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St. Mary Angler Guide Service: a review of the 2020 fishing season.

Overview

As you are aware, the Covid 19 Pandemic has had a profound impact on all our lives in 2020. We were forced to adapt and roll with the closures, regulations and changes in protocols to keep the St. Mary Angler Fly Shop and Guide Service alive this year. When the Pandemic first blew up in the early months of 2020 we wondered openly if the business we have built over 25 years could survive. The questioning was most acute when the Canada-US border closed and 80 percent of our guided customers who come from the U.S. were locked out of Canada. Then there were all the challenges associated operating our little fly shop in line with physical distancing guidelines. But thanks to our fabulous American clients agreeing to let us hold their deposits and come next year, local residents 'shopping local' and some financial support from our Federal Government, we made it through 2020! So, after a lot of worry and work, we can now say that we have made it through this troubled year and will be fully operational in 2021! We hope to see all our old friends next year.

The Conditions in 2020

Last winter brought us a snowpack that was more or less just above what we usually get. On May 1st the snowpack was 106% of 'normal' across British Columbia. The snowpack in the East Kootenay region, which includes the St. Mary, Elk, Bull and Skookumchuck rivers, was at 115%. Over in the West Kootenays, where we fish the Columbia River, it was 117% of usual.

Spring temperatures across B.C. were again in the normal range this year while precipitation was anywhere from 15 to 70% of normal. April was very dry. By mid-May the accumulated snowpack was still holding firm, but by early June about half of the snowpack was melted. By the end of June three quarters of the pack was gone. Rivers were hitting their peak runoff in mid-June. In the East Kootenays we saw higher than average rainfall in May and October, but things were drier than normal from June through September. So, while we saw an above average snow pack, the mild spring

temperatures and limited rainfall led to a steady runoff with no flooding. As a result, we started fishing the St.Mary and Elk rivers in early to mid-July, pretty much on schedule.

In terms of air temperature in the East Kootenays, it was a little cooler in May and October and warmer than usual in June, July and August and September. August (+3.4°C) and September (+3.7°C) were quite a bit warmer than usual, setting us up for a mild fall.

In terms of forest fires, the season started relatively late this year so we avoided the smoke, making for a wonderful summer. However, in the first week of September we had one fire burning north of us near the Skookcumchuck River so that road was closed. We also had a brief period of smoke blowing in from the fires in Washington and Oregon, but it only lasted a couple of days.

Even the warmer than average summer temperatures couldn't overcome the effects of the good-sized snow pack and mild spring weather. The result was that the rivers in the East Kootenays experienced good flows and cool water throughout the season providing excellent fishing conditions.

Over on the Columbia River in the West Kootenays the air temperatures were also warmer than usual in July, August and September. There were no fires of note in the upper Columbia and very little smoke. As the Columbia is a "tailwater fishery", located downstream of a dam, the water conditions in the spring and fall were normal and we experienced very good fishing conditions in 2020.

East Kootenay Temperature and Rainfall (Stn: 'Cranbrook Airport Auto BC'):

Month	May	June	July	August	September	October
Temperature in 2020	17.2 °C (63°F)	21.1°C (70.2°F)	27.4°C (81.3°F)	29.4°C (84.9°F)	23.6°C (74.5°F)	11.2°C (52.2°F)
Average Daily Max. Temperature (1981-2010)	17.9°C (64°F)	21.6°C (71°F)	26.2°C (79°F)	26.0°C (79°F)	19.9°C (68°F)	11.7°C (53°F)
Rainfall in 2020	58.2 mm (2.3 in.)	40.8 mm (1.6 in.)	8.4 mm (.33 in.)	7.9 mm (.31 in.)	8.9 mm (.35 in.)	28.6 mm (1.1 in.)
Average Monthly Rainfall (1981-2010)	46.1 mm (1.8 in.)	62.2 mm (2.45 in.)	38.3 mm (1.5 in.)	28 mm (1.1 in.)	31.3 mm (1.23 in.)	20.8 mm (.82 in.)

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

Month	April	May	June	July	August	September	October
Temp. in 2019	15.2°C (59.4°F)	19°C (66.2°F)	23.1°C (73.6°F)	29°C (84.2°F)	30.7°C (87.3°F)	24.2°C (75.6°F)	12.8°C (55°F)
Average Daily Max. Temp. (1981-2010)	15.3 °C (60°F)	20°C (68°F)	23.6 °C (74.5°F)	28.1°C (83°F)	28.2 °C (83°F)	22 °C (72°F)	12.9 °C (55°F)
Rainfall in 2020	No data	No data	No data	No data	No data	No data	No data
Average Rainfall (1981-2010)	59.3 mm (2.3 in.)	70.3 mm (2.77)	72.3 mm (2.84)	48.1 mm (1.89)	30.4 mm (1.2)	42.4 mm (1.67)	49.4 mm (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 2020 our plan was to hit the water in early April and fish through June. But then the Covid 19 closures took hold. As the border was closed to all “non-essential” travel on March 18th it locked out all our American clients and we lost most of our guide trade for the spring season on the Columbia. That said, we did get out on the River a few times with Canadian clients and just on our own.

The Columbia River fished very well this spring as its population of big rainbow trout were feeding heavily after the winter. The fish had a lot of energy when hooked up. In the early part of the season (April) the fish were holding along the bank edges. But as the water levels started to rise in May we saw more logs and debris on the water and we switched our focus into the big eddies where the fish were now holding and feeding. The flies that were working best at this time of year on the Columbia included; Prince Nymphs, Hairs Ears and Pheasant tails. We also have good success with Pat's Rubber Leg and Kelly's Super streamer.

On a trip out in late May we noticed how the trout were more active in the afternoon than the morning. While we did catch a few in the mornings, it was like someone turned on a light switch by early afternoon as the fish became very active! We noticed caddis fly hatches in the afternoon accompanied by some small midges coming off. Consequently, the fishing really picked up. In response, we used Prince nymphs, Caddis nymphs and the Pickle with good success.

By mid-June the Columbia flows were getting high. Fortunately, our rowable jet boat was giving us easy access to the big eddies. It also allowed us to safely maneuver around the logs and debris that cycle through the eddies when the flows get high. At this time of year, a good boat and experienced operator is an asset on this big piece of complex water as it can be challenging to navigate and fish at the same time. The average size rainbow trout landed during our two-day mid-month trip was between 18 and 20 inches. The biggest fish caught was a little over 21 and was healthy, fat and

jumped like crazy towards the boat. We did catch some females that were just coming off the spawn at this time, which were very hungry of course. That said, most of the fish hooked were strong and healthy with those beautiful Columbia River rainbow colours. Between the two of us we landed about 22 to 25 rainbows in the two days on the water.

In terms of the hatches, we could only see small midges coming off. So, the flies used over the couple of days included; Purple Prince Nymphs, Lightning Bug Nymphs, regular Prince Nymphs, Chironomids, Pickles and Kelly's Super Streamer. On the dry fly side, we used tan caddis and Blue Winged Olives. As June wore on we turned our eye to the reopening of the Canada/U.S. Border, and guiding our clients for cutthroats on the East Kootenay rivers...

