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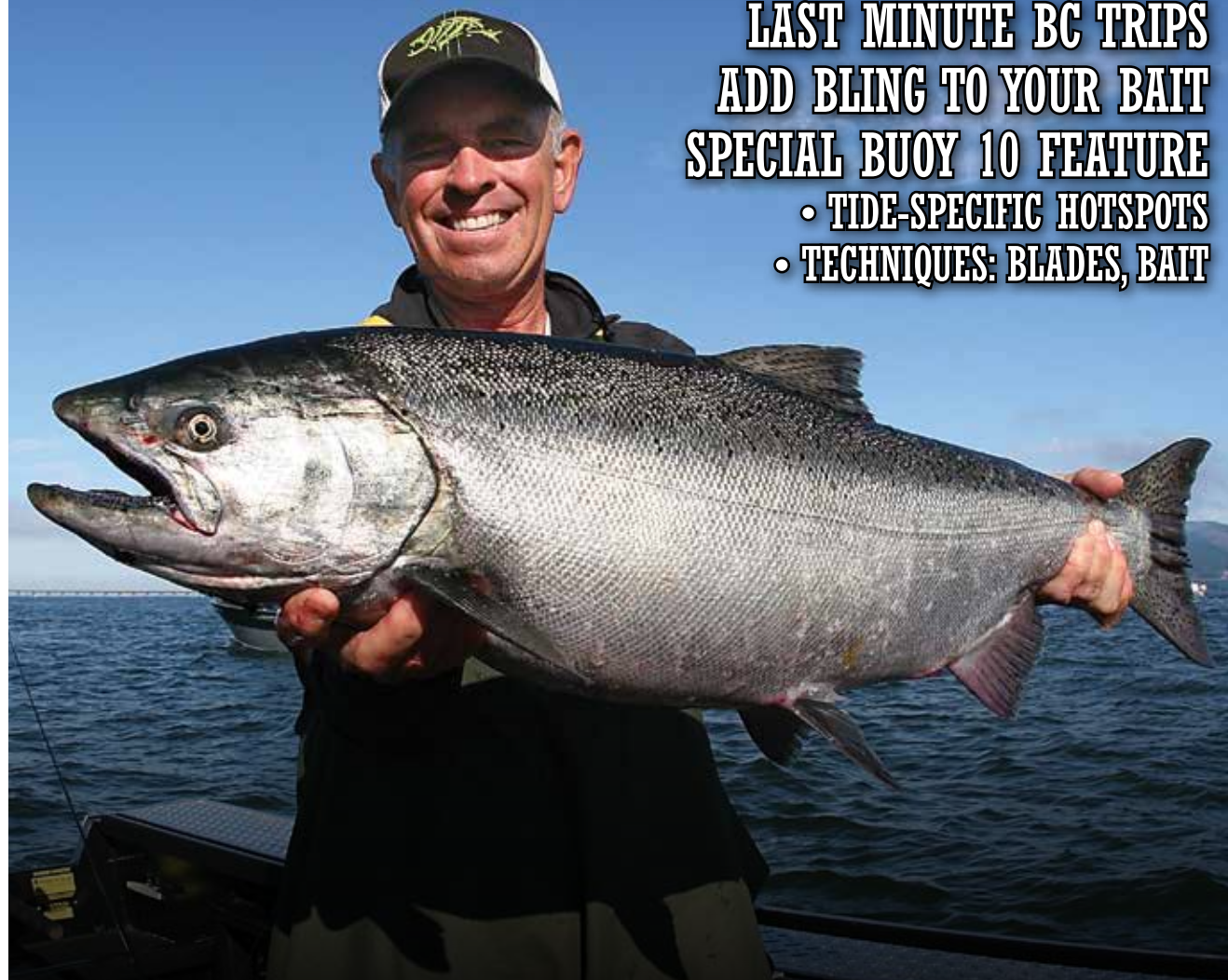
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“YOUR SON AT FIVE IS YOUR MASTER, AT TEN YOUR SLAVE, AT FIFTEEN YOUR DOUBLE, AND AFTER THAT, YOUR FRIEND OR YOUR FOE, DEPENDING ON HIS BRINGING UP.”

