One of the responses I



received was from a man who turned out to be a wonderful guide, teacher,

and companion, Urs Zulian of Austria Guiding. Urs can be reached by phone at 0043 664 392 37 80. His e-mail address is [urs.zulian@sbg.at](mailto:urs.zulian@sbg.at), and his Web address is [www.austria-guiding.at](http://www.austria-guiding.at).

Urs's Web site, which is in English and Italian, as well as German, was very helpful. It gives an excellent summary of many of the streams that are fishable around Salzburg. I provided Urs with my walking itinerary, and he recommended fishing the Goiserer Traun, which is the stretch of the Traun River that runs through the small spa town of Bad Goisern. My friends and I would be walking into Bad Goisern on the

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□ Rocky Mountain West

## Snowpack Report Points to Great Summer Fishing

By Bill Cenis

*Editor Note: Positive snowpack reports across the West suggest 2011 will be a good year to fish in most of the Rocky Mountains. Occasional correspondent Bill Cenis filed this report.*

■ There's good news for anglers planning to fish out West this summer. All indications suggest that summer streamflow conditions will be good to ideal in much of the Rocky Mountain West. This is especially true of the northern Rockies. Drought conditions that hampered river flows and thereby stream fishing during the past ten years apparently will be just that, a thing of the past.

In all but a few western states, the mountains experienced one snowstorm after another throughout this past winter. In some regions, record snow depths were recorded. Reservoirs behind dams that control river flows on major fishing rivers are now close to or at full capacity. There is little doubt that most, if not all, western trout streams there will have plenty of water, allowing for good angling conditions through the summer and well into autumn.

If there is a downside to this rosy forecast, it is that the quality fishing conditions will likely occur later than normal, especially in the premier trout fishing destination states of Idaho, Montana, Wyoming, and northern Colorado, where mountain snowpack that supplies water for reservoirs, rivers, and streams is considerably above the 30-year norm.

Under normal conditions, snowpack runoff peaks between late May and mid-June. Because of the abundance of moisture in the northern Rockies, the runoff (high water) period will possibly extend into late June. Raging rivers and flooding in late spring could pose problems.

The chance of flooding is determined by how fast the snow melts. If the spring weather stays cool, allowing the

mountain snowpack to melt gradually, flooding will likely be held to a minimum. If there is a sudden hot spell or a series of rainstorms during May or June, major flooding on some creeks and rivers is likely. In any case, due to the abundant snowpack currently in the mountains, state and local officials are preparing for flooding in many regions. Bottom line, it will likely be late June or early July before some of the western streams are fishable. However, because of the wealth of water, ideal fishing conditions should continue throughout the summer and into late autumn.

The small window that normally allows for excellent early spring fishing before the runoff begins is at its end for this year. During runoff, anglers and guides can usually find decent fishing in feeder creeks and on side channels of the larger rivers. Locals and guides know the spots where the trout take cover during the rushing waters of spring. Excessive flooding, however, would create an entirely different situation.

As always, when attempting to predict the weather and, by extension, fishing conditions, it should be noted that Mother Nature always has the last word. And as we all know, she has been quite cranky of late.

As reported by the Natural Resources Conservation Service (NRCS), here's a look at the mid-to-late April mountain snow water equivalent measurements in the Rocky Mountain region. Percentages listed are based on 30-year averages.

**IDAHO:** Idaho had twice the normal precipitation in March, on top of an already healthy snowpack. In the northern part of the state, which includes the pristine cutthroat waters of the Coeur d' Alene, Lochsa, Clearwater, Selway, and St. Joe rivers, mountain snow water equivalents are around 120 percent of average. To the south, mountain snow water content feeding fishing rivers such as the Boise, Big Wood, Lost, Henry's Fork, and Snake rivers extends from 102 percent on the Boise,

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afternoon of September 26, so I booked Urs for a full day of fishing on September 27. Urs agreed to pick me up at my hotel and graciously offered to take me to my hotel in Altaussee that night so I could meet up with my wife and friends.

Our walking tour started in the small town of Abersee. We took a short ferry ride across Lake Wolfgangsee to St. Wolfgang, which is a picturesque resort town alongside the lake. As we boarded the little ferry in Abersee, I could see dozens of huge rainbow trout milling around the ferry pilings and shoreline. They were easily 25 inches long, and I'm sure some were more than 30 inches

long. I suspect they were "pet" fish that were being fattened for dinner, but



the ferry captain didn't speak English, so I'm not sure. Regardless, those fish

were my first glimpse at Austrian trout and I was impressed.

Later that day, our walking route took us on a forested path around a smaller lake called Schwarzensee. (Adding "lake" to these names is redundant, as the "see" on the end of a word like "Schwarzensee" means "lake.") There were several bait anglers fishing near the outlet of the lake, and I could clearly see sizable rainbows cruising the shallows near the main inlet stream. Our route then followed the canyon formed by the outlet stream down to the main valley and to our destination that night in Bad Ischl. As we made our way

to 128 percent on Henry's Fork, and 132 percent on the Snake. To the west, water equivalent in the mountains feeding the Owyhee River Basin measured 139 percent of average. Reservoirs are in very good shape.

**MONTANA:** Record snows fell in the mountains of Montana. Some flooding is expected. For example, on the state's largest river by volume, the Clark Fork, river flows are predicted to be 126 percent of average. This compares to last year's 47 percent. Snow water equivalents feeding all of the river drainages are above the 30-year averages. In western Montana, the latest NRCS percent of average water equivalent measurements range from 118 percent for the Bitterroot River Basin to 141 percent for snow water that will feed the Flathead River Basin. Percentages in other major Montana angling destinations include the Madison and Missouri rivers at 118 to 129 percent of average, Gallatin River at 121 percent, Yellowstone River at 125 percent, and, farther east, the Big Horn River at 120 percent. All reservoir water storage levels on major rivers are at or above average.