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

While we moved from the spring season on the Columbia into guiding for cutthroats over in the east Kootenays, the Covid 19 crisis deepened. The Border closure was renewed in April, May and June and it looked like it would continue into July. When it was renewed in July we could see the summer guiding season slipping away from us as our American clients could not come to Canada. Fortunately for us, our American clients were very supportive and understanding as many agreed to carry over their trips to 2021, allowing us to hold the deposits. This was an important element in keeping our business viable as we depend of the trip deposits to fund our day to day operations until the trips occur. We are very grateful to everyone for your support! While Americans could not make it out this year we were able to take out a few more Canadians than usual for floats, which helped fill the void.

The St.Mary River was rounding into form by the time we floated on July 13th. While the mornings were still typically cool, the afternoons were maxing out between 24 and 26°C (75-79°F), perfect for fishing! At this point we were running double sections of the River, pushed along by the moderate early summer flows. We would start off by nymphing in the morning. As things warmed as the sun's rays penetrated the water column, the anglers switched to dry flies and started picking up fish on the surface. A good crop of PMD's were present and the stonefly hatch was gradually making its way up the River. We could see the Green Drakes hatching when the sun disappeared behind the clouds. So, the summer buffet of bugs was now being served!

In addition to the anglers landing around 35 cutthroat trout between them, they caught a nice 27-inch bull trout. It made for an exciting and challenging fight and a beautiful picture fish! It really capped off a great start to the season on the St.Mary River.

By early August all the rivers were fishing very well on dries and the summer weather had settled in. On August 8th we head up into the Canadian Rockies to fish the scenic Bull River. It is an absolutely beautiful float. The guides can't get enough of this amazing place as the Steeples of the Rockies are pure eye candy!

As soon as the float began the anglers started hooking cutthroats on the dry fly! They casted their flies behind rocks, along the bank edges and areas under overhanging vegetation, rocks and logs. This Bull River moves quickly with lots of boulders and structure so the guides are constantly on the oars with the anglers making rapid fire casts. The Bull provides a very active and fun float!

On this float the anglers landed about 20 cutthroat trout each with the average size in the 13-14 inch range. They did land a few fish in the 15-16 inch slot as well. All the fish were very healthy and strong.

In the second half of August the water levels were holding up well on all our rivers, still benefitting from the above average snowpack and mild spring temperatures. On a trip to the Elk on August 27th the River was at its peak in terms of beauty, flows and fishability! Our destination on this day was the section below Fernie, from Morrissey down to Elko.

As the boat was maneuvered downriver, the anglers eagerly casted their lines in search of the wild Westslope Cutthroat Trout. As the Elk River produces a lot of hatches, the anglers awaited the Green Drake, Blue Winged Olive and October Caddis hatches this River regularly generates.

On this day the anglers fished various dry fly patterns including; Purple Haze, Orange Stimulators, Swisher Caddis, Chubby Chernobyls, Fat Alberts and Mahogany Duns. While the fish on the Elk can be very drift sensitive, it did not pose any problem for the anglers on this trip as the two of them landed around 30 fish! The cuts were nice, chunky specimens averaging about 14-16 inches. The catch was well documented as many great pictures were taken!

As September arrived, the Border still remained closed, but the fishing remained very good. Up to now we were guiding people from B.C. and Alberta only and that would continue. Things were not as busy as usual as we missed our American clients and friends! While the guiding work was down, we still managed to find enough trade to keep our guides somewhat busy. With travel restricted, the local anglers were not going anywhere, so they were coming into the shop more than ever. This created an uptick in flyshop business helping to offset some of the decline in the guiding, so we were surviving!

On September 6th Karen and I took a trip to the Elk River on our own. While we could feel the change in the season coming, the fishing remained hot. As soon as we pulled away from shore we were into fish! We took the usual approach; casting along the bank edges, rocks and structures and pulling the boat over to fish along the shore a few times. Some October Caddis were hatching throughout the day, in addition to the odd midge.

We had good catch success with a wide variety of flies on this day. As no pattern produced all the time, we changed things up quite a bit using; Mahogany Duns, Green Drakes, Blue Winged Olives, Caddis, Purple Haze, Stimy Chew Toys, Fat Alberts,

Chubby Chernobyls and Trudes! Sizes 14 and 16. This assortment of flies produced many cutthroats in the 13 to 16-inch slot with a couple beauties to 18! The cutthroat trout were chunky and colourful, with the prominent red slash under the jaw, very pretty fish.

Fall Fishing for Big Rainbows on the Upper Columbia River.

By late September we were back over fishing on the upper Columbia River. And while we fished the stretch right down to the Canada/U.S. Border, it remained closed to everyone. So, we fished on our side anyways!

On our September 28th trip the weather was absolutely beautiful; blue skies with temperatures reaching a high of 24°C (75°F) by mid-afternoon... gorgeous!

We set the rods up in advance for nymphing or swinging streamers. As there is always the possibility of some dry fly action in the fall, we had one some set up accordingly.

We fished in the back eddies and along the bank edges. Where we were able to put the fly close to the feeding fish they would find it and climb right on! These rainbows were strong and fought very hard --- they loved to jump and ran downstream like crazy... yee haw!

On this day we landed many fish in the 17 to 19 inch range while catching a few over 20 to 21 inches! These fish are so healthy and when they grab your fly, what a pull, that is for sure!

The flies we used included; Pat's Rubber Legs, Super Streamer, Prince Nymph, October Caddis and Blue Winged Olives.

On October 19th we put in our last day on the Columbia and the late season fishing was great. The fishers used nymph rods with indicators to start fishing. They also used their streamer rods to cast along the bank edges to try and fool the trout into taking the fly. The morning started off a little slow, but as it warmed up so did the fishing. On the day the anglers landed 8-10 rainbows each.

The rainbow trout landed in the fall are very chunky after the summer feeding season. Most fish caught were in the 17 to 20-inch slot. The rainbows like to jump and run and even a smaller fish has a lot of energy out here. We had a very productive month of October on the Columbia to close off the Pandemic marred year of 2020 in Southeastern B.C.

Annual Hosted Trip to Christmas Island

In February of 2020, we hosted our annual one-week fishing trip to the Republic of Kiribati (Christmas Island). This year our guide Brandon, who also works in our fly shop,

hosted the trip as Karen and I went to Andros Island in the Bahamas. At this point Covid 19 was just flaring up so there were questions about whether the Christmas Island trip would go ahead. Fortunately, they were still allowing Canadians to Christmas at this point so Brandon and his guests were allowed to go. As it turned out they closed Christmas Island to travelers right after our group was allowed to land! They group had a wonderful time chasing Bonefish, Giant Trevally (G.T.s) and Trigger fish.

During their week they caught between 10 and 30 bonefish a day as well as some good sized GT's and Triggers. The Bonefish landed averaged 2-6 pounds, with a number of fish in the 8 to 10 pound range landed! Many GT's were caught in the 5 to 10 pound range with opportunities at 50 plus pounds keeping the anglers all hungry and motivated on the flats. The largest bonefish landed by the group was 10 pounds and the biggest GT came in at a whopping 40 pounds!

The St.Mary Angler is not hosting another group to Christmas Island in 2021, but we will be going back in 2022. The dates are February 22nd to March 1st., 2022. Hopefully we will be allowed to travel by then. If you have an interest in coming along, give us a shout at the flyshop to discuss the details!

