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## **St. Mary Angler Guide Service: a review of the 2019 fishing season.**

### **Overview of the Conditions.**

Last winter brought us a snowpack that was lower than usual. On May 1st the snowpack was 79% of 'normal' across B.C., a major reversal from what we saw in 2017 and 18. As of May 1st the snowpack in the East Kootenay region, which includes the St. Mary, Elk, Bull and Skookumchuck rivers, was at 70%, way less than 2018. Over in the West Kootenays, where we fish the upper Columbia River, it was 89%, again, a far cry from the 180% received in 2018!

Spring temperatures in eastern B.C. were above normal while precipitation was below. By mid-May close to 25% of the accumulated snowpack had melted. With the low snowpack and early melt in 2019, the risk of flooding remained low throughout the spring. The risk soon shifted from spring flooding to the increased likelihood of low flow conditions and warmer water temperatures in the summer. Along with 2015 and 2016, this year was amongst the lowest snowpacks observed in BC over the past 40 years.

We then experienced lower than average rainfall in May, August and October and above normal rainfall in June, July and September in the East Kootenays. So, with the low snow pack we started fishing the St. Mary and Elk rivers in late June, a little ahead of schedule.

In terms of air temperature in the East Kootenays, it was warmer than usual in May, June and August, but cooler in July, September and October. So, fall was a little cooler than we expected. The lower temperatures and higher precipitation in July and September meant we had very few fires and no days of smoke, yay! It also meant the rivers in the East Kootenays experienced good flows and cool water throughout the season providing excellent fishing conditions.

Over on the upper Columbia River in the West Kootenays the air temperature was also warmer in May, June and August. As in the East Kootenays, things got cooler in

September and October. There were no fires of note in the upper Columbia valley where we fish and no days of smoke. As the Columbia is a “tailwater fishery”, located downstream of a dam, the water conditions in the spring and fall were very stable and we experienced excellent fishing conditions throughout 2019.

We started the fishing season on the upper Columbia River in the middle of April. The fishing for wild Westslope Cutthroat on the St. Mary River started in the third week of June. We took our first anglers out on the Elk River in mid-July. We got onto the Skookumchuck and Bull by late July. The season lasted into late September and early October on the Elk and St. Mary rivers respectively. In late October we packed up our spey and fly rods on the upper Columbia River.

### East Kootenay Temperature and Rainfall (Station ‘Cranbrook A’, B.C.):

| Month                                      | May                  | June                  | July                 | August               | September             | October              |
|--|----------------------|-----------------------|----------------------|----------------------|-----------------------|----------------------|
| Temperature in 2019                        | 19.1 °C<br>(66.4°F)  | 22.5°C<br>(72.5°F)    | 24.8°C<br>(76.6°F)   | 27.6°C<br>(81.7°F)   | 18.5°C<br>(65.3°F)    | 8°C<br>(46.4°F)      |
| Average Daily Max. Temperature (1981-2010) | 17.9°C<br>(64°F)     | 21.6°C<br>(71°F)      | 26.2°C<br>(79°F)     | 26.0°C<br>(79°F)     | 19.9°C<br>(68°F)      | 11.7°C<br>(53°F)     |
| Rainfall in 2019                           | 31 mm<br>(1.2 in.)   | 69 mm<br>(2.7 in.)    | 63 mm<br>(2.5 in.)   | 14.2 mm<br>(.56 in.) | 55 mm<br>(2.2 in.)    | 17 mm (.7 in.)       |
| Average Monthly Rainfall (1981-2010)       | 46.1 mm<br>(1.8 in.) | 62.2 mm<br>(2.45 in.) | 38.3 mm<br>(1.5 in.) | 28 mm<br>(1.1 in.)   | 31.3 mm<br>(1.23 in.) | 20.8 mm<br>(.82 in.) |

### Columbia River Temperature and Rainfall (Station Castlegar, B.C.):

| Month                                | April                | May               | June                | July              | August            | September         | October           |
|--------------------------------------|----------------------|-------------------|---------------------|-------------------|-------------------|-------------------|-------------------|
| Temp. in 2019                        | 14.6°C<br>(58°F)     | 23.2°C<br>(74°F)  | 25.4°C<br>(78°F)    | 27.1°C<br>(81°F)  | 30.1°C<br>(86°F)  | 19.9°C<br>(68°F)  | 10.6°C<br>(51°F)  |
| Average Daily Max. Temp. (1981-2010) | 15.3 °C<br>(60°F)    | 20°C<br>(68°F)    | 23.6 °C<br>(74.5°F) | 28.1°C<br>(83°F)  | 28.2 °C<br>(83°F) | 22 °C (72°F)      | 12.9 °C<br>(55°F) |
| Rainfall in 2019                     | No data              | No data           | No data             | No data           | No data           | No data           | No data           |
| Average Rainfall (1981-2010)         | 59.3 mm<br>(2.3 in.) | 70.3 mm<br>(2.77) | 72.3 mm<br>(2.84)   | 48.1 mm<br>(1.89) | 30.4 mm<br>(1.2)  | 42.4 mm<br>(1.67) | 49.4 mm<br>(1.94) |

### The Spring Season on the Upper Columbia River in the West Kootenays.

We fish the stretch of the upper Columbia River from its confluence with the Kootenay River down to where it crosses the Canada-U.S. Border. This tailwater fishery flows about 35 miles, so we have lots of water to choose from. In 2019 we hit the water in early April and fished through June.

We take two approaches to fishing the upper Columbia. The first is to fish from our jet boat using dry flies, nymphs or streamers. The second approach is to get out of the boat and wade in from the wide cobblestone shorelines and big gravel bars. From here we cast dry flies using standard fly rods, or double handed spey rods... whatever you like!

The rainbow fishing on the Columbia is very productive in the spring. The weather is always a mixed bag of sun and showers. As per usual we took our standard approach to spring fishing using streamers with a sinking line, as well as fly rods set up for nymphing. We carried dry fly rod setups in the event that a hatch popped off.

After reaching our preferred fishing zone on the River by boat, we like to cut the motor and do a controlled drift downstream. This allows us to fish the bank edges along any run. At the end of a run we usually slide into a big back eddy of revolving water where we fish the seams and feed lanes. As the spring moves along we do more fishing from shore with the spey rods.

Most of the rainbows we landed in the early spring season were in the 17 to 20 inch range, with fish over 22 showing up on occasion. As the spring moved along the average fish size landed tended to get larger, more in the 18-21 inch slot and fish over 23 showing up. Catch rates were good this spring ranging from 10-20 rainbows per angler day, depending on an angler's ability to cast and the conditions.

The water flow on the Columbia this spring was running typically low starting off at around 31,000 thousand cubic feet per second (CFS) in early April. These lower flows exposed a lot of shoreline, rock and cobble piers and big in-river gravel bars. By May 1 the flows were up to about 44,000 CFS. From May 1 to the end of May flows increased to around 87,000. In the second week of June flows peaked at around 95,000 declining to 81,000 by the 30th. The higher flows resulted in a full channel with less exposed gravel bars and cobble shoreline, but bigger eddies. As flows increase through the spring then stabilized for the summer, the fish tend to move from along the banks and runs into the big back eddies. So as time progresses we switched from drifting the runs and floating along the shorelines, to more time spent fishing the feed lanes in the big eddies.

The Columbia remained typically clear throughout the spring providing excellent fishing conditions. During the spring we fished all four stretches of the upper Columbia with good catch rates. We also experienced the typical robust hatches of caddis, Blue Winged Olives, callibaetis and mayflies. When you throw your line into the Columbia and hook one of its rainbows you don't have any idea what size of fish has taken your fly, but you can be assured it will run and pull hard!

### **Summer Cutthroat Fishing on the St.Mary, Elk, Bull and Skookumchuck Rivers in the East Kootenays.**

We were out on the St.Mary River in the first week of July. On our July 12<sup>th</sup> float it was a lovely 24C° (75F°). The water was dropping nicely with pools and runs well defined and

clear. Hatches of caddis and small black midges were coming off. On this float the anglers caught and released about 15 wild Westslope Cutthroat trout each. Four or five of the fish came in over 16 inches and chunky. One angler on this day hooked a nice 20-inch cut-bow that jumped and jumped, almost pulling her into her backing... what a fight! She was so excited to land that fish taking multiple pictures... what a day!

The Elk River was shaping up nicely by the end of the second week of July. On one of our first trips out in mid-July it was a comfortable 21-22 C° (70-72 F°), after a few days of rain. The water had a little colour but enough visibility for dry fly fishing. The flows were summer normal and the water temperatures were nice and cool! On this particular day the cutthroats were very happy to take the dry fly on the surface. The fishing started off with a bang and continued throughout the day. The anglers managed to hook and land 30 fish between the two of them. We could see that the Elk River cuts had wintered well as they looked strong and healthy with their telltale red stripe under the chin standing out for all to see. The season was off to a great start.

