



Aardvark McLeod

NEWSLETTER

Fish Tails...

ARGENTINA

The finest sea trout fishing in the world – there are still rods available until early April so please do call us.

The Yuk Bug

The Yuk bug is a horrendous looking thing, but incredibly simple to tie. I came across it the first time I went to Argentina in 2000 and since then it has become a staple Argentine sea trout fly. Unlike sea trout fishing in the UK where most patterns tend to be traditional attractor patterns, more nymph like patterns are used in Argentina. Once you see this fly on the water you will understand why it is so alluring as all the legs wobble around and either annoy the hell out of the fish or just look delicious.



Once again it is that time of year in the sporting calendar when the guns are put away and our thoughts turn to fishing. I for one have found it a long and cold winter, but despite that have snuck out on occasion for a little grayling fishing to scratch the itch. It looks like it will be another busy year with many of our Iceland rods returning and many capitalising on some saltwater fishing in the colder months.

As usual we have been scouting for new and exciting destinations to offer this coming season with various new operations in South America, South Africa and for those looking for something truly exiting, Uganda. In Iceland we are still offering some of the best value for money fishing on the market and are also offering a full complement of rivers in Tierra del Fuego, Argentina.

I will be travelling to Alphonse Island at the end of January with a team, and then returning to Los Roques in Venezuela with a group 18 – 26 March which I still have spaces on if anyone would like to join me. I will also be venturing back to British Columbia in September after the incredible trip we had this year.

Charlotte will be leading a team to Alphonse in April, which also still has a few spots if you fancy a pre-Easter getaway, heading back to Iceland in June to the Nordurá River, and then to Mexico in the autumn.

Many ask me about my best fly patterns for destinations, so to prevent my fly box being attacked every time I travel, scattered throughout the newsletter there are a few of my favourites. We look forward to looking after you again this season.

Aardvark McLeod

Out of the blue, head and tailing towards our boat was a school of rolling tarpon, meandering down to our position and oblivious to our presence. The fisherman stood on the casting deck on the front of the skiff trying not to allow his legs to shake as he frantically stripped off line and attempted to control it all the while keeping an eye on the approaching fish. As they came into range he began to whirl the 12 weight fly rod around his head, increasing the distance with every false cast before launching the large 4/0 Black Death fly at an intersecting angle. Pause. The fly is allowed to sink.

“Strip! Strip! Strip!” instructed the guide, “Fish is coming!” the front fish broke away charging forward in a burst of speed and rolling on the fly and engulfing it. The line went tight and the angler pointed the rod directly at the fish before strip striking with the line two or three times. The calm water erupted in an explosion of rattling fury and flashing silver. The tarpon jack knifed out of the water, rattling gill plates in defiance while doing a complete somersault and crashing back into the foam. The reel began to protest as the fish sped away in a blistering display of speed.

“Let him go, let him go!” instructed the guide... the angler cranked the rod over to one side and began to apply pressure to the fish. Again the tarpon launched itself thrashing out of the water in a series of acrobatics, the last of which dislodged the fly from its concrete bucket of a mouth. Another one down to the law of averages. They say you land one tarpon in every ten you hook, but that does not make you feel any better! The angler began to laugh in a slightly maniacal way that immediately indicated to me that his first battle with the silver king had resulted in another tarpon addict.

Megalops Atlanticus, known by some as Buttkickus Fishus, has a following all of its own. No matter whether it is 8 lbs or 80 lbs the first thing a tarpon does when hooked, is head for the sky and that is why they are so exciting. As one of the oldest fish swimming in the ocean, it hasn't changed much in 60 million years. Tarpon still have a lung allowing them to breath air (hence why they roll) which can inject new life into them and prolong a fight extensively. Baby tarpon, up to 40 lbs or so, are huge fun on smaller line weight rods, but ocean going migratory tarpon, normally over 80 lbs, will give you the battle of a lifetime and test you to the limits.

There are many areas around the Caribbean that have tarpon. However one of the only places that has consistent numbers of good sized fish without the flats looking like a regatta is Cuba. It offers a huge variety of environments in which to catch tarpon: from deep Atlantic channels to the endless, clear water flats that provide the perfect opportunity to sight fish for tarpon in shallow water.

