

# Fishing for the Biggest Trout in South America



## Jurassic Lake and The Rio Grande River

March 21-22, Jurassic Lake Argentina - Getting There

When planning a trip, the thought of travel is just one of those necessities to get there. We never really plan or expect what it really takes in doing so. Well, after more than 20-hours of flying, mixed with another 12 hours of waiting between flights, plus taxis, shuttles, one hotel night, long drives, rough jeep roads, I realize that it took the Apollo 7 astronauts less time to reach the moon, and walk on it.

Even though it took more than three days to get there, we finally arrive at Laguna Verde lodge ready and eager to pound some big rainbows. Though it was too late to head to Lago Strobel (A. K. A. Jurassic Lake), Laguna Verde was a small lake below the lodge that was teeming with nice rainbows. This would be the first place in Argentina that a small group of Colorado fishing buddies would cast our first lines in Argentina. We were like kids ready to open our presents on Christmas Morning

March 23 - Laguna Verde - After a late lunch at the lodge, we met our guides and they gave us the low down on the fishing. This little laguna was murky but full of big rainbows. We decided to try an olive jig that imitates a small leech that is suspended under a float. Once we adjusted the jig to the right depth, we started getting bites from the big resident rainbows. The technique worked perfectly and it did not take long at all before we all had eliminated the skunk. I managed eighteen rainbows in a period of about 3 hours. They were all very nice fish, ranging between 4 and 7 pounds. The other guests who were not familiar with our technique became believers in the technique and switched from stripping flies to this indicator approach. I was certain the guides were sizing us up for the rest of the trip, and hopefully we did not disappoint them. Our guide was continuously busy taking pictures. Based on this start, we hope tomorrow is a promising day at the big fish lake, Lago Strobel.

March 24 - Lago Strobel - Day 1



Our schedule allowed us to only fish this lake along with the Baracosso River for three days. With such a limited amount of time, it was a tough decision to start off fishing a tiny river known as the Barracosso River. This creek is the only water that feeds the giant Lago Strobel and is supposedly full of big rainbows. Whenever water flows, the rainbows will follow and fill the river rim to rim. We were about to test this theory out.



My fishing friend Ray and I followed our guide across the volcanic debris fields of the ranch to a hidden little canyon that was carved by this river. The river was no wider than one or two rod lengths. At the very first pool, Ray cast and hooked into a monster rainbow of 13-pounds. Immediately upstream, I cast and landed a seven pounder and it was within our first dozen casts. We knew we were into something special!

We slowly worked our way downstream, looking for rainbows that would be hidden in these semi-shallow pools. Even though the river was small, the angle of the light made spotting these fish very difficult. Our guide would walk very high above the stream and then direct us where to cast. This way we would not spook the fish, which was the key to catching them. Those pools where we did not spook the rainbows were the pools where we had the greatest success.

By the time we made it down the river, I had landed three big rainbows, a 7-pounder, followed by a 14-pound monster and then ending with another 12-pounder. Ray landed two more at 10 and 11 pounds. Considering this stream was totally intimate and crystal clear, we did very well. We also caught many small resident fish, who were aggressive throughout the day.



The Barracoso was an amazing little creek! The rainbows from Stobel run up this river in order to spawn and must navigate all sorts of obstacles in order to reach their pools.



This includes several waterfalls, many three to four feet high. But most amazing was the condition of these fish. They were beautiful in color and had no marks, scars or any injuries from their migration. It was absolutely amazing. Brian said the only concern that they see is that the fish will get sunburned in the shallow water, but seem to recover.

The water was so shallow that I had to remove any weight and just strip a small streamer slightly under the water. This worked well as the fish were aggressive toward our flies. Combine this with the setting of this narrow little canyon and I realize that this is one unique river. I am so lucky to have fished it!

We fished the bottom two miles of river and then caught up with the rest of our group who were fishing the big lake. They had a great day with many fish over ten pounds being landed.

