



A MONTHLY NEWSLETTER

# THE ANGLING REPORT

May 2015 Vol. 28, No. 5

## DATELINE: GUYANA

### Adventure Fishing Want to Go Fishing with a Force Recon Marine?

*Don Causey Note: If you want to get really out there on the edge and catch some magnificent fish, British subscriber Rich Hart has found just the right guy to take you there. Enjoy!*

As I write this, I have just returned from a two-week fly fishing trip on the Rewa River in the mountain jungles of Guyana. My aim was to land a variety of fish in this remote region, including a large arapaima (*Arapaima gigas*). I certainly succeeded at that latter task, landing a fish that weighed in at 420 pounds and is now a pending IGFA All Tackle World Record. It will also likely be recognized as the largest freshwater scaled fish ever landed on the fly.

Subscribers to *The Angling Report* will recognize the Rewa River because some fellow subscribers have fished there out of Rewa Eco Lodge ([www.rewaguyana.com](http://www.rewaguyana.com)), which has received a lot of support from the maker of Costa sunglasses and the Guyanese govern-



ment. Indeed, this is a good program that features local guides who have been trained to handle fly fishermen. These guides have placed locally made wooden boats in some ponds at the upper ends of remote creeks. The rainy

season each year leaves these ponds full of fish when the water recedes, and the boats are used to paddle silently across them as visiting anglers stalk arapaima.

My trip was very different from the one at Rewa Eco Lodge. Mine was outfitted for me by Capt. Larry Jones, a former Force Recon Marine who did two tours in Vietnam before getting out of the service and moving to Guyana, where he married a Guyanese woman. He has lived in Guyana for more than 35 years at this point. He knows the rivers and the jungle terrain well. My two-week trip with him cost \$3,000, including my flight from the United States to Georgetown, the capital of Guyana. I did have to pay for a one-hour local flight, however. The cost was \$500.

To me, the trip price seemed very reasonable when I learned of it, but it was soon clear why the cost was so low. The guides and camp organizers on this trip are Amerindians who have been fishing and hunting these mountain jungles for centuries. Their skills at things like spotting the tell-tale sign of fish movements have been passed down for generations. The food we ate on this trip was all dried or canned, with MREs (military-style Meals Ready to Eat) used on longer overnight trips into the jungle. We boiled our drinking water on a daily basis. If you like survivalist camping or you have had military training, you will be right at home on this trip. We slept at night in jungle hammocks strung between trees, with insect nets and tarps draped over us. The latter were to keep us dry during frequent nighttime rainstorms. We did our bathing in the river, and we used a hand-dug toilet for our bathroom needs. There were insects, ants, and mosquitoes, and the latter seemed to like my blood. Fortunately, malaria is not an issue in this

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#### IN THIS ISSUE

**Argentina**  
The Real Skinny on That Dorado Stopover Fishing  
Pages 3-5

**New Zealand**  
This Auckland Operator Offers Saltwater Fishing  
Pages 5-7

**Venezuela**  
Los Roques Visa Problem Appears to Be Solved  
Page 10

**Special Report**  
Parent-Child Trips: A Special Warning  
Page 11

**Cuba**  
You Won't Believe Those New Trip Prices!  
Page 12

**Subscriber-Written Reports**  
Despedida Lodge in Tierra Fuego.  
Hatchet Cay Resort in Belize  
Pages 13-14

# THE ANGLING REPORT

region.

Our trip took us camping and fishing at various spots along the Rewa. The boat journey part of our trip began at a landing on the Rupununi River, which joined the Rewa some two hours later. During our trip, the water was high and very colored from the jungle rain runoff, which made fly fishing tough. The bait fishermen in our group had no problem catching various species of catfish, however. I caught some Sorubim catfish myself on the fly by casting to them on sandy flats. The lure fishermen in the group used poppers, spinners, various shallow-water lures, and spook-type top water baits for peacock bass that had become trapped in ponds and were congregated around rocks in the river. These peacocks were of the popoca (or yellow) variety, and weighed upwards of ten pounds. I caught a number of peacocks on fly as well. Red and yellow flies, or anything with white in it, would tempt a peacock hit.

The omnipresence of piranha dictated the use of a wire shock tippet. Some of the black piranha we caught weighed more than eight pounds, while the many silver (or red-belly) piranha were much smaller, most of them weighing under a pound. We caught plenty of other fish, too: jeju (or wolf fish), jacundá, bicuda, and pacu, for example. Near the rapids, we caught payara up to 15 pounds on lures and flies. The hook-set had to be strong, and most of the time they would throw the hook out of their bony mouths. Trahira (or wolf fish) were hard to find on this

trip. We managed to find only one, as I recall. It was in a large pool, where it had become trapped from the yearly water drop after the rainy season.

I particularly enjoyed targeting arowana with small baitfish flies on the sandy flats and near overhanging trees, shrubs, and mangroves. I managed to land several small ones, though they can grow to above ten pounds in this region. The arowana were very shy and nervous, as they are regularly targeted by the local Amerindians with bow and arrow and with gill nets. An Amerindian hunter who is a great shot with a bow and arrow, I learned, is a prized man in his village. My guide, Terry, was amazing in that respect. He could hit a dime from 200 feet. He was one of the sons of the chief of the village, and he really took his task of finding me fish very seriously. I nicknamed him Tarzan Terry. There wasn't a thing he missed in that jungle.

Interestingly, one of the foods we had to eat was curried fish. Given the British, Caribbean, and Indian influences on Guyanese culture, the local curries are excellent. We actually had what I jokingly called a "rat" curry one night. Seems the guides would go out at night and traverse the shoreline looking for a very large rodent, a vegetarian, known locally as a laba. That was the best curry of the trip. Larry's right-hand man, Jules, cooked it for us.

One downside of the trip was the boats. They had no real casting deck, and they were hard to manage for a fly fisherman. Locally made metal craft,

## Honor Roll Subscribers

■ *The Angling Report* encourages subscribers to file reports on great places to fish and important news developments that help the rest of us decide where to go—or not to go—fishing. Subscribers who file unusually important and useful reports are placed on our Subscriber Honor Roll and sent a complimentary Angling Report Honor Roll fishing cap. Honor Roll subscribers also get special consideration for FREE trips. Our latest

Honor Roll subscriber is Neil Artz, who filed the report in this issue about a new saltwater fishing operator in Auckland, New Zealand. If you have been on an interesting trip recently, send a letter-length report to see if you can get on our subscriber Honor Roll. E-mail it to doncausey@anglingreport.com. You can find the complete list of Honor Roll subscribers on our website, [www.anglingreport.com](http://www.anglingreport.com). Click on "Honor Roll subscribers."



## THE ANGLING REPORT

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# THE ANGLING REPORT

they measured about 15 feet long. I travel a lot to far-flung places where fly fishing is not known or catered for, so I have learned to work around this kind of limitation. One continuing problem was the tendency of the engines to die suddenly. That was partly due to the number of shallow sand banks in the river and the presence of sunken trees. All you could do was expect the unexpected and just go with what was happening.

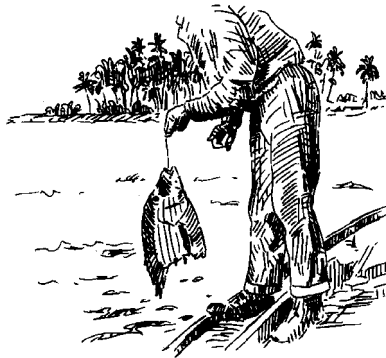
The principal highlight of my trip was the landing of a huge arapaima. It required absolute silence in the boat and took many casts with large flies. The undertaking involved three boatmen to tow the boats into ponds deep in the jungle and then two boatmen to paddle the boats. The ponds we fished were known to leave a lot of trapped fish behind when the rainy season finished. Such ponds are perfect breeding places for arapaima. These fish protect their live young for several months, a task made easier in the remote ponds by the fact that piranha all move out into the river when the water starts dropping.

