

Under the Southerner

“Where’s the Southern Cross,” I asked while craning my neck to observe the starry heavens. I’ve always been interested in astronomy and can’t see the legendary nautical constellation from my home in Maine. Now that I was in Argentina, I wasn’t about to miss the opportunity.

“Up there, right overhead,” said my host, Julio Mazzoli. He stood behind me, placed his arm over my shoulder, and pointed to the sky. “That bright star is the top of the cross. And that other star is the bottom. Those two



These flies were designed to catch Patagonia's legendary lunker trout, but they'll catch big fish everywhere.

ARTICLE & PHOTOGRAPHY BY DAVID KLAUSMEYER

n Cross

stars on the sides make up the bar of the cross. See?" Julio made the sign of the cross in the sky, outlining the famous constellation.

I stood staring up for several minutes. The stars twinkled like diamonds against the midnight-blue background. "Oh sure, now I see it," I pronounced, but to be honest, I was half lying. I thought I could spot the points of the Southern Cross, but there were far too many stars to be absolutely sure. >>>>



We were on a five-night float trip down the Rio Limay Medio. For us Yanks, that translates into Middle Limay River. This evening we pitched our tents on an island in the middle of the river, and except for the millions of stars in the sky, I couldn't see another light. The air was cool, the night was clear, and the black ribbon of river slid out of sight into the darkness. The campfire popped and crackled, and the accommodating guides poked at the embers and swapped tales in Spanish. Regardless of the language being spoken, you can always tell when anglers are talking about fishing.

It was great to be alive and be in Patagonia.

The Setting

The Limay River flows through northern Patagonia from the Andes Mountains to the Atlantic Ocean.

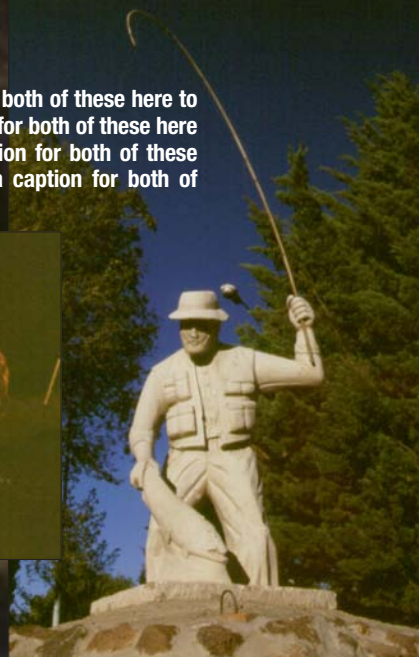
At one time, the Limay contained no obstructions and was home to sea-run brown trout. In recent years, a series of dams were constructed on the Limay to generate electricity for Argentina's emerging economy. These dams closed the river to free passage, and some of the brown trout became landlocked. The fish survived and established a permanent population.

Limay brown trout spend most of their lives in the large, manmade impoundments above the dams. They thrive in these huge lakes, with some of the fish growing to be as large as 15 pounds. For most of the year, these trout are inaccessible to anglers, but in the fall (that's early spring in the United States) they migrate into the river to spawn. This is when they are within the reach of fly-tossing fishermen. The Limay is also home to rainbow trout that weigh three to four pounds apiece. The rainbows remain in the river throughout the year, and also like to feed on flies.

