



St. Mary Angler Fishing Reports

2004

Season in Review

In 2004 the snowfall in southeastern British Columbia was well below normal, followed by a warm and dry spring. The snow pack for April was 80% of normal. By May it was 65, followed by 58 in June and bottoming out at 38% of normal on June 15th. These conditions meant that the spring lake and river fishing seasons started early. The summer began hot as usual, but was met head on by steady rain come mid August. The season finished under clear and cool conditions in mid October.

The year started under clear skies and hot spring temperatures as we ventured out onto the group of productive little lakes known as the Mitton Chain on May 5th. After the previous winter of tradeshows, marketing, tying classes and general 'fishing' inactivity, it was nice to be back on the water! After refreshing our minds on the chironomid fishing basics, like how to rig up and anchor, the season got off to an excellent start. Right off the mark we were into 20 bulky rainbows within the 18 to 21 inch range. The prize of opening weekend was a whopping 27 inch rainbow, what a beauty!

Over the month of May we spent a lot of time on the alpine lakes, most notably Premier Lake and the Mitton Chain. We hooked a lot of healthy fish while we adapted to the weather of spring. By early June the weather had stabilized and the fishing was very productive.

The St. Mary, Elk and all the rivers and streams of our region opened on June 15th to favorable conditions. With the very low snow pack and moderate to warm temperatures, spring came early again this year. We really did not experience much of a freshet as the runoff was gradual. Like in 2003, the lack of much runoff meant that the river geomorphology (pattern, depth and width), pretty well stayed static. Our guiding season started on time and no trips had to be canceled due to inclement spring water conditions.

By the second week of June the rivers were rounding into form as clarity had improved and levels were coming down. By late June the St. Mary was ratcheting down with pools forming along the edges under clear skies and temperatures in the high 70's. We were drifting two sections of the river a day and tying into some nice cutthroats as the caddis flies were dominating the early hatches. Meanwhile on the Elk, things were starting to clear up.

By early July the St. Mary was fishable from 'tip to tail' and we were having a great time

fishing while the caddis and stone flies were doing their thing. Daily maximum air temperatures were hitting the high 80's. Our first trip on the Elk River was on the 13th. As usual the Elk took a little more time to round into form as it does not have the luxury of a headwater lake like the St. Mary. However, the Green Drakes and caddis flies were coming off steadily and the fishing was outstanding. By late July, grasshoppers were all over the place and we were catching some nice big cuts over 17 inches. By the end of July all the rivers were in peak form and we had some very enjoyable and productive trips to the Skookumchuck River in addition to the Elk and St. Mary.

The first two weeks of August saw more great fishing and the usual hot summer weather. We were still experiencing good water levels for floating, but were a little worried that we would be pushing boats by early September due to the low snowpack and dry summer weather. We continued to see good catch rates, healthy average sizes in the 15 inch slot, and lots of aggressive beautifully colored fish.

The weather turned in the third week of August as the typical hot dry summer morphed into a prolonged pattern of wet weather all across southeastern British Columbia. While the water levels on the St. Mary rose due to the rain, it remained clear. However, the Elk was not so fortunate as it clouded up as the river swelled.

By September the rain had tailed off, but there was no denying that fall was to arrive early this year. Fishing picked up again on the St. Mary as October Caddis and Blue Winged Olives were now the dominant hatches. After a stretch of clear weather and improved fishing, the rain returned once more followed by a break in the weather and improved catch rates again. All in all the last half of August and parts of September provided us with some unseasonably wet weather; in fact rainfall was over double the long term average during this period. We hosted our final clients of the season in the second week of October.

2004 was a weird year for weather as it started abnormally dry and ended abnormally wet! That said, we experienced another great year of fishing in southeastern British Columbia. We look forward to next year and wish you a healthy and prosperous off season. Hopefully, we will see you at one of the winter trade shows, go to our website for details. In the meantime the headwaters are covered in snow and the rivers, lakes and fish are silently preparing for next season.

Take care,

Kelly Laatsch

(Report # 23, 2004/09/29)

The Elk River closes the season in fine fashion!

Today was a beautiful, sunny, fall day for fly fishing. The daily high reached about 66 degrees (19 Celsius). Our day was cut a little short by a brief rain storm late in the afternoon. The Elk River is still running high for this time of year, and while it remains a little cloudy, on balance the visibility is still pretty good.

Today we floated as usual getting out of the boat on some of the runs to work the area more intensively. At this time of the year the Elk is decked out in all its fall glory. There are gorgeous views of the Rocky Mountains on every turn in the River and the fall colors are breathtaking. It is sometimes a good idea to take a break from fishing and kick back and drink in the beauty of this place, but with the great fishing this can be hard to do!