So, there you have it, 2020 “the Year of the Covid 19 Pandemic” is in the books! It was definitely the most challenging year for our business to date. But, with a lot of worry and hard work, some luck, and a lot of support from our local anglers, from our Canadian American clients and the Canadian government, we pulled through! We thank you all for your patronage and support. We know 2021 will also be a challenge as the Canada/US border remains closed now, which means we cannot attend tradeshow in Seattle, Portland, Tacoma, Denver, etc. So, some uncertainty still remains. But what we do know is that we will remain open for business in the fly shop and on the guiding side. If you are local, feel free to drop by the shop for a chat. If you are in the U.S. and beyond, call us at 1-800-667-2311 or via the internet or facebook to touch base, or discuss your booking for next year.

We would like to wish everyone a safe winter season. We hope to see you all in 2021.

Take care,

Kelly & Karen

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2020 Fishing Reports:

Report #14 (October 19, 2020)

The Columbia River has been great this fall!

The fly-fishing season is rapidly coming to an end. As this fishing report is being written, winter has arrived a little early to the Kootenays as it is currently snowing.

The last couple of weeks of fishing on the Columbia River have been very good. But as the days grow shorter and the weather gets colder the window to catch fish on the Columbia is closing.

Today the temperature was quite cool to start at 6°C (43°F) warming up to near 10°C (50°F) by the afternoon. There was sun, cloud and the occasional rainstorm which kept us on our toes. Thank goodness everyone dressed in layers and brought along good rain gear!

After picking the guys up at their hotel, we hit the water at around 9:30 a.m. We launched the boat at Gyro Park in Trail and powered upstream to the wide gravel bar complex on the River near the village of Genelle.

Upon our arrival the fishers used nymph rods with indicators to start fishing. They also used their streamer rods to cast along the bank edges to try and fool the trout into taking the fly. The morning started off a little slow, but as it warmed up the fishing picked up. On the day the anglers landed 8-10 rainbows each.

The rainbow trout landed at this time a year are very chunky after the summer feeding season. Most fish caught were in the 17 to 20-inch slot. The rainbows like to jump and run and even a smaller fish have a lot of energy out here.

We have different populations of trout in the Columbia with both spring and fall spawners. Some of the male fish are now showing a dark red stripe down the side of their body and a big jaw. The spawning females are a little more silvery with the smaller head. Both the spawners and non-spawning rainbows scrap pretty hard when they take the fly.

As the guys fished throughout the day the wildlife on the River was very apparent. We saw eagles and ospreys circling over the River diving on occasion. We also saw turkeys along the banks, as well as other ducks scurrying along the water edges.

In terms of the hatches, there were a few October Caddis coming off in addition to some small midges. The flies used on the trip were a variety of different nymphs; mainly Prince Nymphs, Copper Johns and Hares Ear. They also used some different streamers including the Super Streamer, the Pickle and Sculpin patterns.

As the days are now short, we pulled off the River at around 5 o'clock. The anglers had a full day on the water and really enjoyed their fishing experience. With the weather moving in and the temperatures dropping further, the fishing is pretty much over now unless you get days above 0°C so the guides on your fly rods don't freeze. You can still fish the Kootenay River and the Columbia River in the winter if you choose to as they are open all year round.

The lake fishing in our region will continue until they freeze over. You can stop into the shop and ask what's happening if you're still planning to try the lakes in the next few weeks.

We want to take this opportunity to thank all the anglers from Canada who came fishing with us during this most difficult time. We also appreciate everyone who came into the fly shop in 2020. And we have not forgotten our American friends who have stuck with us thru all the uncertainty this year. We look forward to seeing all our American clients again in 2021!

In the meantime, please stay safe, keep your distance and take care.

Tight Lines,

Karen and Kelly

St.Mary Angler
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Report #13 (September 27/28, 2020)

The Columbia River: it's like night and day!

While fall is upon us and the end of the fishing season is just around the corner, things are still going strong on the Columbia River. As long as the weather remains mild, we will continue to get outside and fish. We are now concentrating our guiding on the stretch of the Columbia River from its confluence with the Kootenay River down to the International Boundary.

The morning temperature has been averaging around 6°C (45°F), warming up to a nice 18 to 20°C (65+°F) by mid afternoon. We are seeing just a hint of haze in the valley from the fires to the south in Washington, Oregon and California. That said, it's quite beautiful to be out on the Columbia River now with the leaves turning, sunny skies and sweet smell of the Columbia under the hull.

We have found ourselves with a couple of days off in between clients so we are going to hit the water ourselves for a couple of days. Today we decided to launch at Trail and head upriver towards Castlegar to fish. We got on the water at around 10:00 a.m., fishing until 5:00 p.m., with mixed results. It turns out the flows of the dam were increased the night before by about 8,000 CFS which raised the water levels by about 2 feet. When we get pulse increases in flows like this, the fish seem to get disorientated and don't feed very well for at least a day.

The result is that we fished hard, but landed only a half a dozen rainbows. While some of the fish were a nice size at 17 to 19 inches, the River did not fish as well as it usually does. We don't know in advance when the Canadian and American managers of the dams are going to call for the occasional pulse of water. This is part of the reason why we recommend clients to come for at least 2 days at a time. To experience the Columbia at its full potential, one day is just not enough.

So we packed it in for day 1 of our "busman's holiday" and decided to fish the next day when the fish had settled down. Well it was like night and day!

On day 2 we fished on the lower section of the Columbia River from Trail down to the International Boundary. The weather was absolutely beautiful; blue skies with temperatures reaching a high of 24°C (75°F) by mid afternoon... gorgeous!

In terms of the hatches we saw a few midges and October Caddis hatching as we cruised downriver. Once we hit a promising spot we pulled up the jet and Kelly got on the oars and we began to fish.

The rods were set up in advance for nymphing or swinging streamers. As there is always the possibility of some dry fly action in the fall, we had one rod set up accordingly.

We fished in the back eddies and along the bank edges. Where we were able put the fly close to the feeding fish they would find it and climb right on! These rainbows are strong and fight very hard --- they like to jump and run down stream like crazy... ha ha!

On this day we landed many fish in the 17 to 19 inch range while catching a few over 20 to 21 inches! These fish are so healthy and when they grab your fly --what a pull -- that is for sure!

The flies we used included; Pat's Rubber Legs, Super Streamer, Prince Nymph, October Caddis and Blue Winged Olives.

While on the River we saw eagles and ospreys overhead, and turkeys roaming in groups along the bank edges.

Fishing is still going strong on the Columbia so there remains time for you to get out here and enjoy the last few days before the weather turns!

Fall really is a glorious time to be out fishing the rivers of southeastern B.C.

Lake Fishing is picking up:

Lake fishing in the Cranbrook area and beyond is starting to pick up. Once the fall temperature drop, the fish move back into the shallows to feed on the bug life and we are off again! Anglers are already heading out to the lakes to camp and fish!

Come visit us in our Cranbrook fly shop and we will help you find out where the good fishing is and how to get them on the lakes or rivers.

There is lots of fishing still to come this fall, so tight lines and stay safe!

Take care,

Karen and Kelly

St.Mary Angler
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Report #12 (September 20, 2020)

The Elk River is still fishing strong as we get ready to move over to the Columbia River.

