

# The Complete Fly Fisher

LIVING AND BREATHING THE LIFESTYLE



## ISSUE #280

IN THIS ISSUE: Gently does it – what does fly fishing teach us? • Ed Herbst – the delicate fly fisher • How (not) to spook fish: golden rules of engagement • Untouched: a southern Chilean journey • Unlocking the largemouth mystery • Dapper damsels • Verlorenkloof Estate • Atlantic bonito on fly • Pushing boundaries • Exploring Argentina's wild rivers • Travelling hopefully

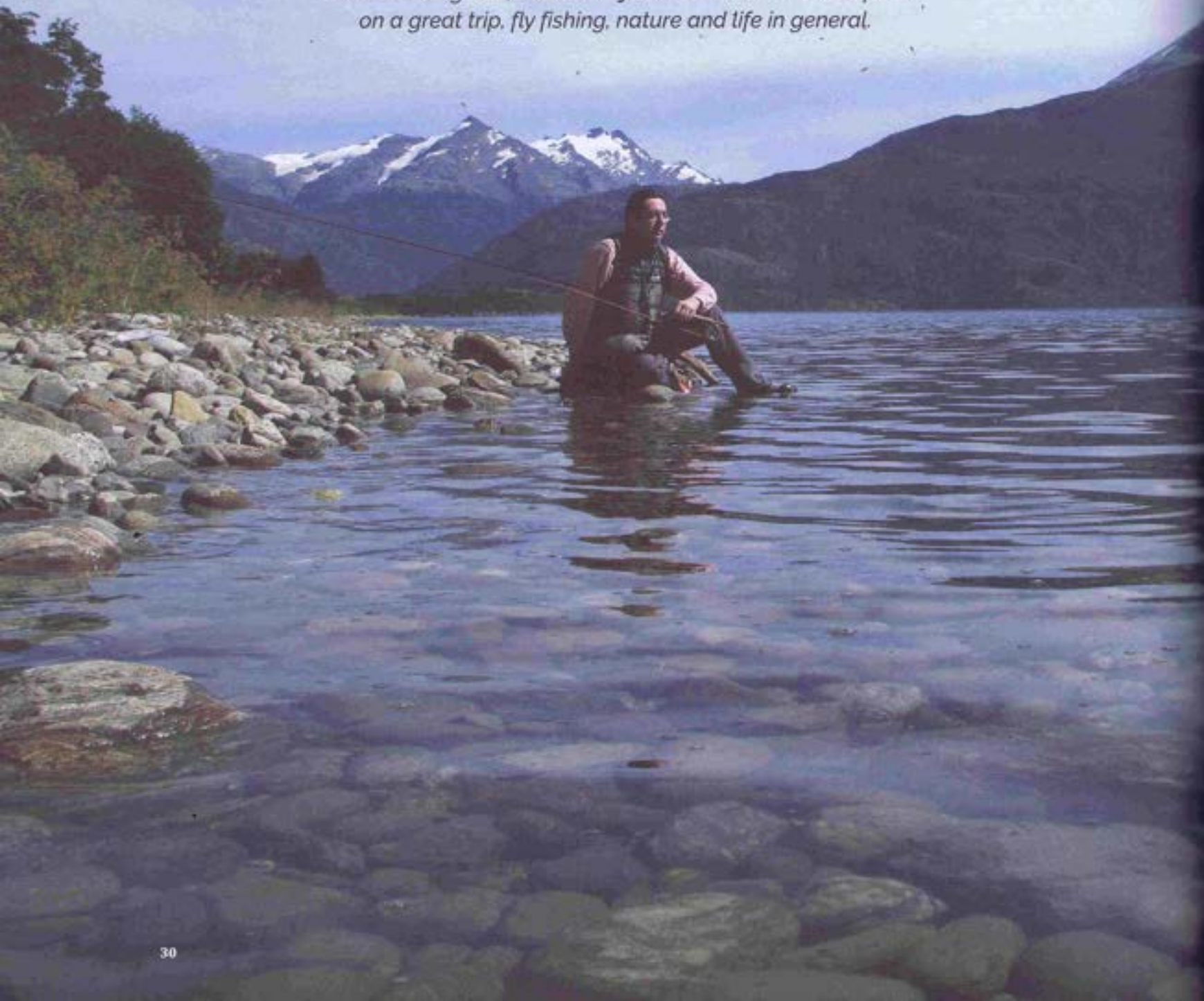


South Africa:  
R185 (incl vat)

# Untouched

A SOUTHERN CHILEAN JOURNEY

*Amidst unspoilt nature, deep in the vast ranges of Chilean Patagonia, **Marc Petitjean** takes the time to reflect on a great trip, fly fishing, nature and life in general.*





**M**y great-grandmother took me to a river to fish for the first time when I was four years old. Today, I am no longer young, and while I do not have the energy and zest of a 20-year-old, I have something else that's important and that's taken a long time to acquire – experience.

Fly fishing is different from many other hobbies in that it is multifaceted and you can pursue it all your life. Very importantly, it allows us to experience, observe and ultimately respect nature.

What is still true today is that, when I am close to water, I am like a kid; watching, learning, trying to understand. If I miss a fish, I remind myself that fish have been around for more than 250,000 years, and it is because they have an enormous capacity for adaptation to continue thriving as a species that they develop marvellous strategies to survive various life-threatening obstacles. Humans are not their only predators; they also have to deal with fish-eating birds, otters, seals, other fish and more. They have developed a reproduction system consisting of naturally overproducing eggs, knowing that only a small percentage will reach adulthood.

Over the years, I have fished in many destinations for many species. In a recent interview, a journalist asked me, "Which is your favourite fish and your favourite river?" It seemed to me that he had not listened to a single word I had said during our long conversation, so I simply replied, "Tomorrow will tell."

