

I was recently lucky enough to find myself working again on a TV show as a survival consultant, all the way down south in Patagonia.

The beauty of this job is that for several weeks before the cast arrives I get to hang out with the locals. My mission, in most cases, is to learn about the wildlife and plants; and also find out how the local indigenous folk use their traditional skills to harvest food and build shelters. From the information I glean from my hosts, I am then in a better position to advise both the cast and production crew about the peculiarities of the location we are working in.

In Patagonia, my local host on a number of outings was Juan. In

made wool clothing, jauntily wearing his Gaucho Boinas (woolen beret), and a wide leather belt to support his pants as he walked gracefully through the bush. He moved with the grace of someone 30 years his junior and always had a smile on his face; obviously outdoor life had benefited his health.

His appearance was polished off with his trusty Criollo (Gaucho knife) that was firmly thrust in between his

his mid-sixties, this rugged outdoorsman epitomized the solid and tough, yet kind, reputation the Argentinian Gaucho (South American cowboy) is bestowed with.

We spent several long periods strolling through the forest, every so often pausing over some exotic flower to admire its beauty or tasting a berry that he enthusiastically offered to me. I followed this gentle soul dressed in his simple but functional attire of locally

shoreline of a mountain lake in foothills of Patagonia with Juan's log home close by. We made a fire and warmed up some fry bread that he had prepared earlier and shared a gourd of mate (Yerba mate - a local tea) however, this day was different from our other meetings as I now had a Spanish translator with me.

Taking advantage of the fact I had a translator, I could now ask about some of the finer details of local wilderness living skills that I had been unable to question before. Excitedly, I started off by asking him about his version of fry bread saying that I was familiar with it as my Cree, First Nations, friends back in Canada make something similar and they call it Bannock or just plain old fry bread. It turned out that he



**My Gaucho guide Juan saddling a horse with his Gaucho knife stuck in his belt**

belt and the center of his back; it added the final touch to his rugged presence.

The only fundamental problem with our journeys of discovery was that I do not speak Spanish and he does not speak English.

One fine mountain day, we stood on the

used exactly the same recipe and he was fascinated that someone so far away was using such a similar technique. The Patagonian twist on this dish was that Juan would prepare his version the night before it was needed. He would create and then deep-fry his bannock and set it aside to cool overnight. The next day he would warm up the fry bread over the fire on a grill. His favored way to eat it was to break off a morsel of bread and then dip it into butter and top it with jam.



**Fry bread heating over a bush fire**



**Flower next to a hook about to be tied onto the hook**

Over mouthfuls of bread and sips of Yerba mate (local tea), from a traditional gourd, our conversation soon drew around to local fishing techniques; Juan asked if I enjoyed fishing to which I replied, “Yes, I fly fish, what about you?” He laughed saying he does not have time for all that technical gear, he uses a simpler more traditional technique. Immediately, he piqued my interest, without waiting for any more questions from me he beckoned me over to follow him as he eagerly dashed away to a very large ‘Coihue’ tree, where nestled among its branches, he had secreted an old large tomato can.

The tree was obviously right next to his favorite fishing spot and being as there was no else in the area, he could safely leave his gear there till he needed it.

When he brought it back over to me I could see that the exterior of the can had fishing line wrapped around it and was held in place by a small silver fishing lure, where the treble hook on the end was hooked through the coiled line. To be honest I put two and two together and made five! There was I thinking, “Oh I see, yep, he is using a can with fishing line wrapped around it, I know that old trick, it must be a Patagonian version of a Hobo fishing kit!” Well, it seems I had incorrectly presumed the skills he was about to show me was old hat.

I metaphorically pinched myself several times over the next hour for

once again assuming I knew more than someone else, especially a local. The premature self-inflated assumption, in most cases, leads to the downfall of many outdoor experts.

Juan brought the can over to me, the small dents and scratches embedded with rust attested to its many days of use and abuse. He then he showed me how he had mounted a piece of bamboo inside; the round piece of wood spanned the width of the can, allowing it to be used as a handle. It was screwed into place with long self-tapping screws from the outside to in, which ran through each end of the handle.

Without further prompting Juan went through the motions of demonstrating how this handle



**Flower tied onto hook**

enables the fisherman to wind line onto to the can in a rapid fashion. It was obvious to me that it would be much easier to hold on to that in comparison to a general Hobo fishing kit, that one may see used in North America. Where in semblance, to secure the can, all you have available to grasp is the rim of the can itself or the option of balling your fist inside.

