

Kyuquot Part 2: The Black and Yellow River

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My first experience with the Kyuquot Sound area occurred in late July / early August 1980. I had heard stories of “giant Chinook” filling Tashish Inlet at that time of the year. So I loaded my trusty 1963 International Harvester Travelall also dubbed “the slug” by my kids.



Photo 1. The Slug

This vehicle had a big 264 cubic inch straight 6 cylinder motor with a four speed standard transmission and a posi-traction rear end. On this trip I took along my two sons Mark (age 5) and Michael (age 7) as well as my camping gear, salt water trolling and jigging gear and a fly rod. I roof raked my 14 foot aluminum boat threw in the 15 hp. Evenrude, its 5 gallon gas tank, plus a spare five gallons of gas along with food and water for three for four or five days. As I had put some air shocks on the back end, when loaded I would just go to the nearest gas station and put in some air until everything was level.

This vehicle was geared so low that at 8 mph in first, it was screaming and on the highway it was quite comfortable at about 50 mph. I actually had it up to 65 once but it scared me so badly that I never tried that again. This was my “bush mobile” that lost just one battle with a hill, but that’s another story.

After loading up and levelling I consulted my handy Esso road map and headed out. At Woss I hung a left off the upper Island Highway on to a gravel logging road going to Zeballos. The term “road” is being overly kind to describe what it was as it took well over an hour to do the 30 miles to Zeballos. It was uphill (Photo 2)



Photo 2. All uphill and downhill...

and downhill; past Atluck Lake (photo 3) and along the Zeballos river. It was incredibly beautiful as well as incredibly lumpy.



Photo 3. Alluck Lake.

Zeballos in those days was just logging town. It had one gas station with just two pumps, regular and marine. The town's library was on the side of the government liquor store and the only pub had swinging half doors, just like in a spaghetti western.

At Zeballos it was a right turn and another hour to travel the 25 mile to Fair Harbour and Kyuquot Sound. About 40 minutes in on this leg, the road came to the Kaouk River and as I went by, it looked split, half black and half sandy yellow (photo 4). It looked so odd that I just had to back up for another look. When I did, I saw that the black half MOVED. It was FISH!

WOW!



Photo 4. The Yellow and Black River.

After another 15 to 20 minutes we came to Fair Harbour. The only thing there was a rough boat launch, a float for tying up your boat and a fairly flat spot where in the past had been a small logging camp that had been torn down. At the time you just found a spot and pitched your tent. Now a-days it is a Provincial Recreation Site. As it had been a long trip we just launched the boat, set up camp, chatted to our neighbours and settled in. At that time Fair Harbour was perfectly named. It hadn't been logged, was very sheltered and very pretty.

The next morning it was up and at it. Just outside of the harbour, it was a right turn to troll down Tashish Inlet. Along the way we passed the Artlish River but couldn't actually see its mouth for all the trees. What we did see were hundreds or maybe thousands of pink salmon jumping and flopping in about a 150 to 200 yard half circle around where we thought the river mouth was. We saw only a few Chinooks but didn't catch any so we stopped at the Tashish river mouth to explore. However after seeing all the bear and probably wolf tracks we didn't go any further up stream than just the estuary.

After lunch we decided to fish the Kushutl Inlet. We were trolling down that inlet when we spotted a large black bear just ambling along the shore. As we didn't vary our speed and just slowly angled towards the shore we probably got within 50 yards before he had enough of us and went into the bush. Truly a great sight for young children as we probably watched him for 5 minutes before he disappeared.

As we had seen pinks in Tashish inlet I had rigged one of the rods with a small red hoochie. After about half an hour I noticed that the flasher with the red hoochie was just skipping along the surface. Thinking I probably had a pink I started to reel it in and told my eldest to get the net ready. All the way in there was only a little tug or two but nothing of any weight or consequence. However just before it got into netting range it dove under the boat at which time I saw about a 3 foot tail section of a sandy coloured shark. In doing so the line rubbed against its skin and broke. I never saw the whole fish but the piece I saw didn't belong to any over grown dog fish. It was some sort of shark which I think would have measured about 6 feet long.

The next day was windy so we went to check out the "black and yellow river. Only a few miles from Fair Harbour we found a trail that led though the forest to a lovely slow moving glide with lots of fish. With in as few cast of my old 10 wt. Eagle Claw (yup same one that I now use for chum) I beached about a 3 pound pink. Another few cast and another pink. Just about then there was a lot of yelling hollering behind me. It was my 5 year old, Mark. He had somehow caught a pink with his toy butterfly net. This net was so small that two thirds of the fish hung out over its top. With all of Mark's dancing around and the fish's wiggling, the net let go at its bottom with the fish slipping back into the river. Shortly thereafter the bite was off so it was back to camp.

The next day was calm so back on the chuck with a few turns off the Artlish to pick up about a half dozen pinks. We then located a reef with lots of bait where the Tashish and Kushutl Inlets merged. After about an hour of "buzz bombing" we had 3 or 4 Chinooks from about 5 to 9 pounds. As we had some fish and as four days camping is about enough for young children it was back to camp to pack and then to home.

I later learned that the Tashish Chinook runs had been adversely affected, starting in the late 50's, by a fish trap that D.F.O had allowed to operate at Yaku bay. The Chinooks would apparently hold in this bay before venturing down the inlet to the river. As a result they were creamed.

Next week will be about my Tashish river trip in 1988.

Cheers

Basher