By late July the weather was hot with a few rainy days mixed in with clear skies as the St.Mary, Elk, Bull and Skookumchuck were all fishing well. Everyone was seeing good catch rates and the cutthroats were healthy and colourful.

Early August brought us some absolutely beautiful hot clear days with little rainfall. On August 3rd we fished one of the middle sections of the St.Mary River from the pumphouse down to the pullout at Wycliffe. While one angler was waiting for the boat to go into the water, he hooked a beautiful Westslope Cutthroat from the shore. While landing the fish, a big osprey swooped down from behind him and dove on his trout! Luckily, the osprey missed and the angler was able to land the cutthroat and get a picture. This angler's day was made before he even got into the boat! He went on to land another 20+ cutthroats, all in the 13 to 15 inch range. At this point in the season we were seeing a few hatches of small midges and a few caddis as the population of grasshoppers in the adjacent fields was exploding.

By mid-August we were into optimal summer conditions as we were running the St.Mary and Elk rivers on a daily basis, as well as hitting the Bull and the Skook. The rivers were running a little bit higher than usual, which kept water temperatures down and the fish healthy. In addition, the skies were completely clear of smoke this year as we had no wildfires, a nice bonus. On the Elk we were seeing hatches of Green Drakes, Blue Winged Olives, Mahogany Duns and caddis appearing regularly. Catch rates were normal and everyone was having good success out on the water.

September started off great on the Elk and St.Mary rivers with anglers landing around 20 cutthroat trout each per day. The fishing was very steady with as many fish missed as caught. Most of the cuts were in the 14 to 15 inch range with some in the 16 to 18-inch slot, which made for some nice fights. Into the second week of September we started to see some cool mornings and some rain which signaled the early start of fall. At this point the fish were healthy and chunky.

Those who were fortunate to get out on the water in September enjoyed great fishing. With a backdrop of fall colours and the light angler pressure associated with the kids back in school it made for some wonderful floats. As the kokanee started entering the St. Mary in later September in preparation for spawning, it signaled to us it was time to head back to the upper Columbia River to fish for rainbows.

### **Fall Fishing for Big Rainbows on the Upper Columbia River.**

By the third week of September we were back fishing for big rainbows on the upper Columbia River. By this time of year, the flows were running at 42,000 CFS normal for this time of year. With these lower fall flows, a lot more shoreline was exposed so fishing along the bank edges was way more accessible. That said, there were still a lot of fish holding and feeding in the big back eddies.

On our September 30<sup>th</sup> trip we took to the top section of the Columbia launching at the Robson boat launch just upstream of the confluence with the Kootenay River. By now the flow was around 32,000 CFS and the water was clear as a bell. The day started out cool and crisp, warming up nicely under a clear blue sky... perfect fall weather on the Big River.

We cruised downriver past the mouth of the Kootenay River in search of prime water. The Columbia River is such a big mass of water that it can be overwhelming. So, you have to break it down into smaller chunks to make it digestible and easier to fish.

Throughout this day, small Blue Winged Olives were hatching in addition to October Caddis and small midges. In response, the anglers used Blue Winged Olives and October Caddis as their dry fly patterns. In terms of the nymph patterns deployed there was Copper Johns, Purple Prince, regular Prince, Lightning Bugs and stone fly nymphs. The streamers used included the Pickle, Kelly's Super Streamer and a few different types of big white and black streamers.

The anglers did very well throughout the day, even when it was cooler in the morning, as the fish were on and biting. The two anglers landed 30 rainbows. These trout averaged 18 to 21 inches with a few in the 22-23 inch slot landed. These fall rainbows were very brightly coloured, thick and powerful... and they love to run and jump!

Our approach on the water was twofold. The first was to power upriver to the top of the big long runs, cut the motor and do a controlled drift under oar power downstream, casting towards the bank as we went. The second was to drift down into the big back eddies, then again under the power of the oars, hold in the prime water as the guys casted into the feed lanes. Both of these approaches provided lots of hits and plenty of fish were caught and released.

We finished out the fall season with a trip on October 14<sup>th</sup>.... deep into fall. On this day we were on the bottom section down towards the International Boundary. Again, cool to

start, but warming up enough under a clear fall sky for us to take off our jackets in the afternoon!

The fish were active early as we caught trout right from the start. We had lots of success using both our nymph rods, as well as using streamers as there were many rainbows camped out in the shallows along the shoreline. The two anglers caught 20 nice rainbows between them. The average size was 18 to 21 inches. The fish were very aggressive when they hooked up and jumped out of the water many times. One 21-inch rainbow almost jumped into the boat at one point, it was crazy, but a lot of fun. We had a very productive month of September/October fishing to close off the 2019 season in Southeastern B.C.

### **Annual Hosted Trip to Christmas Island**

In February of 2019, we hosted our annual one week fishing trip to the Republic of Kiribati (Christmas Island). Christmas is located 1,300 miles south of the Hawaiian Islands. As the host, we made all the arrangements booking our group of 13 into a local lodge. The lodge provided all our meals, while featuring air-condition bungalows with private baths, comfortably accommodating our group.

Each day the head guide scheduled where we would fish depending on the tide, sun position and angler's interests. In the morning each group would leave the beach with their personal guide and boatman. Each angler had their own guide, which is great for all fishers regardless of level of skill.

On Christmas Island we target Bonefish, Giant Trevally (G.T.s) and Trigger fish. That said, we do occasionally hooked the many other types of reef fish that inhabit the waters. The guide carries your 10-12 weight rod, while you look to spot GT's in your fishing area. We use 8 weight rods for the bones.

Our group caught between 10-30 bonefish a day with chances to hookup GT's and triggers. Bonefish averaged 2-6 pounds, but a number of fish in the 9 to 12 range were landed. Many GT's were caught in the 5 to 10 pound range with opportunities at 50 plus pounds keeping us all motivated. The largest bonefish landed was 12 pounds while the biggest GT came in at a whopping 40 pounds!

The St.Mary Angler is hosting another group to Christmas Island again this February 25 to March 3rd<sup>th</sup>, 2020, departing flights from Honolulu.

So that all folks!, another year of great fishing and adventure with the St.Mary Angler is done. It sure went by fast. We would like to thank all those anglers for the opportunity to accompany them out on the water this year and hope everyone had fun.

We greatly appreciated the patronage of our guide service and all those who came into our fly shop in Cranbrook. We would like to wish everyone an enjoyable winter season with family and friends. We hope to see you again in 2020.

We will be attending tradeshows in Denver, Puyallup and Portland in early 2020. We are now booking floats for the 2020 season. If you have an interest in coming along with us to Christmas Island, or wish to book a trip to any of the rivers we float in B.C., please give us a call.

You can contact us anytime via 1-800-667-2311 or email us. We are always eager to talk about our fishing venues and be sure to follow us at the Facebook link below to keep up to date on the rivers.

Take care,

*Kelly & Karen*

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PS To see what tradeshows we will be attending in early 2020, go to <http://www.stmaryangler.com/tradeshows/> for dates, locations and to contact us for will call tickets if you will be attending. To learn more about the rivers we fish check out <http://www.stmaryangler.com/stmary/>

## **2019 Fishing Reports:**

### **Report #19 (October 14th, 2019)**

### **The Columbia River Continues to Fish Very Well into the Fall!**

We are deep into fall now on the Columbia River. The days are getting shorter and the weather is now much cooler. We are experiencing some sunny days, but rain in the valley and snow up in the mountains are pretty well the norm for this time of year. Today we decided to fish

the [lowest section](#) of our portion of the Columbia River as we put the boat in at Beaver Creek just upstream from the International border.

The Beaver Creek boat launch closes after Canadian Thanksgiving so we are lucky to get one more float down on the lower end this season. On this day the weather was absolutely gorgeous with the temperature starting around 9°C (48°F) warming up to a comfortable 14°C (57°F) in the afternoon. There was no wind or rain and at times we had to take our jackets off because it got too warm.... I just love these kind of October days.

The fish were active early on today as we caught trout right from the start. We had lots of success using both our nymph rods, as well as using streamers.

There are many trout now camped out in the shallows along the shoreline. So if you can get a good cast into this area as the boat drifts downstream from say 30 to 40 feet, you have a chance to hook into one of these big rainbows. At this time of year the fish have fed all summer long on caddis et al, and they are very healthy, strong and chunky. The Columbia is a massive system that makes for big powerful rainbows.

The flow in the Columbia has dropped in this last few weeks, typical for this time of year. This has caused a change in the River hydrology, forcing the fish to move along the bank edges to feed.

Today the two anglers caught 20 nice rainbows between them. The average size was between 18 and 21 inches. The fish were very aggressive when they hooked up and jumped out of the water many times. One 21-inch rainbow almost jumped into the boat at one point, it was crazy, but a lot of fun.

When you hook into these fish, you definitely have to let the fish run and take line because if you don't, they can bust you off and be gone in a flash of silver.