### LESSONS I HAVE LEARNT

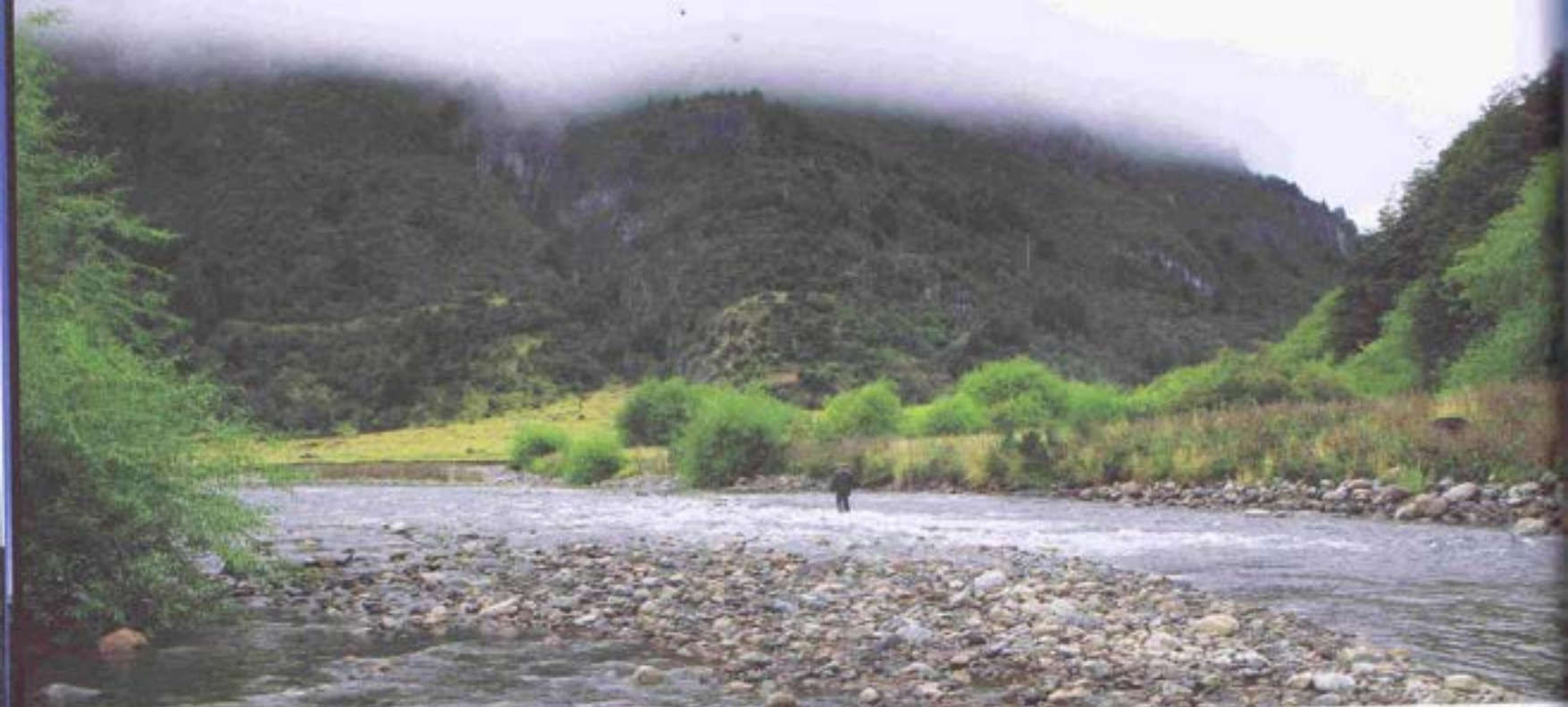
We've all read stories that explain how good the writer is on his favourite river. We've watched videos showing how big the trout are at this venue or that. However, the struggles that the author and/or filmmaker may have experienced are hardly ever recorded. We are never told or shown that it often takes them months, or even years, before they can publish the story or release that perfect video footage of them catching one fish after another. One of the problems with booking a fishing trip far in advance is that multiple elements can conspire against you having that same "perfect" experience. It may be too early or too late in the season; it may be drought-stricken or particularly wet; there might even be unexpected weather phenomena such as flash floods, monsoons or hurricanes, or unusually high or low temperatures. Being at the right place at the right time does not occur all that often, believe me.

So, whenever I book a trip,  
it is without any expectations.  
I certainly have wishes and  
desires, but no preconceived  
assumptions.



**“ONE OF THE PROBLEMS WITH BOOKING A FISHING TRIP FAR IN ADVANCE IS THAT MULTIPLE ELEMENTS CAN CONSPIRE AGAINST YOU HAVING THAT SAME ‘PERFECT’ EXPERIENCE.”**







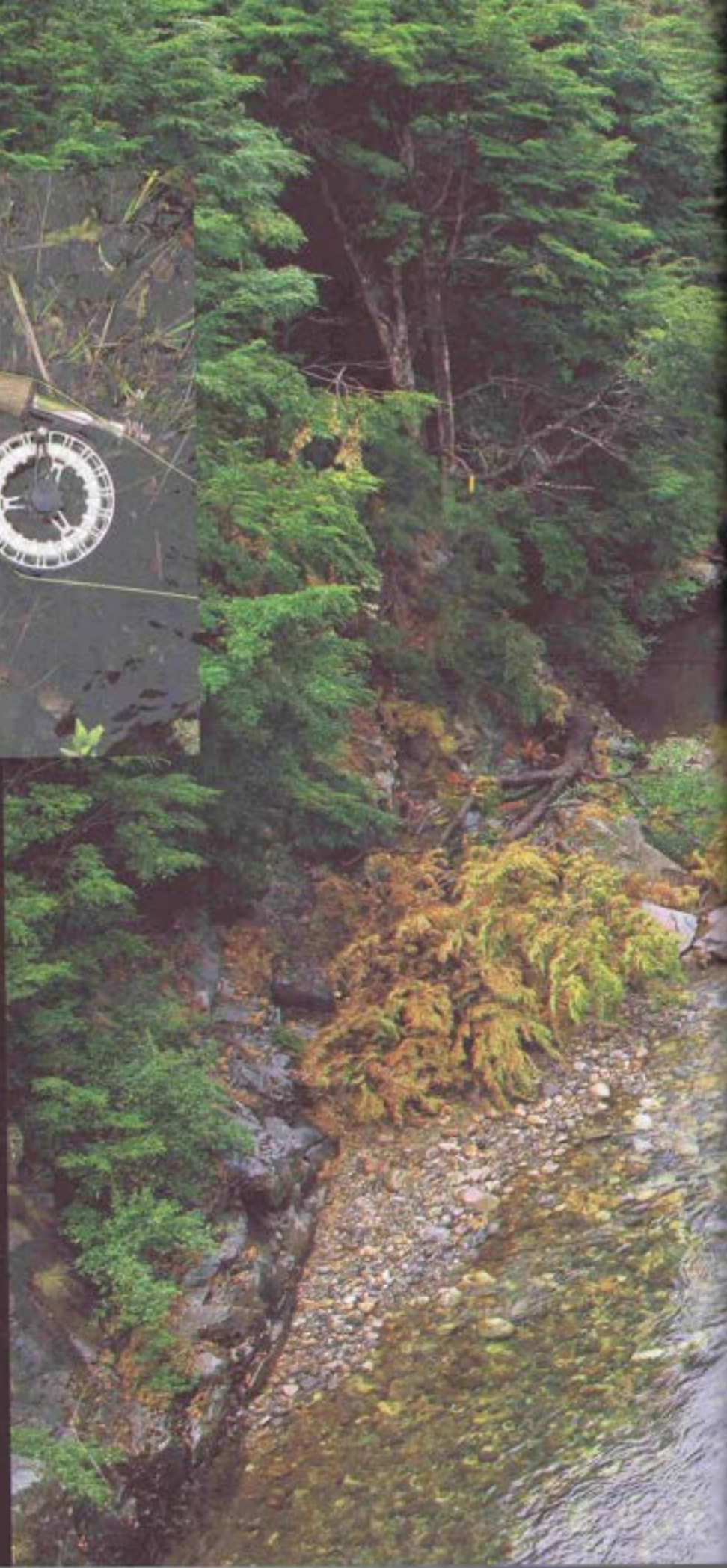
**“BEING AT THE RIGHT PLACE AT THE RIGHT TIME  
DOES NOT OCCUR ALL THAT OFTEN, BELIEVE ME.”**



