

The Flydressers Guild Sussex Branch



Newsletter

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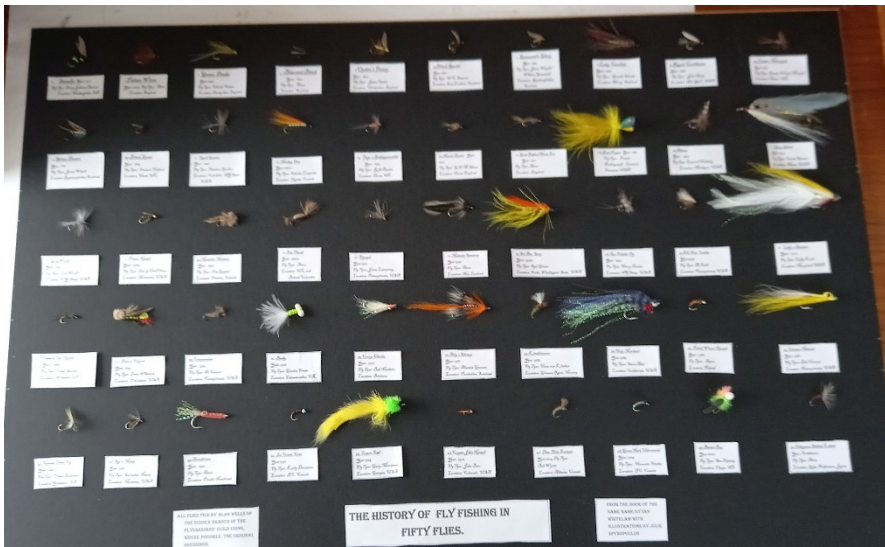
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50 Flies Later.



On one of my more significant birthdays my son bought me the Ian Whitelaw book "A History of Fly Fishing in Fifty Flies". I found this an interesting read and a few months later had the "bright" idea of tying all 50 flies and mounting them in a framed presentation. The book has some lovely illustrations by Julie Spyropoulos and a list of the original dressings but no step-by-step tying instructions. So I started with the flies which were more familiar to me and for which the materials were easily accessible, such as the PTN and the Hare's Ear. I then graduated to the more difficult dressings or those where the materials took a bit more research to find e.g. the Heron for the Lady Caroline or the Schlappen feathers for the Sol Duc Spey. Youtube was a boon in finding tying instructions for the more esoteric patterns, as were specialist materials suppliers like Steve Cooper at Cookshill. Whilst I endeavoured to keep as closely as possible to the original dressings, some materials are no longer easily available and I thought that chasing ram's testicles around Sussex for the dubbing for the Tup's Indispensable, might get me into a spot of bother. Another challenge was acquiring the Partridge K3A Swedish Dry Fly hooks for Oliver Edward's Upside-Down Fly, which are no longer manufactured. However, reaching out to contacts in other Branches of the FDG proved fruitful and I am indebted to Dave Price of the Bristol and West Branch who supplied me with some. I am also indebted to my wife, whose design idea of using magnets behind the mounting board to present the finished flies, was a much better solution than my efforts to attach each fly to a small piece of card and then gluing these to the board.

Someone has now suggested that I try to catch a fish with each of the fifty flies, so if anyone would like to contribute to my crowd funding page to use the Tarpon Toad in it's intended environment, it would be much appreciated. Seriously though, it's amazing that flies such as the Hare's Ear and the Adams are over 100 years old in their origins, yet are still to be found in most game anglers fly boxes. I dare say that many who have a more extensive knowledge of fly tying could argue over inclusions or exclusions in this list but I've enjoyed the experience of widening my tying horizons. However, please don't look too closely at the quality of the dressing – I'm only at Silver Level in the Guild Award Scheme!

See the pictures below.

Alan Wells (Secretary of Sussex Branch.)

Some of the more challenging patterns:



Fly fishing in British Columbia, July – August 2025

Having reached the conclusion that Salmon fishing trips to British Columbia (BC) are, rather than something you'd describe as the trip of a lifetime, an essential part of my annual fishing calendar, I booked my third trip to the Kitimat Lodge for Summer 2025. Recalling a conversation with Tony Harrison at the club one night after returning from my first trip, he told me that he had fished in Alaska for many years (more than 10 trips as I recall), and that the only thing that stopped him in the end was his Bank Manager! I now think he was absolutely right. My own limit will undoubtedly be a function of my own Bank Manager's approval rather than any desire to stop. However, he's okay with it for now and I've already booked my fourth 'trip of a lifetime' for Summer 2026!

