



Sockeyes on a string

Sweetheart Creek 2008 August 6-7

Five years into the Sweetheart adventures and Teamo Supremo was down to Dru and I. In the past we'd fished with four to eleven people but we decided that the two of us would be a nice simple group easy to manage so we didn't actively solicit. Back in June we set aside dates in early August and, knowing that we were poor fishermen, decided to do anything we had to to get the best fishing point on the creek. Wednesday after work we mustered at my house, then drove everything down to my boat in Douglas with the intent to overnight at the homestead and get up at 3:30 to fish. With Glenn's enormous white cooler it took a couple of trips to get everything down to the boat, but it was high tide and the ramp was at a low angle. We headed out, beers in hand, about 5:00. The trip south was fairly pleasant, the breeze was on our stern and we found only moderate seas in Taku Inlet before it calmed down entirely. Dru ate his Subway sandwich as we headed down the channel, then took over driving most of the rest of the way while I ate my sandwich. We passed quite a few boats heading north and made bets on how many we'd find left at Sweetheart Creek.



Dru casting into Sweetheart Creek

When we rounded Sentinel Point we were pleased to see not a single boat anchored up (though it meant I lost the bet) and immediately decided to start fishing that night. First we had to quickly stop by the homestead to pick up a kayak and rearrange our gear, then we hightailed it to Sweetheart Creek, with visions of catching our quota before nightfall. We actually did find a boat there, a comfy looking cruiser with a big cabin and as I was



Dru gutting fish in front of the homestead

kayaking to shore a float plane landed and drifted around offshore. But we figured we'd give it a try. We walked over the peninsula, then along the creek and through the woods until we reached the point we wanted. The only other fishermen were in the lower pools so we had the whole area to ourselves. There were fish in there, but not in the numbers we'd hoped. We each pulled in two sockeyes before calling it a night at 8:30. We carried the fish out,

cleaning them in the creek below the lower pool before crossing the peninsula again. The noseums were absolutely insane near the beach where the boat was anchored and we raced away as quickly as we could to shed them, icing the fish farther from shore. We ran out of gas near the river inlet and it took me a few minutes to get the engine to start with the other tank. The kayak was taking up most of the back of the boat, which didn't help.

Back at the homestead we both crashed pretty early in anticipation of our 3:30 wakeup. It came all too soon. I drug myself out of bed, dressed, and met up with Dru in the lodge. It was still pretty dark in the woods, but I could see the dawn light upriver while I was kayaking out to the boat. I started the engine, brought the kayak aboard, pulled anchor and picked up Dru. We left the homestead at 4:05 am and crept up on Sweetheart as stealthily as we could with a two stroke outboard going 20 knots. I did slow down as we approached the boat at anchor so as not to wake them out, thinking it'd be good



Dru and a sockeye at the homestead

karma. We saw people stirring inside, not sure if we roused them or not. As I pulled in to drop Dru off we made out another boat in the half dark just pulling out and a few people on shore. Dru grabbed the cast net and we agreed that he should hoof it to the point to stake it out. In the meantime, I anchored out the boat, grabbed the dry bag with my backback, the line, buoy, and landing net, and came back to shore. The tide would rise for another hour and a half so I drug the kayak a little farther up the beach and tied it to a rock.

It was light enough by then that I didn't really need a flashlight to find my way to the point. There I met up with Dru and we saw that the other group has assembled on the opposite bank to dip net. I saw some gloves lying on the ground and Dru indicated that I should put them back in the casting net's bucket where they came from. When I opened it up I found two sockeyes inside! Dru caught them on his first cast. It was an auspicious start.

But that was about as good as it got. For the next two or three hours we caught fish every 20 casts or so—just one at a time. Even the humpies weren't in (I think we caught three all morning). The sockeyes were BIG, though, which made up for it a little. I seemed to be having the best luck with form and success, so I did the majority of the casting. Dru took over now and again to give me a break. Twice I caught a sockeye on my first cast

after taking over from Dru, but it didn't work a third time. The four dip netters across the way were catching fish at about the same rate or a bit better and we formed a sort of silent solidarity with them (the creek was rushing too loudly for conversation). It was overcast for the first few hours, then started to drizzle on and off before raining steadily. We were wet anyway, so it didn't really matter.

Within an hour of our arrival other groups began to show up, including a large group (maybe from the anchored boat?) that were clearly disappointed not to get our point. They lingered in the woods above us for a while before spreading out below. Though they had a slow start they eventually began to have some success of their own. Even so, they eyed us the whole time and eventually joined us on the point shortly before we left, casting into the pool below the falls. By mid-morning there were at least seven different



Debbie and some sockeyes in front of the homestead



Dru filleting

fishing groups and more than 25 people on the creek and no one was catching much. Dru and I kept reminiscing to a few years back when we'd get two or three sockeyes in nearly every cast and the bleeding/bonking team could hardly keep up. Our goal was ten fish apiece, but we hit a wall at 18. In part I think the fish were scarce, in part we aren't strong fishermen (in that we don't get the net as far from shore as others

might), and in part my net was failing in the end. I lost the last three fish that I had on, either through a hole or because the purse lines were breaking off and the bottom didn't close properly. Those last few fish we caught were the awfully hard won. Mark Kelly was there photographing and I was disappointed on top of everything else that I never landed a sockeye while his camera was pointed at us. The only sockeye I captured slipped away just as I was bringing it to shore.

Despite our lack of success, the large group continued to salivate for our spot. When I confessed to one of them that we only wanted two more fish, he only half-jokingly offered to give us two fish so we could go. The fact that he was willing to give up two fish was some indication, I thought, that he should continue fishing right where he was and not worry about taking over our unproductive site. But at about 10:30 Dru and I decided to head out. We split the fish between our two dry bags and packed them out to the beach. On the way I found a mosquito head net in a pool and picked it up with the landing net. It proved very handy as I kayaked out to the boat and brought it to shore. The noseems were clustered around our heads—there must have been close to 100 perched on the top of Dru's mosquito net at one time. We loaded up



Processing in my kitchen

and headed back to the homestead, grounding out some distance from shore at low tide. We got out and gutted our fish on the bow of the boat before icing them in the big cooler. One fish was missing an eye, another had a gruesome fresh head wound.

When we were finished I carried the anchor toward the homestead and stuck it in the mud. Dru and I hastily packed up and collected our gear as the tide started to turn; I had to move the anchor twice before we were ready as the tide rose. The ride back was pleasant enough and even hauling the cooler of fish up the ramp was fairly easy. We headed back to my house where we agreed to part for two hours, meeting back up at 5:00 to process. I took a bath, slept for about ten minutes, then started getting ready. I put up a piece of plywood in the garage over a couple of sawhorses for Dru to fillet and began cutting bags for the vacuum packer. When Dru arrived he set to work filleting while I vacuum packed. We both cut most of our fillets into portions for easy eating in the future. The filleting went a lot faster than the vacuum packing, so I concentrated on getting Dru's cuts vacuum packed. The vacuum packer overheats at a certain point when sealing the bags so I was often stalled out. Dru finished up filleting around 7:00 and helped finish packing his fish for another half hour. I was up until almost 9:00 vacuum packing the rest. It made a big, beautiful pile on my counter before I dumped it all in my freezer. That'll be most of the fish I eat all year. For once, there were no exciting adventures coloring Sweetheart Creek!



My share of the catch