

NOOTKA SOUND

by Todd Martin

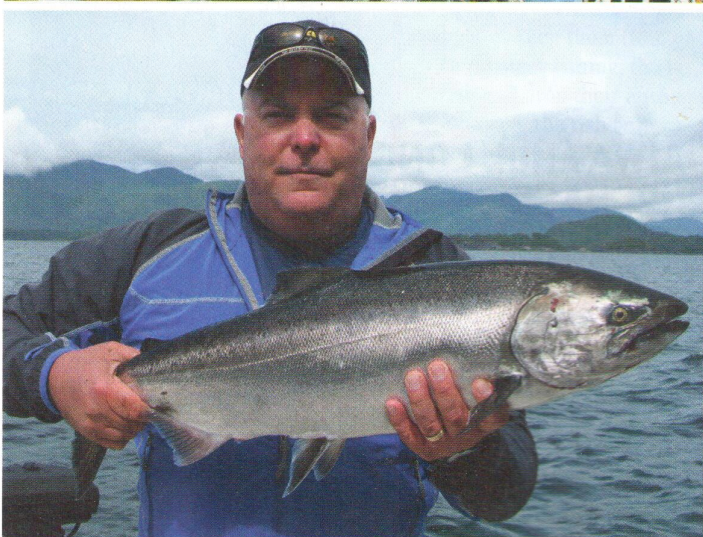
World-Class Salmon Fishing on BC's RUGGED WEST COAST



When you catch ocean-bright salmon you have to show them off. Ryan Gray is the happy angler with Guide Gibran White.



The gang is all smiles at the Moutcha Bay Resort cleaning station.



Todd Martin with another solid springer from Nootka Sound.

If you're looking for a fantastic Canadian fishing destination that offers big chinook salmon and lots of them, Nootka Sound is the place to be. It is one of five major sounds or inlets on the west coast of BC's Vancouver Island, and provides spectacular salmon fishing every year. This area is ripe with fishing opportunities that include strong runs of chinook, plentiful coho or silvers, amazing bottom-fishing and an offshore albacore tuna fishery. Honestly, you can do it all here. For now, we're going to focus on the salmon fishing opportunities in the sound. If you want to pursue large, aggressive salmon, wetting a line in BC's Nootka Sound is the place to do it.

Nootka Sound is approximately half way up Vancouver Island, near the town of Gold River. The entire area enjoys good road access from the main island highway, which is what I look for when searching for a fishing destination. The sound is a massive inlet of fishing goodness. It provides calm, protected waters on the inside, and the more adventurous can poke their noses into the nearby offshore banks when needed to chase the migratory salmon runs.

Salmon fishing in Nootka Sound provides you a longer season compared to other Vancouver Island locations. Early runs of sockeye enter Nootka Sound in May and wrap up by June. In early May, migratory chinook bound for the Columbia River start passing by the outside waters of Nootka Sound. This provides an early season salmon fishing opportunity with 20-pounders being the average size. Chinook numbers continue to build through June, and by July, local runs bound for the Conuma and Gold rivers start to arrive. Among these are the 30-pound-plus Canadian Tyees that travel to the end of Nootka Sound and the Conuma River fish hatchery. This hatchery is the secret to the consistent fishing found here, as their efforts have been very successful in supplementing the local wild salmon stocks.

Conuma River chinook are plentiful and tend to achieve a bigger average size than other nearby river systems. The biggest chinook, with many over 30 pounds, arrive in late June and early July. For the absolute peak of the chinook run, you want to be here

in late July and early August. The chinook run tapers off by late August and this is when the coho or silver fishery gets going through the end of September. Esperanza Inlet, which is a northern arm of Nootka Sound, experiences a prolific run of coho every year. In October, the season wraps-up with a large run of tackle-busting chum salmon.

For my most recent trip to Nootka Sound, I fished with the marine operations manager of Nootka Marine Adventures, Gibran White. Gibran has been fishing and guiding in BC's best salmon grounds for over 20 years, and is as knowledgeable about the waters of Nootka Sound as you can be. After two days of trolling for salmon with Gibran I have six pages of notes and enough tactical salmon information for several articles. That's how much you learn from fishing with this guy. We spent two days fishing the inside sound hotspots during prime time of early August.