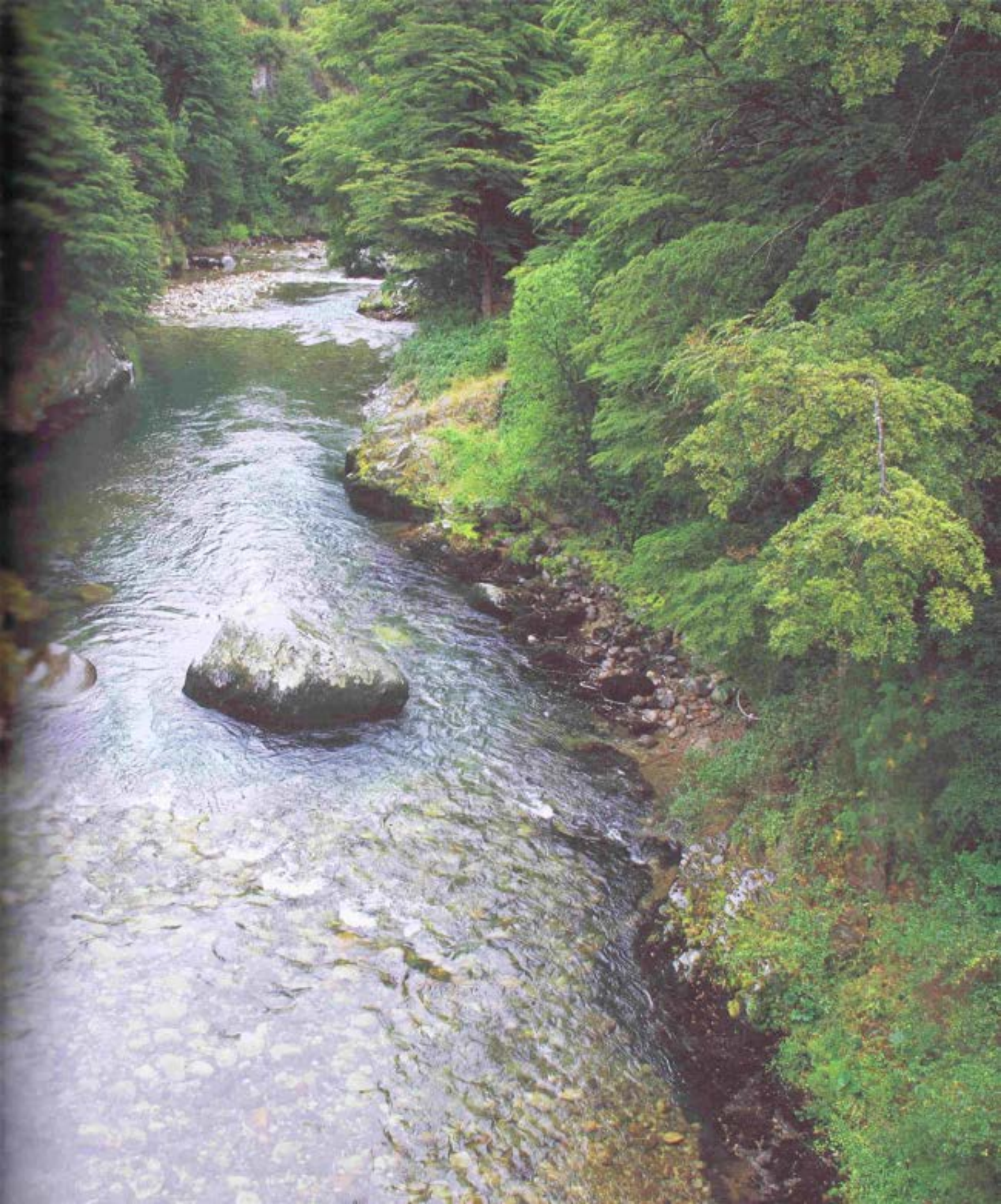


Simply enjoying nature and perhaps catching some fish while spending time with a good friend is perfect for me, and it matters little how many fish we catch or how big they are. I always take along my vise, some hooks and material, just in case I get a chance to tie. I believe that everyone's fishing journey goes through several evolutionary stages. For example, at the age of 25, I was trying to catch as many fish as I could. A few years later, I was catching only those I wanted to catch. Then I only went after the big ones.

Then came a time when I wanted to catch as many different species, and in as many different countries, as I could – as long as it was on a single barbless hook. And so even to this day my fishing continues to evolve.

