



Pacific Sea Salmon Heading Inshore Towards the Deadly Kwakiult Rancherie.

Sea Salmon Catchers

A Day Among the Kwakiult Fishermen of the Pacific

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(Photographs by the Author.)

IT is well that I back myself with photographic illustrations of this—or else my readers might say, "What a fishy story!"

We were in British Columbia. The day was in early November. No sign was there of winter in all the landscape. Firs, green, ever washed to brightest colours by the steady rains, grew all about us. My host was an English rancher—lots of money and no experience; he got the latter later. He had arrived in the country the early part of the present year.

All the day long we had paddled through inlets and fiords. He was deaf to my advice. I wished him to discard the fly. Not a single rise had he got. In vain I exhibited attractive spoon baits. No! He would have none of them. The only game we got fell to my share. Pheasants, glorious as living gems, flashed up out of the alders on the steep banks of the rivers and sailed "rocketing" across. It is astounding how much noise a single cock pheasant can make and how he can rattle a chap as he springs with swiftly beating wings within ten feet of the canoe's bow. At times I was lucky enough to kill the male bird instantly—females are protected—at others he bore off the load of sixes and for the time escaped. This is the feature of these wild tangled covers—this loss of the poor wounded birds—that causes the hunter many a heart ache.

After our frugal supper on the river's bank, where the late wine fruit glowed, and the brilliant red berries in the yew overhead caught the glory of the setting sun, fruit and tree, valley and stream, aye, and snow-capped mountain peak were alike bathed in the ruddy beams. Ever, as the sun sank, came the "flap, flap, splash" of the salmon, rising in every deep pool along the river. We sat and watched and discussed this odd sight. In the half mile of the winding river within our view a constant leaping and splashing disturbed the smooth surface of the water. At times a dozen noble fish were in the air. From our studies we knew they were not

feeding, as all the stomachs of the inward bound salmon are found to be empty after they leave the sea. Nor was it a sporting instinct, as many claim, that led to this myriad water dance. No! just the commonplace fact that they leap and slap their tails on the water to dislodge the sea lice.

Now we run with the current. Ten thousand salmon were congregated in the lower pools or estuaries. The night had fallen dark and all the plankton were rising from the depths, these miniature light bulbs that make the dark surface of the sea glow with phosphorescence. As we entered the pools the crowded fish leaped and turned and swam rapidly from side to side, making the water one glory of blue flame. Every paddle stroke was a stroke of fire; every drop from our blades gleamed incandescent. Ah! gasped my host in the bow, and well he might. A sea lion had entered the pool and its great, skull-like, human-looking face protruded within a few feet of the bow in an upthrown mountain of water, every drop of which glittered and gleamed and burned with the phosphorescence. At times the hurrying, confused mass of fish, plunging in the ghastly light of the animalculæ disturbed my steering. I knew they could not hurt us, but the night was so dark, and the tide currents so swift and the baleful light of the swirling sea so intense, that I breathed more freely when we paddled out on the shallow tide flats.

As we sat, with the hearth-fire dimly burning, a few hours later, my host regretted that the salmon could not be caught. So doleful was his lament that, to cheer him up, I promised to produce two men that could take a ton of salmon out of that river in the three hours of the flood tide and not use a net either. This roused him and he promptly wanted to wager me five pounds it could not be done. I refused the bet, but promised the ton should be captured before noon the next day.

LONG before the sun peeped over the range to the south I was paddling against the last of the "short run out" to the rancherie of the Kwakiult men. It took little urging to get my two old guides to promise to "get sammon" that day, and as soon as the "long run in" started they would be off up stream.

After a leisurely breakfast mine host and I entered the canoe and, aided with the incoming tide, headed riverwards. A regular procession of glaucous winged gulls flew along with us, all going to gorge on the feast my guides were preparing, as it only takes a short notice to bring the big sea-side flocks in, and I knew that the first gulls were even now picking out the eyes of the earliest caught fish.

The river, as we ascended, showed a great host of upward-bound fish. On the shallower riffles the bodies of the upgoing salmon showed almost completely out of water. In fact, in one place, we saw several fish struggle across a perfectly dry spot, where the water ran under the heaped-up pebbles. All the lower pools were filled, little bits of water, ten feet wide and a hundred feet long, with just enough depth to allow us to paddle through. They would have perhaps one hundred



Ashore After a Salmon Scrimmage.



Kwakiult Fishermen Wading Out to the Salmon.



"Fully half a ton on that rope."

adult salmon in them, enough to wet us through as they fled, alarmed, splashing about the pool.

It was not, however, until we rounded the upper bend that the full wonder of the scene burst upon

(Concluded on page 21.)



Taking the Salmon Off the Rope.