Previous to this trip, I had landed arapaima that weighed up to 300 pounds. On this trip, I took extra-strong Sage saltwater rods and heavy-duty reels with extra drag (Tibor Billy Pate Tarpon models in particular). My goal was to land any large arapaima I hooked as quickly as possible, thereby giving it an excellent chance of full recovery. Arapaima are air breathers, and they get very stressed when played too long on inadequate gear. The Guyanese government and the local Amerindians have done an excellent job of protecting this endangered species in Guyana. That is not so in surrounding Amazon countries such as Brazil, where they are regularly hunted and commercially fished for. At any rate, the big fish I caught indeed weighed 420 pounds, and is now a pending IGFA All Tackle World Record.

In sum, this trip is an excellent choice for the angler who wants a real adventure and a chance at a large variety of jungle species, including super-large arapaima. This is a very basic trip, but I can attest that we encountered

no dangers, due to the excellent local knowledge of Capt. Larry and his Amerindian sidekick, Jules. The Amerindians in this area have fished and hunted the surrounding jungle for centuries. While they are now used to westerners, they have chosen to live in their traditional way. They allow only a very limited number of respected operators into their areas to keep fishing pressure to a minimum. If this sounds like the right kind of trip for you, be aware that Capt. Larry takes a maximum of only four anglers per two-week trip.—*Rich Hart.*

*Postscript:* More information on Capt. Larry and his Guyana trips can be found on his website at: [www.guyanafishing.com](http://www.guyanafishing.com).



## DATELINE: ARGENTINA

### **FREE Fishing Trip The Real Skinny on That Dorado Stopover Fishing**

*Don Causey Note: We told you a while back that we were going to send an Online Extra subscriber on a FREE Fishing trip to Argentina to check out a new stopover dorado fishery outside Buenos Aires. Well, the lucky subscriber was Bill Taylor. He just got back from the trip, and here is what he saw and caught. See box elsewhere in this section for more information on our FREE Fishing Program.*

**W**ho would have thought there would be a pristine, remote-feeling golden dorado fishery within one hour's boat run of the northern outskirts of Buenos Aires, a major metropolitan area of close to 20 million people? Spending one or two or three

days in this beautiful area (it's called the Rio Paraná delta) has to be about the best way in the world to rest up and get over jet lag before flying on to a lodge elsewhere in this vast country. I was able to enjoy this stopover opportunity thanks to *The Angling Report* and its FREE Fishing Program, which involves subscribers like me being invited to fish free at places around the world in return for filing an unbiased report afterward. The outfitter who donated my trip is owner/guide Noel Pollak, who has teamed up with Nervous Waters, the international fishing outfitter ([www.nervouswaters.com](http://www.nervouswaters.com)) to create a stand-alone destination fishery here that will also cater to stopover anglers.

My two-day trip to the Paraná delta took place this past February. I fished two days in all and had a wonderful time despite having no luck with the dorado. More on that in a moment. This trip was not the first time I fished with Noel Pollak. We first met when he was head guide and fishing manager at Pira, Nervous Waters' upscale lodge in the beautiful Iberá Wetlands in Corrientes Province. Over the years, Noel has guided internationally in quite a number of places, including the United States. He was at one point a founding principal in, and developer of, the Bolivian dorado operation now run by Untamed Angling. Approximately 40 years old and widely experienced, Noel says the Paraná delta is his favorite place of all for dorado. He has fished it for more than 20 years, he says. All that knowledge is important, because there are hundreds, if not thousands, of back channels, creeks, lagoons, and braids forming an intricate maze covering a massive area from Argentina to Uruguay. The main channel is wide, deep in spots, and a muddy tan color, offering virtually zero visibility into the water, and on weekends it's home to many recreational boaters. But back in the vast wilderness areas, the water, still somewhat tea-colored, clears considerably, presenting opportunities for sight casting in the remotest areas.

Noel and Nervous Waters are building a lodge complex in such an area,

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# THE ANGLING REPORT

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at the junction of a fresh creek and an uninhabited side channel, on a large wooded property accessible only by boat. The property includes two large lagoons said to contain other species (Tarariras) that take surface flies and can be reached by canoe from the lodge. Expected to be completed by the end of May 2015, the lodge will accommodate four anglers in two ensuite doubles. The attractive four-building complex is being built waterside on stilts, with all four buildings connected by elevated decking and walkways. Electricity for air conditioning, cooking, water filtration, WiFi, and so on will be provided by generator. Until completion of the lodge, accommodations are provided at Los Pecanes, a comfortable, intimate inn/restaurant located on a side channel inhabited by other cabins.

My transfer driver, George, of LOL Argentina (<http://www.lolargentina.com/>; tel. US 406-577-1004 or Ar. 54-11-4777-7879) met my morning flight from Miami to Buenos Aires. About 45 minutes later we joined Noel at the Tigre Marina. I was dressed for fishing and had packed a change of clothing, toiletries, and some fishing essentials in my boat bag (George took my other baggage necessary for an ensuing trip to Tierra del Fuego for storage at the hotel where I planned to stay after my delta adventure).

Noel furnishes all needed fly fishing equipment and flies, but I brought my own, just because I enjoy using my stuff. Noel's skiff is a custom 21-foot V-hull center console with a poling platform, powered by a 115 hp Yamaha 4-stroke. Ample casting decks are fore and aft. I especially appreciated Noel's attention to detail in removing any possible snags for fly lines.

After a run of 30 minutes or so, we were fishing well before noon. I used a 9-foot 8 wt. fly rod, tropical floating line, a 9-foot 30-pound fluoro leader with 36-pound wire bite tippet and a 6-inch black-and-red weighted streamer (all terminal parts furnished by Noel). Noel had me blind casting to structure and stripping back as if I were bass fishing. The waterways are lined with

the ubiquitous willow and frequently downed trees and brush, as well as a floating water lily-like plant with purple blooms called camalote or water hyacinth. Because of the overhanging trees, surface obstructions, breezes, and tight quarters, precision rather than distance casting was often required. Not an easy assignment for beginners.

Unfortunately for me, over one and a half days of persistent fishing I had no success. None at all. But I chalk that up to bad luck. Seems a midsummer high-pressure cold front had come through just before my arrival. It was great weather to be outside enjoying the

amazing environment (colorful flowering plants in pink, white, yellow, and purple; impressive birds such as herons and caracara), the cool nights (50s) and days (70s); and south winds (12–15 mph), but, not ideal for dorado fishing.

Despite my lack of success, I'm confident there are lots of dorado in the Paraná delta. Noel had plenty of evidence of that in the form of cell phone videos taken the previous week at spots clearly identifiable as the same spots I was covering. Noel says dorado up to 13 pounds have been caught on fly here by his clients, and that seven-pounders are pretty common.

□ Want to Go Fishing Free?

## All about Our Free Fishing Program

■ *The Angling Report* has always valued feedback from its subscribers. And the reasons are clear. For one thing, *Angling Report* subscribers are some of the world's most experienced fishermen. Hence, their judgments about fishing destinations are broad based and sound. And our subscribers' insights are refreshingly candid. That's because they are written from a point of view that no other publication embodies—namely, the paying client's point of view. You can see that point of view in the report this month by Bill Taylor on his FREE fishing trip to the Paraná Delta near Buenos Aires.

So here's the deal. We encourage lodge owners, guides, and others to offer us FREE visits to their facilities with the understanding that we will turn these invitations over to *Angling Report* subscribers who convince us that they are capable of writing useful and accurate reports about their experience. Nearly 100 subscribers have been invited on FREE fishing trips here in the United States and to foreign destinations such as Argentina, Christmas Island, Brazil, and Mexico. The total value of all that travel is in the many hundreds of thousands of dollars. And the good news is that more outfitters are offering us FREE trips in return for reviews.

