

King's Landing

By Nico Earhart

The ride to King's Landing

was executed via helicopter. The birds chugged up through damp mountain air as we ascended a narrow canyon filled with slag-washes and granite faces, fresh landslides and a creek churning violently within. We summited the high plateau and followed a gentle slope towards the sea, obfuscated in the far distance, contour flying to keep below the squat ceiling of condensation. Our regress could be blocked if the clouds dipped any further, stuck in this isolated depression until they lifted again. We buzzed a lonely pair of faded camping tents perched in the tawny upper-reaches of the valley; some wild men out hunting moose or bear. Certainly, providing themselves as bait for the latter. Creeks and streams began to intertwine, amassing themselves into that shallowest part of the canyon, and as we followed the watercourse it grew to a torrent, bounding with white, effervescent ribbons bubbling around the cobblestones. Stream meanders and rocky banks issued from the spawning brook as both of the aircraft took a few circumferential laps around the landing zone. This pass would give the pilots a look at what they were about to set down in and scare away lurking wildlife. Alaskan bears are impartial to loud helicopters. Our designation sighted and inspected, we dropped through finger wisps of moister and finally came to a rest suspended on a collection of smooth river rocks.

As the rotor wash came to a conclusion and the Helis powered down, fly rods were crimped and reels affixed, a purple wooly bugger with cartoonish eyes fastened to the end of my tippet. We would have to split into packs. The

lonesome trout up here were skittish and they would hone in on shadows, noises, the flying yellow fly line, and especially, the conspicuous cracking of the water's plain surface. Hiking our way down a gap in a vein of granite and keeping close to the sides of the walls, we finally came to a rocky shelf with access to a crystalline pool. Water so clear the eddy appeared as a subsurface room screened off through the waterline. An oblique view into the underwater world of fish, just a few yards away.

I took a precarious stoop on a staircase of rock, hugging close to the wall as I gained traction and began to clandestinely unspool my equipment. One slight smack of the surface with my fly and the fish could be spooked for an hour – More. My first cast was thrown beyond the tumult of a miniature rapid on the other side of the pond. Perfectly placed to pin my carrot past those little, fishy aspects. Pass number one unleashed my foe from his subaqueous hideaway: I could see his skin sparkle, his back arch, as he made a beeline for the bait. A swimming silver submarine of the salubrious sort. He had given up the chase but I unsuspectingly pulled the bugger through the void and sent him long again, past the trundling chute. It folded into the stream without so much as a fine, aquatic globule released from the channel. Once I had strewn him through the cataract, I jigged the bugger past the piscine panel again in palsied stutters. And, to my intense satisfaction, when the fish reappeared, he was set on pescatarian delights, my bait his primary mark. Eyeing his prey, the trout inched closer to the bugger, who unknowingly gaited along. He struck. The set was perfect, stringing him cleanly through the upper lip. I coiled him into my perched position and my guide produced a net to land him with. After securing him, we took a few photos of the beast, maybe a dozen inches, beautifully brandishing crimson

blotches on either side of his flanks. Even in the dimly lit cloud-cover, the sparkling fish glinted about the canyon like an oblong golden nugget. I slid him back into the icy water, gently, almost rebirthing him into the drink. After three days of strikeouts, I had landed my Alaskan Rainbow.