



DATELINE: CHILE

**On-Site Report
This Rainbow Fishing
Was Like Bonefishing**

Editor Note: Subscriber Michael Barnett says Salmo Patagonia Lodge in Chile is his favorite in that part of the world. It will be clear why when you read about the overall experience he had there this past January, capped by a day of sight fishing for rainbows that left him speechless. Enjoy!

This past January, I made my ninth fishing trip to Patagonia, which was also my seventh to a lodge in Coyhaique, Chile, called Salmo Patagonia, my favorite of the five Patagonian lodges that I have visited. On this trip I had the single most amazing day of fishing for rainbow trout that I have ever experienced in my 60 years of fly fishing, but more on

that day later.

Salmo Patagonia is owned by Spaniard Luis Antúnez (luis@patagoniadream.com), who founded this lodge over 25 years ago and is not only a great host and guide, but also, in my opinion, one of a handful of the top



fly fishermen in the world. He was a tournament fly caster in his youth, has traveled widely, and is a representative for Sage rods. He gives his attention to every detail in the operation of the lodge, which provides outstanding ac-

commodations and meals, and, more importantly, to the fishing trips organized daily to some of the more than 100 excellent lakes and rivers within driving range of his lodge. Each day's fishing includes a nice lodge-prepared lunch, and the specific waters chosen depend upon the weather; the water conditions; and the desires, abilities, and preferences of his anglers. The lodge has more than enough variety in the available waters to accommodate anglers ranging from novices to experts. I have always found the guides there to be excellent, and, of course, when Luis guides you, that is the best.

My cousin Jim and I started our week with Luis on a nearby river that I have fished on each of my trips to this lodge, and the fishing there is always outstanding. We caught many brown trout on dry flies and streamers before Luis said he wanted to show us a new nymph-fishing technique developed in the Czech Republic, which is renowned for the expertise of its nymph fishermen. Although nymph fishing is my least favorite way to trout fish, it was interesting to learn the new technique Luis taught us, and it was extremely effective, allowing us to catch many fish from several pools that we had already fished well with the dries and then streamers.

The next day, we drove through the magnificent Cerro Castillo range of the Andes, stopping often to take pictures of the mighty peaks and glaciers before arriving at one of the many lakes in that region. We spent a half day there wading along several shelves of shallow, clear water, where we sight-cast to large brown trout with dry flies. We only landed about seven or eight trout there, but they were all large, ranging from about 18 inches to

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He would stand on the bow next to me, pointing the tip of my rod at the fish 150 yards away and I could see nothing but water with a slight chop on it. Sure enough, when the fish got within 75 yards or so I could pick up the big wake of a permit pushing across the flat (we did not see any permit tails in the air)—it's quite the sight.

As for gear, I would bring an 8, 10, and 12 wt if you intend to seek migratory tarpon (we did not). One thing I would definitely recommend is a variety of lines to combat the breeze. I'm told it can be still at times (and that is apparently not ideal because of the heat and skittish fish) but when we were there it was pretty steady at 5–15 knots with occasional gusts to 20 knots. Our fishing was all done from the skiff, although I am told wading for bonefish is available if requested. Standard tarpon and bonefish flies all seemed to work, and they have a well-equipped fly shop at the lodge. One thing that did surprise me was our guide really did not want to use permit crab patterns much—he mainly just had us use bonefish flies for permit.

My only word of caution is that some of the guests seemed to expect permit would be “easy” or that they would “at least catch one in four to five days of fishing” in Belize. Our experi-

ence was that nothing was easy. We saw lots of tarpon and jumped a fair amount but never boated one (others at the lodge did), which at least in my experience is pretty common. We had shots at permit but never hooked one (again others did), and while we caught lots of bonefish, they were not necessarily easy. My buddy and I are fairly experienced saltwater fly anglers and



we figured out pretty quickly not to make comments at the bar like “we had a fair day, jumped a couple of tarpon and caught about a dozen bonefish.” The guests at the lodge come from all different parts of the world and have all different levels of experience, and for some the goal was simply to catch a bonefish on fly, having never been saltwater fly fishing before. As far as

we know, they all did, but for some who had never tried saltwater fly fishing before—or any type of fly fishing in some cases—it might have been four to five caught during the entire trip. Like I said, they are plentiful but not necessarily easy—particularly the first time out.

