Kyuquot Sound Fishing *Yep, It Is That Good!*

ver heard of Kyuquot (pronounced "ky YOO cut")? I hadn't either until recently coming in contact with Murphy's Sportfishing (www.murphysportfishing.com) located in the heart of the Kyuquot Village. Chinook and coho travel along the west coast of Vancouver Island on what's known as the Super Salmon Highway. All runs of salmon heading south of Alaska take this journey and inevitably make Kyuquot one of their main scheduled stops due to the high concentrations of sand lance (also referred to as needlefish) and other baitfish. The combination of massive amounts of baitfish, structure and perfect currents make this a no-brainer destination-not only for the salmon, but for us anglers too!

Only 14 miles offshore sits the inner edge of the Continental Shelf, which also brings in schools of halibut. Since the waters inside the shelf are overflowing with bait, halibut, who like to ambush their prey, sit on the edge of the shelf and wait for bait to come over. Fish the shelf correctly and this will be some the best halibut fishing you'll ever experience.

With all that bait there's going to be other species hanging around looking to fill their bellies too. Although lingcod migrate, they don't wander too far as it must seem like an endless buffet for these aggressive eating fish. As long as the season is open you should have no problem getting lings to attack your presentation and limits are a slam dunk.

Did someone say snapper? The Canadian name for what we in the U.S. call yelloweye—and yes, you can retain them in these ultra-rich waters.

Even though there are several other species, including albacore tuna (in September), all species mentioned above would be my target on the four-day trip and I was atwitter with anticipation.

I'd be joined by my fishing buddy Brad Pott, who I've fished with since we were in high school. Our trip was scheduled for July 23-26, 2014. The weather forecast was



The crew with a day's catch.

phenomenal. We were looking at 60-degree days, no rain, wind of less than 6 knots and swells of only 2 to 4 feet the entire trip some days the prediction was 0 to 2 feet.

As we left my house in Covington, WA at 1:30 a.m., it started to rain, lightning and thunder. Whew, good thing we're getting away to that nice calm weather in British Columbia.

A quick two-hour drive to the Tsawsassan Ferry Terminal and our excitement was at an all-time high. We visited with other anglers while waiting until 5:15 a.m. for the long boat ride to Duke Point. The crossing took almost two hours so a quick nap was in order. Unfortunately the adrenaline rush would not allow either of us to sleep a wink.

It was a good thing Murphy's provided us with very detailed driving directions as there was a lot of construction and the signs were confusing—but we stayed on the correct path. First it was Nanaimo, then Campbell River. The scenery was great. We stopped for gas and a quick caffeine jolt and headed off toward Zeballos. Now that we were off the asphalt, the scenery was better than great—it was Mother Nature at her finest. Good thing we weren't in a hurry as we stopped many times to take in the eye-popping mountain peaks and deep river canyons. Our cameras were already getting a workout.

Our pickup spot was Fair Harbour and we arrived at 1:30 p.m. for a 3:00 p.m. pickup. Unbeknownst to us the Murphy Boats were already there, fueled up and ready to go after the dock attendant woke them up from sleeping in the cuddies. We asked several anglers how the fishing was and it seemed like it was always the same response—"You should have been here last week." Not the response I was hoping for, but it didn't dampen our spirits. The weather—well, that did dampen our clothes a little as the clouds were socked in and it started to pour.

Three o'clock on the dot and the captains begin emerging from the fleet which consisted of 23- to 26-foot Grady Whites and Pursuits, all equipped with brawny new Yamaha outboards. We met the other guests, loaded up and headed toward Kyuquot to our lodge for the week. None of us sat down as we admired the emerald green water and ever-changing seascape. Our captain was Henry (AKA Senior). He said his wife was a chief of their clan (part of Native Tribe) and a Tribal Council Member. What he failed to mention was that he was also chief of a neighboring clan. The Kyuquot are a very humble people.

As we arrived at the docks we were greeted by the full crew, including Marilyn Murphy. Murphy's is run by a brother and sister team who in addition to the landbased lodge, also have an 83' mothership which accommodates another 15 guests in the same Kyuquot waters. The ship operations are run by her brother (and wellknown professional angler) David Murphy. To round the season out to 365 days a year, they also run a fresh-water operation with a 6000-square-foot lodge on the Stamp River. We were shown our quarters and told dinner would be ready at 5:00 p.m. A fantastically prepared meal by chef Matt consisting of prime rib roast, pork roast, asparagus (my favorite) and an assortment of rice, potatoes and other veggies were there for the taking. All meals are served buffet home-style so all guests could eat what they wanted-seconds were encouraged.