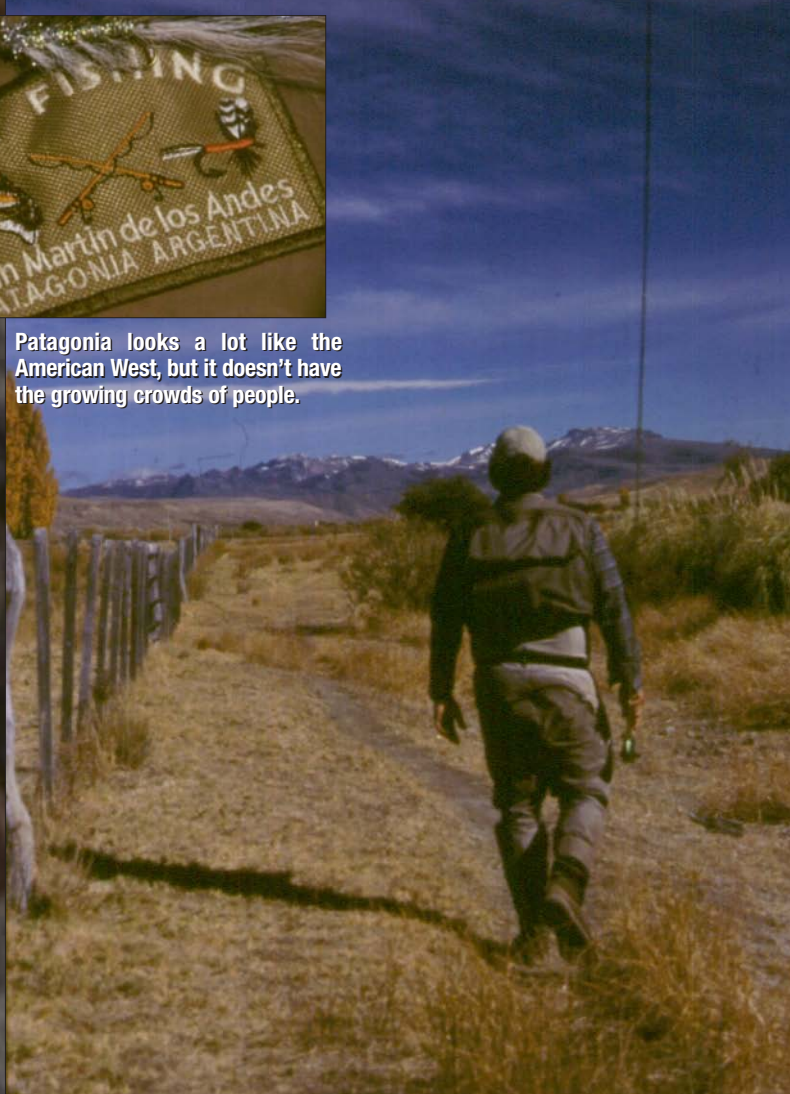
The Middle Limay is one branch of a vast river system. The surrounding countryside reminded me of Montana, except that no one is subdividing the land into housing lots. The river reminded me of the Big Horn, except that there wasn't a flotilla of drift boats. This part of world is desolate, empty, devoid of people. You're out there. It's far more likely that you'll see a red stag or wild boar (both species were imported by German immigrants for hunting) than you will see another person.

