



St. Mary Angler Fishing Reports

2002 (and Review of 2001)

Review of the 2002 Season

In 2002 the snow pack in south-eastern British Columbia was above normal followed by a long wet spring. On June 1 the 'snow water index' was 134% of average! These unusual conditions meant that our river fishing season started later than normal. However, once the good weather came it lasted into October so our season went longer than usual as well.

After the spring freshet had subsided we were surprised to see that some of our favorite stretches of the St. Mary River, like the famous "Photo Hole" had changed completely. Fortunately, the old 'honey spots' were replaced with other glorious riffles, runs and holes that we would fish with great success all season. Nature has a way of renewing itself and this process is never more clear than when you watch your favorite river change during a big spring runoff!

While the start of river fishing was delayed, our valley lakes produced very well right from the start. We had great success fishing Nine Bay and Mitten lakes only one week after they iced off in early May. Working out our Wells Landing Lodge we took full advantage of the abundant chironomid hatches on these productive little lakes. Fishing from pontoon boats, anglers often caught over 20 rainbows a day in the 16-18 inch class. We even had a few monsters which stretched the measuring tape to around 25 inches!

We continued to fish Nine Bay, Mitten and Clealand lakes in early May, then moved onto Premier Lake as the ice disappeared in the subsequent weeks. Given the variety of lakes we fish are located at different altitudes, we had a new one coming on stream almost weekly right through the spring! Our lake-fishing season was very productive and extended right into early July.

The rivers in our region started to fish well by mid July. This coincided with the onset of some hot summer temperatures. The season on the St. Mary started with strong hatches dominated by large baetis and stone flies. We responded with a multitude of colored stimulator patterns. We also had some very good success early on by nymphing with various bead head stone fly patterns. At this point we were keying on both the big bull trout and the abundant wild native cutthroats.

After about three weeks or so we switched over to the dry flies exclusively and had

immediate success as the water levels normalised and the clarity approached crystal. On the St. Mary, Elk, Skookumchuck and Crowsnest rivers we keyed on bulls and cutthroats. We caught large fish on all systems and had good catch rates from early on.

By late July we were floating the St. Mary on a daily basis and keying on cahills, grey drakes and golden stones. Given we have excellent access points to all four river reaches, our clients were afforded great fishing while coming across few anglers during their floats. It also provided them the flexibility to fish similar runs on successive days, or to move onto new and under utilized stretches each day. We regularly had days with catch rates in the 20 fish per angler range with average size in the 14-16 inch class. It was not uncommon for cutthroats in the 18 inch range to be rolled and landed on the St. Mary.

As August blended into September the temperatures stayed hot, the skies clear and fishing excellent. By now we were heavily into the hoppers, in addition to hatches of caddis and blue wing olives. This time of year is especially rewarding as angler pressure declines, temperatures become moderate and the fishing remains hot. As the colours turned to fall and we neared October, the fishing still remained excellent. We finished our season on October 15 against the full colour backdrop of fall.

All in all, we had another excellent year of fishing on the lakes, streams and rivers of southeastern British Columbia. While the season started late, it also ended later than normal. Spring lake fishing was fantastic and river fishing was great as usual. We expect the 2003 season to start on time with lake fishing running from early May to July and river fishing starting in mid June and going into October.

In addition to the great fishing, this year saw the launch of our rebuilt web site which featured regular Fishing Reports from May right through to October. We will continue the reports to keep you informed of the season as it unfolds.

The St. Mary Angler Fly Shop got a partial makeover in 2002, as we brought in a number of new products. We are pleased to say we are a Scientific Angler Mastery Dealer, G. Loomis Fly Rod Dealer and carry a full line of Bare brand products including their outstanding new breathable light weight wader - 'The Cutthroat'. In addition, we are dealers for Ross Reels and Action Optics sunglasses, carry the Exofficio line of clothing, as well as everything else you expect in a full service shop. You will also be pleased to learn that all our products are priced in Canadian Dollars.