So it's 6 o'clock and we're ready to fish. The lodge is literally nestled between huge mountain peaks with a small opening on the west to the ocean—a passage to the Sound and Fair Harbour to the east. Within a mile you are on the open waters. Since we only had a short window of opportunity the first evening we were just going to target salmon, hopefully chinook as they were going to be our main focus of the trip.

For this initial stint we were with a native guide who went by the name of Dennis. A very quiet man, at least that's what we were told. Not so! Being from Seattle we brought out something he was passionate about—the Seattle Seahawks, Super Bowl champs! Along with talking about our Hawks we asked how the fishing was..."Oh, you should have been here last week." Dang, is this going to be one of those trips?

The gear on all the boats was primarily the same. Shimano moocher plus Canadian-style mooching reels attached to



View of the dock.

a Shimano Technium 10' 6" mooching rod rated medium-heavy with a 15- to 25-pound line rating. We're from the States, what's with the single-action stuff, eh? Actually when speaking to David Murphy prior to the trip he gave us the option of bringing our own equipment, but their equipment is replaced annually and is hand chosen by David himself, a living legend in Canadian fishing circles. You know what they say, when in Canada fish as the Canadians fish!

All the boats were also equipped with new Scotty HD downriggers with 20-pound balls. They ain't messing around here! Dennis started us out with a 11" Pro-Troll Flasher and each a different pattern of Goldstar hootchie. We're fishing in 260 feet of water down 160 and 190 feet on the riggers. It didn't take long and the first rod was off—yeah baby, bust my knuckles! It turned out to be a smaller chinook so we opted for a release of this fish, after all we had two full days and another half day to punch four chinook and four coho each (in addition to our halibut, lings and yelloweye).

The two hours went by too fast. We had a blast reeling in a few (seven) chinook and a single coho (all were released). I'd say that wasn't too bad considering the time constraints, and although not hot, it was actually good fishing.

Back at the lodge we schmoozed with the rest of the guests and crew. The rain had subsided and we were looking forward to smooth seas and a beautiful sunrise to start out our first full day's adventure. There were two to three guests per room with plenty of space, a kitchen, fireplace and a couple restrooms (washrooms for you Canadians) in each of the two buildings.

Up and at 'em at 5:00 a.m. and we enjoyed a full breakfast. We also received our guide assignments and we were paired up with Kerry, whom I'd not yet met. By 6:00 a.m. all the boats were loaded up, guests on board and we headed out. The sunrise was beautiful, but as we left the confines of the inner bay it started to get a little rough. What happened to our smooth seas? It was a bumpy ride out, but the 23-foot Grady White plowed through without much hesitation. It took a little longer to reach the fishing grounds, but by 7:00 a.m. we had our lines in the water.

Kerry's plan of attack: salmon fishing and then if we had time we'd target halibut. If halibut proved successful then we'd see if we could drum up some lings.

As I looked at the two Shimano Techniums that were rigged up I noticed he had 6-inch plugs on them, a Silver Horde 562 and a Tomic 602. Both would prove to be lethal. The idea of fighting a fish with no flasher was enticing, plus in Kerry's words, "Yah, a 6-inch plug hanging out of a chinook's mouth kinda pisses them off." Indeed it did!

Once the downriggers were dropped to 180 feet (in 220 feet of water) it didn't take long and it was fish on—in fact a double to start out the morning. The bite kinda confused me. The Techniums were bent over almost touching the water and I was



A combo that proved highly effective.

waiting for the rod to snap up as soon as we got a hit. But due to the fact we were fishing with 40-pound mono and trolling at 3 knots, that bow in the line didn't allow the bite to show much, but we knew there was a fish. As soon as the rod started bouncing it was reel, reel, reel all the way down and if it wasn't already popped then a quick tug and keep reeling until you felt the fish. The 1:1 gear ratio on these reels requires some work! The larger chinooks called for no release off the downrigger clip and as you reeled down on them you could feel their shoulders. Super fun with these single-action reels. The rods' action helped in playing the fish but when they wanted to run you only had to remember two things: 1) let them run and 2) get your hands out of the way! They don't call these reels knuckle busters for nothing. Luckily I'd already experience the rap on my knuckles years ago so I was quite aware of the consequences, as was my partner Brad.