With fall upon us we can now look back over the summer and be thankful that we were able to get outside and fish during these trying times. Now we are nearing the end of September, a month that has produced excellent fishing for those able to get onto the rivers and streams of southeastern B.C.

In September we do the bulk of our guiding on the Elk River, with a few days on the St. Mary thrown in. As the kokanee arrive in the St. Mary to spawn in mid-September it changes the fishability of the River. The cutthroats will still take a dry fly at this time, but sometimes it is harder to get them to come to the surface as they can get lazy and just rely on the fresh eggs to supplement their diet. So, come September, we focus more on the Elk River.

The Elk River in September sees a nice diversity of hatches. These include; Blue Winged Olives, Green Drakes and Mahogany Duns. So it is a lot of fun to fish the Elk in the fall.

The weather over the last week has been mild, but the smoke from the big fires from California to Washington State has moved in. It came in last Saturday, hung around a few days and recently cleared. We are very happy to see clear skies again.

Today the temperature in the morning saw a cool start at 6°C (43°F) rising to a high of 21°C (70°F) in the early afternoon. The clouds were high in the sky, the air was calm and it made for a beautiful fall day.

As the days are getting shorter, the anglers left a little later today than in the summer, heading over to the Elk where they fished down to the Morrissey takeout. The two anglers did quite well with each landing around 20 fish. The cutthroats put up a good fight and the clients had an amazing day.

The cutthroats landed were between 13 and 17 inches in length. One of the fish caught was a nice bull trout which surprised and pleased everyone. Most of the bull trout now are up spawning in the tributary streams so the ones that are still in the Elk or the St. Mary tend to be pre-spawners or juveniles. That said, it's still fun to fool and catch one of these big trout!

The flies working on this fall day included; Purple Haze, Green Drakes, Blue Winged Olives, Mahogany Duns, Stimulators, Elk Hair Caddis, Parachute Adam's and Chubby Chernobyls. As it has been said before, have a good to selection of flies when you hit the water so when one stops working, you can just try another! Our wide variety of flies came in handy as the fish had a big and diverse appetite today.

On the float we saw osprey, eagles and a lot of ducks. We were all excited to see a bear grazing along the bank as we floated by. It was great to see it from the safety of the boat!

We are close to our last float of the season in the East Kootenays. This means Kelly is heading over to the Columbia River in the West Kootenays to round out the season. He will be chasing the big rainbow trout on the stretch of the Columbia River just above the Canada-U.S. Border for the next few weeks.

We will produce another fishing report about the Columbia River next week so feel free to check in then.

As for the fall lake fishing, it has started to pick up. People are now heading out and camping on the lakes as we write. Stop by the fly shop and we will let you know where to go and what flies to use. You will find the St. Mary Angler Fly Shop right beside the Sandman Hotel on the main drag in Cranbrook.

A big thank you to all the people who came fishing with us this year. We really, really look forward to seeing our American friends next summer, 2021.

Take care, keep your social distance and be safe!

Karen and Kelly

St.Mary Angler
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Report #11 (September 6, 2020)

Fall Fishing on the Elk is... Wonderful!

September has arrived along with more beautiful weather in the forecast. It is now cool in the mornings after a good day of rain we recently had. We are now seeing temperatures as low as 1°C (32°F) to start and highs building to the mid 20's°C (mid 70's°F) by the afternoon. We can sure feel the change in the air as fall approaches.

We wanted to get out and fish the Elk River ourselves today, so we wrapped things up early and drove over to Fernie. We always stop at the tunnel between Elko and Fernie to check the wind as it is an excellent indicator of the wind conditions on the River. On this day the wind was very lite, so we decided to float the stretch of the Elk from Morrissey down to Elko.

As soon as we pulled away from shore we were into fish! We took the usual approach; casting along the bank edges, behind rocks and along structures where the fish like to hold and feed. On occasion we pulled the boat over to fish along the shore. A few October Caddis were hatching throughout the day, in addition the odd midge.

We had pretty good success with a wide variety of flies today. As none of them produced all day, we changed things up quite a bit. So the wide cast of flies included; Mahogany Duns, Green Drakes, Blue Winged Olives, Caddis, Purple Haze, Stimy Chew Toys, Fat Alberts, Chubby Chernobyls and Trudes! Sizes 14 and 16.

The average size fish landed today was in the 13 to 16 inch slot with a couple to 18 inchers, nice fish. The cutthroat trout on the Elk River are very chunky and bright orange, with the prominent red slash under the jaw, very pretty fish.

When you fish on the Elk you will find out pretty quickly that you must get a good drift on your fly, on top of an accurate cast. The Elk River fish are very 'drift sensitive' and if you get any drag on the fly at all, you will not catch a fish. If you don't get the right drift you will find that the fish will come up and look at the fly and then dart back down. When that happens, it is recommended to pull your fly back in and change it as the fish has refused your fly. Today we had a few fish come up to the fly, then drastically miss it, which was kind of odd, but funny at the same time. It was like they were thinking, "I want that fly, I want that fly!", but then hit the "abort" button somewhere along the way!

For lunch, we pulled over on a nice run, set up the table with food, then enjoyed the view, the food and ourselves immensely! What a beautiful way to spend the Labour Day, and thanks to those people before us who pushed so hard for "the weekend" that we now take for granted!

As usual the wind picked up a bit in the afternoon as we made our way down to Elko. We saw some wildlife along the way including a nice big osprey patrolling its huge nest. We also saw many merganser ducks scurrying along the bank edges as we floated by... those guys can really move!

In September and October we start seeing more bears along the rivers so be aware, give them their space and stay safe out in the backcountry. By the middle of September Kelly will be heading over to the Columbia River in the West Kootenays to guide for big rainbow trout.

The fall is a great time to fish the Columbia River for big rainbows. We fish the stretch from just below the confluence of the Columbia and Kootenay rivers to the Canada/U.S. border. If you have a few spare days this fall and you like the challenge of big rainbow trout, give us a call and we can get you out there. But don't forget that the streams here in the East Kootenay can fish amazingly in the fall as well.

In terms of forest fires, the season started relatively late this year and was lighter than usual until recently. We also avoided the smoke, making for a wonderful summer. But we do have one fire burning north of us now, near the Skookcumchuck River so that road is closed. Make sure you check things out before you head up that way to know exactly what is open and what is closed. Also remember to check the fishing regulations because some river sections are closed for bull trout spawning now.

Where ever you plan on going fishing, make sure you read the regulations before you head out. Feel free to stop into the fly shop on your way to see if we can help you in terms of flies, leaders or advice!

Take care, keep your social distance and be safe!

Karen and Kelly

St.Mary Angler

Ps call us at 1-800-667-2311 to see if we can sneak you in for a couple of days of spectacular rainbow trout fishing on the Columbia this fall!

Report #10 (August 24, 2020)

The Fishing on the Elk River is at its Peak!

The summer months are slipping away as we now approach the end of August. The fishing on our rivers and streams has been outstanding so far this season and the Elk is now in its prime.

Today our destination was the section of the Elk River below Fernie, from Morrissey down to Elko. When we travel to the Elk River we like to get an early start from Cranbrook so we can hit the River when things are cool, because we know the day is going to get hot!

While the boat was being prepped and launched, the anglers readied their fly rods with dry flies according to the guides advice. As soon as the boat was prepped, everyone eagerly boarded in anticipation of an amazing day of dry fly fishing!

