

THE SPRING STORM BROKE suddenly across the city, its sheets of cold rain sweeping through the streets, concealing the mountains behind the capital. The sullen squalls are a prelude to the coming season, misting restlessly along the Andes, stirring in the eucalyptus windbreaks that shelter the outlying villages and foothill farms. The rivers run milk-colored with melting snow. Several weeks must pass before the trout finish their spawning in the headwaters and fly-fishing season begins. September is a time of late-winter plowing and planting in central Chile, while the wine makers prepare the huge vineyards in the valley outside Santiago.

Chilean weather has mixed and unpredictable moods. Winter rains still clatter through the rattling branches that line the Providencia. Gum-tree leaves scuttle across the paving stones behind the Palacio Moneda, its courtyard still gutted from the bombing that concluded the Allende government in Chile and its somber Renaissance facade heavily scarred with the smallpox of small-arms fire. Brief periods of sunlight coax hundreds of people into the streets, but the bitter *puelche* winds return swiftly, emptying the narrow streets and the stonework benches that line the Plaza de las Armas.

"It's all changed," I thought sadly.

The little bar in the Hotel Carrera was empty, except for the piano player sitting in the corner. The government buildings and offices would still be open for another two hours, and the bartenders were preparing for the late-afternoon crowd. The bar was strangely silent now.

During the months that followed the Allende elections, the moods of the capital were a strange mixture of triumphal excitement and despair, and the dark little bar across the plaza from the Palacio Moneda had been a hotbed of intrigue. There were British agents who had hoped to sell the Allende government Centurion tanks and Harrier jets to replace the outmoded Hawker Hunters based at Los Cerrillos, and a French competitor had the sleek swept-wing Mirage. The Czechs who always took the corner table near the piano were selling Kalashnikov AK-47-G automatic rifles machined at Brno and were competing with a Swiss dealer who wanted to sell his Sturmgewehr SG-542 assault rifles instead. Sometimes we found Soviet officers in civilian clothes mixed with other embassy people in the dark booths along the back. There were usually several Cubans sitting at the bar, sometimes carrying both diplomatic passports and elegant little 9-millimeter Makarov pistols in shoulder holsters.

"It was like a bad Humphrey Bogart picture," I thought while the bartender mixed a pisco sour. "Maybe it's better now."

Later the shopkeepers and office clerks crowded the Providencia buses near the fortresslike cathedral, sheltering their heads against the rain with wet copies of newspapers like *Nacion* and *Mercurio*. Others met with friends in the coffee shops and bars, and some waited for the wintry squalls to pass in the shopping arcades and porticoes that line the

*A package wrapped in Andean mist
with ribbons of rainbow and brown,
its postmark was Santiago*

A River for Christmas

ERNEST SCHWIEBERT

Avenida O'Higgins, the boulevard named for the Irish revolutionary who helped overthrow the Spanish government in 1818. The bitter rains seemed to mute the Chilean people, adding solemn overtones to their typical springtime moods.

The bad weather sometimes lasts for weeks. Its dampness seems to impregnate the massive buildings in the center of the capital, streaking their somber facades with rain. The wet masonry glistens when the squalls finally pass, and it is possible to retrace the firefights of snipers in the narrow streets, reading the intricate tracks of rifle and machine-pistol fire that surround some windows and roof parapets and doorways. It is difficult to imagine those days. I sat remembering the pleasant weeks that I had worked in urban planning with the Frei government, although I had witnessed the turmoil of the political campaign in its final months and the bitter polarities that destroyed many families after the Allende election.

The weather was better before lunch. The boulevards were lined with flowering trees, and the streets and sidewalk cafes were quickly filled. Street photographers with ancient box cameras worked in front of the heroic monuments, while wrinkled flower sellers hawked violets to laughing young couples along the tree-lined Mapocho.

Walled gardens in the fashionable Pedro de Valdivia were bright with scarlet copihue blossoms. The funicular still climbs its steep rails, straining with its loads of school children en route to the shrine at the summit of San Cristobal. The tennis courts



Photo by Randall Kaufmann

were crowded again at the Prince of Wales, where the spectators were sipping drinks on the terrace under half-timbered gables, and there was a pickup match at the Polo Club. The players stood talking and telling jokes on the terrace, while the grooms walked their sweating horses toward the stables. The smoky old Parron still opens its restaurant courtyard in the springtime, the rich cooking smells drifting into its dark-paneled bar. Its patrons still gorge themselves on steaks and roast *cabrito* and seafood under tangled grapevines, and I walked through the bar toward the courtyard.

"Senor!" the old headwaiter said, "you were here in the old days!"

"Si como no!" I nodded, "many times!"

"Springtime is a perfect season to come back," the old headwaiter said as he took me to the small table under the vines.

"Tiempo macanudo," I agreed.

"You've been gone several years." The old man lingered while another waiter prepared the table. "You remember the old days?"