For the first time, this year we actually managed to make a much friendlier connecting flight from Vancouver up to Terrace. It meant that, rather than arrive at the lodge at Midnight, we were able to check into our cabins during daylight hours and enjoy an evening meal over a few beers, ready for the following day's 4 AM alarm call.

The adopted American member of our group, 'Wild Bill' from Wyoming was there to meet us. Bill had been invited to join our party the previous year when he had been on his own at the lodge. He turned out to be such a great character, we invited him to fish with us again. Bill, a retired Petroleum Engineer, is full of entertaining stories. One of his many claims to fame was that, back in the day, he was Red Adair's right-hand man and was instrumental in dealing with the aftermath of the dreadful

Piper Alpha oil rig disaster in 1988. According to his fascinating story, once Red had agreed with Occidental Petroleum on a blank cheque, Red put out the fire, while Bill capped the well using something they call in the trade 'heavy mud'



Sunrise over the Skeena – it was still dark when we arrived!

Our first few days were spent on the Skeena River, where the early starts ensured we were on the prime spots. We are lucky enough to have some of the best Guides in the Terrace (or so they tell us) area and there are days when location is critical to success. It is possible to fish out there completely unguided. But, unless you have access to a jetboat, options are limited to a handful of beaches in the town of Terrace. It's most definitely not for the purist, often termed 'combat fishing', where the competition for space can be intense.



The most spectacular Rainbow scene I've ever seen!

It very soon became obvious that the year's Pink Salmon run was as big as the guides had indicated on our first briefing and much bigger than I had ever seen before. Wading knee deep into the crystal-clear water, the numerous Pinks could be clearly seen in front, behind and even between your feet. Every so often larger fish of other species could be seen moving up river through them. Given the density of fish, it proved very difficult to get a decent swing of the fly. The Pinks would either take before the fly and leader settled or, worse, you'd foul hook one as you stripped in at the end of the swing. Switching to heavier tips and/or weighted flies just resulted in constant snagging on the rocks. Foul hooking a 6lb Pinkie in the tail can be quite an experience. The fish invariably bolt downstream and the clutch starts to scream (setting it too tight is a surefire way to loose fish) When you regain your composure, you'll probably be down to your backing. The initial excitement of thinking 'this feels like a good fish' soon dissipates as you realise something doesn't feel quite right. And when it's happened a few times, it becomes an annoyance. Landing even a modest tail hooked fish in fast water can be a tricky, time-consuming task, with the real danger of rod breakage if rushed. In contrast to previous visits, this year saw all five Salmon species starting their runs a week or two later than the norm. In previous years we have only encountered the very last of the late running Chinooks. Those fish have been few and far between and often not in the best condition, having been in freshwater for a while. However, in contrast to previous years, targeting fresh run Kings was very much a realistic proposition, most of the group encountering a brush with one or more of these beasts. The power of a Chinook is incredible, pound-for-pound, arguably only equalled by a big Steelhead.



A typical Skeena back-drop

I was lucky enough to land a magnificent specimen estimated at 40 pounds. I'm still not sure how I managed to land it. It took off like a train and before I could recover from the initial shock, I was probably a hundred yards into my backing. It's times like that that you are glad you opted for the 25lb tippet that seemed overkill when you chose it and you spent that little bit extra on a reel with a top-quality clutch. After chasing the fish downstream for a long, long way, recovering line and listening to every instruction the guide gave me, the fish was eventually in the net. I was over the moon.

Definitely one of my most memorable catches, which was safely returned to the river to continue its journey.



My PB Chinook from a pool known as 'Formula 1' on the Skeena – it'll take some beating!

The Kitimat River, where leisurely drift boats take the place of Jetboats, was quite low for the duration of our visit. This made the lower part of the river quite busy with other anglers because many of the well-known pools were unfishable. The low water generally made the fishing a little more challenging than we had been used to on previous trips. Although we could see that there were plenty of Pinks and Chum present, they proved rather difficult to catch. However, while not quite meeting expectations, the group still managed to catch plenty of double figure Chum to about 35lb.



