



Aardvark McLeod

WELCOME TO OUR AUTUMN 2011 NEWSLETTER



Doggies of the deep

The Coral Sea, off the coast of Australia is said to have giant trevally that smash fly rods and nightmare inducing dog toothed tuna. Peter will be leading an exploratory trip next Autumn, so if you fancy tagging along please contact him.



Kamchatka

Picture a peninsular that time forgot, with 1000 rivers of which only 30 have been fished. Kamchatka represents the next great wilderness with a population of giant mouse eating trout and aggressive steelhead.

FishTails...

It has often confused me why the majority of international fishermen in the UK won't travel abroad to fish for trout. I have speculated that maybe we feel we have them at home, so why travel for them? Or perhaps they don't fight as hard as migratory species? I have just returned from fishing the Upper Laxá I Adaldal beats for trout, and I have to say the majority of those fish would make you reconsider. They are incredibly powerful, bite through anything less than 6 lbs leader and go mental. This year we will also see Kamchatka trout and steelhead operations being added to our portfolio through our relationship with The Fly Shop. Some of these wild rainbows grow in excess of 8 lbs and eat mice!

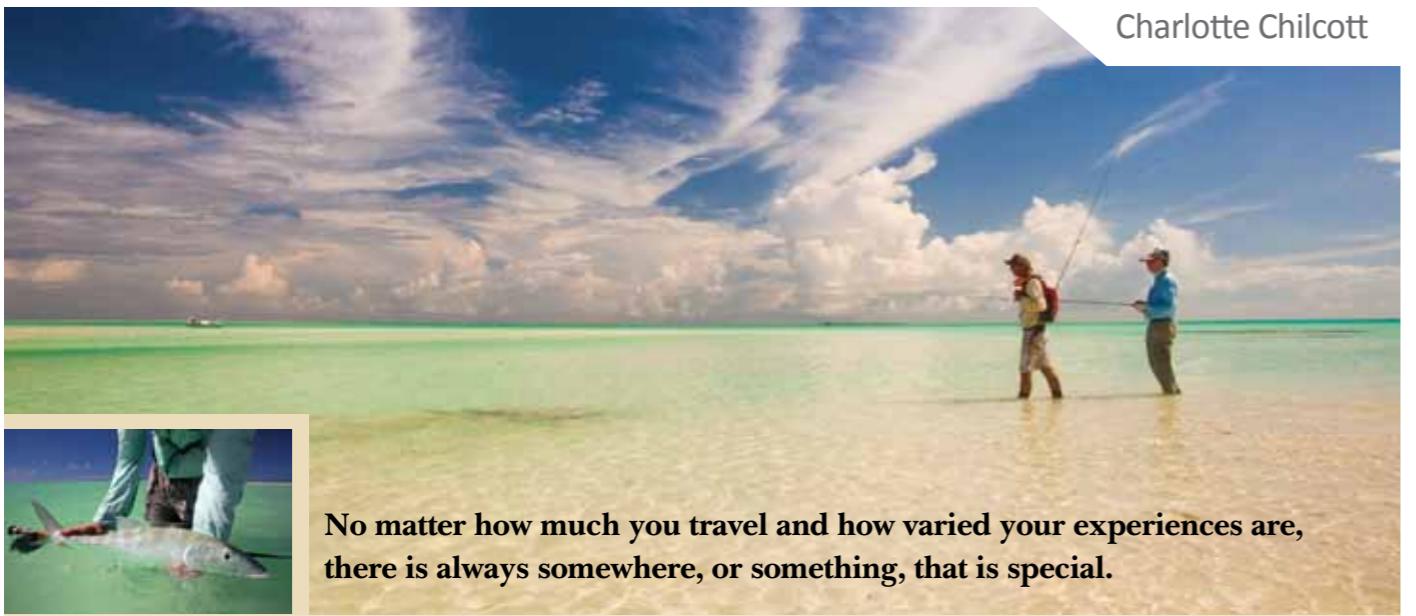
On the saltwater side Alphonse again led from the front with some incredible GT's and milkfish caught. We are very excited about Farquhar which we think is more akin to the outer islands and will be the next saltwater hotspot. The north coast of Cuba looks like the tarpon nirvana we had hoped, for with some huge silver kings being jumped, landed and lost.