After an hour we'd had so much fun and released almost a dozen chinook that Kerry didn't have time to notify the rest of the fleet that we were on them! That's one thing that Murphy's excels with, all their guides share information so all the guests get on fish. After Kerry spread the news via private channel on the VHF, we had a couple of the other boats join us—the others had found fish of their own.

For the next few hours it was consistently 10 to 12 chinook per hour—doing simple math that equates to over 50 chinook in five hours. At times we'd look at the fishfinder and it was solid black with baitfish. Both the rigger lines and rod lines were being pummeled by baitfish. Then of course— Fish On! Oh, yes, it's one of those trips!

The chinook averaged 16 to 18 pounds with several around the 20-pound mark. We each tagged our two chinook for the day which were a little over 20 pounds. As each fish was brought aboard Kerry made sure to bleed them thoroughly, then into a full bed of ice upside down. Taking care of the fish is ultra-important to the Murphy fleet, as it should be.

By noon it was time to put our gear away and tackle some halibut. The wind had died down some but we were still in 6- to 8-foot swells. It was a short jaunt to a halibut hump and Kerry decided we'd drift even though he'd been more successful on this spot anchoring. Even if we got our two (one each) under 90cm (25 pounds) we'd be happy and could search for some lings, which happen to be my favorite, more importantly my wife's favorite!

We rigged-up a Yamashita (Gold Star) 10-inch green glow hootchie over some bait and lowered them down to the bottom—only 160 feet here! Wow, I'm used to dropping 400 to 800 feet in Washington. We were using brand-new Shimano Tyrnos reels and seven-foot Shimano Talavera rods—again Murphy's wants the best for their guests. The 5.0:1 gear ratio was much appreciated—something new I'll have to invest in for my deep-water fishing back home.

Within minutes we had one tinkering with Brad's bait. After he felt the resistance a nice hook-set and we brought it to the boat. It wasn't big but we were happy with it—85cm so this was a good under to start (under 90cm). As Brad lowered his gear again it was instant—even before he hit bottom. This one was released but now I was on. Not wanting to play with the chickens for long I decided to keep this fish as my under (83cm) so we could target some lingcod.

On my favorite halibut grounds in Washington we also pick up several lingcod,



A thick Kyuquot Sound king salmon.

not so the case here. There are so many halibut, and a lot of bigger halibut (over 100 pounds), that rule the ocean floors and they chase the lingcod from the prime spots and let the lings dwell in the rocks.

Even though we had to pick up and move, it wasn't that far, a mile at the most. Now we were in 150 feet of water and the swells had diminished to around 4 feet. The rain started but no matter, this was much better than the wind and the 8-foot swells of earlier. I wonder if the Canadian and US forecasters go to the same university, if you know what I mean.

We used the same rods and reels we did for halibut but now we were using darts. We used 8-ounce Point Wilson darts in white although they were painted as Seahawks (white with green/blue back). I had a ling on before my dart hit bottom and it only took a couple full swing jigs to get Brad hooked up. The lings weren't huge, but at 8 to 10 pounds each with a six-fish possession limit it helps fill the freezer up fast.

Swimming with the lings were a bonus—yelloweye! As we quickly drifted off the ling spot we got our four yelloweye on two drops each. Exact same technique as with the lings—hit the bottom, then lift the jig off the bottom as far as you can and drop the rod, giving the dart slack so it will flutter to the bottom. There were so many fish it never took more than five jigs at the most to hook up—most were within two.

As soon as we got our yelloweye, Kerry motored back to the ling hot spot and hovered over it. That's all it took as we got the rest of our lings on successive drops.

Dang how time flies when you're having fun. It was 3:15 and time to call it a day. What a day—yeah, one of those days!

Coming into the Sound it was as if the weather welcomed us—the sky opened up and there was the sun! All the boats were arriving around the same time and the crew went to each boat to unload their catches. High fives, fist pumps, knuckle bumps all around—it was a great day for all. Pictures of all the groups were being taken and the fish-cleaning station was ever so busy. Each guide made sure to clean and fillet the catch (if you chose to have your fish prepared this way) then they were bagged and quickly moved into the freezer.