My biggest Chum of the trip - a mid-twenty Kitimat Cock fish



A Hen Chum from a very low Kitimat River

The wildlife out in BC is probably worth an article in its own right. But there was one story worth mentioning here from last year's trip. One particular night I was rudely woken in the early hours by the sound of banging and crashing outside my cabin. My first thought was that it was probably one of the other lodge residents being inconsiderate and, with yet another 4AM start, I was none too impressed. I went to the Window and pulled back the curtain to see what all the racket was about. Imagine my surprise when I saw a big Grizzly about 20 metres from my door, up on its hind legs trying to wrestle with a bear-proof garbage bin. Now these bins are made from steel and are about the size of a small car. The Bear was rocking it back and forth, eventually managing to push it onto its side. By this time half the lodge residents were awake and viewing the spectacle. Some, rather foolishly, were videoing in open doorways from cabins closer than mine. Luckily the Bear was preoccupied with getting inside the bin, eventually realising that all efforts were in vain and wandering off. It only became apparent the following day that the Grizzly was a female with two cubs, which were only visible from some other cabins.



Mum Grizzly trying to get into the garbage bin – the cubs are barely visible under the trees to the right

A seaday is an optional extra. However, it provides a popular break from swinging flies on the river and you don't have to live in your waders for upwards of 12 hours. For my group it has become a much-anticipated part of the fishing schedule. Yet again, the conditions out in the Douglas Channel were perfect. Calm seas and pleasant temperatures. After setting the usual Crab pots, Tracey our Skipper took us to one of his favoured Halibut marks. Fishing jigs in 300 feet of water, it was initially a little slow. However, once the tide ebbed, the Halibut came to life. In fact, we very quickly reached our allowance of one fish per angler (plus one for Tracey). I had to return one to the water because it was above the legal size limit of about 40lb! Having taken our limit, we moved to another mark to troll for Salmon that were waiting to run the rivers. Even with a fish finder it proved difficult to find meaningful numbers of Salmon. But we did we managed to bag a few for the table. I caught a big Chum that impressed Tracey as they are not often caught at Sea. Returning to port, we recovered the Crab pots and were able to take about 30 Dungeness Crab for the table. On the way back to Kitimat, we almost collided with a Humpback whale. Stopping the boat, the Whale seemed to sense it had an audience, providing us with a captivating show as it laid on its back and crashed its fins and tail against the water. It was at times perhaps 20 meters from the boat, by far the closest I have ever been to a Whale. You probably wouldn't want to be any closer than that!

Another highlight was the usual trip to the coastal river known locally as 'Jurassic Park', so called because it's in a National Park that resembles a land that time forgot. It's only reachable via a helicopter or a long jetboat journey. We use the jetboat option, which is an hour's ride out into the Douglas Sea channel, followed by a trip up the estuary of the river. The journey itself can be quite an undertaking. Even a modest swell on the channel makes for a rather uncomfortable ride, bouncing from one wave to another. Then there is the hair-raising trip up the river. While the boat has to maintain a good speed in order to skim across the shallows, there is no telling what might appear around the next blind bend in the river.

After arriving at our destination, we got to fish our first pool, nicknamed the 'G-spot'. This is without doubt my favourite place to fish in the entire world. The pool itself consists of a gravel beach about three hundred meters long. It's easy wading to where it's just possible to get fly under the far bank, covering the deeper water where the Salmon lie up. The river is mostly Glacial melt, which is

damned cold and crystal clear. The backdrop is quite simply stunning, consisting of complete wilderness, framed by snow covered peaks and a distant Glacier. The previous year one of the group managed to video a Grizzly crossing at the bottom of the pool. It's an imperfect paradise though. In Summer it's infested with all manner of thoroughly obnoxious biting insects. Mosquitos are the least of your worries here. You need to be more concerned with the plagues of Horse, Deer and Sand flies. Hats, nets, gloves and buckets of insect repellent are the order of the day in such conditions. As I found to my cost the previous year, a typical fishing shirt offers no barrier whatsoever to a Horse fly, they simply slice through your shirt in order to get to your flesh! Mercifully, it wasn't nearly as bad as the previous year, when we actually had to abort because we were in danger of being eaten alive. God only knows what these diabolical creatures feed on when there are no anglers to be had – I can only think that there must be an abundance of non-human meat to feed on



The 'G-Spot' pool at 'Jurassic Park'

Although with such a stunning backdrop the fishing can be almost incidental at 'Jurassic', the lack of water seemed to have an adverse effect. We only managed a handful of Coho (normally the primary target species) and a few Chum. The high...or should I say lowlight of the trip for me was hooking a huge Chum. After battling with it in deep water for a long time, I eventually got it into shallow water, ready for the guide to net it. However, although the guides are really good at their jobs, they all seem to have the same undesirable trait of scooping fish with the net. As all competent anglers know, such practices have the potential to be hazardous. The danger of missing on the scoop and spooking the fish is ever present. So, that's exactly what happened. He missed the fish and it went nuts! It all happened very quickly and I had not time to react. The Chum, well over 30lb, ran upstream then quickly turned downstream, passing behind me in about a foot of water. Suddenly everything went slack. My first reaction was that the tippet had snapped. But it was worse than that, much worse. Yes, the 25lb tippet had snapped, but so had the rod. In fact, it was more of an explosion, with bits of rod everywhere! My 6 piece top of the range Guideline Spey rod had been transformed into 14 or more sections!



