

Our journey to find the elusive northern Vancouver Island coho started out with bright optimism on both Wayne and my parts. We headed out on a sunny September day (Wednesday, Sept 15) for our first stop on our exploration of fishing opportunities. Our first stop was the Eve River, where we set up camp, suited up and headed for the river. There were lots of fish moving in the river but we discovered to our dismay they were spawning pinks. Another small group of Victoria fly fishers told us that after 2 ½ days, their only catch was a 15 inch cuttie. After a fruitless afternoon and evening, we turned in hoping that our next stop would bring better luck.



Goodbye Eve River

We headed north for a couple of hours with the rain beginning to spatter the windshield . . . not a good sign. A quick stop at the Cluxewe didn't produce any good rumours so we continued to the Quatse Campground in Port Hardy. After some sweet talking to a recalcitrant campground manager, we managed to get a spot for the night (apparently they were expecting a big crowd from the arriving ferry . . .which never did show up!) We decided to brave the rain and head out to the Quatse estuary in pursuit of silver sided fighters (since the river had been so low, we thought the rain might attract some in). As we gradually go soaked and rowed around the estuary, the coho were noticeable by their absence. Only a few late pinks and a small school of chum could be seen. Overnight, the rain continued to fall and we restricted fishing to the river where we had seen good numbers of chum going over the counting fence. As the waters rose, and we had several close calls in the roiling waters, we decided to wait out the storm and stay another night. We woke up in

the morning to a river that had risen close to 6 feet in 24 hours! The rain continued to fall and we waited another day thinking to try over towards the West Coast the next day.



A swollen Quatse River

Under an overcast sky, we loaded up the dory and headed over to Coal Harbour to check out the West coast. After a couple hour row across Rupert Inlet we found ourselves at the entrance to Varney Bay where we hoped to find some coho. Again, they were noticeable by their absence. (it turned out that most of the Rupert Inlet coho had shot up the creeks and rivers as they quadrupled (or more) in size. We rowed right through the closed area to the river mouth and found not a single salmon.



Lunch stop in Varney Bay

. We beat our way back across Rupert Inlet to Coal harbour with our tail between our legs but optimistic we would find some fish. As we headed to the launch ramp, we noticed two boats fishing the mouth of the creek coming in at the head of the harbour. Our hopes rose as we headed that direction and noticed some large fish jumping in that area.



The head of Coal harbour . . . coho jumping on the left side of picture

We fished alongside the two other boats and discovered that these coho had been in the harbour for over a month with most of them having gone up the creek. The ones that were left were a mix of silver bright fish and some that were kyping up and turning red. They were holding in quite shallow water but seemed to be not too spooky . . . but were very reluctant to bite any of the delectable coho flies we plied them with. According to our fellow fishers, they hadn't caught any that day and had only heard of a few being caught in the last week. We stayed and fished until after supper time with no takes (other than bullheads and flounders) and decided to call it a day.

We headed back to the Quatse Campground and decided to come back early the next morning closer to the low tide. We had the fish to ourselves and even had a small school of chums move through at one point. We drew another blank and headed back to the Quatse in the afternoon. We stopped into Port Hardy to get propane before we headed off for the head of Rupert Inlet. We talked to a fellow at the service station who told us that the fishing had been great until a few days before when the majority of the salmon shot up the rivers! (does this sound like a broken record or what!?)

Our journey continued back down island where we stopped for the night at Cluxewe. We got a lovely waterfront campsite and after a light supper we wandered down the beach to look for some action. Out of 2 dozen fishers, the only word of coho was of one spin fisher who caught a big coho on a buzz bomb. We spotted a small school up near the river mouth but didn't get close enough to cast to them. We were up early the next morning to be down at the mouth at low tide. We had the area to ourselves (I wonder why!) for a few hours and again had a chance at some small schools that could have been pinks, chum or coho. They were running up and down the river channel at great speeds and declined our well cast offerings. Another bust for the fishermen we encountered all the way back to the camp site. One fellow said a coho followed his fly to his feet then turned away and never came back.

We headed off down island checking various coho spots on the way with no reports of any fish. We ended up at Saratoga beach that afternoon and put the boat in to see if the coho from a few weeks ago were still hanging around. There were some there . . . at least as many as the two dozen fishers thrashing the water trying to convince them to bite. No fish for us or any of the others! We headed back into the lovely sunset and watched the full moon rising over the calm ocean behind us.



Sunset on Saratoga Beach

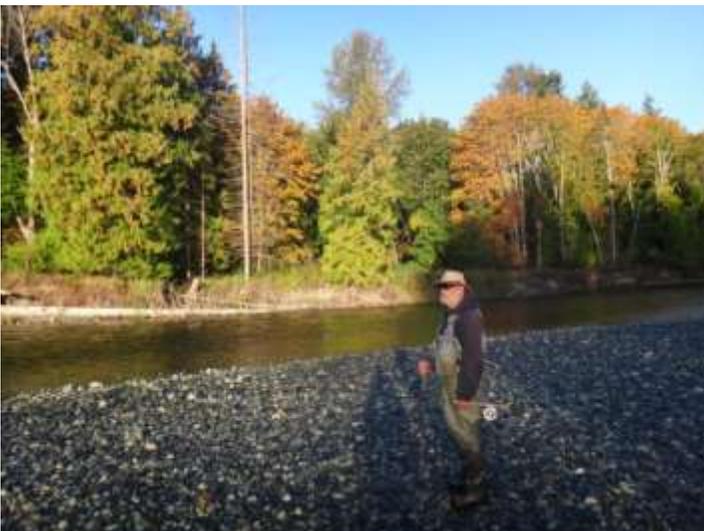


Moonrise on at the mouth of the Oyster

We headed out early the next morning to try a different tide and had the same success that we had had the night before. We did finally see one fisher who seemed to have figured out a way to conquer the lockjaw and we watched him (along with 20 other fishers) hook three coho and land one of them! The only fish we saw caught or even heard about on the whole trip.

Heading south, we stopped and checked out a few places down the coast (rather half heartedly I must say!), looking at Deep Bay, Nile Creek, Big Qualicum and Little Qualicum with nothing that caught our eye. We dragged into home in the late afternoon and decided to spend the next two days fishing the Nanaimo.

We discovered there were good numbers of pinks at the end of Morden Road and fished trout beads along there and up to the House Pool. We saw some chum as well as a pair of spawning sockeye . . . unusual sight! At the House Pool we encountered a small group of coho. I think by this time we were seriously doubting our capabilities as coho slayers . . . which is not a good way to approach fishing! We enjoyed our time on the Nanaimo because we were on a beautiful river and despite only catching a few pinks and some very small trout we found it a relaxing way to finish off the trip.



Fall fishing on the Nanaimo