Over the next hour, we fished using a standard heavy spinning lure, similar to a Mepps # 4 trout spinner, on a 10-lb. line. This was a good combination as the spinner added the necessary weight to cast the line out to a greater distance. He added no lead weights to the tackle set up. Pulling off a yard or two from the can we would spin the

lure in a circular fashion, in a wide underhand arc leading to a point where we would let go of the line allowing the lure to fly towards the fish pulling line off the can before it dropped into the water. We could then retrieve the lure by wrapping the fishing line around the can

With his toughened leathery hands from years of handling horses, cattle, and cutting wood he was able to pull sizable fish up to several pounds in with his bare hands. His technique after hooking a large fish was to just drop the can at his feet and grasping the fishing line would pull the fish in using a hasty hand over hand technique. He would continue using this technique until the golden fish had been unceremoniously, dragged up the gravel-covered beach that he was standing on.

If he hooked a smaller fish he would slowly wrap the line around the can and once he had drawn the fish to the edge of the lake and while the fish was still in the water, he would bend down grasp the lure’s hook, then with a deft flick of his wrist release the fish for another day.

It became quite obvious how the handle mounted inside the can helped with his technique of wrapping the line around the can. The hand holding the interior mounted handle rotates the can in a rapid circular motion without encumbering the other hand which also moves in a circular fashion, while winding, and guiding, the line onto the exterior of the can.



**Gaucha knives**

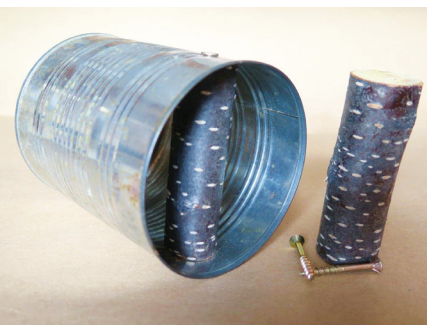


In essence, the can fits onto the hand like a metal glove, the fit is improved by fitting the handle at least one inch inside the tomato can.

As soon as we had caught a fish that was worthy enough to eat, Juan would dispatch it with a stick, which he kept on the shoreline for this purpose. Then he would reach around to the center of his back, and draw his Criollo (Gaucha knife), that was always faithfully waiting for its next task in its sheath wedged beneath Juan's belt. With a few adroitly managed strokes of the knife's cutting edge, the fish was ready to grill over a hardwood fire.

I always love to see the various traditional cutting tools that indigenous people use around the world. Go to any bushcraft meeting in the US or Canada and bring up the subject of knives, which is a proverbial can of worms within itself. You will enter a debate about which is the best knife, a discussion that may go on into the late hours of the night. However, without the luxury of a thousand knives to choose from, indigenous peoples seem to be able to turn their one and only, culturally favored cutting tool to suit any task that they may be called upon to accomplish in their unique environment.

The Gaucha knife to me is obviously a tool that is used by people who work the land with animals. The sheath has a small leather tab around the top, on the



**Can with handle and screws waiting to be attached inside can**

outside, to hold it in place when it's pushed behind the belt; it is traditionally located either next to the stomach or the lower spine of its owner. It also has a tab of leather that protrudes from the rear of the sheath that acts as a scoop to ensure the blade is safely guided back into the sheath, when resheathing the knife.

The knife has a profile that would suit a butcher more than a bushcrafter, which makes sense as the main uses for the Gaucha knife are processing beef, cutting leather and rope, tanning hides and in this case filleting fish. Occasionally, I also saw them used for whittling wood, but not often. Through a



**Can with 550 paracord backing pushed 1 through a hole and tied to the interior handle**

third party, I also heard how on one occasion Juan had drawn his Gaucha knife for self-protection and in regards to that use, I am sure it would be a highly effective tool.

I returned to Canada with two of these well-crafted knives - one of them has proven to be very useful for when I am brain-tanning hides.

Although I was having fun and at the same time learning how to catch the local species of Trout and Char, I needed to find out if there were any more traditional methods that would have been used.

We had a lot of bamboo growing in the area so I considered the fact that it was quite possible for the cast on the show I was consulting for, to



**Can with fishing line attached**

make fishing poles or other rigs to wrap their fishing lines around.

