



Chris Batin

# Adventure fishing at its finest

Stikine Wilderness offers plentiful fishing without the crowds



Top: A tour boat stops in front of Leconte Glacier, in southeast Alaska. Below: A happy angler watches to see if her halibut measures up to the slot limit. She caught the fish near Petersburg. CHRIS BATIN

**A**LL MY LIFE, the words, “Head North, young man!” have been the impetus to experience the best in Alaska fishing. These days, however, I’m getting like an old grizzly bear that keeps his distance from the “fuss” of social fishing experiences, and its lousy angling etiquette, shoulder-to-shoulder anglers and unrelenting noise.

Now, I’ve revised my phrase, shouting, “Head South, young man.” What I discovered was the fabulous fishing in the Stikine Wilderness region in southeast Alaska.

Fishing there was great, but not the dominant component of this trip. I also cherished the superb bear viewing, kayaking, glacier touring, birding and whale watching. It’s as good as you’ll find anywhere in Alaska.

Fishing Stikine wasn’t a mere weekend getaway, either. For two weeks, I explored the region, using the cities of Petersburg and Wrangell as base camps.

After my first day of fishing and catching halibut and salmon, I should have been ecstatic, yet, found myself bewildered. I stopped by the Petersburg Visitor Center.

“Why don’t more anglers know about this place?” I asked Petersburg economic development director Liz Cabrera.

“Most visitors to Alaska have yet to discover these rainforest Islands,” she said. “It’s one of southeast Alaska’s best-kept fishing secrets. We have many opportunities for do-it-yourself anglers who want to enjoy superb salmon and trout fishing at Falls Creek and Ohmer Creek. For the fly angler, there are ample opportunities for fly fishing for king salmon at Blind River Slough on the road system to remote salmon, steelhead and trout streams that don’t receive fishing pressure.”

Cabrera’s words rang true. Here’s what I discovered.



A group of kayakers ready to spend a day of kayaking among the glaciers in Leconte Bay, in the Stikine Wilderness Area. CHRIS BATIN

*“We soaked fish-fighting muscles in a wilderness hot springs tub, and had crab and steak for dinner.”*

On the road system near Crystal Lake Hatchery, I observed two anglers fishing, about a quarter mile from each other, and they were hooking salmon on nearly every cast. This was my kind of fishing stream.

Saltwater options included boat rentals or full-service charters. Fishing for halibut kept me busy the entire day and my best catches were on jigs and lures in 180 feet of water. I hooked two large halibut that shook off, but it was time to head to port. I vowed to return for a rematch.

I also wanted to go fishing at Wrangell, another blink-and-miss fishery that doesn't get the exposure of a major Alaska sport fishery. Guide Marlin Benedict and I trolled miles of remote shoreline. We enjoyed good silver salmon fishing, with two kings hammering my Berkley PowerBait jigs fished on light tackle.

I regrouped for the night at the Stikine River Inn, had some Alaska-sized meals prepared by Chef Jake, and met up with friends who were joining me for a week of fishing on the Stikine River.

The mainland's Stikine-LeConte Wilderness Area offers freshwater fishing and the wildlife opportunities without the crowds. Our fishing group had the nearly 450,000-acre wilderness to ourselves. We observed two riverboats belonging to local residents, and saw no other anglers sharing the watershed, let alone the same stretch of river. It does get some use throughout the summer from tourists, but it's spread out. And it's quiet. Very quiet.

Staying at a public-use cabin was rustic but enjoyable. We observed moose, wolves, black bears and countless eagles. We soaked fish-fighting muscles in a wilderness hot springs tub, and had crab and steak for dinner. The 70-year-old anglers in our group, as well as younger family members, enjoyed roughing it in style.



Guide Dan Roope, left, holds a chum salmon caught by Graham Allison. The fish was caught in a tributary of the Stikine River. CHRIS BATIN

We saw no sign of human presence as we caught chum and pink salmon, tons of Dolly Varden and cutthroat trout. On occasion, a 7-weight fly rod would double over on a hookset. Hiding with the in-migrating chums were 30- to 40-pound king salmon that would oftentimes dart out, and with seething aggression, grab a fly. We'd have to quickly release these fish, however, as actively pursuing king salmon in these freshwater areas is not permitted. Nevertheless, the occasional and accidental hookup gave an unexpected thrill. These waters also offered prime silver salmon and steelhead fisheries at other times of the year.

I spent time enjoying the personality of these Alaska towns, the museums, boat harbors, talking to commercial fishermen and the local business owners. It was all as much fun as the fishing itself. Indeed, there's much to enjoy in Alaska's Stikine Wilderness. So if you tire of fishing the local waters this summer, "Head South, young man!" and immerse yourself in the magic of this wilderness treasure.

*Chris Batin is editor and publisher of The Alaska Angler and author of numerous books on Alaska fishing including "Fishing Alaska on Dollars a Day. Coast's fishing columnist will be giving new seminars on Alaska fishing at the Great Alaska Sportsman Show, April 2-5, at the Sullivan Arena. For details on his free seminars, write him at [batinchr@gmail.com](mailto:batinchr@gmail.com) or [www.AlaskaAngler.com](http://www.AlaskaAngler.com).*