What a glorious day—the sun was shining, there was no wind, we caught a boatload of fish, and Sandy the bear dog was there to greet us. Yep, Sandy is the best bear dog the Kyuquot have ever had and she travels the village looking for head pats and food (of course) while earning her keep chasing the bears away.





Coming into the Sound it was as if the weather welcomed us-the sky opened up and there was the sun!

A quick shower and dinner would be served at 6:00 p.m.—which included fresh salmon (served two ways) and halibut. The guests have a habit of donating their fish for dinner. Previous guests know they're going home with a lot of fish so they're generous in donating some for all to enjoy. And, speaking of the guests being there before, between 70 and 80 percent of the guests are return clients. You don't get return business that high if you're not doing something right. The Murphy's... they're doing everything right!

The next day we were up again at 5:00 a.m. and it would be the same routine with a different guide. We'd be with Junior (who happens to be the Chief's son). The dude is cool and loves to fish. Asked who was a better fisherman—him or his Dad?

> "My Dad has taught me a lot." 'Nuff said.

Since Junior was shadowing us the first day with his crew, we had no reason to change up. We motored out to the same spot, only difference being he's a spoonfisherman. When I heard this I couldn't resist, I pulled out some new X2 Flashers and asked if he wanted to give them a go. His face lit up like a Christmas tree.

Junior didn't want to use the small stuff though—since larger bait were in the area we still needed to "match the hatch." We'd be using Silver Horde 6-inch spoons in Cookies-n-Cream and White Lightning. Junior adds a red eye to the White Lightning which he swears makes a huge difference—and we had no reason to doubt him. He gladly accepted the X2 flashers and we used them as dummy flashers (Ace in the Hole).

The Scotty's were set-up with the X2's off the 20-pound balls with the spoons set 15 feet back. The magic depth again seemed to be that 180-foot mark in 220 feet of water. At about 2.6 knots, we trolled slightly slower than we did with the plugs. As the fishfinder screen started to show signs of life we were anxious to get on that first fish. Another peak and the screen was turning black.

"There you go" said Junior.

Not sure who he was talking to, Brad or myself, as we both jumped up—oh, we both had fish! Those spoons will never leave Junior's boat, I can guarantee you that. It was another one of those days...fish after fish and we were on them. We didn't count how many times we'd hooked up, but we were hitting 10 to 12 fish an hour again, all 16 to 24 pounds and we tagged our two fish. Now only coho remained as a targeted salmon species.

The weather man was once again wrong as the rain began to come down. Luckily I had my Stormr jacket on, along with WetSkins which were supplied to all the guests. I don't think the rain ever did stop, but that didn't discourage the fish.

After another banner morning on chinook we decided to allot more time to halibut since we could target larger halibut this day—those over 90cm (25 pounds) but under 133cm (60 pounds)—and Junior wanted to anchor-up for them. We fished the same hump as the previous day and used the same hootchie and bait set-up as well. With the anchor and the boat holding steady we dropped our presentations to the bottom. They weren't right on the bite so we opted for rod holders. After all, we needed some protein after being exhausted from battling the kings.

Brad started the hali frenzy off again as a chicken decided to jump on his bait. It was too small so we let it go. Then, as nature made its call to Brad, his rod doubled over and it looked like a big fish. Junior hooks the fish for him and handed him the rod when he was able. This was a nicer fish! They called it a "Gretzky!" That would be 99cm for those that aren't hockey fans.

We realized the anchor wasn't holding and we slipped off our spot. We began to hit fish drop after drop, but not being in the correct slot we were only getting the smaller fish. Again, wanting to target lings I opted to keep a smaller fish (84cm) so we could pick up.

As mentioned, Junior had shadowed us the day before so he knew right where we were nailing the lings. Would we have the same fate? Oh, baby did we ever. Using the same "SeaHawk" darts we were on the fish again. It didn't take long and we had our six lings and four yelloweye. Not bad, eh?

We went in early as we had our daily possession limit on board. Only one boat managed to beat us back to the docks...it was Senior. Yep, Junior's Dad taught him well. And how did Kerry's boat fare on this



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Natalie giving a tour of the smokehouse.

day? Awesome, in fact all the boats did. It's that good!

That evening we discussed our next day's plot. We only needed coho as we were maxed out on all other fish. Some guests need a few salmon, or a few bottomfish, while others were punched out and didn't plan on fishing the morning. We knew to leave at least one fish each so we could legitimately head out and fish.