**WYOMING:** Wyoming's rivers should also see good fishing conditions come summer. Snow water equivalents that will feed the Snake measured 130 percent of the norm, the Shoshone 121 percent, the upper Green 130 percent, upper North Platte 144 percent, and the lower North Platte 117 percent. All Wyoming mountain snow water equivalents measured a minimum of 114 percent of average, except for the Belle Fourche at 95 percent. Here again, Wyoming reservoirs hold a good supply of water. Several rivers are rated as high risks for flooding.

**COLORADO:** Unlike the past four years, mountain snow measurements strongly indicate trout streams in Colorado will have plenty of flow to carry them well through the summer. According to the NRCS, many of Colorado's mountains held more than twice as much snow this winter as they did last year. Snow water equivalents for mountains feeding the Gunnison and South Platte river basins (both at 116 percent of average), the Upper Colorado (126 percent), the Laramie and North Platte (138 percent), and the Yampa and White rivers

(133 percent) top the list. Rivers below 100 percent of average include the Arkansas, Dolores, Animas, and San Miguel, but even those top 85 percent of the 30-year average.

**UTAH:** Entering the month of May, Utah has a very good supply of mountain snowpack, averaging 140 percent of normal statewide. All snow water equivalents in the mountains run from 110 percent feeding the Green River Basin to 191 percent for the Virgin River Basin. These measurements for the mountains of Utah point to very good fishing conditions throughout the summer. Other notable basins expecting plentiful summer water supply are the Provo, Duchesne, San Rafael, Seiver, and Escalante rivers. The only basins rated below the 30-year norm are located in southeast Utah, where the average snow water equivalents were measured at 94 percent.

**CALIFORNIA/NEVADA:** There's water aplenty in the mountains that supply water to the river basins in these two states. Temperatures during May and June hold the key to the strength of runoff and the amount of flooding. In mid-April, there was 180 percent of average water content in the mountains in the Lake Tahoe region, 157 percent for the Carson River, 165 for the Truckee, 151 for the Walker, 148 for the Klamath, 145 for the Humboldt, and 124 percent for eastern Nevada.

**NEW MEXICO:** Coming into 2011, water content in the northern New Mexico mountains was in decent shape. Recently, though, the lack of mountain precipitation has put a damper on some streamflow outlooks for this coming summer. Across the state, mountain water content is below the 30-year average. Still, all is not lost. Content measurements feeding the Rio Chama, San Juan, and Animas river basins are between 85 percent and 96 percent. Navajo Lake in the San Juan Basin will do well with runoff as a result, with more than 100 percent of the average inflow expected. This is good news for those targeting the San Juan River, New Mexico's prime destination trout fishery. Enjoy! – *Bill Cenis*.

*Postscript: Updated information on snowpack conditions across the West is available on the NRCS Web site: [www.wrcc.dri.edu/cgi-bin/sno\\_narr3\\_pl](http://www.wrcc.dri.edu/cgi-bin/sno_narr3_pl).*

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downstream, I spotted rainbows in nearly every plunge pool and deeper run. It seemed as if Austria had trout nearly everywhere there was water.

The next day's tour took us over a big mountain and then down to Bad Goisern, which was where I would meet Urs the following morning. That evening, I watched brown trout sipping flies on the small stream that ran alongside our hotel.

After breakfast the next morning, the rest of my party took off on that day's hike. Urs arrived a few minutes before our allotted meeting time (he was born in Switzerland, after all) and introduced himself. He's a very outgoing, friendly man in his forties who speaks excellent English, and I was instantly at ease with him. The sun was out, it was a beautiful, brisk morning, and his enthusiasm was contagious.

Our first stop was at the Gasthof Moserwirt ([www.moserwirt.at/en/index.php](http://www.moserwirt.at/en/index.php)), where I purchased my fishing permit for the Goiserer Traun. My permit was good on nearly five kilometers of river and cost 87 euros for one day. In addition, Urs's daily guide fee was 250 euros.

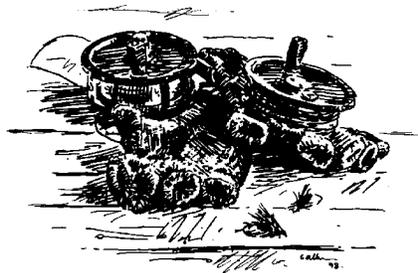
Once I had my permit, Urs drove a few kilometers up-valley to the spot where the Goiserer Traun runs out of Hallstattersee. We parked near a little restaurant and geared up. Urs provided me with everything necessary, from boots and breathable waders, to all the flies, to wonderful, smooth-casting Vision 3- and 4-weight rods. Once we were suited up, we walked past the bountiful vegetable garden of a small restaurant and headed down to the water under the baleful eye of several geese (next month's foie gras, perhaps?) who were loudly guarding the produce.

We fished the east side of a small island where the Goiserer Traun tumbled from the outlet structure of the lake. The water was clear and, with the sun at our backs, the visibility was perfect. I could see the shadows of fish holding in the deeper sections of a diagonal run in front of us. Urs set me up with an indicator rig made up of a size-14 weighted nymph and a size-18

unweighted nymph similar to a pheasant tail.

I started with short casts, working my way toward the deeper run. After a few casts, the indicator popped under and I tightened up on my first Austrian fish. It fought briefly, and before long, Urs landed a grayling of about 10 inches. As I started fishing in the deeper holding water, my next few casts produced several takes, but I was too fast, too slow, or too something to hook them.

Urs asked if he could give me a pointer or two, and I was happy to accept. Certified by the European Fly Fishing Association as a casting instructor and a simply outstanding coach, Urs showed me a variation of what might be called a "tent" or



"parachute" cast. Here's my inadequate description: Throw a line that goes progressively higher off the water in front of you by bringing the backcast very low behind you and then aiming the forward cast to a point *way* up in the air. Once you have the desired distance and height, let the cast collapse so that the fly barely flutters to the surface. At the same time, do a fairly pronounced downstream mend. You end up with a slight downstream belly in the line, but it produces a very nice drift.