We broke up the day with a nice shore lunch on the River, then fished from shore for a while before we headed back out to fish in different spots through the afternoon. On the River today we saw some Caddis hatching, as well as a few Blue Winged Olives and some big October Caddis. The nymph patterns used included the Purple Prince, regular Prince, Copper Johns and Hare's Ear, and for streamers we used Kelly's Super Streamer, Pat's Rubber Leg and sculpin patterns.

We saw a few other fishers out on the Columbia on this glorious fall day, which was nice to see.

We have a few more days guiding left on the Columbia River this month then our season we will wrap up. So we want to take this opportunity to thank everyone who fished with us this year for your patronage and making 2019 a successful season.

All the best,

**Kelly and Karen**

**St. Mary Angler**

PS keep in touch with us through [stmaryangler.com](http://stmaryangler.com) and facebook to find out which tradeshow we will be attending this winter and available spaces on our annual Christmas Island trip.

**Report #18 (September 30th, 2019)**

**The temperature is cool, but the fishing is hot on the Columbia River!**

We have had a cool autumn this year with the temperatures dropping last week and continuing to stay low across the southeastern corner of B.C. We have also seen quite a bit of snow accumulating on the mountain tops making for some striking views when the sun shines, just beautiful!

The mornings are starting out at around 3 to 4°C (37-39°F), reaching highs of 12 to 14°C (55-57°F), with the sunshine.

On this day the guys decided to float the [top section](#) of the Columbia from the Robson boat launch, downstream. We hit the water at around 10-10:30 a.m., after things had a chance to warm up a bit, and stayed out on the River until 6 p.m.

Shortly after launching the jet boat we cruised downriver in search of some promising water. We went quite a way down, scouting out certain eddies and runs, before powering back up to the most promising sites.

The Columbia River is such a big piece of water that it can be overwhelming. So you have to break it down into smaller chunks to make it digestible and easier to fish.

We had all the fly rods set up with different lines in advance so we were ready to go with streamers, nymphs or dry flies. So whatever presented itself, we were ready to respond. This way the guide can choose whatever fly rod he thinks the clients should fish depending on the conditions. Spey rods are also in the mix should the anglers bring them along as the current conditions are perfect for fishing from the shore now.

Throughout the day, small Blue Winged Olives were hatching in addition to October Caddis and small midges. In response, the guys used Blue Winged Olives and October Caddis as their dry fly patterns. In terms of the nymph patterns they used Copper Johns, Purple Prince, regular Prince, Lightning Bugs and stone fly nymphs. The

streamers included the Pickle, Kelly's Super Streamer and a few different types of big white and black streamers.

The anglers did very well throughout the day, even when it was cooler in the morning, as the fish were on and biting. Between the two of them they landed 30 rainbows. Their average size was 18 to 21 inches with a few in the 22-23 inch slot being landed. These rainbows are very brightly coloured, are thick and powerful now. They are feeding aggressively as temperatures have dropped and they are keen to bulk up for winter.

During the float we saw bald eagles and ospreys above, as well as groups of turkeys feeding along the shoreline. We were also treated to seeing a group of mountain goats up on the hillside earlier on in the morning.

As long as the weather holds and the temperatures are not too cold, we will be guiding on the Columbia River.

The weather service is calling for some warmer seasonal temperatures next week so we will be out on the River enjoying this incredible piece of water for the rest of October.

Tight lines,

**Kelly and Karen**

**St. Mary Angler**

**Report #17 (September 20th, 2019)**

## **Fall is here so we are off to the Columbia River to chase the big rainbows!**

As we head towards the end of September we are nearing the end of another successful season of fishing the rivers of the East Kootenays. While we still have some trips scheduled for the Elk and St. Mary rivers, the coming of fall signals that it is time to head over to the Columbia River to fish for big rainbow trout. We fish the stretch of the Columbia from the confluence with the Kootenay River down to where it crosses the U.S. border. We will be on the Columbia from now until late October, weather permitting.

On this trip to the Columbia we decided to focus on the [middle section](#) between the settlement of Genelle down to the City of Trail. After having a great breakfast at Gabriel's at the Prestige Hotel in Rossland, we headed downhill into the valley to fish the Big River.

The weather was typical for a mid-September day in the West Kootenay; cool in the morning with high cloud. As the day progressed, the sun made a couple appearances mixed in with some rain, yep a normal fall day. Just remember to dress in layers and always bring a rain jacket, waders and boots and you will be fine. The temperature today started off at 8 to 10°C (46-50°F) and warmed up to a high of 16 to 18°C (61-64°F).

The flow of the Columbia River now is around 42,000 cubic feet per second (1,170 CMS), normal for this time of year. With these lower fall flows, a lot more shoreline is exposed so fishing along the bank edges becomes a lot more accessible. That said, there are still a lot of fish holding and feeding in the big back eddies.

After launching the jet boat we cruised downriver on the lookout for favourable bank structures and nice eddies to fish. We like to enter the eddies from the top, cutting the engine upstream and rowing silently into the eddy so we do not disturb the holding and feeding

rainbows. The Columbia River rainbows are easily spooked, so we always want to be quiet as we approach them in their runs and eddies.

The Columbia is described as an 'intermediate' fly fisher's river. You want to be able to cast at least 30 to 40 feet out and away from the boat. An ability to cast out and to a specific point on the water will increase your chance of hooking up on one of these beautiful trout.

Today, as we floated along the bank edges, we threw streamers and nymphs close to the shoreline. When in the back eddies we tried some nymphing and tossed streamers. The fishing was quite good in the morning as the guys landed 10 fish each. Unfortunately, a storm rolled in around 1 p.m. and the wind and rain really picked up! At this point the fish just hunkered down and were very tough to catch.

The guys worked quite hard for a couple of more hours, landing a few more rainbows. Fortunately, as the weather cleared up the fishing picked up again and the clients landed a few more fish before calling it a day. On this trip, the anglers landed between 15 to 20 rainbows each. A really nice outing.

In terms of hatches, we saw some October Caddis and Blue Winged Olives coming off the water. Sometimes when a hatch is coming off we will switch to a dry fly setup and have the anglers cast for the fish as they are rising to the surface.

There is definitely a fall feeling in the air now. With the leaves changing colour and a dusting of snow on the mountains, it is time to get out and fish now.... before the season is over!

Have fun and stay safe on the water.

Tight lines,

**Kelly and Karen**

## **St. Mary Angler**

### **Report #16 (September 9th, 2019)**

#### **Fall has arrived to the St. Mary River!**

We are now into the heart of September and it feels like fall! The weather has changed drastically as summer fades into the rearview mirror of memory. The daily temperatures now range from 8°C (47°F) to start and climb to highs of 15 to 18°C (60-65°F) in the afternoon. Recently we have had days with rainy and stormy weather. Fortunately, the storms have rolled through pretty quickly with most of the days being cloudy with the sun peeking through occasionally.

Today our destination was to float the bottom section of the St. Mary River. With the rain we've had in the last few days the River has come about a foot and the bottom section has been fishing very well. I think the fish are very happy with the cooler weather and recent pulse of rain. They are feeding aggressively in this last stretch of the season.

At this time of year, the St. Mary River, as well as all the small tributaries of the Kootenay River, is experiencing the influx of spawning Kokanee. They usually start heading up the small streams around the end of August and continue through September. This does change the feeding habits of the cutthroat and cut bows in the system. But you can still get them to come to a dry fly if you work at it. We are also seeing a higher number of rainbows entering St. Mary River system now.

On this float the anglers fished along the bank edges, behind logs and in the runs trying to entice the wild Westslope Cutthroat to come to the surface. In the cool morning they tried some nymphs and smaller flies. After the rays of the sun had time to warm the water column up a bit,

they broke out the bigger attractor patterns. When it's cool on the St. Mary we still see some hatches including midges and Blue Winged Olives. These are in addition to the grasshoppers which remain present are all along the bank edges now.

The patterns fished by the anglers included; Purple Haze, Blue Winged Olives, Green Drakes and various caddis patterns. They also casted Fat Alberts, Chernobyl Ants, and an assortment of beetle and ant patterns.

The anglers caught some fish in the morning with more showing as the day progressed. By afternoon they had caught around 20 cutthroats each. They also caught some rainbows and cut-bows. The average sized cutthroat was 13 to 15 inches, with the rainbows tending to be a little bit bigger and chunkier .... up to 18. All the fish were healthy, obviously feeding quite well over the summer.

The cooler the weather, the more wildlife we tend to see. Today we saw some elk down near the River, as well as a wide variety of birds. Now we will see the odd bear coming down towards the River to feed on the spawning Kokanee ... everyone's gotta eat!

Into September one definitely has to dress in layers and bring rain gear along with waders and boots. It is always more enjoyable when one is prepared for the weather.

We will continue guiding on the Elk and the St. Mary rivers into October, but are also sending a couple of guides over to the Mighty Columbia River soon. The fall fishing on the Columbia for big rainbow trout is awesome and we really enjoy it as the final phase of our guiding season.