If you want to get in on this opportunity, all you have to do is upgrade your subscription to Online Extra. The cost is only \$2 a month for a service that includes unlimited access to our custom-searchable, 5,000-page database of subscriber reports and previously published articles, early-bird electronic delivery of your newsletter each month, and access to periodic e-mail bulletins describing FREE fishing opportunities. These bulletins invite Online Extra subscribers to tell us why they should be selected to go on FREE fishing trips. We always give the nod to the most experienced subscribers with the most relevant experience. No favoritism of any sort is shown. Sound like fun? Well, what are you waiting for? Sign up for Online Extra right now and get on the list of subscribers invited to go fishing for free. The easiest way to sign up is by going to our website, [www.anglingreport.com](http://www.anglingreport.com), and clicking on "Upgrade to Online Extra." Or you can e-mail Mike Lyons in our new administrative offices at: [mike@anglingreport.com](mailto:mike@anglingreport.com). Just be sure you sign up with an e-mail address that you check often and be sure to add [onlineExtrareply@anglingreport.com](mailto:onlineExtrareply@anglingreport.com) to your address book to ensure our bulletins get through. Enjoy!—*Don Causey, editor.*

# THE ANGLING REPORT

As I mentioned, my excursion lasted two days. The second day I fished a full nine hours, 8–5, with a break for a delicious stream-side lunch, complete with table and a bottle of Malbec. We were back at the marina by 6:00. Noel is flexible on times, but day trips usually start at the marina at 8 AM and end there at 6 PM.

The cost per day is \$750 for one or two anglers, full board, including lunch, beverages (wine, beer, soft drinks, and water) and use of fishing equipment and flies. Transfers are \$60 one way (for up to 3 people) from hotels to the marina or \$100 one way from the international airport.

*Postscript:* The person to contact about a stopover trip to the Paraná delta is Santiago Seeber at: [santiago@nervous-waters.com](mailto:santiago@nervous-waters.com). Tel. 800-530-6928. In a note near press time, by the way, Bill Taylor had this to add about his trip: “I should probably mention that I spent one night during my stopover at Hub Porteño, a boutique hotel in Recoleta rehabbed by Gonzalo Robredo, former COO of Nervous Waters. It’s a beautiful property; each room is unique. The standard rate of \$332 is a bit pricey, but the rooms are palatial. Tarquino, Gonzalo’s five-star restaurant, is next door. I highly recommend both.” Finally, we reached out near press time to Santiago about the lack of fishing success, and he reiterated what Taylor has to say about the weather and its impact: “Yes, Bill Taylor was our guest right after a cold front. It was the first cold front of the year, and it is not unusual or unexpected that the fishing would be bad. Dorado tend to be moody wherever you fish for them in South America, and our area is no different. Typically, our fishing guests have success on fish in the two- to 15-pound range. I’m sorry that didn’t happen during Bill Taylor’s stay.”

**DATELINE: NEW ZEALAND**

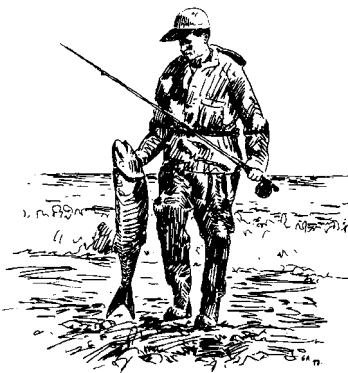
## **Honor Roll Report**

### **This Auckland Operator Offers Saltwater Fishing**

*Editor Note: Want to rest up and fish*

*saltwater a bit in Auckland before going on to fish for trout on your next trip to New Zealand? Subscriber Neal Artz has a suggestion. We are putting him on our Subscriber Honor Roll for taking the time to file this intriguing report.*

About a year ago, I accompanied my wife on a work trip to New Zealand. She had several days of meetings scheduled in Auckland, after which we planned to head to the South Island for a week in Wanaka, including a few days on the Clutha and Makarora Rivers with Greg Dougherty of Alpine Fishing Guides. But you know what they say about the best laid



plans: they often go astray. In our case, the change in plans meant I had a few extra days in Auckland, which inspired me to see if I could find some good saltwater fly fishing to occupy my time.

The search turned out to be a difficult one, but it eventually led me to Craig Worthington in the Bay of Islands some 125 miles north of Auckland. He said he could line me up if I was willing to make that long drive. When I hesitated, he went on to tell me about an interesting option right around Auckland. He suggested I get in touch with Matthew von Sturmer (“Matto”), who is creating a pioneering saltwater fly fishing service centered on the waters of Auckland Harbor and the adjoining Hauraki Gulf. The name of his company is Salt Fly Fish ([www.saltflyfish.co.nz](http://www.saltflyfish.co.nz)).

I quickly learned that Matto’s plan to create a destination and stopover fly fishing service near Auckland had evolved to more than a gleam in his

eye, but not by much. He clearly has passion, fishing experience, and familiarity with his home water, plus some support from the Sage Rod Company and a large local fly shop are falling into place. He also has plans, he told me, to acquire a purpose-built fly fishing boat. More on that later.

The operation he had in effect last year during my visit was based on ferrying clients out to nearby islands in the gulf where he helped them scramble around the sheltered rock coves he had explored as a kid in search of *Pagrus auratus*, a fish that goes by the name of snapper locally but is actually a species of Australasian porgy. These fish are voracious predators and strong fighters, and they are spectacular table fare to throw baitfish patterns to. It was precisely this kind of fishing he offered me when I called. Stranded in Auckland by my wife’s change in business plans, I eagerly accepted the offer.

The next morning Matto picked me up in front of my airport-area hotel in a small hatchback crammed with tackle, cooler, and snacks. He said harbor fishing had been tough for the past three days, with steady 15 to 20 mph winds from the east. He suggested we try something novel: walking/wading out on a shell bank in the inner harbor, at Point Chevalier, in sight of Auckland’s famous Sky Tower. He parked at a narrow park strip among fine homes behind wide lawns and hedgerows. Once we had waded out, our view to the left was of a roadway across a harbor arm. On the right was one of New Zealand’s many marine preserves, primarily for birds but protecting a range of marine and intertidal habitats. Overall, the area had a suburban feel, but it was picturesque and appealing on several levels.

We had a 6 wt Sage rod and an assortment of Matto’s own shrimp and crab imitations for snapper, with a 12 wt in reserve if a “kingie” (*Seriola lalandi aureovitta*, or yellowtail amberjack, the fierce fish of these waters) came by. Matto said he’d observed kingfish riding above big rays lately and he advised, “Hit him in the head, strip strike, and hold on!” if one happened to come by.

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# THE ANGLING REPORT

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We were at the top of the incoming tide, and I cast down current, slowly stripping shrimp patterns back up the bar. The bar itself was solid clam shells, marked with holes made by snappers hunting like bonefish for crustaceans. I hooked my biggest snapper—at 12 inches—first. Four more pan-sized snappers, a juvenile kahawai (*Arripis trutta*, or Australian salmon, though not related to the salmon family), and a scrappy pound-and-a-half parore (*Girella tricuspidata*, or black bream) rounded out the take for the morning. When the tide turned, the outgoing current made standing waves across the bar. No kingfish showed, so we went for brunch at a trendy café and called it a day.

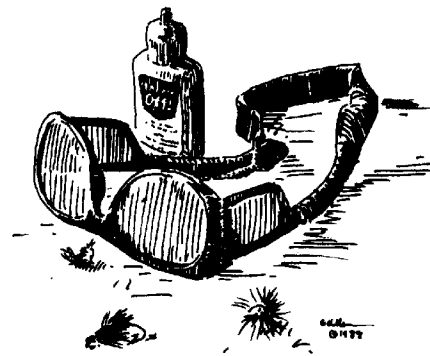
Day two dawned cool, calm, and misty, conditions Matto assessed as good for a shot at ambushing kingfish following the tide in then back out along the mangroves lining another beautiful Auckland Harbor inlet. A deeper channel skirted the flats and provided an anchorage for some of Auckland's fleet of big, elegant sailboats. It was a beautiful, still morning, with every sound carrying through the mist. Unfortunately, we didn't hear the swish of a kingfish waking through the mangroves, but we did have time to socialize as we waited and watched, occasionally working the adjacent channel with the 6 wt and shrimp patterns for snapper. It was a largely unproductive but still enjoyable day.