Although the season in Iceland was a little delayed, with very cold weather the salmon rivers have again performed amazingly and with plenty of water this year the west coast rivers have returned with a vengeance. The Nordurá looks like blowing all previous records out of the water at over 2,000 fish with the Langá in hot pursuit. We are currently rebooking all our Iceland rivers so please contact us for availability and prices; after a sold out 2011 season space will be at a premium.

We hope you enjoy our Autumn newsletter, and look forward to hearing from you.

Alphonse

truly unforgettable



Charlotte Chilcott

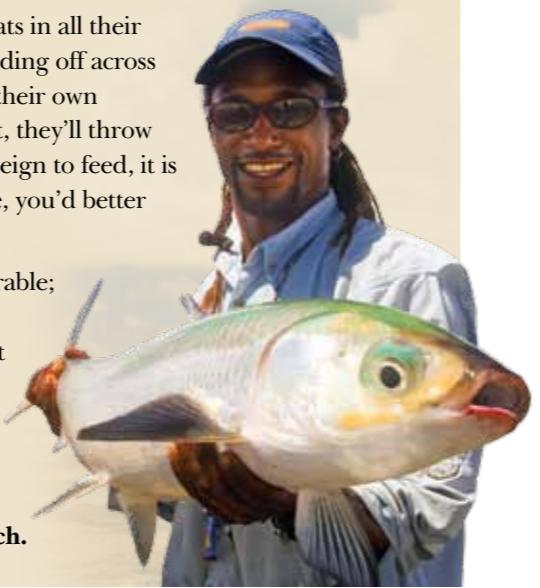
No matter how much you travel and how varied your experiences are, there is always somewhere, or something, that is special.

What that 'something' is, can be hard to pin down. For me, Alphonse is special but when asked why, I struggle for an answer. As it is undeniably a phenomenal fishery, whether you are a novice or an expert, there had to be something I could put my finger on and I thought I'd have a crack at analyzing it...

- You can't get bored with the scenery or the variety of environments... St Francois Atoll is immensely varied with seemingly endless sand flats, coral finger flats, deep dark channels and of course the crashing surf of the reef.
- It is bonefishing nirvana. There are enormous schools of fish averaging between 2 - 4 lbs that move onto and off the flats in dark clouds. There are larger bonefish that move across the flats in small schools or individually, up to 8 lbs, that are a great test of skill and presentation. Lastly – and rarely – the occasional double digit fish to push you even further.
- Trigger fish skitter across and around the finger flats, flashing yellow and impersonating lumps of coral. Not easy to persuade to take your crab fly, their fighting strength is totally out of proportion to their size. They are truly beautiful with fantastic colours and markings, and their coral crunching teeth and cameleon like eyes are a wonder.
- The 'hoodies' of the Indian Ocean, GT's lurk along the edges; dark, mysterious and very often violent. No wonder really when their favourite 'hang-out buddies' are the sharks they can scavenge a meal from. Forget stealth – noise and disturbance attract them and whilst not pretty, there is an undeniable attractiveness to these tough 'bouncers' of the reef edge who are not above biting the end of a fly rod off for a bit of fun.
- Permit are like women some say... rarely doing what you expect them to, seldom being where they should be, what works once often never works again or it does when it shouldn't. Beautiful, exasperating and undeniably desirable they never lose their ability to make your palms sweat.
- Then there are milkfish... they glide past you on the flats in all their solid silver glory, exploding in a shower of water and heading off across the shallows at extraordinary speed when frightened by their own shadow. Should you give in to temptation and have a cast, they'll throw you a scornful look before they flash off. When they do deign to feed, it is 'one fly does all' and if you are lucky enough to hook one, you'd better hang on for the ride.

Setting it down has only proved that it is not one thing that makes Alphonse memorable; it's all the pieces fitted together: the A-frame chalets and the outdoor showers, the food and wonderful staff, the guides and their absolute focus on fishing, the run out on Tam Tam and the excited but weary chatter on the run back. It's the flight out to the island, the bikes, avoiding tortoises and coconuts, and Yousef's willingness to refill your glass in the evening. Above all it's about spending time with like minded souls and pushing yourself for bigger fish and different species.

I can't wait to go back, if you would like to join me 24-31 March, please get in touch.