"Those people in Obras Publicas always had me working."

"Springtime is impossible for working," he said.

"You're right!" I laughed.

There were fresh sea-urchin eggs on the menu, and the waiter seemed surprised when I ordered them with a mushroom omelette. The headwaiter found a single bottle of white wine from the vineyards of Cousino Macul and started chilling it in a pewter ice

bucket from the bar. Swallows were busily nesting under the eaves, and several brightly colored finches were quarreling in the vines.

"The wine is still excellent," I thought.

"You will travel south to try the fishing?" the old man asked.

"It starts in a few weeks," I nodded.

The young waiter served the sea-urchin eggs in a chilled broth with finely chopped onions. "You still like our *erizos!*" the old headwaiter commented as he watched me sample the sea-urchin eggs with relish. "Will you try the fishing at Pucon?"

"Lago Ranco," I replied as the massive omelette arrived in its pewter service. "Friends have a small hosteria at Llifén."

"It was not taken away?" he asked.

"There was some trouble in the valley," I nodded, "but my friends were helped by their workers."

"Your friends were lucky," the old headwaiter shook his head. "Many farms and lumber mills and vineyards were stolen—roving bands of guerrillas talked some workers into nailing a Chilean flag on their doors and stealing them in the name of the people."

"Did their owners resist?" I asked.

"Some simply left the country, but many people were killed," the old man nodded. "It was a bad time, and there were political murders in many villages and towns—those were bad years!"

Lunch lasted almost three hours, while I finished the wine and dessert and lingered over coffee. It was still warm, and the sunlight moved in leafy patterns across the courtyard tiles. The old restaurant had been filled at midday, its patrons laughing and light-hearted like the old days, but now its tables were almost empty again. The finches were still quarreling over bread crumbs.

"What were things like in Santiago?" I asked.

"You mean during the Allende years?" The old headwaiter accepted a small glass of wine. "There were many strikes and terrible inflation and shortages—and there was the demonstration the women called the March of the Empty Pots."

"Empty pots?" I asked.

"Women organized a march to protest the food prices and the shortages," the old man explained. "Thousands of housewives marched down the Providencia to confront Allende at the Moneda and stood in the plaza beating on their empty pots!"

"What happened?" I smiled.

"Allende got a little crazy after that," the old headwaiter continued, "and the women beat on their empty pots every night, until you could hear them clanging all over Santiago!"

"That's some story!" I laughed.

CHILE IS JUSTLY FAMOUS for its wines, its exceptional seafood and some of the finest trout fishing in the world. The wines are made in the beautiful country south of Santiago, and the riches of seafood are born in the cold pewter-colored currents that work north along the mountainous coasts, mingling with the warmer waters offshore to produce some of the finest