Most recently the St. Mary Angler was awarded the "Tourism Excellence Award" by the Kimberley Chapter of the British Columbia Restaurant Association. This award coupled with the positive feedback from our clients signals a successful year for the St. Mary Angler Guide Service and Fly Shop.

2002 Fishing Reports

(Report #21, 02/10/15)

The final act on the St. Mary River is a good one!

As the season comes to a close on October 15th, we are now into overcast days with some sunny periods. Mornings are a cool 40 degrees, heating up to the mid 50's by the afternoon. Water levels remain low and visibility crystal clear. For fish holding on the flats the clear water makes them a little more spooky, and fishing rather technical, but the fishing in the pools is still outstanding!

We are now wading quite a bit during the floats. Where the fish are holding close to shore, we walk the banks staying dry while firing short casts into the pools. When we get 'the right drift' we get some excellent results. The average size fish are 14 to 16 inches and we are rolling and landing many fall cutthroats. A pair of polarized sunglasses has been a great asset when trying to track these highly active fish!

The dominant hatches are the Blue Wing Olives (sizes 18 to 20) and Green Drakes (sizes 10 and 12). We are getting our best results with a matching Blue Wing Olive, Renegades sizes 14 and 16, and Silver and Grey Wulffs sizes 12 and 14.

As we complete our final float of the 2002 season, the leaves are tumbling off the trees and drifting softly into the pools, rifles and runs. The sun is illuminating the leaves still clinging to the trees creating that great western fall color palate. Autumn is a beautiful time to be on the St. Mary River.

So that is it for the 2002 season. We hope to see you on the St. Mary in 2003 or at one of our winter tradeshows.

On behalf of Kelly and Karen and the staff of St. Mary Angler, I would like to thank everyone who contributed to a successful 2002. We wish you a safe and healthy off season.

(Report #20, 02/9/27)

Fall is settling in on the St. Mary River, but fishing remains "spectacular"!

We are now starting to see frost in the mornings and afternoon temperatures peaking around 60 degrees. Morning showers with clearing by noon is an emerging weather pattern. Today we had a campfire on the River at lunch. Fall has certainly arrived in our neighbourhood.

Water levels are at fall ' lows ' and we are having to get out of the boat from time to time to make it through the growing number of gravel bars and shallow areas. However, the water remains crystal clear. We also find ourselves getting out of the boat more often to fish the emerging braided sections of the Mary as water levels decline. While we are experiencing subtle changes to the weather and the River, the fishing has remained excellent. The average size cutthroat is 15 to 16 inches. Today we had over 50 fish brought to the boat. The largest fish caught was a nice 18 incher.

The cool weather has altered the fishing only by forcing us to start later in the morning and fish longer into the early evening. The hatches have been dominated by Midges and Blue Wing Olives. We have been using Blue Wing Olives and Griffith's Gnats (size 18 and 20) to enjoy some spectacular fishing!

The fall colors on the St. Mary are gorgeous, bright and beautiful. Our season runs to October 15th.

(Report #19, 02/9/22)

The Elk River is 'a blaze' in fall colors!

The weather is holding up really well this fall as we are experiencing a run of beautiful sunny days. The fishing is also holding strong against a backdrop of trees turning bright yellow and firey orange. The mornings are cool and crisp starting off at around 40 degrees and warming up to the mid 60's to early 70's by afternoon. The water level on the Elk River is running at 'fall low' and very clear. While we are still working out of the boats, we are also spending a good deal of time wading on the prime spots as the fish are concentrating in the pools not far from shore.

Most of the fish caught today were in the 14-18 inch window and there were lots of them. It was a real pleasure to see some healthy 'over 18's 'hooked, landed and released'. The dominant hatches coming off were the White Cahills, Blue Wing Olives and October Caddis. As we are getting late in the season we are now hitting the water around 11.00 a.m. and getting off around 7:00 p.m.

Fishing remains very good this late September and the backdrop of fall colors and crystal clear water illuminated by brilliant sunlight is nothing short of spectacular!

(Report #18, 02/9/12)

The Elk River is 'on fire'!

