

Haines and Skagway:

Discover the Upper Lynn Canal

By Randy Ericksen

Haines and Skagway are the only two communities in southeast Alaska with year-round ferries and road access to interior Alaska. Located at the northern end of Lynn Canal, the longest fjord in the world, these towns boast some of the most breathtaking scenery in North America.

HAINES

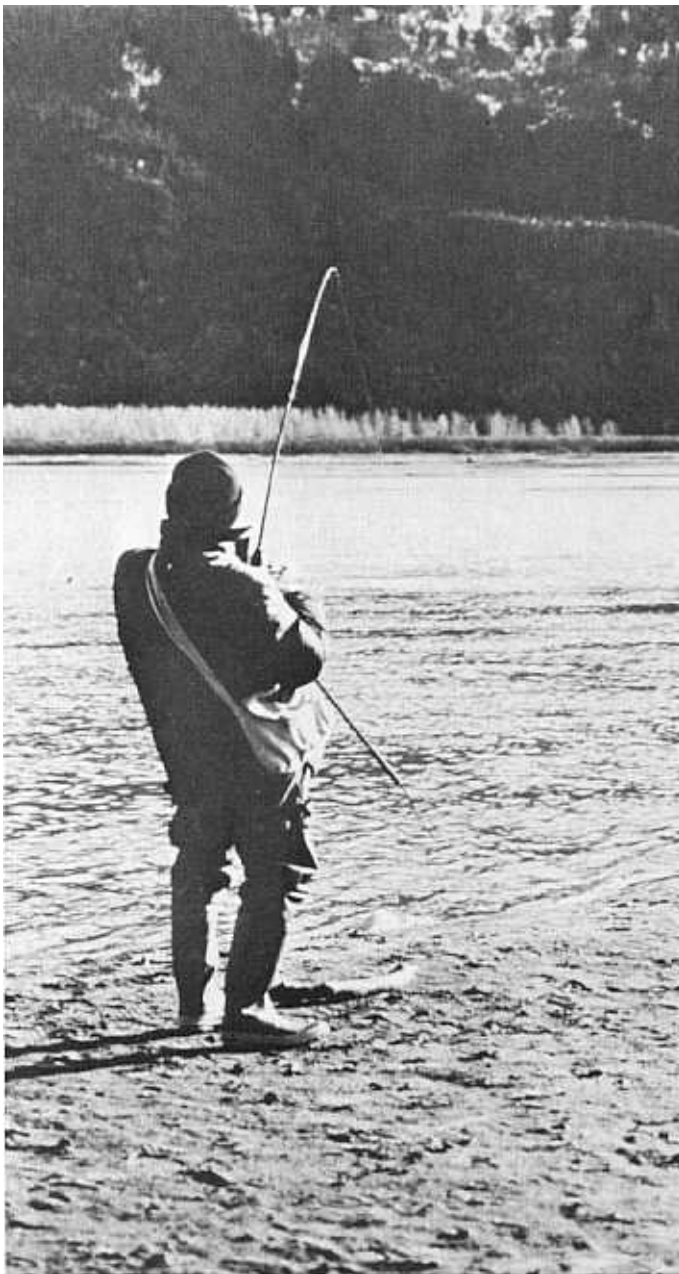
The Chilkat and Chilkoot Rivers support large stocks of salmon, trout and char. These in turn sustain significant commercial, subsistence, and recreational fisheries. Sixty percent of the roadside sport anglers in Haines are from Canada. This often leads to confusion when asking the time of day (British Columbia and the Yukon are on a different time zone from Alaska). Another 20 percent of the anglers are from the "lower 48," so meeting a resident angler in Haines is a real novelty. Haines has a full range of facilities for the visitor ranging from primitive camping facilities to comfortable hotels and everything in between.