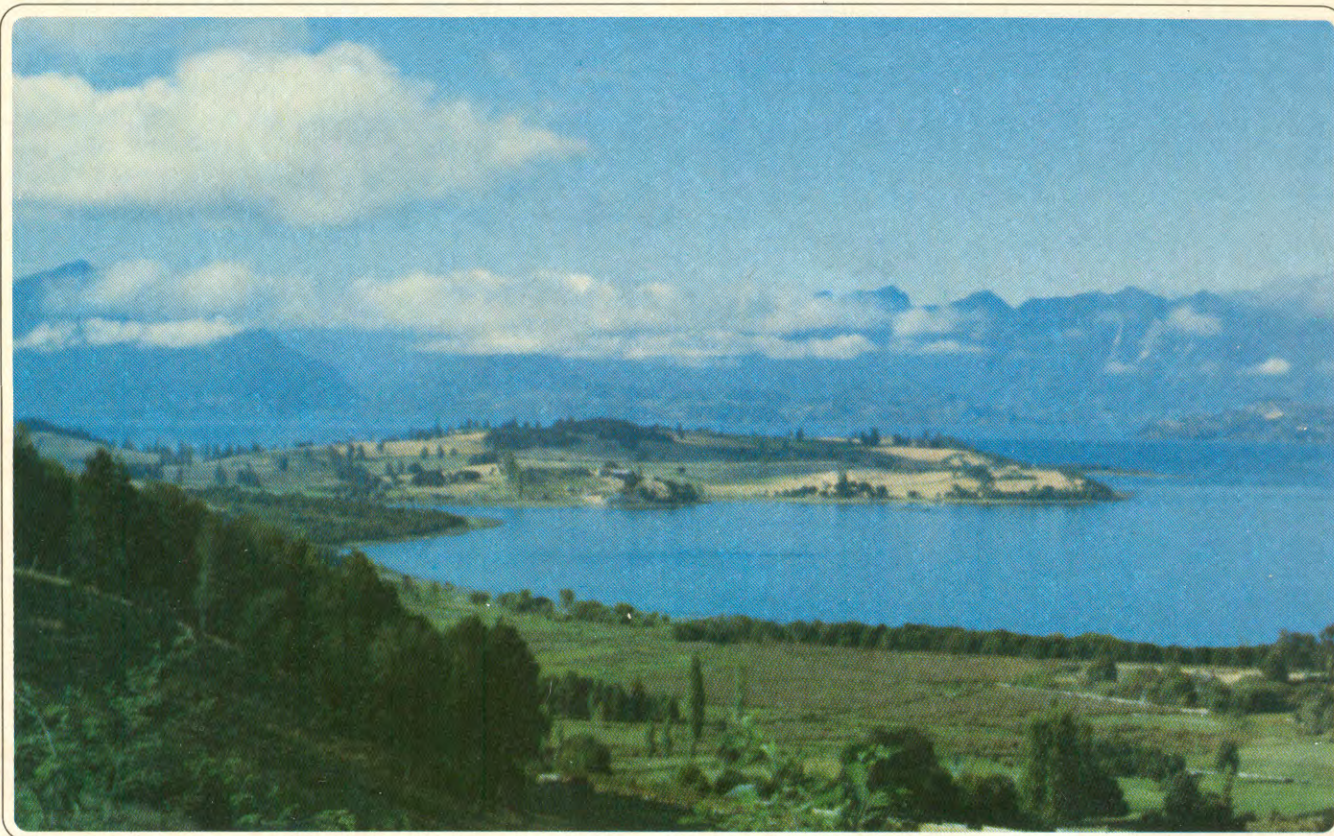
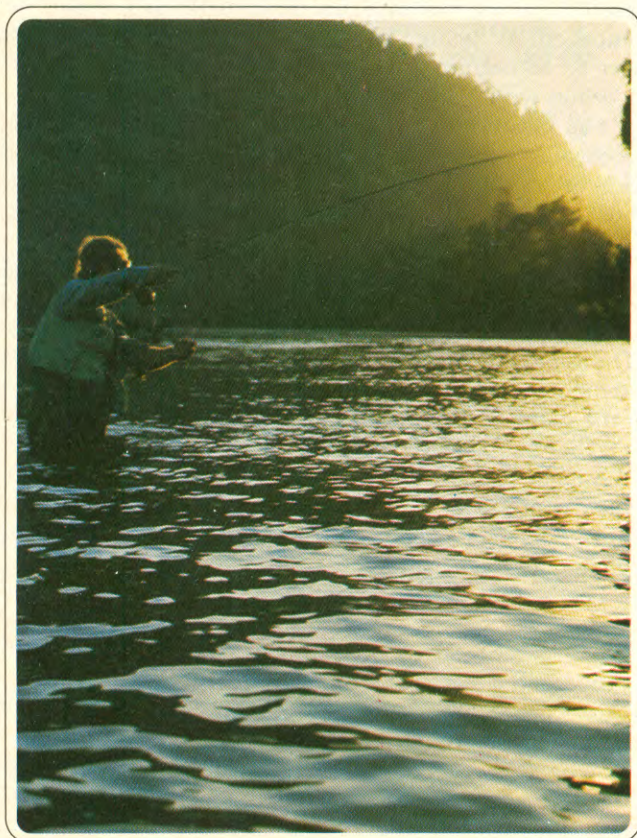


Photo (above) of the Chilean lake country by Kurt Zahner.
Photo at lower left of the Cumilahue River by Adrian Duffloca.



fishing grounds in the world. The best trout fishing lies between Santiago and Puerto Montt, a fishing village more than 500 miles farther south, where the coastline is broken with countless glacier-fed rivers and fjords.

The concierge sent the night porter upstairs for my baggage and fishing equipment and had a taxi waiting in front when I finished settling my accounts. The narrow streets behind the hotel were empty before breakfast, and the driver drove swiftly through the intersections with a rapier flick-flick challenge of his headlights. There was still a light ground fog layered across the vineyards that lie between the city and the airport at Pudahuel, and I paid the driver with a sense of relief.

Our sleek little Hawker-Siddeley climbed out across the city and settled into its course toward Puerto Montt. The patchwork of fields and small farmsteads and vineyards lay between the arid coastal hills and the Andes. The mountains were crowned with white-topped volcanoes like Chillán and the symmetrical Antuco in the spectacular monkey-puzzle forests above Concepcion.

Our flight passed Pucon, the charming foothill town where Alfredo Heusser, the best-known fishing guide and fly dresser in Chile, has outfitted floats on famous rivers like the Tolten, Liucura and the storied Trancura. Heusser still fishes in spite of his 80-odd years, although time has sapped his ability to wade

heavy water, and there are few flies from his feather-littered shop.