This week on the Elk we are experiencing sunny and warm weather to go along with excellent fishing. We are still experiencing summer water levels and near perfect water clarity. The average size cutthroat is a very nice 17 to 18 inches and there are lots of them! The hatches have been dominated by Baetis, PMD's and Green Drakes. We have been using Blue Wing Olives (size 18) and Tan Comparaduns (size 16) to slay them! In a word, fishing has been 'great'!

We still have some days open, so give us a call if you can manage to get up to the Elk River for a couple of days between now and October 15th. Just a reminder that the Elk River is single fly only, so no droppers please!

(Report #17, 02/9/9)

September on the Skookumchuck River.

Fishing conditions are near perfect for early fall on this little gem of a river. These days we are experiencing daily highs in the early 70's with mostly sunny skies. Water levels are at their typical fall low with near perfect visibility. As the Skookumchuck is a 'wade only' stream for us, we typically walk for over a half an hour to get to the more remote sections. This week the walk is particularly nice as the leaves are just starting to turn.

The average sized cutthroat on the Skookumchuck is running around a nice 15-16 inches. The catch rates are good as the fish are moving pretty well all day. The hatches are marked by mostly Green Drakes and Mayflies. We have been responding with an assortment of dries and have had most success with PMD's, Grey Wulffs and Renegades (sizes 12 and 14).

As we are lucky enough to be visiting the 'Skook' in September, we have this beautiful piece of British Columbia wilderness to ourselves!

(Report #16, 2002)

Have the St. Mary River all to yourself!

As we end the second week of September, we are now experiencing end of summer weather on the St. Mary. Midday temperatures hover around 70 degrees with mostly sunny skies. The water conditions remain at summer low and are crystal clear, beauti-

ful conditions for dry fly fishing. The River is fishing very well. Both our beginners, as well as you experts, are having lots of success rolling and hooking cutthroat. The average size remains around 14 inches, with the odd big one rising to the challenge. Grey and Blue Duns, in addition to Caddis are dominating the hatches.

September on the St. Mary is a very serene and beautiful experience. There are very few people on the water as the kids have gone back to school and their parents have followed to work. September is a time when you can have this magnificent river pretty well to yourself. As our season extends to mid October there is still lots of time to fish.

(Report #15, 2002)

September fishing on the St. Mary River is excellent!

We are now experiencing sunny and warm days with consistent daily highs in the late 70's to early 80's. Occasionally we are getting fairly brief, late afternoon thundershowers. The St. Mary itself is flowing crystal clear and water levels are 'optimal' as they run at their 'summer low'. We are routinely floating all four stretches of the River, spreading the days out to ensure the fish are not seeing too much of us. We are enjoying consistently good catch rates of cutthroats in the 14-15 inch range, with the occasional big one over 17 inches being landed. The other day a member of our party was fortunate to land a very nice 18 inch rainbow, a beautiful fish. In the case of the St. Mary, as our webmaster Greg found out on his annual float the other day, you will see and roll many, many, nice cutthroats on your float, but landing them is up to you! In terms of hatches, we are seeing some midges, but caddis and grasshoppers seem to be dominating the menu as of late. Some of the more effective patterns we are using this early September include Kelly's Caddis Emerger, Elk Hair Caddis and the Parachute Hopper.

(Report #14, 2002)

The St. Mary River is in the groove!

We are now experiencing normal summer conditions on the St. Mary. Water clarity is excellent and the river level is reaching optimum. The river is fishing excellent with catches in the 12 to 17 inch range and is producing consistently well into the later afternoon. We are seeing good hatches of caddis and PMDs. A lot of success is coming with Royal Wulffs, Parachute Adams, and Orange Stimulators.

(Report #13, 2002)

The Elk River is fishing very well!

Water levels on the Elk River are still a little high for this time of year with clarity at about 80 percent of optimum. We are mostly floating the river while stopping to fish the best runs. Afternoon fishing has been excellent, with most fish in the 15 to 17 inch class. Most of the hatches have been dominated by Yellow Sally's and PMD's. We have been fishing mostly small 'traditionals'; Royal Wulffs and the Parachutes Adams have been producing well.