Shake
Rattle
& Roll

Cuban Tarpon Hotspots



Cayo Largo, also on the south west coast in the Canarreos archipelago offers consistently good fishing with tarpon ever present and found primarily in the mangroves or reef ranging from 15 lbs to 30 lbs. Traditionally the migratory fish arrive from April to August and tarpon over 100 lbs have been landed. Winding through the flats and cays are deeper channels that provide perfect areas for tarpon to feed on the bountiful shoals of sardines but when the tides are right they move onto the flats providing great sport. Here you would be hotel based, staying at the all inclusive Sol Melia Hotel. The season runs from October to August with prime time in May and June.



Jardines de la Reina on the southern coast is fished from the live-aboard boats La Tortuga (moored), Halcon, La Reina, Caballones and the luxury yacht, Avalon Fleet 1. The area is bisected by large channels, or “Bocas” that provide conduits from which the tarpon can move from the safety of deeper water up onto the flats. They are perfect for polling and give you the opportunity to cast at specific rolling fish. The season runs from October until August with baby tarpon up to 30 lbs present all year – mainly in the mangroves. Larger tarpon, up to and above 100 lbs, are seen on the flats from the end of March onwards and prime time is between March and June.

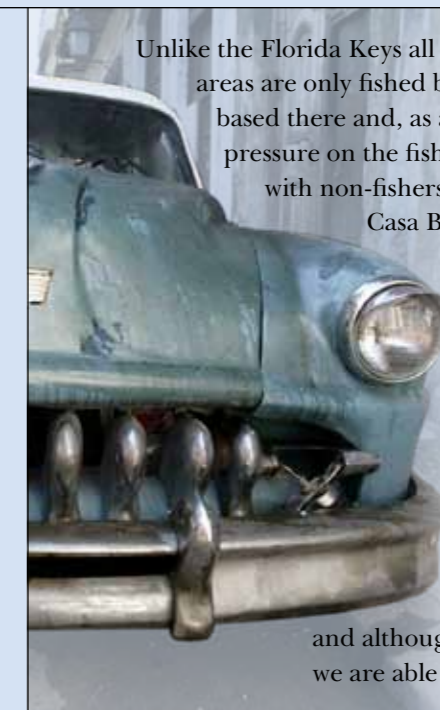
Casa Batida Santa Maria is located on the north coast of Cuba at Jardines del Rey and UNESCO has declared this region a biosphere reserve. This stunning area of channels, mangroves and flats has world class tarpon fishing with fish from 10 lbs to 40 lbs present year round and migratory fish 80 lbs to 160 lbs showing up in great numbers from March onwards. Accommodation for fishermen is either in the nearby beachfront bungalows next to the fishing club, or the all inclusive Sol Club Melia. The season runs from March to September with prime time April to July.



Isle of Youth (Isla de la Juventud) is on the south west coast and this remote Marine Park in the Canarreos Archipelago. The combination of marl, sand, and turtle grass provide a perfect environment for fishing from a skiff, enabling you to target tarpon as they come into the channels from deeper water. Tarpon here frequently tip the scales at 100 lbs but it is true to say that fishing here can be challenging. You can be based at the Hotel El Rancho or on the live-aboard, La Perola, which allows you to avoid the open water crossings from the mainland. La Perola is taken by an intact party and can accommodate up to six rods. The season runs from October until the end of July with prime time falling in May.



Unlike the Florida Keys all these huge protected areas are only fished by the operations based there and, as a result, there is less pressure on the fisheries. If travelling with non-fishers, Cayo Largo and Casa Batida Santa Maria have suitable accommodation and those of you with diving partners, Jardines de la Reina offers fantastic diving. Virgin, Iberia and Air France all have flights to Havana that work with the fishing schedules and although visas are required, we are able to issue them for you.



Tails in the air

There is nothing quite like arriving on a flat and being greeted by the sight of silver tails glinting in the sun. Seeing bonefish tailing on the flats still gets my heart going. My mind jumps to the stealthy approach to within casting distance, dropping to one knee to lower my profile, the slow cast and the intake of breath as I will the fly to be as quiet as possible as it enters the water...