As Urs describes it, "it is a combination between high speed, high line, and parachute cast. Subsequently, you use the resulting spare line for your mending up- or downstream."

This is, of course, nearly opposite of the way I've usually fished here in Jackson Hole, where you try to keep the fly line upstream of the fly. After some

trial and (more) error on my part, I started to get the hang of it. Sure enough, one of those casts led to a strike, and just a slight lift of the rod tip gave me a solid hookup to a good fish. It was a big grayling that used the current to every advantage and sped up and down the run several times. As I was working the fish from the run and into the shallows, I put on too much pressure just at the moment he did a strong headshake, and I broke the tippet. I don't know how big that grayling was, but they run up to 50 centimeters (20 inches) on that stream.

We continued to fish beautiful water through late morning and early afternoon. I caught a few rainbows and several smaller browns and grayling on mayfly and caddis dries, but the fishing wasn't nearly as fast as it should have been. In several places, we could see lots of good fish holding at the bottom, but I couldn't get them to strike very often. At my insistence, Urs tried drifting nymphs through some of the runs, with little more success than I.

At one point, the river keeper came by to check my permit. He and Urs had a long talk in German while I continued to fish. Earlier in the day, we had seen two other fishermen. They were obviously skilled, and they weren't catching much, either. After the river keeper walked on, Urs told me that the other two fishermen were Czechs who had also been having slow fishing for the last few hours. The river keeper said that it was the full moon (which was quite bright even in the early afternoon) and that the fish wouldn't bite. That's the first time I've ever heard a full moon's impact being applied to trout fishing, but who knows?

Late in the afternoon, Urs took me to another section that featured a long, deep, fairly swift run along the opposite bank. There were two good fish rising regularly along the far shore in an eddy formed by a fallen tree. They were at the extreme end of my casting range, and when I did manage to land a fly in the target, the current ripped the fly out so quickly that I couldn't get a drift. After a few unsuccessful attempts, I managed to

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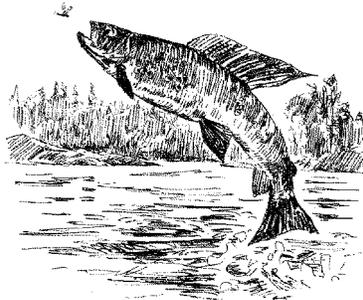
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put both fish down without ever getting a strike.

Shortly after that, I asked Urs if he cared if I tried a streamer. He was upstream of me and said to go for it, so I tied on the heaviest streamer I had in my little travel fly box, a size 2 cone-head black sparkle buggler with added weight. I chucked it out into the run a couple of times and suddenly came up tight against a fish. Urs came down to net it. Though not huge, that fish turned out to be a strong and thick 15-inch brown—the biggest fish I would actually land in Austria. When Urs saw the fly, all he could do was laugh.

“Do you actually fish for trout in Wyoming with flies that big?” he asked. When I told him that I do sometimes, he chuckled and said that it looked more like a fly he might use for Danube salmon. That started a new conversation on the way back to the van. Starting in October, Urs fishes the

Mur River in the Steiermark region of Austria for Danube salmon for about four months. Apparently, they are similar to Mongolian taimen. They are very big, landlocked salmon that can run all the way up to four or five feet long!



Now I've added yet another thing to my bucket list.

Although we didn't land large numbers of big fish, my day on the Goiserer Traun was fantastic. It was spectacularly beautiful water surrounded by stunning

mountains. Urs was fun to fish with and has the perfect ability to coach and counsel while still maintaining his enthusiasm. He has many, many more streams that he fishes within an hour-and-a-half drive of Salzburg. On the remainder of my hiking trip, I saw lots more trout in the streams we passed.

This is an area that could easily be viewed either as a destination trip for a serious angler or as a side trip for a fishing spouse while the non-angler enjoys the hiking, biking, boat trips, spas, and shopping. Salzburg is a marvelous city and less than an hour's drive from many of the best streams.

I came away very impressed with the quantity and quality of the streams in that part of Austria. I wish I'd had more freedom to sample the fishing in some of the other streams. I'm just going to have to go back there and schedule several days with Urs. Now about those Danube salmon. . . . — *Bob Peters.*

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## • Briefly Noted •

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

■ Correspondent Tim Jones tells us he's found an unusual and inexpensive opportunity for Atlantic salmon on the Miramichi River in **New Brunswick**. He writes:

“In recent decades, opportunities for anglers to fish for Atlantic salmon on the Miramichi River in New Brunswick have steadily declined. Many of the old-time sporting camps, places rich in history and tradition, have gone private and are no longer accepting paying clients. As more anglers jockey for limited slots, prices have risen.

“It's still possible to arrange a do-it-yourself trip to the Miramichi, of course. You can stay in a motel, hire a guide, and fish public water. But there's a learning curve with these excursions, and you won't always get the quality experience you had hoped for. So, the question is, how can you gain quality access to this river?

“Enter Mahoosuc Guide Service (207-824-2073; [www.mahoosuc.com](http://www.mahoosuc.com)) and Kevin Slater, a master Maine

guide. I got to know Slater through an online magazine I edit ([www.EasternSlopes.com](http://www.EasternSlopes.com)) devoted to active outdoor sports in the northeastern United States and Canada. In that capacity, I participated in a guided trek on remote Umbagog Lake in northern New Hampshire this past winter. On this trip, our group traveled by dogsled and cross-country skis and stayed two nights in woodstove-heated canvas tents. The trek was well organized, the food was substantial and good, and all equipment was in good condition. Kevin Slater and his assistant guides were personable, knowledgeable, and efficient, and they invited clients to fully participate in camp life, including the care of the dogs who pulled our sleds and transported all the food and gear for the expedition. Slater, incidentally, is a master craftsman who made the elegant sleds the dogs pulled. It really was a journey back to a different time and place.