As for myself, I walked down the shoreline to cast perpendicular into the wind. There were several big weed beds that I was trying to reach, with the suspicion that they held big cursing fish! Fishing was tough, but I did catch three nice fish between 5 and 12 pounds. Then, to finish the day, I spent a few minutes in the sheltered "home" pool where I could put the wind at my back and launch the fly and float a great distance into the bay. After about an hour of fishing, the float just disappeared and I had another big rainbow on the other end. This turned out to be another twelve to thirteen pound fish. This is how my day ended and I cannot complain. My first true day of fishing in Argentina yielded seven giant rainbows between ten and fourteen pounds! Now I know why this lake is known as the best rainbow trout lake in the world!

March 25 - Lago Strobel - Day 2

Like the first day, this would prove to be another great day with many big fish. As is customary for me, I like to do a bit of exploring and worked my way down toward the south end of the lake to fish off the big calcified rocks. Fishing started slow with only a few strikes and just a few fish. I finally reached a small island that I could wade out to and put my back to the wind. This allowed me to cast way out into the bay and then allow the wind aid in casting my entire fly line across the bay. I had never been able to fish this way before and it made sense that I was probably fishing waters that no one had ever fished before. In doing this, I caught my biggest fish of the trip, a seventeen



pound monster rainbow.

The big rainbow took my fly at the very end of my cast. Once the fish was on, he headed the opposite direction which was toward the other shoreline. All I could do is simply watch the backing level on my reel disintegrate. With about ten wraps left, the fish finally turned and circled back toward me. Slowly I gained my backing and then my line and eventually, the big rainbow came to the net. This was a beautiful colored male, my biggest ever on a fly rod! This was one of four rainbows over ten pounds that I landed today, with several more that were slightly smaller.

In lieu of my great day, many others had career days for big rainbows as well. Mike also did well with several over ten pounds and two fish over sixteen pounds. Guy landed what turned out to be the biggest rainbow of the trip and of the year, a 23.5 pound

monster. Chris also lost a monster rainbow over 15-pounds. Only Diefenbaker can produce bigger, but not in the same quantity!

March 26 - Lago Strobel - The final day.

I just had to returned back to the island where I found such great success the day before. Chris joined me and later our guide followed soon thereafter. The difference was today, it was dead calm, the first windless time of the entire trip! The gem clear waters were like fishing in an aquarium, where cruising fish could be easily spotted and



cast to. I managed to catch several fish by casting over the ledges of giant rocks, behind of which the cruising rainbows travelled. My memory from today was when a giant rainbow of 12-14 pounds boiled up from under my indicator and inhaled my fly. I wound up landing this fish and got video to boot! Chris was also doing quite well and soon landed a 14-pound trophy of his own before the wind returned in full fury.

As we looked up the lake, it looked like a bore tide coming our way as the water went from flat calm to five foot whitecaps. This caused the fishing to slow down, but we still hooked and missed a few fish. By the end of the day, I still managed to catch eight fish,



with another four over 10 pounds. As the evening set in, I was wishing that I had just one more day!

Looking back, Lago Strobel was an incredible place. The amount of food in this massive body of water, reminiscent of Pyramid Lake Nevada, was amazing. As I walked along the sandy beaches, piles of shells from shrimp and other aquatics were 10 to 12 inches deep. These fish did not have to work hard for their food! I hope I return some day, with maybe a few more days to fish. So the end of this day marks the half way portion of our trip. Next up is Tierra Del Fuego, with all of its wind and massive sea run brown trout. My fishing wish is for just one big brown. Just one!

March 28 - Rio Grande River - We fished at Aurelia lodge, which is the uppermost lodge on the Argentine side of the of the Rio Grande. The lodge actually borders Chile, where the river is much smaller than that of the lower lodges. We were actually more than 100-miles up river from the inlet, so we expected the sea run browns to have lost their silver sheen in exchange for spawning colors. What we observed was something very different!

The first morning our guide took us to the hole named fourteen run. This was where a 14-kilo brown had been taken a few years back and to this day is one of the biggest browns ever caught out of Auralia Lodge. Ray had no problem getting into the catching mode and latched into a big female of 13-pounds. He was stripping a large black articulated sculpin with a blue head, a super good fly for brown trout. I managed the

reality check, which was the constant hard wind and how to deal with it. I got many great tips from our guide, who was touted as the best young caster in all of Argentina. He would later show us why!