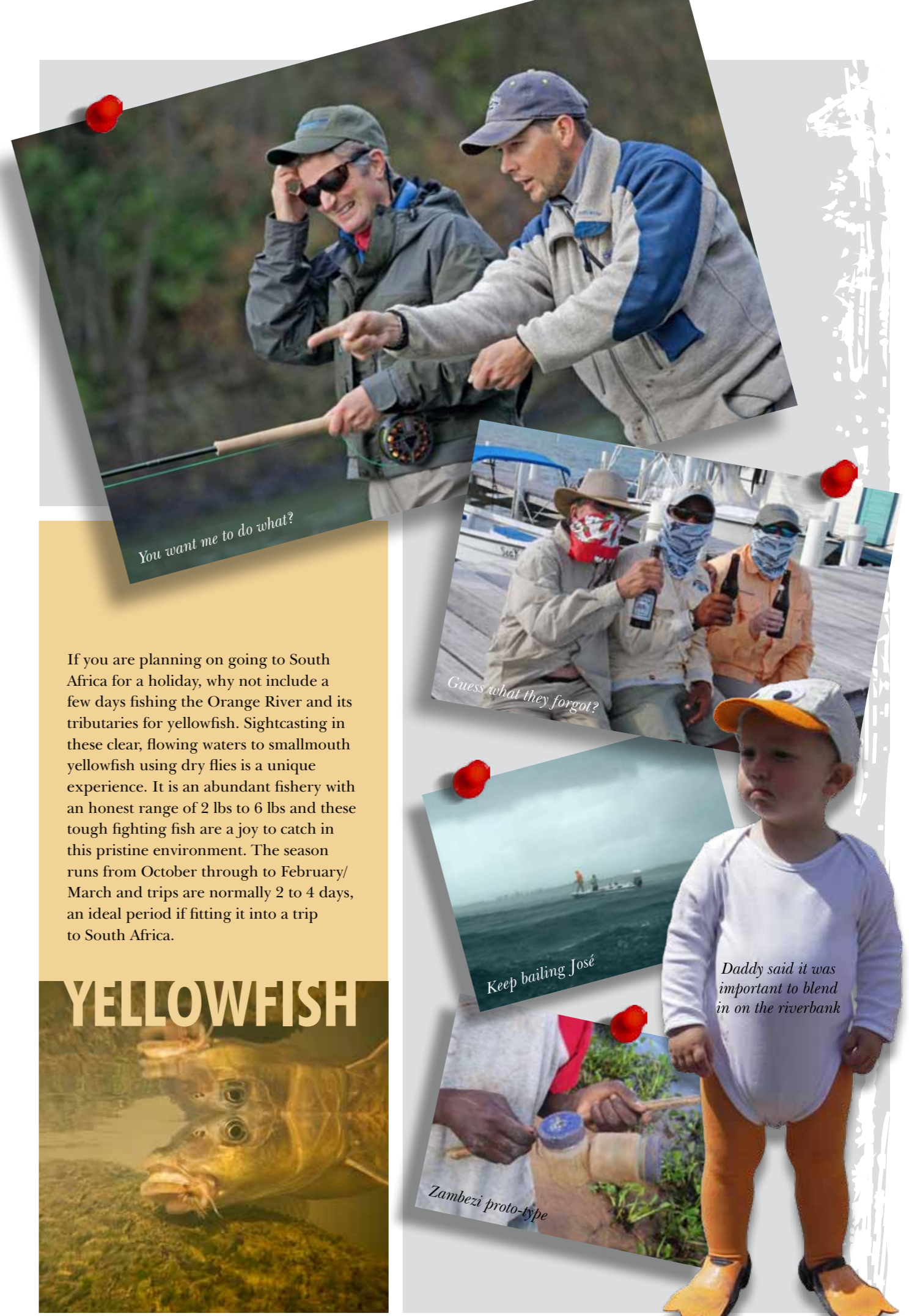
For me, casting to tailing bonefish is what bonefishing is all about and is what I actively search for. Wading for fish like this is very different to casting at patrolling bonefish from a skiff and is not something you see every day on the flats. The tide needs to be perfect, the fish unaware and relaxed, and flats hard enough to wade. So where do you go to see this?