Besides the larger average size of Nootka Sound chinook, this area is famous for providing calm, protected waters in which to fish. When the local Conuma and Gold river salmon runs are passing through Nootka Sound in July and August, you can fish inside the sound on what local guides call a paved road. You're not beating up your boat and there is no fighting motion sickness. Some of the preferred inside sound locales include Burdwood Bay, Beer Can Bay, Strange Island, San Carlos Point and Camel Rock. While fishing with Gibran last August, we focused on Burdwood and Beer Can bays and did very well.

Outside Nootka Sound you can quickly find two more well-known fishing locations, Maquinna Point near the lighthouse entrance to Nootka Sound, and the Bajo Reef which is a large area six miles offshore. The latter is a very productive spot where salmon migrating to the Columbia and Fraser rivers pass by. They can be targeted as early as May, right through to September. A little further offshore, Nootka Sound guides and experienced locals also target the salmon highway. This is a few more miles offshore, but it is the main transit corridor millions of salmon use as they travel south towards their home rivers.

Now that we have you excited about Nootka Sound and its great salmon fishing, let's discuss tactics and gear. While enjoying great salmon fishing and sharing a few good laughs, it was clear that Gibran was utilizing some well-honed tactics, and he was kind enough to share them with us. Trolling speed is absolutely crucial for success! An average speed of 2.0 – 2.4MPH is best, but needs to be adjusted depending on how you are fishing. If trolling a few feet off the bottom as many locals do here, a slower speed of 1.5 to 2.0

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MPH is preferred, and the same reduced speed is used when trolling bait. If you are trolling lures, hoochies or other hardware, a faster speed from 2.5 to 3MPH is employed.

When you drop your lines, typical starting downrigger depths will be 47 feet on one side and 60 feet on the other. In front of your trolled offerings, blue, green or purple flashers are popular choices, but it was explained to me that gold is a good option on cloudy days. It seems to call the fish in better. Also try matching the color of your flasher to your bait holder, and you can also match the color of your flasher to the color of chinook you are catching. It's a local trick that pays off. Following these Nootka Sound salmon trolling guidelines will get you as effective as a local ringer right away.

On our first day we trolled hoochies on one side, and an anchovy in a teaser head on the other. This was working, but Gibran modified the plans for the second day as we switched to trolling hoochies on both rods. He was up at 5:00 a.m. getting his boat prepared for the day when he noticed squid jumping out of the water and onto the docks. They were attracted by the overhead marina lighting. He noticed the size of squid was smaller than he had been using and the color was light brown. Well, out came the clippers to shorten the length of his hoochies and the brown magic marker came out of the tackle box to modify the color. We had a tougher time fishing the second day due to a low-pressure system blowing in, but had much more success than any other boats around due to Gibran's early morning discovery. All the groans on the radio from other guides proved this point. Overall we had a great experience and retained our limits in salmon well before noon both days.

Now let's discuss specific gear details to help you get more fish in the boat. For your flashers, Gibbs Delta and Hot Spot are the local BC companies that have all the preferred colors. Behind these, run a 3- to 4-foot leader to your gear. Gibbs Delta has a great hoochie selection, and a new squid imitation that Gibran has had success

with is the Luhr-Jensen Flash Fly. Again, he shortens the length and modifies the colors to his liking. Hot lures in the area include the old reliable Tomic plugs, and the 6-inch Luhr-Jensen Live Image spoons, which are quickly becoming an item many guides swear by. If you are fishing bait, the most common set-up is an anchovy in a Rhys Davis teaser head.

An advantage of fishing with a larger operation like Nootka Marine Adventures is that they normally have over 20 boats from three different resorts on the water at any one time. They have their own VHF radio channels, and these guys communicate early and often for better client success. Gibran noted that they also communicate with other lodge guides and experienced locals to get the best fishing intelligence possible. His mantra is work the radio, spread out, team up, and find the fish.

Nootka Marine Adventures have three resorts in this area with every imaginable amenity depending on your needs and budget. Nootka Sound Resort is a floating resort in Galiano Bay, and is close to both the salmon and bottom-fishing grounds. Moutcha Bay Resort, their flagship lodge, is near the end of Nootka Sound at the mouth of the Conuma River. It offers campsites, cabins, lodge suites and luxurious waterfront yurts. In 2015, Nootka Marine Adventures opened their third resort in the sound, Newton Cove Resort. This is another floating resort in a prime location near the entrance to Esperanza Inlet. This area provides faster access to the offshore tuna grounds, and also enjoys amazing coho runs in September.