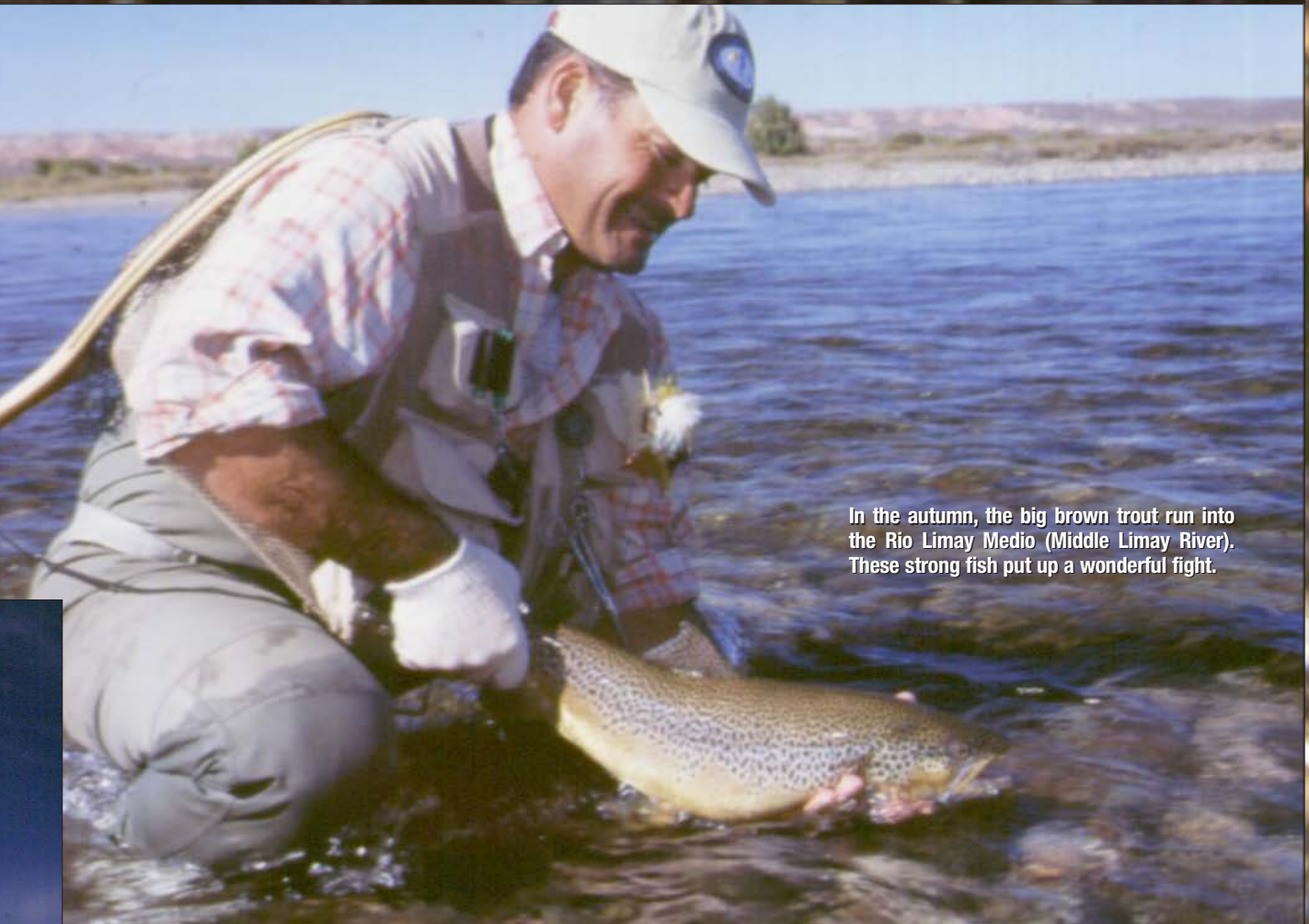
The Middle Limay averages 165 to 220 yards

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Patagonia looks a lot like the American West, but it doesn't have the growing crowds of people.





In the autumn, the big brown trout run into the Rio Limay Medio (Middle Limay River). These strong fish put up a wonderful fight.

wide, although it is broader at some points. It has a gentle gradient and steady flow with very little white water. The river bottom is mostly pebbles and small cobblestone, which make wading a delight. These accommodating conditions make it an ideal river to drift, fish, and fight big trout.

The Plan of Attack

Getting to San. Martin des los Andes, the departure point on your trip to the Middle Limay, is a little adventure in itself. The first leg of the journey is to fly to the international airport in Buenos Aires. Okay, that's no big deal: get a passport, buy a ticket, and fly down. Next, you must transfer to the domestic airport on the other side of Buenos Aires to catch a flight to San Martin. This sounds more daunting, but it's not: the Buenos Aires airport is well organized, and several shuttle companies offer inexpensive service to the domestic airport. You'll take this

same shuttle service from the domestic to the international airport when you return home.

In some ways, those rides across that fascinating metropolis were some of the most memorable parts of the trip: I enjoyed seeing the sights and the people. I've grown a little tired of taking the kind of trip in which an outfitter picks me up at airport, secrets me off to his fishing grounds, and has me slaying fish for the next week. Look, I love to fish, but after a couple of days I'm eager to head to town and see what the locals are up to. It was wonderful

to see Buenos Aires, and if I ever return to Argentina, I'll spend more time in that fascinating city.

