



2008 Newsletter

Wapiti Waters
Fly Fishing Western Montana

Jack C. Mauer, Outfitter and Guide
Reservations 1-800-254-5311
(406) 642-6548 Voice
(406) 642-6599 Fax
Website: www.wapiti-waters.com
E-mail: wapiti@wapiti-waters.com



Day one. Our host Dave Brandt with a nice heavy rainbow.

Inside this Issue:

The First Cast	1
2008 Season Forecast	4

The First Cast

I visited Argentina two winters ago and was deeply moved by the constellations in the southern hemisphere as they illuminated the night sky. It was the motivating force that drew me back.



I have heard that Patagonia looks just Montana. Certainly, there are mountains, rivers, and towns. The native montane forests are composed of many species of deciduous beech trees, not conifers, although there are Scotch and Ponderosa Pine plantations in curious perfect rows. The pompous grasslands really don't look at all like Montana's short grass prairie. When driving around urban areas, you don't see any full size gas guzzling pickups, rather Nissans, Toyotas, Fiats, VWs, and a smattering old Fords, including 1960s vintage Ford Falcons.

It was late summer and Patagonia was in the middle of a drought and the rivers were at record low flows, something we have had to adapt to in Montana. Upon arrival at our destination, San Martin de los Andes, I shared a brainstorming idea with my host, Dave Brandt, and the outfitter who was willing to try it. Why not float 3 days and 2 nights on the Chimehuin rather than the usual 2 days and 1 night. The local outfitter assured us that this could be accommodated both logistically and legally. We would need a gear boat to haul all our camping gear and food. He hired a local named Torito, a powerful little guy about 5'3" in height, as our gear boat operator. My nick-name for him was "Little Toro." Torito could neither speak nor understand a lick of English but was quick to smile.

Rio Chimehuin, drops precipitously through a spectacular landscape and is also the most navigationally dangerous stream I have ever rowed. The erosive cutting action of this river seemed to create some hazardous situation around every bend. Access to the Chimehuin is very restrictive, as about 25 miles runs through several large privately owned "Estancia" catering to anglers willing to pay the healthy fees for the guiding, lodging, and private access. Stream access laws in Argentina are similar to Montana. That is, if you stay within the high-water mark, you will be tolerated by the land owners. The camping site on this reach is a designated island with room for two private camps. This site is MORE than a comfortable day's float. The non-native rainbows and browns that live in these riffles and runs are and runs are strong. One Argentine guide describes them as "trout on steroids."

We launched just before noon and immediately had some good dry fly fishing on hoppers and beetles. When we fished the Chimehuin 2 years ago, its waters appeared gin clear. This year's drought conditions seemed to enhance algae blooms particularly downstream of the town of Junin. The low flows, hot air temperatures and warmer water temperatures were not conducive to actively feeding trout. As we floated past both Estancia wading guides and independent float fishing guides whose clients were also wade-fishing, I couldn't help but think if this were the Blackfoot they probably would have instilled mandatory afternoon fishing restrictions.



A 21" brown on Rio Chimehuin. This is the last fish we caught on the trip.

(Continued)



One of the Chimehuin's best fly fishers – a Kingfisher.



“The art of fly fishing may be attained by surrendering our egos to the stream. And when we have done so, we are likely to recapture innocence again, a catch beside which a cartful of trophy trout is insignificant.”

Frank Mele (1988)



Torito, “little bull,” in the gear boat.

(Continued from page 1)

The Argentine guides didn't appear too disturbed about our presence. Their clients were from Texas, New York and Chicago (I had to ask). The jokester that I am, I had to get a little political and smiles abounded all around as I made a passing remark about Barrack and Hillary in the upcoming US presidential primaries. We also floated past a horse mounted gaucho no doubt employed by the Estancia to patrol the banks. At this point, we knew we were going through the “humor-free zone” based on his stony gaze and firearm on his side.

Despite the good fishing, the last couple hours of daylight were stressful, floating through some extremely technical water that could eat your boat. The specie of tree willow that thrive along the stream corridors is incredible because of its ability to sprout after it has been entirely uprooted and moved downstream. It can take a toe-hold in the middle of some swift reaches forming “strainers” that will give you indigestion. The willows have created a maze of tunnel-like channels which are very tight to navigate. Rocks and boulders also form a few navigational nightmares. One big “maytag” had to be run in fading light. A giant boulder and channel constriction had to be hit just right or the boat could be either plastered on the rock permanently or sucked back in behind it. Oh, the adrenaline was flowing as we got past this hazard without incident. As we looked behind us, we saw the Argentine guide we had passed do an uncontrolled spin move on that same hazard. It was almost dark as we pulled into camp. It was a welcome site as Torito came out to greet us.