As the boat was nimbly maneuvered downriver, the clients cast their rods along the bank edges, behind rocks and along structures in search of the wild Westslope Cutthroat Trout. The Elk River tends to see a lot of hatches, more than on the St. Mary River, which can make for a lot of excitement. Green Drake hatches often occur on the Elk and when this happens it is a lot of fun to try and match the hatch. You can also experience good hatches of Blue Winged Olives and October Caddis which will take things up another level.

Today the anglers fished various dry fly patterns including; Purple Haze, Orange Stimulators, Swisher Caddis, Chubby Chernobyls, Fat Alberts and Mahogany Duns. And the result was very good as the two anglers landed around 30 fish between them! The cuts were nice, chunky specimens averaging about 14-16 inches. The catch was well documented as many great pictures were taken!

The fish on the Elk River are very drift sensitive. If you do not present the fly properly and mend your line with the direction of the current, the bigger fish will not be fooled. You may catch a few smaller guys without good technique, but you will struggle getting takes. In addition, these cutthroat tend to take the fly very slowly, so you want to be patient once they hit in order to avoid pulling the fly right out of their mouths!

The Elk Valley is full of wildlife with deer, elk, black and grizzly bears and even cougars traversing the land. If you are lucky enough to see some of these animals give them their space and observe from a safe distance.

If you are planning to fish the streams or lakes in our region stop by our fly shop in Cranbrook and we will be happy to assist you. We can tell you what flies are working and how the different rivers and lakes are fishing.

We are guiding all of September on the St.Mary and Elk and over on the Columbia River thru October. So if you want to do some fall fly fishing just call 1-800-667-2311!

Take care, keep your social distance and be safe!

Tight Lines,

Karen and Kelly

St.Mary Angler

PS For more information on guided trips contact us at 1-800-667-2311.

Report #9 (August 8, 2020)

The Bull River is on!

All the streams in the East Kootenay region of B.C. are fishing amazingly right now! The weather is hot and the fishing is on!

Today we decided to head up into the Canadian Rockies to fish the scenic Bull River. The Bull flows out of the Rockies and joins up with the Kootenay River. It is an absolutely beautiful float. The guides can't get enough of this amazing site, as the Steeples are pure eye candy!

On this day the weather was absolutely fabulous. The temperature started off at around 15°C (60°F) and reached highs of 29 to 30°C (86°F). It was an amazing summers day with just a few clouds floating around.

We floated the section of the Bull River above the Aberfeldie Dam. As soon as the float began the anglers started hooking fish on the dry fly! They casted their flies behind rocks, along the bank edges and areas under overhanging vegetation, rocks and logs. This Bull River moves quickly with lots of boulders and structure so the guides are constantly on the oars with the anglers making rapid fire casts. The Bull provides a very active and fun float!

On this float the anglers landed about 20 cutthroat trout each with the average size in the 13-14 inch range. They did land a few fish in the 15-16 inch slot as well. All the fish were very healthy and strong.

The artificial flies that worked best included; Purple Haze, H&L Variants, Caddis, Lime Trudes, Stimulators (orange or yellow) and foam patterns like the Chubby Chernobyl. We saw stone flies hatching along the River throughout the day.

There was lots of bird action on this float, we even saw an eagle attacking a hawk! Deer were also seen drinking water at the River's edge on this hot summer day.

All the streams in our region are now fishing very well on dries. The cutthroat trout are looking up and taking the dry as long as it is presented with a good drift. The fly has to float naturally down the stream long enough for the fish to find it and come up and eat it. This means it is very important to lengthen your leader if you are fishing a small fly as it will produce a longer drift. If you are fishing a big stone fly pattern then you can shorten your leader to 7 or 8 feet, but you must move or twitch it constantly as it drifts. If you don't shake the stone fly to activate its foam legs the fish won't even look at it.

We are now in the middle of August and the fishing is prime. Stop by the St. Mary Angler Fly Shop when in Cranbrook. We have an excellent selection of flies and we will help you any way we can to get you out on the water.

The water levels in our rivers are holding nicely this summer, benefiting from all that snow last winter and the cool, wet spring. We expect them to fish very well into September and early October.

So get out on the water and have fun. Please remember to keep your distance and stay safe!

Tight lines

Karen and Kelly

St.Mary Angler

PS For more information on guided trips in our area please contact us at 1-800-667-2311.

Report #8 (August 2, 2020)

St. Mary River Report: Summer is here and so is the dry fly fishing!

We are already into August with our fellow British Columbians just coming off their B.C. Day long weekend. Lots of people are now out enjoying the beautiful weather, summer is here!

On today's St.Mary float the temperature started out cool at 15°C (60°F) building to a high of 34°C (93°F) in the afternoon. The bulk of our fishing this season has been focused on the St.Mary River. Why you ask?, because it has been fishing so well! In addition to the great fishing, we are often the only boats floating down the River most days! So, with the exception of a few pleasure-craft with fisherman, we have the place to ourselves.

Today we decided to float from the Pumphouse down to the Wycliffe takeout. We started at round 9.00 a.m., a little earlier than usual as a temperatures are getting quite warm by later in the afternoon. The cutthroat trout love it when the sun hits the water as it triggers the start of surface feeding. You can always start out earlier, but the action really begins once the sun's rays penetrate the water column.

In the last couple of weeks, the dry fly fishing has really taken off. The fish in the St. Mary are now very active and are looking up! The anglers are responding with big attractor patterns tied onto their 4 and 5 weight rods. As soon as we cast off from shore, the guys are busy tossing their bugs along the banks, behind rocks and beside structures wherever they can. The anglers are also getting out of the boat occasionally to cast from the bank edges. On a few of the most productive runs, we actually rowed back upstream and floated through the run a second time!

By mid-afternoon the heat was building up on some of the clients so the guides took the opportunity to get wet and cool themselves down. Our group was not the only one trying to cool down. On this day we saw a mother bear with her two cubs in the water doing the same! We also saw many birds including; eagles, ospreys and mergansers ducks fishing in the water for themselves and their young.

The clients had a wonderful time on this float catching 15 to 20 trout between them. The catch was mostly wild Westslope Cutthroats with a few rainbows and cut-bows thrown in.

In terms of the bugs, we did see some stoneflies hatching along with some midges. Most of the flies used by the anglers were the big attractor patterns such as; the Chubby Chernobyl - purple and orange, Fat Alberts - black and red, Stim-Chew Toys and anything else that resembled a stone that had foam and legs on the bodies. We also tried some traditional patterns including; Parachute Adams, Lime Trudes, Royal Wulffs, Caddis and Purple Haze (sized from 12 to 16).

We are definitely in the midst of summer now, but there is still loads of time to get out and enjoy the rivers and lakes in the region. When in Cranbrook, stop by our fly shop with your ideas of where to go and what to use and we will give you some feedback.

The fishing in the Elk, Bull and the Skookumchuck rivers have all started to turn on the last couple weeks with some outstanding dry fly fishing. As for the lakes, the hot summer temperatures have caused them to slow down dramatically. That said, they fish ok in the mornings and evenings when the temperatures are lower.

Just remember to read the regulations in advance of your trip and to stay safe, keep your distance and enjoy yourself during these strange times.