San Martin des los Andes is the base of operations for several fly-fishing outfitters, including Southern Cross Outfitters. It is a beautiful ski resort on the edge of the Andes Mountains in northern Patagonia. San Martin features



In the morning, everyone drinks the local tea called yerba mate. It's prepared in a gourd called a mate, and drank through a metal straw called a bombilla. The mate is passed around for all to enjoy.

terrific restaurants and high-class shops. After our trip to the Limay, we spent a couple of days in San Martin, relaxing, enjoying a variety of delicious Argentine cuisine—and doing more fishing. After your trip to the wilds of the Middle Limay, you could also spend another week in San Martin and fish some of the local rivers.

I met Southern Cross Outfitters general-manager Julio Mazzoli and head-guide Gustavo Hiebaum at the small airport in San Martin. They tossed my gear into their van, and we immediately headed toward the Middle Limay.

The first part of the trip took us to the small town of Piedra del Aguila, which is about a half-hour from the river. We checked into a small, clean motel for the night. Piedra del Aguila is the type of place you might drive through without paying much attention, except for one thing: in the middle of town there is a large statue of a fly fisherman. You know you're in a land of good fishing when you see such a sight.

The next morning we met the rest of the crew on the banks of the Middle Limay. Our small fly-fishing flotilla consisted of three rafts. I shared a



Sunrise Murder

tied by Gustavo Hiebaum

Hook: Tiemco TMC811S, size 2/0.

Thread: Brown Monocord.

Tail: Orange yak hair.

Body: Tying thread and orange yak hair.

Wing: Orange yak hair.

Belly: Orange choique fibers. (You may substitute with orange ostrich herl.)

Hackle: Black Ice Wing (or Polar Fiber) used as dubbing.

Head: Deer hair, spun and clipped to form a small Muddler Minnow head.

a crackling fire and opened bottles of wine. Each two-man tent was supplied with a cot, a bar of soap, a wash cloth, and a towel. All of our personal gear was in our tents. All we had to do was pull up on our rafts, get out, and enjoy. Man, we were fishing like Teddy Roosevelt!

Our goal was to cover about 40 miles of river in five days, which meant we had to float a little less than 10 miles per day. To meet this objective, we often fished from the rafts, but we occasionally got off the rafts to wade and fish the better pools near islands and the shore. If a pool contained good trout, we would linger and fish it more thoroughly; if the fishing was slow,

raft with Julio and Gustavo. Two of Gustavo's pals joined us on this trip in another raft. All of these guys were fly-fishing fanatics who knew the nuances of the river very well.

We were accompanied on our journey by a large pontoon “mother” raft that had a two-man crew. This raft carried our food, camping supplies, and personal items. Every morning, they broke camp and secured our non-fishing gear onto their raft. While we spent the day floating and fishing, this Tom Sawyer and Huck Finn of Patagonia pushed ahead to set up the next camp. As night fell, we would arrive at a fully assembled camp, complete with

Argentina

is home to some of the very best fly fishing on the planet; it also has some of the best outfitters in the business.

Southern Cross Outfitters offers opportunities to fish for brown, rainbow, and brook trout. You can take a weeklong float trip in remote Patagonia, or stay in town at night and venture out during the day to sample the local fishing. Their base of operations is San Martin de los Andes, a lovely ski-resort town on the eastern edge of the Andes Mountains in northern Patagonia. San Martin offers excellent amenities, and the region is chockfull of excellent fly fishing. Southern Cross Outfitters also guides anglers to fish for freshwater dorado in the rain forest of northern Argentina.

Do you like to hunt big game? Southern Cross Outfitters offers hunting for trophy red stag, and they will be happy to create an itinerary that includes both hunting and fishing. That's the best of both sporting worlds in a remarkable country.

What will your non-fishing companion do while you're on the water hooking the big ones? Plenty! Southern Cross Outfitters offers hiking, bicycling, trips to local wineries (the Patagonia wines are excellent), and what they call a “culinary adventure,” which is a unique opportunity to learn to cook Argentine cuisine. Golfers can even play a course designed by Jack Nicklaus. Southern Cross Outfitters can tailor a trip that will keep the entire family happy.