AUTHOR UNKNOWN



A Father's Week to Remember

By PAT HOGLUND

Peter was slouched over asleep in the back seat of the De Havilland Beaver. A small stream of drool trickled down his chin and his breathing was heavy. Even though he was on the cusp of becoming a young man, I couldn't help but think of him as a toddler asleep in his stroller fresh off a stint at our local park. After playing on the swing and in the sand box he would instantly fall asleep on the way home. Today, the drone of the airplane's engine on the heels of a 4:30 a.m. wakeup call was enough to put him to sleep. He was plum tuckered out.

Peter was 14 and his week of fishing in Alaska was coming to an end. We were returning to Rainbow King Lodge after a day of fishing on the Brooks River, an iconic trout river in Katmai National Park. It was the culmination of a week that had us gallivanting to some of Bristol Bay's premier salmon and trout fisheries. Our five days fishing together included stops to many famous streams in Alaska including September Creek, the Kamishak, the Gibraltar, the Newhalen, and finally a nameless river on the coast



JOHN FUENIA PHOTO

The author and his son Peter after a day of fishing on Alaska's Brooks River. Below, Peter with a nice silver caught on a spoon from the Kamishak River.

was here that our trip first began.

Rainbow King Lodge is one of the oldest Alaska fishing lodges in operation. First started by Ray Loesche in 1968, he eventually sold it to Tom Robinson. He passed away in 2011, and Rodger Glaspey and Ted Sheely purchased the lodge from the Robinson family. While maintaining RKL's reputation as one of the premiere fly out lodges in Bristol Bay, Glaspey and Sheely have changed things for the better. Upgrades to the lodge itself are too numerous to list, but rest assured the accommodations are as nice as anyplace you'll find at any fishing lodge. In fact, I would say they're better than most. At the same time the new owners have maintained a fishing program that allows them to put fishermen on over 30 different rivers and streams, including many with exclusive lease rights. It's kind of like your own private Alaska, only with fringe benefits of 30-inch rainbows and salmon runs so strong that they can choke off a stream.

When Peter and I left our home in Portland we had a brief stopover in Anchorage and then hopped on a charter flight into Iliamna, where lodge manager Craig "Gus" Augustonovich met our plane. Craig's personality is uplifting and inviting and it was the perfect welcome to the Great Land. We loaded our gear into the van and within 10 minutes we arrived at the lodge, which commands a king's view of Lake Iliamna. Waiting for us were a couple hundred golf balls, a set of clubs and a makeshift driving range that stared out into the lake. Peter got the green light to hit them into the lake and he did his best to the floating dock. He was even more excited to learn the golf balls would be picked up at low tide and would be waiting for him when he arrived back at the lodge the next day.

Not every fishing trip to Alaska starts with hitting golf balls from your personal driving range, but it's an added bonus to Rainbow King's fishing program. Where RKL shines is having a plethora of different rivers to fish thanks to the two float planes, a Beaver and an Otter. Before dinner we signed up to fish the Gibraltar River, a popular fly out for lodges in the area. Having read about it, and talked with many fishermen who have fished it, I was eager to fish it. Peter, meanwhile, didn't know what to expect only that he'd be up at 5 for a 6 o'clock departure. The next morning we boarded the float plane

and were in the air for less than 30 minutes before touching down on a small lake that fed into the Gibraltar River.

A sow and two bear cubs were on the opposite shoreline watching us load our fly rods into the raft and from my son's vantage point it was a little disconcerting. His only exposure to bears was through a filter of a camera lens and the fact that a 600-pound brown bear was staring him down had him spooked. It wasn't until we had floated the river for a couple miles before he stopped rubber necking. I suppose he was expecting the bear to follow us, but like most all bears in the area it wanted nothing to do with us. Nevertheless, he wasn't taking any chances. I couldn't help but chuckle.

The river was swift and crystal clear and it was full of red salmon, which only meant the trout fishing would be excellent. Rainbows were feeding on eggs and our beads were just the right size and color to provide him with a crash course in hooking, playing, landing and losing fish. By the end of the day he was becoming much more proficient at catching fish, but he still had his work cut out for him. Which ultimately proved to work in my favor when he wagered a bet I couldn't



JOHN FUENIA PHOTO

that was so loaded with silvers that it was literally a fish every cast.