“I mention all this because

Mahoosuc offers a guided canoe/camping/salmon fishing float trip on the Miramichi system in the summer. For this trek, Mahoosuc teams up with one of the Miramichi's legendary guides, Kevin Silliker, who grew up on the banks of the Miramichi and has more than 30 years of guiding experience on the river. I know Silliker by reputation but have never fished with him.

“This year's float is scheduled for June 25 to 30. Departure point is the University Motor Inn in Orono, Maine, easily accessible from Bangor International Airport (BGR). From there, Mahoosuc transports clients and gear by van (about 6.5 hours) to Upper Oxbow Lodge on the Little Southwest Miramichi. The float will be either on the Little Southwest or the Northwest Miramichi, depending on water levels and salmon runs.

“In either case, the canoes launch on the morning of June 26, and from then until Tuesday, June 29, participants will, according to Slater, ‘canoe

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a little, fish a lot each day. We may or may not move camp each day depending on how the fishing is going.' In other words, the fishing is the priority.

"It should be noted that this is public water and the native community at Red Bank does have some nets in the water at that time of year. However, salmon get past the nets, and floating the river allows one to fish some remote 'public' pools that see far less angling pressure than more accessible waters.

"Accommodations on the river are in comfortable canvas tents with sleeping bags and pads. A woodstove is available to dry wet gear. Unless the water levels are extremely low, you'll be paddling in wood-and-canvas canoes hand-built by Slater. Again, a touch of another era.

"The cost for this trip is \$1,250 per person, and that includes all meals, guides, paddling and camping equipment, transportation from Orono and return, and lodging at Upper Oxbow. Not included is fishing license (\$75), fishing gear, alcohol, and any overnights in Orono/Bangor upon arrival or return. After coming off the river on Tuesday, a visit to the Mic Mac Cultural Museum in Red Bank, New Brunswick, is an optional add-on.

"I haven't taken this trip with Slater and therefore can't recommend it from personal experience, but I have fished some of these waters, and I have taken salmon there. Most important, however, I have traveled with Slater and seen him in action as a wilderness guide and outfitter. If his summer trips are as well run as his winter ones, you shouldn't have any problems. The June time frame is an interesting one. Traditionally, July is more popular, but I have had spectacular fishing on the Miramichi in June on at least one occasion. June is also black-fly season, a fact not to be taken lightly, so come prepared with repellents and a head net.

"For the angler who doesn't need his hand held every moment, who is eager to 'rough it' a bit and get a taste of a bygone era, and who would enjoy fully participating in a river camping/canoeing experience, even if the fish

don't cooperate, this trip is probably a very good bet." – *Tim Jones.*

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■ Now, here's something interesting to do this summer on a trip out West! We are indebted to subscriber Bob Peters for the report.

"**Yellowstone National Park** is famous worldwide for its wildlife, its scenic beauty, its astounding geysers, and its thermal features. It was the very first national park in the world and it remains one of the most visited parks anywhere. One centerpiece of the park is Yellowstone Lake. It is the largest body of water in the park and the largest lake above 7,000 feet in North America. The lake is also the home of one of America's greatest native trout subspecies, the Yellowstone Lake cutthroat.



"Although a major park highway parallels the lake for about 30 miles and casual anglers often fish from those nearby banks, there are about 80 miles of shoreline and tens of thousands of acres of lake that are almost completely untouched by anglers. This is the water that my wife and I will be fishing this July with Jackson, Wyoming, outfitter "Dutch" Gottschling of Wooden Boat River Tours (440-506-1442; [www.woodenboattours.com/yellowstone.htm](http://www.woodenboattours.com/yellowstone.htm)). Dutch and his partner John Fournelle have established a backcountry camping concession with the park service and offer multiday fishing trips targeting the lake's remote population of cutthroats.

"I'm told we'll spend our days sight fishing with dry flies or streamers to big cutts in a remote and wild corner of the lake. Our nights will be spent

in a comfortable tent camp. We'll fish from boats, float tubes, and the shore. With luck, we'll be able to target cruising trout feeding on Callibaetis dries on the surface. We'll also learn more about threats to the Yellowstone Lake cutthroat fishery posed by invasive species such as lake trout and the parasite that causes whirling disease.

"I'll be filing a full report about it upon my return. In the meantime, I thought this trip might appeal to fellow *Angling Report* subscribers who are planning a summer visit to Yellowstone. Perhaps I will see some of you there? Enjoy!" – *Bob Peters.*

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■ As this issue goes to press, we have been offered a FREE trip to Tarpon Caye, a 10-acre private island about 15 miles east of Placencia, **Belize**, in an area that has come to be known as "permit alley." By the time you read this, a lucky Online Extra subscriber to this publication will have been selected to go on the trip. That subscriber's report will appear in these pages in a future issue. In the meantime, we asked agent Doug Schlink of Angler Adventures in Old Lyme, Connecticut ([www.angleradventures.com](http://www.angleradventures.com)), to provide a snapshot of the fishing at Tarpon Caye. He writes:

"Tarpon Caye takes its name from its tarpon lagoon, which reliably holds a resident population of midsize (30- to 60-pound) tarpon. There are also some fair to good bonefish flats in the area as well, but permit are the main attraction at Tarpon Caye. On the top half of the tide, permit predictably flood dozens of flats found within a five- to 20-minute run of the Caye. These are skinny, gin-clear ocean water flats, and dorsal as well as caudal fins are frequently out of the water. While you can skiff-fish these firm, shallow flats, it's often more productive to wade them. It's not unusual to have 20 or more legitimate shots over a tide.

"Tarpon Caye Lodge is owned by permit guru Charlie Leslie, who has spent more than 35 years guiding permit anglers on these flats. What distinguishes the fishing program at Tarpon

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Caye from the programs at most lodges is that they fish the tides. 'We do fishing here,' is Charlie's motto, and he means it. If you are there during a full or new moon, the highest tides occur at midday, thus the best permit fishing will be during the midday hours. However, if your stay coincides with a quarter moon, when low tide typically occurs around midday, Charlie will schedule 'split-day' fishing. During these tides, you might fish from first light until the permit leave the flats with the falling tide, for example, from 5:30 a.m. to 8:30 a.m. You'll then return to the lodge for a breakfast/brunch and a siesta. Around 2:00 p.m., you'll head back out to meet the permit returning to the flats on the incoming tide, and you'll fish until dark.

