



The Langara Experience: Salmon University Fishes the Queen Charlotte Islands with Oak Bay Marine Group

We emerged from the clouds and were quickly approaching Langara Island. A very small Island, at the northern tip of the Queen Charlottes, that rarely shows up on a GPS or even some maps, but don't let its small size fool you. This "little" Island is fishing heaven. The twin turbo prop Otter float plane circled the Island before coming in for a landing so we could see where we would be calling home for the next four days.

The excitement was unreal. Seeing the boats scattered throughout the small coves and off different points, it was as though the Island was man made with the perfect complement of unique features that would allow us to fish under any situation.

As the plane touched down around 11:30AM and we docked in front of the MV Charlotte Princess, the whole crew stood by to greet us. Up the ramp and onto the boat a great feast was waiting, including ribs, chicken, seafood chowder and numerous salads and other goodies. Two refrigerators were stuffed with beverages for us to have as we please along with pots of coffee and snacks everywhere.



The Captain started off welcoming us all aboard the MV Charlotte Princess and let each crew member introduce themselves. Then it was down to business... let's get to fishing! Oh, but not so fast. Shawn "Cookie" Pennel introduced himself as the FishMaster and explained he would be briefing us as to when, where, why and how to fish for each species. A very detailed map was given to everyone so we could mark spots and take notes. After a ½ hour lesson on the Island's fishing opportunities, we all adjourned to our rooms to find all of our bags and gear waiting for us. In addition there were also boots and Mustang Storm Suits in the appropriate size for each person.

The anticipation was overwhelming and I couldn't get suited up fast enough. We all met at our individual boats (shared between the two guests in each room). We were greeted by a crew member who stepped us through all the safety and operating procedures. 17ft Fat Cat boats, 50hp Yamaha outboards, dual fuel tanks, Lowrance fish finder, Icom VHF radio, tackle box full of all the necessary gear, two 6' Hali Rods and reels loaded with 100lb braid, four 10 ½' custom made mooching rods and reels with 25lb mono. I quickly took all the reels off my rods and changed them to reels I had specifically brought up for the trip, although the gear they had was top notch.



It was now 2:00PM and we were on the water. Our strategy was to get a feel for the layout of the Island and hit each spot briefly before moving to the next. We paid close attention to the bottom structure and the surrounding areas for future reference. The "East" side of the Island was where most of the Chinook were being caught, but high winds forced a shut down. NOT a problem. We had the whole "West" side to become familiar with and target some Lings and Hali's. You can circle the entire Island in less than an hour, so we were never more than ½ hour away from the home base. As we moved from spot to spot "Cookie" would point out where the pinnacles were where concentrations of fish would use to protect themselves from the current, and also attack unsuspecting baitfish. I was sure to mark these spots on the hand held Lowrance GPS I packed along so we could run directly out to them either after drifting away or for the days to come. Those spots where we hooked up instantly got special attention on the GPS and we knew THOSE were the spots we would come back to. We picked up a few Lings and Hali's but released them to try and get some larger ones, and also not to punch out too quick on our possession limit.

Upon releasing around a 20lb halibut the Fishmaster for the MV Marabell came over and asked "Oh, confident are we?"

Without hesitation, I simply answered "Yes".

And for good reason. In the next days to follow, my fishing partner, Frank Urebeck, and I hit the GPS spot on the nuts and as soon as hitting the bottom (300ft) we both doubled up on nice Lings and Halibut. Average Lings were going 15lbs with several over 20lbs, a few over 30lbs and we did have one on the boat over 40lbs. The average Halibut was also probably 15lbs, but most of those kept were in the 20 - 25lb range. Some of the other boats in our group did manage some nicer halibut with 3 being caught over 60lbs and a very nice fish estimated to be 80lbs was lost at another boat.



After a good 6 hours of fishing and marking our spots we retreated back to the Princess for a four course meal prepared by none other than "Cookie", our Fishmaster. The regular chef was due in the next day. This is no buffet style or fast food. We're talking first class all the way. We started out with "Cookies" famous "Over the Limit" clam chowder with Yelloweye; next, a Ceasar Salad. The main course, New York Steak with Prawns. And for desert, Chocolate Volcano! For the wine connoisseur's, wine was included with meals.