It has been a great fishing season so far. The catch rates have been good and the water levels and weather conditions have held up well.

Tight lines,

## **Kelly and Karen**

### **St. Mary Angler**

PS Call us at 1-800-667-2311 to discuss a day of fall fishing for big rainbows on the Columbia River into October.

## **Report #15 (September 3rd, 2019)**

### **The Elk River is fine fall form!**

Today we headed over to the Elk River to fish a shorter section of water where we could get out of the boat and spend the bulk of our time fishing from shore. Our Moravia rafts make it very easy to put in anywhere, as well as pull over and cast from shore wherever we want.

Right from the start, the dry fly action was on. The cutthroat trout were coming readily to the surface to eat the fly. We continued on the float, stopping at the head of the promising looking runs to get out and cast along the bank edges and behind rock structures. As always, when casting, you have to get a good drift on the fly, or the fish won't even look at it.

Today the anglers landed around 20 cutthroat trout each. The fishing was very steady with as many fish missed as caught. Most of the fish were in the 14 to 15 inch range with a couple in the 17 to 18 slot, which put up a nice fight.

There was little in the way of a hatches happening on this particular day with only some small midges coming off, but the grasshoppers were everywhere in the fields.



On the day we fished an assortment of dries including; Green Drakes, Blue Winged Olives, Mahogany Duns and Caddis in the morning, then switched over to foam patterns for the afternoon including; beetles, ants and Chubby Chernobyls in the afternoon.

As we floated down the Elk we saw a number of eagles and osprey busy tending their young. We also saw a number of ducks moving their young along the River's edge. It was a busy place for wildlife!

The September weather is looking great as the dry fly season continues in southeastern B.C. So give us a shout if you have some time for a September float on the Elk or St.Mary rivers.

Tight lines,

**Kelly and Karen**

**St.Mary Angler**

PS Call us at 1-800-667-2311 to discuss available days on the Elk or St.Mary this September, or a fall day of fishing big rainbows on the Columbia River into October.

## **Report #14 (August 25th, 2019)**

### **The Bull River is perfect for dry fly fishing!**

We are now in the middle of a stretch of gorgeous weather here in the East Kootenay region of southern B.C. The mornings are cool and crisp with clear blue skies and afternoon temperatures reaching a high of 26-28°C (80-83°F). We definitely can feel the coming of fall in the mornings, but the warm afternoons remind us there is still plenty of

time left for cutthroat fishing in 2019. With this in mind, the anglers got up nice and early today and we all headed out to fish the Bull River.

The drive to the Bull River is about 45 minutes from our Cranbrook fly shop. The Bull River provides spectacular views as it spills out of the Rockies. It is a beautiful high mountain stream that provides ample opportunities to dry fly fish for wild Westslope Cutthroat Trout. On this River the guides are on the oars a lot as there are many rocks and structures to maneuver around, so be prepared for a lot of action.

Today we floated the lower section of the Bull River, above the dam. This stretch is a particularly scenic run of river. Quickly upon our arrival, the anglers put on dry flies then climbed into the boat and readied themselves for a day of casting. As we floated down the River they launched their lines behind rocks, along log structures and close to the bank edges in anticipation of enticing the hungry cuts.

In the morning the anglers only picked up a few fish, but as things warmed up, so did the action. By the afternoon the anglers had landed about 20 cutthroats each. The average sized trout was in the 13 to 14 inch slot, with a couple of really nice 16 inchers being landed. The cutthroat trout on the Bull are very healthy and feeding well now as they build their energy stores for winter.

We did see a few midge hatches on the day, but the menu is now mainly grass hoppers as they are visible all along the bank edges.

We cycled through a variety of artificials including; Purple Haze, Stimulators, Royal Wulffs, Chubby Chernobyls, Parachute Adams and Stimy Chew Toys, just to name a few.

As we floated down the River we were treated to the sight of a few whitetail deer, as well as eagles and ospreys. The combination of the dry fly fishing, the scenery and the wildlife made for a really nice day on the water.

With September just around the corner, I like to remind people that it is probably my favorite time of the year to be out on the water fly fishing. The combination of the fall colours, reduced angler pressure, crisp cool mornings followed by warm afternoons make for excellent conditions!

We will be guiding all the way through September in the East Kootenays, so if you are in the area give us a call and we can get you out on a float. Please stop in at the shop if you have any questions on where to go and what flies to use in our region. And always remember to check out the regulations because come September 1<sup>st</sup>, some of the rivers have closures to protect spawning bull trout.

Hope you are having fun out there and enjoy the fall fishing!

Tight lines,

**Kelly and Karen**

**St.Mary Angler**

PS Call us at 1-800-667-2311 to discuss a fall fishing trip for big rainbow trout on the Columbia River!

## **Report #13 (August 14th, 2019)**

### **Elk River Report: summer conditions are prime for dry fly fishing!**

We are halfway through August and the rivers are running at their normal flow for this time of year. Actually, we probably have a little bit more water than usual as we have seen a fair bit of rain in July and

August which is good for water temperatures and fish. In addition, the skies are completely clear of smoke this year as we have no wildfires.

Today was a beautiful sunny day for our group of anglers who were eager to drive over to the Elk River to dry fly fish for the wild Westslope Cutthroats. On our Elk trips we like to leave a little early from Cranbrook so we can get out on the water ASAP. The mornings are already starting to feel cool, but the days warm up quickly reaching afternoon temperatures around 27 to 28°C (80-83°F). We always pack extra gear and dress in layers so we can just peel things off as the day warms. And don't forget to bring along your raincoat as insurance!

On this float we hit the section of the Elk River that runs from Morrissey to Elko. We like this stretch as it flows away from the highway into a more natural setting with views of the Rockies that are spectacular... real "eye candy"!

To start off the anglers strung their rods and tied on a nice big dry fly attractor pattern. The approach on the Elk River is to cast along the bank edges, behind rocks and along the side of logs on the float. But you can also hop out of the boat and cast back up into a nice run, something we recommend doing quite a bit.

If you get a good cast, and mend the line so the fly floats naturally, then you stand a good chance of enticing a cutthroat up to the surface to eat your fly!

The temperature at the start of this float was quite cool so things started off slowly. As mid-morning came around the sun's rays had warmed up the water and the cutthroats were coming to the surface for a dry fly and the action picked up.

Sometimes when it's quite cool to start with, we will go to nymphs and fish under an indicator. But it has to be pretty tough fishing for us to go to over to the "dark side"!

By the end of the day, each angler had caught around 20 trout in the 14 to 17 inch range. They were all nice, chunky Westslope Cutthroat Trout!

The cuts seem to eat very well on the Elk River as there are many hatches that come off throughout the day and into the evenings. Green Drakes, Blue Winged Olives, Mahogany Duns, and Caddis are just a few hatches that regularly appear on the Elk. Today, along with these patterns, we also casted Purple Haze and various foam patterns such as Chernobyl Ants and Fat Alberts. There are many types of foam patterns that work very well. We also used the Parachute Adams which is a great cutthroat fly.

We recommend having a wide variety of flies in your box that you can try. As we all know, some days one fly works a lot better than another, so it's good to have a selection at your fingertips. Oh ya, and always have doubles because if a fly is working well and you loose it... that would be most unfortunate!

We saw lots of bird life on the water today including eagles, ospreys and geese. We also spooked some whitetail deer when we interrupted them sipping from the water's edge.

Overall the fishing season has been very good. The rivers have held their water and the fish seem to be happy with the cooler mornings and evenings as they continue to feed aggressively.

We hope you are getting out and enjoying the outdoors. It has been a very nice summer with no fires or smoke... just a normal, beautiful summer. If you have any questions about the rivers or what flies are working on them, stop into our Fly Shop in Cranbrook where we will be happy to help you out.

Tight lines,

## **Kelly and Karen**

### **St.Mary Angler**

PS Call us at 1-800-667-2311 to discuss available days this summer, or fall fishing options on the Columbia River.

## **Report #12 (August 3rd, 2019)**

### **Its summer time on the St.Mary River!**

The long hot days of summer are here! The weather this week has been absolutely beautiful with highs of 31°C (88°F). That said, the high mountains of the Kootenay Region provide us with cool evening breezes. So, after a long day of fly fishing it is very inviting to relax outside with a cool beverage and discuss the days exploits.

Today we decided to fish the section of the St.Mary River from the pumphouse down to the pullout at Wycliffe. While the angler was waiting for the boat to go into the water, he hooked a beautiful Westslope Cutthroat from the shore! While he was trying to land the fish, a big osprey flew down from behind him and dove towards his trout! Luckily the osprey missed the target and the angler was able to land the cutthroat and get a picture. This angler's day was made before he even got into the boat!

The River levels are dropping into their summer groove now. The cutthroats have found their feeding stations within their own natural pecking order in certain runs and along the bank edges. They are now feeding happily in the types of classic water we would expect to find them in... fattening up quickly in the few short months of summer.