Tight lines

Karen and Kelly

St.Mary Angler

PS For more information on guided trips in our area please contact us at 1-800-667-2311 or drop into the Fly Shop in Cranbrook.

Report #7 (July 19, 2020)

The days are getting warmer as the flows are coming down into their summer range.

The water flow of the St. Mary River has been decreasing daily. Our guides are now running single sections of the River and the fishing has started to pick up on the surface more and more. Today we ran the Canyon Section of the Mary from Wycliffe down to the St. Eugene Mission takeout.

The Canyon Section of the St. Mary River provides a beautiful float with lots of runs and pocket water for fish to hold in. There are also many areas where anglers can get out of the boat and fish from shore.

The guides are getting out on the water around 9:30 a.m. now and are using dry flies right from the start. When the rays of the sun pierce the water column it triggers the dry fly action. So, it makes no sense to get out any earlier because it is the sunlight in the water that marks the start of the fishing action for the day.

Westslope Cutthroat Trout like big attractor patterns early in the season as the stone flies are hatching. So, if you fish foam patterns, cast along the bank edges, or behind a rock, or any obvious structure. Remember to give the rod a shake so the fly looks like it's skittering on the surface. If the foam pattern does not move on the surface the fish are not going to be interested. You can also fish traditional patterns at this time of year including; Purple Haze, orange and yellow Stimulators, PMDs, Lime Trudes and Royal Wulffs. Try any or all of them. The foam patterns you can use that work well are the Fat Alberts - Black and Red, Chubby Chernobyls and basically any foam pattern with legs.

The mornings are still on the slow side, but as the day builds so does the action. On this float the anglers landed around 30 to 40 trout between them. They landed mostly Cutthroats with a few cut-bows and a couple of full strain rainbows. They also had a bull trout eat a Cutthroat that was hooked up and were able to land both of them!

As we floated down the River we saw a few anglers fishing from shore, out enjoying the day. As the water drops it gets easier for people to get out and fish along the edges.

Wildlife on the River included eagles, ospreys, ducks, geese and a couple mule deer down on the water.

River Roundup:

The Elk River is still a little high and off-color, but clearing more and more each day. The Bull and the Skookumchuck are now clear and the water levels are dropping daily. These streams are just starting to fish very well.

With the cool spring and the resulting high-water levels extended, the fish are very healthy and seem happy now. All this water should lead to great fishing opportunities into the fall!

As the weather is warming up, people are enjoying the outdoors. Of course, physical distance is easy to do in our part of the world.

If you are interested in a fly-fishing trip give us a call 1-800-667-2311. If you have never gone on a float, try something you haven't done before. You will enjoy it! If you are going out on the rivers on your own, stop by the shop and we can point you in the right direction and help select some flies that will work at your destination.

Stay safe, remember to physical distance and enjoy your time on the water... wherever you are!

Tight Lines,

Karen and Kelly

St.Mary Angler

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

Report #6 (July 13, 2020)

The St.Mary River is starting to round into form!

The summer weather is now upon us, but the rivers are still running high. The higher flows have put us about two weeks behind a normal year. However, the St. Mary has cleared up nicely and the anglers have been out fishing it with great success!

The summer of 2020 has been quite cool so far. We have been experiencing storms coming through the valley pretty much every day or two. The average daily high temperature now is between 24 and 26°C (75-79°F), while the mornings are starting out cool at around 6 to 8°C (43-46°F). We have also seen some strong winds in the valley recently.... but on this particular day it was nice and calm!

The guides are running double sections of the St.Mary River right now, pushed along by the moderate flow. Today we decided to float the reach from the St. Eugene Mission down to Fort Steele. This is a stretch of the St.Mary that has many nice runs and holding water for both Cutthroat and Bull trout.

The anglers started off nymphing in the morning. As things warmed as the sun's rays penetrated the water column, they switched to dry flies and started picking up fish on the surface. They casted along the bank edges, behind rocks and beside the log jam structures, trying to fool the fish to come to the surface to take the dry fly.

We are now seeing a good crop of PMD's and the stonefly hatch is gradually making its way up the River. We also noticed the Green Drakes hatching when the sun disappeared behind the clouds. So the summer buffet of bugs is now being served!

The average size cutthroat landed today was between 13 and 15 inches, with a few in the 17 to 18 inch slot. When the hatch of Green Drakes started to pop off the cutthroat became very happy feeders and that is when we hooked some of the nice chunkier fish.

In addition to the clients landing around 35 cutthroat trout between them, they did catch a nice 27-inch bull trout. It made for an exciting and challenging fight and a beautiful picture fish! It really capped off a great day on the St.Mary River for them.

The flies that work best at this time of year on the St.Mary are the foam patterns that imitate stoneflies. Today we used Fat Alberts, Red and Blacks, Stimy Chew Toys, Chubby Chernobyl Ants, regular Stimulators (orange and yellow), Prince Nymphs, as well as stone fly nymphs.

Before you hit the St.Mary River for a float or walk and wade, come visit us in the fly shop. We will help you select the flies that have been working best recently. After all, the successful fly patterns do change throughout the summer.

The wildlife on the River is now abundant with many types of birds (eagles, ospreys and mergansers ducks with their young) and deer (whitetail and mule) frequenting the edges.

The flow of the St.Mary River is now coming down every day and the River is starting to define itself nicely for the summer season. The cutthroat trout are finding their summer feeding stations and our ability to walk and wade along the River's edge is improving each day.

The Elk River is just beginning to shape up as it is drops and clears. It is about two weeks behind as well. As both the St. Mary and Elk Rivers are going into summer with healthy flows, we expect that they will hold their water levels later throughout the fall.

Border Update:

Unfortunately, the U.S./Canada border remains closed until the end of August due to the Covid 19 Pandemic.

Please, everyone stay safe and take the necessary precautions to protect your health.

Do get outside and fish locally as much as you can this summer. The outdoors is the best place to be during these tough times.

Tight Lines,

Kelly and Karen

St.Mary Angler

PS Call us at 1-800-667-2311 to discuss the latest fishing conditions and available days this summer and fall.

Report #5 (July 5, 2020)

The Weather is Warming up and the St. Mary River is Ready to go!

The first weekend of July has brought us weather that is starting to feel more like summer. Which is a nice change from the extended spring weather of 2020 to date.

Today we decided to go out and float the St Mary River. The weather was absolutely beautiful with highs of 26°C (79°F). It was a typical summer day with only a few clouds dotting the blue sky. We floated the stretch of the Mary from the St. Eugene Mission downstream.

As the River is still running pretty high with the snow melt coming off, we made good time on the fast-flowing water. During our five-hour float, we casted our dry flies towards the bank edges, behind logs and rocks searching for the hungry Westslope Cutthroat Trout.

The cutthroat are just coming off the spawn and are dispersing upriver in search of their summer feeding zones. So, in advance of our float we knew we would likely run into some stretches of water devoid of fish and others with large numbers of cuts. With this scenario we knew we were going to have to search them out as we made our way downstream.

We set up two rods in our boat in advance; one for dry fly fishing and one for nymphing. The St. Mary River is just starting to see hatches of stoneflies busting off later in the afternoon, with PMD's hatching throughout the day. That being said, the dry fly fishing was slow in the morning, so that's when we tried some nymphing. Later in the afternoon the dry fly action started to pick up nicely as we landed a few pretty cutthroats on the surface.