(Report #12, 2002)

The St. Mary River is showing it's true summer colors.

We are now floating the St. Mary River on a daily basis. On our last time out we experienced comfortable temperatures in the 80's (F) with occasional cloudy periods. Water levels continue to drop steadily and we are now in the 'medium to high' range. Clarity is also improving steadily as we are seeing little erosion apart from some of the historic clay bank sources. We are now doing a fair amount of wading, in addition to boat angling. We are pleased to see that the cutthroat are now settling into their summer habitats, as the side channels and long runs are fishing 'good to excellent'. We are experiencing good catches of trout in the 11 to 17 inch range and are starting to see some bigger fish. A very nice 19-inch cutthroat was today's top prize!

With respect to hatches, we are seeing lots of Light Cahills and Grey Drakes, as well as some Golden Stones. We are also seeing many grasshoppers on the shore, but the fish are not taking them yet. All of our effort is now on the dry fly side with Yellow Stimulators, Blue Dunns, Orange Bodied Elk Hair Caddis, and Royal Wulffs working well in sizes 12, 14 and 16.

Overall fishing is excellent as the St. Mary is coming into 'summer bloom'. We expect the St. Mary to fish very well from now, right on into October. All our 'tributary streams' are also fishing well, including the Skookumchuck and Wigwam rivers.

(Report #11, 2002)

The St. Mary River.

On July 23 we floated the St. Mary River again. It was another beautiful sunny day with temperatures in the early 30's Celsius (mid 80's F.). Water clarity is improving steadily

as we inch closer to ideal fishing conditions. As usual, we hit the water in the inflatable boats, hopping out to fish the runs. We are starting to spend more time wading, but the river is still too high to cross. On this day the 'Mary' fished well, as we caught numerous cutthroats ranging from 8 to 15 inches. We saw fish consistently throughout the day. We are still not hooking many fish over 15 inches, but good presentation is rewarded with a few of the bigger boys and girls rising to the fly! We had good success both with dry and wet lines with the best performing flies being the Yellow Sally, Caddis and Grey Drake. The quality fishing has definitely started!

(Report #10, 2002)

The Elk River is clearing up.

On July 22 we took our most recent float down the Elk River. It was sunny and hot pushing 30 degrees Celsius (86 F), a beautiful day to be on the water. Like the other rivers of our region, the Elk has undergone a prolonged spring runoff. However, water levels are now declining and clarity is slowly improving. So we headed out onto the water, anchoring from time to time to fish the runs as it is still too high to wade. The average cutthroat landed was 15 to 16 inches. Our efforts were rewarded when we landed a couple of hefty bull trout, the largest of which ran 22 inches in length. As there were no perceivable hatches observed on this day, we used a number of different flies, but had most of our success using Parachute Adams and Stimulators.

(Report #9, 2002)

The Crowsnest River is starting to come 'on stream'.

On July 17th we waded the Crowsnest River in southwestern Alberta. It was sunny and hot, 31 - 33 degrees Celsius (88-91 Fahrenheit). The 'Crow' is still somewhat high for this time of year, but the visibility is very good given the flows. The fishing took a while to get going, but after we figured it out, we caught a number of really nice trout. We were treated to only rainbows over 16 inches with the biggest around 20! As the fish were feeding exclusively on the surface, we had pretty well all of our success on the dry flies. We used a variety of flies on this day, but had success with the Yellow Sally, Golden Stone Nymph, size 14 and 16 PMD's and size 10 Stimulators. According to one member of our group; "bring your camera, as there is nothing under 16 inches".

(Report #8, 2002)

What a long wet spring it's been!

Since our last report, the St. Mary River has seen water flows increase again with another big pulse of snow melt. We are now over three weeks behind our usual schedule! Fortunately, on our trip out yesterday (July 16th) we experienced water levels in decline and improving water clarity. It was a very warm day with temperatures up to the 34 degree Celsius (93 Fahrenheit). With water clarity being 'fair to good' we floated the river in the inflatable, stopping from time to time to fish up the channels. While we were keying on the large bull trout, we had most of our success with the cutthroat. We landed over 30 feisty 'cuts' in the 12 to 15 inch class. We did not see any significant hatches to speak of, so went after them with attractor patterns; big Stimulators, Royal Wulffs and Lime Trudes. In terms of the nymphs, we used Woolly Buggers in white and purple, both size 8 and 10. The St.Mary is finally rounding into form.