On my final day, Matto worked hard to put me into some fish. Despite a prediction of severe winds, he arranged a water taxi (sea shuttle) to take us out among the volcanic islands of Hauraki Gulf, hoping to find a sheltered spot to ambush snapper, kahawai, and kingfish. We eventually spotted a likely-looking rock about 50 yards off the lee-side cliffs of a large island, and there we scrambled off the pitching bow of the water taxi. A fellow member of Auckland's salt fly fraternity, Andrew Pering, joined us for the day.

Matto had explained earlier that the standard Kiwi way of fishing under these conditions was to chum heavily, tossing frozen pilchards down current

until snapper action switched on. His modification to this approach was to back away from the water, hide behind the raspy fins of our tiny lava rock pile, and occasionally toss small bits of pilchard into the current. The plan was to get the snapper heated up to the point that they attracted big kingfish or kahawai within sight-casting range, then cast to the target of opportunity.

It soon looked like the strategy was working because a couple of fairly large snapper came up from the depths of the cove close enough that I could drop a weighted shrimp pattern among them. The fly slowly sank from view untouched, but then, suddenly, my line came tight and line began to peel off my reel. Soon enough, I worked a 27-inch kingfish to the net for a quick photo and release.



Over the next several hours, we managed to land a dozen 12- to 16-inch snapper, plus two similar-sized kingfish and kahawai. The most memorable event of the day started when I made a long cast against the wind with a Gurgler fly to a clearly visible kahawai that was lurking on the fringe of the action. The fish struck hard, then jumped and cartwheeled like his true salmon namesake before being led into the lee of our rock, where a kingfish rocketed up from the depths and attacked him. Matto grabbed a 9 wt rigged with a baitfish pattern and quickly swapped rods with me, whispering urgently for me to slap the big fly down hard on the surface between the two swirling fish. About three such slaps and my third kingfish spun and grabbed the fly. Another twice his size joined the fray for a moment before

dropping back down into the dark.

We were all still grinning ear to ear when the water taxi showed up a half hour later. All three of us managed to jump onto the pitching bow for a slow, pounding ride home, running straight into the wind with 6-foot swells breaking over the cockpit of the rugged launch.

Matto's partner in Salt Fly Fish, Doug Rankin, is owner of Rod and Reel, one of Auckland's largest tackle shops. He shares Matto's passion for tapping the fly fishing potential of the area and is an avid supporter of Matto's desire to own a boat. In fact, I'm told the boat has now been certified and licensed. It's a custom-made 20-foot outboard seaworthy enough for careful navigation in the bay, but shallow enough to work in close to structure and onto the flats that line this and other harbors. It has a casting deck, accommodates two anglers, and is trailerable to access either coast given the right wind and tides. "I've been in enough boats to hate the idea of bouncing clients across the bay chop at full throttle, hurting their backs and burning fuel," Matto told me. "I'd rather trailer to a well-chosen launch site, look for fish, and come back to shore to move on if conditions aren't right."

At this writing, The Salt Fly Fish operation has moved from Auckland proper and is now based on Waiheke Island, a 35-minute, \$27 US ferry ride from Auckland. The island is known for its world-class vineyards and beaches. When I contacted Matto for a recent update, he said that he and his clients were cruising the flats in knee-deep water hunting for 20-pound-plus kingfish. He says the new boat has allowed him to do mostly pure fly fishing—that is, fly fishing without the use of chum to heat up the action.

You can get more details on his operation at: [www.saltflyfish.co.nz](http://www.saltflyfish.co.nz). His fee for the three days of fishing I did last year was \$675 US at the exchange rate then in effect. The website now shows a rate of \$450 US for one or two anglers per half day from the Waiheke Island base, \$75 US additional for an

# THE ANGLING REPORT

Auckland pickup. Rates for longer trips and packages are negotiable, according to the website.

All in all, I thoroughly enjoyed my time with Matto, and I suspect many fellow subscribers would, too, and not just those who find themselves stranded for a few days in Auckland like I was, but also anglers passing through Auckland on trout trips who want to try something brand-new. Just be aware that this is a start-up enterprise. It's run by a competent interesting fellow, however, and I suspect we will be hearing much more about him in the future as he "cracks the code" on saltwater fishing near Auckland.—Neal Artz.

*Postscript:* By all means, if you fish with Matto, file a report and let the rest of us know how he is doing. Write: doncausey@anglingreport.

## DATELINE: ARGENTINA

### On-Site Report

#### All about a Personalized Fishing Trip to Patagonia

*Editor Note: Most trips to South America these days are off-the-shelf trips to individual lodges. But not this ten-day personalized trip to Patagonia. Subscriber Ed Swift filed the report. Enjoy!*

**I**t had been nineteen years since I'd last fished in Patagonia. I won't make that mistake again.

This past February our party of seven embarked on a ten-day trip to the Esquel area that was organized by Benjamin Beale, a charming Argentinean whose family has been hosting fly fishermen for over 30 years. The name of Beale's company is El Encuentro Fly Fishing ([www.elencuentroflyfishing.com](http://www.elencuentroflyfishing.com)). My wife, Sally, met Benjamin three years ago when she went to Patagonia with a women's fly fishing club, and her rave review of that trip (Benjamin actually brought in tango instructors for the ladies) made us want to put together a couples trip of our own.

We were met in the airport at Buenos Aires by Benjamin's ultra-ef-

ficient operatives and escorted to the stunning Hotel Alvear, which ranks among the world's most elegant hotels. After exploring the nearby cemetery and finding Eva Peron's tomb, we had a fine dinner and rejuvenating night's sleep. The next morning we flew two hours to Esquel, in the west-central part of Argentina in Chubut province, just a few miles from Chile, where we were met by the four guides who would accompany us our entire trip. All of them were native to the region and fluent in English: hard-working, companionable, and expert. They drove us to our first destination, Estancia Tres Valles, a 25,000-acre cattle operation some three hours to the south.

Because the Beale family pio-



neered the fishing/guiding business in and around Esquel, Benjamin has working relationships with seven different fishing lodges in the area, and access to hundreds of miles of private waters within them. The lodge at Tres Valles, with views of Lake Vilches and the mountains beyond from every bedroom, was a stunning introduction. It reminded me of certain parts of Africa: dry, dramatic, and remote. At dinner, which featured grass-fed beef from the ranch, the fishing options were presented to our group: the Rio Pico, a freestone river that held big browns and rainbows; the Materno spring creek, highly endorsed by a friend from an earlier trip; and a nearby lake that reputedly held 25-inch brown trout that sipped caddis hatches.

Unfortunately, we awakened to a howling, relentless wind, which blew at 40 mph all day, gusting at times to 50. It was, by far, the windiest day any of us had ever fished: it turned the lake into a washing machine. Nevertheless, bundled in layers, we headed out to face whitecaps on the Rio Pico, where, to our surprise, we still managed to catch fish. Some were big fish. Stripping large terrestrials near the bank to tease them from the undercuts, one of our group fought and lost three brown trout between 24 and 26 inches. I landed a 22-inch rainbow. The casting was difficult, the rowing of a raft all but impossible, but Rio Pico fished well from the banks of its many braided channels and the trout were willing if you managed to land your fly in the right spot. We figured if we could have success in conditions like that, it was going to be a special trip.