Lago Ranco was visible now, its wind-riffled water strangely pale through the gleaming blur of the propeller, with its outlet clearly visible under our wing. The somber Cordillera Nevada towered beyond the lake, and the snow-capped Puyehue volcano was still farther south. Osorno was ahead on the sprawling river that drains the fjordlike Lago Rupanco, and its volcano rose in the distance near beautiful Todos los Santos and Petrohue. Our plane finally started its approach into Puerto Montt, its shadow flashing across the sprawling expanse of Lago Llanquihue.

Alberto Schirmer was waiting while we taxied in toward the airport terminal, and we started toward Puerto Montt when we finally collected my baggage and fishing gear. "We'll have lunch at Pelluco," he explained, "and then we'll drive over to Petrohue."

"How's the fishing?" I asked.

"It's been pretty good," Schirmer replied. "There's a new logging road along the river as far as the estuary."

"It's possible to float the lower river now?" I asked.

"That's right," Schirmer smiled.

It was raining when we finally drove north toward Puerto Varas, circling the still Llanquihue Lake along the Bahía de Volcan, but the Calbuco and Osorno volcanoes were lost in the overcast. The road winds between both mountains, past the spectacular Cascadas de Petrohue, and we arrived at the Hosteria Petrohue at nightfall.

THE RAIN LASTED through the night, drumming fiercely on the split-shingle roof of the hotel, but the lake was perfectly still at breakfast. Lago Todos los Santos is perhaps the most beautiful lake in the world and is the watery leg in the journey between Puerto Montt and Llao-Llao in Argentina. Its reedy lagoons shelter rare black-headed swans, and dense thickets of tree ferns and bamboo shroud its rocky beaches. Its turquoise depths mirror volcanoes like Calbuco and Puntagudo and Osorno in Chile, and the broken snow-covered summits of El Tronador rise on the Argentina-Chile boundary.

We loaded a truck with two boats, and our young Chilean boatmen scrambled up with them. The mist was burning off the mountains that enclose the gathering currents at the outlet. The launch from Peulla arrived with the steady chunk-chunk of its engine, and the happy clamor of the schoolyard drifted through the trees.

Alberto Schirmer clambered into the driver's seat. "It looks like a good morning to float the Petrohue," Schirmer said.

"Let's get going!" I nodded.

Beyond the wild cascades of the Petrohue, which are completely impassible to boats however skillfully handled, we wound down a narrow woodcutter's trace toward the river. The bamboo thickets still glistened with the rain. The boatmen helped unload

the boats, and we wrestled them down to the rocky shallows.

"Lucho," my boatman introduced himself, and we shook hands. "We will fish the river together today!"

Ragged clouds still drifted in the coihue thickets and ulmo trees where we pushed off into the current. Lucho pulled skillfully at his oars, running the swift chutes between the fallen trees and back rowing to hold the boat against the current while I worked several casts in a better-looking reach of water.

"It's a beautiful river," I thought.

The first half mile was a strong flow broken with tangled logs and trees and dark current scours that held greedy schools of 12- to 16-inch rainbows. We fished carefully during the morning's float, casting to the turquoise-colored runs under the trailing vines and pale bamboo, but the fish were stubborn and uncooperative. Twice we rolled big brown trout under the swinging bucktail, but both fish were sluggish and missed the fly. Several times we worked good-looking holes without moving anything, and the young *botero* shook his head unhappily. The overcast was breaking up slowly, and I shed my rainjacket just before lunch. We took several small rainbows in the long riffle above the sheltered meadow where we stopped for lunch, and the river felt unusually cold against my waders. Lucho killed a half dozen of these trout for his cookfire, and I rummaged through my tackle bag to find my stream thermometer.

"Forty-six!" I thought. "It's still too cold!"

Alberto Schirmer and his boatman arrived soon afterwards, and Lucho already had his cookfire burning. Its smoke drifted downstream on the wind. The meadow was enclosed by a stand of copper beeches and thickets of tree ferns and coihue.

"Bad fishing!" Schirmer said.

"But it's a beautiful river!" I accepted a wine glass from Lucho. "The fish will cooperate when it gets warmer!"

"Perhaps you're right," he nodded.

"How were things during the Allende years?" I asked.

"Pretty difficult everywhere," Schirmer shook his head. "There were no travelers coming to our hosteria after his election."

"Nobody came to fish at Petrohue?" I asked.

"Nobody came for anything!" Schirmer laughed bitterly. "We had to sell most of the boats and motors and let the boatmen go!"

"What happened to them?" I interrupted.

"Many simply drifted away," Schirmer continued. "Lucho and his brother live across the lake—the others had no reason to stay."

"But you kept your property?" I asked.

"We were lucky," Schirmer observed sadly. "Other hotelkeepers in Chile were not so lucky with their property."

"Was there lots of trouble in the lumber camps and farms?"

"There were some bad times," he replied gravely. "Some farmers were killed defending their property,

and an overseer in a lumber camp on the Chamiza was murdered by guerrillas."

"But Allende was already elected!" I interjected. "Why were there guerrillas roaming through the countryside?"

