

# Argentina boasts world class fishing

By OWEN SCHROEDER • The Leaf-Chronicle • January 18, 2009



The big trout slurped my fly off the water's surface as we drifted by a stand of willow trees on the bank of the fast moving river. "Set the hook, Big O, set the hook," Eduardo Wisner, my Argentine guide, yelled.

quickly reared back on the nine-foot fly rod and it bowed in an arcing curve as the fish streaked for the deep water of the river. My fly line stripped off the reel as the fish used the swift water to its advantage and I was into my backing before I could stop the powerful rainbow.

The fish responded with a spectacular leap that carried it 3-4 feet into the air and then the battle for supremacy began. The fish had hit a green inch worm imitation tied on a tiny size 14 hook, and I couldn't horse it to the net. The battle went back and forth for several minutes, then the fish tired and slowly came to capture.

Eduardo netted the 16-inch rainbow and it was quickly released. It wasn't a particularly large trout, but it was wild as a tiger and fought with all its power to rid itself of my hook.

It has long been a dream of mine to fish the fabled trout waters of Patagonia in Argentina, and my dream came true last month when my son, Owen III (Woody), and I joined my brother-in-law, Navy Capt. Dam Ammons, and several of his friends for the fishing trip of a lifetime.

Dan, along with my sister Theresa, had been assigned as the Naval Attaché in the U.S. Embassy in Buenos Aires two years ago. Dan is an avid angler and we began planning for a fishing trip last year that would take us to the bottom of the world where December is the beginning of summer.

We were joined on our fishing adventure by Craig Barnum, a retired Navy Capt. who lives in Buenos Aires and Col. Allen Thomson, Royal Marines, who serves as the Defense Attaché in the British Embassy, along with his stepson, Sebastian, who was visiting for the Christmas holidays.

Dan had set us up to fish with Flotadas Chimehuin out of Junin de los Andes in the foothills of the Andes Mountains near the Chilean border. Junin sits on the banks of the Chimehuin River in Neuquén Province and is the destination of trout anglers from around the world.



The Chimehuin originates from the glacier-fed waters of Lake Huechulafquen in the Andes and runs for 37 scenic miles until it flows into the Collon Cura River.

The Malleo and Aluminé Rivers also flow into the Collon Cura, and, collectively, these four rivers provide some of the premier trout fishing in the world, famous for the quality and size of their brook, brown and rainbow trout.

Legendary trout angler and fly fishing instructor Mel Krieger fished in Argentina for 40 years and considered the streams and rivers in Neuquén Province a must-fish place for the avid trout angler.

Flotadas Chimehuin is a family-run operation headed by Angel Fontanazza, assisted by his wife, two daughters and three sons. They primarily run float trips on the rivers, along with wade fishing in shallow water areas.

Angel runs a first class operation that is highlighted by great fishing, gourmet food and outstanding guides. His oldest daughter, Giselle, is an experienced English-speaking guide who is the only woman professional fly fishing guide in Argentina.

Amelí is responsible for catering purchases and food preparation while assisting her mother, Analía, as receptionist and host. She is a college student studying for a degree in ceramic fine arts and is an amateur fly caster.

Gabriel is an outstanding fishing guide, expert fly tier and speaks English fluently. He has also fished and guided on many of the blue ribbon trout rivers in the United States.

Andrés is a young fishing guide and currently working to improve his English.

Julian is a primary school student who is studying English and learning to be a fishing guide.

Together, the Fontanazza family provides first-class guiding services that will cater to the desires of any trout angler.

Our adventure began with a two-day, 1,100-mile drive from Buenos Aires to Junin de los Andes, and it gave us the opportunity to see the beauty of Argentina from the Atlantic coast to the Andes Mountains.

During the trip we drove through lush agricultural areas, the plains of the Pampas and the semiarid steppes of Patagonia, where we observed a variety of wildlife including guanaco, red stag and Andean condors, the largest bird in the Western hemisphere.

Argentina is the second largest country in South America and the eighth largest in the world. It runs 2,500 miles from the northern border with Bolivia to Ushuaia, the southern most city in the world, at the tip of South America. The widest breadth of the country from the Atlantic Ocean to the border with Chile in the Andes Mountains is about 870 miles.

The country has a population of more than 40 million people and nearly one-third live in Buenos Aires.

Our fishing began with wading on the Malleo River, where we caught numerous rainbows and browns in the 17-19 inch range. The outing was a warm-up for the next three days where we would fish big swift rivers from rubber rafts and drift boats.



Days 2 and 3 put us on a 30-mile float trip on the Chimehuin and Collon Cura Rivers with an overnight camp on the river bank. The camp was memorable with tents and sleeping bags highlighted with an evening meal of steaks grilled over a wood fire.

The final day was another 15-mile float trip on a different section of the Collon Cura.

The areas we fished were catch-and-release and the trout were big and abundant, but we had to battle the swift current and winds up to 40 miles per hour to get our flies under the willow trees that lined the banks of the rivers.

The trees were full of small one-inch green caterpillars, much like our American inch-worms, and the wind was blowing them into the water where the trout were gorging themselves.

At times, we were catching so many trout that my arm began to ache and I had to stop and rest. The trout were mostly rainbows up to 20 inches, with an occasional brown to 19 inches. Bigger brown trout were lying in deeper water, but the current and wind made it difficult to get big streamers and buggers down to them.

I kept a tally for a one-hour period on Day 3 of the trip. Woody and I had 14 trout rise to our flies and we put 11 of them in the net, averaging about 16 inches. They weren't world record trout, but fighting them in the current and wind added to their size.

We all had our chance to land at least one big trout during the four-day trip, but the small hooks pulled out of the fish or the tippetts broke. That all goes with the fishing experience, and it gave all of us a few tales to tell.

I hope to go back to Argentina again someday. My dream has been fulfilled, and now I have another dream of catching one of Argentina's renowned monster brown trout. Who knows, it might just happen.

If you are interested in a premier trout fishing trip to Argentina, you can contact Angel Fontanazza on the Internet at <http://www.flotadaschimehuin.com.ar/>. It will be an experience that you will never forget.

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