We camped under a marvelous canopy of these willows with an understory of bamboo. We dined on salad and tri-tip roasted to perfection on an open fire. A few glasses of Malbec, the regional red wine, and of course a cigar afterwards, I was ready to pass out. As I lay on my back, I noticed not only a flock of night birds calling, but also the unmistakable drone of a generator of the neighboring camp. I couldn't help but think that we had come 8000 miles, the clients in their camp had come 7000 miles, and floated 15 miles in this pristine setting in order to hear the sound of the motor. About 2:00 AM, it finally shut down. I wonder, were they trying to catch the latest US news broadcast or latest sport score?

The next day would not be quite as thrilling but equally interesting. I was really looking forward to getting out earlier on a shorter piece of water. This would mean there is time to wade fish. Streamer fishing, the method I used to catch big fish 2 years ago, proved fruitless. Dredging deep, dredging shallow, retrieving slow, retrieving fast, olive, black, or white in color, bunny, wool, or marabou, it didn't matter. NO SALE. So, it was back to the dry fly.

We got to the tail-out of a long heavy run and there they were, the kind of trout that most people would expect to see in this Argentine river, plus-twenty inch trout sipping in the shade and the cover of the overhanging willow in-between rock lanes. These were tricky slow currents. The flies they were feeding on appeared to be a #18 rusty spinner, but there were other tiny mayflies and Midges on the water, too. Naturally, I left my small dries at home since I had little use for them 2 years ago. Fortunately, I had a few tricos and PMDs on my vest patch. Drift after drift went unrewarded. After downsizing, I finally had a hook-up followed by a quick pull-out. At least I seemed to have found a pattern. However, I am afraid to tell you that continued accuracy, followed by dogmatic persistence, did not produce any more favorable results. Humble pie isn't so bad now, is it? Remember what it is all about, the trout, its environment, and the privilege to cast to big, very picky fish. After hanging the tiny dry on a limb, it was time to move on.

The boats from the generator camp passed. They pulled over ahead of us and began working a long choppy riffle. Torito had pulled out of camp and also passed us and began talking with the senior

Argentine boatman, chatting away in their Spanish dialect. I could detect a little worry in Toritos body language. The guide now spoke to us in perfect English saying he could help us in translation with Torito. He began the conversation saying we were in trouble for trying to camp anywhere between here and the next take out. I couldn't tell whether he was sincere in his intentions to educate us on proper procedures or if he was being disingenuous. He probably does not see too many gringos with their own boat. We had a choice, go to the take out and have no-one there to pick us up and have to camp in a miserable, dusty place along a



Torito heading through a tunnel of willows.

(Continued)

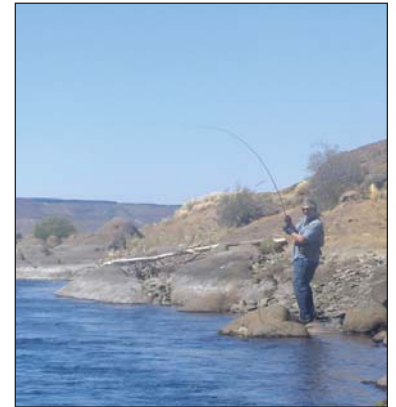
busy, paved highway, or risk camping in a place along this stretch of the river where we were not supposed to be. This guide recommended that if we decide to camp, we do it downstream on the next island out sight of the Estancia in a place appropriately called the “tunnel.”

Deciding to stick to our original plan, we stopped in the run below and fished, ate, and hung out in the much welcomed shade for several hours. About 7:00 PM, we were heading for the “tunnel” and our next camp site. We then proceeded to float past an armed watchman from this Estancia. He checked us out thoroughly and had probably never seen anyone floating down here so late in the day. He pulled Torito over to the bank and I watched this conversation with binoculars from about 100 yards downstream. After the conversation, Torito floated down to us. He didn’t seem so nervous anymore. In his “rrrapid” Spanish, he appeared to be saying that we could not stay on the island tunnel after all because it belongs to this Estancia. So, on we floated. After a couple of miles of futile dry fly fishing, we came to a long back-water with dense cover of shrub willows. Needing to make camp before dark, I signaled for Torito to pull over. He grinned widely at my gesture suggesting we overnight in this secretive island spot. We rowed up the backwater, unloaded gear, and set up the tents and tables all within the high-water mark. The leftovers from the night before were not all bad as we did not want to draw attention on ourselves by starting a fire! With no fire, the Southern Cross was even more brilliant. I felt like Butch Cassidy or the Sundance Kid. We were Bandido Trout Fishermen!