"That's an interesting question," he smiled.

"Were there many guerrillas?"

"Thousands!" Schirmer exclaimed angrily. "Some were taking our property while others trained in the hills!"

"Did the army get most of them?"

"Between the army and the national police," Schirmer nodded grimly, "most of the guerrillas were caught—hundreds were killed or captured in a mountain stronghold behind Pangipulli!"

"But why were they there?"

"Allende had many bedfellows whose politics were more radical than his philosophies," Schirmer observed dryly. "Perhaps some of them were using his popularity to win the elections first."

"And then take over?" I asked.

"Like Masaryk and Benes in Czechoslovakia," he nodded. "Perhaps like Kerenski in the October Revolution in 1917."

"Alberto!" I smiled. "You remember something about history!"

"Chileans have just taken a bath in history!" Schirmer observed wryly. "We learned more about politics than we wanted!"

The big brown slashed wildly across the surface, its tail throwing water on the wind . . .

The weather improved steadily during a leisurely lunch, and our boatmen stripped the stalk of a giant elephant-ear fern for dessert while we boiled the coffee. Finally we loaded the boats and pushed off again. The river was even more beautiful downstream, and the Osorno volcano towered behind us, its perfect snow-covered cone reflected in the current. The Petrohue eddied through dark-blue channels under the cliffs and flowering vines, with immense fallen trees breaking the flow.

The fishing went better in the afternoon. The first deep run under the overhanging cliffs produced a fat three-pound brown, and we picked up several rainbows in the pockets. Some fish were rising softly in a long, smoothly flowing flat, and Lucho muted his oars to stalk them in the still current. We could see every stone on the pale, chalk-colored bottom, but the rising trout were invisible. The first fish was working above a jackstraw tangle of coihue trees, and it refused my Muddler when I worked it through. It ignored a second cast, still holding its steady feeding rhythm above its deadfall sanctuary.

"He's selective!" I thought.

The riseforms were so gentle that it looked like a fish feeding on spent mayflies. Sporadic hatches of

mayflies had been coming all morning, although the fish had ignored them.

"Maybe there was a mating swarm," I thought suddenly.

There was a single box of dry flies in my tackle, and several polywing spinners were in one compartment. The rusty-brown spinner seemed like the best solution to matching the hatch, and our log-jam trout took it on the first float. Lucho sat grinning toothily, while I played the fish, and explained that he had never seen the dry-fly method before. We took six more trout in the flat, including an 18-inch brown that was rising in a tight puzzle of deadfalls.

Our best fish came later on a bucktail. It was lying behind a huge boulder, and it took my swinging Muddler savagely. Lucho worked hard, pulling fiercely at his oars to hold our position in the current, and his shrill laughter echoed from the cliffs.

The big brown slashed wildly across the surface, its tail throwing water on the wind, and settled into a sullen fight that took us 50 yards downstream. The fish weighed four pounds, and Lucho grinned when I released it.

"Muy bien!" Lucho said.

It was a perfect conclusion to the day's float, and we drifted lazily down the last mile to the waiting truck. "It was a good day's sport," I said. "Too bad we have to leave Petrohue tomorrow."

"The fishing is good at Lago Ranco, too," Alberto smiled.

DURING THE TRIP NORTH to Llifen, we sat watching the beautiful foothill country and the snow-capped Andes in the distance. Memories of other seasons on the rivers of Chile passed through my mind as our truck rumbled toward the mountains beyond Paillaco.

Lago Ranco lay ahead now, its sprawling expanse glittering beyond the wild-flower meadows and rolling hills. The mountains were almost black with line squalls on the horizon. There are several islands in the lake, and some like Gualpi still have primitive Araucan settlements. Ranco receives the flowages of almost a dozen rivers, and its principal headwaters are the swift streams that drain the impenetrable rain forests above Lago Maihue.

Maihue itself is drained through a narrow lagoon that spills into the rapids of the strong Calcurrupe, which plunges wildly against the towering cliffs downstream. The Calcurrupe is a forbidding river in its 10-mile odyssey between Maihue and its outlet at Lago Ranco. Its currents are much too formidable for wading, and it is primarily fished on day floats with skilled swift-water boatmen. The Calcurrupe is a little overwhelming to most fly fishermen, particularly below its junction with the Cumilahue a mile downstream from Lago Maihue.

The pastoral little Cumilahue is warmer than its sister rivers in the region, and it serves as the principal spawning tributary for both lakes and the Calcurrupe itself. Several other rivers flow directly into Lago Ranco. The Quiman and Caunahue drain the rain forests that surround the Chohueno

volcano. The Furaleufu is a strange little brown-trout river of still turquoise-colored lagoons. Ñilahue is a larger river that drains a basin of volcanic barrens and postpile cliffs that enclose a waterfall gorge of bamboo and nalca thickets. Riniñahue is a classic little river that fishes well in springtime, when it is filled with spawning rainbows that migrate upstream to its waterfall pool from Lago Ranco.