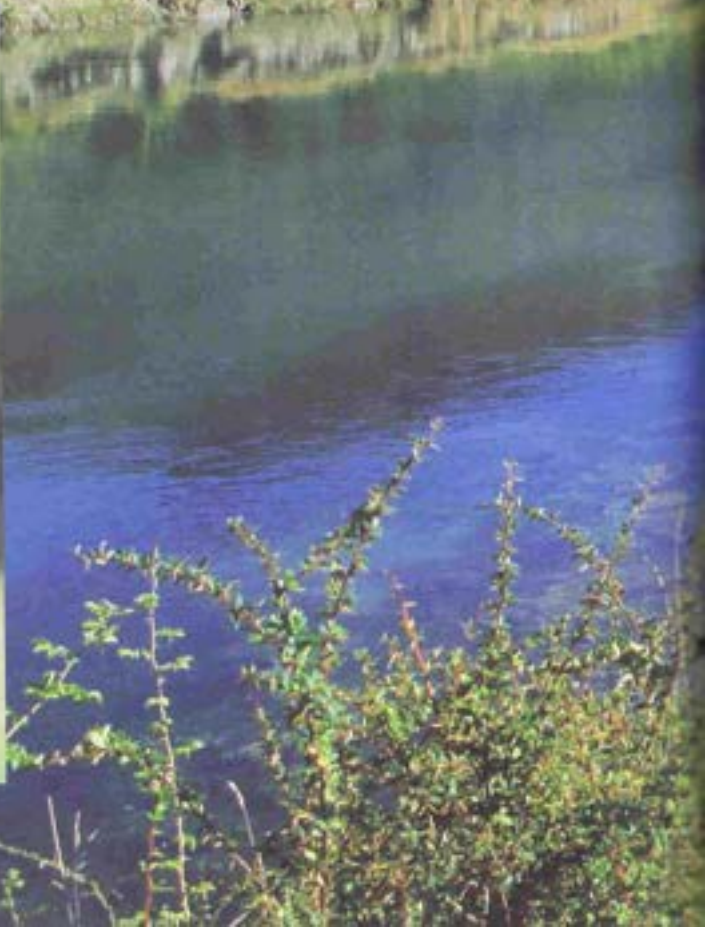
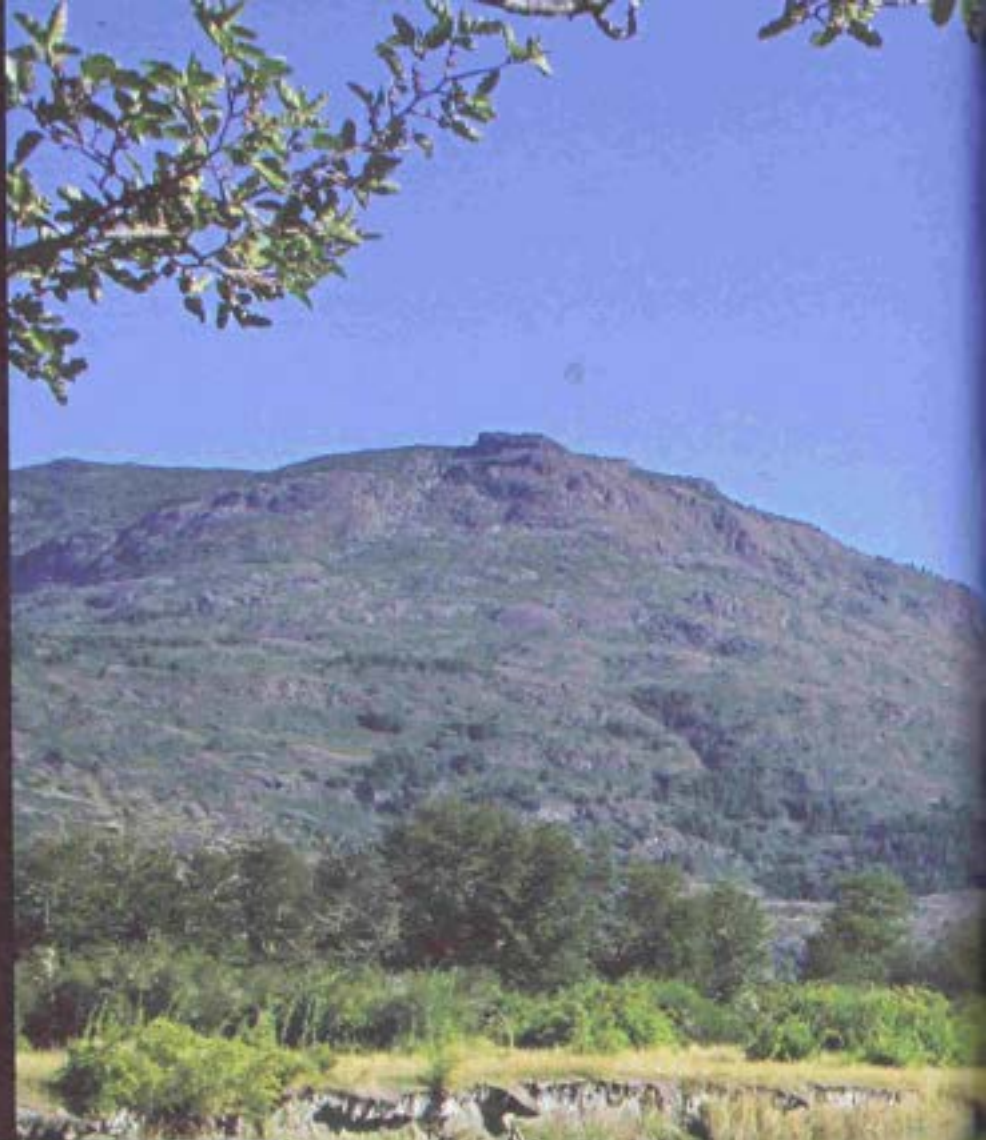