With Brooks River checked off our list Lake Iliamna came into view and the pilot banked hard to set up his landing approach and Peter woke from his slumber. He stretched, yawned and mumbled something I couldn't make out as the plane's pontoon's met the lake water. We taxied to the front of Rainbow King Lodge and when it came to a stop we unloaded our gear and walked up the grassy bank to our home away from home. It

refuse.

The next day we fished the wildly popular Kamishak River and again we encountered enough bears to keep us on high alert. But after the third bear sighting Peter was more at ease and by the seventh bear he decided to test his arm with a small rock. It landed close enough to the bear that it scooted into the bushes, tail tucked between its legs. On the plane ride back to the lodge, Peter announced to me and anyone else who was listening that he wanted to become a guide during his

ESSAY

A brown bear fishes for salmon on the Brooks River.

summers. I just smiled.

The next day we opted to fish the Newhalen River, a big sprawling river that dumps directly into Lake Iliamna. It is every bit as wide as a quarter mile and there's little to no structure that might suggest holding water for trout and salmon. We fished the river from jon boats powered by small motors that were retrofitted with jet pumps. The fishing was rather straightforward and effective. We'd run the boat up river, cut the engine and our guide Justin would navigate the boat down river using a long set of oars to steer. We would cast beads under a strike



PAT HOGGALD PHOTO

indicator and let it drift behind schools of spawning sockeye. Trout and grayling situate themselves behind the spawning salmon and pick off any egg that was dislodged from its redd. Our beads were closely matched to the size of eggs in the river and if we found the right slot we'd catch and release until our arms got tired.

The Newhalen River's beauty lies in its proximity to Lake Iliamna, at 1,012 square miles it is the eighth largest freshwater lake in North America. It is also the lifeline for millions of sockeye and subsequently a robust trout population. It has so many trout it proved to be the perfect testing ground for a competition of who could be the first to catch 100 trout in a day. It was Peter's idea and with lunch only two hours away we started with a fresh slate. The winner would get the first shower when we returned to the lodge, which also meant the first crack at the driving range and the appetizers. Keep

in mind my son is a growing teenager and food and golf happen to be two of his primary interests. Let's just say he was motivated. It was game on.

With one of us positioned at the bow and the other at the stern we would cast and drift until we hooked up. We decided to take our lunch break when the first person hit the 50 mark. It was a dead heat until we hit 45. That was when Peter started to get the yips. He'd set the hook too early, or set his drag too loose or find some other way to lose his fish. When lunch was served I had a comfortable five-fish lead. After lunch we were back at it and within three hours I was holding a 10 fish lead at 90-80. To make it interesting I let him catch eight fish, just enough of a cushion. That's when the smack talk started flowing. Not from Peter, but from me. And it proved to be just enough that it put him off his game again. When I released my 100th trout I reminded him that the first shower was going to feel really good and if was lucky I'd leave him

something to eat at the hors d'oeuvres table. And if he was really lucky I wouldn't hit all the golf balls into the lake.

At dinner that night we mapped out the rest of the week, and we opted to finish our week's trip with a trip to Brooks River, a nameless river on the coast and September Creek. Having been to the Bristol Bay region numerous times I had never fished the Brooks but I knew enough that it would make a lasting impression on my son. It is your iconic Alaska fishery, one rife with people and bears and park rangers and regulations. And trout. More than anything I wanted to experience it with Peter and Gus made the flight arrangements. It was a long plane ride, but the experience was worth it.

Bears are, in my opinion, part and parcel to an Alaska experience. John Furnia and Tony Simmons walked us upriver from the famous Brooks Falls and found some quiet water that held both char and

rainbows. Peter was a little unnerved when a massive boar stumbled out of the bushes and started fishing in the same spot we were in. Watching from a distance the bear buried its nose in the river and came up with a salmon in its jaws. We could smell the bear's stench and hear it tear the red salmon into shreds. We just sat on a log and took in the show. That, along with the encounter of three cubs and a sow and a handful of rainbows to the net, made our Brooks experience more than memorable.

Even though they're habituated to humans the bears at Brooks have an affect on you when you experience them firsthand. Raw power, massive in size, and close enough to see them work in concert with nature is enough to leave a lasting impression on anyone. It's no wonder that Katmai National Park has a growing cottage industry of bear viewing. Throw a father-son team in the mix and you leave with memories to last a lifetime.