Today the Elk River fished very well. We spied many bull trout as we floated over their backs, but the cutthroats were what we were looking for. The average sized cutthroat caught and released on this day was once again in the 15 to 16 inch class and we found these fish to be in prime shape. We also caught a few cutthroat in the 17 to 18 inch range among the 15-20 fish we landed and released.

The Elk River tends to have a lot of food on the water and the fish respond by achieving a good average size. Today the food of choice included Caddis, as well as a few Green Drakes. We also spotted some Blue Wing Olives coming off. The most effective flies of the day were the lime trudes, Adams, parachute Adams, hoppers and royal trudes. We also had some success with a small black ant pattern.

As the season winds down we would like to thank all our clients for coming to fish with us this year. It has been a wonderful season and we appreciate your patronage and interest in our region of British Columbia.

We will see you this winter at the tradeshows and you can expect our newsletter to be part of your Christmas reading. Take Care and have a safe and healthy off-season!

(Report # 22, 2004/09/21)

The Elk River is high but fishing well.

Today was another beautiful fall day as the temperatures reached as far as the low 70's (21 Celsius). There was no wind to speak of apart from a hint of breeze now and again. The Elk River remains high from all the rain we have had this past month. In terms of visibility, we still can see 2 to 3 feet into the water column. This definitely is not normal for this time of year.

We floated a little more than usual today. We held the boat in some sections and fished from the raft instead of getting out. Our method of choice was to hookup the anchor and fish.

The fish in Elk River are beautiful wild westslope cutthroats and due to all the food emerging out of the tributaries, as well as the Elk itself, the cutthroats are nice and chunky. The average size today was a bright 15 inch fish and we caught a few healthy 18 inchers as well.

We caught and released around 30 to 35 fish on this trip. Many came to the fly, but the age old challenge is to hook up! Word amongst the guides is that the fish can feel winter is now just around a couple of bends in the calendar, so they are feeding quite bit. The sunny weather has also been a tremendous help to get these boys and girls active again!

In terms of hatches, we did not see them come off until after lunch. The hatch seems to be lasting about 4 hours these days - from the early to late afternoon. Consequently, the fishing in the morning is slow, but very good in the afternoon. Today it was Blue Wing Olives, Green Drakes and Caddis making up the lineup. We concentrated on 'matching the hatch' using all of the above patterns, as well as stimulators and black ant patterns.

How wet has it been this year? Apparently we have received as much rain this fall as the pervious four Septembers combined! Go figure the life of a fisherman!

Hope your fishing season is going well. For those of you who are about to come fish with us, the weather has broken and we expect good fishing as long as we stay in this present string of warm, sunny and clear fall days! See you on the river soon!

(Report # 21, 2004/09/20)

The leaves are turning as fall descends on the St. Mary River.

After a two week run of rain pretty well every day, we were able to see the sun today! A few high clouds, with a little wind in the afternoon, but all in all a relatively beautiful fall day. Our high temperature topped out in the mid sixties (17 degrees Celsius) amidst the rapidly changing color palate of the fall leaves. The forecast looks good as 'they' are calling for sun and a few clouds throughout the week... normal weather for this time of year. Now that the fog and mist have left us we can see a nice coat of next years 'water' frozen over the peaks of the mountains. Fall is here.

The water levels on the St. Mary are high for this time of year. We were looking at mid-July water levels today. But with the last couple of days of no rain, the River will soon drop again. During this latest stretch of rain we were very pleased to see that the St. Mary remained clear and did not get cloudy. Thanks again to our headwater lake!

We did our usual float trip and got out of the boat quite a bit to fish up the back channels where the cuts were holding. The average size on the day was 13 to 14 inches, but we did manage to bring in a couple 16 inch cutthroats - nice and chunky. With all the rain lately, fishing had become tough, but things are turning around now as the fish have become lively again.

Are far as the hatch goes, caddis and blue wing olives were coming off here and there. We used regular Adams, Royal Wulff's, October Caddis and small black ant patterns in response. The sizes ranged from 14 to 18.

Tomorrow we are off to the Elk River so we will report back soon!

(Report # 20, 2004/09/07)

The Elk River fishes well in the early fall!

Today the weather started off very cool and rainy. Our initial reaction was to roll over and go back to sleep! Fortunately, we came to our collective senses, donned the rain jackets and quaffed some hot coffee to warm up. By mid morning things were warming up and 'they' were calling for a high of 66 degrees (19 Celsius). The sun poked her head out from behind the clouds a few times in the afternoon and it stopped raining! Actually it turned out to be a nice fall day.

The Elk River is definitely higher than normal for this time of year. The water conditions

are not clear, but that said, it really never does completely clear up anyways! All this rain is not normal either, and it impacts the Elk more than the St. Mary.