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Accommodation on Farquhar is a basic but comfortable guesthouse which caters for eight to ten anglers at one time. The main lodge is fully air-conditioned and has four twin en-suite bedrooms and a central sitting area to relax in. Dinner is a mixture of Creole and international cuisine and is served looking out over the ocean.

Farquhar Atoll

The Seychelles has remained one of the holy grails to saltwater fishermen for over a decade. With the postponement of trips to Cosmoledo and Providence, the hunt for a land-based outer island operation was on and Farquhar Atoll was the result.



Lying just over 700 km to the southwest of the main island Mahé, this remote atoll has a total area, including the large lagoon, of 170.5 km² and is 18 km north to south and 9 km east to west. The total island land mass is 7.5 km² with an airstrip situated on the most northerly island and is mid way between Alphonse and Cosmoledo. Alphonse remains a phenomenal fishery, but for those of us with a thirst for adventure Farquhar could be an alternative.

It has one full season under its belt, and the fishing has been outstanding. This diverse fishery is made up of countless flats, channels and surf zones. The flats consist of hard white sand,

turtle grass and broken coral which enable comfortable wading for a wide range of species. Onshore, Farquhar is best known for both its great GT and bonefish populations but also offers fishing for Indo-Pacific permit, triggerfish, barracuda, milkfish, bumphead parrotfish and various other trevally species. Offshore, anglers can come into contact with grouper, GT's, dogtooth tuna, yellowfin tuna, wahoo, sailfish and even marlin on occasions. The GT fishing has been especially good with top weeks producing over 30 fish with some in excess of 100 lbs.

Fishermen have the use of four new 17.3 ft Angler skiffs, each of which carry a single 90 HP 2-Stroke Yamaha engine. These boats have been specifically designed and fitted to fish both the flats and offshore waters of the Seychelles in comfort and safety. They have a draft of approximately 9 inches allowing anglers to access some extremely shallow areas of the atoll; however the main attraction still lies in wading the flats. Equipped with fish finders, the skiffs make the excellent offshore fishing far more enjoyable and rewarding.

If you are looking for the next challenge in the Indian Ocean then this is it.



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cayo santa maria *cuba*



Having fished many parts of the world for the fly-hungry saltwater species, Peter McLeod recommended tarpon as a change. I had fished Alphonse Island for milkfish and GT's many times so felt part prepared and trained.

Well, as incredible as milkfish are I had no idea that the silver sided tarpon could better their sporting performance. Having seen many a satellite TV film when a bunch of guys armed with lures, live bait and spinning rods like tree trunks went in pursuit of tarpon Florida Keys style, I wondered what a fish of that size would be like on a fly rod.

Mid-July, I packed my rods and left for Cuba, heading on to Cayo Santa Maria – the Mecca of Caribbean tarpon fishing. Accompanying me was my good friend Graham. We were like kids on a school day out. Virgin to Havana and a short internal flight later and we were into the first of many Mojitos in a flash.



Mac special baitfish fly to 2 ft of 100 lb and 10 ft of 80 lb and headed out of the tiny immaculate marina, 12 wt in hand. It was 0615 and the sun was pushing over the horizon orange and hot, not a breath of wind and a sea flat enough to play snooker. Near the horizon the frigates and terns were diving on a white foam of sardinas and tarpon were flashing their silver sides in the morning sun. Looking right and left there were three schools of fish all with birdie aerial displays aloft. Samuel cuts the engine and sits on the bow with a paddle and we quietly edge towards the tarpon enjoying a fresh sardinas breakfast. “There must be a hundred fish”, says Samuel, “only small ones”, he says, “just 60 pounders”. I look at Graham,

“We are going to need a bigger skiff.”

First cast and it’s a 60 pounder that leaves the water like a Cuban missile (we won’t go there) the splash of re-entry shatters the excited bird screeches and 100 meters of fly line is gone. Five times this silver ingot leaps for freedom, five times now my well-rehearsed flat out heart misses a beat, my arms are hurting, it’s me or him, this time I win.

Samuel boats the brute and says, “This is the only place on earth where even these small ones are big!” I have to agree, this is a fat, firm, pristine conditioned fish, the likes I have never seen. Later, Samuel explains the average is one fish boated to 10 fish lost, we are now into three out of three and he is impressed! The advice on how to set the hook has stopped and he is watching intensely and starts making notes!

