

TITANIC

FISHING THE RIV

TYEES

ERS INLET BY SCOTT DAHLEM



Northeast of Vancouver Island is an area that's become one of the most dominant salmon fisheries in the world. Three major spawning streams intersect at the famed Rivers Inlet (280 miles north of Vancouver Island), which spans 38 miles and is seven miles wide at its mouth. This inlet, a cradle for massive salmon migrating toward their natural streams, hosts an amazingly rich fishery. Waters teem with some of the largest silvers and king salmon in the world. In fact, more 50- to 80-pound trophy kings are caught here each year than at any other area in BC, earning the nickname "home of the giant tye" (tye are kings over 30 pounds). Hundred-plus-pound, spawning tye are seen in the Wannock River, which feeds into Rivers Inlet.



The author with his 31-pound tyee caught with a plug-cut herring while mooching on the Rivers Inlet during a late-evening bite.

When Phil Dawson and Mick Heath (hosts of Legacy Lodge) invited me and my friend Steve Williams to come fishing for giant kings in August, it was a dream come true. For starters, Legacy Lodge has nine private, cozy guestrooms and four beautiful suites surrounded by some of the most majestic scenery I've ever seen. Views from your room and balcony are about as nice as they get. And from the moment you arrive, Mick and Johanna, along with the Legacy staff, are there to greet you, assist with your bags, and show you to your rooms. From the moment you step off the floatplane that chauffeurs you to the lodge, the first-class designation is abundantly clear.

Shortly after our arrival Mick invited the guests down to the main dining room for a meet-and-greet and to go over some safety tips. First thing I noticed was how many families there were, and I was particularly impressed with how young so many of the anglers were. I only wish my dad had taken me there when I was growing up. After all, places like this are where legacies are born.

Next, we all gathered in the main dining room for an exquisite prime rib dinner. Each night guests are served a three-course meal that parallels any five-star restaurant, along with a very nice bottle of wine. Utilizing his world-class culinary skills, Legacy executive chef Courtney Burnham creates a new menu each night that highlights local delicacies, from fresh seafood appetizers, like scallops and Dungeness crab, to entrées consisting of local halibut and salmon. Classically trained in the art of fine dining, he also specializes in traditional Pacific Northwest cuisine.

Our first day of fishing started out with an iconic view of the foggy, mist-covered forest canopy – a typical weather effect for late August and one that is simply gorgeous. It is like stepping into an Ansel Adams photograph (except these pictures are not in black and white).

Standing dockside, everyone was buzzing with excitement, anticipating the onset of gray light. That's when Mick gives the "A-okay" for everyone to jump into their boats and head out to the fish-



Lindsey Poole is all smiles, showing off this 38-pound tyee. Not bad for a 12-year-old.

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With cozy sleeping quarters, gourmet dining, and a fleet of well equipped custom center consoles, Legacy Lodge is an ideal launching point for your British Columbia adventure.

ing grounds. Legacy provides the best boats I've seen, powered by some of the quietest engines I've had the pleasure of not hearing: more than a dozen 15-foot, custom-designed center console Scout boats equipped with four-stroke smokeless 60-horsepower Yamaha outboard engines.

While Steve and I were getting ready to jump into our boat, Mick asked if we'd like the grand tour. So we said, "Of course," and Mick came with us. He's fished the Pacific Northwest for more than 20 years and knows these grounds better than I know my own backyard. Steve and I were excited to hear about his experiences and the Rivers Inlet. As he took the wheel and headed us out to the fishing grounds, I can't tell you what a breathtaking 15-minute ride it was from the lodge to our first stop. Nature put on a good show, from bald eagles to humpback whales and unbelievable shoreline views blanketed with new and old growth from fallen logs, mossy boulders, and huge pines. We were literally in awe.

Merc Point was one of our first stops (it received its name because someone nailed a 54 Mercury hubcap on an old tree), an area where large kings have been known to feed in the early morn-

ing hours. Lazy kings like to hang around in areas where the current isn't strong and they can ambush their prey. Besides being an easy meal for them, this helps them preserve energy for their long trek upstream. Guides will show you exactly where they are, as well as the technique they use to carouse them out of their holes.

Mick and the other guides prefer a technique called mooching. Mooching for salmon uses a type of specific gear and is generally composed of a long limber 10-foot rod combined with a single-action fishing reel. A time-honored tradition is to use a six-ounce cannonball sinker attached to a 10-foot double-hooked leader and a plug-cut herring. Pulling the plug-cut herring behind the boat at a slow motor speed – just a knot or two – about 20 feet deep allows the herring to flutter behind the boat when it is taken out of gear. This is a very simplistic way to fish and takes just a few times to get down. I watched our guide (who was driving) and asked him if he wouldn't mind showing me this technique. After about half an hour it was like second nature to me – and a lot of fun. Because of its simplistic approach, mooching allows you the opportunity to really take in Canada's beauty and

everything the Inlet has to offer.