I have cast at tails on flats in Cuba around Jardines de la Reina, on Turneffe Atoll in Belize, and also on certain white sand flats in Ascension Bay in Mexico. You will also find tailing fish on some flats on Alphonse and St Francois in the Seychelles, especially up near the island of St Francois itself.

For me though the ultimate destination are the pancake flats of Los Roques – the only place that I have ever seen such huge schools of tailing fish. Often as you pass a pancake in the boat you will see the flat covered in routing bonefish, all waving their little flags in the air. I suppose that is what draws me there every year. It certainly does not mean that they are easy to catch, and I have taken to slithering over those pancakes with a 6 weight and size 14 flies to ensure I have the light presentation needed.

It is a little like dry fly fishing for bones, and I am already looking forward to my next fix. I am hosting a trip back to Los Roques leaving on 18th March and returning on 26th March so please do give me ring if you would like to join me.

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You want me to do what?

Guess what they forgot?

Keep bailing José

Daddy said it was important to blend in on the riverbank

Zambezi proto-type

YELLOWFISH

If you are planning on going to South Africa for a holiday, why not include a few days fishing the Orange River and its tributaries for yellowfish. Sightcasting in these clear, flowing waters to smallmouth yellowfish using dry flies is a unique experience. It is an abundant fishery with an honest range of 2 lbs to 6 lbs and these tough fighting fish are a joy to catch in this pristine environment. The season runs from October through to February/ March and trips are normally 2 to 4 days, an ideal period if fitting it into a trip to South Africa.

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With twelve guests I returned to Langá in July this year. I was looking forward to being back on the river and hoping that the poor snowfall through winter and the lack of rain wouldn't affect our fishing.

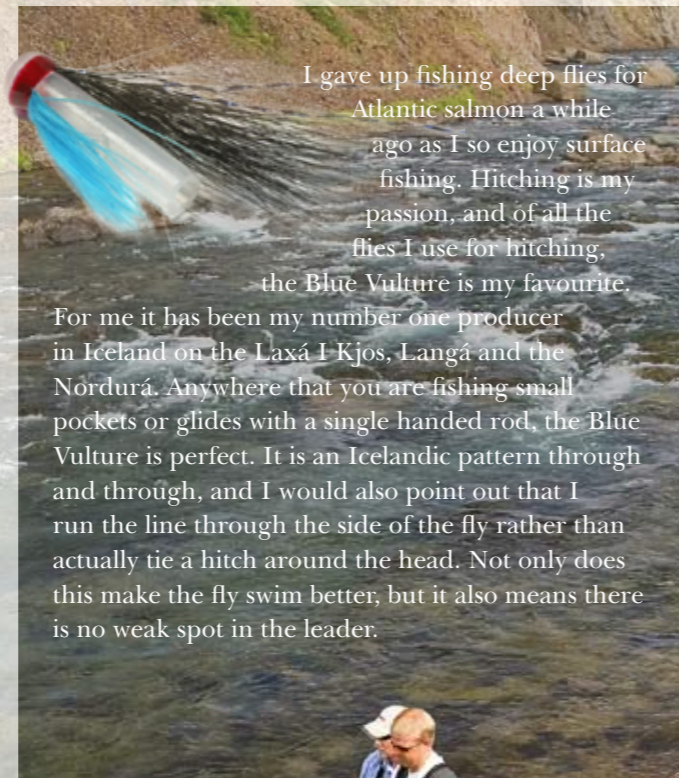
Well, I need not have worried as although the water levels were undeniably low, the river was stuffed full of fresh fish. In fact the run of fish was deemed to be 40% higher than the previous season. The weather was more akin to Majorca than Iceland and, at one stage, in the shallows the water temperature rose to 20°C. Guests all said "if this was Scotland we would all be on the Golf course and only going out at dusk"

Well Iceland is different and the fish were very obliging and took in the brightest of conditions. We were all amazed at how small a fly they would take: a large number were taken on size 18's and tiny hitched tubes with a number also falling to micro cone heads. The middle beat fished best followed by the lower section; especially after a high tide. Indeed a number of salmon (and a couple of sea trout) were even caught in saltwater. A large percentage of the fish caught still had sea lice thereon and were extremely lively on light tackle – a 9' single hander for an # 8 was the norm. Those fish that had made it to the top beat were to be found in deep holes with many having already made a dash for the lake in the headwaters. The lake tends to keep the Langá topped up through the season. I was hoping for an average of 15 fish per rod for the week given reasonable conditions so we were all thrilled to have averaged 13 in low water. Most rods lost a similar number so there was plenty of action. I am looking forward this year to a week of medium water with overcast skies – that could be truly awesome! Four of us had been before and our average annual catch per rod (for the two years) is 14.5 which is extremely respectable for low conditions.