Day one!

Our guide Samuel met us at the marina. We instantly liked this guy, how nice to have a guide with perfect English, skill and an entertaining nature that is so often lacking in other fisheries. We put our rods together, I tied a size 2/0 Silver Sar Mul

The take from these athlete fish is so violent that you just forget the rod and hang on to the fly line for as long as you can (about two seconds) and the hook is set, the rod is rendered useless, in three seconds the tarpon is in the air and all hell breaks loose. As the tarpon sucks in your fly he inhales a couple of gallons of sea water and that has to be exhaled from his double jointed mouth before he can shut it, set the hook too early and you miss the hook hold and there are precious few in a ceramic bucket! When his mouth is closed the hook will find its spot under a tight line.

The week continued with tremendous fun. Together we boated 15 fish of 29 jumped, the smallest 40 lbs, the majority 70/85 lbs, and one of 100 lbs.

Can you compare milkfish from the Indian Ocean with Caribbean tarpon? Yes, they are both aerial displayers, they are both good for an hour workout. The difference – you play a milkfish but you fight a tarpon and these fish are present to 180 lbs!

The best fly fishing experience ever, and I want to do it again real soon.



Prime time starts in May, running through until early August. Accommodation is hotel based and trip length and number of days fishing are flexible.



It is exceptionally good value and it is perfect for a small intact party, whether a group of friends or a multi-generational family fishing trip. The lodge is small: catering for a maximum of 8 anglers at any one time, sharing 4 rooms. A very personal lodge, the chef prepares both Mexican and international cuisine, all drinks are on the house and the bar is always open. Costs are from US\$1,995 excluding international flights.

Grand Slams, Super Grand Slams, Aussie Slams... they are always easy to talk about, particularly after a beer, but can be frustratingly hard to achieve. For a 'Yucatan Slam' you need to land a bonefish, tarpon, permit and snook – all in the same day.

To do that, you need to find a location that genuinely gives you the best chance to achieve this and that is where Paradise Lodge, on the Yucatan peninsula in Mexico, comes in. It is purposefully remote and was built where it is to take advantage of the many inland tarpon and snook lakes, connected to the sea by cenotes as well as the bays: Chetumal (to the south) and Espiritu Santo (to the north) where you can concentrate on bonefish and permit.

The lakes are generally shallow water allowing you to sight cast to fish from your skiff. The tarpon and snook may well lead you a merry dance amongst the mangroves; acrobats once hooked, you'll have everything crossed that your jumping tarpon doesn't tangle you in an overhanging branch as it leaps for freedom whilst heading for the safety the mangroves offer. By contrast, the bays give you a classic flats fishing experience: wading in knee deep, warm water, eyes peeled

for silvery bonefish and elusive, picky permit. Here, the expanse of flats give these fish the opportunity to run: keeping your reel screaming as they head at high speed for deeper water.

Many fishermen have never even caught a Grand Slam (bonefish, permit and tarpon) despite having fished in more expensive and arguably better known destinations. We think Paradise Lodge, given the variety available, is one of the best places to start your saltwater fishing adventure at a fraction of the cost of some other locations. The guides here are highly experienced and will help you target the different species. Helpfully, for those new to saltwater fly fishing, Paradise Lodge has four complete saltwater outfits available for use by guests on a first come, first served basis.

Until you have tried saltwater fishing you never really know what the drag on your reel is for. Hold on tight.

Paradise Lodge and the Yucatan Slam... on a budget



Gordon Richmond

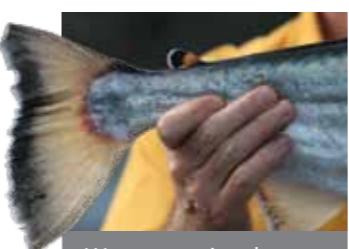
The Vampires' Cauldron Uraima Falls, Venezuela

Venezuela normally conjures up images of warm saltwater pancake flats, sight fishing for bonefish... but could that all be about to change? We are always looking for new destinations that push the boundaries of fly fishing and have been working on an exploratory trip into the Venezuelan rainforest after a much sort after species: payara.