A couple of notes about the lodge in general. The dinner meal is served family style *al fresco* and is very high quality. The fare is a mix of local seafood and meat or chicken with fresh vegetables topped off by a delicious desert. One night they happened to serve my all-time favorite meal—stone crab and key lime pie for dessert! As mentioned, the rooms are clean and spacious. The bar area has a pool table and a TV, usually with some type of sports coverage on—we saw the British Open and various soccer matches. You can opt for a plan where local beer, rum drinks, and sodas are included, so there is no extra charge at the bar. For non-fishing guests, the lodge has at least two swimming pools that I saw, and snorkeling, diving, and trips to the reef are available. At least this year, from July through the end of the year, the lodge is running a 2-1 special, so the price of the trip was under \$2,500 each, which we all thought was a tremendous value for the experience provided. We definitely expect to be back in the future.

• Briefly Noted •

Things to Do . . . Places to Go . . . New Developments

■ It's important, we feel, when a new fishery comes on line, that we reach out to more than one angler for a report. After all, one report may catch a fishery at its worst or its best. Either single report would provide a skewed perception, no?

What occasions that comment is a follow-up report we just received on that new arapaima spot in Brazil developed by Untamed Angling (www.untamed-angling.com). Subscriber Randy Sultan reported on the place last month, you'll recall, giving it a generally good review in spite of low-water conditions that restricted his fishing access to a handful of areas. Well, conditions were very dif-

ferent when Honor Roll subscriber Allan Craig fished the area. Here is what he has to say about the experience:

“Heading into this experience, I expected to spend my week in remote thickly vegetated marshes under Spartan survivalist camping conditions trying to catch an almost impossible species of fish. As it turned out, the accommodations were much more comfortable than I had hoped, and the fish were much more numerous and catchable than I had imagined. To make the trip even more appealing, access was almost easy compared to some of the other fishing options in the Amazon.

“The accommodation here is in Uakari Lodge (Pousada Uacari), which is very popular among eco-tourists who come to see the many forms of wildlife, including birds, that live in the surrounding jungle. On their website, they state that you will wake up to the sound of pirarucu (aka arapaima) hitting their tails against the water. Indeed, the fish were frequently doing just that, and splashing the walkways, plus bumping the flooring beneath the floating cabins. Some of the bumping was also caused by other creatures such as black caiman.

“Though the fish were obviously numerous, that did not mean big fish

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were easy to catch. Anglers in prior weeks had landed fish over 200 pounds, but the water had risen considerably by the time I arrived. The channels that had produced well for others did not produce well for us. That's not to suggest we didn't catch fish. On the first morning, in fact, after several hours of no action, my boat partner hooked up. While waiting to see where I should stand to be out of the way, my line tightened up. An arapaima double! Fortunately, the two fish went in opposite directions, and we eventually landed one about 50 pounds and the other (my fish) of over 100 pounds. After that, our group frequented the channels and large lake; watched big fish surface around us; but just never found the right fly, fly line, depth, or retrieve to catch large fish. Admittedly, this was an exploratory trip, and that meant the guides had minimal firsthand experience with the fishery. They were still learning what to do in the different water conditions.

"While the rising water in the lake and channel made fishing there less productive, it created an entirely different opportunity in the shallow lagoons. As rising water entered the lagoons, smaller arapaima of 20 to 50 pounds followed in good numbers. These fish were actively feeding, too. Using floating lines in shallower water, my fishing partner and I brought about 20 fish to the boat in just one morning. The other boat did equally well in a different lagoon. One angler also hooked into a single very large fish, which broke his leader after a long run.

"We fished a total of four days, experimenting a lot in different locations and for different species. It was a lot of fun using lighter rods and poppers on the abundant, aggressive and acrobatic arowana. Another excellent fly rod fish was the tambaqui, a hard-pulling species resembling the pirapitinga in Tsimane that prefers "fruit" fly patterns resembling seeds.