The Ñilahue is a superb river, but its sister Cumilahue is perhaps the best fishery in the region. Its relatively short flowage drains a rich little valley surrounded by dense forests of coihue and ulmo, and the hot springs in its headwaters multiply its fertility. Unlike several other rivers near Llifen that are slightly roiled with volcanic ash or flow milky with glacier silts, the crystalline Cumilahue tumbles through a rich valley of dairy farms and orchards.

We wound down the mountain, crossed the gorge of the Caunahue on its trusswork bridge and circled the lake into Llifen. Roderick Haig-Brown traveled to Lago Ranco almost 30 years ago, and it has changed little since he described the village in *Fisherman's Winter*, his classic book about trout fishing in Chile and Argentina. Haig-Brown would still recognize its simple houses and inns and the headquarters of the Chilean *carabineros* above the lake, but the simple clapboard hotel burned several winters ago. Haig-Brown wrote about Llifen in *Fisherman's Winter* with these observations in 1954:

I first learned about Llifen and Lago Maihue and its Calcurrupe country from my friend Edouard de Rothschild when we were fishing a swollen British Columbia stream in May. When he heard that I was going to Chile, Edouard wrote to urge me again not to miss the place. He was quite right. Although my time there was far too brief, I believe that Llifen could well prove the best fishing center anywhere in Chile.

Haig-Brown died in the late fall of 1977, but little has changed at Llifen since his brief visit, and the perspective of 20-odd years has proved his judgment that Llifen has the best fishing in Chile. However, there was strangely no mention of the Ñilahue and Cumilahue in *Fisherman's Winter*. The Ñilahue lies across the Calcurrupe in a valley farther south, and the Cumilahue is unobtrusive at the bridge to Lago Maihue. His party must have crossed it for the float trip he described, but his Chilean hosts were probably preoccupied with the better-known fishing in the more spectacular Calcurrupe.

We reached the charming Hosteria Cumilahue in late afternoon, turning in through the timber gate and its lane of flowering trees. Adrian Dufflocq was in the garden helping another guest with his fly-casting, and we shook hands warmly after several years.

"Ernesto!" Dufflocq laughed. "You're back in Chile!"

Dufflocq is the son of a famous Chilean teacher, who authored the best-known reader in Chilean

schools. His ancestors were Basques in the foothills of the Pyrenees, and his character still echoes the humor and fierce pride and independence of that mountain people.

The rivers and rain forests and lakes of the Chilean mountains have fascinated Dufflocq since boyhood, and trout fishing is an obvious extension of his Basque blood and its passion for mountain country. His apprenticeship in fishing and fly-dressing and guiding parties on the rivers was served under the storied Alfredo Heusser at Pucon. Those lessons were mastered well, and now that his master is well past 80, Dufflocq is the finest trout fisherman in Chile.

"How's the fishing?" I asked.

"It's been excellent," Dufflocq answered, "but it's changed since the last trip you made to our country."

"What's happened to change things?" I asked.

"We've not had many fishermen from other countries since the Allende elections," Dufflocq explained. "Mostly embassy people."

"You've had less fishing pressure?"

"We've had other changes, too," Dufflocq continued. "Fly-only fishing has helped in some ways, but we had terrible floods that changed the streams and tore out bridges and hurt the fishing."

"You had the best fly hatches in Chile," I interrupted. "Did the floods hurt the fly life in the Cumilahue?"

"The floods hurt the fly hatches and the fish," he said.

"What happened to the fish?" I asked.

"The flood water decimated the small rainbows that were spawned in the Cumilahue," Dufflocq explained, "and hurt the browns, too."

"It held mostly browns before," I said.

"They're coming back," Dufflocq agreed. "It was mostly browns mixed with a few good resident rainbows—but we still get some big silvery browns and rainbows migrating from the Calcurrupe."

"What's the fishing like now?"

"We're getting a few pretty good rainbows," Dufflocq grinned. "We've taken some six- to eight-pound fish."

"Let's try them!" I said excitedly.

We walked up through the wild-flower meadows above the farmstead to the beautiful pool against the mountain. There are marvelous forests in the Cumilahue country, dense with copper beeches and flowering ulmo mixed with the yellow bell-shaped blossoms of the pelu trees. It is not difficult to understand Darwin's fascination with these latitudes and the role their exotic flora and wildlife played in the evolution of his philosophy. Birdlife was everywhere along the river. There were gaudy scarlet-breasted flickers and parakeets and Chilean lapwings. Strange mockingbirds trilled and cried in the tree ferns. Flocks of black *bandurrias* protested shrilly as we passed. Magellan woodpeckers hammered on a giant coihue deadfall, their bright-crested heads looking like our rare pileated species. Patagonian kingfishers and dippers were foraging in the riffles, and I watched a torrent duck slip

from a boulder and swim swiftly upstream under the surface.

