

BACK CASTS

Flats Fishing Alaska-Style

Head Northwest in September for Superb

Sight-Fishing Action  BY TOSH BROWN

When most anglers think of saltwater fishing in Alaska, they typically envision downriggers, strip baits and slicker bibs. Even though the various salmon species all stage in the tidewaters before running upstream to spawn, most outfitters choose to pursue them close to their camps and lodges — far inland from their migratory origin.

On a September 2005 trip to the Alaska Peninsula, I was pleasantly surprised when outfitter Rus Schwausch described his sight-casting program for sea-bright salmon. His Alaska Wilderness Safari camp is located less than a half-mile from the ocean on a high bluff

they follow their noses inland to spawn. If the weather turns gloomy — which it regularly does in Alaska — you can still position yourself at the right water depth where v-wakes and rolling fish define their path across the flats. Just lead the pack by a few feet with a gaudy

these ballistic slabs of muscle are a rare find for the saltwater sight-caster. For anglers looking for an even greater challenge, Rus and his guides can also position casters at the surf line to intercept staging schools roaming the beachfront. These fish are especially wild as they're still sharing the water with hungry orcas, salmon sharks and sea lions.

Rus opens his camp each summer in July with the arrival of the chum and pink salmon. Sea-run arctic char are also avail-



overlooking an expansive tidal sand flat. With a massive daily water fluctuation, the salmon stage at the inlet during low tide and then push across the flats with each surge of new water. On clear days when the sun is high (10 to 12 hours per day in mid-summer), the salmon resemble hordes of over-served bonefish as

streamer fly, and then brace yourself for a big grab and a blistering run.

Catching a bright salmon in heavy river current is certainly a kick, but you've never seen them run quite like they do with 200 acres of knee-deep tidal flat for an escape route. Decorated with sea lice and primed for the rigors of the spawn,

able during that time and are also viable sight-casting targets when the light is good for spotting and stalking. By late August the chums and pinks are on the wane, and the silvers (cohos) are staging in the surf in huge, marauding packs.

While the tidal flats are certainly a large part of the fishery at Alaska Wilder-

SALT SPRAY

ness Safari, Rus also offers plenty of opportunity for the freshies that prefer their salmon and char in traditional habitat. The main river that feeds the tidal inlet offers classic holding water and additional sight-casting prospects.

When packing your fishing gear, think of bonefish on the heavy side. Rods in the 8- or 9-weight class rigged with floating lines are suggested for the salmon. Saltwater reels are recommended

for their backing capacity and quality drag systems. For char, a lighter 5- or 6-weight rod with a floating line is ideal. A detailed packing, travel and fly list is provided for each angler, and since its sight-fishing, don't forget your polarized glasses!

For more information on this unique Alaska flats fishery, contact Rus Schwausch at (512) 656-2736, or visit his website at www.alaskawildernesssafari.com.