A number of years ago the owners discovered, with the help of the local Indians, what could possibly be the best hot spot for one of the least spoken about predator fish. This Dracula of the fishing world is found in a few other South American countries, but seldom in the concentrations that allow a fisherman to specifically target them. Normally elusive, one hears tales from other fishermen who have had encounters with these silver terrors. They are hugely aggressive fish with a toothy maw like no other.

For three months a year the water level in the Paragua River drops significantly, and the payara migration begins as they move up the river system and congregate in a 1½ mile section to feed. The dropping water rings like a dinner bell as they chase the thousands of coporo and curvinata bait fish migrating upstream to breed. If they make it past the waiting payara they then attempt to jump the falls. Ian MacDonald, Fred Richardson and I stood open mouthed as we watched hundreds of fish of all shapes and sizes trying to jump the falls like migrating salmon. Every so often in the cauldron below, showers of fish would explode from the water trying to evade the terror lurking beneath.

Payara are one of the most aggressive freshwater species I have had the pleasure of fishing for, and give even large tiger fish a run for their money. Their unique fangs and needle like teeth are also equipped with a slicing edge that chew through flesh like a knife through butter. The fangs on the lower jaw slot into large holes in the upper jaw, and if a fang is lost, like a shark, another comes forward in the jaw to replace it within a few hours.



We are running three, five and seven day trips which start from £1,200 not including flights, and it will be the perfect add on to a Los Roques bonefishing trip for the adventurous. Please contact Peter for more information.

You will need a large supply of terminal tackle as these fish will chew up flies, wire leaders (I had a titanium leader bitten clean through) and even Rapala lures. Lures would come back chewed to pieces with tooth imprints all over them and even the odd fang sticking out! Payara tend to hit the lure or fly side on in a slashing motion and then just go nuts, charging off across the current and performing extraordinary acrobatics. They run like a bonefish and jump like salmon and we were all astounded by their speed and power.

Uraima Falls must be to payara fishing what La Zona has become to dorado fishing. The three of us banked or boated 210 payara in four days of fishing on a combination of fly and lures. We estimated our conversion rate was somewhere in the region of three to one of hook ups to landings, so heaven knows how many we hooked. Fish of note were three fish of 28 lbs, 24 lbs and 22 lbs respectively, and most of the payara are between 8 lbs and 12 lbs. This area holds the current IGFA records for payara at 39 lbs and 4 oz which we found unsurprising.



trout & salmon in Iceland

Two passions I have had throughout my fishing career are large wild brown trout and large Atlantic salmon. I have fallen in love with a valley in the north of Iceland that simultaneously fulfils both these passions. The Adaldal valley, just south of Akureyri, is home to not only some of the finest trout fishing in Europe but also Iceland's premier big fish river, the Nes beats of the Laxá I Adaldal – known to many as the Big Laxa.

There is no place I know of currently that can produce such a high density of large wild brown trout as the Myvatnssveit and Laxardal beats of the Upper Adaldal. I know I have waxed lyrical about them previously but this season the fish have overwintered even more successfully into deep butter coloured torpedoes that can put some salmon to shame in their fighting prowess. The largest so far this year has been a 5.3 kg (just shy of 12 lbs) brown trout caught by Lochy Porter. Numerous fish over 5 lbs have also been landed. For me the Upper Adaldal is a little like fishing a giant chalkstream as the river has a high density of alkaline nutrients flowing from Lake Myvatn. The river is full of weed and therefore food, so this abundant supply feeds the athletic brown trout hidden amongst the black lava sand.

In warm conditions these fish will rise in packs to the small black midges found in quantity. So, often, the softly softly approach is the most effective. Myvatnssveit braids as it flows out of the lake creating a fisherman's playground of channels, riffles and long pools. The current is strong adding excitement to any battle. Laxardal is similar to a wide open bonefish flat, which can easily be waded and contains the larger fish, if in



less density. As your fly disappears in a tiny dimple you are never sure if you are about to hook into a trout of a lifetime.