We mainly floated on this trip, but just like the St. Mary we did get out and fish the banks and the top of the runs by foot a few of times. The Elk fish are very nice and healthy these days with the average all day in the 15 to 16 inch class. We did see a few 18 inchers as well, nice fish. The fishing was better in the afternoon than the morning. We had pretty good catch rates between the two anglers in spite of the many we missed!

The dominant hatches over the course of the day were caddis with some green drakes and blue wing olives thrown in. We used black ants, blue wing olives, stimulators and some green drakes - sized 12 to 18. We also had to use size 6X tippet and get a good, clean, drift to bring up the fish in these conditions!

It was a very nice fall day of fishing on the Elk. Hope to see you on the River soon!

(Report #19, 2004/09/06)

Fall has risen on the St. Mary River!

No one can deny it, fall has arrived in earnest. This year has been crazy for weather. Lately we have had very cool mornings, temperatures in the early 40's (6 to 7 degrees Celsius), warming up by mid morning and into the afternoon, with highs around the mid to late 60's (17 to 19). We have had everything including sunny, cloudy, rainy and breezy days! However, the trees have refused to turn color as yet, no doubt holding onto the last vestiges of summer!

The water on the St. Mary is running a little higher than average, but not too much. The water remains clear and the fish are feeding consistently. Today we floated mostly, only leaving the raft a couple of times for a wonder up the channels and to fish the runs.

Today we had a pretty good day. Each angler caught and released around 15 to 20 cut-throat. On three occasions we had quite a bit of excitement in the raft as we experienced a 'double' with both anglers yelling 'fish on!' It got pretty exciting as the afternoon picked up quite a bit.

Because of the cooler temperatures in recent days, October caddis and blue wing olives were coming off. In the morning we used royal wulff's, lime trudes, royal coachman and small caddis. Later in the afternoon we were using mostly October caddis. Yes we are still using all dry flies!

Historically, September is a beautiful warm month in this region of southeastern British Columbia. Yet this year we have had every type of weather from scorching hot, to chilly and rainy. Currently things are cool, but it does not preclude it from warming up again. In the mean time, remember to dress in layers as it can be cold in the morning and warm up in the afternoon. Don't forget to bring your rain jacket!

Hope to see you on the River soon!

(Report #18, 2004/08/30)

The sun is back and so are the catch rates!

Today the St. Mary provided us with a nice and sunny summer day – calm and comfortable, but not hot. The morning started out at about 60 degrees (15 Celsius) and the temperature reached the mid 70's (24 Celsius) by the afternoon.

The water levels have come down as last week's rains have worked their way through the system. The water clarity remains very good. The River is pretty well at the normal 'end of July' height. This extra water should really pay off in September.

Today, the fishing was 'hot'! It was the first real 'big fish day' of the season and we caught numerous nice fish throughout the day. Most of the cutthroats were in the 15 to 16 inch range with quite a few 18 inchers mixed in. We really had a load of action! What a nice change from the previous week.

The hatch was mainly caddis flies with a few big stone flies emerging as well. We responded with the usual traditional patterns such as lime trudes, royal wulff's and elk hair caddis sized 12, 14 and 16.

All in all the St. Mary fished 'unbelievable' on this late August day.

Elk River Update: The Elk River and it's tributaries are in the process of coming back into form after last week's rain. Please check your angling regulations for closures on certain tributaries and streams as some go into effect on September 1st.

Hope you get the chance to take advantage of some of this great fishing on the St. Mary River. See you on the water soon!

(Report #17, 2004/08/23)

Unseasonably cool weather has descended upon the St. Mary River.

The last week we have seen the temperatures drop significantly along with a good amount of rain. The mornings have been starting out at around 50 degrees (9 Celsius) only to climb to daily highs in the late 50's and early 60's (16 Celsius)! The Elk River has seen the turbidity levels rise quite a bit along with the increased water level from all the rain. On the St. Mary, the headwater lake has protected it from turning color, but the level has risen about two feet. While still very fishable, water levels on the Mary are higher than what we usually experience this time of year.

Today we floated some and got out of the boat quite a bit. We walked up and fished the top of the runs, or headed up into the back channels. Because of the cooler temperatures we saw quite a few smaller fish than usual. We did catch a few fish around 15 to 16 inches, but in general it was not a day for banner catch rates.

We observed a few green drakes and blue wing olives hatching, but in general the activity was pretty limited due to the weather. We used hi-vise elk hair caddis, lime trudes and hoppers later in the afternoon.

The weather is supposed to clear up in the next week. Hope to see you on the water soon!

(Report #16, 2004/08/14)

The Skookumchuck River provides great scenery and hot fishing!

Today we undertook another trek back into the Skookumchuck watershed. It was a hot one, a perfect summer day, ninety plus with very little breeze (34 Celsius).