As this float proceeded downriver the angler dry fly fished from the boat, casting along the banks, behind big rocks and along the logs trying to entice the cuts to take the dry fly on the surface.

With traditional dry flies you need to mend your line and let the fly float naturally down the run. However, with foam patterns, once you cast the fly, you mend it and give it a little shake so it looks like it's fluttering on the surface. This can drive the cutthroat crazy bringing them up to the surface to either take it, or to try to drown it before he eats it.

On this float the angler landed around 20 cutthroats, all in the 13 to 15 inch range. He also caught a few cut-bows in the 16 and 17 inch slot. The cut-bows love to jump out of the water and make aggressive runs. So it can be exciting to hook one of these guys.

In terms of the bug action, we saw a few hatches including some small midges and a few caddis. We are also starting to notice a lot of grasshoppers in the fields and along the bank edges.

We changed the fly many times today in an effort to fool the fish and bring them to the surface. Some of the flies used included; Orange and Yellow Stimulators, Purple Haze, Swisher Caddis, Royal Wulffs, Parachute Adams and Foam pattern, such as Fat Alberts and Chernobyl Ants.

If you are in the area feel free to come into our Cranbrook flyshop and we will let you know what's going on and what flies are working well. All the rivers are fishing quite good now and people are still fishing the local lakes with success. In fact, Whiteswan and Moose Lake have been fishing very well. Premier Lake is also seeing some nice fish being caught, although the fish are quite deep now so you must fish early mornings and later into the evening to have success.

We hope you are getting out and enjoying the backcountry while the weather is beautiful. Remember to bring your regulations along and check them to ensure you are in compliance with the law.

We hope you are getting out on the rivers, streams and lakes wherever you are!

Tight lines,

**Kelly and Karen**

**St.Mary Angler**

PS Call us at 1-800-667-2311 to book your float today!

## **Report #11 (July 25<sup>th</sup>, 2019)**

### **The Bull River is crystal clear and producing well!**

Today we headed up to the Bull River to chase some wild West Slope Cutthroat Trout. The Bull originates in the Rocky Mountains near the Continental Divide. It flows generally south and west, joining the Kootenay River east of Cranbrook. Today we floated the section above the Aberfeldie Dam (in between the Steeples and the Lizard ranges) where we dry fly fished all day!

The temperature saw a high of 25°C (77°F) with just a few clouds floating through a beautiful blue sky. The winds picked up near the end of the day which made casting a challenge.

The views from the Bull River are spectacular and the water is crystal clear. As we floated down River the anglers focused on casting between and behind rock structures and along the bank edges. On the Bull the guide has to be on the oars the whole day as there are many rocks and boulders to maneuver around. So, it is a very busy fishing experience for sure! Most of the fishing on the Bull is casting from the



boat, but there are a few places where you can stop and cast from shore.

The Bull River moves along pretty quickly so casts have to be precise and you need to mend the line to get a proper drift on the fly. If the fly drags even a little bit the fish will not even look up... so you have to keep that fly floating naturally long enough for the fish to spot it and be attracted to it.

Today, the cutthroat were very active as the anglers landed 15 each with the average size in the 12 to 13 inch class. They did catch a couple of 16 inch cutthroat which put up a nice fight in the swift clear water of the Bull River.

We did see lots of bird life on this float including eagles and ospreys. We also caught a glimpse of a bear running up the bank and into the bush as we floated by. We prefer to see all our bears from the boat on the move as opposed to when walking along the shore!

The Cutthroats have wintered well and are looking fantastic. They are eating aggressively as the summer is short in the Rockies. In terms of hatches we saw a couple of little midge hatches, nothing huge. We are also starting to see some grasshoppers in the fields and along the bank edges. The flies we used on the Bull today included; H&L Variant, Purple Haze, Chernobyl Ants, Caddis and few different types of foam patterns.

Over the last couple of weeks we have had some rain. These summer rain events can blow out the Bull and the Elk rivers on occasion. Therefore, before we venture up to float the Bull and Elk we always check before we go to see if the conditions are right. It can save you a few hours of driving because you cannot fish these streams when they go dark. It's been one of those years when we have received a fair amount of rain. But given the alternative of a dry year with wildfires, a moist year is a pretty good way to go as we have seen no fires and no smoke in the sky and we are loving it!

The summer fishing season is in full swing so drop by the fly shop and check out the flies that are working on each of the rivers and see all the new products in stock.

We hope you are enjoying the weather and getting out onto the rivers, wherever you are!

Tight lines,

**Kelly and Karen**

**St.Mary Angler**

PS Call us at 1-800-667-2311 to discuss fishing conditions and available days!

## **Report #10 (July 19<sup>th</sup>, 2019)**

### **The Elk River is rounding into dry fly form!**

The Elk River over near Fernie B.C. has come into shape over the last few days. Some of our guests wanted to go and fish on the Elk so we headed over to the lower section from Morrissey down to Elko. The Elk still has some colour to it, but it's got enough visibility for dry fly fishing.

Recently we have had a few storms roll through the valley bringing stormy weather and a lot of rain. But with the rain also comes numerous types of hatches on the River, especially the Green Drakes which can provide a lot of action.

Today's weather conditions saw an overcast sky with highs of 21 to 22°C (70-72°F). A few showers showed up in the afternoon, but the sun did shine through at various times throughout the day.

After we set the fly rods we started fishing foam patterns right from the get-go. The anglers casted along the bank edges and along the riffles that form into runs. When one fishes foam patterns you must remember to always twitch it a bit or the fish won't be attracted. And cutthroats tend to take the fly very slowly so when they rise to the surface you have to let them hook themselves. If you don't let them do the work, you will find yourself pulling the fly out of their mouth every time! So be patient.

On this particular day the cutthroats were very happy to take the dry fly on the surface. The fishing started off with a bang and continued throughout the day. The anglers managed to hook and land 30 fish between the two of them. The Elk River cuts have wintered well as they looked strong and healthy with their telltale red stripe under the chin standing out for all to see.

We did catch a couple of cutthroats in the 16 to 17 in range. These cuts put up a nice fight which made things exciting for the anglers.

The artificial flies used included; Green Drakes, red and black Fat Alberts, Purple Haze, Foam Chernobyl Ants, Stimulators and a few different types of Caddis patterns.

On the Elk River you must be able to cast your fly and mend your line to ensure a nice drift on the artificial. The fly must look like it's floating naturally down the stream. When there is more pressure on water the fish tend to be a little more fussy so you must present the fly properly.

The cast itself does not need to be that far from the boat, but when you fish small dry flies make sure your leader is a little longer to around 10 feet so it makes it easier to get a proper drift.

As we floated along the Elk River, casting our flies, we did notice a lot of bird life including eagles, ospreys and mergansers (fish eating ducks). When you are out on our rivers you never know what you're going to see in terms of wildlife, but if you look around between casts you may be surprised!

So we are now moving into mid-summer already. The fishing will only get better from here on in and with this weather we are looking at a nice long fishing season. If you have any questions about what flies or equipment to use on our rivers, come into the St. Mary Angler Fly Shop in Cranbrook and we will help you get everything you want.

Remember to have fun out on the water and play safe!

Tight lines,

**Kelly and Karen**

St.Mary Angler

PS Call us at 1-800-667-2311 to book your August dry fly float today!

## **Report #9 (July 12<sup>th</sup>, 2019)**

### **The summer dry fly season is here!**

The summer season is under way and the dry fly fishing on the St. Mary is very good now. While the River is slowly dropping, it is definitely holding water nicely as we have been getting rain here and there throughout the past couple weeks.

Today we decided to float the Pumphouse to Wycliffe section of the Mary. The weather started off beautiful in the morning, then the clouds built up by late afternoon with a few rain showers following. The temperature reached 24 to 25°C (75-77°F). It was calm in the morning with some light winds in the afternoon.

Before we launched, the anglers strung their fly rods setting up the gear for a day of dry fly fishing. Most of our anglers prefer to fish with 5 and 6 weight rods. However, if they are targeting bull trout they will use 7 and 8 weight rods as these fish can get quite large.

As we floated along we made casts towards the bank edges, behind rocks and along log jams. We also got out of the boat and walked up the back channels to fish a couple of times. We did see some sizeable bull trout lurking in the deep holes, but they eluded our attempts to hook them!

One thing to remember when you are using foam patterns on the St.Mary, or anywhere else, is to always keep them on the move. You want to cast, mend and then give the fly a little shake so it looks like it is fluttering on the surface. The cutthroat trout can't resist this motion and they will come flying out of the water to try to drown their meal. Remember you have to set the hook slowly with cuts as they take that fly veeerrrry slowly.

On this float the anglers caught and released about 15 trout each with four or five of them coming in over 16 inches and chunky. The lady angler with us today hooked a nice 20 inch cut-bow that jumped and jumped, almost pulling her into her backing... what a fight! She was so excited to land that fish taking multiple pictures... what a day!