"Accommodations at Tarpon Caye consist of basic but comfortable double-occupancy cabañas on stilts, each with full tiled bath with hot and cold water and generated electricity. The clubhouse features a bar and dining room where guests enjoy libations and meals featuring the freshest local seafood. Tarpon Caye Lodge is currently offering a special seven-night, six-fishing-day package priced at only \$1,999 double occupancy. Tell your subscribers to come on down!"

*Postscript: To get in the running for trips like this one, upgrade your subscription to Online Extra on our Web site, [www.anglingreport.com](http://www.anglingreport.com), by clicking on "Online Extra Upgrade."*

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■ So, what's the latest on Tsimane, that exciting new golden dorado destination in **Bolivia**? It caught the eye of international anglers, you'll recall, because it offers opportunities to catch a truly powerful freshwater species on a fly in trout stream-like conditions. Tsimane won unanimous rave reviews from everyone who visited last year. Unfortunately, the excitement was tempered at the end of the season by word that a handful of anglers had come down with leishmaniasis, a disease transmitted by sand fly bites. One *Angling Report* subscriber became very ill and, at last report, was still

struggling with the disease.

At press time we contacted Rodrigo Salles, sales director of Untamed Angling ([www.untamedangling.com](http://www.untamedangling.com)), the Argentinean company that developed Tsimane. He had this to say about the upcoming season in general and about leishmaniasis in particular:

"We are very excited about the 2011 season at Tsimane! We are 95 percent booked for the entire season, and we already have a waiting list for 2012. We have added a lot of fishable waters at both camps, plus we have created a new place to stay at the headwaters of the Secure River. We have also installed a solar power generator and some small hydraulic turbines that will provide a much more stable power grid in the camps than last year.



"As for the problem of leishmaniasis, we have taken all possible preventive steps to protect anglers, not just from leishmaniasis, but from all of the tropical diseases that one might confront in this area. We are ready to launch a full season in 2011 with more than 250 anglers!"

*Don Causey Note: If you fish Tsimane this year, do check in with a report afterward. Write [doncausey@anglingreport.com](mailto:doncausey@anglingreport.com).*

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■ Still on the subject of stream dorado, Rod and Gun Resources (800-211-4753; [www.rodgunresources.com/argentinasaltahunting/saltafishing.php](http://www.rodgunresources.com/argentinasaltahunting/saltafishing.php)) is gearing up to offer this kind of fishing in Salta Province in northern **Argentina**. Rod and Gun's J. W. Smith wasn't eager to talk about this fishery near press time because he is still mak-

ing check-out trips. Suffice it to say, what little he did share with me was very interesting. Seems the roiling pot of possibility here involves a wealthy individual who has locked up access to several streams that are said to have smaller dorado (three to 15 pounds) year round, with bigger fish (15 to 25 pounds) on tap during the spawning period.

At present, the investor is building a lodge on a hill overlooking the rivers. Plans call for the construction of a number of roads leading to the river in a spoke-like manner. ATVs will be used to transport anglers to and from the rivers. In all, the investor owns more than 120,000 acres of land protecting both banks of some achingly beautiful streams. I can describe them this way because Smith directed me to a Web site with footage of anglers punching casts out over crystal-clear expanses of river. Indeed, the experience appears to mirror that provided by Tsimane. The only difference is that the terrain does not appear to be as difficult. Smith said he would be happy to direct interested anglers to the Web site he told me about; he just wants to talk to them first.

In coming months, we hope to have an on-site report about this fishing. In the meantime, if you want to be among the first to fish there, you can count on spending around \$700 a day. Clients will be accepted starting this fall, according to Smith. Tentatively, the annual schedule will see anglers on the rivers September through December, then again in March and April. Stay tuned for an update.

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■ Finally, *The Angling Report* has just learned that Montana fishing travel company, Sweetwater Travel (888-347-4286; [www.sweetwatertravel.com](http://www.sweetwatertravel.com)), has acquired Mangrove Cay Club on Andros Island, Bahamas. The company already owns camps in Mongolia, a steelhead property in British Columbia (Sustut Lodge), and two fly-out lodges in Alaska (Copper River Lodge and the Royal Coachman Lodge). That's in addition to an important fishing operation

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on the family ranch in Montana (Harrison Homestead). Mangrove Cay is an important lodge, and it is Sweetwater's first saltwater fishing property. Acquisitions of this importance don't happen every day, so we asked Sweetwater's Jeff Vermillion to answer a few questions at press time.

## **What does the purchase of Mangrove Cay Club mean for Sweetwater Travel?**

Mangrove Cay Club for Sweetwater means that we can, at long last, send our clients to a saltwater property that will deliver superb food, lodging, service, and, most importantly, some of the best bonefishing in the world.

**But why buy a lodge in the Bahamas, as opposed to somewhere else?** Finding a saltwater property that was right for us has been very difficult. We've been looking for one for 20 years. My brothers and I looked hard at places in Mexico, Central America, and French Polynesia, as well as other islands in the Bahamas, and there were always issues with location, fisheries management, or with the fisheries themselves. We finally settled on the Bahamas because the government there has made conservation of bonefish and other sport fish a real priority. This gave us confidence that the

fishery there will be well managed into the future. Then there is the location of the Bahamas close to the United States. That makes it easy for U.S. anglers to reach a facility there.

