

## **Muddling Along June 14**

### **The Big Qualicum River**

From what I understand, the Big Qualicum River has dwindled from a once highly productive stream to a mediocre (at best) place to catch a fish. However, it does provide a place to fish in early summer for those of us who can't get into the higher altitude lakes and are waiting for the salmon to approach close enough to shore for beach fishing!

If you are looking for information, remember the proper name for the Big Qualicum is actually just the Qualicum River. (The Little Qualicum is given the modifier to distinguish it). The special regulations for the river are shown exactly as they read in the Fresh Water Sport Fishing regulations. The regional regulations hold for the river and include the usual bait ban, barbless single hook, wild trout, steelhead and char release and 2 fish limit.

### **Special Regulations**

1. No Fishing downstream of boundary signs located 100 m downstream of the hatchery counting fence
2. No Fishing from E&N trestle to 100 m downstream of the hatchery counting fence, Aug 10-Oct 15
3. No Fishing tributaries
4. Artificial fly only from the Horne Lake dam to E&N Trestle, Oct 16-Aug 31
5. Fly fishing only , Sept 1-Oct 15

The first means no fishing ever on the Indian Reserve from the hatchery down to the salt chuck.

The second restricts fishing for about two months (Aug 10 to Oct 15) to above the E&N trestle (up to Horne Lake).

The fourth restriction means that gear of any sort can be used from the hatchery up to the E&N trestle for the period from Oct 16 to Aug 10. This restricted period is to accommodate the fly fishing only in the whole river from Sept 1 to Oct 15 and the closure of the section from E&N trestle to Indian Reserve from Aug 10 to Oct 15. Artificial fly only allows for the use of floats (or strike indicators), weights on the line and spinning rods or level wind steelhead outfits.

The fifth restriction gives fly fishermen exclusive rights for a chance to try for jack Chinook as well as trout.

The river is home to a variety of salmonids, including Rainbow, Steelhead and Cutthroats, Dolly Varden (although I have never seen one personally) and 4 species of salmon (all except sockeye).

There are resident cutthroat and rainbows as well as sea run cutthroat but there seem to be very few hatchery marked fish, so catch and release is the order of the day! Chinook salmon are found in good numbers starting in September and fish can be retained after Aug 1 (jacks only – less than 62 cm (24 in))



**18 inch Big Q Cuttie caught on Hare's Ear Nymph.**

and after Oct 15 (2 over 62 cm) with limits depending on the returns for the year. Coho salmon are abundant in some years with the main run coming in mid-October and regulations change from year to year for their retention. Fisheries notices need to be checked before angling there. Chums start showing in the river in mid October and peak in the next few weeks. Numbers are usually quite high and anglers are allowed to retain one or two fish starting on Oct 1. There is a small pink run which shows up in the river starting in mid August. They tend to concentrate when fresh down near the hatchery so cannot be fished easily except for a few that head up above the E&N bridge. (Remember the closure from Aug 10 to Oct 15!)

As far as flies to use . . . for trout try the tried and true Muddler Minnow as well as other small streamer flies. Check the river banks and under rocks to see what hatches are occurring and fish nymphs and dry flies where appropriate. For salmon, flies in greens and blues for Chinook and Coho and fluorescent Pinks, Chartreuse and Orange for Chums and Pinks.

The Big Qualicum has excellent trails as well as a gravel road from the hatchery right up to Horne Lake. This is a great river to access using your Mountain Bike. I generally mostly walk and wade upstream riding the bike where possible and pushing it along where not. The bonus is at the end of the day, you have an easy ride on the gravel road back to the car instead of having to walk 6 or 7 km!