A fresh run Coho from the 'G-Spot' – I momentarily lifted my face net and braved the flies for the purposes of a quick photo!

In summary, while I had another great year, it wasn't quite as good as the previous one. A new PB Chinook was certainly my own highlight. Within the group, some great fish were landed, including several other big Chinooks, the usual monster Chum, but fewer Sockeye and Coho (the flip-side to the enhanced Chinook presence). For the first time I missed out, but most rods bagged one or more mid-double Steelheads. I'm almost ashamed to say, we all became a little bit fed up with Pinkies. With the sheer quantity of them, the numbers game in breaking through to other species was heavily stacked against us. Jon, who keeps a religious tally on the number of fish he catches, told us he bagged 340 Salmon over the 13 days, an average of 26 fish per day! However, to keep grounded it's often necessary to put some perspective into play. I did have one very frustrating day when I just couldn't put a foot right. I finished the day with a mere 8 Pink Salmon. Reminding myself that eight Salmon to 10 pounds would have been an outstanding day, long remembered on a UK River, made things feel a little better!



'Wild Bill', our adopted fishing buddy, taking a refreshment break on the Kitimat, together with Gordo our guide and drift-boat pilot

Following the breakage of my primary rod, I had to press my backup into service, a budget Guideline Spey rod. This one only lasted about 2 days before one of the sections broke at the joint on a roll cast! I can only assume that it was down to some form of manufacturing fault. It was brand new and, unlike my other Canadian rods, had suffered no abuse whatsoever. I have heard that this kind of breakage can be caused by loose joints caused by continual Spey casting – indeed some anglers tape joints for added security. However, that was definitely not the case with mine, where the break was above the joint. Having seen individuals go through multiple rods on previous trips, I had actually packed a second spare rod, thinking it might be overkill at the time. I was pretty glad that I did, as I unpacked my Snowbee Switch rod from its tube. Unbelievably, this rod also broke on a roll cast later in the trip. Fortunately, it happened during the final hour of the very last day.



One of our regular guides, Donny, enduring yet another hard day at the office!

If I've learned anything about fishing in Canada it's that the place is a graveyard for fishing kit. Any weaknesses in equipment from rods and reels to waders and waterproofs will soon be exposed. I don't know anybody who hasn't broken one or more rods out there. I've witnessed reels literally falling apart as their inadequate clutches fail to cope with a Chinook ripping off down river. I've even seen shooting heads and 40lb rated running lines simply snap under pressure. Then there's all the usual leaking waders, wading boot failures and, of course, waterproof clothing that proves to be anything but!



Rod carnage!

Let's make it a hat-trick!

Looking forward to Summer 2026, we have decided to shake things up a little. Rather than aim for the 'confluence of the runs' in late July, when all 5 species of Pacific Salmon can be on the cards, we are going to fish three weeks later. In theory, this window should sit well after the peak of the Pink and Chum runs. We're very unlikely to see any Chinook, but we should hit the tail end of the Sockeye and the peak of the Coho runs. The Steelhead are there all Summer and Autumn, but they don't compete very well with Chinook and Chum, the bullies of the Pacific Salmon world. Although we are likely to catch less in terms of sheer numbers, the rewards should be improved hookups of Coho and Steelies. I will, of course, report back on how it all pans out.

As a post-script all 3 of my rods are now back in action. Guideline customer services were excellent, especially when they saw pictures of the shattered rod. They admitted that they had never seen anything quite so extreme. Although the rod had a 25-year guarantee, they normally charge a 40 Euro admin fee for each section. In my case they kindly replace both sections free of charge. The reserve Guideline rod was still in its 12-month warranty period, so I was able to get a section for that one free of charge. My Snowbee switch rod came with a lifetime warranty, which was just as well because I have broken it in Canada twice now. I did have to pay the £30 admin fee though.