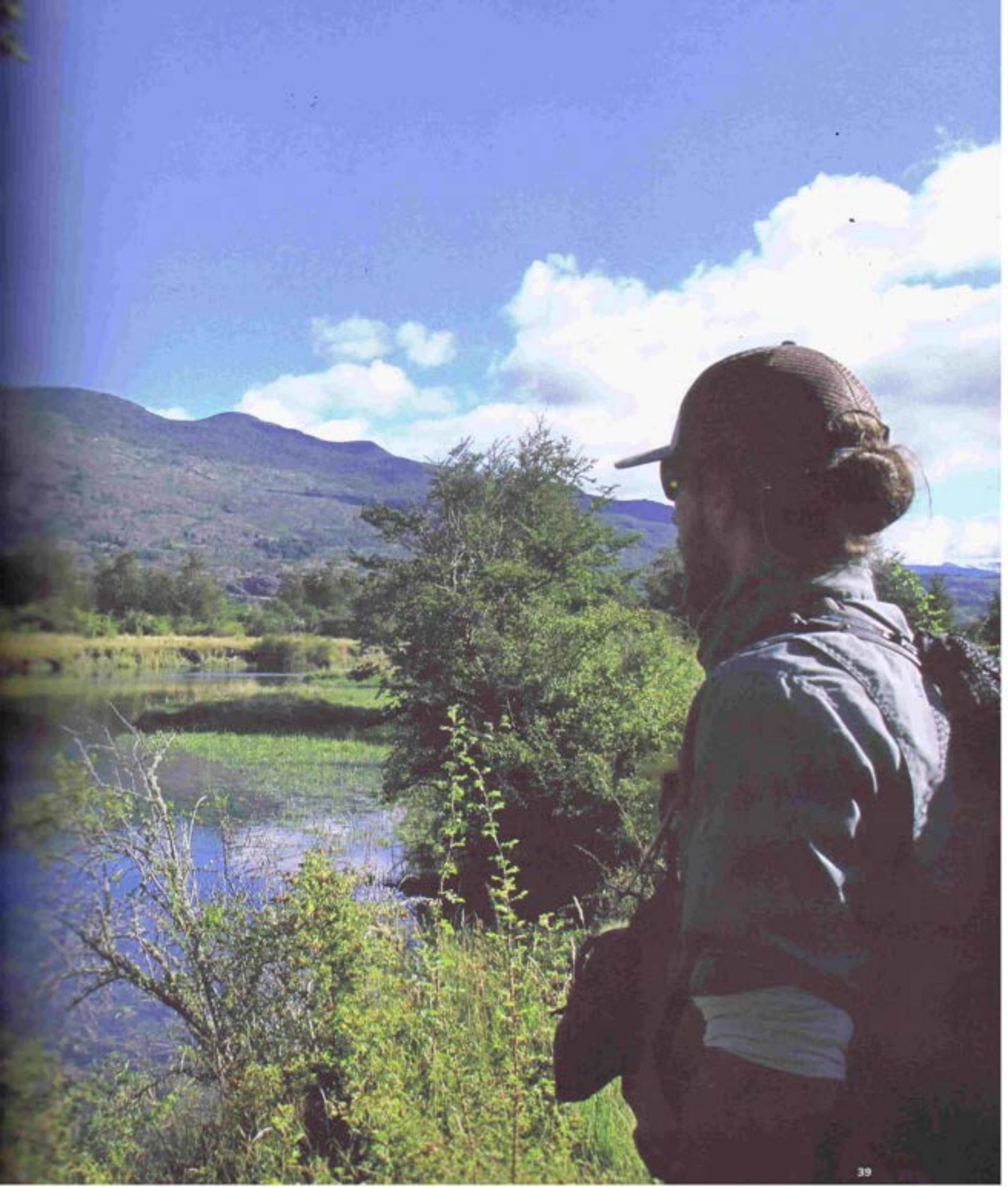




One of those memorable trips was to Chilean Patagonia in January 2020 with my friend Jean-Luc Estublier, who is a good fisherman and fly-tyer, and is well-known in the French competitive fishing circles. We're about the same age, and he understands fishing the way I do. With the assistance of Planète Fly Fishing and French guide François Bietry, we had a fantastic couple of weeks' fishing, experiencing surroundings that were virtually untouched by human activity.

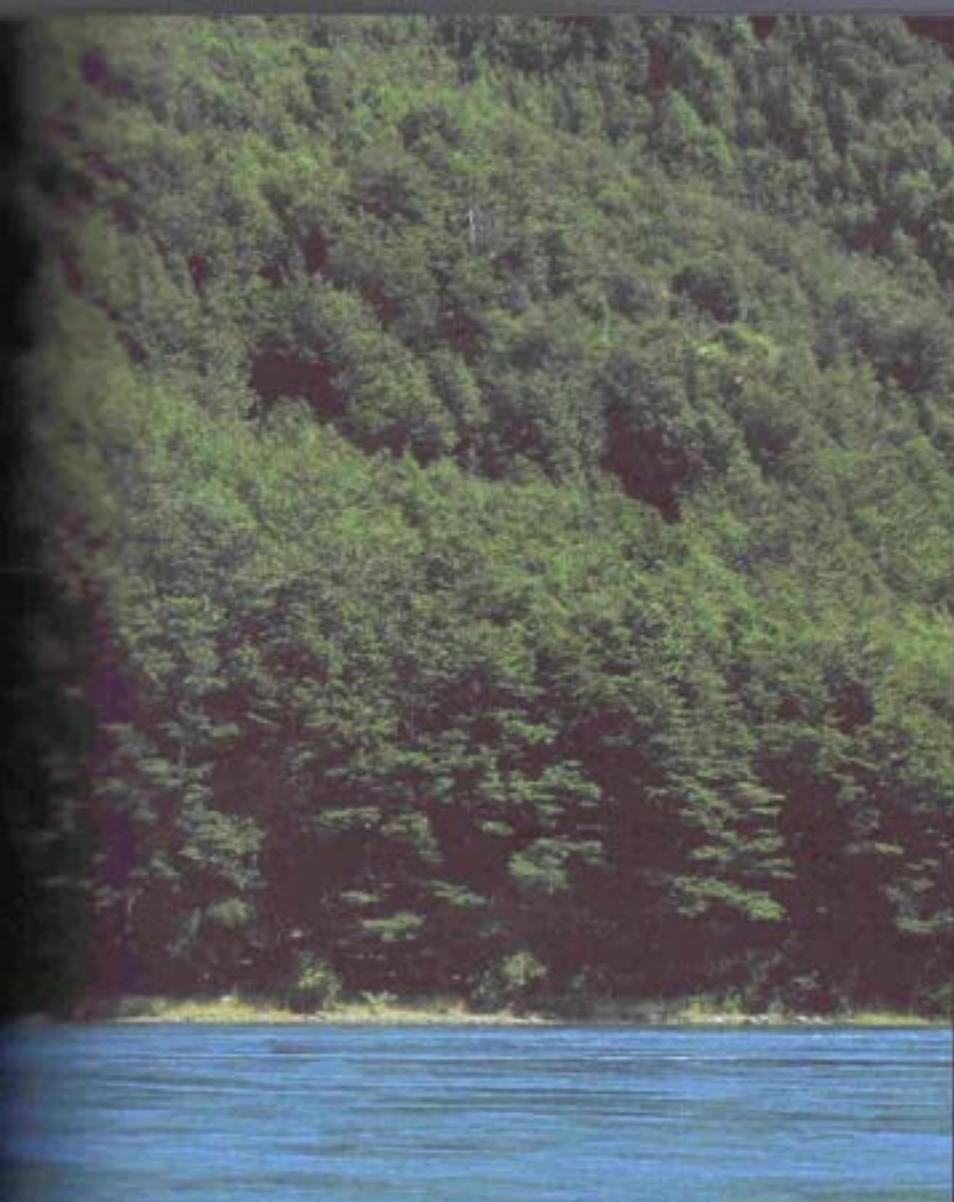
François was the perfect guide, checking the weather constantly and ensuring we made the most of the conditions every day. Without making a big deal, he would provide the right flies when necessary.





**“THE MILLION-SQUARE-KILOMETRE TRACT OF LAND, WITH JUST A FEW SOULS LIVING THERE ALL YEAR ROUND, ENSURES THAT NATURE IN PATAGONIA IS LITERALLY UNTOUCHED.”**