Day two, the wind let up some, so we fished Lake Vilches, opposite the lodge, reputed to hold huge trout as large as 36 inches. Our guide, Alun Lloyd, a music teacher from Esquel, said the lake is one anglers either love or hate: not a lot of fish, but every fish is a good one, and some are of the once-in-a-lifetime variety. We cast from a river raft, slow-stripping large nymphs and streamers from sink-tip lines. Benjamin's brochure recommends bringing 5 wt and 6 wt rods, but I was very happy to have my 10-foot 7 wt rod along, which handled the wind, heavy flies, and sink-tip beautifully. By lunchtime I had landed a 25-inch rainbow that we estimated at 6 – 7 pounds, and another that measured 21 inches that looked like it had swallowed a football. I'd also missed a vicious strike that literally ripped the line from my fingers. Some people find lake fishing tedious. I do not count myself among them.

The lunches were uniformly excellent. The guide and his assistant would set up a portable table in the shade, drape it in a tablecloth, unfold chairs, open a bottle (or two) of wine—or other beverage if you

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# THE ANGLING REPORT

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preferred—and start you with a plate of cheeses, charcuterie, and olives, followed by a light main course of pasta or cold meats, salad, and dessert. One day we had caramel flan. It was the very definition of a civilized streamside lunch, and the fishing was so uniformly excellent I never felt the need for a siesta afterward.

The third morning was a highlight of the trip. I went to a tiny spring creek that ran through the ranch, the Rio Negro, small enough in many places to step across. The wind had finally died, making it possible to alternatively make long, precise casts with hoppers to slivers of open water, or dab a Fat Albert into a tiny protected pothole in the weeds. Santiago, my young guide, would spot a trout holding in the current, instructing me to cast the fly behind it, slapping it down as it landed. The holding browns would hear the commotion, turn, and attack the hopper from as far as 10–12 feet away. The wakes they made in that tiny creek were breathtaking. We used this technique all morning, casting over electric fences, under willows, beside thorn bushes, negotiating tall streamside grasses. In three hours I landed a dozen browns and rainbows between 15 and 22 inches in water that was little more than an irrigation ditch.

That afternoon we left Tres Valles and drove four hours to Benjamin's home base, El Encuentro Lodge, built on land his grandmother bought in the early 1980s. The lodge, which can accommodate up to eight guests, was gorgeously sited on the banks above the Futaleufú River, a tailwater flowing from a dam a few miles upstream. A mountain nicknamed "The Sleeping Nun" towered beyond the river, part of Los Alerces National Park. Benjamin's younger sister, Cecilia, ran the lodge. A former guide herself, she was married to one of our guides, Julian Gomez Villafane, and their two young daughters live at the lodge. It's very much a family affair, and one of the special pleasures of staying at El Encuentro (which means

"meeting place") is you are made to feel part of this wonderful fishing household. Cecilia keeps a large garden where nearly all of our salads and vegetables were grown, and over an early-morning cup of coffee on the porch we could watch the dimpled rises of cruising rainbows feeding on caddis hatches. Bookend that with a late-evening cigar and a glass of homemade sour cherry liqueur, and I give you paradise.

When the wind is down, the fishing on the Futaleufú River is extraordinary. One day I started with a small (#16) Parachute Adams and Elk Hair Caddis, drifting them along the tricky eddies and foam lines near the lodge as 16- to 20-inch rainbows slurped



the naturals and, occasionally, my offerings. We then switched to large terrestrials—the Gypsy King was a winner—presented along the banks. Before lunch we sight-fished to rainbows trapped in a landlocked channel, roll casting hoppers to the cruising trout. Later, we had luck with streamers and weighted sink tips, hoping to hook into the monster 36- to 40-inch brown that my guide, Martin Majul, lost near the boat last year. And finally, late in the day, we fished tiny (#20) midges, which a pod of rainbows were slurping in a backwater. It was as varied, and interesting, a day of fishing as I'd ever experienced.

The fish of the day, however, went to my brother-in-law, Charlie Lee, who accompanied my wife to the Rio Frey and landed a 25-inch, 8- to 10-pound hog of a brown trout. (We never weighed any of the fish. We fished barbless and released ev-

erything.) It was so fat it looked deformed, a huge hump protruding from its back like a salmon. It had a mouth that could have swallowed your arm.

Just getting to that river was an adventure, and an example of the lengths Benjamin and his guides would go to to put clients onto rarely fished, trophy trout water. It required an hour drive to the launch ramp above the dam while trailering a small motorboat. Piggy-backed on the motorboat was the frame of a rubber drift boat. After being launched, the motorboat buzzed up the 10-mile reservoir, which eventually narrowed into a flooded canyon, past a waterfall, through stands of dead trees flooded by the dam, and finally into the Rio Frey. When the boat could motor no further, it was beached; the rubber raft was taken off and pumped up, the oars installed, and the fishing day begun. The whole process took over three hours, each direction.

But for the chance of an eight-pound trout? A no-brainer. The next day, friend Bill Crossman and I signed up for the trip, and after finally arriving at the rapids where the fishing was to begin, Billy was handed a 6 wt rod with a sinking tip and told to make a few casts to get the feel of it. Bill got the hang of it pretty quickly. On his third cast from the rocks a 24-inch brown inhaled his fly, jumped three feet out of the water, thrashed about, and eventually was netted. The raft was still being pumped up at this point. I was still assembling my rod. The fish weighed close to six pounds.

That was only the beginning. Two hours later, fishing a black Conehead Woolly Bugger with white rubber legs, Billy landed an even larger brown, 26-inches, out of the rapids. It was amazing to me that such a fish would hold in such turbulent water. After lunch it was my turn: two-hundred yards downstream I landed a 25-inch brown. We also had a number of rainbows in the range of 18–21 inches. Nothing small seemed to swim in that section of the river. By 5 PM we put



# THE ANGLING REPORT

away our rods and watched as the guides deflated the raft and reloaded it into the motorboat. The wind during the day had steadily built, so the 90-minute ride back across the white-capped reservoir was harrowing, but we got safely back at the lodge by 9 o'clock.

El Encuentro keeps a number of horses for riding, and Cecilia's husband, Julian, in addition to being a fishing guide, is an expert polo player and mountain climber. So the next afternoon two members of our party took a horseback ride and picnic into the surrounding hills, an option that is always available for non-fishermen.

The last night the Beale family organized an asado, cooking a local lamb the traditional Argentinean way, splayed on an iron cross, beside an open fire, basted with garlic, herbs, water, and salt. A table was set up with cocktails and hors d'oeuvres near the asado, overlooking the river, so we were able to watch the final hour of the three-hour operation, then sample the kidneys (a delicacy) while Pinky, the chef, expertly sliced up the lamb.

By the time we finished the feast that evening and the last of the Argentinean Malbec, it was 11:30 PM.

We reluctantly said goodbye to El Encuentro the next morning and made the two-hour drive to our final stop, Tecka Lodge, one of two fishing lodges inside the massive Estancia Tecka, a 450,000-acre sheep ranch with some 65 miles of spring creeks and private access to the Rio Corcovado. The lodge itself dates back to the 1920s, when the ranch was originally settled, and is surrounded by 100-year-old poplar trees. While it did not have the views of our previous two lodges, it possessed an understated elegance that was welcoming and historic. The four bedrooms all had private bathrooms so large you could have done laps there.

By noon we were on the Rio Tecka, casting dry flies from the banks to pools so thick with small trout they raced one another to eat them. The wind had picked up again—it was blowing 20 mph and gusting to 30 mph—and the trick was to lure the bigger trout from their holes

in the undercuts. Large terrestrials like Gypsy Kings, Chernobyl Ants, and Stimulators were all effective, but the biggest brown I encountered only showed itself when it tried to eat a small trout I was bringing through the pool. My rod immediately bent double as it grabbed its prey like an ear of corn. The big guy soon let go of my fish, which I landed and released, but this called for a change in tactics. Gregorio, my guide, tied on a big, heavy streamer, which I cast upstream and stripped fast. A 21-inch rainbow came out of the shadows to eat it. This was not the monster we had seen. It jumped, ran, made a commotion, and soon was netted. But I figured the pool was now shot. Gregorio, however, sug-



gested we rest it a few minutes and try it again. I cast a second time, stripped fast, and a different big rainbow started following the streamer. Suddenly that trout veered away, and behind it the monster brown suddenly appeared. He was swimming straight toward me, so I didn't feel it take the fly. But Gregorio saw it from his perch on the bank, and hollered to strike. I did so, felt the weight, and the trout turned and thrashed on the surface, showing us his huge flank. Gregorio thought it was over two feet. Then it turned and ran back upstream, hard, yanking the line out of my fingers until I heard a sickening "ping." I had been standing on my slack.