In terms of the hatches on the River we saw mostly caddis and small black midges coming off. The flies used today included; foam patterns (Chernobyl Ants and Fat Alberts), orange and yellows Stimulators, Purple Haze and Green Drakes. They also tried a few different Caddis patterns as well.

Around 1:00 PM we pulled the boat over, set up the table and chairs and had a nice five-course shore lunch. After lunch the fishing was very steady. We stopped the boat in runs, allowing the anglers to cast their lines and get a good drift through the section. With a good drift all one has to do is wait to see if a big head will come out of the water and eat the fly... that is the most exciting part of dry fly fishing.

When dry fly fishing on the St.Mary one does a lot of concentrating on casting technique and managing the drift of the fly. But don't forget to stop and look up around once in a while as the Rocky Mountain backdrop and accompanying scenery is amazing!

We will soon be heading out to fish some of our other rivers this coming week. So we will be able to give you a report on the Elk, Bull and the Skookumchuck rivers soon.

If you have any questions about fishing in our region, feel free to drop by our Fly Shop in Cranbrook. We are happy to help you plan for a successful day on the water.

Tight lines,

**Kelly and Karen**

**St.Mary Angler**

PS Call us at 1-800-667-2311 to discuss available days or to book your summer float with us.

**Report #8 (July 6<sup>th</sup>, 2019)**

**The St.Mary River is Rounding into Form!**

The St. Mary River has come into shape over the last couple weeks and the fishing has been outstanding! We can now say for sure that the dry fly fishing is on for the summer – yay!

We decided to fish the lower section of the St. Mary today; from the St. Eugene Mission down to Fort Steele where we pull out. This section of the Mary tends to braid quite a bit and allows anglers to get out of the boat and pursue fish up the back channels on foot.

The weather in the East Kootenay Region has been a mixed bag of late. We have seen little bouts of rain morph into thunderstorms, then transition into sunshine and then do it all over again. So, we have been getting a little bit of everything. Today the temperature saw a high of 25°C (77°F). It was a beautiful summer day in the East Kootenays.

It is always a good idea to pack extra clothes and bring waders along on your float, just in case. The guides have a dry box in the boat where you can store your stuff. So if it does decide to rain you can readily put your jacket on and just continue to fish.

As the guides track downriver they are always looking for classic holding water along logs, rocks and bank edges where the fish tend to stay and feed. Right now the St. Mary's cutthroats are in the process of moving into their summer feeding lanes. So, while a patch of water may look completely fishable, you may not touch a fish. At the same time, the next piece downstream may be full of fish where you least expected them to be! So with the fish in transition, you just have to find them when you do, which makes current conditions a lot of fun.

The anglers stayed true to the dry fly today. They caught a few Cuts in the morning, but it really took off in the afternoon with the big guys coming to the surface to take the fly. The anglers landed 20 to 25 fish between them with the biggest being a nice 20-inch cut-bow that almost took us into the backing. The cut-bows love to jump and it's very thrilling to land one of these fish. In addition to the cut-bows, the

cutthroats landed were all very healthy with the average size looking a little bit bigger this year.

There have been lots of hatches early on this season. And today was no exception. We saw Green Drakes, PMD's, Yellow Sallies and Brown Caddis. The artificial flies working well included; Chernobyl Ants, Purple Haze, Green Drakes and Orange & Yellow Stimulators.

The lower section of the St.Mary is a wonderful stretch of water as it flows towards the Rockies providing you with amazing views. The guides will advise you to cast along the bank edges, logs and behind rocks and to get a good mend on your fly, so it floats naturally. If it's not floating naturally, the cutthroat may come up to look at it, but they won't take it.

Sometimes the fish will just outright refuse the fly. When this happens pull your line in and change of your fly immediately. If you continue to cast with the same fly you will just end up spooking them and they won't even come up when you do change the fly later on.

Today we saw ospreys and eagles around their nests tending their young. It looked like they were fishing themselves when we floated by. We also saw a small cinnamon colored bear run up the bank at one point. That was really cool to see!

Overall the St.Mary River has been fishing very well. The Elk River has started to clear and the fishing is getting quite good over by Fernie. The St.Mary River flows came up a bit over the last couple days due to the rains high up in the mountains. Fortunately, the headwater lake on the St.Mary buffers the flows and allows things to clear before the water enters the River. But it is an indication of the recent weather and that flows are in pretty good shape as we move towards summer.

So enjoy your dry fly fishing in the East Kootenays! If you have any questions stop by the St.Mary Angler Fly Shop in Cranbrook where we



can advise you on the latest conditions and help you choose the best flies.

Tight lines,

**Kelly**

**St.Mary Angler**

PS See you soon!

## **Report #7 (June 30<sup>th</sup>, 2019)**

### **The Season has Started Early and the St.Mary River is Already Producing Well!**

All the rivers in our Region 4 opened on June 15th and the fishing has been very good early on. Some rivers such as the Elk River have yet to clear up, but the St Mary, Skookumchuck and Bull rivers are all clear and water levels are dropping steadily.

Today we were on the St.Mary River keen to fish and check out any potential changes to gravel bars, banks and logjams. We floated from the Kimberley Golf Course down to the takeout at the St. Eugene Mission Resort. This is two sections of the River, which we were able to do in one float as the flow is still high enough to push us quickly along.

The weather was a very nice reaching a high of 24°C (75°F). We had a clear blue sky with a few clouds floating by in the late afternoon. Today we wanted to stay true to the dry fly, so right out of the gate we

hooked a couple small cutthroats on top of the water. These guys really hammered the fly on the surface!

If you can cast the fly into the correct water and mend to make it drift naturally, the cutthroats will come to the surface and give themselves away! We saw these cuts jump out of the water and try to drown the fly, roll beside it, and come up so slow that if you pulled it away too quickly you would deny them the fly! The cuts will key on the hatch some of the time, but most of the time if you get good drift on the fly they will come and take it on the surface without hesitation.

During the float we saw a lot of wildlife along the St. Mary. We saw two whitetail deer down drinking water and we quietly drifted by a large big Blue Herron - which was very cool to see. We saw an osprey nail a fish in a pool then watched as a big bald eagle tried to take the fish away! There were also lots of merganser ducks with their cute young ones cruising along the bank edges.

But the real show was the wild Westslope Cutthroat Trout. These fish have wintered well. They are very chunky and are fighting very aggressively when hooked. On this float we caught and released about 20 Cutthroats, it was a great day on the water.

During the float we noticed a number hatches coming off, including; Green Drakes, Pale Morning Duns, Yellow Sallies, as well as Stones and Caddis.

The flies that worked well included; stoneflies, Green Drakes, various foam patterns (i.e. Fat Alberts and Chernobyl Ants), as well as Purple Haze, PMDs and Yellow Sallies.

The season has started early and the fishing is great. Come on up and enjoy the East Kootenay region of British Columbia and everything we have to offer.

Be safe out there and have fun!

Tight Lines,

**Kelly**

**St.Mary Angler**

PS Drop into our fly shop in Cranbrook to see all different fly patterns and latest fly fishing equipment we have on display.

## **Report #6 (June 16<sup>th</sup>, 2019)**

### **All the Rivers are Now Open and the St.Mary is Looking Good Early in the Season!**

All the rivers in the East Kootenay region are now open as of June 15<sup>th</sup>. The lower accumulated snowpack this winter, in combination with the warm spring temperatures, has meant the peak runoff has already passed. The rivers are in very good shape for this early in the season. While they are still running high, the rivers are very clear and fishable. It has been several years since the rivers have looked this good, this early.

So on this day Father's Day weekend we decided to do a test fishery on the St.Mary River. Our goal on the day was to inspect for any changes to the river in terms of log jams, new channels, gravels bars, etc. and to see where the fish are.

We put the boat in at the Kimberley golf course and floated down through the Wycliffe section. It was a fairly quick float as the St.Mary is still high, moving us along quickly. That said, we were able to fish as we looked around for any obvious changes in River morphology. We stayed with the dry fly techniques, fishing the runs along the bank

edges and behind large rocks. As it is still early in the season we are really looking to see if the cutthroats have started to move into their summer feeding spots, or if they are still spawning in the small back channels.

We concluded that most of the cutthroats are still spawning and yet to find their summer lies. However, we did turn a few fish that came screaming to surface to take the dry fly!

In the few hours we were out checking the St.Mary, we landed about 10 cutthroats. One was a lovely 17 incher who took the fly very aggressively on the surface and fought hard. It looks like they have wintered well as they were very healthy and hungry for sure. So we know some of the cutthroats have moved into the runs already and are ready to eat! It is only a matter of a week or two before they return en masse.

As we floated down the St.Mary we could see the runs are already coming into shape and are looking very inviting. Today we did not see much of a hatch; only a few Caddis coming off. There were no Stoneflies or Yellow Sallies hatching yet. However, the lower section of the River towards Fort Steele likely has seen Stoneflies already. As this hatch starts on the bottom of the Mary and works it way upstream as things warm up, we expect the Stone and Sally hatch is on its way now.

