



Wild, Remote & Bountiful

Despite its location B.C.'s Pitt River offers a remote, world-class fishing experience. By PAT HOGLUND

Still today the Pitt River's turquoise green and sea blue color is with me. Its cold, free flowing water had a lasting impression. I remember when I first caught a good glimpse of it. I was standing on a bridge overlooking the river and taking in the Pitt River Valley in its entirety. The river's blue and green hues contrasted with the chalk-white stones that made up the riverbank. In today's world it is every bit wild as it is free. No dams. No people. No homes. Just a river teeming with salmon that pours from snow-capped mountains.

Someplace, miles up river from me, the river tumbled out of British Columbia's Coast Range Mountains and continued to flow through, around and over large and small round rocks that were smooth from years of tumbling and rolling over the river bottom.

In most places the riverbank slopes gradually to the water, yet in other places the bank is non-existent; the river cuts into the interior forest eliminating any hint of a shoreline. There simply is a cut bank that drops to the river. Like a piece of birthday cake, the ground is sliced exposing sand and rocks and a layer of green fauna serves as the frosting. Trees stripped of their bark and bleached from exposure lay haphazardly on gravel bars. It was an artist's rendition of a perfect river.

The Pitt River is glacier fed and a dam free river. Only one reasonably maintained logging road follows the river. The small deserted community of Alvin is a reminder of past logging operations. Today you'll find a fishing lodge, a few year-round residences and a defunct fish hatchery. Aside from that you'd be



KAI TEUBERT PHOTO

Kaid Teubert shows off a beautiful chrome king his client caught swinging flies on the Pitt.

Tim Hehr with a Pitt River sockeye, left. A typical Pitt River king, bottom right.



KAI TEUBERT PHOTO



PAT HOGLUND PHOTO



PAT HOGLUND PHOTO

hard-pressed to recognize any signs of civilization. What's more, you won't find more than a handful of people on the river at one time. Which makes it hard to believe that the city of Vancouver is 45 miles to the west. Except for the rushing river water there is no sound. If you allow yourself the luxury, it's very possible to hear yourself think. The Pitt River is everything any modern-day fisherman would want a river to be. To say it's a step back in time is accurate. Knowing that you have it all to yourself is even better.

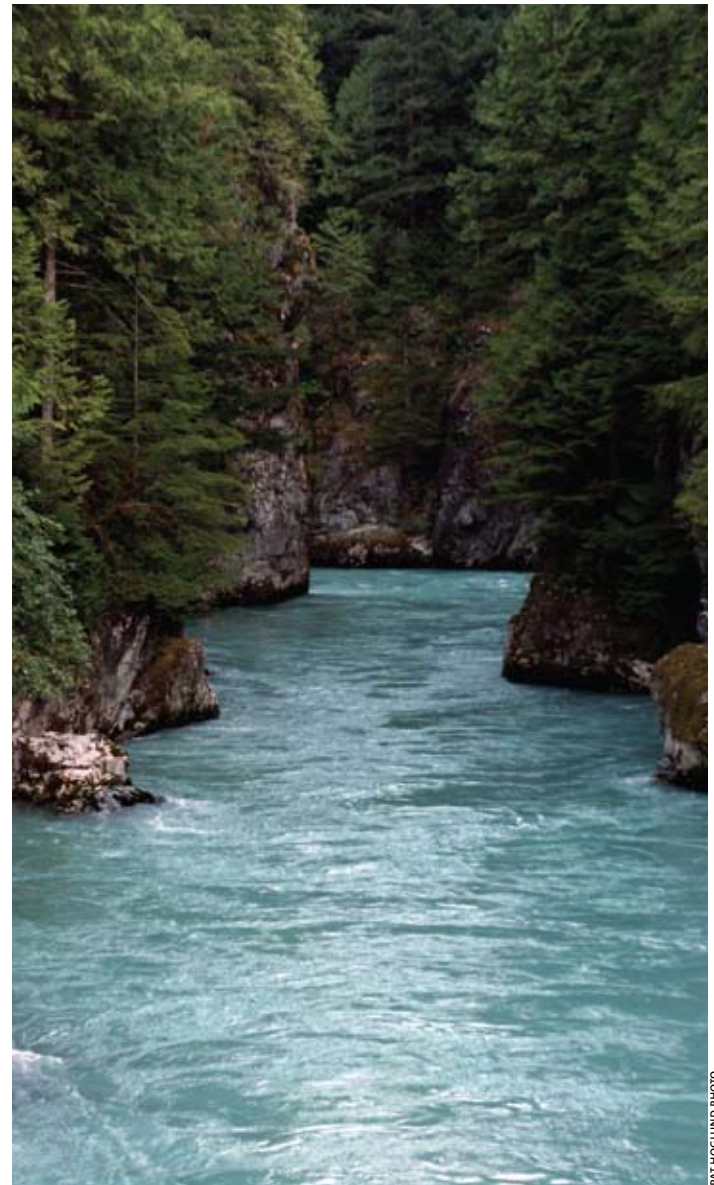
Here to sample the king and sockeye runs, and maybe catch a few sea-run bull trout, my hosts were Danny Gerak and Lee MacGrager, owners of the Pitt River Lodge. Located about five