The Adaldal then flows over a cliff edge before being channelled through the hydro station before meandering across the flat farmland of the Adaldalur valley. Here you will find some of the largest salmon in Iceland nosing their way up the river course to the redds. One of the first rivers ever fished in Iceland by foreigners, the tradition of fly fishing blossomed across



Prime time is July and August for salmon and trout and Peter will be hosting a group 9 -12 July on Laxardal and 12 -15 July on the Nes beats. Cost will be £4,150 ex flights and if you would like to come please contact us.

the country from these banks leaving behind a long and colourful history. It is perfect fly water for a traditional two handed rod, and the lovely grassy banks are ideal for those who may not be as spry as they have been. The river is challenging and the more technical the approach the more success you will have.

Despite the size of the fish the clarity of the water often dictates small flies, and there is nothing more exciting than seeing a fish of over 20 lbs lurching off its lie, bow waving in pursuit of an irritant before watching that tail flap and yank on the line making the heart judder. Unlike the west or east coast rivers this gentle giant has stunning

green water meadows along its course on the Nes beats, more similar to a Norwegian river valley than the north of Iceland. However when the wind swings from the north you will very quickly be reminded you are just outside the Arctic Circle!

As these two areas of fishing are only 30 minutes apart awesome trout fishing and large salmon can be combined into my fantasy fishing trip: three days trout fishing and three days salmon fishing. The ideal time is July when the trout are firing and the big silver fish are charging the lower river. I am putting a group together of kindred spirits, who wants to come?



Of course, when targeting big, mean fish, you need stout rods, reels and terminal tackle. Unlike their Atlantic counterparts, chinook keep their heads down and to consistently catch them you need to sink the fly to their level, in water three to eight feet deep. This means sink tips, 20 lbs to 25 lbs Maxima Ultralight, 9 to 10 ft single handed rods, or Spey rods 13 to 15 ft long, rated for a 9 to 12 wt line. High capacity large arbor reels with a good drag system are standard tools for the job. While you'll want to match the size of your flies and colours to the prevailing water conditions, flies in the three to eight inch range are the norm. Chartreuse, blue, purple, black, orange and pink are favourite colours to entice these Pacific monsters, but if I were stuck alone on a prime piece of chinook real estate with only one fly, it would be a two-toned chartreuse, heavily weighted Intruder style fly around six inches long.



Chinook (king) salmon on the fly

Chad Black, Nicholas Dean Outfitters

This is hands down one of my favourite fisheries in our angling season here at Nicholas Dean Lodge, on the Skeena River system in Terrace, British Columbia. There, I said it. And yes, this does factor in our numerous steelhead fisheries through the spring, summer and fall, and myriad other fisheries including coho (silver salmon), chum, sockeye, pinks and trout. Why chinook? Because there's absolutely nothing like the pull of a chinook as it slams your fly on the swing. Takes can sometimes be so aggressive that they nearly rip the rod right out of your hand. I also like the feeling of being helpless as I watch backing melt off my reel, and realizing that there may be a possibility that this fish is so big and so strong that it's not landable. After all, with chinook averaging 20 lbs to 35 lbs in the Skeena and Kitimat river systems, and the very real possibility of seeing fish 50 lbs and over, this can very easily be described as 'big game fly fishing.'



Starting in late April and early May, Spring chinook start entering the Skeena and Kalum rivers and are a welcome addition to fresh steelhead migrating at the same time. However, the window to target these spring fish is often very short, about a three-four week season, depending on when the spring freshet sets in – usually around May 25th. The summer chinook season on the Kitimat, Copper, Skeena and Kalum rivers is much longer and lasts from June 10th through July 20th and even later on some rivers. It is in this period that the big, mean fish of summer ascend the rivers and we go searching for them with flies bordering on the gargantuan.

The first to recover after its spring freshet, the Kitimat River is a meandering, braided river that empties into Douglas Channel near the town of Kitimat. On the upper river, fish often hold on edges and seams where side channels enter the main current, and casting bead head or large Intruder style flies is often met with smashing takes and long, searing runs. Because it's a particularly woody section of river, you'll likely lose a good number of fish, as they're not entirely stupid – they often head right for the gnarliest tangles of tree root wads and midstream debris. Those you do land will be hard fought battles that leave you shaking. The lower Kitimat – larger, broader and with a more gentle gradient, is chinook heaven. Only a few miles from the ocean, chinook enter the lower river in waves, and you'll often see them porpoising as they move their way up the pools. With several pods of fish moving upriver each day, one of the best tactics is to find that perfect run that's ideally suited to fly fishing and simply wait for them. You may have a few casts to make between fish, but there are few places on earth where you'll find brighter, fresher fish. And these fish are often in the 35 lbs to 45 lbs range, and up to 60 lbs.