After dinner and our nightly discussions came the highlight of the trip. I'd been talking to Marilyn about our trip, the lodge, the crew and the Kyuquot people. You could tell there was a special place in her heart for this place and conversing with her I soon found out why. Not only did the Kyuquot embrace her and Brother David as family, both were being "adopted" into the Kyuquot family in a ceremony to be held this fall. As she mentioned this her eyes welled up and a single tear trickled down her cheek. She had me grab my coat to take a little trip.

Brad and I joined Marilyn at the dock and we jumped in a small boat. She didn't tell us where we were going, but we knew it would be worth it. We had discussed Bigfoot at some length and she said some of the elders had stories...maybe she was taking us to hear some for ourselves? Just up from the dock were some totem poles in process. Further up, Sandy (the bear dog) came to great us. We passed several natives whom all greeted Marilyn as if she were their sister. We, however, were going to the house of one of the hereditary Chiefs. As the door opened, the arms flew and it was a hug fest. Both Marilyn and the Chief are huggers. We were introduced to her as Natalie. Not Chief, not Mrs. Jack, but Natalie. What an awesome lady. She didn't want to share bigfoot stories, but she did even better.

She explained to us that the day we had arrived they had received 1,500 sockeye from the Nootka. The whole village spent countless hours cleaning and processing fish while the youngsters played and danced near the water. She pointed down and there were cases of canned salmon—salmon that she had put up for the village. She even divulged her recipe (sorry, I can't jeopardize her trust by printing it) which was something I never could have expected as it's been a family "secret" for hundreds of years. She reached down and grabbed a jar for each of us. Yes, pretty special indeed.



Shark bite.

But that wasn't the highlight. Natalie is also entrusted with smoking all the fish for many family and community members. She has her own smokehouse and she gave us the grand tour. From the wet alder, to the type of fire (slow and smoldering), to the seasoning (most was without any seasoning) to the type of rack and exactly how to place the fish, this was an experience that very few might ever have the pleasure of experiencing. A truly once-in-a-lifetime opportunity and I will treasure it.

Prior to taking pictures of the surroundings and Natalie herself, I asked for permission. Although reluctant at first, the smile on Natalie's face once she gave in (with nudging from Marilyn) was absolutely priceless. As we arrived back at the lodge the word had already spread. We sat up for hours and talked about our trips that day, both fishing and our special village trip.

Up at 5:30 a.m.—yes, half an hour sleep in and no breakfast for us (although it was upstairs). 6:00 a.m. and we were headed out with Scott—a seasoned veteran who has spent many summers guiding the waters off Kyuquot. He had his orders from the boss: get them coho! We traveled out to the same area as we'd been hammering the chinook. For coho however we'd be switching up tactics. Now we would be using a flasher and Silver Horde Kingfisher Lite spoons in Cookies-n-Cream and The Kitchen Sink. Seems word gets around quickly, so Scott wanted to know if I had any more of those "fancy" flashers.

"Oh, you mean these?" I said as I pulled out two super trick X2 flashers from my bag. "Sweet," said Scott... "Let's give those a go."

So how was the coho fishing? While fishing for chinook we managed to hook several coho if we released from the downrigger to check our presentation. If we lost a chinook during the battle, you'd just have to leave your gear out for a minute and a coho would grab on. We even caught a 6-pound coho while having our halibut bait hanging over the side of the boat while moving—even with all the bait out there they acted like they were starving. Seeing them you could understand why, a 6-pound fish was on the larger size, these coho needed to put on some weight!

I didn't answer the above question, did I? Phenomenal would be the answer—and the coho aren't even in yet! We fished 20 feet back and down 50 feet at 2.6 knots. The fishing was non-stop. As one of the guests put it, "we spent more time with fish on, than with fish off."

It was a short day but we released as many as we could before tagging out and calling it a trip.

All the fish were waiting in our 150quart coolers, ready for the ride home. Those caught that morning would soon be joining them. The coolers were topped with ice, a gift from the Kyuquot as they had excess after processing all their sockeye.

Again it was hugs, high fives, shaking hands and knuckle bumps. A short trip back to Fair Harbour and they sent us on our way. As the new guests arrived they asked how fishing was?

"You should have been here last week." I think that's the response you get any

time you visit Kyuquot—Yes, it's that good!