Fishing the following day picked up where it left off. The parachute hoppers, foam Chernoble ants and beetles that did work on the first day just didn’t generate any interest. Looking down into specific runs, one could see sizeable trout that were indeed stacked up like “cord-wood”. I parked the boat way above the next similar run. I pulled out my box of bright beadheads, lightening bugs to be precise, set an indicator bobber at 5 feet (two flies are not legal in Argentina, so no dropper rigs). This lava-flow bank, was unlike any in Montana. It included giant erratic boulders probably deposited by glacial ice. I walked downstream on this formation scattering a few small lizards. I then worked up stream into a mid-tempo current about 6’ in depth. The wind began to pick up, naturally, blowing downstream against my cast to make it even more challenging. I brought my 6 and 7 weights specifically for dealing with this relentless force. It was gratifying to hook and release at least half-a-dozen of the hottest rainbows I have ever caught, while trying not to lose my hat with each powerful gust.

After this delightful hour and a half, my host offered to row a bit. I fished from the boat with the same set up and caught a nice big brown in the middle of a fast moving riffle. This proved to be the last fish of the day. It got even windier as the afternoon turned to early evening. We wanted to hit the take out around 7:00 PM to meet our shuttle driver. Torito was way past us now rowing for home. It was time to do the same.

The take out was fairly congested with boats and guides that had passed us. Everyone seemed to know each other and were very cordial, all helping one another load their heavy gear. I reacquainted myself with a guide named Rubin, whom I had worked with the last time down here. Our host, who also knew him, gave him one of the rubber baled nets I had brought from the states and I gave the big shouldered guide a few lightening bug nymphs. We shook hands and drove back to San Martin de los Andes. After we unloaded our gear, Torito gave me a hug. Despite the language barriers we managed to communicate just fine. He is one of the main reasons this trip came off the way it did. I will never forget our river compadre who was willing to try something very different nor the lessons learned on this majestic river of Patagonia.



Wind, lava rock, and fish on, hat off.



“And if the angler catches the fish with difficulty, there is no man merrier than he is in his spirits.”

Juliana Berners, 1450



Big fish in tough water. With not much room to cast, patience is a virtue.



Bandido trout fishermen camp.



Argentine Guides loading gear at the take out. They all pitch in and help one another at the end of the float.



Wapiti Waters

Fly Fishing Western Montana

Jack C. Mauer, Outfitter and Guide

Reservations 1-800-254-5311

(406) 642-6548 Voice

(406) 642-6599 Fax

516 Chickadee Lane

Victor, MT 59875

We're on the web!

www.wapiti-waters.com

E-mail:

wapiti@wapiti-waters.com



Not the biggest fish, but the biggest smiles for Craig and Alec Bashein.



Nice fish in the bottom of the ninth for Bard Gessaman.

2008 Season Forecast

Predictions for the 2008 fishing season have to begin with an explanation with what the stream status has been in the last six months. Western Montana streams made it through another long, hot, dry summer. September of 2007 received precipitation that not only recharged area streams but also squelched some massive forest fires. Fall fishing was really quite good as we did many days angling in the rain. Trout that fed voraciously in the fall have a much better chance of surviving in the winter – normally a critical time in the life of a trout as they go into a semi-dormant state and feed only when temperatures allow.

It is now early Spring and approximately 120% of normal snow pack is in place. This spring will probably go on record as one of the coldest ever. It is a good thing to be thinking about how much water is stored in the watershed rather than having to “pray for rain.” An orderly run-off would be the best case scenario for both the angling and summer stream flows. With this much snowpack, however, any warm weather system this spring will cause rivers to blow out quickly.

As the river flows subside after the main run-off thrust, the summer angling begins, usually mid-June. At this time you will see the most variety of aquatic insects as well as actively feeding trout. Because of our experience, Wapiti Waters is able to anticipate when a given river or reach is about to turn on. Please call us or visit our website for updates. Booking early for these coveted summer days is encouraged.

