

# H A A N E E N A A

N E W S

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## HAA NEE NAA LODGE

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BY CLAYTON VANIER & JENNIFER NELSON, OWNERS/OPERATORS



## YEAR IN REVIEW

### RECORD BREAKER

When my father Claude and his friend Wayne Haw stepped off the floatplane in early June of 2003, I would be lying if I told you I didn't think it would be a special trip. Since the early passing of my mother to terminal cancer in January, my father and I hadn't seen much of each other. Work and life's inevitable deadlines too often get in the way of family. Resolved, this time I was determined to get out on the water with them on at least a couple of days.

During the first few days the fishing was consistent, even great, both for salmon and halibut. No surprise then that both Dad and Wayne were quickly in the undesirable position of being down to one salmon each left on their tags. Then the weather turned. With southeast winds and a liquid sky prevailing, Claude and Wayne sensibly opted to fish within hailing distance of the lodge and the warmth of its fire. No one was surprised when the pair arrived back at the dock just after 8 a.m., but what they had in their fish box left my mouth hanging open and put a virtual end to the \$1200 derby that was on.

Hoisted on the scale, the monster chinook weighed in at 78 pounds, shattering the old record by almost eight pounds and ranking among the largest salmon taken in the Pacific last summer. Call it faith; call it luck, but as far as I was concerned, it was the work of an angel.

With the 2003 season starting off so well, things just kept going well. Chinook fishing was very consistent and at times extremely good. Although our catch of tyees (30lb. plus) was down a little over previous years, most guests had good luck and retained their limit.

We opened the doors on the 25th of May last summer for our 12th successful season of operation. Jennifer and I have much to be proud of, what started as a dream has become reality. Over the years we never deviated from our original goal of providing clean, comfortable accommodations, great food and fabulous fishing set amidst some of the most breathtaking beauty found anywhere in B.C. Looking back, it strikes us both that we seem to have found the right mix.

We cater mostly to serious salmon fishermen, those clients who value quality fishing, quality equipment and first-class boats above five-star hotel trappings and jacuzzi tubs in the bedrooms. Not surprisingly, these tend to be quality people and it is the countless friends we've made over the years that truly makes this business a joy. We would like to take this time to show our appreciation to our repeat guests and friends, many of whom have made Haa-nee-naa Lodge their choice fishing-vacation destination for years. Simply put, Thank You!

*Fish The Magic*

Last summer saw the early arrival of the northern coho in our waters. Although not an anomaly, they were abundant as early as mid June, with the first coho of the season caught at the end of May. By the end of June, coho fishing was exceptional.

Add that to the consistent chinook fishing and the result was guests leaving with loaded fish boxes.

2003 was also memorable as the year of the great drought on Dundas. With little more than a sprinkle of rain through July and early August, our fishing paradise was even more appealing than usual, if that's possible. Weather the like of which has not been seen since the mid 80s was an unexpected bonus, a true blessing.

Our 2003 catch statistics showed a considerable drop in the number of large fish taken by guests. Fish over 40 pounds were not nearly as common as in the previous three seasons, but on average guests caught more chinook salmon. We had 199 guests take part in the chinook fishery from mid May to the end of July with 677 chinook harvested. This works out to an average of 3.4 spring salmon per guest. The average weight of these fish came in at 25.58 lbs, which is more than respectable. Of these 677 chinook, 141 were fish of over 30 pounds; 21 were fish over 40, five were fish over 50 pounds and one was a fish weighing in excess of 60 pounds. Compared with the figures for 2002 – with an average weight of 28.2 pounds, 550 chinook were harvested of which 121 weighed more than 30 pounds, 69 more than 40 pounds, 22 weighed more than 50 and four weighed more than 60 pounds – it might rightly be said a consistent and good season was had by all.

As the chinook season passed, fly fishermen started appearing at the lodge again in early August for what turned out to be some of the most remarkable fishing ever. The coho relentlessly swarmed huge schools of jack herring and needlefish. Guests using seven-, eight-, or nine-weight fly outfits and sinking lines had outstanding days on the cast fly. Take the great weather into consideration as well and the fishing just couldn't get any better.

There were so many hungry coho available that 2003 saw the development of a new fly strategy. For the first time ever, guests were casting dry flies to the coho and they were doing so with huge success. For sheer adrenaline-pumping excitement, there is nothing quite like watching literally dozens of slashing coho salmon attacking your skipping minnow fly on the surface. The mayhem provided unique opportunities for observation and learning.