As we floated this section of the St. Mary River we observed that the runoff had not caused any major changes to river morphology. So, if you fished this stretch of the River last year, you won't see any changes in 2020.

In the five hours of floating we landed about 15 Cutthroat Trout, with some of them being really chunky. The average sized fish was 13 to 15 inches in length and very colourful.

The choice of dry flies on this trip included; stoneflies, orange and yellow stimulators, Fat Alberts, Chernobyl ants, and anything with foam we could use to imitate a stonefly.

We also tried a Green Drake pattern and PMDs. The nymphs used were the Prince Nymphs, Copper Johns and Lightning Bugs.

As we move into the warmer days of summer and the River drops, the fish will settle into their summer homes and the dry fly fishing will pick up dramatically.

On this Sunday float we saw some people kayaking, folks fishing from shore and people just out enjoying the beautiful weather of the East Kootenays. It was nice to see.

We also saw a lot of nature including; bald eagles and mergansers ducks with their young. It was an absolutely beautiful day and we really enjoyed the chance to float the scenic St. Mary River again.

If you are heading out to the rivers in our area, stop by our Fly Shop in Cranbrook. We can help you with your fly selection and discuss what is working best on the water. If you want to experience a guided trip down the St. Mary, Elk or the Bull River this summer and fall, give us a call at 1-800-667-2311.

If you have just starting to fly fish, a guided float is a sure way to speed up the learning process and see firsthand how to fish a river. Our guides can show you how to read the water, where to cast your line, how play your catch and the important role of being patient!

We really encourage people that live in British Columbia and Alberta to come out and see how lucky we are to have this quality of dry fly fishing in your greater backyard.

Stay safe everyone, and enjoy the outdoors this summer!

We are very lucky to live where we live!

Tight lines,

Karen and Kelly

St.Mary Angler

PS Call us at 1-800-667-2311 to touch base on the fishing and available days this summer and fall.

Report #4 (June 15, 2020)

Columbia River Report: spring is cool, but the fishing is hot!

June is here and the Columbia River is still fishing very well! We just returned from a couple days over on the Columbia in the West Kootenays. The weather was typical for June as we had some sun, cloud and rain. We also had to dodge a couple of hail storms while out on the River, so yes, it is typical spring conditions now!

The temperature each morning started off pretty cool at around 5°Celsius (40°F), but reached highs of 20°C (70°F) by the afternoon. So we dressed warm in the morning and peeled most of it off after lunch!

The water conditions of the River are high as the runoff continues to come. Navigating a boat on the Columbia at this time of year is for the experienced boater only. You have to be aware of logs and debris on the River at all times and a jet boat rather than a prop drive is strongly recommended. And if you are fishing as well as navigating, you have to be very aware of what's coming at you all the time.

On this trip, we chose to get out on the Columbia by late morning, around 11 a.m., and fished till about 5 p.m. The fish are not that active early in the morning, so getting there a little late meant we hit them when they were up and feeding.

Our approach was to just cruise the River in our jet boat, stopping at promising looking eddies to fish, but generally kept moving throughout the day. This stretch of the Columbia River, from its confluence with the Kootenay River down to the International Boundary, is so big and so fast. It is completely different from any normal stream fishing, but provides a lot of choice. We had multiple rod setups in advance; one with a streamer, another with nymph and the third with a dry fly. We were prepared for whatever opportunity presented itself while on the water.

Once we found a nice piece of promising water, usually a big eddy, we cut the motor upstream and rowed down into it. On this day the fish were up and feeding pretty well in every location we angled in. It wasn't a-fish-a-cast, but it was pretty darn good.

The average size of the rainbow trout landed during the two days was between 18 and 20 inches. The biggest fish caught was a little over 21 and it was healthy, fat and jumped like crazy towards the boat. We did catch some females that were just coming off the spawn and they were very hungry of course. That said, most of the fish hooked were strong and healthy with those beautiful Columbia River rainbow colours. Between us both we landed about 22 to 25 rainbows.

In terms of the hatches, we could only see a small hatch coming off. It was most likely midges as we could see big groups of swallows circling and feeding on the River during the hatch. We also saw ducks floating around gobbling up the food off the surface.

In terms of the flies used over the couple of days we were casting mainly; Purple Prince Nymphs, Lightning Bug Nymphs, regular Prince Nymphs, Chironomids, Pickles and Kelly's Super Streamer. On the dry fly side, we used tan caddis and Blue Winged Olives.

Over the course of the two days we did not really see much dry fly action. But as we go through June the Caddis are going to start coming off in large quantities and the Dry Fly Season will begin.

The bird life on the water at this time of year is amazing. We saw a turkey fly all the way across the Columbia, which is remarkable because you hardly see turkeys fly any real distance. We also saw some Canada Geese with their young floating the back eddies, as well as a lot of merganser ducks along the shoreline. Then, in the tall trees along the shoreline we saw a few occupied eagle nests as well.

Overall the fishing on the Columbia River at this time of year is amazing. We are always trying new and innovative techniques and patterns to entice the fish to catch even more of them!

Lakes Update:

The lakes in the East Kootenays are still fishing quite well. The washout on the road to White Swan Lake was fixed quickly so people are back in their fishing again. We are also hearing that Whiteswan, Premier and Whitetail lake are fishing very well.

In June everything is hatching so you have a choice to fish many different techniques. On these lakes you can fish chironomids, leeches, balanced leeches, damsels, dragonfly nymphs and mayflies. If you find that nothing is working for you, then try the booby and the blob flies as they work very well ... so give them a try!

The rivers of southeastern British Columbia all open to fishing on June 15th. The St. Mary River is dropping and clearing up quite nicely now so we should see some great fishing soon!

Canada–United States Border Closure:

Unfortunately, it was just announced that the Canada/U.S. border closure has been extended till late July due to the Coronavirus Pandemic. That said, we wish our American friends to stay safe and be healthy. We miss you all, but hopefully we will see you guys this summer.

To our Canadians friends, please get out and fish! But keep your distance and stay safe!

Fishing is the one sport that you don't have to be around a lot of people to have a lot of fun at.

Tight Lines,

Karen and Kelly

St.Mary Angler

PS Call us at 1-800-667-2311 to touch base with us on the fishing, the border or available days this summer and fall.

Report #3 (June 12, 2020)

Road Report; we have had a couple of washouts.

Over the last couple of days we have experienced a lot of heavy rain throughout southeastern British Columbia. As a result we have seen the access roads to the Bull River, Whiteswan Lake and the road around Fort Steele washed out. Please call the fly shop at 1-800-667-2311 if you want more information on exact locations.

Stay safe!

St.Mary Angler

Report #2 (May 27, 2020)

May Fishing Roundup; things are shaping up very nicely!

Spring is cruising right along as the end of May approaches. The lakes of the East Kootenay region have been fishing very well over the last two months. Along with the chironomid hatches, everything else is emerging now including the Dragon, Damsel and May flies. And just last evening the first batch of flying black ants were around so the full spectrum of food is now available for the trout in the lakes!

Whitetail, Whiteswan and Premier lakes are all fishing very well now, while some of the lower valley lakes have slowed down and become hit or miss. However, when the trout are feeding there is nothing better than being out on the water, immersed in nature, catching fish on these beautiful lakes.