For more information about Southern Cross Outfitters, go to www.southerncrossoutfitters.com. If you'd like to chat with someone about fishing in Argentina or get more information about Southern Cross Outfitters, contact general-manager Julio Mazzoli at his office in Michigan at (248) 626-3101, or drop him an e-mail at jcmazzoli@southerncrossoutfitters.com.



we'd hop back onto the rafts and beat it to the next pool. It was a good plan that allowed us to enjoy the best fishing and still make it to each new camp with ease. It was a thoroughly relaxing, pleasurable fishing experience.

Gear and Flies

You don't have to buy anything special to fish northern Patagonia. I had a selection of three rods—a 6, 7, and 8 weight. I used the 6-weight rod the most, and occasionally strung up the 7 weight when the breeze freshened. One day we experienced Patagonia's legendary fierce winds and I turned to the 8 weight, but even with that it was almost impossible to fish. After a few hours, the gale subsided and we returned to normal fishing conditions.

I've become a big fan of multi-tip fly lines. These versatile lines are especially great when packing for a big trip. Rather than lugging the additional weight and making room for several spare spools filled with different lines, one reel with a multi-tip line can answer the majority of your fishing needs—all you need to do is attach the correct sinking or floating tip. I used the faster sinking tip on this trip, but I was always prepared to fish shallow depths or on the surface.

Even though we spent a lot of time fishing out of rafts or wading near shore and casting into the deeper sections of pools, I think you'll be more comfortable wearing chest-high breathable waders. You can get rather wet hopping in and out of rafts, and the breathable fabric is great protection for when the winds begin to howl.

The Patagonia sun can be fierce, especially if you work indoors and don't spend a lot of time outdoors. Be sure to take a couple of hats (one you plan to wear and a spare). A full-brimmed hat designed for flats fishing is ideal. And be sure to pack plenty of sunscreen lotion. If you have especially tender skin, toss in a pair of the thin fishing gloves designed to block the sun. As for the rest of your gear, you probably



Tornillo's Rabbit

Hook: Tiemco TMC9395, size 4.
Thread: Brown Monocord.
Body: Orange chenille.
Rib: Copper wire.
Wing: A natural gray or light olive rabbit strip.
Head: Olive angora goat dubbing.



Argentine Special

Hook: Tiemco TMC9395, size 4.
Thread: Brown Monocord.
Tail: Grizzly hackles.
Body: Silver Ice Wing (or Polar Fiber) chopped up and used as dubbing. Spiral-wrap a grizzly hackle over the body.
Hackle: Grizzly saddle hackle.



Marabou Pejerrey

tyed by Guillermo Palacio
Hook: Tiemco TMC9395, size 4.
Thread: Brown Monocord.
Tail: Tan marabou.
Body: Silver Krystal Flash dubbing.
 (Silver Crystal Chenille is a fine substitute.)
Hackle: Tan saddle hackle.

already know the drill: pack good rain gear and dress in layers. Remember that floating and fishing the Middle Limay is a camping trip. The nights were cool but not cold, but then, I sleep with the window slightly ajar even in January.

The main source of food for Limay trout is a small baitfish called the pejerrey. According to Julio Mazzoli, the pejerrey is a variety of freshwater mackerel. Sometimes the large gamefish, especially the rainbows, key into the pejerrey; having a pattern to match will really increase your chances for hooking a large fish.

All of the flies accompanying this article came from the fly box of guide Gustavo Hiebaum. These are his everyday working patterns, and he uses several of them to imitate the silvery pejerrey. While they were designed to catch Patagonia's trophy trout, I am looking forward to testing them wherever large fish swim.

A couple of the materials in the recipes are unique to Argentina. For example, Gustavo often uses the feather fibers of a bird called the choique. The choique is sort of a small ostrich that is common in Patagonia; we actually saw these unique birds while traveling to the river. The ostrich herl you find in the local fly shop is an acceptable substitute. I have mentioned other substitute materials were appropriate. Hey, I want you to go to Argentina to fish, not look for unusual fly-tying materials.

David Klausmeyer is the editor of this magazine. He is also the author of several fly-fishing and tying books. David is now working on a new book titled Unnaturals, for Countryman Press.

For more info, go to flyfishingmagazines.com