The water conditions remain normal for this time year and the pools are still holding water nicely. The River is very clear and the fish remain a little skittish, so one's stealth is important!

Once we emerged from the path onto the River, we decided to walk for some time before fishing. As the scenery is beautiful along the 'Skook' it makes the walk rather pleasant. In addition, the walk gives time to peruse the emerald waters leading to much anticipation of what this little gem has to offer!

The fishing was 'awesome' on this trip as we caught and released over 30 cutthroats in around 5 hours of fishing. The average size was about 15 inches with the largest fish

just under 18 inches! A very healthy looking beauty. By the end of the day everyone was satisfied that they had covered enough scenic territory and caught enough fish.

The hatches of note included little midges and some October caddis. That said, we used small terrestrial patterns. Blue wing olives sized 18 to 20 were the best producers on this day.

Please remember to pack out everything you bring into these remote sites to ensure the next group has the same quality experience that you enjoy.

Hope to see you on the water soon!

(Report #15, 2004/08/13)

The Elk River is fishing "exceptional"!

We are back into hot temperatures as we reached 90 degrees today (32 Celsius). We experienced virtually no wind, even though it usually picks up in the afternoon. The water conditions are in pretty good shape with some slight color; nothing out of the ordinary for this time of year.

Today we spent most of our time fishing from the raft. The Elk was very busy as we saw 15 boats and several shore anglers in one section alone! It was one of those days where the application of a heavy dose of "river etiquette" was appropriate and welcomed. We avoided floating over the water of other anglers and slowed our pace to give people room to ensure a quality experience. It was nice to see many people out enjoying nature at its finest and catching fish on top of it all!

The Elk River fished very well on this trip out. Each angler caught and released around 30 fish with the average size being 14 to 16 inches! An exceptional day indeed!

We did not observe any significant hatches during the day. However, we had good success using H and L variants, in addition to small midges and small terrestrial patterns - beetles or ants. Big hopper patterns took over later in the afternoon and produced very well.

Today was one of those great days on the Elk and we enjoyed every minute on it.

We hope your summer is going well and hope to see you on the river soon!

(Report #14, 2004/08/06)

The St. Mary River has settled into its summer groove.

Today was a little overcast as we are currently working through a rare summer wet period. The temperature topped out at about 75 degrees (23 Celsius), but we expect things to warm up again by the 10th.

The water conditions are very good for this time of year. Plenty of water in the runs and crystal clear. This latest period of moisture will bolster the small winter snowpack so we will not be dragging bottom in the near future!

As usual we floated some sections and then pulled over to fish at the nice pools. The fish like to hold close to the edges and often locate right under that big log you are drifting by. Depending on the current of the River, and the savvy of your guide, you will be held there long enough to make a couple or 3 casts to cover the water and roll a fat cutthroat.

As it has been cooler, we thought it would effect the catch rates as the cuts love the sun. We were pleasantly surprised to see the fishing was consistently good and there were no real slow periods on this day. The catch rates were over 20 per angler so everyone was pretty happy with the day. The average size on the day was 14 inches with biggest topping out at a nice, healthy 16 inches.

Caddis, yellow sally's and midges were coming off sporadically. We used parachute adams, hoppers and stimulators once again sized 12 to 14. Traditional flies have been working very well lately as well.

While there are reports of wildfires in various regions of British Columbia, there are none of note in south Eastern B.C. The recent moisture will ensure that we do not face any significant problems this year.

Hope to see you on the water soon!

(Report #13, 2004/07/29)

The Skookumchuck River: the weather is smokin' and so is the fishing!

Today was a scorcher as it reached into the high 90's (37 Celsius). The water levels on the 'Skook' are normal for late July with many pools to choose from and crystal clear water to boot! With the water as clear as it is, anglers have to work hard to ensure they

do not spook the fish when approaching and casting.

Today was a nice day to hike into the Skookcumchuck as the path provides some comfortable cover from the sun and heat. Once we made it to the River, we worked our way from pool to pool and ventured further and further back into this beautiful secluded part of the world. At the first pool we saw four nice, hulking bull trout lying near the bottom of the pool! While the bulls were wonderful to see, today we wanted cutthroats so on went a dry and we commenced to fish!

Today was 'amazing' as we caught and released many fish with some into the 17 inch range! It was one of those days where we did not want to leave a hole, but at the same time we were constantly beckoned forward by the serene emerald green water of the next pool!

There was no big hatch of note today as we only saw a few midges. We fished with stimulators, royal wulff's, small ant patterns and lime trude's that worked well.

The walk out was a nice as the walk in, although the temperatures were cooler! You can't top a trip to the Skookumchuck on a sizzling late July day!

Hope to see you on the water soon!

(Report #12, 2004/07/27)

The top run of the St.Mary provides great scenery and fishing to match!