"Correntino!" I pointed.

"They're fantastic little birds!" Dufflocq nodded. "They eat some trout, but I love them too much to care!"

The path leads down through the cherry orchard at Bernardino's farm and disappears into the bamboo thickets that conceal the pool. It is still a beautiful reach of water, tumbling down from the dark whirl-pool under the polished cliffs and flowing smooth under the trees, but the pool had changed. The steep mountain is still an exotic current behind its glassy flow, but the sheltering pelu and deadfalls that I remembered had been stripped clean in the recent floods.

"What should I fish?" I asked.

Dufflocq suggested a small Muddler, and I clinch-knotted the fly to my tippet, feeling the old shivers of anticipation. The throat of the pool flows tight against a current-polished outcropping, and I

There was an immense heart-stopping swirl under the tree . . .

dropped my Muddler tight against the trailing vines. I fished through the holding water patiently, working out each fly swing along the bottom before taking a step downstream and casting again.

We fished through the deep run without moving a fish. "Your pool hasn't fished well since the flooding," Dufflocq called. "But fish the Silver Puye through the tail — you might find a good rainbow!"

The tail-shallows looked too thin to shelter a big trout, with every stone clearly visible in the smooth current. There was a small tree branch throbbing in the flow, and I dropped the sparsely dressed bucktail just above, teasing it under the snags. It looked like a good holding lie, and I tried it again, casting a few inches farther to work the fly well back under the drowned branches.

There was an immense heart-stopping swirl under the tree, and a big rainbow followed the fly swing, its bulk pushing a wake in the shallows. Waves undulated down the pool as the trout returned to its lie under the branches, and I decided to rest the fish.

Several minutes later I repeated the cast, and when the rainbow turned to follow the fly swing, I slowed it enticingly. The spreading wake dissolved into an immense swirl, and when I felt its weight seize the little bucktail, I struck hard. The shallows exploded into a wild cartwheeling jump as the rainbow bored downstream. It stopped momentarily and exploded again, showering spray in the evening light when it tail-walked back upstream toward its sheltering tree. Several times I forced it back away from the drowned branches, while the straining nylon ticked like a guitar string on the snags, but somehow the

big rainbow came free. Finally it circled stubbornly just out of reach, and when it surrendered, it thrashed wildly in the net.

"Four kilos!" Dufflocq guessed.

Eight pounds seemed about right, and I gently removed the fly. "Good rainbow!" I yelled back. "No puedo matar esta trucha!"

We released the silvery henfish and stood watching while it gathered its strength in the smooth current downstream. The big rainbow worked its gill covers patiently for several minutes before it suddenly turned and drifted out into the gathering darkness.

"It's still some river!" I grinned happily.

There was a fire roaring in the hearth pit when we reached the farmhouse, and Patricia Dufflocq was lighting the candles on the dining table. The cooks came in with the whiskey tray, and Dufflocq poured us both a strong drink in celebration.

Dinner began with tiny shrimps in a white-wine sauce, followed by a crown rack of roast lamb. Dufflocq disappeared briefly into the kitchen and returned with a dust-covered bottle of wine.

"Ernesto!" he began ceremoniously. "You remember the last time you came to fish with us on the Cumilahue?"

"Como no!" I smiled. "It was a perfect trip!"

"Well," Dufflocq continued, "the last night you were here, you signed a bottle of wine — and we saved it until you returned."

"I'd forgotten!" I said. "It's been too long!"

Dufflocq carefully opened the bottle of perfectly aged Antiguas Reservas and poured the wine with a skilled rolling of his wrist. "Welcome home!" he said warmly. "It has been too long!"

"Mil gracias!" It was exquisite.

WE FISHED THE CUMILAHUE HAPPILY for several days, taking at least one good fish each time we tried the river. There were fine rainbows in every piece of holding water, fish that had migrated up the river in late winter and had fully recovered from spawning. Several times I hooked fish that I thought were big browns from their sullen fights, but each time I lost them when the fly pulled out.

"There's nothing wrong with big rainbows!" I thought happily each time I held a good trout in the meshes of my net.

"Find some good browns today?" Dufflocq asked at dinner.

"Not today," I replied.

"Well," Dufflocq laughed wryly, "you know all about brown-trout fishing anywhere you find them — they're never easy to find!"

"I know how they are!" I admitted. "Too well!"

Our last afternoon I decided to fish the long still-water below the trestle bridge. It lies in the meadows of the Yugoslavian farmstead a few miles upstream, where the rain forests and steep-walled valley screened the higher snowfields in the Andes beyond. The farmstead and its split-rail fences and outbuildings were covered with moss from the winter rains that shroud the Cumilahue country.