Just a reminder that the St.Mary River is fly fish only. That means no indicators, no lead and no droppers!

(Report #7, 2002)

The St. Mary River is finally ready to float!

The St. Mary River is finally rounding into form with medium to high water levels and good visibility. The late spring runoff has meant we are getting on the water a couple of weeks later than usual. We will be running our first guided trips of the season starting on Monday, July 8. The hatches on the St.Mary have been dominated by large baetis and stone flies. In response we have been using stimulator patterns (all colours), as well as yellow sallys. We have also had some very good success by nymphing with various bead head stone fly patterns in close to the river banks. We have had good catch rates of wild westlope cutthroats in the 14-16 inch range. However, the larger fish are still finishing the spawn and not moving much yet.

(Report #6, 2002)

Whiteswan and Premier lakes are producing well.

As of the week of July 4th, Premier and Whiteswan lakes are still producing good catches of rainbows in the 18 to 24 inch range. We are seeing consistently healthy hatches of callibaetis and damsel flies. In response we have been using beaded hare's ears on a chronomid rig and zug bugs on the wet line. Both of these combinations are

providing us with lots of action. The days have been sunny and hot followed by evening thundershowers, normal for this time of year.

(Report #5, 2002)

Premier Lake is where the action is.

We arrived at Premier Lake in the mid afternoon of June 16th. We immediately noticed that the water levels are dropping a little and are now more in line with what we are used to this time of year. The weather was sunny and hot as summer approaches the Kootenays. We parked our boat with our backs to a light wind and started to fish. One of the group was using a type three sinking line while the other two were running chironomid rigs. The fishing was very good from the start and kept us on the water until around nine in the evening. The rainbows seemed to be taking everything we tossed at them. We caught fish using chironomids, damsels, half backs, full backs, bead head hares ears, prince nymphs, zug bugs and lightning bugs! One of the more experimental members of the group even put on a caddis fly and caught a nice rainbow on the surface! The hatches were dominated by callibaetis and may flies with the odd chironomid mixed in. In addition to Premier Lake, White Swan is also fishing very well these days.

(Report #4, 2002)

The St. Mary River is open, but high.

The St. Mary River officially opened for angling on June 15th. While it was looking pretty tempting over a week ago, the late snow melt in the last couple of days has taken off. As a result, the water levels are up and the clarity is way down. It will be a week or so until it is worth floating. In the meantime, if you wish an up to the minute report give Karen and Kelly a call at 1-800-667-2311.

(Report #3, 2002)

White Swan and Moose Lake fish "amazing" on the first trip out.

On May 25th and 26th we made our first visit of the year to White Swan and Moose Lake. The weather conditions were again a mixture of sun and cloud. The water conditions were very calm during the day, finishing each evening with wind and rain. The water levels on these lakes remain pretty low as the ice has just disappeared in the last ten days and most of the water remains locked up in the snows of the high country.

Spring is arriving late this year. Again we left shore in the pontoon boats and were greeted with some really amazing fishing. We experienced fish on almost every cast! We encountered many big fish, averaging about 20 inches. Fish up to 24 inches were landed and released, after some wonderfully long fights, of course. The dominant hatches were chironomids and they were all over the water - huge hatches. Again we used a combination of wet line and dry line techniques. As the fish were holding in shallow water, we accommodated them with short leaders of 6 to 8 feet in length. All in all, an impressive debut for White Swan and Moose Lake this spring.

(Report #2, 2002)

Nine Bay still fishing well.