Each year more kelp beds are fished, leaving available unfished kelp patches at a little less than a million. Lots of water yet to try. We made observations of a small school of coho holding in the current under the arms of the bull kelp in ambush of



unsuspecting minnows, much like trout holding in a river awaiting passing mayflies. Whenever a hapless minnow happened by, the coho attacked aggressively, often breaking the surface of the water with sufficient velocity to rocket them into the air.

Master saltwater fly flier Peter Morrison was at Haa-nee-naa Lodge last season hosting his soon-to-be famous fly fishing seminars. They went so well that Peter will be back in 2004, offering his seminars for three trips, one of which is an eight-day excursion. The seminars run in conjunction with trips #21 (Aug. 2-6), #22 (Aug. 6-13) and #23 (Aug. 13-16th.) Those who would like to take part in one of the fastest growing sports in North America will not be disappointed. Aside from the sheer drama of hitting saltwater with fly-rod in hand, Peter's fun, humorous style of teaching is refreshing and his knowledge of saltwater fly fishing is second to none. His seminars are geared to fly fishermen at all levels, from beginner to advanced. Typically, novices are shown the basic steps to casting a fly while more advanced casters benefit from personal lessons designed to increase distance and accuracy. Peter, a certified master caster at the instructor level, also fishes with several of the guests personally, giving them in-the-field hands-on instruction. All in all, the seminars are a great way to promote this fine fishery. If you're interested in fly fishing, or maybe just curious to discover what all the fuss is about, take a look at one of the August 2004 trips and drop us a line.



We're again looking forward to hosting another great season of fun and fantastic fishing. Call early for available dates.

## FOCUS FISHING HOLE

Not far to the northwest of the lodge lies a group of islands known as the Gnarled Islands or Gnarlies as they are affectionately known. Rugged and weathered as they are beautiful they sit as a testament to the once beautiful mountain tops they must have been before the last ice age some 10000 years ago. Laden with kelp beds, the always present

bait fish that feed and hide amongst them it is a perfect place for the marauding northern coho. A more perfect setting could not be construed. A lodge favourite this area hosts some of the best coho fishing on the entire coast both with the fly rod and without, and a spot you surely want to try while visiting Haa-nee-naa Lodge.

## FANTASTIC STAFF

Once again a wonderful crew was on hand to take care of our guests in 2003. Chef Kirk Borchardt was back, serving his delicious meals and fine desserts, always with a smile and often delivered right out on the water – now that's service. Our great staff of guides, Wonderboy, Double D, Lucky Duck and Willy who aren't happy unless they're working double tides to get their guests into fish. And who can forget smiley Ben,

our terrific dockhand. His politeness, incredible work ethic and outgoing personality are seldom seen in today's youth. A special thanks goes to our wonderful hostess Robyn who kept the lodge together, working long hours, always with a smile, to ensure the lodge's reputation for spotlessness was admirably maintained. Let's not forget about our dockhand in training Taylor, who's great big smile will be remembered by all of us.

## 2003 FISHING FORECAST

Although forecast to be a banner return on the Skeena River for chinook in 2003, the run size was down dramatically. No mystery there, though, as the resurgence of the commercial troll fishery on the north coast of the Queen Charlotte Islands and Alaska's heavy pounding of Skeena stocks intercept many of these fish. Record returns to the Columbia River and strong returns on other B.C. rivers saved the day for Dundas Island fisherman last summer.

Although the troll fleet is nowhere near Dundas, since they fish Dixon Entrance and the west coast of the Queen Charlotte Islands, the impact will be felt. A very efficient fleet of commercial boats is again harvesting both chinook and coho.

The Fisheries and Oceans Canada outlook for the 2004 season in B.C. states, "Improving ocean survival conditions for salmon and healthy stocks in many areas are expected to provide a wide range of fishing opportunities to the recreational sector in 2004... Average returns for most salmon stocks to river systems throughout B.C. are expected"

By all accounts, limits for Dundas Island will once again be set at four salmon per day with a total possession limit of eight, four of which may be chinook (per trip). Any changes to these base limits will be made public by late January 2004 by DFO.

Even though recreational lobby groups are fighting to have halibut limits increased from three to four per trip, opposition from commercial interests at the Pacific Halibut Commission has been stiff. I don't foresee the increased bag limits being implemented for 2004, or in the foreseeable future.