So I asked Juan, through my translator, if there were any traditional methods of baiting the hooks. His eyes lit up and he took me over to a prickly bush near his chicken coup that was covered in a red and yellow tube like a flower. I later researched this exotic looking shrub and found it to be a flower called *desfontainia spinosa* or Chilean holly. He picked one of the colorful flowers and said that in the old days Gauchos would attach these to their hooks. The red and yellow flower epitomized the fishing lures I have used around the world; brightly colored and no doubt if you were a fish this could prove irresistible if presented in the right manner. Juan asked me if I tie my own flies to which I answered yes, so from there he took me through the process of attaching this tube like a flower to my hook.

Let me explain the process I was taught by Juan. First, I built up the body of the fly with white thread; a survivalist could use the inner threads of 550 para cord for this. To build the body I first attached the thread with a clove hitch behind the eye and then wrapped it around the hook until I had formed a body. Juan explained how I needed to ensure I tapered the body down from large, near the eye, to a smaller diameter towards the bend in the shaft of the hook. But ensure I still kept the binding diameter small enough so I could slide the flowers tube like

body over the wrapped body.

I finished the body wrap off by winding the thread back up to the eye and tying a two clove hitch just behind the eye of the hook. I left a trailing spare end of around 6" running forward.

Carefully, I eased the trailing spare end of the thread through the tube of the flower then slid the tube like blossom onto the hook. After that I brought the thread back and wrapped it around the front exterior of the tube of the flower close to the eye of the hook, this secured the flower in place. Finally, I wrapped the thread around the flower four times applying tension slowly before finishing with two clove hitches.

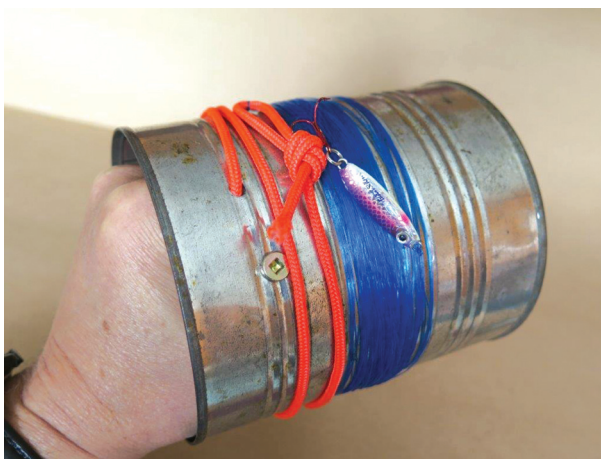
It's a fiddly job but those of you who are used to tying flies will find it an easy task, if you are new to tying your own lures then I'm sure this will encourage you to try tying other styles of fish attractors. I am sure many of you will come up with different ways of carrying out the procedure I have described, it's not rocket science.

This 'flower fly' is very light, you can use it on a fly fishing tackle set up, which I did on a number of occasions. I actually made my own fly fishing rod from bamboo to try it out by fashioning a Japanese "Tenkara" style fishing set, but that's another story!

The alternative is to use lead weights that you can crimp onto the fishing line about 6" above the hook, now you can use the weights to help get the flower lure out to the fish. Then, you can use this style of lure with the fishing apparatus that Juan had shown me. You have to be very careful casting and retrieving the hook, the flower is amazingly tough but it's not indestructible. So if you

catch any branches or weeds in the water there is a high likely hood the flower may break off the hook.

The best technique I found was to cast the line out as far as I could then let it sink to the bottom of the lake. When fishing I was located in the marginal area of the lake, where a mountain stream ran into it, so it was only around 4-ft. deep at the furthest point I was casting to. In fact, the water was so clear I could see the flower flutter to the bottom. I then retrieved the line, wrapping



**Can with my hand in it**

it around my can as I did so, this wrapping motion added a jerking movement to the lure that had the local fish streaking towards it.

Although each flower will stand up to many casts, sadly the flowers will only last for one and at best, maybe two fish strikes before they are too badly damaged or simply fall off the hook. However, once the flower falls off all you have to do is undo the 6" of thread that held the flower in place and slides a new flower onto the hook and reties it in position.

If you don't have this particular plant growing in your area don't despair there are many other flowers that are similar in structure. Just get out and scour your region and see what you can come up with that is similar to the flower I was

given. Failing that, just wrap the colored paper around the hook. To be honest, this article is more about the style of fishing with a tin can rather than the actual flower lure. But this method of tying lures does make you think outside of the box and will hopefully, encourage you to think as a survivalist, encouraging you to consider other less common materials that could be used to tie a fly or lure. But if you are determined to use a flower, consider that fact that many of the plants I saw in Patagonia are used in ornamental gardens, one that springs to mind is the Fuchsia. You just might have some of these flowers growing in your area.

