

RC 178

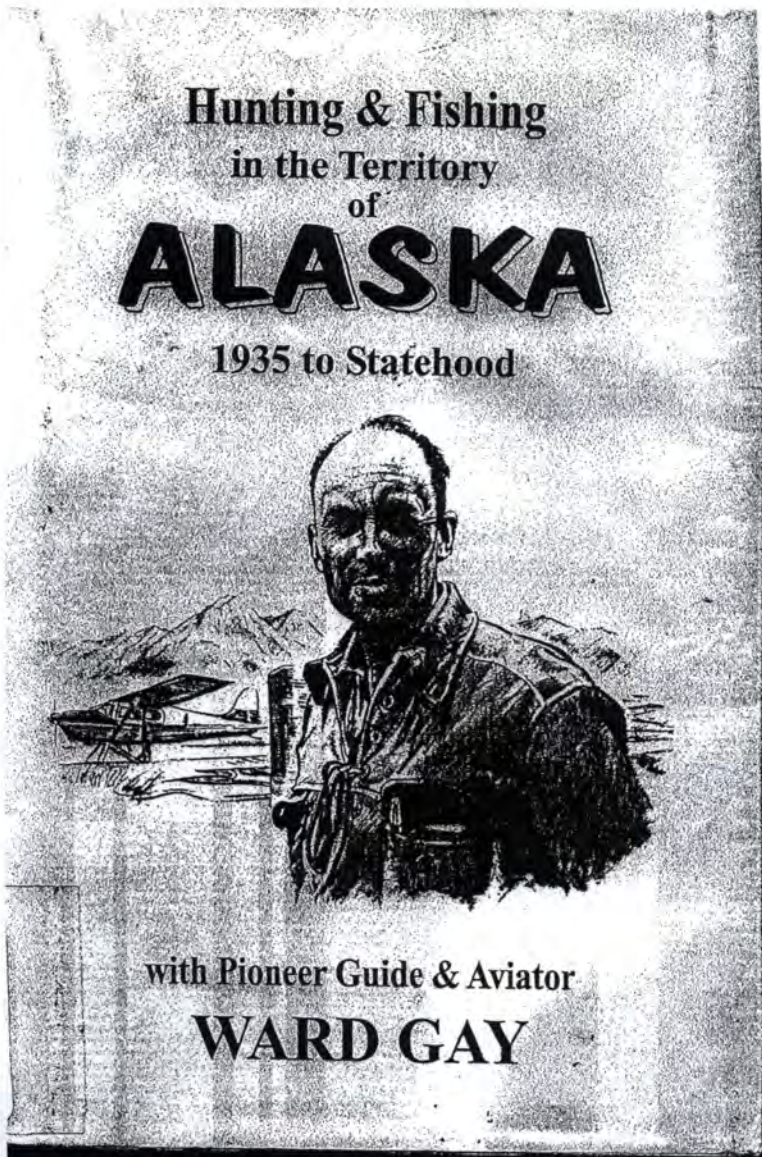
Submitted by Jeff Berger

Evidence Regarding Previous Stocking of Kenai River King Salmon

Ward Gay came to Alaska in 1935 and was a guide and aviator among other things. He died in 1998. His son published his diaries in 2004.

On pages 139 and 140 the book has an account of Ward Gay learning from an employee at the Fire Lake Hatchery that king salmon eggs from the Columbia River were being used at the hatchery to produce fry for stocking the Kenai River.

The pertinent pages are attached.



This book is a special story about a man who pl...
The late Ward Gay, an unassuming and straig...
early adventures and bush pilots. Arriving in the year 1935, he had a sole desire: to be a
hunting and fishing guide and fly bush planes in the wild and mysterious Land of the Midnight
Sun. He did just that and more.



in 1959.
Alaska's

WARD GAY

In his engaging narrative, Ward Gay takes readers on big game hunts for walrus on the Bering Sea, flies us into remote regions to hunt grizzly bears at Cooper Pass, leads us on horseback and pack trains down Francis Creek for moose rams. He tells us about fishing the Kenai River for king salmon and rainbows at a time when the only access was by floatplane. He takes us back to Anchorage in 1944, when he launched SeaAirmotive, one of Alaska's great aviation companies. He risks his own life in 1951 to save a downed pilot and flies to his rescue. He continues to share his exploits and adventures with us in the exciting polar bear hunts in Point Hope, in the early 1950s.

His journey is a wonderful adventure story that ultimately takes us into the heart of the people and places of early Alaska, describing what it took just to survive. Ward's exploits and discoveries are documented in the fascinating photographs he accumulated and in the journal he so faithfully kept.

Ward Gay stands among Alaska's great pioneer guides and bush pilots. This book is an accurate account of his life, an adventure biography of a truly remarkable man. Everything is real, everything is true, and above all, everything is still there—waiting for newcomers to discover all over again through Ward Gay's inimitable voice.

