

Salmon Fishing Primer - 2019

A. Where to fish

Salmon arrive along Vancouver Island at different times during the summer and fall. Pink salmon are the first, followed by Chinooks (Springs) and Coho and finally Chum. They are going to their home rivers to spawn. Summer Steelhead arrive about the same time as Coho. There is a winter run of steelhead as well. Sockeye salmon only spawn only on rivers on the west side of the island.

1. Beach

For fly fishers, salmon can be found cruising along the beaches prior to entering their home river to spawn. Fly fishers cruise the beaches, looking for signs of cruising salmon. Carry binoculars and go to a beach access point, see if you can see cruising salmon, look for fins, or jumping salmon.

Along much of the east coast of the island there are access points to the water where you can park. A good idea, before fishing season starts, is to get in your car and explore looking for access points. When there are beach homes there will be roads providing access. In most places there are periodic access points between the houses where you can park. If you do your beach scouting when the tide is out, you can see the features of the beach, such as dips or rock points where fish sometimes gather.

Days when the sky is overcast or at dawn or dark are times when the fish often move closer to shore because they can feed in shallow water without fear of overhead predators.

Beach fishers usually fish with clear intermediate sink or slow sinking lines. In other words, the fish are caught on, or near, the surface.

Fish caught along the beach are often fresher than those caught in the river.

2. River

Fish in rivers tend to hang out in pools or slots in the current as they move upstream to spawn. This means that you need to use lines that will get the fly down to the where the fish are. On Island rivers the casts are often not that far from you. Sometimes, the fish are right at your feet. How far the casts have to be depends upon where you are situated on the river vis-à-vis the pools or slots. The tough part is that you will be casting sinking lines which can be tough to lift from the water and propel towards a fish. Learn casts such as spey casts which can make it easier to handle a heavy sinking line. Practice these casts before you go fishing!

Check the regulations before you go to make sure the river is open to fishing. Sometimes only specific parts of a river are open. In addition rivers have different times for when you keep fish or can't keep fish. Check the regulations before you go. When you check find out if the fish caught can be retained or must be released!

When you are thinking of fishing a river don't forget about the estuary of the river. Sometimes there are lots of fish hanging around the estuary waiting for rain or high water to ascend the river.

B. When to Fish

Beach fishers check the tide tables before they plan a fishing trip. Tide tables are often published in local papers or can be found on the internet for local areas:

Local area: <http://www.waterlevels.gc.ca/eng/station?sid=7938>

Campbell River: <http://www.waterlevels.gc.ca/eng/find/zone/14>

Port Alberni area: <http://www.waterlevels.gc.ca/eng/station?sid=8575>

Many beach fishers like to fish on a full tide, others favour going out when the tide is out and just starting to come in. If the tide is in, go early at dawn when it is dark and the fish may be in shallow water is because they are not afraid of overhead predators. When you go to the beach, if you see other fly fishers standing around, talk to them to see what is happening, if they have seen fish, what flies they are fishing with etc. Most fishers are quite helpful and you can always learn something.

In late fall and winter, river fishers check the river flow rates to see if whether the river is running too high to be fishable. Check https://wateroffice.ec.gc.ca/my_station_list/index_e.html. It takes some effort to learn how to read the information.

C. Fishing set -ups

7wgt rods work well for pink salmon, while 8 or 9 wgt rods handle the larger salmon better. If you want just one salmon rod buy an 8 wgt single handed or two handed rod. If you plan to release your salmon it is important to have a rod that lets you land the fish as quickly as possible so you don't tire it too much or you may affect its chances of going on to spawn!

Some people buy a two handed rod because they believe they will be able to cast further or because a two handed rod is easier on the arms and shoulder. While that may be true, **two handed rods, just like single handed rods, require learning to cast them.** If you are a proficient single handed caster and want to use a Spey or switch rod it is a good idea to get some casting lessons from a pro. It speeds up the learning process. The club offers casting instruction in both single and two handed casting.

1. Single handed rod

Beach - floating Weight forward line for the beach.

To your floating line attach a slow sinking leader (**intermediate sink tip**) A 1.5 i.p.s. (inch per second) sinking rate for an intermediate line is a good general purpose choice. To this, attach 4' -10' tippet for fly attachment. You may have to tie figure eight or perfection knots to attach lines.

Single Handed Rod - Beach



River –floating weight forward line with either a built in sinking tip or a detachable sinking part called a polyleader. If you use a floating line without a built-in sinking portion, you will have to add one. Attach a (**polyleader**). Poly leaders are sinking leaders which are tapered like regular leaders to make casting easier. The weight of the polyleader required will depend upon how fast the river is flowing and how deep the fish are. Salmon tend to lie on the bottom of pools or slots to escape the force of the current.