My first fish came well after lunch and it was a big sea run trout. However, for some reason, he broke my line. This is very unexpected, as I have always prided myself as avoiding the break off, but not this time. The wind may well have knotted my leader, which was a problem I had all evening. After the big fish, I hooked one small sea run and that was it for the day. I was forewarned, sea run brown fishing can be very much like steelheading in the northwest. Each and every fish is hard earned and one must cast well and thoroughly work the water. We fished continuously until the stars began to come out but it made no difference. At this point I realized that one big fish will certainly make the trip as I expect to really have to earn it!

At the conclusion of the day, we headed back to the spectacular lodge, which may be one of the nicest places I have ever been. Every part was decorated in beautiful hardwoods, tiles, and colors. The beds were like that of the best hotels in the world. I am truly lucky to experience such a place! With its beautiful pictures of past clients holding such massive brown trout and the past remnants of this ranch, one can just roam the rooms for hours learning about this place and the memories within.

Once again Ray proves to be the first fish guy and he certainly did it here. Mike and Chris came up with zeroes as well, but we are all pumped as a couple of other guys did



catch a couple of big browns in the fifteen to twenty pound range. We knew the big fish are there, we just have to find that needle in the haystack! Lots of casting was necessary and the great guides help with our techniques to consistently reach the other side of the river.

March 29 - Rio Grande River, Day 2 - I will always remember this day and why I just crave the challenges in fly fishing! We started the day fishing the same hole as we had finished the night before, as it is where my guide Gabi's clients consistently catch big fish. Both Ray and I knew that they were there, as several big rolls were spotted the

previous evening. Today, I knew what I would be up against and the drill was already engrained in my aching back and shoulder. Cast my black and white rubber legged fly across the river to within an inch or two of the cut bank, mend, and swing the line. Take one step down and repeat. When the end of the run is reached, repeat. Again it is that searching for the needle in the haystack. I was just hoping the needle would be found sooner than later. My confidence needed a boost!

Well, my first bite of the day came much sooner than expected as my line swept away from the opposite bank toward to middle of the stream. It just stopped with a definite thunk! This was no snag and I knew it was a good fish. As the memory from losing a big fish yesterday was far too fresh, my first thought was to try to get some sort of control of the situation and get any slack out of the line. Unexpectedly, this fish just stayed in the center of the river and made its way downstream, but like a prize fighter directing me to his corner. After some fifteen minutes, I realized that I had really never gained an inch on this fish and my guide insisted it was indeed one big sea run brown!



It was just how big? Just after that thought, the fish showed me how big she was as she exploded out of the water. It was well over twenty pounds as she completely cleared the water showing us her strength and silver sides. Wow, what a splash. Now I was really nervous!

My guide kept shouting instructions mostly in Spanish. Most of it I did not understand, which added chaos and comedy to the situation. I eventually got the clue to slowly to

back out of the water ever so carefully. As the fish tired, it finally allowed itself to be seen. Kneeling down so not to spook it, my guide crept into the water on his hands and knees, extending the net under the massive belly of this brown. Finally, the girl was captured and he raised the netted beast into the air. I yelled "YES" for I had just landed



my life's best brown trout by a considerable amount! This was why I travelled more than seven thousand miles, to catch one of these famous sea run browns. The fish was carefully weighed and after the weight of the net was subtracted, the tally was at 23-pounds. She was full of eggs but still muscular and incredibly energetic despite her journey of almost 100-miles upstream from her last meal. What an incredible specimen of nature!

After many photos, the beautiful brown was released back into the waters of the Rio Grande. Just to show us how much energy she still had, she flicked her tail one time and gave us all a shower of water. And she was gone!

Later in the day, Gabi told me that that was the biggest fish of the year and I felt more lucky than good. But, I will take every lucky fish I can ever get, as I did find that needle in the haystack! We went back to fishing hard for the rest of the day, casting with much more confidence, but the results were dismal. This was my only fish, my only strike. But, the reality of the morning's catch kept the casts going strong well past dark. Fish can only be caught if fished for!