The next day we again were up early and heading off into the wilds of September Creek. The plan was to land on the lake, walk upriver to the braids and fish our way back. The hike in was close to five miles, and we traversed and crossed the river a dozen times. I could tell Peter was feeling comfortable and confident. He stopped asking for help and he began to recognize holding water. When he reached a spot in the river that held trout, he unhooked his bead and flipped it upstream to give it the proper drift. It was the culmination of a week of fishing that taught him many things.

We were over halfway into our trek when the river took a series of turns that on the map resembled a serpent. Fast and waist high deep, the river twisted and turned its way in and out of logjams. At one point we had to cross the river in waste high water. Peter followed our guide Derek and I brought up the rear. Derek crossed and Peter made his way into the river. It was at this point Peter lost his footing, and for the better part of ten seconds he struggled to stay upright.

My heart raced and I looked downriver where a logjam waited. My voice squeaked when I yelled to him to drop the rod. He hadn't yet gauged the severity of the situation and was worried about losing his fly rod. For what seemed like an eternity Peter hung between falling and staying upright. The river was running fast and had he slipped and fell he certainly could've been swept into a waiting logjam. His body leaned into the river and



Victory is sweet for the "old man."

Below, a week of solid fishing lessens the learning curve of hooking, fighting and landing fish.

water spilled into his waders. Peter was on the verge of falling. This time I yelled, "Do not fall! Don't fall!" I wasn't pleading with him, rather instinctively yelling a direct order.

Somehow he managed to stay upright, and Derek grabbed his arm and led him to the other side of the river. Peter pulled off his waders, which were filled with a couple gallons of water. Thank God for wading belts. Being 14-years-old he didn't comprehend the severity of the situation, and when I said words to the effect of "that was a close one" he responded with a, "Ah Dad, that was nothing." Then he asked, "How much farther 'til we reach the braids?" Oh to be fourteen.

Despite the brief encounter where he skirted a possible disaster, that day on September Creek proved to be one of our most memorable days in Alaska. It was a week-long Boy Scout trip rolled into a day. Our shore lunch was freshly caught char and lots of trout to the net. Peter learned how to make a fire in pouring rain and his fishing elevated to another level. After he changed out of his wet clothes he proceeded to fish as if he didn't have a care in the world, and he managed to out-fish me, which cost me the first shower and first crack at the appetizers. Not to mention about 50 good swings at the driving range. "You're getting old," he was quick to remind me. I didn't argue.

It's been said that your son at age five is your master, at ten your slave, at fifteen your double, and after that, your friend or your foe, depending on his bringing up. My son is now 15-years-old and on the cusp of becoming a man. There are days when I long for him to be five years old and playing at the park only because I know that would give me another 13 more years with him. Within a few short years he'll be off to college and except for

a few short stints he'll be leaving home for good. That tears at my heart strings, but there is very little I can do except continue to spend time with him, continue to pursue

like interests, and continue to be his friend. Fishing together is just one way that our relationship continues to evolve. I no longer treat him like a little boy, or at least I try not to. I try to include him with me on fishing trips, to the point now that he would sometimes prefer to go fishing with me than hanging out with his friends. Fishing has that affect on people.

To this day he recalls our trip to Alaska and Rainbow King Lodge as one of his fondest memories. His list of epic fishing trips is short, but there's no reason to think it will be topped. And why would it? He fished hard for a week, flew across Bristol Bay in float planes, battled salmon and trout, watched bears up close, learned

to wade rivers and most importantly spent a week pushing the boundary between boy and manhood and at the end of the week felt like he accomplished something special. He did, and so did I. It was quite possibly one of my most memorable fishing trips as well. Not because of the fish we caught, or the planes we flew in, or the rivers we fished, but rather because it was a week spent together. We just happened to spend it together in one of the world's biggest parks, and we were two of the biggest kids in the park. Instead of going home in a stroller, we flew home together each night in a float plane.

I was jolted awake when the Boeing 737 landed at Portland International Airport. I had fallen asleep, exhausted from a week of early mornings, late nights and 14 hour days on the water. I looked over and Peter was already awake. He pointed to my chin. I wiped the drool from my face and smiled. It had been a long week, one that will be remembered for a long, long time. **SSJ**



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