Along with offering great meals, fully guided or self-guided fishing trips, rental boats and fish processing, all three resorts have plenty of dock space if you want to bring your own fishing machine. Nootka Marine Adventures also hosts three fishing derbies each year. On June 25 and 26 they will be hosting their annual chinook derby from Moutcha Bay Resort. This derby promotes salmon enhancement and habitat restoration in the Nootka Sound and

Enjoy staying at Moutcha Bay Lodge while enjoying the prolific fishing just minutes away.




Esperanza Inlet watersheds. They also host their annual kayak fishing derby on September 3 and 4. Fish for tyee's, in calm protected waters, from a kayak! New this year, Nootka Marine Adventures will be holding its first annual, all women's salmon derby. This will be held on July 2 and 3. So if you're competitive fires are burning, book a trip to coincide with one of these very popular events.

On top of the world-class salmon fishing, offshore albacore tuna, and the outstanding bottom-fishing opportunities, it gets better for visiting American anglers. The Canadian dollar has plunged in recent months levelling off in the 70 cent range compared to the U.S greenback. So come to Canada this summer and you'll get 30% more bang for your buck. The outstanding currency exchange rate makes your Canadian fishing adventure much more affordable. So if you are pondering a trip to a Canadian fishing lodge, this is the year to do it.

Nootka Marine Adventures offers the most knowledgeable guides, best equipment, and finest amenities in the area. The fact that you can chase large aggressive chinook in an area considered to be as smooth as a paved road is a huge bonus. I know I'll be returning to Nootka Sound this summer for my third year in a row to experience some of the best salmon fishing Vancouver Island has to offer. If you want to join me, check out www.nootkamarineadventures.com and come chase the plentiful chinook of Nootka Sound.

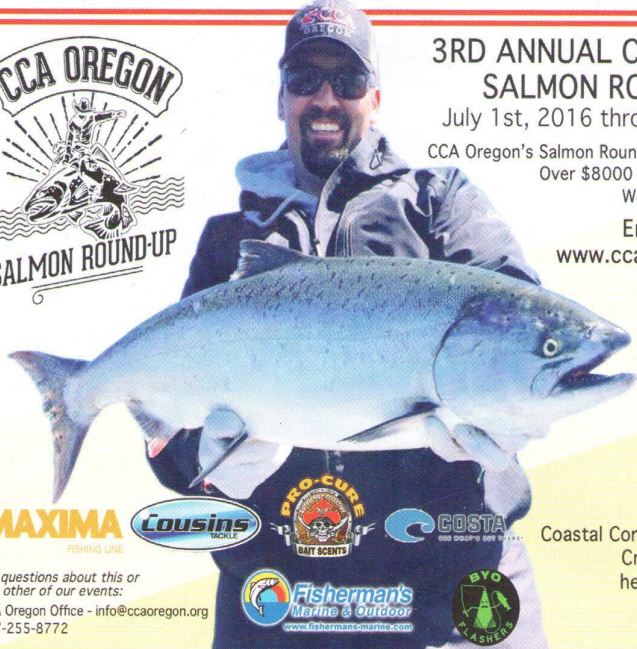
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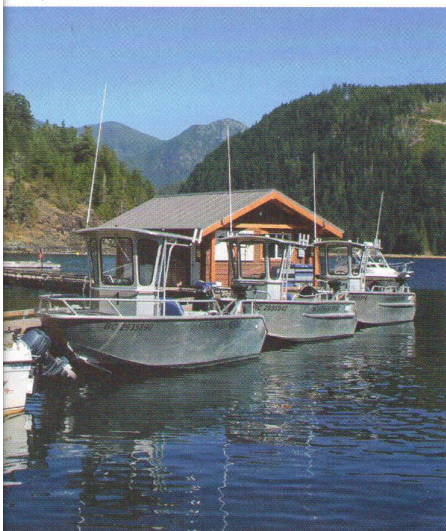


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