miles up from the mouth of the river, it is the only full service lodge of its kind on the Pitt. Once you take into account the river's remoteness and lack of access, it's hard not to marvel at the lodge's size, the attention to detail, and the amenities that it offers. The fact that the lodge exists is testimony to Gerak's desire to build a luxury lodge in the wilderness. He has succeeded masterfully. He employs several full-time guides and they're extremely knowledgeable of the Pitt's waters. The lodge accommodations are very comfortable and the meals are excellent. They're served family style in the morning and evenings and lunch is served streamside. It is a slice of fishing heaven in a fisherman's paradise.

Pitt River flies



One of the prettiest rivers you'll ever lay eyes on, the Pitt River runs cold and aqua-green.



Originating in the Coast Mountains, the Pitt River flows into Pitt Lake, which then empties into the Fraser River. For what it's worth, Pitt Lake is the largest tidally influenced lake in the world. It is 15 miles (25 km) long and takes about 45 minutes to run the entire lake in a powerboat. The upper river empties into the lake near a small outpost, which serves as the river's 'meet and greet point' for boats hauling supplies, backpackers, mountain bikers or fishermen wanting to fish the river. Access into the Pitt River is gained by jet boat or by helicopter. It is possible to use the Pitt River water taxi service (a privately owned company that ferries people from Grant Narrows Park to the mouth of the river) and walk or mountain bike the lower river, but it is not recommended. There's too much river to limit yourself to such a small section. The vehicles here have been transported by barge.

If you're a guest at Pitt River Lodge you gain access at Grant Narrows Park. From there the water taxi service ferries you up to

WHAT TO BRING Waders, wading boots, wading staff, polarized glasses, sunscreen, rain jacket, brimmed hat, stocking cap, and clothing that you can take off in layers.

FLY RODS A 6 or 7 weight rod for the trout equipped with a floating line; an 8, 9 or 10 weight rod for the salmon with interchangeable sink tips if possible. Heavy sink tips are often used for salmon.

LEADERS Fish with 10- to 20-pound test for salmon; 6- to 10-pound test for bull trout.

FLIES FOR SALMON Minnow patterns, egg sucking leeches, leeches, articulated flies, intruders, weighted flies and spey patterns. Flashier flies such as Christmas Trees work well for the coho.

SEASON There is a fishery to be enjoyed the entire year on the Pitt River. Starting in January and ending in April you can catch steelhead and resident trout. Beginning in May and lasting through July sea-run bull trout make their way into the Pitt. In July king salmon arrive, however the run is small and incidental. Throughout August and September sockeye are present, followed by the river's signature run of coho that last into November. Throughout December you'll be able to catch rainbow, cutthroat and bull trout.