Iceland is not just about the fishing – the Langá Lodge, although architecturally no beauty, is most comfortable with twin bedrooms (single occupancy unless sharing a rod) with their own en suite facilities. The sitting room overlooks the river with stunning views of a glacier and hills to the North West. The staff were charming and highly attentive to our needs. The Chef was sensational and our well travelled group felt he provided the best food of any sporting lodge that any of us had ever been to!

The bird and wildlife were plentiful with arctic foxes and mink spotted along with merlin, golden plover, skua, ringed plover, drumming snipe, whimbrel and bar-tailed godwit to name but a few!

A big thank you to the proprietors, staff and guides of SVFR – we are all coming back again this July – bring on a normal Icelandic winter so we can see the river at its best!



I gave up fishing deep flies for Atlantic salmon a while ago as I so enjoy surface fishing. Hitching is my passion, and of all the flies I use for hitching, the Blue Vulture is my favourite.

For me it has been my number one producer in Iceland on the Laxá í Kjos, Langá and the Nordurá. Anywhere that you are fishing small pockets or glides with a single handed rod, the Blue Vulture is perfect. It is an Icelandic pattern through and through, and I would also point out that I run the line through the side of the fly rather than actually tie a hitch around the head. Not only does this make the fly swim better, but it also means there is no weak spot in the leader.

Langá Revisited...

Peter Baxendale



Why I love the Nordurá...

Peter McLeod

I have fished many rivers in Iceland but there is one that keeps me coming back. The Nordurá has a magic all of its own and for discerning fishermen a huge variety of different water to fish.

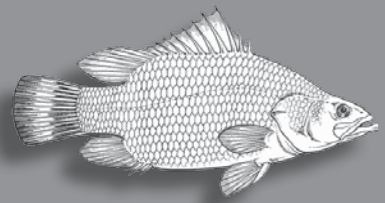


Nordurá is renowned for its consistency and the runs of salmon appear almost to the day every year. They also appear earlier than other West coast rivers starting in early June. By mid June the numbers of fish running the river have to be seen to be believed. We have also seen an increase in large fish (9 lbs – 16 lbs) over the last two years and this year it produced three fish over 20 lbs which in the past would have been unheard of. There is no river that excites me quite so much, and I never quite know what is going to happen.

With over 100 named pools on over 60 km of water the river winds its way out of the northern canyon before meandering across the valley. It eventually arrives at my favourite area, the Lava Pockets. At some point in the distant past a lava field headed across the valley floor and the river has now cut a path through this. The result is some extraordinary topography that creates some of the most interesting pocket fishing I have ever experienced. I whiled away countless hours flicking flies into riffles with a single handed rod, watching in fascination as fish smacked at the waking fly.

The river then charges down the Glanii Falls generating power and width before gliding through a peaceful area between falls before smashing down the Laxá Foss Falls. I remember fishing below the waterfall once and peering into the blue coloured water, entranced by the flashes of silver coming from the deep. As the fly began to drift to the bottom of the pool suddenly a pod of salmon came porpoising over the lip of the pool and fish began to jump all around me. The fly was hit, released and then hit again by another salmon and thus ensued some frantic action for the following hour.

Below Laxá Foss the river carves into the area known as the Canyon, one of the most beautiful spots I have fished in Iceland. It is quite a steep climb down the wooden walkways, but the river empties through some deep pools punctuated with hard rock bands and here I have landed the largest salmon I have encountered in the river. Often fish can be spotted in the crystal clear water from high up and targeted individually which can put your heart in your mouth. This magical area is a fisherman's playground.



UGANDA & NILE PERCH

Nile Perch on the fly? It's a tough call however you look at it but the challenge has proven irresistible to many and is one to be risen to rather than tucked away in the 'to do sometime' drawer.