## **Why buy Mangrove Cay in particular?**

Our expectation for our clients, as you know, is first and foremost about quality fishing; the next priorities are location and quality of the property and facility. As for the former, Andros Island is one of the most famous bonefish places in the world. Double-digit fish are a weekly occurrence for most anglers at Mangrove Cay, particularly during the November to March period, plus the surrounding waters have plenty of two- to five-pound fish that are aggressive feeders. Additionally, during our check-out visits, we had regular encounters with tarpon, particularly in late May and June. Little by little, we came to realize that the longtime, on-site operators of Mangrove Cay, Liz and Alton Bain, had absolutely nailed it as regards location. From the lodge one can access the bonefish flats of South Bight, Middle Bight, and North Bight, plus the world-famous west coast of Andros. Mangrove Cay also provides almost immediate access to blue water, and it

is less than ten minutes from the airport. A great community that provides the superb staff that has given Mangrove its reputation is just minutes away as well. The facility at Mangrove Cay was a huge selling point for us, too. It sits above the water on coral rock looking out on the water. When you are there, you don't see roads or neighbors—just a superb view. The guesthouses here are huge, impeccably designed, and well spread out over a very large property. The central lodge is well designed, too, and functional from every standpoint I can think of. Few fishermen understand how challenging it is to build a lodge like this in a remote location.

## **So, what kind of changes do you plan to make?**

Each new venue we develop here at Sweetwater gets us to thinking about exciting new things we can do. But in this case, we realize our ideas could get in the way of what is already a great product, thanks to the hard work and intelligence of the current managers. We do plan to test a number of things on the fishing front to provide even better angling, but none of those will be labeled "permanent improvements" until each has been tested and given a stamp of approval by the clients.

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## • OUTFITTER CRITIQUES •

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### **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. Alternately, you can file a report online by going to our Web site, [www.anglingreport.com](http://www.anglingreport.com), and clicking on "File A Report." For details about how to do custom searches for Angler Network Reports on our Web site, see page 2 of this issue.*

■ If you are going to be in **Charleston, South Carolina**, and you want to get in a day of redfishing, subscriber Timothy Liptak has just the guy for you—Jeremy Melhaff of Charleston Shallows Inshore Fishing Charters (843-478-5319; [www.charlestonshallows.com](http://www.charlestonshallows.com)). Liptak fished a half day with Melhaff this past February and gives all aspects of the experience excellent ratings. He says Melhaff has a 17-foot Maverick HPX-V with a Yamaha four-stroke 90 horsepower engine, which he used to pole him in search of

reds, mostly in small creeks.

"The weather was perfect: 75 degrees with light winds. We fished an outgoing tide and caught a good number of fish," he writes. "The highlight of the trip was catching a 10- to 12-pound redfish in a small creek."

Liptak gives the cost of his half day of fishing as \$350. He warmly recommends this guide, calling him a real pro. "Melhaff loves to fish, and he is a true fly-fishing guide. Charleston has tons of guides, but very few are well versed in fly fishing for reds. His

knowledge of the area tides and estuaries made our trip very productive."

■ *Don Causey Note: The following report on big game fishing in the Andaman and Nicobar islands from subscriber James de Penning, who lives in India, made me realize that The Angling Report has not taken full advantage of the important knowledge international subscribers have as a result of living where they do. As this issue goes to press, I am in the process of reaching out to international subscribers with a*

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*special request that they share what they know about where to fish in their native countries. The possibilities are exciting, as The Angling Report has active, knowledgeable subscribers in places like New Caledonia, Scotland, Russia, Italy, France, and more. Stay tuned.*

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Subscriber James de Penning is not high on the big game fishing available in the **Andaman and Nicobar islands**. In fact, his report verges on warning subscribers to stay away. In case you are wondering, the Andaman and Nicobar islands are Indian territory in the Indian Ocean between India and Sri Lanka on the west and Thailand on the east. De Penning stayed at a SeaShell Resort ([www.seashellhavelock.com](http://www.seashellhavelock.com)) on the island of Havelock, northeast of Port Blair, the capital of the Andaman and Nicobar islands. His fishing outfitter was Surmai Fishing Club ([www.andamanadventurefishing.com](http://www.andamanadventurefishing.com)). His trip took place last February/March. He has this to say about the experience:

“Fellow subscribers need to know that the fishing I experienced was generally poor, with only an occasional OK catch. We did catch many giant trevally, but most of them were small, school-sized fish in the eight- to 12-pound range, mixed in with a few larger fish up to 25 pounds. We also caught two small wahoo (15 pounds), a small dog-tooth tuna, an emperor fish, a grouper, and a snapper. The most notable catch was a very large sailfish, estimated at about 220 pounds from length to girth. Disappointingly, the only other billfish we encountered was a small sail that briefly examined our teaser spread on the first morning.

“We did most of our fishing by trolling and popping, but we did try fly fishing some, using heavy sinking lines and weighted flies. For marlin and sailfish, we used 10- to 12-inch flashy profile flies (FPF) tied on tubes with tandem rigged hooks. For the giant trevally, we used 6/0 FPFs and assorted clousers, deceivers, and so forth for reef and other fish.

“All considered, the quality of the fishing we experienced was simply not

good enough to warrant the journey and cost of the charter. The problem appeared to be overfishing, as there were huge schools of bait but no predators feeding on them. Perhaps if efforts are made to control the commercial and local take, stocks will recover quickly, but this is extremely unlikely in a country like India.

“I should note that there are some spots well to the south of Port Blair that are said to be untouched. Still, unless one lives in India or the vicinity, it’s probably not worth risking a journey there, given what I saw on my trip. My advice is to save your money and go to Thailand instead, where the boats and the overall set-up are better. Also, the fish stocks there are not so decimated.”



De Penning gives the cost of his five-day trip as \$3,600 (US) per person. He notes there are a good number of very nice beaches on Havelock Island where he stayed, “particularly Beach No. 7, which is stunning. But other than sunbathing, snorkeling, and beach combing, there is little to do on the island itself.”