Once again we had a beautiful day with clear skies and temperatures into the late 80's (30 Celsius). We thought seriously about diving into the water midway through the day to cool off! With the hot temperatures we have been experiencing lately, the water has dropped back down into normal range for this time of year.

Today we floated the upper most section of the St.Mary, starting just below St.Mary Lake. This section of the River has some very nice scenery with lots of trees and bushes running down to the water's edge which gives it a different feel from the other portions. In general, we tend to float this section a little more, but we still took the opportunity to jump out and fish the most promising runs and pools.

The morning and afternoon fished very well. We kicked off the day with a nice 17 to 18 incher - a beautiful fish. Throughout the day the River produced an assortment of nice sized cuts in the 15 inch window. We also had a lot of smaller fish in the 12 inch range taking our flies. Our response was to try and wiggle the fly free before they got to the

boat! Seeing smaller fish is a good thing as it is evidence that this section of the River is producing a nice balance of big and small fish.

The dominant hatches on the day were once again grasshoppers and caddis. We responded with; renegades, various mosquito patterns and lime trudes all sized 12 and 14.

We had a nice trip out today with great weather, splendid scenery and healthy catch rates of big and small cuts.

Remember when you are fishing in a new area to drop by the local fly shop to find out what is working, as it changes everyday!

Hope to see you on the water soon!

(Report #11, 2004/07/21)

The water on the St. Mary has risen, but fishing remains good.

Today was a nice day with temperatures around 80 degrees (27 Celsius). This is a change from the last few days when we experienced cool temperatures as a result of a couple of days of fairly heavy rain. While we found it inconvenient, the parched forests of the back country drank it up readily!

As a result of the downpour, the river rose about 2 vertical feet. However, the moderating influence of St. Mary Lake at the top of the system meant that the River remained very clear and the pools still produced fish.

We floated and fished from the boat as we moved from pools to areas which were hard to get to by foot. We also pulled over and fished along the shore in various locations. When the River is low it allows waders an easier time than when it is up. As levels begin to drop again, fishers will eventually be able to cross the River at certain sections. The other beauty of the lower levels is a wider flood plain which translates into much more room for casting as there are no trees close behind you!

On this trip, some of the sections fished very well, while some pools were readjusting from the increased elevation and fished a little slower. Over the course of the day we caught and released around 25 fish and saw a number of fish in the 14 to 15 inch range, as well as quite a few 16 inchers. The fish of the day was a big, fat, 20 incher! The first 20 incher of the year.

In the rain earlier this week, green Drakes and big stone flies were coming off. Today, caddis flies and some grass hoppers were most visible. We are seeing the hoppers a couple of weeks earlier than usual this year. The flies that were working on our trip included; caddis, orange bodied stimulators, Royal Wulffs and humpies all sized 12 to 14.

All the rain the last few days meant that the Elk River, which had been fishing outstanding, is running pretty dirty in sections. Apparently, a clay bank cut loose and spilled its contents into the River. The guys over there expect it to clear up in the next couple days. We expect it to be back into full form by next week.

Hope to see you on the water soon!

(Report #10, 2004/07/20)

Frank's Fishing Report: the St. Mary is "Remarkable"!

Nancy and I just got home from a terrific fishing trip with Kelly down the St. Mary River. We floated the lower stretch of the River on the Saturday, then after a day off, we floated the Canyon, on the Monday.

We had warm weather for both days, 80 and 90 respectively, and the fishing was great! I would say the water levels were up, but clear. There was a lot of action on both days, and we caught good sized cutthroats and a few cut-bows. Our friends Kevin and Deb also came along, and they had a great time and good fishing. With Kelly and John for guides, we each got friendly quality instruction and help, and as always, Karen's lunches were mouth watering. We also saw a couple of bald eagles, one golden eagle and an osprey on the float which added nicely to our experience.

We spent about half of each day in the rafts and the other half exploring the back channels that were truly remarkable. Each one had at least one fish that seemed anxious to be caught. That is until they felt the hook, and then the fight was on!

The flies we used included; H and L Variants, a PMD, a Royal Wulff, and a variety of terrestrial patterns, consisting of ants and grasshoppers, as well as a green sedge here and there. I think the best producers were the variants, Wulff's and the ants.

We took off the middle of the three days to do some local touristy stuff. We visited Fort Steele in nearby Cranbrook and did some souvenir shopping at the Platzl in Kimberley. The ladies really enjoyed the fishing and did very well at it... no comment about whether they caught bigger and more fish than the boys!

It was a really nice trip.

If you haven't tried it, you should.

(Frank is a regular, and valued, client of the St. Mary Angler. Thanks for the report Frank!)

(Report #9, 2004/07/13)

The Elk River is fishing outstanding!