The flies fished today included; Fat Alberts, Stoneflies, Yellow Sallies, Parachute Adams and Chernobyl Ants. I am sure that if we had nymphed today we would have picked up a lot more cutthroat in the runs. But that would have been cheating as our goal was to see if the cuts are ready to come to the surface for a dry fly. Our conclusion is, 'yes they are out there, and they are hungry!'

In terms of wildlife we saw a few mergansers with their fluffy young trailing behind. We also saw a few ospreys and eagles up in their nest.

Oh ya, and the local lakes, such as Whiteswan and Premier, are still fishing great!

Remember before you get out on the water to check the fishing regulations. If you want to know what's going on and what flies are working on East Kootenay lakes and rivers stop by the St.Mary Angler Fly Shop to chat with our friendly staff. We have a large selection of flies and we will give you advice on what rivers are fishing great and what flies to use.

Be safe out there and have fun!

Tight Lines

**Kelly and Karen**

**St.Mary Angler**

PS Call us today at 1-800-667-2311 to book your float on the St.Mary River.

## **Report #5 (May 28<sup>th</sup>, 2019)**

### **The Season is Rounding into Form Early this Year!**

#### **The Lakes:**

Here we are heading into June with all the Lakes fishing very well. In addition to Moose and Premier lakes, Whiteswan Lake has really come on of late and is fishing quite well.

At this time of year everything is hatching on the lakes. So you can try almost anything and the fish will take it, unless they have already fed for the day! You just never know with the lakes as one day they are on, and the next off.

### **The Runoff:**

All the rivers in our region are high as the spring runoff continues. That said, they are not that dirty so by Opening Day on June 15th the fishing conditions may be pretty good. We will do our annual test float on June 16th to check out the St. Mary River so we will let you know more after that. But right now we are thinking we are headed for good fishing early on!

All our guides are ready to go early this season. So if you want to get out on a float with us soon, book a date now to take advantage of the good early summer conditions.

### **The Columbia River:**

Over on the Columbia River we are just about to wrap-up the spring season for this year. So we will return to guiding in the East Kootenay in the next few days.

The spring fishing on the Columbia River has been very good in 2019 with many fish caught and many great photos taken.

On our trip today we put the boat in at Genelle and headed upstream towards the confluence of the Kootenay River to fish the eddies. We got an earlier morning start as the weather has now turned towards summer temperatures in the West Kootenay region. We reached a high of 30°C (86°F) in the afternoon with clear blue skies and very light wind.

The guys spent the morning mostly throwing streamers along bank edges and nymphing in the deep eddies. They also used their dry lines occasionally. The Columbia has come up quite a bit now as it sits around 2,300 cubic meters per second (82,000 cubic feet per second). We are seeing more debris and logs floating in the water as a result.

On the day the anglers landed around 25 rainbow trout. They all looked very healthy and jumped like crazy when hooked. The average fish size was between 18 and 21 inches. The biggest fish landed were a couple of 23 inch rainbows, one by each of the anglers. These fish took the anglers into the backing on their reels which made it quite exciting landing these big rainbows.

In terms of the hatches appearing on the Columbia, we are seeing mostly caddis and small midges now. The effective flies today included; Copper Johns, Lightning Bugs, Purple Prince Nymph and the regular Prince Nymph. As for streamers, the guys were throwing sculpin patterns, Kelly's Super Streamer and the Pickle.

In a couple of more weeks all the rivers will be open and everyone will be looking to hit the rivers. So come visit our Cranbrook Fly Shop to check out on our new stock of patterns for dry fly fishing on the St. Mary and Elk rivers. We are anticipating an early season start this year so make sure you are ready to go!

Tight lines,

**Kelly and Karen**

**St.Mary Angler**

PS Call us today at 1-800-667-2311 to book your early season float on the St.Mary or Elk rivers.

## **Report #4 (May 23, 2019)**

### **May is nearly done, but the fishing is just beginning!**

May is almost over... can you believe it! The lake fishing in our region has been very good this spring. The higher elevation lakes continue to fish well as the chironomid hatches have been very robust.

Meanwhile, the lower elevation lakes have been on and off depending on the hatches of black ants and chironomids. Either way, there has been lots of feed for the fish this spring and they have been very active making for some great days out on the water.

The weather the last few days has been a mixed bag as we have had rain, clouds and some sun. Last weekend we could see a dusting of snow high up on the mountains so we are still in the process of transitioning to spring.

The recent cooling of the weather has stopped the runoff cold in its tracks. The rivers have now cleared up, which seems a little odd. However, once we get some hot days the snow will melt and water will again pour off the mountains and we will be back into the freshet.

The guys coming into the fly shop are telling us that Whitetail, Whiteswan and Premier lakes have been fishing very well with lots of nice fish being caught. The thing to remember about the lakes is that some days are slower than others so you just have to put the time in out on the water to get the best chance of catching one of those "on" days.

The flies that have been working quite well include; chironomids, damsels, balanced leeches, dragonfly nymphs and mayfly nymphs. So you have many choices of flies to use in May.... because most everything is hatching!

**The Columbia River is looking good!**



The Columbia has been fishing quite well this May and the fishers have had lots of great days on the water. On our most recent trip the anglers put in at the Genelle launch and jetted upstream where they worked along the bank edges and tried some of the great big deep eddies.

The weather this week has been rainy and overcast with the temperatures starting each day at around 8°C (46°F) and topping out at about 15°C (60°F). This wet weather has the added bonus of bringing out more hatches including small midges and caddis throughout the day. When we fish on the Columbia in the spring we always dress in layers as it starts off cool, but often heats up nicely by midday. The boat ride can also get chilly so one must be prepared. The boat has lots of storage for any extra gear or clothing you bring along.

On this trip the anglers mainly fished with their nymph rods, but also threw streamers. When we saw a hatch coming off they tested their dry fly rods as well.

The fishing was quite consistent throughout the day. The two anglers caught and released 35 fish in total. All the trout were very healthy and fought well. Some of the fish jumped so many times they had to be quick on the retrieve or face losing them. The average sized rainbow landed was in the 18 to 21 inch slot.

One of the anglers caught a nice 22 inch rainbow trout. This fish was very chunky, jumped repeatedly and ran the angler into his backing! It was a great fight to watch.

The flies used includes nymphs such as Copper John, Prince Nymph and Hare's Ear Nymph. The streamers included the Pickle, a black and white streamer and sculpin patterns.

We cruised up and down the Columbia, fishing different banks and eddies, before stopping and having a nice shore lunch. We then returned to the water after our break and fished till around 6:00 p.m.

The wildlife viewed on this trip included an otter cruising along the shore, ospreys and eagles in their nests and flying overhead.

The rivers in southeastern British Columbia all open to fishing on June 15<sup>th</sup>, with the exception of the Columbia and Kootenay which are open year round. A lot of local anglers are waiting for the rivers to open, but in the meantime the lakes are fishing well, so get out there and enjoy the outdoors. If you need some advice on what flies are working on certain lakes, come on into our fly shop in Cranbrook and we can show you what's working and let you know which lakes are fishing best.

Tight lines,

**Kelly**

**St.Mary Angler**

PS Call us today at 1-800-667-2311 to book your summer fishing trip!

## **Report #3 (May 12, 2019)**

### **Another spectacular week of spring fishing in the Kootenays!**

Today we decided to fish the [middle section](#) of the upper Columbia River, from Genelle down past Mary's Rock to the City of Trail.

We all met for breakfast at Gabriel's Restaurant in Rossland, then headed down the hill for a full day of fishing on the Big River. We brought along an assortment of rods each rigged for streamers, nymphing or dry fly fishing. This allowed us to hit the water ready to rock. We never know what we will be using throughout the day so it's good to be prepared for everything.

The weather today was lovely, starting out clear and crisp at around 5°C (40 °F) in the morning reaching an afternoon high of 28 °C (82°F). A perfect spring day for fly fishing!

The flow of the Columbia is increasing daily now as the spring freshet grows, so we are starting to see some sticks, leaves and wood debris on the water. Under these conditions we have to be vigilant to ensure the lines remain free of woody stuff and no wayward logs are encountered. Today the Columbia River was flowing at a rate of 1,830 cubic meters per second (64,625 cubic feet per second).

Our approach today started with us drifting down along the riverbank looking for feeding trout. As the day went on we switched over to searching both small and large eddies for more of them.

Initially the rainbows were taking the fly, but only very lightly. So one moment we thought we had a fish on, and the next, it was gone! After we figured this out the guys ended up landing many rainbows in the morning and into the afternoon.

The average sized rainbow trout caught was in the 15 to 18 inch slot with the biggest fish being a nice 23 incher! This large fish jumped many times and provided a lot of excitement. Some of the fish were caught on streamers and the rest on nymphs. A few of the fish caught were showing signs of returning to feed after spawning. Others were chunky and brite.