*Postscript: James de Penning’s e-mail address is [jwdepenning@hotmail.com](mailto:jwdepenning@hotmail.com).*

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■ Subscriber A. Michael Pardue makes some interesting observations about flies and other things in his report on a trip to Alaska’s Fishing Unlimited Lodge last August. He writes: “I have fished at Alaska’s Fishing Unlimited Lodge (907-781-2220 or 262-515-3714; [www.alaskalodge.com](http://www.alaskalodge.com)) several times over the past ten years, mostly going for rainbows and gray-

ling. I resisted fishing for salmon here in the beginning because I have never been particularly interested in catching large fish. That seems to be more work than enjoyment. My attitude about big fish changed several years ago, however, when I agreed to go with the other guests to fish for silvers one day. What an experience when my first silver started upstream with numerous jumps! He had me into my backing before I managed to exert some control. Since that day, I have always reserved at least one day here to fish for silvers.

“Mind you, my favorite Alaska fishing is still for rainbows, particularly with dry flies. This is not always successful, of course, once the salmon have started to drop their eggs. Why should a rainbow exert himself when all he needs to do is sit on the bottom, open his mouth, and let the eggs roll in? On one of my trips, another guest and I were floating a small stream and fishing for grayling and char with dry flies with some success. From time to time, I would hear the sound of water disturbance in the distance, but I could never see what the fish were after. I concluded that whatever was on the surface was black, which was why it was invisible.

“The following year I returned to the lodge earlier in the summer with the intention of fishing black dry flies to see what the outcome would be. One evening, I was asked by one of the guides if I would like to go for rainbows the following morning, and I said yes. He said there would be three of us fishing: a couple from Pennsylvania and me. We had to get up early the next morning, eat an early breakfast, and leave right away because the flight to our destination would take a half hour to 45 minutes.

“When we reached our destination, Martin rigged us to fish on the bottom. None of us did very well, but as I was casting and reeling, I kept hearing the noise from surface takes. I decided to give one of my black flies a try. It worked right away, but with one drawback: it was impossible to see my fly on the water, which meant I had to lift

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my rod by the sound of the take. Over the next few hours, I caught a three- to four-pound rainbow about every ten minutes or so. A couple of hours later, the woman on the fly-out with me asked if she could try one of my black flies. She, too, was successful in catching rainbows with it. A few hours later, her husband asked if he could try one of the black flies, and he was as successful as his wife for the remainder of the afternoon. What a day we had catching large rainbows on dry flies!

“Later that summer, I returned to the same lodge and the same river to again fish for rainbows. This time, I fished with pink beads and had another day of superb fishing. On this occasion, I happened to look out at a large gravel bar over which the flowing water was gin-clear and about a foot deep. I soon began to make out dark shadows scattered over the gravel bar. Momentarily, I saw one of the shadows move. It then became apparent that there were 20 or more rainbows holding over that gravel bar, taking eggs as they rolled by.

“You can well imagine that I started fishing that gravel bar. What ensued was an incredible afternoon of fishing to specific rainbows, New Zealand-style, most of which were in the two- to three-pound range with an occasional trout twice that size.”

*Don Causey Note: Pardue does not give the cost of his many trips with Alaska's Fishing Unlimited Lodge. He does recommend the place, however. As for the techniques he suggests here, additional comment is welcome. Write doncausey@anglingreport.com.*

## Controversies

• Our report last month from Randall Sultan regarding his stay at **Alaska Sportsman's Bear Trail Lodge** has stirred up quite a lot of comment. Sultan, you'll recall, was not happy with his stay at Alaska Bear Trail, partly because he found the fishing in the nearby Naknek River unsatisfying, but mostly because bad weather cut into the number of fly-outs he was able to enjoy. He says this lodge's policy of using planes based in nearby King Salmon exacerbated the weather problem because the

pilots there are subject to more stringent rules than those imposed on lodge owners who tether their planes out front.

The first follow-up comment we received was from Sultan himself who reiterated his point about flight rules, quoting Brian Kraft of Alaska Sportsman's Lodge. Sultan says Kraft told him that he is able to fly out at Alaska Sportsman's under less restrictive rules than the charters out of King Salmon. “It's a fact,” Sultan says, “we were stuck in King Salmon several days due to fog while Kraft's guests departed on their fly-outs under what I believe to be similar fog conditions.”

Here at *The Angling Report*, we aren't taking sides, preferring to let the subscribers who checked in discuss it further. We do think it's necessary,



however, to point out that float planes at both lodges fly by the same set of rules—namely, visual flight rules (VFR). The real issue is how those rules are interpreted by officials at an airport versus how they are interpreted by pilots who can look out the window and make seat-of-the-pants decisions.

**Subscriber Barry Leeds writes:** “I've made 15 trips to Alaska over the years, and I feel compelled to write in response to Randy Sultan's comments regarding his stay at Alaska Sportsman's Bear Trail Lodge in King Salmon. Twelve of my 15 trips to Alaska have been in September. Why? Because that's when the big rainbows come out of the lakes and into the rivers to feed on spawn and salmon. It is probably the best month to catch the largest and fattest rainbows in Alaska. The only problem is the weather. In September,

it is very unpredictable and often rainy and windy. I have fished with Nanci Morris many times, as well as with Brian Kraft at the sister lodge on the Kvichak River.

“I have two points to make: one about the fishing and one about the flying. Fishing the Naknek is tough. It's a big river, and it's not easy to wade (for us old-timers anyway), plus the rainbows can be picky. I like to fish the Naknek anyway for one reason: to catch big rainbows, not lots of rainbows. I have had days when I caught just one rainbow over 25 inches. One time I caught eight over 28 inches. Still another day, I caught six over 27 inches, including a couple over 30 inches. On the other hand, I also remember the day I fished with Nanci and two novice fly fishers. They caught four huge 'bows between them and I caught only a couple of dinks. That's what Nanci calls anything under 18 inches. This is why it's called fishing. You never know what will happen. If Mr. Sultan caught a 28-inch rainbow on a day he couldn't fly out, he should be very happy, as there are not many places in this world where you can do that.