Our last night we had another asado, this one indoors, elegantly hosted by the owners of the Estancia Tecka, who make a point of trying to meet all the guests who fish on their property. Anyone who has been there can attest that the Argen-

tineans are wonderful hosts. Throughout our trip, the food was delicious, the wine bottomless, and the lodges accommodating of every request. Beyond packing and unpacking our bags, we never had to lift a finger the entire trip. The most stress we encountered was trying to decide who would fish where, and with whom. There were no wrong choices, only better ones. It was, we all agreed, the trip of a lifetime.—*Ed Swift.*

*Postscript:* Benjamin Beale's e-mail address is: [bbeale@elencuentroflyfishing.com](mailto:bbeale@elencuentroflyfishing.com). You can call him on his cell from outside Argentina by dialing: +54 9 2945 532445. He indeed specializes in putting together custom fishing packages and discovering new waters to fish in central Patagonia. The lodges he recommends often vary depending on your dates. Prices vary according to length of stay. Special offers are listed on his website at: <http://www.elencuentroflyfishing.com>. Our own 9½-day fishing trip cost \$6,120 per angler, plus tips, not including roundtrip airfare and lodging in Buenos Aires.)

## New Contact Details

■ Starting this month, *The Angling Report* has a new mailing address, phone number, and e-mail address. Effective immediately, all correspondence relating to subscriptions, Trip Report Forms, and other administrative matters will be handled as follows:

**Postal Address:** The Angling Report, 4431 Greenwich Parkway, Washington, DC 20007.

**New Phone Number:** 202-770-9942. Leave message for Mike Lyons.

**New E-mail Address:** [mike@anglingreport.com](mailto:mike@anglingreport.com).

As before, editorial queries, reports, feedback, and story suggestions should be sent to Don Causey at: [don-causey@anglingreport.com](mailto:don-causey@anglingreport.com).

# THE ANGLING REPORT

## Briefly Noted

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

■ Anglers interested in traveling to **Los Roques** will be glad to hear that the Venezuela visa problem we told you about last month has been solved. We have that from Chris Yrazabel of Sightcast Outfitters ([www.sightcast.org](http://www.sightcast.org)). He writes: "I have some positive news to pass along regarding the issuance of Venezuelan tourist visas. We have made contact with a company in Houston, Texas, called Quick Passport and Visa Services ([www.quickpassport.com](http://www.quickpassport.com)) that can obtain tourist visas in a very short period of time without the client having to go to the consulate in person. The fee is quite high at \$305, but we are considering at this point the idea of deducting that amount from the normal cost of a trip. Interested clients should keep in mind that Los Roques waters have been very lightly fished over the last 10 months. The fishing has been great."

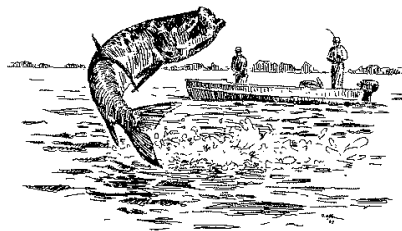
Here at *The Angling Report*, we are not advocating travel to Venezuela by publishing this item. We are agnostic in that regard, because US/Venezuela relations are in a mess. Anyone who tells you they can predict what will happen in that part of the world is blowing smoke. That said, Los Roques Archipelago is far out to sea, very distant from the madding crowd of politicians. Almost certainly peace will prevail there no matter what happens in Caracas. Just be careful getting through the International Airport and on to your local flight. File a report if you go, and let the rest of us know how the novel and wonderful "toadstool flats" and other areas of Los Roques are these days.

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■ There have long been unconfirmed reports of good tarpon fishing in **Nicaragua**, and I am not just talking about the upper Rio San Juan where a few anglers have connected with an occasional big fish over the years. The unconfirmed reports I'm talking about have always focused

on lightly traveled rivers way off the beaten path where almost no one goes. There just has to be some good tarpon fishing in all that unmapped, hard-to-reach territory, right?

Enter Flywater Travel in Ashland, Oregon ([www.flywatertravel.com](http://www.flywatertravel.com)). The guys there appear to have finally hit pay dirt, as witness the following snippet from an e-mail flyer they sent out last month: "Season one of Nicaragua's new Tapam Lodge is now well on its way. After a rocky start with a string of trips experiencing nasty



northern storms, the weather and fishing has returned to normal. The past two weeks have produced some truly incredible action. Fish of all sizes have been caught, with a good number exceeding 100 pounds. Best of all, these huge tarpon have resumed their signature aggressive feeding. Very few even experienced tarpon anglers have seen anything like what happens here . . . sudden outbursts of reckless feeding activity in which masses of huge tarpon smash the surface or fly clean out of the water chasing a wide range of plentiful bait.

"This unique fishery is on the Atlantic coast of Nicaragua, in a nature reserve where only the local Indians can decide who is allowed to fish. The fishery consists of miles and miles of river(s), plus a good number of lagoons. The amount of bait in the area is staggering and the sheer number of tarpon impressive. On top of

that, the area is home to snook up to 40 pounds, jacks, and enormous jewfish (grouper)."

Flywater Travel says it is the exclusive agent for this opportunity, and it was advertising trips last month through May 16 for \$4,500 per person. It may be too late this year to book this trip, but if you happen to already have a booking and you are going (or have gone) this year, please file a report. Write: [doncausey@anglingreport.com](mailto:doncausey@anglingreport.com) The Flywater guys have promised to check in with a postseason summary themselves. Stay tuned.

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■ Remember that query we had a few months back about fishing in the island nation of **Maldives**, southwest of Sri Lanka in the Indian Ocean/Arabian Sea area? Well, we are closing in on some useful information about the place, thanks to subscriber Richard Schumann. He writes: "I have fished a number of the Maldives atolls over the years, and I really do enjoy the destination. It does not have the head of fish on the flats that Seychelles has, but on the right tide at the right spots one can expect good GT and bluefin trevally action, plus there are flats that regularly produce bonefish. I regard Maldives as the best triggerfish destination I've had the privilege of fishing, and one can usually find good-size blacktip reef sharks on certain flats, as well as the odd gray reef shark. I have copied Ben Pretorius of Ufudu Flyfishing Safaris ([www.ufudu.co.za](http://www.ufudu.co.za)) on this e-mail, and you may want to speak to him, as he has fished Maldives on a more regular basis over recent years than I have. In fact I think he is on charter in Maldives at the moment. I hope this information is of use and interest."

We immediately reached out to Ben Pretorius and asked him to file a short report on how he views Maldives and how his services there

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# THE ANGLING REPORT

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work. So, stay tuned. Thanks, Richard Schumann, for cracking this nut for us!

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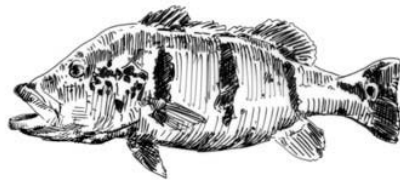
■ The development of **peacock bass fly fishing** opportunities in South America just keeps gaining momentum. Witness the upsurge of interest in Agua Boa Lodge in Brazil ([www.aguaboamazonlodge.com](http://www.aguaboamazonlodge.com)). You almost can't find a spot open there nowadays during the prime period. Then, there was the enormous buzz surrounding Untamed Angling's lock-up of the Marié River in collaboration with The Fly Shop ([www.theflyshop.com](http://www.theflyshop.com)). Almost at the last minute, the two firms sold out last year's exploratory season, and bookings are coming in strong this year, we are told. As if all that were not enough, The Fly Shop is actively involved now in an effort to reopen the Mataveni River in Colombia, one of the all-time great rivers where sportfishing for peacock bass originated. See last month's issue for more details. There are a number of other nearby rivers where Colombians and a handful of European anglers have been fishing of late. Some of those rivers are almost certain to be appropriately outfitted soon for American anglers.

