

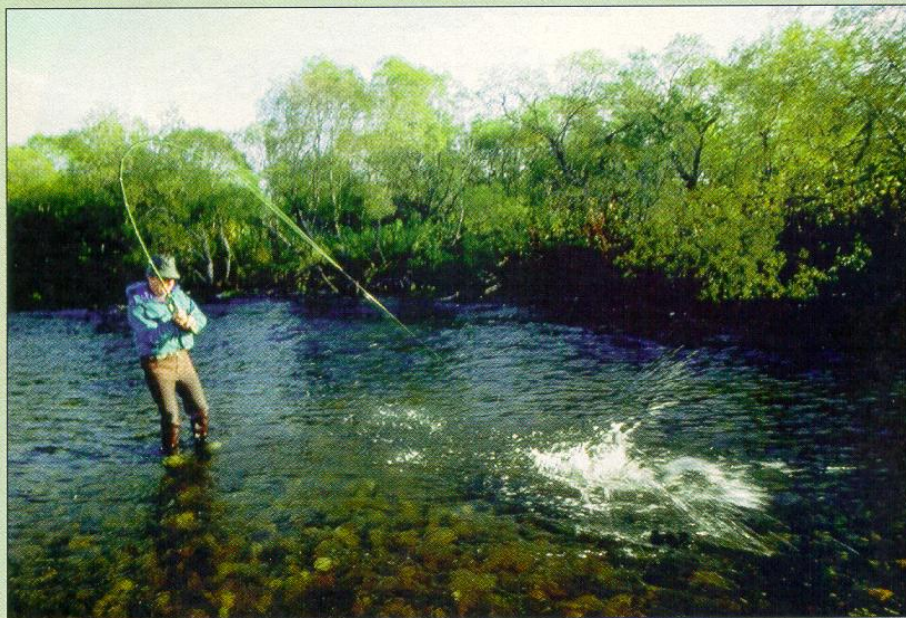
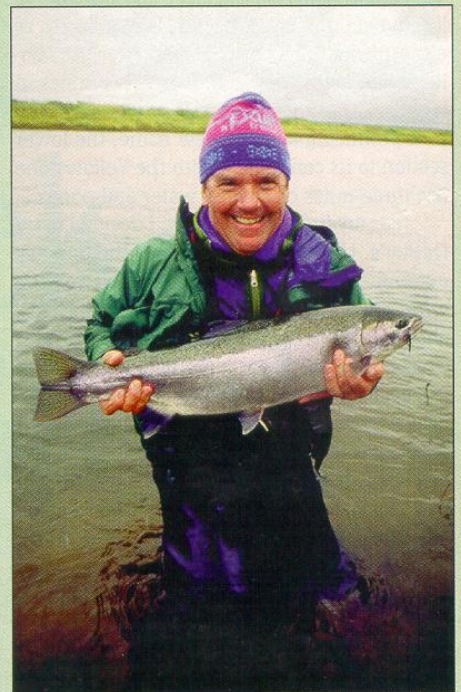
Top Left: The exploration party afloat on the Medved.
 Middle: Ed Exum with a Medved River steelhead.
 Lower Left: Beautiful steelhead water on the Kamchatka Peninsula.

*Russia offers
 new waters for the
 adventuresome
 steelheader*

Russia's Far East

A New Steelhead Frontier

Tony Oswald



*S*ever since fly rodders discovered steelhead, ardent anglers have been looking in some of the most remote areas of the world for new steelhead adventures. Certainly, the mystique of fly fishing for steelhead lives in an honored history. Its literature is sprinkled with references to rivers where the surrounding land remains unplowed and its forests uncut. As well, of all steelhead, none are as highly regarded as the wild, uncivilized genre. After all, wild places and wild fish belong together, a judgment shared by others who have chased fish for most of their lives.

Finding such untamed prizes often requires calculating investigation. For many steelheaders, sifting through obscure literature about where steelhead live is as much a part of life as fishing for them. Volumes have been written about steelhead, their environments, and how to tempt them to a fly. The truth be known, there are few areas left on earth where fly fishermen haven't probed the water, the Russian far east may be the last.

During September of 1992 a band of fly rodders floated Russia's Medved River, a premier *semga* (steelhead) river. It had never been floated before—by anyone.

Located on the Kamchatka Peninsula, the Medved coils through a vast area flanked by deciduous forest and unbroken tundra. Annual runs of both common and unique Pacific salmon (including steelhead) follow its path. Stone char, a unique, indigenous strain of char are there. All annually make their way past resident rainbow trout, (also wild and genetically legitimate) to spawning gravel washed by crystal clear water.

It was an exploratory expedition led by Paul and Sharon Allred of Ouzel Expeditions, an Alaska based sportfishing float trip operation. Over several years, Ouzel has established a track record outfitting fishing trips into Russia's remote areas.

Ed Exum, a Colorado angler, and I coordinated research, travel arrangements and contacted anglers who would eventually become members of the expedition. The would-be explorers had to be willing to run a remote, previously unfloatable Russian river to look for steelhead. The expedition was full when famed mountain climber, Yvon Chouinard, joined Jack Ferguson, Kent Rickenbaugh, Don and Eric Ringsby, Bob Samuels, Bruce Kistler and Bob Collins for the trip.

The Allreds, their Russian river guide staff and dozens of others in the US and Russia contributed heavily to researching the expedition. The big question for the explorers was: which, of the hundreds of Russian far east rivers, is the best steelhead river? Naturally, they wanted to fish the most productive of them.

Contacts were made both in the U.S. and Russia. Information was exchanged. More questions were asked. A broad picture developed. The answers to the two big questions were: the best steelhead fishing found in Russia is on the Kamchatka Peninsula. One of the best steelhead rivers in Russia is the Medved.

The morning of September 17, 1992 the group left Anchorage, Alaska under tense circumstances. Mt. Spurr erupted the second time the day before. If wind blown ash from the eruption made it to Anchorage, the flight to Magadan would surely cancel. Luckily, prevailing winds carried the ash in the opposite direction.