Expect 2004 to be another season of good fishing. Even with the heavy commercial exploitation on chinook salmon, run sizes have been strong for several consecutive years and next summer does not appear to be an exception to that rule. Barring any unforeseen oceanic disasters and no commercial over harvest, fishing should again be strong.

Since the cutbacks of the late 90s, coho fishing has been world-class on Dundas and surrounding islands. I fully expect guests will continue to enjoy the same fabulous fishing conditions in 2004. No red light warning signals have been put on north coast coho this season by the Department of Fisheries.

Once again, we will be putting a lot of effort into our fly fishery this upcoming season. From professional instructors and seminars to fully functional fly boats, we will be fine-tuning every detail to ensure our guests a successful shot at this exciting, one-of-a-kind fishery.

Just like our fishing lines, available dates are tight, so book your trip to Haa-nee-naa Lodge as soon as possible. Coho action should be outstanding in 2004.

## MEMORABLE & NOT SO MEMORABLE MOMENTS

### TIP OF THE HAT

Goes to Wayne Haw from Edgewood, B.C. along with net man Claude Vanier of Winfield, B.C. for Wayne's tremendous trophy chinook of 78 pounds taken on June 12 at the Wall, with a little help from my mom.

Honourable mention goes to Wade and Lynette Werenka of Edmonton, Ab. who are long time guests of Haa-nee-naa Lodge. They had an impressive take home this year while being guided by Wonderboy. They took chinook weighing 48, 46, 39, 36, 35, 34, 32 and 30 pounds. For the first time ever, Wade managed to beat his wife for big-fish honors.

### FIGHT NIGHT!

What do you get when you cross an ex boxer, a redneck and a bottle of Jack Daniels? Let me tell you what. You get black eyes, sore heads and bruised egos, not to mention a whole lot of razzing from your buddies. I won't tell you who won because there wasn't any winner only LOSERS! And I also won't tell you which Steve fell out of the top bunk hitting the floor five feet below at mach three while in a dead sleep.

### SHARK ATTACK!

I heard the screams first, then unabated laughter for a full five minutes. All this emanating from our anchor only a short distance away. It sounded like long-time guests Don Pratten and Rod Wentworth of Seattle WA. On regaining their composure, the pair explained they had been trying to release a small pink salmon caught on the fly when a four-to-five-foot long salmon shark exploded out of the kelp. The prehistoric fish engulfed the salmon and left the boys totally astonished and maybe even a little scared.

## TESTIMONIALS

"I want to thank you for a wonderful fishing trip. Everything was superb and I appreciate the special things you do for me. My wife thanks you for the Nanaimo bars. They are a real treat. Once again thank you and I look forward to next year." *FREMONT BURROWS, CHEHALIS, WA. JUNE 2-6, 2003*

"It's been two weeks since I was at the lodge and I'm still thinking about it. For me it was a tremendous experience. Everything was perfect; from Robyn's center pieces on the table every night, Ben's help on the dock, bringing us lunches, taking care of our fish and of course Kirk's food. What more could we ask! Fishing with Peter was a pure delight, not to mention the help he gave us with our casting. The fishing, what can I say, it was superb! I'm looking forward to next year." *JOE UHLMAN, WA. AUG. 4-11, 2003 FLY FISHING SEMINARS*

## MEMORIES



Although a great year, 2003 was marred by heavy personal loss. My young, vibrant mother succumbed to cancer at the age of 64. Without her and her constant support none of this would have been possible.



Don Shon, who appeared on last year's newsletter cover, was taken prematurely from us by cancer. He will be missed by all those who met him.

## THE TACKLE SHOP

In this segment I would like to talk about downrigging for halibut. People tend to give me quite a lot of flak about the downriggers on my boat. Not being a big advocate of downriggers, especially for salmon, I have steadfastly refused to use them while fishing for salmon. My reasons are numerous, but basically boil down to the fact downriggers lessen the subtle skills involved in catching salmon. Halibut are a different story. They're not the supreme gamefish salmon are, but they are great eating. We want to catch 'em, subdue 'em, bag 'em and eat 'em.

Wondering what all this has to do with downriggers? Years back in the 1980s I fished one summer on a commercial troll boat plying some of the most beautiful areas on the north coast, places like Cape Muzon where I cleaned in excess of 700 salmon per day, or stunning Langara Island and the entire north end of the Queen Charlotte Islands. All in all, quite an experience for an 18-year-old and I learned much about the water and fishing from this one summer.