The latest fascinating tidbit to emerge is some guarded talk about the use of Texas-style tunnel boats in some headwater stretches of Amazon rivers where the sandbars and beaches and shallow water just go on and on, around two, three four, a dozen bends. The peacocks there are said to suspend at times near the surface, dream-like, blazing with color, completely visible, and eminently catchable with a fly rod.

The problem is getting to them because the typical skiffs used in the Amazon can't get shallow enough to reach some of the best areas. The distances involved make poling impractical. And, as for the idea of walking quickly up one of these rivers, the presence of freshwater stingrays makes that inadvisable. Hence the talk about tunnel boats, which cre-

ate a mound of water just behind the transom of a boat once it is in motion. The propeller of a raised outboard pushes directly against that mound of water, making it possible to run at speed, literally in just inches of water. Tunnel boats are widely used in the shallow Laguna Madre in Texas. They promise to offer access to miles of currently unfishable headwaters in the Amazon.

I heard this talk of tunnel boats from J. W. Smith of South American Fly Fishing ([www.southamerican-flyfishing.com](http://www.southamerican-flyfishing.com)), a fly-fishing-only subsidiary of Smith's Rod and Gun Resources. Smith has long worked with River Plate Anglers, the largest



operator of peacock bass trips in the Amazon, in booking traditional anglers. Now, the duo have turned their attention to creating a range of trip options for fly fishermen. Quietly, in terms of total numbers of fly anglers booked, they are very close to the top of the heap. The introduction of tunnel boats to reach new water is their latest move to become the dominant player in peacock bass fly fishing.

It's irrelevant, of course, who wins this competition for peacock anglers. The important thing is the presence of the elixir of competition; it's accelerating the development of ever more exciting and interesting peacock bass fly fishing trips. Enjoy one soon and see what the excitement is all about. Just be sure you weigh in with a report afterward and let the rest of us know how your trip went. Write:

[doncausey@anglingreport.com](mailto:doncausey@anglingreport.com).

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■ Talk about an important reminder! Chris Pipes of Deep Water Cay on Grand Bahama Island in The Bahamas ([www.deepwatercay.com](http://www.deepwatercay.com)) tells us it is getting increasingly important that single parents traveling internationally with children have in their possession a signed travel consent form from the other parent. The consent-form requirement, which varies from country to country, is designed to prevent child abductions. Pipes says he became aware of the need for such a form because he is hearing reports of problems cropping up on father/son, father/daughter trips. "At Deep Water Cay, we strongly suggest the parent bring along a notarized letter indicating that the child has the permission of the other parent to be traveling internationally with him or her. We have heard that it is becoming a common practice for customs/immigration to ask for such a letter. Please notify your subscribers about this development so they can avoid unnecessary problems."

You can read much more about all this on the US State Department website, but, to cut to the chase, we found a sample consent letter at the following address: [http://photos.state.gov/libraries/unitedkingdom/164203/cons-acs/sample\\_letter\\_of\\_consent\\_to\\_travel.pdf](http://photos.state.gov/libraries/unitedkingdom/164203/cons-acs/sample_letter_of_consent_to_travel.pdf). Has anyone been caught up in this problem? Write: [doncausey@anglingreport.com](mailto:doncausey@anglingreport.com)

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■ Continuing subscribers know we ask correspondent Bill Cenis to file a report each spring about snowpack conditions in the **Rocky Mountain West** because they have such a large impact on summer fishing quality. Typically, we file our snowpack report in June, and that is what we will do again this year. However, because we were hearing alarming reports of drought out West, we asked Cenis to take a look at the early figures and give us a sneak preview this month. Turns out the situation is not that dire at all. "All considered, at this point in

# THE ANGLING REPORT

time, it appears decent trout fishing in the Rocky Mountain region should be available across much of the West come mid-June," Cenis tells us. "I'll have all of the details next month."

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■ The 2014 Atlantic salmon season in **Canada's Maritime Provinces** (New Brunswick, Nova Scotia, and Prince Edward Island) was extremely bad, you'll recall from correspondent Paul Marriner's recent report in these pages. It was bad enough that Canada's fisheries minister has announced some new, more restrictive, angling regulations, Marriner tells us. Specifically, in this region, at least for the 2015 season, no Atlantic salmon (grilse or multi-sea-winter salmon) may be retained. Hooks must be barbless and only single hooks are going to be permitted. Most conservation groups up his way applauded the announcement, Marriner says, but not everyone is pleased. Once again, sport anglers are an easy target while major underlying problems are ignored. For example, the so-called food-fishery along the Labrador coast, which intercepts stocks bound for Quebec and Maritime rivers, remains untouched, he notes. He's promised to keep us up-to-date on new developments.

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■ A while back we published a few notes about the unbelievably high guide prices in **New Zealand**. Well, they haven't moderated at all in absolute terms, but the improved US/NZ exchange rate appears to have made them a bit cheaper for Americans. We have that from subscriber Jim Hendrix. He writes: "I again spent the month of February this year in the Omarama region of South Island, New Zealand. The area was experiencing drought conditions, and, with water levels quite low, the fish were even spookier than normal. I still managed to catch some nice fish, however, including a seven-pound brown on a cicada. As regards our ongoing discussion about the escalating guide costs in New Zealand, the current issue of *Trout Magazine* has

a story about an innovative fly tier/guide in the Queenstown region. I looked up his website and learned that he charges 882.96 for an eight-hour day of guided fishing. I don't know where the 96 cents comes in (New Zealand doesn't even have pennies), and it wasn't clear if the price was in New Zealand or US dollars. If it was in New Zealand dollars, that would mean his cost, as I write this, is about \$705 a day. In a similar vein, a guide friend told me, while I was there, about a guide in Christchurch who charges \$950 (NZ) a day, which at this writing is about \$760 US. My guide friend, thankfully, is holding his charge to \$690 (NZ), about \$550 US at this writing."

*Postscript:* Anyone else have any



comments on this issue? Last we heard guides over that way were trying to get some taxes on their businesses reduced so they could lower prices. We are looking into that. Write: doncausey@anglingreport.com.

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■ Still on the subject of high fishing costs, it appears that Avalon (the dominant fishing company in **Cuba**, [www.cubanfishingcenters.com](http://www.cubanfishingcenters.com)) is pushing through some very large price increases for 2016. The cost for a week-long stay on *Avalon II*, for example, one of their mother ships, is going up by \$3,500! The increase may be one of the most dramatic examples of congestion pricing we've ever heard of. The ride-sharing service Uber uses congestion pricing,

doubling or even tripling the cost of a ride when it rains and everyone needs a cab. I guess it's raining Americans now in Cuba after the Obama/Castro handshake, so why not go for the gold?

Interestingly, we understand that similar price increases are not being put through by Fabrizio Barbazza of Batida Travel, who controls a good tarpon area on the north coast of Cuba and a recently opened area on the south coast where bonefish, permit, and tarpon are all found. One of his principal agents, Olivier Lauzanne of Planet Fly Fishing in France ([www.planetflyfishing.com](http://www.planetflyfishing.com)) says he understands the 2016 increase will be roughly 20 percent, not almost 100 percent.

In case you are wondering, you can indeed fish legally with Batida Travel as an American by getting a permission letter through Bonefish Tarpon Trust. As is the case with trips booked through Avalon, clients need to book directly with Batida Travel or with agents for Batida Travel and complete all travel and fishing arrangements before contacting Bonefish Tarpon Trust. BTT only issues the permission letters; they do not get involved in trip planning in any way. Your outfitter or agent will get in touch with BTT for you. The permission letter will add \$500 to the cost of your trip.