As for the rest of us, no more big fish were landed, though a few were hooked. The last couple of hours of the day proved to offer the best chance of success and this is when Chris had his strikes. The one good thing about this type of fishing is one will certainly,

and almost by necessity, improve on their casting. When it is all performed correctly, the effort to throw the line far is much easier. I continue to watch my guide cast, especially at lunch when he picks up any rod rod to practice, as he throws a beautiful and distant line!



Once again, we return to this wonderful lodge and have a feast prepared as the middle of the night approaches. It is amazingly hard to believe that we are now half way through this portion of the trip. We have not experienced the famous winds that Tierra Del Fuego is famous for today, and maybe that is why the fishing was tougher. Chris has decided to learn to cast a switch rod, which is a cross between a two handed and one handed rod. The casting is based on a combination of roll casting, followed by overhead two handed casting. His guide is a very accomplished caster in his own right and a very good teacher. Chris and his willingness to learn a new way of casting would find this to be a good choice as the trip progressed.

March 30 - Tierra Del Fuego - Day 3

Today, our guide decided to take us to the Rio Menenedez, a small tributary of the Rio Grande river. This was a far more intimate water, but it has its own strong population of brown trout. Being that I landed the biggest fish, I encouraged Ray to take the first shot as we started fishing. Ray fished a run that we knew held big fish and we spotted a few

big browns rolling as we arrived. While Ray explored his pool, I was instructed to fish the next run upstream and so I headed up there to explore.

I tied on a green bomber style of fly to see if I could make one of these big fish come to the surface. I made many great casts, but they did not produce any fish. Gabi then called me to come back to a small seam just above where Ray was fishing. I tied on my standard black rubber-legged fly and made another seemingly worthless cast. As I mended my line, my rod jolted and I was into another big fish. The fight was much like the giant of the day before, but this would unfortunately have a different ending. After a couple of minutes, the fish managed to swim under a snag and break me off. It was a big bummer.

We fished the Menendez for another hour but with no success. We then went on to fish other holes with the same result. Ray was fostering the opportunity to learn spey casting and was rapidly perfecting the cast. This allowed him to effortlessly reach the other bank. He was rewarded with a few small fish, but nothing big. I did manage to catch a small four pound resident brown, with beautiful red spots, but it seems like my quota for hooking into a big fish is one per day.



We fished some other runs later in the day and hooked a few small fish. Regardless of size, they were well earned. Mike and Chris had better luck as they found the fish stacked in the bottom hole near the ranch's property line (that bordered Kao Tapen Lodge). In fact, Chris hooked and landed several nice fish and Mike landed a beautiful 17-pound brown, his best on a fly rod as well. Chris continued to perfect casting with the switch rod and that was making the difference, as distance casting did not diminish over time and his arm stayed fresh all day long.

### March 31 - Tierra Del Fuego - The last day

It is hard to believe that this ten day trip is about to end, as it seems like I just arrived. With one day to go, the promise was to fish hard until the very end. We started on one of the lower holes, close to where Mike and Chris had success yesterday. As I worked down the run, I did spot several boils from big fish. I kept fishing the run, trying different flies and then finally I latched into a big brown. This fish was on for a long time and finally I was close to having it ready to be netted. As my guide was stretching to net this monster, the line went slack. The big male brown slowly turned and swam away. It was gone. It was a giant male brown with his awesome hooked jaw. He was strikingly visible in the gin clear water and I will always remember this fish even though I never

got to touch it! This would prove to be my last big fish of the trip. In all, I hooked one big fish a day, but only landed one!

We finished the trip fishing the same hole where I caught my beast. Ray did catch a nice 11-pound male on the spey rod and I landed a small resident. We pounded the water until the sky was black and filled with stars, making every minute count. But the fish gods decided to call this trip complete. Chris proved to have the best ending of any of us, landing several big fish on that final evening, including his best of the trip, a 17-pound monster. His willingness to try an improved technique allowed him to land more giant browns than the rest of us combined!