Today was our first trip to the Elk River this year, and what a fine day it was. The temperature was very comfortable topping out at 84 degrees (29 Celsius). As per usual the wind picked up in the afternoon, but it was relatively mild and did not create any challenges.

The River is still cloudy as the Elk never really clears up like the St. Mary. Fortunately, that did not impact our catch rates today! On the Elk River we tend to fish more from the boat compared to the St. Mary. That said, on this day we took the opportunity to get out and venture back up the runs on a number of occasions.

Today the fishing was "outstanding"... 'so many fish came to the fly we lost count'. There were probably over 50 fish brought to the boat and released by the two anglers. The average fish released was 14 to 15 inches with some up in the 'chunky' 16 to 17 inch class.

Green Drakes and Caddis flies were coming off pretty steadily, all in the adult stages which was neat to see. Pretty well everything used today was effective as long as the angler got a good mend and drift on the fly. Today the natural float on the water seemed more important than the particular pattern. Throughout the course of the day we tossed out a wide variety of dries including; Royal Wulff's , H & L Variants, Green Drakes, Green Humpies and Caddis. All sized 12 or 14.

Both the St. Mary and Elk are fishing very well now. When you come to fish remember to review your regulations beforehand. In this part of the world we have the "one fly only" rule so there are no droppers or second flies allowed on your line! Another important piece of information to remember is that if you are nymphing on the St. Mary River, strike indicators and/or weight on the line are not allowed. In addition, it is "single barbless hook" and "catch and release"!

Help us keep our rivers and streams productive and plentiful. Hope to see you on the water soon!

(Report #8, 2004/07/12)

Fishing is 'Grand' in the St. Mary Canyon!

Today was a hot, clear, beautiful day as temperatures climbed into the high 80's (30 Celsius). As the St. Mary is now fishable from 'tip to tail' we ventured into the section of the River known as the Canyon for the first time. The River remains clear and levels are in the 'normal' fishing range for this time of year.

Today we did a 'combination trip' as we spent our time both floating and walking along the main portion of the River. It worked out pretty well as we used the boat for transportation, hopping out to concentrate on the most promising runs. This approach allowed us to see a lot of water and of course many fish!

Today the fishing was on! Our boat caught and released around 35 fish between the two anglers. The average size was in the 14 to 15 inch class with a few over 17 inches released... nice, big, healthy cutthroats they were! It is good to see that the bigger fish are starting to roll.

During the trip we noticed steady numbers of caddis and stone flies coming off. We used stimulators - orange and yellow, as well as caddis emergers, Adams and Royal Wulffs. Most of these dries were sized 12, 14 and 16.

Today we had a great trip through the canyon section of the St. Mary – the fishing was hot, the weather was beautiful and scenery wonderful. Hope to see you on the water soon!

Elk River Update:

The Elk River is currently fishing very well on dry flies. The next report will be on the Elk as we have just started to run trips over there. The Elk takes a bit longer to drop and clear as it drains many streams directly from the slopes of the Rockies. The St. Mary clears faster as its water comes from the Purcell Mountain Range through St. Mary Lake. The Lake allows the water to settle and clear before flowing over the lip into the St. Mary River. And now you know the rest of the story...or at least why we can fish the St. Mary in June while the Elk takes longer to come on stream!

(Report #7, 2004/07/02))

The St. Mary River is running clear, sunny and active!

Today we took to the St. Mary River under a generally clear sky. Later in the day we spied some thundercloud activity along the Rockies, but we were fortunate enough to have it miss us! The temperature peaked around 70 degrees (20 Celsius) so we were comfortable throughout. The St. Mary River continues to run high, but the water is holding clear.

With every day the river is slowly ratcheting down and the pools are forming along the edges. At this time of year the speed of the drift allows us cover more water as we fished two sections of the St. Mary today. The enhanced speed allows us to hunt and find where the fish are lying and to quickly move off further downstream if they are disinterested in our offerings. From time to time we anchored and hiked up the back channels where we found some nice big cuts resting in the shallows.

When the sun beams cut directly into the water we experienced some very active cutthroats. Each boat caught and released around 15 fish between two anglers. The biggest release of the day was a hefty 16 inch cutthroat!

Every river condition dictates a change in approach. The bigger, and subsequently faster water we are experiencing now, is forcing anglers to think and move quickly. One has to be able to pick up the line and cast it in a very short period. We have only a few seconds to pick a location, cast and mend the line for a nice drift, before we are off into the next pool! Timing and speed are very important on the bigger and faster water. While it takes a little while to adjust to these conditions, everyone gets the hang of it after a few tries.