If you want to shop for a trip through Planet Fly Fishing, be aware that the site is in French, but look for the small pdf symbol on the pages devoted to Cayo Santa Maria and Salinas San Lazaro. Click on the symbol and material in English will appear. Some of it was out of date at press time, but Lauzanne said he was in continuing touch with Fabrizio, and he could certainly help American clients set up trips. Another European agent who is working with Batida Travel is Wherewisemenfish ([www.wherewisemenfish.com](http://www.wherewisemenfish.com)). The best contact there is Justin Maxwell at: [justin@wherewisemenfish.com](mailto:justin@wherewisemenfish.com). Enjoy!

# THE ANGLING REPORT

• OUTFITTER CRITIQUES •

## The Good, the Bad, and the Ugly

*This section of The Angling Report is based entirely on subscriber-written Fishing Trip Report Forms. Our policy on these forms is to publish excerpts in the newsletter of Angler Network Forms as received without censorship. Agents, guides, lodge operators, and/or outfitters who disagree with anything said about them in this section are free to submit a rebuttal. As a subscriber, you can help extend the reach of this program by filing a Fishing Trip Report Form yourself. You should find one inside this issue of your newsletter. Alternately, you can file a report online by going to our website, [www.anglingreport.com](http://www.anglingreport.com), and clicking on "File a Report." For details about how to do custom searches for Angler Network Reports on our website, see page 2 of this issue.*

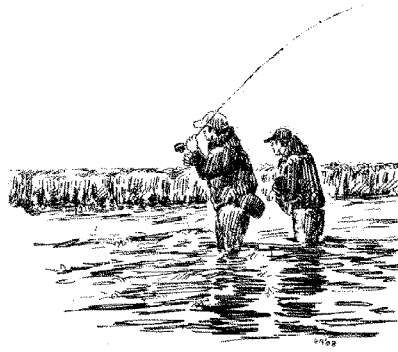
■ Subscriber Bill Taylor can't say enough good things about a trip to Despedida Lodge in **Tierra del Fuego**, arranged for him by Far Away Flyfishing, personal guide, Nico Trochine. He writes:

"Over the past 20 years I have made many trips to Argentina's Tierra del Fuego for the thrill of hooking up with the giant sea trout of the Río Grande. The big river seems to get better and better over the years, and 2015 for me was the best year yet. Where catching 25 or so of these magnificent fish in six days of fishing is usually considered a pretty strong week, I had the good fortune of landing 61, three over 20 pounds, and more than 100 hookups. What a week!

"The water was low and clear, the winds consistently down-river, and a midweek rain raised the water level a few inches without affecting its clarity. The river was full of bright fish, fresh from the ocean, rolling and porpoising in the pools on their way upstream to spawning waters. I have seen this before, but often while being unable to entice a take even with hundreds of casts, especially during the brightest daylight hours.

"Why were the fish taking flies in midday this week more than others? Who knows. But I think two factors helped: (1) a late cancellation at Despedida Lodge meant that I had no fishing partner, and consequently, no shared guide or pools; and (2) I lucked into fishing with Nico Trochine, one of the best anadromous species guides I have ever met. Nico has guided in Russia, Iceland, Norway, Bolivia, and, of course, throughout Argentina. He and his twin brother, Alex, are owners of Far Away Flyfishing ([www.farawayflyfishing.com](http://www.farawayflyfishing.com)), headquartered in Bariloche. They have been alternating seasons, one guiding at Despedida and the other at Kooi Noom Lodge ([www.kooinoom.com](http://www.kooinoom.com)), a joint venture

between Far Away and Untamed Anglers. Now in its second season, Kooi Noom is a lake and river rainbow trout fishery located on a working estancia in sparsely populated Santa Cruz Province, in southern Patagonia at the foot of the Andes, about five hours' drive from El Calefate Airport. While I have not yet tried it, I hear that the giant rainbow trout fishing at Kooi Noom is similar to that of Lago Strobel (which I enjoyed a couple



years ago) but with perhaps more river access. Knowing Nico and Alex, I'm confident Kooi Noom is a class operation, and I'm adding it to my bucket list.

"Unlike many other guides I've known, Nico is not stubbornly insistent on following the party line and sticking to whatever worked last week, even when the fish seem uncooperative. He's not only widely experienced, he's flexible and creative. We varied the distance and angle of the casts; whether to mend up or down or not at all; the length and density of sink tips; the length, diameter, and material of leaders/tippet; and the size, weight, and color of the flies. Together we 'figured out' a pool that hadn't yielded a fish in weeks, even though abundant fish were showing and moving in the pool. For us, it gave up more than ten beauties in the range of 15 – 21

pounds. We were casting at a certain angle and distance using mostly long leaders and tiny unweighted nymphs, which may account for the landed-to-hookup ratio being less than ideal. Losing big fish because of small-hook failure and pullouts is frustrating, but the excitement of more frequent takes was worth it.

"Who knows; next season the conditions may dictate a completely different approach. But if you're lucky enough to fish with one of the Trochine brothers, you have a leg up on success."

□

■ Subscriber Kenneth Spint says he caught only a few bonefish (no tarpon or permit) during his stay this past February at Hatchet Caye Resort in **Belize**, but he is willing to give this new place another try later. His guide was Daniel Cabral, and he does not fault him for the lack of success. "I have fished with the Cabral family before and have always found them excellent at what they do and truthful with catch numbers," he writes. "Daniel was truly flummoxed regarding the lack of tarpon and permit we saw. According to the moon, we were right on, but tidal height change was almost nonexistent during my stay. Perhaps that is what kept the fish sightings down?"

Spint goes on to note that Hatchet Caye Resort ([www.hatchetcaye.com](http://www.hatchetcaye.com)) is a new facility located on an island east of Placencia. You reach it via a Maya Island flight from Belize City to Placencia, then a 45-minute boat ride. He describes the place as follows:

"Hatchet Caye Resort is a recent build, owned by an Australian, I am told, who has spared no expense in its completion. There are seven duplex cabanas, one single cabana (honeymoon suite), and a single room within the administration structure, all well designed and beautifully finished while still retaining island charm. The is-

# THE ANGLING REPORT

land has its own desalination and reverse osmosis plant, so there is potable water out of every faucet and unlimited solar-heated water for showers. The grounds are well maintained with daily attention to the many trees, palms, and even an organic vegetable garden.

“As for the food, the Lionfish Grill’s meals are excellent, with lionfish and other

locally caught fish featured, along with chicken and steak. After dinner, it remains active as a bar for resort guests and visitors from the many yachts that tie up to the docks.

“There are plenty of non-fishing activities at Hatchet Caye Resort. Pedal boats, kayaks, and other small craft are available for water activities—diving, sailing, and

paddling—or you can do what we did: lie in a hammock and relax. To compare, we have stayed in Belize at Turtle Inn, Belcampo Lodge, and El Pescador, and while we enjoyed them, Hatchet Caye Resort is one accommodation we will hurry back to.”

*Postscript:* Spint gives the cost of his trip as \$4,500, excluding airfare and staff/guide tips.

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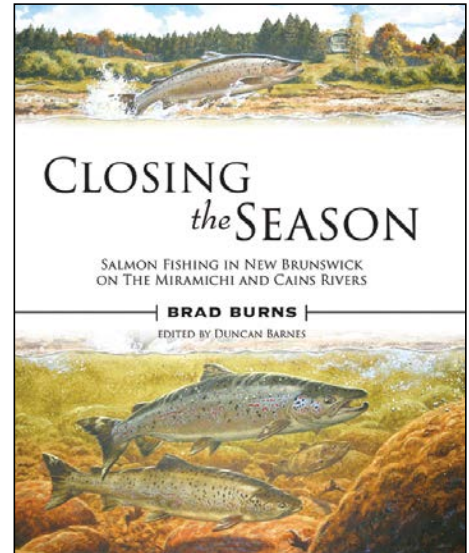
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