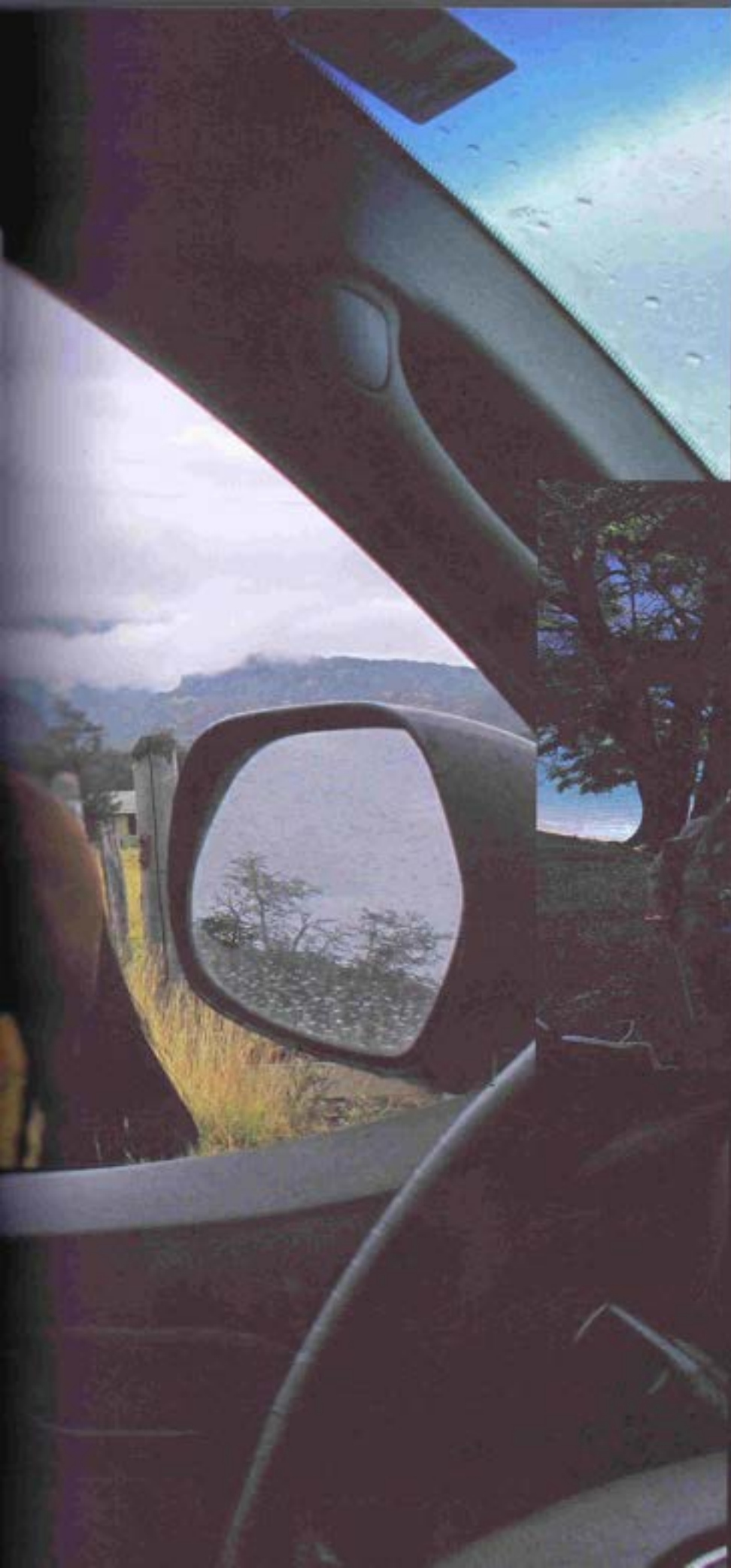


Patagonia is an interesting region on the southernmost tip of South America, shared by Chile and Argentina. The two countries are separated by the Andes mountains, which creates two very different geographical areas. The million-square-kilometre tract of land, with just a few souls living there all year round, ensures that nature in Patagonia is literally untouched.

You can imagine the health of the rivers that run down from the Andes – which is what makes it so renowned for fly fishing.







Since Jean-Luc and I did not have the time for exploring, finding access points and reading about the various regulations, François' help and input was invaluable.

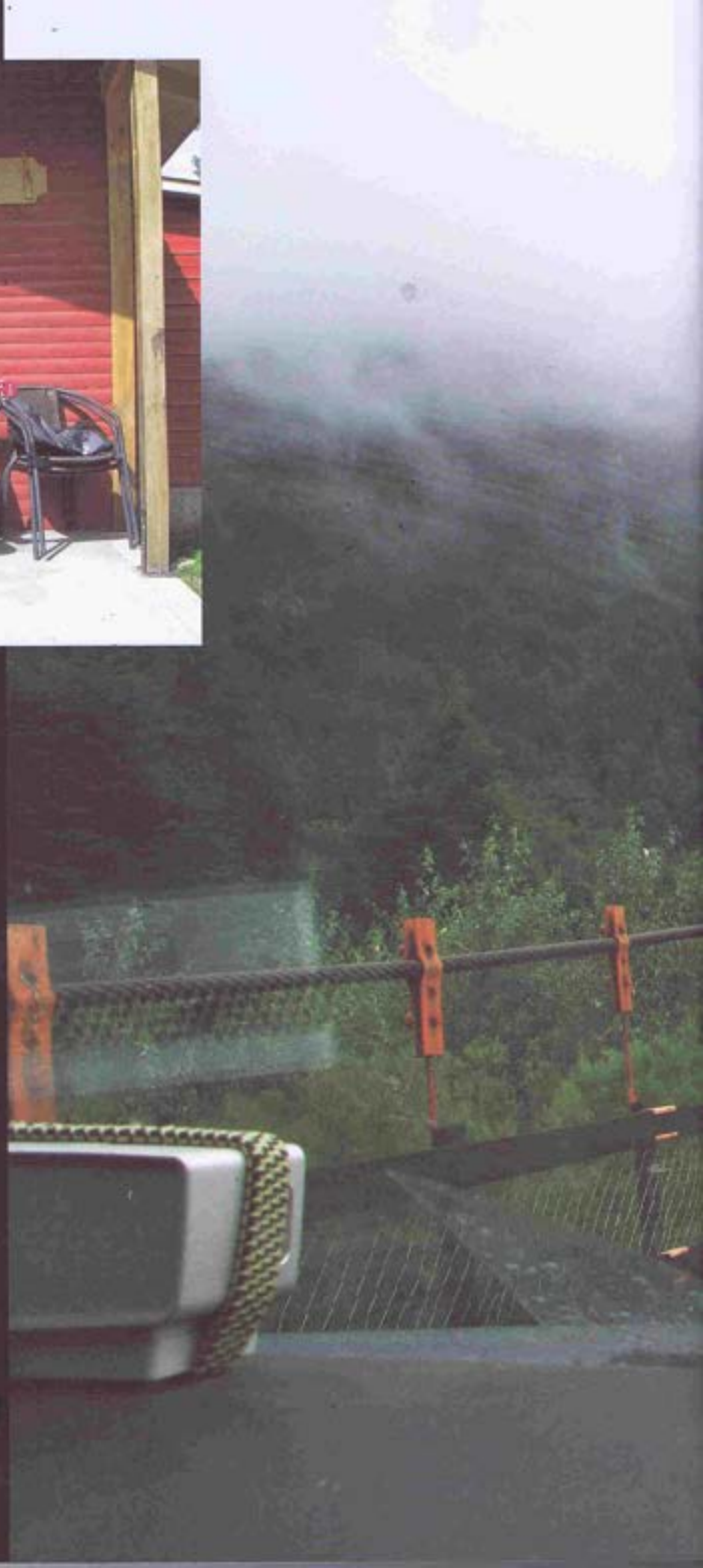


Argentina is known for its sea-run brown trout, as well as the huge rainbows of the famous Jurassic Lake for example. The tough and windy conditions are the result of the geographical location, with the Andes to the west and the coast of the Atlantic Ocean to the east. In between, you'll find the cloudless and vibrantly blue skies over the Pampas, with small hills and valleys characteristic of the landscape. I will let François tell you more.