Chilkat River

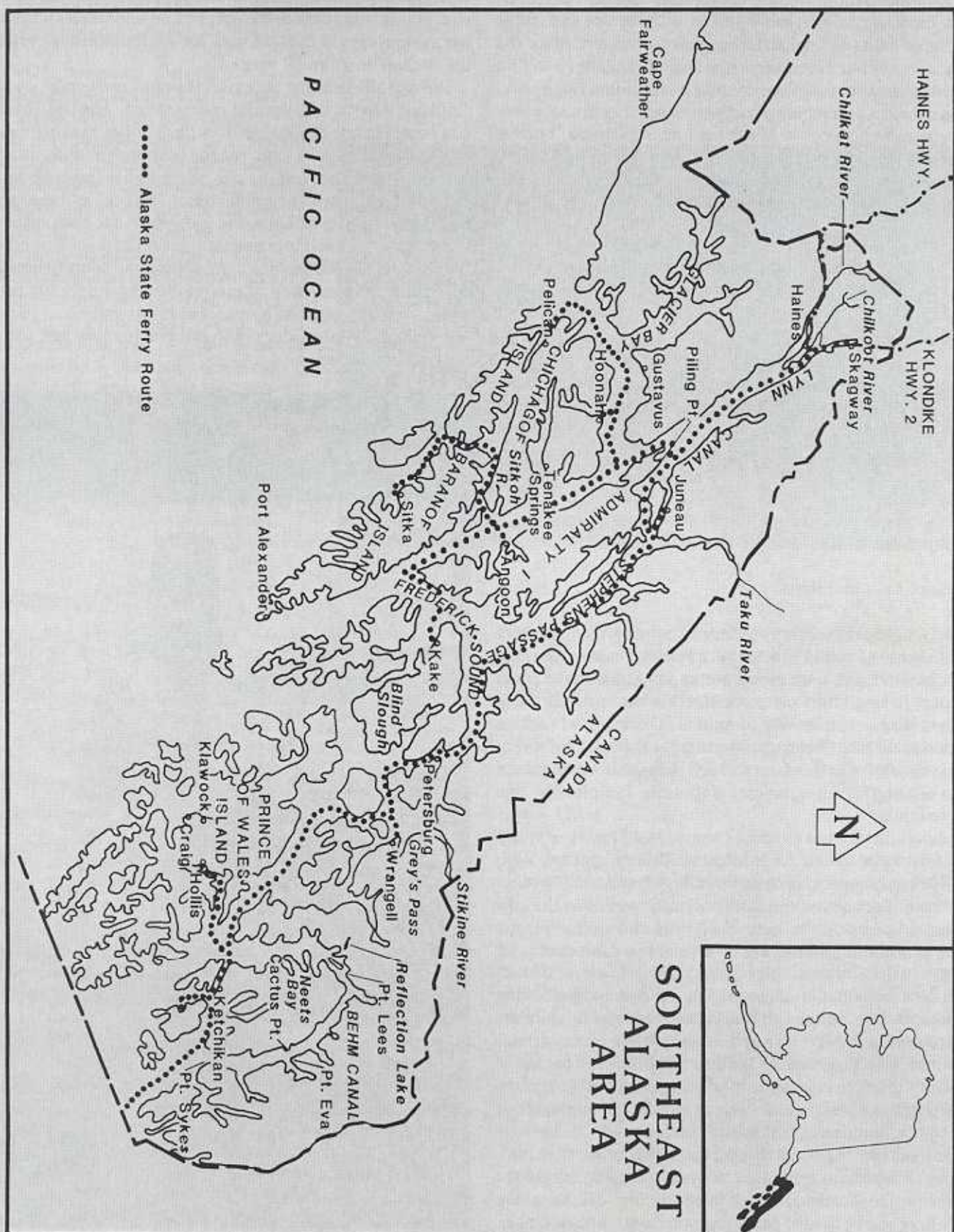
The Haines Highway follows along the Chilkat River and its tributary, the Klehini River, all the way to the Canada border and offers excellent access to fishing areas. The fishing season officially begins in April when thousands of 1 to 3 pound Dolly Varden migrate out of Chilkat Lake (not accessible by road) into the Chilkat River. These Dollies are easily caught between 8 and 22 miles of the Haines Highway. Most anglers use pixies or salmon eggs when fishing for Dollies, but fly fishermen have good success using fly patterns imitating salmon fry.

The Chilkat River becomes increasingly silty as the glaciers begin melting with warmer weather. From June to mid-September, sport fishing on the Chilkat is limited to a few clear water tributaries where Dolly Varden and pink salmon can be caught.

Fall is an especially good time of year to fish the Chilkat River. The fall colors and crisp weather of the Chilkat Valley create an excellent environment in which to fish for coho and chum salmon. Fishing begins in earnest in mid-September as



Richard Farnell



the river level drops and the water clears with cooler temperatures. Anglers tend to concentrate near the Haines airport. Incoming salmon move upriver with the tide and rest at the upper limits of tidal influence near the airport. Since the river is very braided in this area, the biggest challenge is to find the best channel to fish. On more than one occasion I have walked past dozens of discouraged anglers to reach a channel where every angler had close to his or her limit of salmon. I prefer to fish further upriver where the river channel is more defined. Pixies are by far the most popular lure with anglers, but bright spinners are just as effective in catching coho.

Mosquito Lake

Mosquito Lake is reached by a well marked road which begins at mile 27 of the Haines Highway. This lake probably is the least used along the road system. (I suspect that this is due to its name, not to the lack of fish.) Mosquito Lake has small runs of both sockeye and coho, but the best fishing is for cutthroat trout and Dolly Varden. Fishing can be productive in the fall when casting from shore, but the best fishing is at the north end of the lake which is accessed by boat. When fishing from shore, use salmon eggs for bait or try casting small spinners near weed beds or fallen logs. Cutthroat prefer the cover that these areas provide. Mosquito Lake also provides excellent ice fishing in the winter.

Chilkoot Lake and River

The Chilkoot River sport fishery is the most intense fishery in southeast Alaska. The river runs just over a mile from the lake down to Lutak Inlet, yet supports up to 32,000 angler hours of sport fishing effort per year. ADF&G has operated a fish weir on the river since 1976 to monitor the return of sockeye salmon to the lake. Technicians working at the weir can be seen counting salmon as they pass through the weir, or netting them to take length measurements and scale samples for age determination.