All in all, it was a wonderful trip to Tierra Del Fuego. We were recipients of very good weather with mostly clear skies and very little wind on all but one day. Whether the wind or lack thereof impacted the fishing, no-one knows. But it was a great trip from the perspective of fishing with some of the best guides I have ever known. These young and enthusiastic fly fishing experts were very accomplished and very good teachers. The learning experience in and of itself was part of a great experience. With that, I now know what it will take to cast a spey rod, cast a switch rod and with practice and persistence, I will be able to master this new way to fly fish and become better in the end. I will be better prepared for my next visit down here.

The browns of Tierra Del Fuego could almost be considered a separate species of brown. They have a combination of habits that resemble the strength and stamina of a steelhead, but have the nocturnal habits of browns. Though we were more than 100-miles from the sea, we found fresh fish in all the pools we fished. We were told that these fish probably make the journey in 1-3 days, which is essentially a marathon each day to reach the pools we fished. When hooked, these fish fought tremendously hard. The big fish do not stay in their pools, but will make you chase them downriver if you want to stay connected to them.

Fishing at both Jurassic and Tierra Del Fuego is with flies only. This does not mean that it must be by fly rod, as a few folks were observed fishing flies off spinning gear and they did have success. However, most fish with fly rods and with the wind that nearly consistently blows, one should practice to cast before such a trip. We had calm days, with calm being that we could stand and fish in the wind. Bad days leave one able to only fish those waters when the wind is at their backs. Fifty to eighty mile per hour winds are common most days on the plains of Patagonia, so one must be prepared!

As for flies, leach patterns in dark colors proved to be the ticket at Jurassic Lake and were also effective on the Rio Grande. At Jurassic, most people strip these leaches, but I used a technique where I suspend the leach under an indicator and move it very slowly. The waves provide more than enough action and the fly is kept in the feeding zone nearly the entire cast. By the end of the trip to Jurassic, everyone in our group had switched to this technique, which I have found to be effective on all trout waters that have shallows with lots of weed and feed. On the Rio Grande, some browns were caught on the leach patterns, but they go to patterns are small girdle bugs. For some

reason, these monster browns will pick these overly small flies out of the water column and strike them with a vengeance. Here, small flies are size 8 to 10.

As with most big browns, fishing is best when the light was low. We had our best success before 0800AM and after 5PM. In between was very slow fishing and we caught only small fish. Fishing was most exceptional the hour before total darkness. We found the most of the browns in the deep holes, under cut banks and in the natural channels of the river. Regardless of the depth of the hole, we always had to take great care not to spook the fish. Like all browns, they are incredibly wary of their surroundings.

I am not sure I will ever fish the Rio Grande again, as there is currently many good brown trout waters in North America. With the Great Lakes producing consistent numbers of 20-pound plus browns, it is a much shorter journey to pursue these more local giants. But fishing the Rio Grande was an experience in an of itself. It is a harsh and rugged land, not much different than the high plains of Wyoming. But this geography and its Argentine people are a big part of this wonderful experience.

Jurassic Lake is another story. These fish are off the charts and it is not uncommon to catch a dozen rainbows over 10 -pounds in a given day. We fished the slow time of the year. I cannot imagine how fishing would be during the peak season (November-December). Again Jurassic is full of wind, but there is always a place to have it at your back. It is not a lake that can be boated safely, as the Patagonia winds always blow here. But the fish are always close to shore, rarely never more than a couple of rod lengths out. These rainbows seem to always be aggressive, love to take a variety of streamer flies, and are always close to shore.

Since my trip several new areas have opened up on this lake, which is shared by two large private ranches. These new waters boast huge schools rainbows that cruise the shorelines. I have heard reports that the size of the fish remains stable, with 10 to 20 pound rainbows being caught every week, but the numbers of big fish are way up. I have heard claims of 80-fish days, which I find hard to believe since it takes 10 to 15 minutes to land each fish. If it is true, then there are some tired arms and backs, obviously caused by the overwhelming success.