

Editor's Note: This article was originally written to partially fulfill the requirements of the Fall 2005 Intermediate Fly-fishing & Tying offered at the University of Alaska Fairbanks. The piece is edited and reprinted with the author's permission.

By Brant Widness

Many people come to Alaska to fish for monster chinook, plentiful sockeye or feisty silver salmon. While all of these fish are fun to catch, I enjoy hooking to the elusive *Oncorhynchus Gorbuscha*, more commonly known as the pink salmon or 'Humpy'. This last summer brought record returns of Humpies back to their spawning streams all over Southcentral Alaska. Record returns mean only one thing to fisherman—really good fishing.

Many people have their secret spots for other types of salmon, but pinks fill every little dribble from the hills into Cook Inlet come mid to late August. However, I do have a 'secret' pink salmon spot. It lies about 20 miles from Homer in Tutka Bay. Some crazy person thought it necessary to start a pink hatchery in a small lagoon within Tutka Bay. It doesn't make much sense to me, but I can't complain about some of the best fishing in my life!

In early June, the pinks return to the hatchery via a small salt chuck and they pool up in the lagoon. This year there were at least 250,000 fish in this lagoon. The water was a dark, moving orb from so many fish being there at one time. The place seems like it should be illegal to fish because of the overpopulation of humpies and very few people. This is why the lagoon was nicknamed 'The Cookie Jar'. There is an abundance of 'white socks'. Even when the bug dope wears off, the abundance of fish will keep you there long after you've been eaten alive. The bugs can be bad, but the fishing is better.

I've found that Tutka Bay pinks like hot pink-colored flies. The Humpy is an obvious choice for the fishery, but anything tied hot pink on a long-shank #2-4 hook will work fine. There's something about pink that entices the fish into hitting the fly nearly every time. Other than catching fish, the hot pink color is highly visible from the boat, and makes it even easier to watch the fish take your fly. Any fishery is fun when you can watch the fish take your fly. The rule at The Cookie Jar is hot pink. You can experiment with wet or dry flies just make them hot pink.

Gear for this area depends on the angler. I recommend a 6 or 7-weight rod with a fast sinking-tip line although I have caught fish ranging from 5 to 10-weight. A boat is necessary to access fishing in The Cookie Jar. A 25-foot fiberglass or aluminum boat is about the biggest that can get up into the lagoon. Kayaks are always fun to fish out of as well. There are several water taxis that run in and out of Homer for fairly cheap. A trip to Tutka Bay would cost about \$100 round trip on a water taxi. The State of Alaska has cabins to rent for \$50 a night nearby. There are also yurts available for rent in the summer. The other option is to camp on a nearby beach, my personal favorite. This is a way to get by rather inexpensively for a very nice trip. Also, there is a run of sockeye right down the coast and up another bay.

The regulations for 'The Cookie Jar' are the same as the rest of Cook Inlet. You may keep six salmon a day (other than kings, and only three may be silver) and have six fish in possession; however, pinks are not that great to eat so you can practice

catch-and-release. If you want to catch a lot of fish in a short amount of time, I highly recommend Tutka Bay Humpies. They put up a good fight and you pretty much catch one on every cast; just remember the hot pink flies and you're in business.