This is a suitable destination for wannabe Indiana Jones with a fishing rod: this is hard, tough, fantastic, exciting, frustrating fishing whether you are using a fly rod or spinning gear. It is also an option for those wanting a family African adventure, including Murchison Falls as part of an all round safari and/or gorilla trekking in either Uganda or across the border in Rwanda.

An intrepid group of four: Gordon Richmond, Ian MacDonald, Fred Richardson and Martin Koper headed out to Murchison Falls in Uganda to try their luck for Nile Perch – ideally on the fly was their aim but actually they were happy to try anything that worked. Based in Uganda and an exceptionally keen fisherman himself, their host for the week had the following advice for them as they were considering what to take and what to leave behind...

'the biggest rod they've got, with the strongest leader they can find and the biggest perch flies they can get their hands on'...

The River Nile below Murchison Falls is one of the most inspiring, challenging and captivating stretches of water you can imagine fishing. Along with Lake Nassar, Muchison Falls is home to Nile perch of legendary proportions and they are a reality rather than a jungle myth. Fish of over 130 lbs have been recorded at Murchison and each of the four rods hooked and lost big fish. One of the first hooked was a monster, jumping clear of the water several times before shaking free and giving rise to some rather astonished looks as the reality of what they had come to catch dawned. There were plenty of tales of the 'big one that got away' but

these are big, tough fighting fish and losing one is not hard. Between the dustbin sized mouths, hard gill plates, razor like spines and the rocks, turbulent water and all round hazards of fishing in this environment, landing such a leviathan is never going to be easy with 100 lbs tippet regularly cut like a hot knife through butter.

Having all lost big fish, they all also landed 3 or 4 Nile perch between 50 lbs and 65 lbs. Hard fought and hard won, these Nile perch were not tiddlers by any means and plans are already afoot for a return trip. Those massive fish, despite their brief appearances, have only added fuel to the fire and the desire to land one.



Chile

trout fishing Heaven

Although most famous for large sea trout, Patagonia is home to some of the world's greatest trout rivers. In the Aysen region of Chile it is as if time has stood still with gauchos still herding cattle across the pampas and condors tracking across the sky. It is also home to some phenomenal trout streams. Eager to find pastures new and off the beaten track, we are pleased to offer Cinco Rios, Posada de Los Farios, Coyhaique River Lodge and Picacho Lodge in this area that provide an eclectic mix of fishing

experiences from stalking large brown trout on small brooks to drift boating down the Rio Cisnes, casting at rising fish as you go.



These operations not only offer extreme comfort, very high standard of food and wine, but as most of them are working estancias they also offer an authentic Chilean experience and total flexibility. Not only can you access numerous rivers depending on your fishing style preference, but you can take non fishers and families to see life on working ranches or the majestic sight of Andean condors drifting lazily across the sky. If you are heading back to your trout fishing roots, an adventure, or a family holiday with some fishing for you, then Chile is at the top of our list.



The G in GT is not gin...

Peter Opperman

Last month four friends and I returned to Alphonse Island in the Seychelles. Having fished together before we had dallied with other locations but the reliability, beauty and luxury of Alphonse pulled us back.

It was great to see many familiar faces amongst the guides, particularly Serge who was back guiding for a few weeks. As a result of the guide rotation policy on Alphonse we all fished with each of the guides at least once over the week and Hugo and Fred, two amateurs when it comes to casting a fly rod, filled their boots. Fred, supposed to be the worst fisherman, was always coming back with stories which topped ours: the milkfish hooked on the flats, the huge barracuda and the large number of trigger fish he kept catching when we could catch none. What we hadn't realised was how good a rum punch Serge could knock up on a flats skiff. He is a man of few words and quite a few cigarettes and has provided us with some wonderful highlights in the past which the team took to calling 'Sergism's'. These have included:

"For God's sake Aedan pass the rod to Peter"

"Don't you think you should stop fishing and concentrate on golf"

"Strip, strip, strip... you strip like a woman"

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On the last day Aedan, who had been mumbling about wanting to catch a big fish, went out with Serge. A giant trevally ("GT") was spotted by Serge while they were outside the reef. Due to recent experience with Aedan's casting skills which had resulted in some physical injury for poor Serge, he walked from his end of the skiff in a light swell, stood behind Aedan and quietly pointed the fish out to Aedan. None of this "GT 60 feet at nine o'clock cast now." Aedan saw the fish, cast beautifully for once and scarcely had his fly landed before the GT was disappearing out to sea with Aedan's reel screaming.