The stillwater flowed for a hundred yards under a high wall of volcanic soils that looked like rich layers in a gargantuan chocolate cake. Its best-looking pocket lay under a dense cluster of mimbres, and there were several good-looking eddies along the high bank. Downstream there was a deep hole below two boulders, and there was a deep run under the trees in the tail-shallows. It was a stretch where I had taken a six-pound brown several years earlier.

There was a dark-olive-hackled Pancora in my fly book, the palmer-tied wet fly carried by most Chilean fishermen. It was the creation of old Alfredo Heusser, the master fly tier from Pucon, during his early years in Chile. The fly dropped just above the overhanging mimbres, where the current shelved off against their roots, and I let it sink before starting its teasing rhythm with the rod.

The fly had almost circled past the mimbres, pulsing from the shelving depths of the run, when a strong strike boiled to the surface and my reel started shrilly as the fish hooked itself.

"Rainbow!" I thought wryly and smiled.

The fish measured 24 inches, and it showered my sunglasses with water when I released it. I wiped the lenses carefully, watching a large mayfly hatch in the smooth currents, and fished down the mimbres without moving another trout.

Farther down the stillwater bend, there was another heavy swirl behind my swinging fly. The fish took the third cast and quickly stripped the reel into its backing, jumping like a tumbler down the shallows. Twice I worked the big rainbow back, and twice it frog-walked into the backing again. Finally I beached the trout, a fine cockfish slightly larger than the rainbow from the run under the mimbres, with a frayed caudal fin that betrayed its recent spawning. It had recovered well from its spawning rites, gorging itself on a rich diet of Chilean crayfish, and it bolted back into deep water.

About 30 yards farther I hooked and lost another big rainbow below the boulders. It took the fly hard, hopscotched wildly across the pool and almost dry-docked itself when the fly came free.

"The river is loaded with big rainbows!" I thought happily.

Downstream under the trees, another large fish porpoised and took a fluttering mayfly. Several flies had hatched while I fished through the stillwater, and I studied the current until I could capture one. It was surprisingly like a yellowish *Ephemera* hatch common in the Catskill country, and I changed to a floating double taper with a finer leader before searching my fly boxes for an imitation. There was one likely pattern in the Wheatley.

The cast settled, the fly cocked nicely above the rising fish and the smooth current bulged as the trout drifted back. It took the fly softly and shook itself when it felt me tighten. "Big brown!" I gasped as it thrashed angrily. "Big brown!"

The fish shook its head, simply holding in the current before it probed deep under the bank in the tail-shallows, searching out roots and snags. It

bored upstream past my legs and scraped the tippet over a boulder, and I felt the nylon grate and slip free. The tippet held, and the fish suddenly bolted downstream, forcing me to stumble down the riffles in the darkness. It fought doggedly until it forced the fight down toward the cane weaver's hut, and I netted it gratefully in the shallows. The trout measured 26 inches, and it flopped sullenly in the meshes, purplish and bright orange below its richly spotted sides. The fish lay gasping in the shallows, and when my breathing settled, it left a taste of old pennies in my throat. The big trout finally regained its strength and drifted back into the darkening pool.

"Hasta pronto!" I whispered hopefully.

THE LIGHTS WERE WELCOME across the meadows when I finally reached the farmhouse, and Dufflocq was preparing to broil the meat in the fireplace when I returned for supper. Patricia served a rich lentil soup with freshly baked bread, and when the meat was finally ready Dufflocq poured several glasses of Antiguas Reservas.

Later that night the ragged clouds gathered across the foothills, until the overcast drifted in thick layers against the Andes, filling the steep-walled little valley. It started raining just before supper, wetting the streets of the village and drumming gently on the farmhouse roof. The sullen *puelche* wind rose steadily in the darkness, driving the bad weather deeper into the mountains. Whitcaps rose on the lake and crashed across the sandbars in the mouth of the river.

Supper was finished and our empty coffee cups were scattered along the hearthstones. The wind grew stronger in the darkness, sighing past the eaves of the farmhouse, and the fire sputtered in a back draft as the wind licked past the chimney. Our candles were burning low, and my trip was finished. It was time to travel back to Santiago in the morning, and we sat talking and remembering other seasons and savoring our cognac while the fire settled and died.

"You always leave too soon!" Dufflocq and his wife protested. "Our best fly hatches are coming in a few days!"

"When do the fly hatches come?" I shook my head sadly.

"Christmas!" Patricia laughed.

The dying fire flared again briefly when she worked the embers together with the poker, and I stared into the glowing coals, swirling the fine Chilean brandy in my glass. "Christmas is still several weeks away," I sighed unhappily and added another small log. "Fishing those hatches seems like something for another trip."

The fresh log started to burn brightly, and I laughed softly when Dufflocq poured more cognac. "What's funny?" he asked.

"Nothing!" I smiled. "Just thinking what a fine present the Cumilahue would make — and about getting a river for Christmas!"

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