Each night after the first, we had four choices for dinner including, Prime Rib, Jumbo Mango Prawns, Rack of Lamb, Chicken stuffed with artichoke hearts and sun dried tomatoes, Roast Duck, Halibut, Halibut and more Halibut. There was something for everyone and if you didn't like what was on the menu they'd fixed something up for you special (this came in handy for the youngster on the boat). If you missed the main sitting for dinner, not a problem, they would hold your dinner for you when you arrived back from your daily fishing adventure.



The next days to follow we came in several times to dry off, grab a bite to eat, get re-fueled and load up with more bait. The crew was always there to greet us and offer us great food at any time.

After dinner the lounge was available for a beer, drink or just for talking fish. "Cookie" lined up the next days recommendations and we were told there would be Gale Force winds from the South East which pretty much was going to shut the East side down again for Salmon fishing unless we got up early and hit it before the winds picked up. My fishing partner and I got up at 3:30AM, grabbed a quick breakfast (prepared to order) and were on the water at 4:30AM. To our surprise, we were the only guests on the water where "Cookie" had thought there might be fish, Andrews Point. Within 2 minutes of dropping down, my rod buckled over and I had a fish on, but it wasn't meant to be, as it swam right up to the boat, took a quick look and turned away. As it turned out, the barbless hook slipped out from a very light hookup. The wind was picking up and the tide was moving pretty good. Two more passes produced two more hookups, but with Pinks. These were let go as we were after Chinook.

It was getting a little rough so "Cookie" advised us to hit Langara Rocks and then the Lighthouse. The swells were building, wind picking up and the drift was moving us from Langara Rocks out past the Lighthouse. We were headed towards a group of Commercial Trollers so our plan was to drift to them and if no action we would pick up and go to our Ling/Hali spot. After drifting for ½ hour or so, I saw an ever so light tap on my rod. Could this be it? Another tap - and another. I chose to leave the rod in the holder but fed it 5 or 6 pulls of line. As the line got taut, there was another slight tap and then it happened...the rod tip buried in the water! FISH ON! It didn't feel very large so I told Frank to leave his rod out to see if we could double up. I was fishing with 102ft of line out, 6oz lead and a cut plug herring in 228ft of water. After reeling the fish to within 20ft of the boat I figured it was a good fish, but nothing big, then he woke up! The Daiwa Luna 300 went screaming and now I knew this was more fish than I had originally thought. Frank quickly reeled his line in to get it out of the way. A true battle ensued and the rod was doubled over, as the fish wanted nothing to do with us. Again I got the fish to within a reasonable distance to the boat and he took off again just like a freight train and peeled out 300ft of line. I slowly worked the fish up to the boat and Frank got into position. We saw the fish 4 or 5 times and knew he was nice, but he wasn't quite ready yet. Finally, he surrendered and rolled on his side. Frank did a fantastic job of netting the fish and we had him in the boat. We estimated the fish to be at least 25lbs and probably closer to 30. As it turned out, 6 hours later it weighed 31lbs on the certified scale. Welcome to the Captain's Club! A special pin is awarded for Chinook over 30lbs and my name will soon join the others on the wall of the MV Charlotte Princess for those that have also brought in a fish over 30lbs. They also have a "Master Fisherman" category for those over 50lbs.





One thing I can say about these fish is they are super fresh, super fat and super tough. That was some of the best runs that I can remember from a Chinook that size.

It was only 6:30AM so the day was just started. The other boats started arriving after hearing there were Chinook at the Lighthouse, but the weather also followed us. Another hour of salmon fishing and we decided to hit the bottom fish.

We arrived back for a quick lunch around 1:00 with a fish box overflowing with Salmon and Ling Cod.

