

Kennedy Lake / Kennedy River

From: Bob Kissinger [basherbob@outlook.com]

For three summers in the mid '80's I took my 3 children camping on the back side of Kennedy lake. To reach this spot I would take the Kennedy West Main logging road which was located just about a half mile before the "T" junction that goes to Tofino on the right and Ucluelet on the left.

Taking the Kennedy West Main, it was about 7 miles from the highway to the bridge crossing western outflow of the Kennedy river.



Shortly after crossing this bridge we turned right and drove a further 3/4's of a mile to the gated bridge which crossed the entrance to the Clayoquot Arm of Kennedy lake. Along the way we past a few acres of old growth cedars





which we dubbed the "Ewok forest" These were huge trees some of which were probably 10 to 12 feet across at the butt. All however quickly broke into multiple tops which probably made them poor lumber.

At the gated Clayoquot bridge, the MacMillan and Bloedel logging company had bull dozed a rough camping area on one side of the road



and a rough boat launch on the other.

I would roof rack my 14 ft. aluminum and 15 hp. Evenrude so we could explore the lake and river. From camp we would run about 5 / 6 miles down the Clayoquot arm to the Clayoquot river (more like a creek) estuary. Usually we would pick up 3 to 4 cutthroat in the estuary shallows each morning which seemed to get replaced over night. Once we tried to hike up the Clayoquot river to the Clayoquot lake. As the river bed consisted of large-ish ankle busting boulders we probably only got about 2 / 3's the way. The river / creek was low and crystal clear and looked fishless but in the largest pool which was only maybe 2 feet deep and 12 feet long I managed to catch a 17 inch really skinny cuttie using my favourite brass mepps.

The first time down Clayoquot Arm we sighted what looked like a seal in the distance. As we were in fresh water we thought that this was impossible but as we closed, it was indeed a seal. We later learned that the seals came into the lake and the river for the sockeye.

Going down the Kennedy river, for about 100 yards before the bridge there were large boulders just about 2 to 6 inches beneath the surface so I would have to slow down to avoid them. Once



downstream of the bridge the river was deep and more like a meandering prairie river (pic. 5). There were yellow water lilies along the shore and even a spot where the river had formed an "ox bow". From the bridge to the "reversible fall" was maybe four and a half mile. The term "reversible falls" is a bit of a misnomer as the river flow only occasionally reversed during the extreme winter high tides and then with only a strong on-shore wind. When we were there it was just a shallow very large boulder strewn river which ended any attempt to reach the ocean. I tried fishing the "falls" and caught a small (about 8 inches) silvery fish which I later learned was a "pea mouth chub". The Kennedy and one small creek in the Nanaimo area are the only places where they are found on Vancouver Island. (weird ?)

Just above the "reversible falls" the river formed a very large pool. One time, when I went camping on a Labour Day long week-end, this pool was filled with schools of 12 to 14 inch sea run cutties. It wasn't a question of trying to catch a fish but only a question of which one you kept and how many. I later learned from some locals that the "small" trout come first (around Labour Day) and that the bigger fish (3 to 5 pounders) came later (towards the end of September).

On one trip I talked to some Fed. Fish people who were checking the sockeye run in the lake. During that chat I learned that they would occasionally spot some large individual fish on their sonar at about 70 feet deep. Both I and they felt these may have been very large cutties (7 to 10 pounds) which like to inhabit some of the larger lakes on the Island. I tried dragging salmon gear on my down rigger but got no takers.

On another exploratory trip we took the boat across the west end of Kennedy towards the highway. To our surprise we found a fairly extensive shallow area only about 2 to 3 feet deep over fine white sand.

My last time to this area was in the fall of "03", by which time they had ceased logging with the consequence that the roads were washing away quite badly in spots. The bridges were still intact as well as the "Ewok" forest and the rough campsite .

Although the logging road may no longer be passable there appears to be a boat launch at the Provincial rec. site just off the highway at the west end of the lake. I would suggest that a shallow draft 14 ish foot aluminum would be the best for the river and to keep a keen eye for boulders as you approach the Kennedy river bridge.

Cheers

Basher