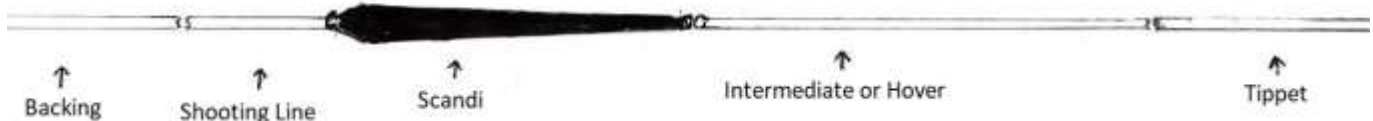
Single Handed Rod - River



2. Two handed rod

Beach- Use a Scandi line for the beach. Attach an **intermediate tip**, 1.5 i.p.s. sink rate is good. To that segment add 3' or 4' of tippet. It can be just monofilament. What strength mono you use depends upon the fish you are going after. 15-20 lbs is suitable for big fish like Chum or Springs. For Coho use 12-15lb on the beach and for pinks 8, 10 or 12 lbs should work. Some people on the beach, if the fish are not biting, change to a smaller tippet so the fly acts more natural.

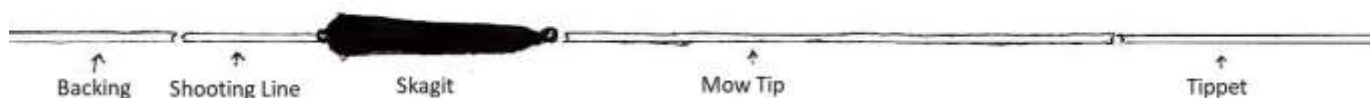
Two-Handed Rods - Beach



River - Use a skagit line with a Mow tip sinking line, plus tippet. Skagit lines are sinking lines that are made for casting big heavy flies. Mow tips, come in various sizes from 8-17. A common size to use is 11 or 14 depending upon the depth and speed of the river. Attach a 3-4' tippet to the Mow tip for fly attachment.

The important thing is that you can not only hold the fish you are going after, but that you can break the leader if it becomes snagged on a rock and you can't get it loose or if a fish is running and you can't hold it. If you can't break off a big fish you could use lose your line! To break off a fish or snagged rock, lower the rod tip, point it at the fish and pull directly backward on the line. Do not try to break it off by raising your rod tip or you may break your rod!!

Two-Handed Rods - River



D. Playing Fish

When you hook a big fish the natural response is to raise your rod tip and to control it that way. If you do you will probably break your rod! Keep the rod lower so you have a bend in the midsection of the rod, not the tip. When the fish gets close to shore lay your rod down and grab your line and bring it in hand-over-hand .

E. Handling Fish

When you bring your fish to hand, if you plan to release it, keep it in the water. If you want a hero shot of the fish, again keep it in the water! If you plan to retain it then kill it as quickly as possible, with either a blow to the back of the head with a fish billy or sever its spinal cord with a knife. If you keep it be sure it is out of the sun, keep it cool and clean it as soon as possible. Beach fishers often carry a mesh bag, put their fish in it and put a rock on it to hold it down in the water.

F. Knots

Know how to tie the knots that make good loop to loop connections, such as a **Figure 8** or a **perfection loop**. The connections between various parts of the line will be made with loops. When you attach your fly, use a knot which allows the fly to swing naturally such as a **non-slip mono loop knot**. The flies you will use are supposed to imitate bait fish. If you are beginner, practice these knots before you go fishing! If you can't remember how to tie a knot go to You tube, the club manual that is on the website or buy one of the handy little knot tying guides like **Guide to Fly Fishing Knots** by Larry V. Notley.

G. Flies

Suggestions for flies are made on the beach fishing chart handout. Check with fellow anglers and with your local fly shop for suggestions. If you are fishing for big fish buy or tie flies on 1-4 size hooks!

H. Regulations

Before you fish check the regulations to see what is open, how many you can retain etc. To find out what is open on a river fishing check the provincial regulations:

http://www.env.gov.bc.ca/fw/fish/regulations/docs/1921/Region_1_vancouver_island.pdf

For the ocean check the federal regulations: <https://www.pac.dfo-mpo.gc.ca/fm-gp/rec/fresh-douce/region1-eng.html> This site will also tell you how many fish you can keep of which species on a river as well as in the ocean.

I. Further References

It is worth-while having some good reference material to aid your salmon fishing. Here are three sources worth owning. They are probably also in our club library.

- **Vancouver Island Back Road Mapbook**
- **Fly-Fishing for Pacific Salmon II** by Bruce Ferguson & Les Johnson
- **Vancouver Island Fishing Guide** by D.C. Reid