We all caught fish, lots of fish and the issue became not how many you would catch but which species you wanted to target. I had never caught a large permit before. At the end of an exhausting day walking to the wreck we were sitting in the boat having a restorative beer. We had five minutes of fishing before we had to go back. I saw a couple of permit coming up the channel, had time to change the fly on the eight weight but not the 11 lbs leader and walked into the channel to intercept them. I had two casts at them where one of the fish turned and looked at the fly and then they both went behind a ray coming up the channel. I cast in front of the ray which was in four feet of water and as the ray came up to the fly I raised the rod tip; the largest permit turned and nailed the fly about fifteen feet from me. Twenty minutes later after much shouting and Andrew, the guide, saying he was having a heart attack we landed what Devan the head guide said was the largest permit ever caught on the island. Over many beers later in the bar I may have embellished my skill in the capture, but truthfully this fishery is getting better and better and I was in the right place at the right time.

Now how do I persuade my wife I can go back next year?

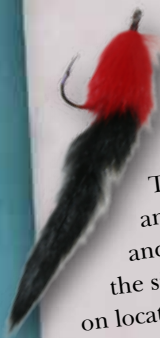


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Favourite flies...

Peter McLeod

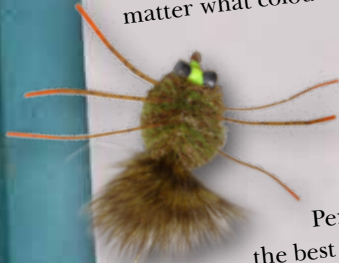
Some of these may be contentious choices but they continue to work well for me and judging by the swooping that goes on when my fly boxes are opened and the subsequent empty spots, I'm not alone!



Tarpon

Black Death
Tarpon Bunny

This pattern has proved itself again and again across Cuba, Mexico, Belize and Venezuela as a tarpon taker. I will vary the size from a 4/0 down to a 1/0 depending on location and how educated the tarpon are. The more educated, the smaller the fly. The rabbit strip tail gives the fly huge movement in the water, and the colours show up well no matter what colour the water.



Permit

Enrico Puglisi
EP Crab

Permit are hard to catch at the best of times and everyone you talk to has a different theory. My personal view is that most people fish with flies that are too large. Normally in the heat of permit fever it is the presentation that is key, so I like a smaller fly that is less likely to spook the fish. Enrico Puglisi's flies are pioneering and normally have more movement than most. I love his small plain EP crab in olive, and have had more success in Mexico, Belize and Venezuela with it than normal Merkin crab patterns. They also look cool... obviously.



Steelhead - Popsicle

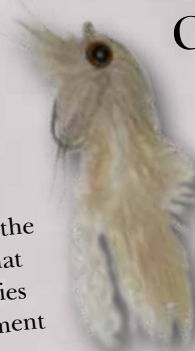
Steelhead are currently my favourite freshwater species, mostly due to their incredible aggressiveness. For fish up in the Skeena system around Nicholas Dean Lodge I have found the Popsicle to be a go to pattern. I am not sure that the colour really matters, but generally the flashier the better. The marabou the Popsicle is tied with is also highly mobile and I feel can often induce a fish to hit over more traditional hair winged patterns.



Trigger Fish

Flexo crab

When I first saw the flexo crabs I thought they would catch more fisherman than fish, Wow, was I wrong! The flexible shell lands incredibly lightly and when trying to drop the fly onto a tailing trigger fish on a finger flat in the Seychelles I have to say the flexo crab is exceptional. Triggers are odd fish, and their separately pivoting eyes are slightly freaky. They do however provide awesome sport and are great fun to catch.



Giant Trevally

Brushy

The Brushy I believe was originally formed from a squid pattern, but the addition of the teddy bear eyes and the hugely mobile body give the Brushy a fantastic profile in the water. My last trip to Cosmoledo converted me to these flies where we caught nearly all our GT's on them. They are also surprisingly durable.

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