One lesson that stuck was the incredible numbers of halibut we used to catch in a place called Rose Spit on the NE corner of the QCI. Almost every pass by the Red can buoy brought halibut to the bottom lines of the troll gear. So numerous were they that gear 60 feet off bottom was being engulfed by hungry flat fish. Which leads me to today and all the deceased halibut holes I have on the north end on Dundas Island.

Halibut, especially chickens, move around on a yearly basis and their migration takes

them to different spots every year. Finding these spots takes time and patience. Downriggers have a decided advantage here: they cut the searching time down dramatically.

Last season I experimented with downriggers and had great success, so this season two guide boats also will have riggers on them. Every once in a long while there's an advantage to being the guy in charge!

Generally halibut can be found in areas where the bottom contour is flat in depths of 150 - 300 feet. When conditions are right, I prefer to troll very slowly with a huge fresh herring, either whole or cut plugged, hooked with tandem 5/0 EagleClaw hooks. I determine my location by past experience or nautical charts of the area.

Weather and tide play an important role in how I fish the area. Under optimal conditions, I like to troll with the current, keeping my baits 10 feet off the bottom. This allows me to cover plenty of water in a short time. When I hit fish, I punch the location in the GPS and troll back over the spot. If the current is running hard, I sometimes sit in one spot trolling against the current and let the fish come to me. All in all it's a great way to catch halibut and a variety of bottomfish, not to mention the incidental catch of salmon hanging around the bottom.

Perhaps the biggest benefit is that guests no longer have to reel up 200 feet of line with a 16-oz. lead attached. We use lighter trolling rods with 50lb. Tuf line, which increases the fight of the fish and adds to the excitement.

## TO GUIDE OR NOT TO GUIDE...

Many guests ask me the question when booking a trip to HNLL, "Do I need to be guided at your resort?" The answer is no, Haa-nee-naa Lodge provides all guests with top of the line boats, motors and the fishing equipment needed to catch trophy salmon or halibut. The resort is anchored close to the fishing grounds, literally minutes away on calm, protected waters. A thorough area and fishing orientation is given before any guests leave the dock. Guests can fish from dawn until dusk with unlimited time on the water in search of that fish of a lifetime.

Lodge statistics do however show a much higher catch percentage on guided boats. In 2003, Haa-nee-naa guides helped their guests catch more than 66 per cent of the chinook landed at the lodge. Only 45 per cent of the lodge guests were guided last season. This equates to an average of more than 4.5 chinook per guest on the guided

boats and 1.85 chinook per guest on the unguided vessels.

For the first-time salmon fisherman, or for those who wish to relax a little more, the small daily fee for a guide is well worth the price. The average guided day is 10-12 hours, which costs about \$10 per hour/person based on double occupancy. Guides need to be booked well in advance since only a limited number of guides can be housed at the lodge. If you want to be guided, call early. Haa-nee-naa Lodge guides are all local, professional, first-class fishermen who will make your trip an experience to remember. Those of you who do fish a lot and prefer to fish alone, our guides' local knowledge and fishing ability are still recommended for at least one day of your trip. It may make the difference between a fabulous trip and a so-so trip. It is money well spent.

## RECIPE BOX

### HAA NEE NAA SALMON

#### INGREDIENTS:

1 Fillet Salmon  
1 Lemon  
1 Lime

Equal Parts Coarse Salt and Brown Sugar  
1 Small Pack Dill



Debone and skin the salmon

Zest the lemon and lime and put on top of the salmon

Put the dill over top of the lemon zest

Mix enough salt and sugar together to cover the salmon

Spread the salt and sugar mix over the salmon

Place the fillet in a shallow baking dish and cover with Saran Wrap

Place a heavy weight on top of the fish and press for 3 hours

After three hours remove the wrap and lightly rinse off the fish removing all salt and sugar

Cut the salmon into small pieces (no more than 3oz)

Preheat a pan on high

Once the pan is hot sear the salmon very quickly on the skin side (not the cured side)

Once the salmon is half cooked remove from the heat and serve on a bed of greens with a nice vinaigrette.

## SUGGESTION BOX

Make your stay at Haa-nee-naa Lodge a more memorable one. Jenn and Clay would love to hear from you if you have any suggestions or comments that would help us serve you better. Thank you to several guests last year who made recommendations. Many of these suggestions will be implemented in coming seasons. Please fax us any comments to 1-800-668-8955 or e-mail us at silverbk@citytel.net.