REGULATIONS The Pitt River is open year round. Barbless hooks are required and all species must be released.

Rowing through the canyon walls on the upper Pitt.



PAT HOGLUND PHOTO

the head of the lake where the river and lake meet. Grant Narrows Park is located on the south end of Pitt Lake. Prior From Vancouver, you can drive and park your vehicle for however long you're staying. The river flows into the lake some 15 miles up the lake. Which is how you find yourself completely removed from civilization. At the head of the lake you're greeted by the lodge's staff and driven up a well-maintained logging road to the lodge. That's about the time you meet your guide and your hosts.

After our bags were situated, rooms assigned and dinner served I met Kade Teubert, who would guide my good friend Tim Hehr and me for the next three days. We arrived in August,

Kaid Teubert lets it all hang out on the lower river.



PAT HOGLUND PHOTO

several weeks behind the prime king fishing. We were on time for the sockeye run, and two months early for the Pitt's more famous coho run. Over the course of three days we would fish for kings, sockeye as well as fishing for one of the river's signature fish, sea-run bull trout. As it were, we caught several small bulls, but didn't hook into a bull trout in the 25- to 30-inch range.

The Pitt has a long list of fish runs, some of them stronger than others. For example, the coho run is said to be one of the strongest in the southern half of the province. Its king run isn't quite as large, but it sees good numbers starting in July. There is a steelhead run of small consequence and its sockeye run varies



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LOCATION The Pitt River is located less than an hour east of Vancouver, B.C. Highway 7 will access to Grant Whittler Park near the town of Pitt Meadows. Accessing the river is somewhat involved. You must first reach the river, which is located above Pitt Lake where there is no vehicle access. A water taxi service will run you to the mouth of the river, where you can access the river via well maintained logging roads.

RIVER LEVELS Depending on snow melt in the Coast Range Mountains the river will get blown out and be un-fishable in the hotter periods during the summer. But that is an uncommon occurrence.

GUIDES There are some guide services that work on the Pitt, but it's recommended to call Pitt River Lodge where you'll find knowledgeable guides, great accommodations and access to the river for as long as your stay.

WHO TO CALL Pitt River Lodge, 800.665.6206 or [www.pittriverlodge.com]; Pitt River Water Taxi, 778.785.1491 or 604.526.0140.

from year to year. This past summer the sockeye were late and the numbers were down compared to recent years. Even though, there were plenty of sockeye in the river. The Pitt's population of sea-run bull trout migrates into the river in May and June and can be caught up until the end of July. While Tim and I missed this fishery, these fish reach 10 pounds and behave very much like steelhead. They take lures and flies readily and have helped to make the Pitt a popular destination for fly fishermen.

After breakfast on our first morning, we dressed in our waders and climbed into a 1-ton flatbed truck loaded with 16-foot rubber rafts. We drove the logging road and thirty minutes later we dumped the rafts over a steep embankment. After stringing up our fly rods and tying on flies, Kade rowed Tim and me down river to the first salmon hole on the river.

Because there are no boat ramps you either slide a raft over a bank, or run upriver in a jet boat. There are several guide services out of Vancouver that use the river, and they access it in jet boats. Those who fish out of Pitt River Lodge float it in rafts.

The king run typically enters the Pitt River in July and the overall run size dictates that fresh fish can be caught throughout the month. Fishing on the back end of the king run this past August, the three of us managed to hook five kings the first day. Our percentage of salmon landed wasn't high, but Kade did manage

A picture perfect morning on the Pitt River, right.

A surprisingly chrome sockeye from the Pitt, left.

to bring one to the beach for a photo. It had plenty of fight and a bronze tinge—which means it wasn't the freshest king—but you take what you get when you fish in August.