Today was a caddis fly day as they were coming off pretty good. So we responded with caddis emergers sized 14 and 16 and had good success. We also tossed out Turk's tarantula's sized 12 and 14 and yellow and orange stimulator's sized 10, 12 and 14. All in all it was a good day for fly fishing on the Mary.

Over on the Elk River, things are just starting to clear up. We expect to start floating the Elk by mid July.

If you have yet to book your trip, we still have some openings so feel free to call Karen at our fly shop for details. She can be reached at 1-800-667-2311.

Hope to see you on the water soon!

(Report #6, 2004/06/16)

The St. Mary River is open and fishing well!

Today was a beautiful day for an early season float. It was calm, clear and sunny throughout with a maximum temperature of 77 degrees (25 Celsius). Today was one of the earliest dates we have ever been able to get out and tie into some good fishing on the St. Mary.

The water is still running high, but the river is very clear and many of the pools are already forming along the edges. During our float we noticed that the small tributary streams are coming down in size.

Fishing from our Maravia raft, we worked the river with dry flies. As the river is moving pretty good these days we were able to cover two of the four sections of the river on this day. On a number of occasions we anchored the boat and walked up the back channels where the fish were tending to stack up. We did not see a lot of the big fish we usually see later in the season as they are still up the tribs finishing the spawn. However, we were treated a number of nice medium sized cutthroats on this day.

The biggest fish caught on our float was a nice and chunky 16 inch wild west slope cutthroat. We also caught and released many fish in the 12 to 14 inch range, pretty good for the first time out.

The dominant hatches were caddis and PMD's. Stone fly adults were also coming off. The most effective patterns were Chernobyl ants, traveler sedge and stone fly patterns sized 10, 12, and 14.

On the day we had a great time taking in the scenery of this extraordinary river while soaking up the sunshine and tempting these beautiful cutthroats. It is always special to get out on the river for the first time each spring and today was no exception.

We hope to see you on the river soon!

Please note that our e-mail address has changed to angler@telus.net

(Report #5, 2004/06/13)

The St. Mary River is ready to go!

The St. Mary River and all the small streams of the east Kootenays are opening on June 15th. At this point, the St. Mary River is looking very good. The water level is nor-

mal for this time of year; high with very good clarity. We are looking at excellent conditions for opening day and unless we get a huge downfall of rain before then, all trips are on!

Early season river fishing can be a tremendous amount of fun. Our approach is to float the river looking for back channels where the fish like to stack up and hold. This allows them to avoid the fast water of the main channel and gives us some great early season action as they concentrate in areas we can easily get to.

Hold on for the ride as 2004 is starting right on time!

(Report #4, 2004/06/7)

A great weekend on the Mitton Lakes!

We were off to the Mitton Lakes for an overnight trip which allowed us to fish a couple of these fine little water bodies in one outing. The days started on the cool side, but we only had a couple of small showers during our trip. Midday temperatures were comfortable as temperatures topped out at around 65 degrees (18 Celsius). We also had the pleasure of no wind over both days, which is always an additional bonus.

On the first lake in the Mitton chain, the water conditions were normal as the water had dropped to optimal fishing level. The level on the second lake up the chain was also good on our day two foray. It was nice to try two different lakes on the same weekend trip. It was also great that we did not see anyone else fishing so we had the whole place to ourselves. This is the beauty of our part of the world; lots of lakes and streams to fish with good access and few people who use them.

We used the pontoon boats on both of the lakes. After the obligatory morning 'drag' of equipment we were ready to go. Both lakes fished extremely well. At times we were catching fish on almost every cast. In addition to the frequency, the fights were sweet, lasting up to 10 to 15 minutes! The average size of fish caught was a hefty 18 to 20 inches with the biggest trout stretching over 25! We caught lots of beautiful fish over the two days and had a great time.

In terms of hatches, both lakes were similar. Callibaetis may flies were coming off the most, while chironomids and caddis pupae were hatching on the surface.

However, the fishing techniques differed between the two. On the first lake we did not use the typical chironomid fishing techniques. Instead we used a technique called 'deep line fishing' as the trout were right on the bottom. We measured the depth (25 - 30 feet) and then casted the fly out to that length. We used chromies and black

chromies. In addition, we trolled damsels and leech patterns which worked pretty good as well.

On the second lake, we were dry fly fishing on the surface with traveling sedge and caddis flies. We also used the typical chironomid fishing technique which worked very well. Similar hatches, but different techniques!

If you are coming up to fish the lakes in our region make sure you stop by the St. Mary Angler Fly Shop. We will be glad to point you in the direction of the lakes that are fishing well, in addition to letting you know what is working.

Hope to see you on the water soon!

(Report #3, 2004/05/30)

Lake fishing continues to produce, while the rivers look ready to go!