Anglers travel from as far as Ontario and Florida to spend a month or two fishing for the elusive Chilkoot sockeye. With sockeye escapement counts between 70,000 and 100,000 in recent years, sockeye are the most common salmon in the lake system. In contrast, the sport harvest of sockeye has ranged between 600 and 3,000 a year. There are two distinct runs of sockeye in the Chilkoot. One is in later June or July, and a second larger run is in mid-August. If you are serious about fishing for sockeye, you need to fish below the weir (state law prohibits fishing within 300 feet of any fish weir) in the main current. This involves a long walk up the far bank or wading out to the middle of the river. Here again the most popular lure is the pixie. Fly fishermen using red streamers or small red sponges, about $\frac{1}{2}$ " square, are generally most successful.

Pink salmon begin running up the Chilkoot River in mid-August. They can be caught in the river, or heading toward the river along the shoreline of Lutak Inlet. Any kind of shiny spoon or spinner can be used to catch them through mid-September.

The bread and butter species of the Chilkoot recreational fishery is Dolly Varden. Dollies can be caught anywhere on the river at nearly any time of the year. People who target on Dollies use salmon eggs in the lake near the outlet. Most of the fish are in the 1 to 2 pound range.

Perhaps the fish that generates the most excitement on the Chilkoot River is the silver, or coho salmon. The peak of the run occurs in late September or early October, making it one of the latest runs in the state. The size of the run is small, usually less than 2,000 fish, but the size of the fish is large, up to 20 pounds. Because of the small size of the run, and the large amount of fishing pressure, the sport limit has been reduced to 2 coho per day and in possession on the Chilkoot River. The Sport Fish Division has had to limit the coho sport fishery by emergency order for the past two years to protect the run from overharvest. Anglers are encouraged to use catch and release methods when fishing for Chilkoot coho to make best use of the resource for all.



Richard Farnell

Of Special Interest...

Chilkat River Critical Habitat Area

Of particular interest in the Haines area is the Chilkat River Critical Habitat Area, approximately 20 miles north of Haines. There, at the Chilkat River Bald Eagle Council Grounds, up to 3,500 bald eagles gather every fall to feed on late-run chum salmon. The greatest eagle concentrations occur during mid- to late November in a three mile stretch of river where warm upwelling water keeps ice from forming. Best bald eagle viewing can be found between miles 18 and 22. Wildlife viewers must take extreme care with traffic traveling at high speeds along the highway. There are no visitor facilities in the critical habitat area.



SKAGWAY

Skagway is known more for its historical gold rush sites and its narrow gauge railway than for its fishing. The fishing opportunities should not be underestimated. Two hatcheries operate in the area and contribute salmon to the local sport fisheries. Several lakes have been stocked with trout in the area and provide fishing for the more adventurous angler. Only Lower Dewey Lake has good enough access to be considered in this article. Skagway's tourist facilities are highly developed, ranging from modern hotels to a tent campground in Dyea.

Taiya River

The Taiya River has the best natural run of fish in the Skagway area. Because the river is glacial, the best fishing is in the spring and fall when the water is clear. The Dyea Road provides good access to the river. Dolly Varden can be caught in the river in early spring or fall. Chum and coho salmon can be caught at the steel bridge in September and October using brightly colored spinners or spoons.

Shoreline Areas

Dolly Varden and an occasional king salmon can be caught in May and June along the shoreline of Yakutania Point and Long Bay. Pink salmon can be caught in August as they return to the Burro Creek and Pullen Creek Hatcheries. Fishing along Yakutania Point and Dyea can be fruitful, but I recommend fishing bright, flashy lures near the mouth of Pullen Creek in front of town.

Pullen Creek

Pullen Creek runs through the heart of Skagway. Pullen Creek Park was developed along the banks of the creek and includes a small pond complete with docks to fish from. The Pullen Creek hatchery operates near the headwaters of the creek and has provided good returns of pink salmon to local anglers. Adult coho have just started returning to the hatchery; we can expect better fishing in the future as the run develops.

Dewey Lakes

Upper and Lower Dewey Lakes have been stocked with, and maintain, healthy populations of eastern brook trout. Upper Dewey Lake lies at nearly 3,000 foot elevation and involves a strenuous 2 ½ to 4 hour hike. Lower Dewey lake involves a steep 20 minute hike from downtown Skagway. A trail runs along the shoreline of Lower Dewey lake and a small skiff allows good access to virtually all the fishing areas on the lake. Brook trout grow up to 16 inches and tend to travel in schools around the lake perimeter feeding on insects. The best way to catch them is by casting small artificial flies, size #10 or #12, out into deep water, retrieving slowly.

Whether your destination is Haines or Skagway, fishing opportunities abound in the upper Lynn Canal.

Randy Erickson is a Fishery Biologist with the Division of Sport Fisheries, ADF&G, Haines.