The Copper River, in contrast, is a higher gradient river with large, cobble sized boulders lacking the woody debris so characteristic of the Kitimat. Long, classic pools and runs with soft inside seams just above a fast, rough section of water is where you'll find Copper chinook. And they can get very big indeed. Copper chinook average slightly larger than Kitimat fish, at 25 lbs to 35 lbs, and almost any day in prime time there is a possibility for a fish at 50 lbs or larger. When fishing the Copper it's always a good idea to have a reel with slightly more backing than you might on others, because these fish like to explode out of pools, requiring you to give chase. I like to call it the mad dash.

Given the right water conditions, the Kalum and Skeena rivers can also be prime chinook fly fishing waters in their own right. The big, broad Skeena is the superhighway for chinook and other salmon migrating upstream, and they'll pause briefly in long, bouldery pools, particularly where the clean water of tributary rivers adds influence. The Kalum, often high from bank to bank, has several excellent runs, and its fish tend to hold on calm pockets and seams off the main current.

After hooking a fish on either the Kalum or Skeena, get ready to jump in the boat because that might be the only way you'll land them. Oh, and by the way Kalum and Skeena River chinook are literally some of the largest fish in the world, and have been caught on conventional tackle to 99 lbs. While landing a fish that size on fly gear is unlikely, it does tickle one's imagination...

Overall, the Skeena hosts an incredible number of fisheries each year and while I absolutely love targeting steelhead in remote coastal rivers and seeing them sip dry flies off the surface, there are few moments that compare with the electrifying grab of a fresh, chrome bright chinook just in from the salt. After all, they aren't called 'kings' for nothing...

Argentine adventure

I fished the Irigoyen a couple of years ago and have pined to head back to Tierra Del Fuego. This year I thought I would try the crème de la crème of sea trout lodges – Kau Tapen on the Rio Grande. As I could not get away in prime season (January-March) I went towards the end of the season at the beginning of April, and the conditions were not ideal. Cold and windy and we also had the first frost on the ground. Nevertheless, we had great fishing which is only a testament to this incredible river.



Fishing the main river was hard work, but productive, and I managed a few good sized fish in the 6-10 lbs range. Sometimes I have to pinch myself to put this into perspective as a fish of that size would be a sea trout of a lifetime here in the UK. Down there, nothing under three pounds is actually counted. On the third day we fished the José Menendez, a smaller tributary that was running clear, and I managed a couple of lovely fish up to 8 lbs that tested my single handed rod.

On the last day the main river was high and coloured so I reverted to my 14 ft rod to combat the wind with a full sunk line, mini tip and short leader attached to a large steelhead chartreuse and white popsicle, to show up in the murky water. The guide was unsure how I was going to cast that rig but, funnily enough, I did not touch the bottom all day and after a few nice fish including a beauty of 12 lbs it proved its worth.

The light was fading fast, and as this trip drew to a close I threw one more long cast across the pool. As the line swung across, it went tight and I thought the guide was right – I was snagged on the bottom. I gave it a small tug and after no reaction pulled in a handful of line and gave it a much harder wrench before nearly having my arm torn off! The line shot out of the rings followed by a large boil on the surface and then a mad shaking of the head. I knew this was a substantially bigger fish as it tore off downstream with the guide and I in hot pursuit. After a tussle in the pool below, the fish changed its mind and headed back upriver above where I had hooked it. Again we gave chase. This process repeated itself three times and after five aborted landing attempts and a 45 minute battle we netted a 22½ lbs bar of silver straight off the tide.

As a sea trout nut I had come to Argentina to catch my sea trout of a lifetime, and I accomplished my mission. Kau Tapen lodge is the most luxurious I have ever stayed at, and its cuisine and service are second to none. Even though I fished a back end week I landed over 10 fish in four days and, unlike salmon, sea trout can be taken at any water height in any condition. It is important to have the right kit as you may encounter every condition possible: four seasons in one day.

If you are a sea trout or salmon fisherman I can only urge you to try this, it will expand your mind!