Around 3:00 we headed back out to see what to tackle next. We figured we'd hit salmon around 4:30 at the tide change but while traveling to our destination we saw the water boiling with Sea Bass. We quickly dropped down and caught our daily limit of these tasty little critters then moved on to Coho Point where we began again to motor mooch with cut plug herring for Chinook. It certainly wasn't hot, but just felt fishy. It wasn't too long after we were into a nice drift and I got a nice little take down. I quickly fed line out and the rod almost ripped from my hand. Again I didn't think it was that big of fish and had it up to the boat before Frank could reel up and get the net ready. No problem though as he just wanted to check us out, apparently to see who he was messing with. He must have decided he didn't like what he saw so the line began peeling off the reel like the fish before. Not quite as strong and I had already seen the fish so I figured it was in the 15lb range. A couple of really sweet runs and another great net job and the 17lb fish was in the boat.



Dinner was served at 8:00... King Crab Legs, Jumbo Mango Prawns and New York Cheese Cake. I was stuffed.

After dinner "Cookie" had everyone up to the lounge for a quick announcement of the fish that were caught that day and he welcomed me into the Captain's Club. He also had herring there with mooching rigs all tied up so he could show everyone how to properly cut and bait their hooks. A nice little shot of some Irish Cream and I was ready for bed. 11:00 and the alarms going off at 3:30! Can't wait!!!!

Day three - again, we are the first ones on the water and were very quickly into Pinks. It was as if we couldn't get through them to find any Chinook. The pinks and all the bait also drove in some Killer Whales, which amazed us with their presence. They had no problem at all getting close to our boats and even going in between two of us that were parallel in search of the mighty Chinook. I'm guessing the whales were pretty successful as they stayed around for hours, even posing for us on occasion.



Since the whales were stirring up the bait and the salmon we decided to hit my Ling/Hali spot. Talk about instant hookups! Before we could engage the reels after hitting the bottom we were doubled up. Again the weather kicked up and we took some water over the back. Time to come in. We'd taken 3 of our 4 Hali's and a couple more Lings.

After a quick lunch we heard about another spot that was out of the weather but I didn't know where it was. I asked one of the crew members if he could get a GPS coordinate for me. After a few minutes I came back out, the boat was cleaned up just as though we'd never been in it and there was a piece of paper there with the coordinates. Fifteen minutes later we were on top of the spot and hoped to get into a quick Hali so we could concentrate on just salmon the last day. Quick was an over estimate. I don't even think we hit bottom and we both had hooked up. We took the biggest one and were punched out for halibut. We shared the spot with a couple other guests that were catching other bottomfish, just no halibut. They thanked us; as in 4 drops they had 4 fish! Can't get any better than that.



Another gourmet dinner and up to the lounge for a few minutes before retiring for a few hours sleep. I really must have been tired because I woke up a short time later and thought the clock said 3:00. Not wanting to fall back to sleep, I listened to my iPod for a while then was wondering why the alarm hadn't gone off. Hmmmm... big hand was now on the 7, small hand on the 12... DOH!!! I originally looked at them backwards and it was 12:15 when I thought it was 3:00. None the matter, the alarm went off at 3:30 and we were up and out there again.

Strictly fishing for salmon we were into the pinks but didn't want any. We hit many of the known spots for Chinook but couldn't locate any.

Boats had to be in by 10:00 to get ready to go and I still wanted to hook up again. Oh well, a few tussles with some Pinks and I got a quick fix of salmon on the end of the line. We arrived back at 10:00 (well OK we pushed it to 10:10) where a nice hot lunch was ready after changing out of our raingear.

The crew met us, we had an awards ceremony and



everyone was in great spirits.

Even with Gale Force winds knocking out the best Chinook grounds for 2 of the 4 days no one was disappointed. There was ALWAYS something to fish for even in the adverse conditions that Mother Nature threw our way. Everyone came home with boxes of fish to fill the freezer.

As we departed and said goodbye to our new friends/new fishing buddies, we all talked about returning next year for an even better trip now that we know the waters a little. And don't worry, for those that don't know the water at all, "Cookie" will be there for you!

Until next year....

Terry Wiest
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