

Chilcotin Odyssey

I woke up to the sound of feet moving on the floor above me. That would be interesting if I was in my own bed since my bedroom is on the top floor! I realized that I was in Harry McLeod's guest room where I had spent the night so we could get an early start on our marathon trip to Fletcher Lake west of Williams Lake. Harry was up about an hour earlier than we needed so I grabbed a few extra winks before heading up for some fresh coffee, OJ, cereal and toast.



We were to meet Ron Busche and Dan Hooper at the ferry terminal in time to catch the 630 ferry to Horseshoe Bay. We made the ferry easily and took off from Horseshoe Bay in the light drizzle and headed off up the Sea to Sky highway through Pemberton, over to Lillooet and out to the main highway just north of Trash Creek (oops, Cache Creek). With a quick stop in Williams Lake for some additions to the food supply and topping up our tanks with gas, we made good time into Fletcher Lake where the wind was gusting, rain was falling and the temperature was a cool 7 degrees.

Fletcher Lake Campsite

Wayne (older brother) had already set up his Boler and put the 12 ft Fly Fisher in the water. We set up our part of the camp and started making some supper for the hungry crew. Wayne returned with the good news that he had landed a dozen or so fish in the 16 to 18 inch range in the last few hours. The rain had settled in rather solidly by the time we ate and got everything set up. The evening fish out was postponed to the following morning. Over the next 2 days we caught numerous trout up to 20 inches, mostly on small wooly buggers (black with gold bead head). Wayne also had good success with #14 microleeches (black with red rib).

The days were highly unsettled with cool temperatures, regular wind gusts, a few thunder showers and even an inch of hail to make life interesting. Everybody managed to get into fish and we decided it was time to move on to the next goal-Cochin Lake south of Tatla Lake on the Tatlayoko Lake road.



17 inch Fletcher Rainbow

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Looking from Fletcher down Big Creek Road at an approaching storm.



A gusty North wind bending the tule reeds over and starting to whitecap the lake

Cochin Lake proved to be a beautiful spot to camp with a lovely lake with giant mayflies and a few caddis hatching at various times. The fish were very uncooperative except when the insects were actually emerging at the surface. Those times tended to be later in the day with the best fishing in the early evening . . . if the wind would let us get out.



A rare calm moment just before bedtime (for us and the fish!)

We did manage to get the camp set up and get out and catch a few fish the first evening. These were impressive fish with the largest a 22 inch beauty looking not unlike a small coho (and fighting like one too with the line into the backing several times.



22 inch Cochin Lake beauty

We spent several days testing our patience against these beautiful, strong fish with a bit of success but a lot of hard work to catch the few fish that were boated.

We wanted to try the fishing in Sapeye Lake as well as the neighbouring Bluff and Horn Lakes. Dan had headed back to Vancouver for an appointment, so we were able to cram the 4 of us into Wayne's truck along with Ron's trailer and boat for the 50 minute trip over to Bluff Lake. We had heard discouraging reports about Sapeye and Horn, so decided to concentrate our efforts on the lake which got the best ratings. We arrived to gale force winds coming out of the west with a light drizzle. We decided after our long drive to go out and brave the elements anyway. After some searching and heading up the lake into the wind, we found our first fish in a small bay with some lee from the wind. These were taking a dry fly quite willingly but were quite small (largest was 15 inches but most in the 9-10 inch range.) We continued up the lake and the wind gradually dropped off and the rain stopped. We encountered some larger fish by then and before the day was over we managed to have good success, catching trout up to 20 inches and one 18 inch bull trout. We returned to camp at Cochin Lake feeling like we should return the next day. The following day was a repeat of day 1 with much improved weather and good success as well. (no bull trout though!)



17 inch Bluff Lake Rainbow



18 inch Bluff Lake Bull trout



Afternoon wind coming up on Bluff Lake

We decided to spend on more day on Cochin Lake before heading east to Becher Pond near Williams Lake. The last effort on Cochin was especially rewarding for Ron, where he managed to land a 22 and a 24 inch trout as well as hitting a number of others and either having them break the leader or escape before he could land them. The wind was strong, but the big mayflies were coming off anyway. If you could find fish feeding, you could catch them if you fished near the rises. Ron had good success with an olive leech with gold bead head.



24 inch Cochin Rainbow

Interestingly enough, the stomach of the large rainbow we kept was stuffed with tiny green chironomids plus a few mayflies, a small leech, a gomphus dragonfly nymph and a few mayflies. Efforts using dragonfly and chironomids were singularly unproductive.!



Goodbye sunset the last night at Cochin (no photoshop!)



The other 24 inch Cochin fish

We managed to break camp and get away to Becher Pond by noon. We were amazed by the fishing in this weedy little lake. Everybody had great success catching plenty of trout up to 20 inches. They seemed to be willing to take most flies thrown at them with a number taken on dry flies and a variety of woolly buggers and leeches. The most difficult part of the fishing was finding a relatively weed free area to fish so they wouldn't break off in the weeds. This amazing little lake was right beside the highway, yet had no other fishers disturbing the lake. The only downside was the parade of logging trucks heading into Williams Lake with loads of beetle damaged pines. The fish in Becher were probably the most athletic of any of the fish we caught with a large number of startling leaps into the air, 4 or 5 feet in height. (I counted the leaps of one fish and lost track at about 11 or 12!)



A frisky 18 inch rainbow continues its acrobatics and leaps out of Wayne's hands to freedom.



A fat Becher rainbow hides the smile of the happy angler!

Up early on Thursday morning, we said our goodbyes to Wayne and headed down the road to Williams Lake and made our way south to Cache Creek and down the Fraser Canyon to Hope and on to Tsawassen. We made good time and were 1 3/4 hours early for the 545 PM ferry to Duke Point. Unfortunately, there was an abundance of overweight vehicles left from the previous sailing and Ron missed the sailing! It had been an interesting experience with all kinds of weather conditions and all kinds of fishing conditions as well. I think the crew was happy with the overall experience and will want to return to the Chilcotin for some late spring fishing again in the future.

There should be some photos coming from others on the trip!