"Marc is a long-time friend, who took me under his wing when I was just a teenager. He helped me to be recognised as an international guide, and to get a job at Planète Fly Fishing, the agency I now work for. I make a living from teaching fly fishing to kids in southern France, and from guided trips to Chilean Patagonia, Italy, Spain and a couple of other destinations. I had the pleasure to have Marc and Jean-Luc as guests on a 12-day road trip across southern Chile. The idea was to discover the uniqueness of that less famous side of Patagonia, where the valleys tend to be deeper and the hills higher, and where a variety of rivers and lakes – and some less windy places – can be found (one of the reasons I base my trips in Chile).

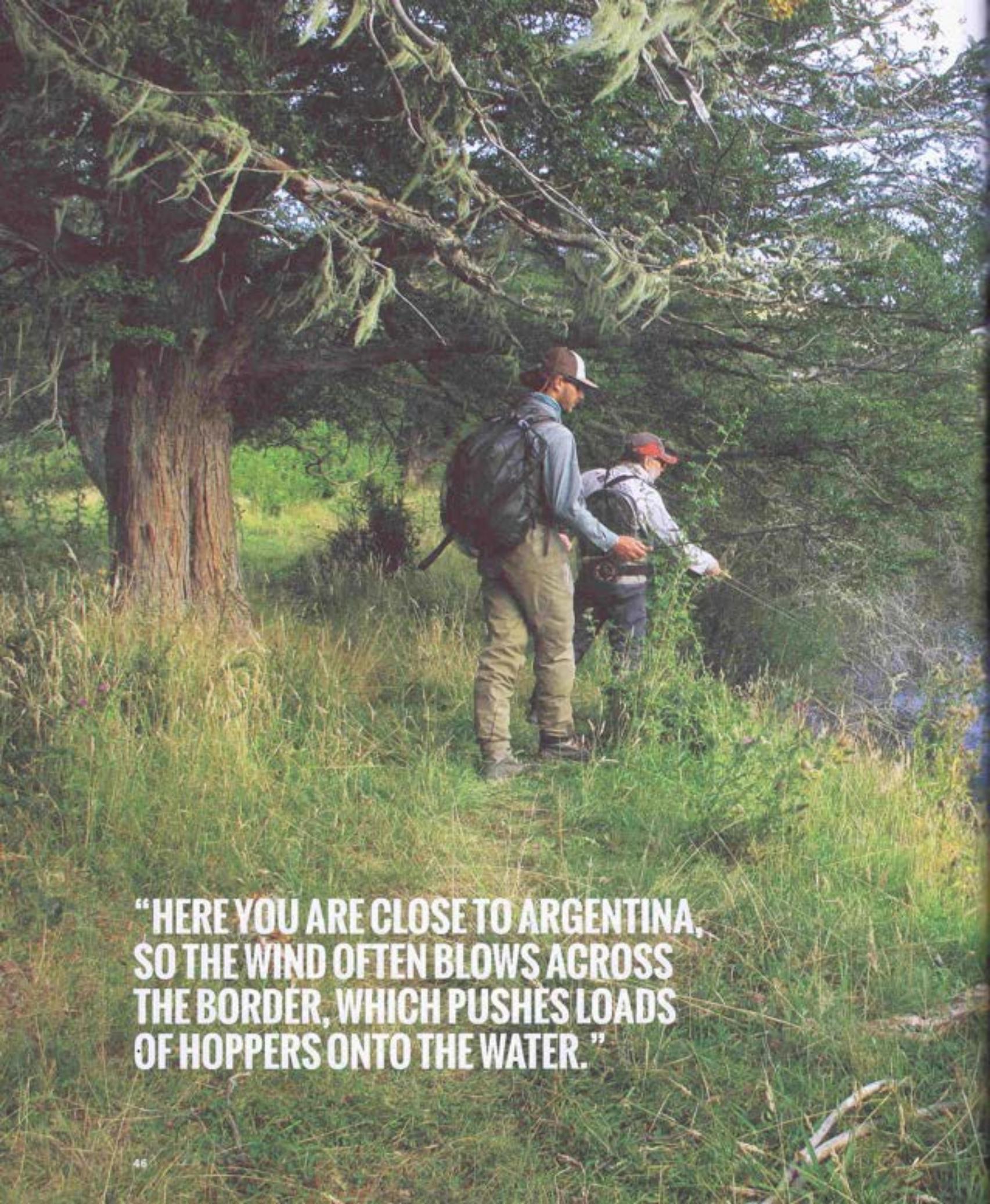
We started the journey at a simple lodge a mere stone's throw from the river. I chose this area because it is the style of fishing you can expect when travelling to Patagonia.





A photograph taken from the driver's perspective inside a car. The car's dashboard and the top of the windshield are visible in the foreground. The windshield is covered in raindrops. In the middle ground, a suspension bridge with a wooden deck and metal railings stretches across a valley. The bridge's towers are painted a bright orange-red. The background consists of steep, forested mountains under a heavy, grey, overcast sky. The overall atmosphere is misty and dramatic.

**“THE IDEA WAS TO DISCOVER  
THE UNIQUENESS OF THAT LESS  
FAMOUS SIDE OF PATAGONIA...”**

A photograph showing two individuals in a natural setting. One person in the foreground wears a dark cap, a light blue long-sleeved shirt, olive green pants, and a large black backpack. The second person is partially visible behind them, wearing a red cap and a patterned shirt. They are standing in a field of tall grass and weeds. A large, mature tree with thick branches and green leaves dominates the left side of the frame. In the background, a body of water is visible through the trees. The overall scene is outdoors and appears to be a natural habitat.

**“HERE YOU ARE CLOSE TO ARGENTINA,  
SO THE WIND OFTEN BLOWS ACROSS  
THE BORDER, WHICH PUSHES LOADS  
OF HOPPERS ONTO THE WATER.”**



A couple of rivers in the upper part of the Aysén Region are typical spring creeks, and this is what we headed for – small streams running through grass fields. Here you are close to Argentina, so the wind often blows across the border, which pushes loads of hoppers onto the water. The brown trout subsequently feed very close to the bank, and a good way to target them is by casting tight along the banks with a big hopper pattern and stripping back in the waves.

