

# THE POWER OF ALASKA



By Allison Murphy

**D**uring my senior year of high school my father took it upon himself to teach me how to fly fish. My first attempt ended with knots, an empty net and a bruised ego, and my dad still remembers it as the day his young daughter mastered the use of adult-grade profanity. I'm not sure whether he was appalled or proud.

I was born into a family with a father who was an avid fly fisherman, had two daughters, and was determined to make at least one of them a legitimate angler. Since my sister had less than zero interest in anything having to do with fish or standing knee-dep in a river, I became the chosen one, and had no choice but to learn. It has been more than a decade since my dad and I started fishing together, and we've now fished together across the U.S. and even on a memorable trip to South America. Our father-daughter fishing escapades have created a special bond, and each adventure is always filled with the element of surprise and the unexpected. While I've probably never told my dad how much I've come to love fishing, I now work at the largest fly fishing travel company and spend each day talking exclusively about fishing. He's probably figured it out.

This past September I was invited to join a last-minute trip to Alaska to spend a week with No See Um Lodge – a legendary fly out operation in the heart of Bristol Bay. As I prepared for the trip with only 72-hours' notice, I scrambled to collect the right gear and line things up before my departure. I had heard that late season fishing in Alaska could be unpredictable, and I honestly had no idea what to expect with regard to the fishing or the conditions. The moment I arrived in King Salmon and climbed aboard the lodge's Beaver float-plane, however, I knew I was in for an incredible adventure.

The week ended up being spectacular; full of adventure, awe, wonderment and countless new experiences. I came back from my time in Bristol Bay having learned a few key things about fishing in Alaska:

• **THE FISH.** I caught grayling, sockeye, char, and, of course, more rainbow trout than I could count. The diversity of species was truly unbelievable. And while I have caught plenty of trout throughout the US West, the fight in the big Alaskan trout was something I had never experienced. I fished eggs, mice and lots of big streamers, and everything seemed to produce. In one day, I reeled in more 20-inch plus trout than I thought possible. One memorable and ultra-colorful Char that I landed was arguably my "fish of a lifetime" to date.

• **THE FLOAT PLANES.** I had never been in a float plane before this trip and had no idea how much I would fall in love with flying. The sound of the powerful radial engine starting up each morning was the clear signal to grab my gear, find my guide and head to the dock. It became the epitome of instant excitement and adrenaline. The views from the planes gave me an entirely new perspective. Not only with regard to the beauty of the Alaskan wilderness, but of how important fly fishing had become in my life.

• **THE GUIDES.** They set me up to catch the biggest fish of my life, which I did on day one. They then did it again and again – every single day of the week. After releasing each memorable fish, I barely had time to process how special it was before the process repeated itself. I was so impressed with the knowledge of each guide I fished with, their love for the sport, and their patient ability to put up with my questions, goofy comments, and poor attempts at telling jokes.

• **THE LANDSCAPE.** Fall in Alaska is unlike any place I've ever experienced. The changing colors of the leaves, the beautifully rugged mountains, the ever-present wildlife and the raw, volatile weather all combined to continuously overwhelm my senses. Most surprising to me was the number of bears that we constantly encountered, and how quickly I became comfortable fishing amongst them.

• **THE TOTAL EXPERIENCE.** Although the fishing was unbelievably good, it was only one part of an incredibly memorable trip. It was the people I spent the week with, the places I saw, the laughter and the fun that truly made this trip special. The lodge staff and the other guests became family for the week, and I made lifelong friends along the way. I returned to Montana a changed and better person, with memories that will forever be close to my heart.

Though it's the fishing that creates the opportunities to travel, it's the element of surprise, the anticipation of learning, and the excitement of not knowing what lies ahead that truly has me hooked. So, I travel on, in search of fish and new life experiences – tackling each opportunity and adventure with an open mind and daring spirit. It's only been ten years, and already fly fishing has completely changed my life.

*Allison Murphy is a program assistant at Yellow Dog, working with the Mexico, US West and Bahamas programs. While her taste in music is questionable, her commitment to the sport is not.*