Later in the day Mick jumped on another boat to help out with some of his other guests, and we were lucky enough to pick up Rob McGeorge. Rob is a knowledgeable guide and really knows his stuff when it comes to mooching and fishing the Inlet.

Another technique, my personal favorite, that Rob showed us is drifting in a tide line. When moving your boat from point to point, you come across tide lines, and they seem to go on forever. Generally, you'll see birds working them for herring, another good indication of where to start fishing. Guides at Legacy Lodge provide you with this information as well as give you a lot of other inside information about the Rivers Inlet and all the great honey holes it has to offer. These guys are experts on local fishing grounds and fishing in general, often passing up higher-paying guide positions to work at Legacy Lodge because of the intimate fishing experience that Legacy has to offer. You can fish with or *without* a guide. I'd recommend having one go with you on your first and second days.

For bait, we used plug-cut herring – the best natural lure you can use. It offers the best of both worlds – the natural

scent of herring, and the way it spins and flashes with silver and blue patterns in the water. And that's why they supply your boat with a huge amount of bait each morning.

One service at Legacy that I haven't experienced at any other lodges is, each morning around nine o'clock, the chef brings a hot breakfast and a thermos-full of coffee right out to your boat. They do this for lunch, too.

At the end of the day, Steve and I had bagged a lot of silvers, but we were most impressed by his 16-pound silver and one very ornery 14-pound chum that I caught. Our excitement was cut short, though. Upon returning to the lodge, we found out we had been outgunned by ten-year-old angler John Moffet with his 26-pound king, and twelve-year-old angler Lindsey Poole with her 38-pounder. *Checkmate!* Those kids are going to remember that experience for the rest of their lives. Their parents were very proud of them. Good job, kids. I have to admit I was a little envious.

When we got to the spot the next morning, Steve had his bait out and in the water in a flash while I followed the kelp line just a few yards from shore and tried to set us up in a good spot that Mick had showed us just the other day. I asked Steve to take the wheel so I could get my line out, and that's when it happened. Steve's rod got hit and bent straight down into the water. Without a moment to spare, he grabbed it, and the fight was on. He fought this fish forever, it seemed, as it darted back and forth, doing a few underwater spins and some amazing runs while Steve kept the pressure on and the rod tip up. Finally, after the fish took him around the boat several times, Steve got it in range for me to net. I nailed it in one shot, and we had our first silver for the morning on the boat, a well-earned fish that weighed in at 18 pounds.

At the end of the day, I asked Steve if he was ready to head for the barn (we were the last ones out there), and as we turned to head around a point, we spotted Mick and Ryan (the lodge's manager) doing a slow drift with a couple of rods out along an area called Arthur Point. "Mick wouldn't be out here doing a drift so late unless he knows something. Let's do a drift, too," I said, and we put out our gear and started our drift about 100 yards upwind from

Mick and Ryan, right in a tide line and as the sun was setting. That's when all hell broke loose.

Six feet of my rod crashed straight down into the water, and drag started screaming out. I grabbed it, keeping pressure on the fish and my rod tip up. This fish took me – with Steve and his net right on my heels – around the boat several times. Just as I would get it almost in range, it would peel out another run and then do a few aerals. After about ten minutes of chasing this fish around the boat, Steve finally put the wood to him when he rolled up along the boat. Finally, we'd caught our first tyee.

Steve and I were "high-fiving" each other on the boat, telling each other how great we are for bagging such a quality fish – that is until we got back to the dock and good ol' ten-year-old John Moffet reminded us who the real king is, with his 43-pound tyee that he caught that day.

As Elvis used to say, "Bow to the King, baby."

Legacy Lodge provides a warm, friendly environment, and their hospitality was second to none. Mick, Johanna, and Ryan have thought of everything – all the amenities and creature comforts you could ask for in such a pristine setting. Everything from foul-weather gear (if needed) to rods, reels, and tackle is provided. Also included is a professionally filleted and vacuum-sealed fish service. They'll even package it in an insulated box for your travel back home.

Remote yet easily accessible, the area promises a premier sportfishing experience found nowhere else. Situated on the protected, glassy waters surrounded by the panoramic beauty of British Columbia, Legacy Lodge offers traditional salmon fishing on the sheltered waters of the famed Rivers Inlet.

Traditionally, seasons for kings and silvers are July through September.

This is one place where the elements converge for epic sportfishing adventures with world-class salmon that await your challenge. I recommend this lodge to anyone interested in fishing the Pacific Northwest.

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