

ROXTONS

Patagonia BaseCamp Trip Report January 2012

Why did you start fishing? To have fun? To get away from the madding crowd? To catch fish? To unwind? To enjoy being with a group of friends? To see parts of the world you didn't know existed? To learn new things? To simply do something that made you laugh?

I thought of all of these things on the plane back from Santiago and came to the conclusion that, whatever makes you first pick up a rod and the many reasons that you now love fishing, a trip to Patagonia BaseCamp fulfils any and all of these reasons...and more.

There is no doubt that a trip to Chile involves a lot of travelling but as long as you have the right frame of mind and embrace the travel as part of the adventure, it will not detract from the experience of visiting this stunning country.

Our happy band of five got to the Patagonia BaseCamp Lodge on Friday evening to be greeted by some of the widest smiles I have ever seen from lodge staff; that welcome and enthusiasm remained constant throughout our week.

After pisco sours and empanadas, a sign of things to come (we all needed extra holes in our belts by the end of our trip), it was time to be shown around the fabulous lodge. The phrase "Mia casa es su casa" was never so apt and we were made to feel that the lodge was indeed our home – albeit one with hot and cold running staff.

The next morning saw us tackle up and introduced to five seriously top class guides. All American, all excellent, all strong, all capable and all amusing – they were one of the many keys to the success of our trip.

Alan and I went off to fish Lago Rosselot whilst the rest of the team were to take a float trip down the Palena river. Lake fishing has never really been my thing and I have to confess to gearing myself up for a day of trying to enjoy myself rather than being genuinely enthusiastic. I was 100% wrong as it was one of the most fun days fishing I have ever experienced. We were looking for cruising rainbows and then trying to tempt them with beetle patterns, dragon flies and Chernobyl ants.

It was bonefishing in all but name as the lake was crystal clear and you suddenly saw a ghostly back about 10-15 yards away and cast as fast as you could – invariably the fish would saunter over and after having a good look would inhale the fly. It took enormous amounts of self control and quite a lot of swearing not to snatch the fly out of the approaching fish's mouth.

When we returned to the lodge it was clear that the river floats had been equally, if not more, successful and the conversation at dinner was full of superlatives, for the fishing, the scenery, the guides, the sheer novelty of fishing this amazing area.



The days that followed were very similar bar one thing: the camping! At BaseCamp they have two overnight camping options which we were initially rather wary of as we were reluctant to leave the comfort of the lodge for the perceived discomfort of camping. However Marcel, the visionary owner of the lodge, would not take no for an answer and we set off for a three day and two night float trip. Not for the first or last time on the trip we found out that it paid to listen to Marcel.

After driving an hour and a half to Temple camp we dumped our overnight bags and eagerly set off to the Upper Temple float. This was to be one of the most stunning parts of any of the rivers we fished with a class 4 white water rapid thrown in for extra fun. In the hands of inexperienced guides a class 4 is not something to be messed with but we simply enjoyed every minute of it.

Marcel and his team at PBC are the only lodge that has the overnight camp set up as well as guides who are capable of running the rapids with paying guests. It was staggering and rather humbling to think that so few people had ever fished a fly along this section of water. The quality of fishing reflected this and we landed 30-40 fish each that day, all taken on size 2 dry flies which, by any standard, is astonishing fishing.

We overnighed in the camp - but to call it a camp is to do it an injustice: two extremely comfortable twin beds in fixed safari style tents with an ensuite outdoor shower meant that this was camping in style. After a delicious, guide-cooked supper and too much wine we collapsed into bed for a fabulous night's sleep by the river.

The next two days were just as enjoyable as we rotated through the varied and many options that being in the middle of nowhere offers you.

Fish here are measured in inches rather than weight and it took us a day or two to get used to it but in the end we were confident in predicting a 20" or 22" fish. A 23" fish weighs around 5-6lbs and the biggest brownie we caught was 26" which looked to weigh around the 12lbs mark - a superb specimen of a wild fish.

Non-fishers are welcome and there is a huge programme of things to enjoy such as horse riding, whale watching on the coast, an in house yoga specialist, a natural hot spring spa and a gym in the lodge as well as simply floating down the river taking in the majestic scenery.

For those who "don't see the point in going all that way to catch a trout", I can only simply say this: The trout fishing here is totally different to anywhere else in the world and when the weather is right, the dry fly fishing is arguably the best on the planet. The lodge is set up to give you the maximum amount of pleasure that can be had from a week's fishing and the guides are as good as you will ever find. When you combine it with superb scenery and plentiful, hard fighting, wild trout, it is one of the very best fishing experiences and weeks of fun that is available in our world of fishing.

Charlie White
Director of Fishing