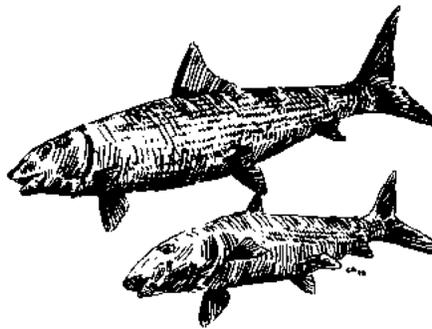
"Regular trips to this destination will likely begin next season. Travel to the lodge is relatively easy: it starts with a one-hour commercial jet flight to Tefé from Manaus, and then a one-hour boat ride to the lodge. A non-angling spouse

who enjoys wildlife and photography could consider this trip as an option. Just be aware that there are small fans, but no air-conditioning at this time. I booked my trip through The Fly Shop (800-669-3474) in Redding, California. Michael Caranci handled all the arrangements and everything went smoothly. The cost of the four-day trip was \$4,250, plus guide tips, and a \$450 fee that goes to the local community."

□

■ We have mentioned frequently that **Grand Bahama Island** is uniquely appropriate for the angler who wants to take a non-fishing spouse along on a Caribbean fishing trip. Here's another argument to that effect by peripatetic and wonderfully prolific subscriber, Elbert Bivins. He writes:

"My spouse much likes going fish-



ing but only spinning, trolling, etc., and not sight fishing with a fly rod. That presents me with a problem if I want to go bonefishing and yet have her make the trip with me. She's not interested in staying at a fishing lodge; she wants the amenities of a resort and access to restaurants and nightlife. I want fairly remote and undisturbed fly water. It is sort of hard to find both, but I think I have.

"Freeport, Bahamas, is only an hour and a half from Atlanta on Delta. There, the Grand Lucayan Beach Resort (www.grandlucayan.com) has all the amenities and is just across the street from restaurants, shops, and Count Basie Square, which is the entertainment hub of the Port Lucaya Marketplace. It is remarkably inexpensive; I think we paid about \$180 a night, which includes the resort fee. Clean, with attentive staff, I had no

complaints.

"So, where is the fishing? In my few trips there I have found that the east end of the island, out from McLean's Town, has vast stretches of quiet bonefish water around the series of keys to the east and on the north side of the island. There are reputable bonefish lodges in that area for sure, but that would not work with my wife. So, I found Captain Phil & Mel's Bonefishing Guide Service (www.bahamasbonefishing.net), which is literally a mom-and-pop operation that employs a couple of relatives as guides. My guide, P.J., picks me up at the hotel at 7:00 AM, we make the approximately 50-minute drive to the dock and are fishing by 8:30. At the end of the eight-hour fishing day, he drives me back to the hotel. I never saw another fisherman on my recent trip.

"My experience with Bahamas guides has been spotty, with the gaps in their performance more related to attitude than ability—not a problem with P.J. He knows how to behave when I blow the perfect opportunity at a fish he has presented to me. In many places in the Bahamas, clouds and wind seem to be a big issue, but we had clouds and some wind and rain, and it did not slow us down. We saw hundreds of bones in skinny water (schools, pods, and singles), and some of them were big, 8-10 pounds. Yes, they are as spooky as bones are everywhere, but I was able to overcome that and subdue a few in my two days with him. We did particularly well wading at one point in an area where the fish didn't panic when a fly landed among them. P.J. has lived and fished this area all his life, so he knows every good fishing spot on that end of the island. His boat is what I would call well used, but it worked fine and, importantly, it had a rail on the deck to lean against.

"Freeport has the deepest harbor on the east coast, and accepts the world's largest supertankers and other ocean-going behemoths. P.J.'s other job is piloting those ships into the Freeport harbor. He is pretty handy with his 16-foot Dolphin skiff, too. The cost was \$450 a day plus tip. No extra charge for the transport. I'll