We were off to Premier Lake today under a changing sky as the weather refused to make up its mind! The high was around 60 degrees (15 Celsius) with wind picking up as the day progressed. One minute the sun was out, the next it was cool and windy. We alternated between fishing on the open water and darting into the sheltered bays from time to time.

The water conditions were gin clear and the depth is coming into the 'normal' fishing range. As the water level drops a little more, we will spend more time in the bays as the depth and bottom relief becomes more conducive to fishing.

Given the mixed conditions, we responded by mixing up our approach. Today we tried both chironomid techniques, as well as using the wet lines. The average size trout released was between 14 and 15 inches. We had an interesting surprise today as we caught a really nice, chunky, brook trout around 16 inches. Nice fish. The rest of the catch was all silver, shiny, rainbow trout.

Today we were greeted with the sight of intense activity on behalf of the the sparrows flying close to the water. As we got set up and started to look around it became apparent that this aeronautical display was driven with by a big hatch of chironomids. Over the course of the afternoon we used leeches, damsels, full backs and half backs in the size 12 and 14 class. Snow-cone chironomids and chromies were also working well. While the weather was mixed the fishing was pretty steady all day as we caught over 20 fish between the two of us.

While we continue to fish the lakes, we are keenly awaiting the opening of the rivers on June 15th. They are really rounding into form as the runoff has been steady, but light. We expect conditions to be 'spring optimal' as soon as they open and will be floating on the 15th and guiding trips on the 16th.

We are really excited about the upcoming season. Hope to see you on the water soon!

(Report #2, 2004/05/09)

Premier Lake is starting to round into form.

Today we ventured out onto Premier Lake, the home of our version of the 'Silver Bullet'. It was a little cool as the high for the day only reached 57 degrees (14 Celsius). When the sun peaked out from behind the clouds it was nice and comfortable, but when things clouded up we were thankful to have dressed warm and in layers. The wind was up as well, so we found a little bay out of the wind which was nice and calm. The water conditions were very clear, but Premier is still a little high from the early season snow-melt.

Today we fished out of the comfort of our 14 foot aluminum boat. It is always nice to have the storage space and protection afforded by the boat when the weather conditions are less than optimal. So we anchored up in shallow water on top of a drop off ledge with the wind at your back. We fished for three hours in the afternoon and found the Lake fished pretty consistently.

We caught and released about 8 fish each with the average size in the 15 to 17 inch class. Some of the fish are still spawning, but most are now bright silver, thus the moniker refer to above. The biggest fish caught was just over 17 inches, a nice and healthy lake reared rainbow trout.

Midge and pupa chironomids were dominant as they were hatching consistently throughout the trip. In May and early June the diet of these fish is about 80 percent chironomids. As the weather gets warmer more food sources start to appear in and on the water. This abundance of food gives the fish much more choice and their feeding habits change accordingly.

We had good success using black chironomids and snow-cones. We also caught some nice fish using black and red leeches, doc spratleys and zug bugs.

While it is still a little early in the season for Premier Lake, we still caught some nice, lively 'Silver Bullets'!

Hope to see you on the water soon!

(Report #1, 2004/05/01)

Here we go again!

The ice is off the water so we packed up our gear and headed up the valley to the Mitton Lakes for the first action of spring. We have had a fairly dry spring to go along with an abnormally low snow pack of only 61 percent this winter. This has led to a small and controlled snow-melt and runoff so the lake levels are pretty well optimal for trout fishing already.

The Mitton Lakes are located in the beautiful Bugaboo Mountains. Access to this chain of lakes varies as you can drive to some and have to hike to others. However, like most of the back roads in this part of British Columbia, traveling in a four wheel drive is very much advised.

On this trip the weather was fantastic. We fished under a calm blue sky all day with temperatures reaching 81 degrees (27 Celsius). With the lake levels stabilized we had excellent visibility and could see the fish swimming under us so we had good success on the sight fishing from our self-propelled pontoon boats. No motors allowed on these small lakes.

Today the fishing was very hot, as each of us caught about 20 bulky rainbows within the 18 to 21 inch range! The prize of the day was a whopping 27 incher! What a beauty!

Midge chironomids and pupas were the dominant hatches on this trip. The flies of choice were snow cone chironomids and the size 16 black chironomids, black leeches, half backs and full backs. When the fishing is hot out here you can toss a lot of stuff out there with pretty good success!

Because it was our first day out we had to refresh our minds on a few of the lake fishing basics. Probably the most important thing to do when chironomid fishing is to anchor your boat with the wind at your back. We always try to fish over a drop off ledge casting our dry line with a leader and tippet from 15 to 20 feet in length. We like to let the leader sink and slowly retrieve the line with a keen eye on the strike indicator as it definitely helps us see the strikes!

The Mitton Lake chain always produces pretty well and on this trip they really delivered some fabulous fish! Hope to see you out on the water soon!