

Luxury fishing camp the spot for a first catch

B.C. | 'Even a blind squirrel gets a nut' at West Coast Fishing Club on Langara Island

BY DAN RUBINSTEIN

LANGARA ISLAND, B.C. It's deader than a doornail here at the world's richest salmon fishing hole. So says David, the guide assigned with the dubious challenge of helping me catch something other than a hangover during a three-night escape at the West Coast Fishing Club's opulent clubhouse camp.

We're trolling for salmon in Parry Passage near the southern shore of Langara Island, about 33 sq. km of rainforest, moss and rock off the northern coast of the Queen Charlotte Islands.

It's a 15-degree, sun-soaked morning — which is unusual this late in the season, at such an exposed and remote spot.

On a clear day you can see Alaska's Dall Island from Langara, and, to the west, the wide-open Pacific.

That the fish aren't biting is not overly unusual to David. Nor, it appears, the least bit troubling. At the helm of an almost seven-metre Boston whaler, the sturdy yet agile boats favoured by this

fly-in resort, he's so serene that his every word, no matter how banal, seems positively philosophical.

A linesman in the American Hockey League during the winter months, David has spent seven summers as a fishing guide, working all the way from southern B.C. to Alaska.

"I'm a little salty," he says. He also says things like "tough to know" when I ask which is harder to land, salmon or halibut — the most sought-after trophies of the West Coast Fishing Club's well-heeled guests.

At about \$1,500 a night (which includes return airfare from Vancouver and a helicopter shuttle from Masset, as well gourmet meals and fine wine) people come hopeful for an almost 23-kg salmon and halibut twice as heavy.

But I have never fished before. For anything. Anywhere.

My only hope is to avoid cutting myself on a hook, getting seasick or falling overboard.

The lines on our dual electric downriggers, baited with herring,



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The opulent West Coast Fishing Club on Langara Island in the Queen Charlotte Islands, which charges about \$1,500 a night, provides return airfare from Vancouver, helicopter shuttle from Masset, gourmet meals and fine wine.

are sunk to depths of precisely 14 metres and 16 metres. I'm sitting in a swivel chair in the front — sorry, bow — of the boat, drinking a Coke and eating banana bread.

David chews tobacco and looks out over the gentle swells. There's some chatter on the radio among guides with nicknames such as Screamer and Mad Dog, but otherwise it is quiet and we are alone.

So, if there's nobody else where we are, no guests or guides, why exactly are we fishing this spot. I diplomatically ask David?

"One guy doubled up this morning," he says, pointing across the channel to a cluster of

assuming, somebody caught two fish. "Now there's 14 boats there and nobody has got a bite. Do I think there's any fish over here? Honest answer: no. But there's nobody else here . . ."

"So," I interrupt, "we're here because nobody has not caught anything here."

"Exactly."

I am here at this lodge, on the house, because sometimes writers get invited on trips they'd be fools to refuse.

When you've got two demanding toddlers at home, a place like the clubhouse feels like heaven. Except the food is probably better here.

community on the Queen Charlotte Islands with about 2,500 residents, including 800 or so in the adjacent, totem pole-adorned Haida village of Old Masset.

While waiting for my chopper ride to Langara, I'm given a tour of the towns and adjacent Naikoon Provincial Park by Andrew Merillees, the owner of Northwest Recreation Services.

Unlike a fishing guide, Andrew's job as a tour operator entails talking — and he's very knowledgeable, not only about local attractions, but also local culture, history and politics.

A black bear crosses the road in front of his van, and Andrew

native terrestrial mammals on the Queen Charlotte Islands: the dusky shrew, the deer mouse, the pine martin, the Haida ermine, and the black bear.

The bears here are among the biggest in the world, Andrew says, thanks in part to the abundance of nutritious salmon.

They also feast on razor clams and Dungeness crabs exposed on the beach, illustrating an old Haida saying: "When the tide goes out, your table is set."

After a 20-minute helicopter flight to Langara, my table is set — the buffet brunch is still underway.

Food is a major part of the