The flies that have been working consistently throughout the Spring Lake Season have been chironomids (when the hatch is on) and balanced leeches. The anglers have also been using micro leeches, as well as Damsels, Doc Spratleys and Dragonflies quite a bit.

All the B.C. Provincial Parks are open for fishing and boat launching now. As of June 1st they will also be open for camping for B.C. residents. So even with the Covid 19 restrictions, the fishermen in our region have been able to spread out and fish our many different lakes.

Even though the Provincial Parks are open for B.C. residents only, non-residents can camp at the Forest Recreation sites and at any privately owned R.V. facility in B.C. Of course, 'social distancing' practices will be in effect at all public and private camping facilities.

The snowpack is slowly converting to its liquid form and flowing out of the mountains at a measured pace. As a result, the spring runoff has been muted with no significant flooding to date... but that can always change! The rivers are slated to open on June 15th when we will be able to hopefully get out and enjoy some Cutthroat fishing. We will know how these rivers are shaping up in the next couple of weeks and let you know as well.

Over in the West Kootenay region, the stretch of the Columbia River flowing from Castlegar down through Trail and into Washington State, has been fishing very well. The flow of the Columbia has been coming up slowly over the last few weeks and is now quite high with a good amount of surface debris on the water. So, you will have to

watch out for the odd log and clutch of branches when you are boating along the River or fishing from shore.

Due to the higher flows the rainbows have made their move from along the bank edges into the big swirling back eddies and their accompanying feed lanes. So, having a boat to fly fish from is as much as a necessity as a luxury under the current conditions.

We were out on the upper Columbia the last couple days and noticed how the fish were more active in the afternoon than the morning. We did catch a few in the mornings, but it was like they turned on a light switch by early afternoon as the fish became very active! We noticed caddis fly hatches in the afternoon accompanied by some small midges coming off. Consequently, the fishing really picked up. In response, we used Prince nymphs, Caddis nymphs and the Pickle with good success.

We are just enjoying the time we can spend outside right now. But as the summer approaches we anticipate a lot of changes in the tourism industry this year because of the pandemic. We expect to see more people from B.C. traveling close to home.

To our American friends to the South there are still a lot of unknowns as the border is still closed till June 21st. We are expecting the Canadian Government to let us know if it will reopen in late June. We have no idea if the the border will open then, so in the meantime we are trying to take things day-by-day. We will let you know as soon as we find out.

As for Canadian anglers, we are now able to guide you following certain procedures and protocols that we have received from Government Officials. This may be the year to think about seeing what recreation opportunities you have in your own backyard. If you are new to fly fishing, think about taking a float down the St.Mary River to speed up your learning process and see what we show anglers from around the world every year. You will experience how absolutely beautiful and fun it is to float down a river, catching Cutthroat Trout on a dry fly while viewing the Rockies. That's why people travel from around the world to come to our area and see what we can do every day!

When in town we encourage anglers to come into our Fly Shop in Cranbrook. We will talk to you about where the fishing is good, what flies are being used on different lakes and streams, and keep you updated on all the fishing news and trends in our area.

Take care everyone!

Stay safe and get out there and enjoy the outdoors where you can.

Tight Lines,

Karen and Kelly

St.Mary Angler

PS Call us at 1-800-667-2311 to touch base with on the fishing, the status of the border and available days.

Report #1 (May 1, 2020)

The Spring Fishing Report

To begin with, I want to apologize for not starting the fishing reports on time this year. With everything going across the globe with the Novel Coronavirus (Covid 19), its lockdowns and the accompanying fear and uncertainty, we just got sidetracked. However, the fish don't know anything about it and the drive to go fishing continues regardless. All the lakes are now open and spring has arrived in full force so we are going to try to focus on fishing again.

The weather this past month has been typically spring like for us. We have had days with rain and snow, as well as days with sun up to 20 plus Celsius (that's roughly 70 Fahrenheit). It definitely has felt like a typical spring in the East Kootenay region of southeastern B.C.

By mid-April all the lower elevation lakes in the Rocky Mountain Trench were iced off including; Edwards, Horseshoe, Lazy, Grundy, Echo and Larchwood. Premier, White Swan and Whitetail have more recently become ice free as well. We have had a lot of wind along with some warm days, so now almost all the lakes are open and the locals are champing at the bit to get out on the water.

What you have to remember at this time of Covid 19 is that all the Provincial Parks are closed to camping. Their boat launches are also closed. That being the case, the boat launches at the Forest recreation sites are open. So, you are allowed to fish on these lakes, but you can't hang around and party at the boat launches or at the camp sites. As long as you just launch your boat, go out and fish, then go straight home afterwards, you are good to go. The officials also want you to fish only with family members that live in your house, or just fish on your own.

The fly patterns working very well on the lakes these days include; Balanced Leeches, Boobies, Blobs and Leeches (Black, Green or Olive). Chironomids such as Rick's Prom Midge, Chromies and Gun Metals are also producing well!

It will be to your advantage to have a number of different types of Chironomids in your fly box when you hit the water. Things can change a lot during the course of the day. A fly that worked well yesterday can be a dud tomorrow. So a good variety can sometimes make all the difference to your success.

All the lakes we fish are a little different so when you hit the water the first thing you have to do is check out where the fish are located, and at what depth. They usually are

anywhere between 12 and 20 feet. So you have to build your leader with an indicator and swivel (as a weight) to fish the drop off ledges to the proper depth.

Remember that all the rivers are currently closed from April 1st to June 15th in our [Region 4](#), with the exception the Columbia and Kootenay rivers. This closure is for Cutthroat spawning and fishability during the spring freshet. In the last couple of days, the Kootenay River has started to rise and has become dirty as the runoff has begun. So fishing the Kootenay is essentially done for now.

The Columbia River has been fishing just great as its population of big rainbow trout are feeding heavily after winter. By the look of them they have wintered well and have a lot of energy when hooked up for sure. We fished the Columbia recently and the fish we're still holding along the bank edges. But as we come into May and the water levels start to rise we see more logs and debris coming down the River and the eddies become the only place where the fish will hold and feed.

Flies that will work at this time of year on the Columbia include; Prince Nymphs, Hairs Ears and Pheasant tails. We also have good success with Pat's Rubber Leg and Kelly's Super streamer.

Next week we are expecting our Government to give us some guidance and protocols to follow in order to safely guide anglers out on the water. We are excited to get this direction as it means we will soon be able to start taking anglers out on the water again. We will let you know more about them as we hear about it!

With regards to guiding our American clients we will have to wait for the border to open. We will know more about this in late May or early June. Hopefully they will announce when the border will reopen soon and provide us with direction on how to move forward. We look forward to seeing our American friends again!

As of right now we wish everyone to stay safe and get out on your local waters to fish if you can. It is the best way to self-isolate and get some good positive energy!

If you are in the Cranbrook area please stop by our Fly Shop on the main drag of to discuss the local scene.

We are open six days a week, Monday through Saturday, 9:30 to 5:30 starting May 1st.

We only allow two people in the store at a time and are practicing all social distancing protocols, as well as regularly cleaning the counters and POS machine.

Stay Safe and Tight Lines!

Kelly and Karen

St. Mary Angler

PS Feel free to call us at 1-800-667-2311 to touch base with us as the restrictions around Covid 19 change.