

# A Guides Day at Yes Bay

By Captain Jim Lucas

The morning was cold as I cut bait for the day to come. The weather had been bad last night and I expected it to be a little windier today, however, the storm looks as though it had blown through and all that was left was the morning fog. As I looked up, I could see a few spots of blue sky through the fog and I knew that it was going to be a special day of fishing in Southeast Alaska.

My guests for the next few days were long time Lodge customers, I had fished with them last year and I was anxious to fish with them again. The conversations from our previous trip needed to be finished, even though it had been nearly a year; it seemed like just a few weeks ago. I decided to skip breakfast and get the boat ready for an early departure; I knew the kids would be anxiously tugging on their Grandfathers arm trying to head to the dock as soon as possible.

The season was nearly half over and the fishing had been pretty slow up until a couple weeks ago, the rain had come with a vengeance and pushed the salmon towards their spawning grounds. Daily limits of salmon were the norm for the past week, and I didn't expect that to stop any time soon. Beautiful bright pinks, chums and silvers were all over Neets Bay and that was where we were headed.

The bait was cut, the rods were in the holders, ice in the cooler, motors warmed up...all I needed were my people...can't they see what a beautiful day they were missing? I looked at my watch and realized it was just barely past 6:00 am; maybe it was me who was over-anxious!

I decided a little breakfast might slow me down a little, so I took the long walk up the ramp to grab something to eat and refill my coffee cup. Breakfast and coffee didn't take long and I was back down on the boat ready to leave before 6:30.

OK, now where are they?

A few slow minutes went by before I saw two smiling faces running down the ramp with Grandpa trailing behind, trying to keep up. That was impossible, the boys were charged up and ready to go fish...you could see the excitement in their steps.

The questions started to fly from their mouths the moment they reached the boat; where are we going, what are we fishing for, did you catch any yesterday...a full years worth of conversation came flowing out in seconds. I tried to calm them down as best as I could, making sure they had their life jackets on, all their rain gear and plenty of warm clothes. You never know when the weather will change here in Alaska, so you leave the dock prepared. They assured me they had everything they needed and jumped in the boat, continuing to barrage me with questions...maybe I was a little hasty in rejoining this group for another year!





That thought flew out of mind as a smiling, gentle man approached the boat and told the boys to hush and said, "I am so glad we are fishing with you again this year. It's really good to see you."

I was now reassured that taking these people fishing was the best decision of the season.

Dad arrived a few minutes later, with all the things the boys had forgotten. After a quick hello and the tough decision of who was going with who...Grandpa and Tom, the oldest boy were in my boat. Dad and Will were going with one of our other guides and they were right behind us.

The next few minutes of checking licenses and filling out my log book flew by, lines were

untied and we were headed fishing. I looked at my watch and it was not even 7:00 Am., the perfect time to head out. With the tide change a comfortable one and a half hours away, we had plenty of time to get to Neets Bay and get our lines wet.

The run out Yes Bay is always special, but today was as pretty as it gets. The water was glassy and the reflection of the fog and mountains seemed to rush by at breakneck speed. The blue sky was more visible now and just as I had thought, this would be a special day of fishing from Yes Bay Lodge.

Twenty five minutes later I slowed the boat down among some jumping fish and set about getting our lines in the water. The rods were all rigged, just a quick piece of bait and the downriggers were set and we were fishing. To Tom, what seemed like an eternity was really only a few minutes before his rod tip was out of the downrigger clip and he was reeling in his first fish of the day. A beautiful silver sided pink salmon was soon in the net and again the questions flew out...what kind is it, how much does it weigh...did we get the first fish or did my brother Will catch his first? The other boat was right beside us and they had fish on as well.

Three hours flew by, the action was nearly non-stop and it was time to head in for lunch. Tom could not wait to compare "our catch" to theirs. The ride in was just as beautiful as the early morning ride had been, the water was glassed off and the bright sunshine reflecting the surrounding mountains was a sight to behold.

Twenty minutes later we were at the dock; the fish hung up and carefully weighed so there was no disputing the size of each of the boys catch...each fish and weight was permanently committed to the boy's memory. The lunch time discussion was to be nothing but fish, size and weight, each boy reliving the morning past.

Lunch flew by, but I was in no hurry to get back down to the boat. As it was last year, Grandpa and one of the kids fished in the morning, the afternoons were reserved for Grandpa and I to enjoy by ourselves. The



boys and their father would be heading down the ramp right after lunch; ours was at a much more leisurely pace. Rather than rush out, we would be leaving the dock around 2:00 pm...time for short rest after lunch.

I headed down about 1:15 to get the boat squared away, put away one of the rods and rig up for some more salmon fishing. I spent some of my extra time cutting bait for tomorrow and cleaning the boat.

Right on cue, just as I finished squaring things away, my guest appeared. A soft hello and a "Let's go fishing" and we were on our way. I asked how his lunch was and if he managed a little rest, he assured me that lunch was great and he looked forward to some quiet time relaxing in the open air and maybe even catch a fish our two.

Earlier that day we had managed to hook up a double of beautiful Silver salmon and that was our target species for the afternoon. So we headed back down to the same spot in Neets Bay, hoping for a repeat. Even though it wouldn't be a double, both of us agreed that a couple more in the box would be a great afternoon.

It's not often that I have the privilege to fish with someone with the years of experience, who really understands what fishing is all about. Last year, we were running from one location to another, it too was a beautiful day and we were both quietly enjoying the ride, when he tapped me on the shoulder and said, why don't we stop here for a little while. I stopped the boat, turned off the motor and we drifted for a few minutes. We both sat in our solitude, enjoying the fresh air and scenery. It wasn't the conversation we had; it was the lack of conversation which meant so much to me. After our time alone had passed, he broke the silence with; this is what fishing is all about, fishing gives me a reason to be here.

With that, we sat a couple more minutes, then I quietly started the motor and we moved on to our next spot to fish and enjoy the rest of the day. I imagined today would be similar.



We arrived at Neets Bay about 25 minutes later; I set the rod in the pole holder after rigging the downrigger. We were fishing. We talked about our winter and some of the things we had done, relived a little of the boys excitement from earlier in the day, when our conversation was rudely interrupted by the snap of the downrigger and the reel screaming through the silence. I suppose one of us should catch this fish, I said!

Our goals were met, almost. Although we did manage to find some nice silvers, we put a few more in the box and decided to head in early so we could be there when the boys and their father hit the dock. The boys had been determined to do some bottom fishing for halibut and yelloweye snapper.

We were both anxious to share in their excitement at the end of our quiet afternoon.