

Kyuquot Sound, its Rivers and Streams

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As this will be a series of three or maybe four articles, I will limit this one to its location, some of its rivers along with some of their historical returns and their destructions.



I first went to Kyuquot in 1980 and again in 1988. However about three years ago, as a result of receiving new information about “big trout” being caught in one of its streams I start researching its past fisheries with the idea of discovering some of its current potential.

To this end I talked to individuals who had more recent experiences in that area as well as completed numerous “on-line” searches. I also consulted the Fisheries and Oceans web site “mapster” for more current salmon returns.

The “on-line” searches revealed two excellent older documents but failed to reveal any current ones. The first, “Catalogue of Salmon Streams and Spawning Escapements of Statistical Area 26 (Kyuquot Sound)”, 112 pages, was prepared by Marshall, Comfort, and Britton in 1980 for the Enhancement Services Branch, Fisheries and Oceans. This was truly an excellent document

which detailed the incredible historic returns as well as the destruction of the watersheds by various logging operations. The second document, "Strathcona TSA Stream Inventory; Artlish River" was prepared by Fielden, Gebhart, and Egan(82 pages) in 1996 for the provincial Ministry of Environment, Lands and Parks. This second document is a " biophysical and fisheries survey " of that river during September 1975. It didn't contain any historical data but it did confirm the presence of some of the "big trout" which had set me on my quest.

Kyuquot Sound is located in the upper west coast of Vancouver Island between Nootka and Quatsino Sounds. It has two main branches; the Kashultl Inlet, sometimes called the "cock shuttle" and the Tahsish Inlet. Into this sound flow 23 rivers and streams of varying sizes.

In 1972, according to the "Catalogue of Salmon Streams etc.", 157,575 pink salmon returned to the various streams in this sound. In 1968, 7000 sockeye, in 1952, 14,525 Chinook, in 1956, 37,300 coho and in 1972, 106,350 chum .

Unfortunately with the advent of industrial logging, which started in the 1950's and peaked by the early 90's with its almost "no holds barred" logging practices, many of the salmon runs have collapsed. The Kaouk, also known as the Fair Harbour river because it flows into Fair Harbour, was noted to be " a fairly steady producer of Chinook" (3500-1966), " and coho" (3500-1958). It also produced chum (15,000-1958) pinks (75,000-1972) and steelhead (3500-1955). In 1956 the Kaouk was described as "a large and fairly slow moving river. As a result the run-off does little damage to spawning beds, particularly in the lower reaches". In 1960 "logging operations began on this river "and by 1969 it was recorded that "this river remains high and muddy after other rivers have cleared". In 1978 logging and road construction began in its upper watershed along Rowland creek. As a result, by the 1980's the salmon runs to this stream had collapsed. The Chinook returns fell from a high of 1500 as late as 1973 to a scant 60 just 6 years later in 1979. By 2013 the returns are still a paltry 256. Coho fell from 3500 in 1958 to just 50 by 1978. By 2013 they have struggled back to 2596. Pinks were perhaps the biggest losers. They fell from a high of 75,000 in 1972 to just 200 by 1984. As of 2013 only just 8 pinks were recorded. **Truly a tragedy.**

The Kauwinch River which is also know as the "cow inch" was another fine river. The Catalogue of Salmon Streams recorded that by 1975 "80% of watershed had been logged" and in 1979 it was noted that "due to past logging, now subject to rapid changes in water levels". This river in 1966 had a return of 100, 000 pinks (yes you saw it right , that was one hundred thousand). By 1984 "none were observed" and the last recorded pink sighting on this system occurred in 2001 when 1 (that's right, just one!) was observed. Chinooks fell from a high of 750 in 1961 to just a hand full by 1977 and by 2013 they had come back to a whooping 21. Coho seems to be rebounding from a low of 25 in 1969 to a healthy 4,850 in 2013.

Many of the other streams and rivers have suffered similar fates.

The next instalment will be about my first time to this area in August 1980 when I first experienced a black and yellow river

Cheers

Basher