H. P. Publishing
P. O. Box 24155
Hilton Head Island, SC 29925
(843) 342-8777 (843) 816-8626

U.S. \$24.95
Canada \$34.95



CHAPTER 23

Fishing the Kenai River

ALL KINDS OF PEOPLE MAY DISPUTE IT, but I'm convinced that the Kenai River is one of the best fishing streams in the world. Nobody showed much interest in the river when I was getting established at Lake Hood. "Wasting your time," one fisherman told me. "Might be a few trout there, but too much glacier silt to be any good."

Flying to Anchorage from Homer, I did some checking. I flew the river from the beach all the way up to Skilak Lake, then swung around and came back down to study it closer. A sandbar jutted into the river, stretching halfway across, creating a deep hole. *If there's any fish at all in the Kenai, that should be a good place to try*, I thought to myself.

I circled around, landed, and taxied in behind the sandbar. After securing the floatplane, I put a daredevil lure on my fishing line and cast into a ripple. *Pow!* The tip of the rod bent over, and the reel started singing. The fish jumped several times, and the bright, shimmering flash told me I had a rainbow. I landed the trout. It measured just over 20 inches. Then I released it. My heart was pumping. I cast again, and another trout hit hard. This one measured 24 inches. I made seven more casts and caught big rainbow on every cast, the largest just under 30 inches. I knew I had found something special.

The next day I bought a canvas tent, a little camping gear, and an inflatable rubber raft. I flew back over to that same sandbar and made a camp. Jimmy Sumpter, who ran a bar in Anchorage, was the first fisherman I took there, along with two of his friends. They just went wild with the magnificence of the fishing.

I established two other fishing camps downstream, on a river where there was "too much glacier silt to be any good." The news got out fast, and fisherman began putting up more camps. Two years later, the military joined in, putting up camps, and brought in 30-foot motor launches to access the river. The main military camp was at the point where the Kenai River leaves Skilak Lake. The military flew in PBV seaplanes loaded with G.I.'s. Some of their camps even had mess halls with cooks.

Once I flew a general and two colonels to the river with my Stinson floatplane. As we were tying up the plane, a motor launch came chugging up the river with three officers aboard. They were hooting and hollering with happiness at the superb fishing, and laid out fifty-eight big rainbows on the dock. I looked them over and asked, "Isn't that a few too many?" "Oh," one of them said, "You can't say we weren't sporting about it. We threw away a lot of them that were under 24 inches." I asked him, "But don't you think that killing that many fish in just one day is awfully hard on any river?"

The callous way that many fished the Kenai River almost ruined it, an attitude that would unfortunately continue for many years. When the Kenai road was put in, it opened up the river to hundreds of fishermen, and my little fly-in paradise was lost.

At this time there were almost no king salmon going up the Kenai River. The large pile-driven fish traps had pretty well wiped them out. The big run of kings went up the north side of Cook Inlet into the Susitna River.

* Kenai Road
went in
in 1951

Continued...

I joined the Anchorage Sportsman's Club when they wanted to raise money to buy forty acres of land at Sand Lake and also build a fish hatchery to help rebuild the fisheries. We built the hatchery on Fire Lake, north of Anchorage, about halfway to Palmer.

Several years later I went up to the hatchery to look at things. One fellow was showing me around and I said, "You sure have a lot of fingerlings—they look like kings to me."

He said, "They are, and we have two million of them to plant this spring."

"Gee," I said, "Where in the world did you get enough eggs to hatch that many?"

"Well," he said, "Don't say anything about it, but the eggs came from the mouth of the Columbia River. We want to make sure that the Kenai River produces king salmon from spring to fall."

For several years we stocked the Kenai with fingerlings from the Fire Lake Hatchery. Most of us who did this are gone now, so it shouldn't hurt to talk about it. The state has long since taken over the Fire Lake Hatchery and continues with their restocking programs.

CHAPTER 24

Joe Delia, 1948

GUIDES REALLY DID MAKE my operation a success. I could not have done as much without their help and expertise in the field. Joe Delia is one of the finest men that I ever knew.

I was returning from Fog Lakes late in October 1948, moving out the remainder of a hunting camp I had there. Just below Willow, I crossed a small lake. There was a man standing on the shore waving a red flag—his red woolen underwear, I found out later. I circled.

The lake was frozen except for a round hole in the middle, large enough to land in, but too small for takeoff. I thought, *Well, I will have to break ice to take off, but I can't pass him up, he might be in trouble.* I was flying a newly purchased Stinson Station Wagon on EDO 2300 floats. It cost me \$10,300, and I did not want to damage it.

I landed, carefully broke ice to shore, cut the engine, and stepped out on the float. There stood Joe Delia.

I said, "What's your trouble?"

He said, "Can you fly me out of here? Back to Anchorage? I ain't got no money and I can't live on rabbits. I was going to trap mink here till Christmas. The guy who flew me here was coming back then to pick me up. He said that I wouldn't have any trouble getting a moose to eat. There isn't anything here but rabbits! He charged