The two anglers caught over 15 fish each making for a very good day on the water.

In terms of the hatch, the Spinning Caddis were everywhere throughout the day. These caddis are mating and laying their eggs on the water in large numbers now. The trout are not feeding on the adults, as they are keying on the caddis emergers as they pop to the surface. But wow, the air was full of them today!

The most productive flies on the day included Kelly's Super Streamer, Sculpins and the Pickle. In terms of nymphs it was Lightning Bugs, Copper Johns, Prince Nymphs and Hares Ear Nymph.

When we were fishing along the bank edge at one point we noticed a large splash of water. As we looked we could see a large sturgeon jumping, it was quite something to see.

### **Lakes Report:**

The lakes in the East Kootenay are in full go mode now as people are catching lots of fish and having a great time on the water. Premier Lake has been fishing exceptionally well, as has Whitetail Lake.

Chironomids of all sorts are driving the system now. Since there are many different types you have to closely examine the size of the shucks on the water and try to match it. Or when you catch a fish you can use a throat pump to see what types of chironomids are being consumed. If you use a throat pump, make sure you know the proper technique for its use so as not to hurt or kill the fish.

Callibaetis are also coming off some of the lakes now. When they show up both the fish and the anglers are very happy indeed! Balanced leeches are still producing as are pulling patterns such as Woolly Buggers, Doc's Spratlys, Damsels and Dragons Nymphs.

So there you have it. Have a great May long weekend and make sure you're safe out on the water.

Tight Lines,

**Kelly and Karen**

**St.Mary Angler**

PS Call us at 1-800-667-2311 to find out the available days to book your summer fishing trip!

## **Report #2 (May 8, 2019)**

**The Lakes are looking good and the Columbia River is fishing very well!**

### **The Lakes Report:**

The spring fishing season is well on it's way in southeastern B.C. Some of our lakes are hot, while others have yet to hit their stride. One never really knows what is working when you hit the water. So a good strategy is to come into our Cranbrook shop in advance of your trip so we can give you the latest take on what is working on the various lakes.

Most of the guys visiting the shop have had good success on our East Kootenay lakes including; Premier, Whitetail, Lazy and Echo. Chironomids have been the hot ticket lately, but balanced leeches, Booby flies and pulling patterns (i.e. Woolly Boogers, Doc Spratleys, regular Mini Black Leeches and Dragon Fly Nymphs) are all working pretty good as well. The lakes are definitely on right now as the anglers are catching quite a few fish.

Just a reminder when you hit the lakes to spend a little time rowing around looking for cruising fish as a way to start. If you find them along the drop-off ledges between 8 and 15 feet, then you just need to anchor your boat on both ends with your back to the wind.

You can build your leader up to 15 to 18 feet with an indicator and a swivel. Then put your chironomid 18 inches below the swivel and cast your line out over the drop-off ledge and let it sink. Then slowly retrieve the line back in. You can also use the same line setup with a balanced leech. Both of these approaches have been working very well. If the fish are holding in shallow water just move your indicator along your leader to get the desired length.

### **Columbia River Report:**

The Columbia River is gradually increasing in flow now, as the spring freshet slowly builds. Today it was running at around 1,660 cubic meters per second (59,000 cubic feet per second).

The weather the past couple days has been absolutely beautiful with temperatures reaching highs of 20-22°C (68-72°F). This coming weekend it is supposed to get quite warm, up to around 27°C (80°F) in the east and west Kootenays. The runoff should start to rip for sure and the water levels will rise on all the rivers.

Today we put in at the Beaver Creek boat launch and fished the lower section of the Columbia down towards the Canada/U.S. Border aka the [Fort Shepherd Run](#). We fished along the bank ledges and out in the deep eddies using both nymph and streamer setups.

The anglers had a very good morning and afternoon of fishing landing 35 rainbows between the two of them. The rainbows are very healthy this year; very chunky, strong and good fighters! The red stripe along the body is now very prominent on most of the fish. Most of the fish caught today were in the 18 to 21 inch range with the biggest being a

lovely 23 inch rainbow that jumped so much it almost ended up in the boat!

Even the smaller fish jump and pull hard on the Columbia. You never really know what size of fish you have hooked on this River until it comes near the surface or breaches it completely.

The hatches coming off included small midges and chironomids. The flies that were working best were the Prince Nymphs, Lightning Bugs, Copper Johns, black or white streamers and the Pickle (aka Pat's Rubber Legs).

Last year at this time the Columbia was high with lots of debris in the water and we had to be careful of all the big water hydraulics happening. So far this season we are seeing a lot smoother start, but as the freshet comes, things can change.

Today we saw an osprey and an eagle down on the lower section of the River to go along with the Canada geese along the bank edges. There is so much bird action everyday and it is wonderful to see as we fish.

Remember at this time of year that all the small streams in our Region 4 are closed April 1st to June 15<sup>th</sup>. Only the Columbia and Kootenay rivers remain open year round.

Feel free to head on out and enjoy the back country this spring, but remember to check the fishing regulations before going fishing.

Tight Lines,

**Kelly and Karen**

**St.Mary Angler**

PS Have fun on the water and stay safe! Call us at 1-800-667-2311 to book your float with us today!

## **Report #1 (April 26, 2019)**

### **The Lakes are fishing great and the Columbia River is ready to go!**

#### **The Lakes Report:**

We are pleased to say that the 2019 spring fly fishing season has finally arrived... Yay! The sun is warming things up and folks are heading outdoors to find a lake to go and wet their line. Premier, Whitetail, Whiteswan and all the lower elevation lakes are open and the chironomid season has just recently taken off!

Anglers are fishing chironomids in the lakes when the hatch is on. This is in addition to using balanced leeches, regular or micro leeches, booby flies, Doc Spratleys, as well as half and full backs to round out their lake angling arsenal.

The lakes are hovering around 5°C (40 °F), so the fishing has been slow in the mornings. That said, the activity picks up when the hatches start to come off as the water warms up by later in the day. You just have to be patient out there. The key thing is to figure out the depth the trout are holding in. Sometimes they can be found at 12 feet, or they can be down below 20 feet. The nice thing is that they are moving in pods, so once you find their location and depth, you are in business.

When you are in Cranbrook feel free to drop into the fly shop for a chat. Our friendly and knowledgeable staff will give you the latest intel on what is working and what lakes are fishing the best. As you know



the lakes can be “on” one day and “off” the next. So, the more intelligence you have, and the better prepared you are, the better your chances of catching fish.

### **Columbia River Report:**

We have just started guiding on the Columbia River over in the West Kootenay region. As you are aware, we fish the stretch of the Columbia from its confluence with the Kootenay River near the City of Castlegar, down to the Canada/U.S. border. For more information on this piece of robust water go to the [Columbia River page](#).

Recently the water level of the Columbia has been quite low to accommodate the spring spawning/incubation period at about 1,125 cubic meters per second (39,000 cubic feet per second). Recently it has started to rise to about 1,300 CMS (45,000 CFS).

The morning fishing has been slow, but by 11:00 a.m. the hatches start coming off, the water surface temperature begins to rise and the fishing activity increases accordingly.

On this trip we put in at the informal boat launch at the hamlet of Genelle then headed upriver to fish along the bank edges and take a look in the big back eddies. Before we set out we made sure we had our separate streamer and nymph rods set up just in case we wanted to try both techniques.

The weather was very nice today with temperatures reaching a high of 15°C (60°F). The sky was clear and sunny with very little wind making it a perfect day for casting the fly rod.

It was apparent from the start that the rainbow trout on the Columbia have wintered well. The fish are already looking chunky and are sporting nice red colours on the side of their body and cheeks!

Today the catch total was very satisfying as we landed about 35 fish between the two anglers. The rainbows mostly ranged from 17 to 20 inches in length, which is normal for this time of year. However, we did catch a couple of bigger trout that came in at around 22 inches. They were nice fish that jumped and fought well and looked very healthy.

The hatches that came off included small midges and Blue Winged Olives. They were coming off sporadically throughout the day. One can tell when the hatch starts on the Columbia as the swallows get very active, swooping down and feeding just above the surface of the water. I am sure the fish are already feeding below the surface before the birds show up!

The most productive flies on the day were Prince Nymphs (both regular and purple, sized 10-12), Pat's Rubber Legs (sized 10-12) Green and Tan Sculpins and Black or Olive streamers (sized 8-12).

Well there you have it. The fishing has started off nicely in the East and West Kootenays of southern British Columbia. So it is time to get out to enjoy the great outdoors! Remember to pick up and review the latest version of the fishing regulations as there are always some changes of note.

Have fun on the water and stay safe!

**Kelly and Karen**

**St.Mary Angler**

PS Feel free to call us at 1-800-667-2311 to book a trip on the Columbia River for this spring. We still have days available for all our rivers, but the prime days are booking up fast!