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Seas, Bays and Rivers of Queen Charlotte Islands Abound With Fish of Marketable Varieties

(By C. Harrison)

The seas, bays and rivers in and around the Queen Charlottee Islands teem with domestic resources of fish in endless variety. We have all the species of salmon frequenting our waters that can be found elsewhere on this coast, and these fish are of first-class quality. The great drawback, however, is that they do not run in large enough quantities to warrant the erection of many canneries for their curing. Spring salmon can be caught in the spring by thousands in several bays and harbors of our islands.

The great difficulty in regard to the salmon fishing industry of these islands is the exposure at the entrance of several of the rivers to the southeast wind, which at the time of the fall fishing is the prevailing wind. The rivers being so narrow no legal fishing can possibly allowed in the rivers themselves, as an ordinary gill-net would block the entire river and so prevent any of the fish from reaching their spawning beds. All fish therefore must be caught in Hecate Straits or in the waters of the Inlets outside of the entrances of the rivers, and without the least doubt by so fishing a large quantity of fall fish could be obtained.

It if imperative that hatcheries should be created at the same time that commercial fishing is allowed, otherwise within a very short period our rivers will be entirely depleted of salmon. Reliable men also must be placed in charge of these hatcheries, and if everything be conducted on up-to-date lines, I have no doubt that the fall fishing up and around the inlets of these islands will prove successful to all parties interested.

Careful Observation

After careful observation for many years of the salmon that frequent the streams of our islands, my opinion is that the sockeyes begin to run the third or fourth week in March. The heavy run is generally from the middle of April to the end of June. The steel-heads run in August and again in December. The cohoes begin to run about the second week in August and continue to run until the end of September. The humpbacks and dog salmon commence to appear about the first of August and continue until the end of November. Special legislation I think ought to be made so as to allow the sockeyes to be caught whilst they are runing plentifully. In regard to the quality of the sockeye salmon Captain Walbran, formerly commander of the D.G.S. Quadra, stated: "Whilst at Skidegate, Queen Charlotte Islands, I examined the excellent salmon rivers from which the cannery lately established there was drawing at that early stage of the season (May) some splendid fish. The fish were small but of excellent flavor, being in that respect more like British salmon than I have yet met with on this coast.

Herring Banks

As regards the herring banks, they have never yet been prospected thoroughly, but we who reside on the islands know that they make their appearance in April and are caught by the Haidas for bait in countless numbers. The Haidas dry thousands of pounds of their spawn annually for their own consumption and for trading with other Indians. These fish are admirably adapted for making bloaters.

While I am writing about the herring, there is something which I think should be known and which should at once be stopped. I refer to the wanton destruction of the herring eggs by the Haidas. During the spawning season they take boughs of hemlock trees, and after stringing lines on them, submerge the boughs in the waters of the bays near their homes. After the branches have been in the water two or three days thy are drawn up and great bunches of herring spawn are found clinging to them. The Haidas then take these eggs, dry them, and pack them into boxes which hold about forty pounds apiece. These dried herring eggs are considered quite a delicacy by the natives and are shipped as far as Hazelton on the Skeena and Aiyansh on the Naas. Nearly all the stores in the interior as well as those on the coast which cater to the Indian trade handle these dried eggs, and an immense number of them are sold annually.

If the herrings are of any commercial value, then this destruction of their spawn ought to be immediately stopped. At present there are no regulations governing the destruction of herring spawn, but it can readily be seen what harmful effect this indiscriminate destroying of the spawn is bound to have on any herring industry wherever established. Should the Government decide to protect the herring spawn, it would certainly aid in the propagation of the fish in the bays and harbors or our islands, but it will take many years before this can finally be accomplished.

For the Sportsman

For the sportsman's pleasure trout of all descriptions are found in our lakes and streams and are of excellent flavor and often weigh as much as two or three pounds apiece.

The next choice and marketable fish to be found in large quantities in these waters is the skil or black cod. The cod fisheries I think must to a large extent be carried on by sailing vessels, and our islands offer immense advantages for the operation of such craft over almost any other part of the coast. The length of a fishing voyage is very uncertain, as it all depends on the presence of the cod. In the eastern waters some fishermen are absent two or three months bfore a catch is made, and frequent changes of ground are often necessary before a promising bank for operations can be determined, consequently the duration of the trip seems to me to indicate that the operation of steamers or motor boats in these waters for cod fishing would be a very expensive operation. Prince Rupert at the outside calculation being only one hundred miles away from any of the cod banks, when a catch is effected, twelve hours sailing would easily bring the fish to their destined distributing point. The best cod banks are about five and a half miles off the west coast of these islands, and at times are to be found in large quantities in two hundred fathoms of water, and the fish average about seventeen pounds apiece.

Mr. Mowat, who was an expert in these matters, pronounced the black cod caught in these waters the finest fish in the world, far surpassing the eastern salmon and mackeral. He predicted that any company that would go into this business properly would reap splendid results, and that such an enterprise would prove remunerative, as the superior quality of these fish would command a ready market wherever introduced.

In addition to the black cod we have the black rock, the orange rock, the red cod, flounders, plaice, crabs and shell-fish of all descriptions. Notwithstanding the matchless inducements presented by the fishing wealth of these islands, scarcely more than four companies have as yet assayed to grasp the prize.

(Editor's Note.— This is the sixth of a series of articles on the Queen Charlotte Islands by Mr. Harrison. The next will appear in an early issue).

As the result of the turning over of a coal oil cooking stove, the contents of 116 Eighth street occupied by Mrs. Quarrell, were badly scorched by a fire which broke out at 2 o'clock New Year's morning. The fire department answered the call and, upon arrival, found the fire making headway with a strong breeze blowing. A line of hose was run out and the fire extinguished before any considerable damage was done.

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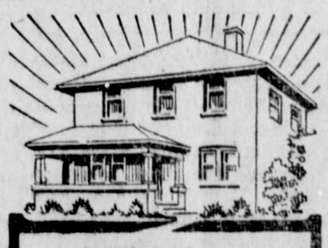
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