

SPORTS &gt; OUTDOORS

## 'Ocean to Idaho' follows migration of salmon from Pacific to central Idaho through immersive social media campaign

Sun., July 5, 2020



Filmmaker and journalist Kris Milgate hangs out in her Toyota Tundra during the production of "Ocean to Idaho." Her truck/camper rig has allowed her to have self-contained transport and lodging in one while she is on the road, allowing her to minimize interactions with others. (Tight Line Media/courtesy)

**By Dave Nichols**  
[daven@spokesman.com](mailto:daven@spokesman.com)  
(509) 459-5441

Outdoor journalist Kris Millgate spent a decade in TV news before starting her own production company, Tight Line Media, in 2006. With a quarter century of multimedia storytelling, Millgate traverses the country in search of dynamic topics, researching issues thoroughly then translating core elements via video, photo and words with credibility.

Her latest project is an immersive experience which will keep her on the roads, and streams, of the Pacific Northwest all summer long.

“[Ocean to Idaho](#)” debuts on social media platforms this summer. The multimedia experience offers audiences the opportunity to track the journey of migrating salmon from – as the title implies – the Pacific Ocean to the Salmon River in central Idaho, an 850-mile journey.

“We have so many things going on, and so many layers of priorities, whether it be figuring out how to feed our family tonight to how we’re going to try to plan a summer vacation,” Millgate said. “And within all of that is wildlife in wild land just trying to do their thing with all of us on top of them. And, just for a minute, I can help people engage in what is going on within our natural resources, despite all the things that we’re doing on top of them.”

## **Social media**

Her outdoor adventure began at the mouth of the Columbia River in Oregon and will end at the Yankee Fork of the Salmon River in Idaho. Footage gathered during the trip will turn into a finished film plus stories for print and video media outlets nationwide in 2021.

“I go stretches at a time, like 10 to 12 day trips at a time, and then I get ahead of the fish so then I can come home, hug my kids, take a shower, catch up, make sure that everything social media-wise is running because that can turn into its own separate beast.”

The immersive social media campaign has been a challenge for the veteran journalist.

“By having social media, we can reach these audiences in a more dynamic way that really makes them feel involved. My credibility, my accuracy, my journalistic integrity – all those things still exist, but there’s this more accessible layer there where people can engage more.”

During her time at home, she writes, edits, cuts video, schedules more interviews – it’s a hectic pace.

“As a reporter, it changes the expectation because they want more of the personal behind-the-scenes stuff. I get asked for more of that in the last five to 10 years than ever before. But, we’re still just real people. And so, I go on these assignments and I’m not trying to tell you how to think on an issue, I just want you to think.”

## **Logistics**

Millgate hasn’t run into too many surprises on her trip yet – at least with the fish.

“What is surprising me is that everything is falling into place,” she said. “I’m pulling off the impossible here, and I haven’t gotten lost. I find every spot I need to be. I find it when I need to be there. Everyone that agrees to be interviewed is in their spot when I get there. And that’s pretty unbelievable.

“It’s almost serendipitous, you know? It’s like, everything that could go wrong is not going wrong.”

Millgate is well familiar with the Idaho section of her journey this summer. The rest has been an exciting discovery for her.

“You get me past like the very end of this migration route and I don’t know what anything looks like, I don’t know where anything is,” she said. “And so it’s this whole new world of shooting a landscape I’ve never seen and I love that.

“There’s nothing boring about it when your eyes are overwhelmed with everything that’s new. I like those days. So the fact that there’s like this rain forest which is the Lower Columbia sitting in the middle of this basic desert migration route, it’s awesome.”

## **In the beginning**

Millgate shot a film a few years ago on the Yankee Fork of the Salmon River in central Idaho that was dredged for gold and left in ruins.

There she found the genesis for her current project.

“When I was in there shooting – I’d never seen a salmon. I’ve never caught a salmon in Idaho. I’ve never touched one. But I saw them in there and I thought, I’m watching them, you know basically on their last day of life and they’re guarding their spawning bed. And thinking, ‘How on earth does this fish do that and what on earth does that journey look like?’ I’m looking at a fish that just swam 850 miles to lay eggs and die. So my imagination kind of wandered: ‘What does that journey look like and how do I chart this back to the ocean?’ ”

Then last year, Millgate severely broke her leg when she was hit by a puck coaching her kids’ hockey team.

She was incapacitated for four months.

“When that happens to you, and you get thrown down on the couch like that, you really have no other choice but to look at yourself and your work, and where you’re at and what really matters. And I had a lot of those things already lined up in my life. But that concept of following the fish just kind of started sticking with me.”

In October of last year, she planned out how she’d pull the project off, with intricate levels of detail, lining up travel schedules and lodging and crews. But then, the pandemic hit, throwing much of the plan out the window.

“When that happened, as a freelancer a lot of my work fell away instantly. And there was nothing I was going to do about that. But this project kind of hung on and it morphed into this whole other thing – ‘OK, now we’re going to stack even more odds against you. See if you can pull this off.’ And so, I dumped my flights, I dumped my hotels, I dumped crew, and figured out how to do it in a way that was safe, responsible and reasonable.”

Toyota and Four Wheel Campers came through as sponsors for the project, giving Millgate self-contained transportation and lodging in one.