“Regarding flying in Alaska, everybody is supposed to fly by the same rules. I have visited some lodges that take chances to keep clients happy and take off when they really shouldn't. I know the charter companies the Alaskan Sportsman Bear Trail Lodge uses, and I have entrusted my life to them many times. If they say we can't fly, that's fine with me. I have also done some fly-outs at Alaska Sportsman's Lodge on the Kvichak River. They use their own planes and, in my experience, they play by the same rules as the pilots at Bear Trail Lodge.” – Jillbarry612@aol.com.

**An experienced bush pilot who asked that his name be withheld writes:** “I'm a 5,000-hour, float-rated pilot who has flown a lot in Alaska. I've been from Dutch Harbor to Nome to Prudhoe Bay to Ketchikan and between. Mr. Sultan's frustration is understandable, but he should be grateful the pilots were wise enough to stay on the ground rather than fly in fog. Alaskan flying is dangerous,

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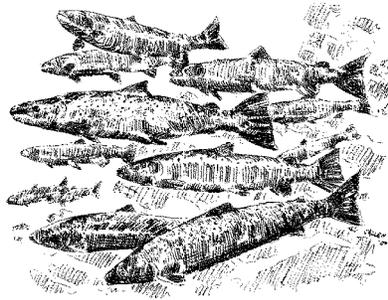
as there is no low-altitude radar coverage over most of the state. Float planes all fly VFR-only for a very good reason. If you live in Alaska, you learn to accept the weather. People call it "Alaska time." Someone will tell you he'll be somewhere at a certain date and show up days or weeks later. Why? Because he was weathered in. I've spent days on the ground at remote camps because planes could get neither in nor out. I've seen Juneau shut down for a week or more with no air service. I've landed on rivers and taxied because the ceiling came down. Sen. Ted Stevens died near King Salmon because someone flew when he shouldn't have. During World War II, the U.S. Army suffered more than 90 percent of its Alaskan fatalities due to weather-related accidents. Alaska has the worst aviation safety record in the country for one reason: weather. The hardest decision a pilot makes up here is not to fly. I'm not saying don't fly in Alaska. I'm saying use good sense and accept weather delays with grace."

**Subscriber Danny Simms writes:**

It so happens that I fished with Nanci Morris out of Alaska Sportsman's Bear Trail Lodge in 2004. It was probably the best trip of my life. However, the weather was good, and we made fly-outs to the Brooks River, Kulik River, and American Creek (twice). The days on the Naknek were easily the poorest of the trip. Consequently, I can understand why Randy Sultan was dissatisfied with his trip. Unfortunately, weather can screw up any trip. It is my experience that when a pilot in Alaska says it is unsafe, it is way past unsafe. Most bush pilots in Alaska have more hair on their body than brains in their head." – ddsimms@clearwire.net.

**Subscriber John Pierson writes:** I just received the April newsletter and noted the Controversy Report regarding Bear Trail Lodge. I have fished with Nanci Morris Lyon two times and had very fine fishing, but we, too, had to work around weather conditions. I have been to Alaska fishing about 12 times, with six of those at lodges where you fly out frequently. At two of those lodges (not Bear Trail Lodge), aircraft mishaps oc-

curred at the time or near the time we were there. So I do have some perspective about safe flying. Judging by the report, it appears that Nanci still utilizes Branch River Air Service for flying. My fishing friends and I came to the conclusion that we liked that arrangement for reasons of safety. During our last trip to Bear Trail Lodge in September 2006, there were days with limited visibility. We would get excited to go fishing and arrive at the Branch River office ready to jump in the plane, only to be told by the owner, Van, to take a seat and wait until he was ready to fly. Again, after some reflection about this, we concluded that was just fine. The point is, Van was not about to send his planes, pilots, and clients out until he was sure they were also coming back. Our expe-



rience in 2006 was that Nanci and her staff did a good job of adjusting to the flight delays and cancellations. One day, we delayed until late morning and then flew to the Kulik River, which is always crowded with both fish and fishermen at that time of year. By doing this, Nanci knew we would be the last fishermen to float the river, and that meant we had it to ourselves. We had the best fishing I have experienced on the Kulik. The Branch River plane arrived at nearly 7:00 p.m. to take us back for a late dinner. This gave us a full day of fishing. On other days, we fished the Naknek and had good days. All four in our party caught rainbows over 10 pounds. – piersonjhn@aol.com.

□

• Subscriber John Scelfo says Charles Richards's critical report on **Crystal Creek Lodge** in the March issue (see

page 12) needs to be offset by some balancing input. He writes: "I have been fishing with Crystal Creek for about 10 years now and consider it one of the finest fishing lodges in the world. Mr. Richards is absolutely correct, however, in his assessment of the weather last year. It was indeed the most difficult weather year that I have ever faced fishing in Alaska. He is also correct in saying that fewer fish were caught than in a normal year. And, yes, it did require greater effort than usual to find and catch fish. My disagreement with Mr. Richards is that I have never seen staff, guides, and pilots work so hard to make one's stay a great experience in spite of the weather. When a lodge willingly flies hundreds of extra miles around weather systems to get to locations, I consider that outstanding. When guides and pilots willingly pull anglers out of what are usually prime locations and fly them to different locations because the fish are not there, I consider that outstanding. When a lodge owner is willing to spend extra money on fuel and staff to overcome difficult conditions, I consider that outstanding. We flew to all the usual spots that should have held fish and then to some that we had never fished before. The entire staff was baffled as to why the migration patterns had changed and why certain streams had no fish. Some small streams had blown out with the heavy rains, and the larger rivers were more difficult to fish than usual. Still others experienced late runs of fish. That is not to say that there weren't fish to be caught. A guest who fished the same weeks that my wife and I did caught three 30-plus-inch fish during his stay. Like Mr. Richards, I like to catch a lot of big fish, especially when spending the kind of money it takes to visit Crystal Creek. However, I have fished long enough to know that only so much is under our control when it comes to fishing. My wife, our son, our daughter-in-law, and I will return to Crystal Creek this year, and I know we will have a great trip whatever the conditions."

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## • Back of the Book •

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