The chinook here run upwards of 40 pounds, with a 20-pound fish considered average. The river is filled with a variety of different water, all of which hold fish. Due to the river's gradient—steep, fast flowing and constant—you won't find a lot of deep holes and pools on the Pitt River. There are some, but you'll likely spend the majority of your time swinging flies in water that you'd expect steelhead to hold: water with fairly good depth (3- to 7 feet) that moves along at a fairly good pace. It was perfect for swinging flies through, which is how we spent our day. I fished a 13-foot spay rod with a Type I sinking head. Tim fished an 8-weight, 10-foot single-handed rod with a multi-head system. He, too, fished primarily a Type I sink tip. Leaders were 7-foot-long and tied with 25-pound test. The color of our flies bounced between red, orange, black and blue and almost all were all articulated leech patterns tied by Kade.



PAT HOGELUND PHOTO

Kade is young and enthusiastic and has the personality to be good at what he does. You instantly like him when you meet him which explains his fast rise to head guide at the lodge. He has a fisheries degree that he's unsure it'll be put to use. He majored in fisheries science so he could spend time on rivers and work outdoors. But government jobs are hard to come by in Canada, and working at the lodge allows him the luxury of being on the water more than he probably would were he to land a biologist's position. Besides, fishing suits him well, as does guiding. During the

An advertisement for Solitude Reels. The top half features the brand name 'SOLITUDE REELS' in large, white, serif font, with a stylized 'S' logo to the right. Below the text is a large, detailed image of a silver fish, likely a salmon or steelhead, lying on a dark surface. A fishing reel is visible in the background. At the bottom, there is a dark blue banner with white text: 'NEW LARGE ARBOR SPOOLS AVAILABLE • Four Sizes from Trout to Saltwater'. Below this banner are logos for VISA and MasterCard, and the text 'CALL TO ORDER (360) 848-6900' and 'www.solitudereels.com'.

PITT RIVER

BRITISH COLUMBIA



off-season Kade is usually fishing for steelhead on some of British Columbia's premier steelhead rivers. To say guiding is a bonus is probably an understatement for Kade.

Fishing for kings is fairly consistent in July, but when you show up in August as Tim and I did you're stuck with casting to the few remaining salmon that haven't tucked into the tributaries to spawn. For a steady diet of catching and releasing salmon we turned to sockeye. We spent the better part of an afternoon swinging flies and lining sockeye. Yes, lining sockeye is an accepted

method primarily due to the fact that sockeye don't take flies or lures and people enjoy fishing for them. I might quantify that by saying there is the rare occasion a sockeye will take a fly, but it's few and far between. Which is why lining is an acceptable method. It is arguably not the most sporting method to catch a salmon, but it is what it is, and for a short period Tim and I waded into the Pitt to partake in a game of catch and release.

Once we located a school of sockeye we cast our flies upriver and allowed the current to carry our flies through the school.




TRAVIS DEBOER PHOTO

When the fly became lodged into the mouth of a sockeye, we gave a hook-set and played the fish to the shore. By nature sockeye are strong fish and the average size of Pitt River sockeye runs on the large size. These are said to be some of the largest sockeye in Canada and I believe it. The Kvichak River in Alaska is the only other watershed I can recall seeing bigger sockeye. Catch-

The author pulls back on a sockeye from the Pitt River.

ing and releasing sockeye is one way to spend an afternoon, but after awhile we longed for something more. Especially given the fact that you cannot retain sockeye. It would've been nice to take home a couple salmon, but regulations in the Pitt River require that you release what you catch. And despite our location (over 50 miles from the ocean) we caught several sockeye that were obviously fresh from the Fraser. Which is to say I was surprised at how bright they were. Salmon from the ocean have to travel less than 20 miles to reach Pitt Lake, and another 15 miles through the lake, before entering into the river. When they push in on a tide, it's pretty clear.

All of which had me thinking about the coho run that was knocking at the door. Reports of a strong silver run this past summer made me think that some of the Pitt River's best salmon fishing was yet to come. Upwards of 50,000 coho were supposed to make their way into the Pitt starting in September. Given a coho's tendency to chase a fly, and the sheer numbers that will reach the Pitt River, I was already trying to find a way to come back. With that many fish, and so few people, it seems like a can't-miss trip. 

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