**Takes can be ferocious  
and care needs to be  
taken because you never  
know the size of the fish  
you may hook.**

After a few days in the Pampas, we fished another river further north, in a more protected, less windy valley. The river was gin-clear, with fast water lined by weeping willows. The style of fishing is very different here, using longer tippet and smaller flies, and focusing on getting the fly to drift naturally in the fast water.



The stretch that I took Marc and Jean-Luc to crosses the property of an elderly lady by the name of Villanueva. When I bring anglers here, I always stop to ask her permission to fish it – and also to drink a cup of traditional maté. As always, she received us with open arms in her modest wooden house, pushing the chickens off the old sofa before inviting us to sit around the wood-burning stove, where water was already boiling.

We talked about the simple things in life, the chickens and the ducks, the weather and the horses, while sipping her maté, eating traditional homemade bread cooked in lamb fat.



Often, it is these unique experiences that are remembered as vividly as the fishing itself.



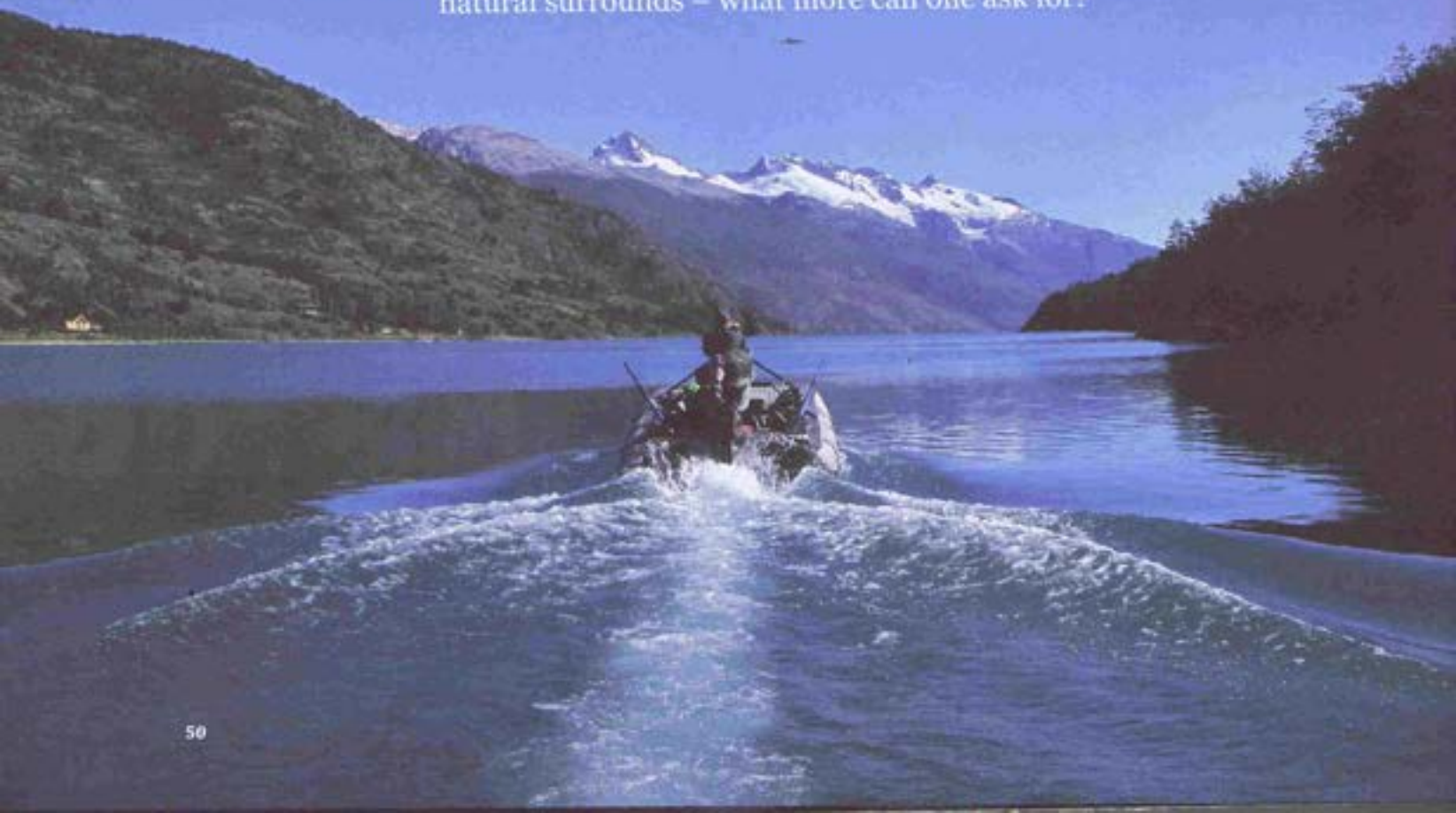
After a few days fishing in the upper Aysén, we ended the first part of our journey with the classic asado – a lamb cooked directly on the fire.

The next day, we drove about 500km south on the mythical Carretera Austral. Our destination was one of the most iconic rivers of southern Chile, the Río Baker, which delivers thousands of cubic metres of crystal-blue water from the Andes to the Pacific Ocean. At first, it's difficult to imagine catching a trout in such a huge mass of water. Then, when you're out fishing on the cataraft, you start noticing the silver backs of rainbow trout appearing. They often swim in the foam line, and a #14 dark caddis or a terrestrial will get those big rainbows to lift their noses. For our final day, I booked the upper stretch of the river so that we could fish the rapids. This may be the most intense style of fishing that you'll find here. It's a one-kilometre stretch of Class V rapids, and the challenge is to cast an articulated streamer and strip it as fast as you can in the white water between the big rocks.



*Above: Jean-Luc (left) and the author enjoying classic asado.*

All in all a trip that provides varied fishing with exquisite and breathtaking natural surrounds – what more can one ask for?





This trip once again brought up the topic of modern man's impact on nature. Much has changed over the decades, including some things that we have no control over, and as a German friend of mine recently wrote, "The only constant in life is change." But we can no longer turn a blind eye and claim ignorance. With the advent of modern technology, it is not difficult to access records from more than 100 years back – they contain hard lessons that should be drawn from in order for us to bring about positive change and avoid the messy mistakes of our past. *We are* responsible for what the future looks like – and by being close to the rivers, us fly anglers can keep an eye on all kinds of developments, and report the transformation we see.

The more we are touched by nature, the stronger our chances of preserving it.

# CDC whisperer



PETITJEAN  
CDC



**M**arc Petitjean is regarded as a pioneer in the development of using CDC as a fly-tying material. His tying style, teachings and innovative approach have cemented him as an icon of the pursuit. His magnificent book, *Petitjean CDC*, is considered revolutionary, and an absolute must-have for those who love tying with the "magic feather". More information can be obtained at [www.petitjean.com](http://www.petitjean.com)