We visited Nine Bay and Cleland Lake from May 17th to the 19th. The weather conditions were a mixture of sunny and cloudy periods, normal for this time of year. The lakes themselves were crystal clear as they have yet to undergo their spring turnover. We were working from pontoon boats where we observed hatches of chironomids, calibaetis mayflies and damsel flies. We fished a wet line with a type 3 sink, using full-backs, half backs, damsels and leeches. On the dry line we used a long leader with snowcones, a chromie and chironomids. The catch rates remained very strong at about 20 a day for the more experienced anglers. The sizes were in the 16 to 20 inch class range. Fishing was consistently productive from mid morning until late afternoon each day.

(Report #1, 2002)

Spring has sprung in the high country!

With less than a week since the ice disappeared from on our high mountain lakes, we took to the water from May 1st to the 5th. Our destination was Nine Bay Lake and the Mitten Lake chain located near our Wells Landing Lodge. While the weather was still pretty cool, normal for this time of year with clouds and some sunny breaks, the fishing was in the high 90's! The chironomids were hatching in abundance and the fish were obviously keying on them. We responded in kind with a couple of different techniques using an assortment of black chironomids, chromies, snowcones, leaches, damsel, halfbacks and fullbacks. This strategy paid off early and often. The three days on Nine Bay were pretty unreal with each angler catching and releasing about 20 rainbows per day. While the average size was a healthy 16 to 18 inches, the largest fish was an enormous 24 to 25! The day on Mitten Lake also produced some excellent rainbow action. The boys really gave the pontoon boats and float tubes a workout!

Preview of the 2002 Season

The coming fishing season looks to be promising as the snow pack in southeastern British Columbia is hovering around average depth. We are expecting a normal spring runoff followed by good summer flows and elevations in our lakes, rivers and streams.

We expect the spring fishing to commence around April 1, 2002. Premier Lake, in addition to all of the lakes around Kimberley, B.C., will be fishing great for rainbows from 2 to 5 pounds. The lakes around our the Wells Landing Lodge, located near Golden, B.C., will open on May 1, 2002. If you have ever dreamed of hooking up with a 3 to 6 pound Kamloops Rainbow, well we have the place for you. At the Wells Landing Lodge you will enjoy "5 Star" accommodations and food on top of the spectacular lake fly fishing. We hope more of you will consider spring fly fishing at this majestic place. Give us a call to talk about it.

Summer river fishing starts in mid June as the spring freshet subsides. The St.Mary and the Elk rivers both fish extremely well at this time of year. However, most clients prefer to fish later in the summer so there are some days available earlier on. Some of the largest fish of the year will be caught between June 15 and July 15. If you have ever thought about coming to Canada for some early summer fly fishing, here is your chance. Another forgotten time for fishing up here is in the late fall. If you are intrigued by the prospect of catching big fish on small flies, think about getting away for a few days in the late September to mid October period. It is truly an incredible experience.

Hope to see you on river!

Review of the 2001 Season

The fishing season actually starts in the midst of winter as the snow pack dictates spring and summer water levels. As we all know, the spring runoff and summer water levels have a tremendous impact on the quality of fishing. We have all seen and heard how a flood can change the size and shape of a favorite pool, or how the effect of drought can devastate trout spawning success.

Last winter, the low snow pack with its implications for low river flows, was a major concern throughout the West. Fortunately, the levels in the rivers and streams across southeastern B.C. were not as low as feared. As a result, the fishing in our region held up really well throughout the whole season.

The 2001 season went very well considering the initial fears over water levels. Spring river and lake fishing was pretty good and a number of clients came early to take

advantage of the action. June and July fishing was outright fantastic with some of the largest fish of the season taken. August and September fishing was also good in the face of very warm weather. The water in our smaller, well vegetated streams, was generally a little cooler, so a lot of clients took advantage of the great fishing on the Skookumchuck River and Michele Creek. The low runoff, in combination with the warm spring and summer, meant we started our guided trips a bit earlier than normal. Overall the number of guided trips was up again last summer.

Our season ended abruptly with the tragic events of September 11, 2001. These acts of terror left all of the staff of St.Mary Angler with a profound sense of loss and anger. We know that several of our clients lost friends or relatives in these terrible acts and our hearts and prayers go out to everyone effected. We hope that time will heal our collective wounds, but we will never forget those who lost their lives.