The technique I use for casting with the Gaucho fishing rig is; I pull off a long length of line that I can spin around in a circular underhand motion without it catching the ground. On about the second or third circular rotation, I release the line and allow the weight of the lure, fly, and lead weight to pull the line off the can as

it flies out towards your submerged quarry. Allow the fishing line to uncoil freely, turn the base of the can so that it faces the direction you are casting towards.

The more safety conscious amongst you may have considered that a spinning line with a hook on the end poses a certain level of inherent risk, as my wife says, "It's all fun and games till someone losses an eye!" So please, wear eye protection, a good pair of ballistic sunglasses will work perfectly.

Once the hook and weight land in the water let it sink a few feet then slowly start to pull in the line wrapping it around the can again, every so often give a quick pull which will accelerate the lure underwater making it act like a darting fish.

On occasion, I would let my hook

and weight drop to the bottom of the sandy lake and then wait until fish swam back above it before I retrieved it. This seemed to drive the local Brown and Rainbow Trout mad with desire for the flower encapsulated hook, as it suddenly rose up from beneath them heading to the shore. My slow and steady retrieval method, with the odd jerking action, added to make it emulate a darting fish seemed to work perfectly.

When you actually catch a fish you obviously need to now consider what technique you will use to retrieve it. For someone with softer hands and when the fish is slowly moving towards you, just wrap the line around the can.

If the fish runs away from you, grasp the interior handle tightly then support the other end of the can with your other hand and hold the can side on to the fish. Using this method you are essentially trying to stop the fish from running or at least restraining it until it changes direction and allows you to start retrieving the line again. If the fish picks up speed and runs towards you, drop the can and use both hands in a hand over hand technique to pull in the line. Hopefully, you can coil it in some moderate fashion of tidiness as you wind it back onto the old tomato can. Then you can get back to casting without having to untie any knots or rearrange your line.

This really is a simple project here are the tools and items I use:

- a large tomato can
- 6" long x 1" diameter wooden dowel or tree branch, willow is great for this
- 2 x 2" self-tapping wood screws
- A drill and drill bit (size equal to or slightly smaller than the diameter of the screw thread) or multi tool, or awl. Nails will also work just punch them right through the can into the handle.
- screwdriver

- 50 yards of fishing line
- hooks or fishing lures
- split lead shot
- two and a half feet of parachute cord 550

To make the Gaucho fishing can I will select a piece of wood about one inch in diameter and long enough to fit securely across the interior diameter of the tomato can. After I have cut the wooden handle, I push it about one inch into its interior, it should fit snugly into place requiring a little bit of force to get it there.

Next job is to work out where I will drill my pilot holes for the two-inch self-tapping wood screws that I intend to use to hold it in place. Once I have figured out where I need to drill those holes, I mark their location with a marker pen or sometimes I just scratch a cross with the tip of one of the screws I am going to use. I remove the handle out of the can and then drill the two holes through the points I have just marked, either equal or less than the diameter of the thread of the screw. Do not drill a hole larger than the head of the screw as the screw will not hold the handle in place. You could also use the awl on a folding knife or multi tool to punch the hole through.

I then place the handle back inside and locate the central points of the ends of the handle beneath the holes I have just drilled and fully screw in the self-tapping screws to hold the handle securely in place. At this stage, if you want, you can also drill some pilot holes for the screws into each end of the handle, make sure they are at least half the diameter of the screws thread or less.

To attach your fishing line, first drill a hole in the can, close to the interior handle. In the picture, you will see that I threaded a length of 550-parachute cord through the hole then tied it around the handle. I used a two and a half foot length of

paracord but in a survival situation, you could use a longer length of paracord and a shorter length of fishing line as a leader. Tie a loop on the other end and attach your fishing line to the loop.

I have taken this concept one stage further by drilling two holes in one of my cheaper camping pots. This gives me the option to either hook the ends of the pot bail through the holes and use it to boil water. Or if necessary, screw a wooden handle inside and attach your fishing line. Remember to pack two screws and your fishing lines and hooks, the wooden handle you can make from the bush you are traveling through.

A little bit about myself is that I'm a guide and outdoor pursuits instructor here in the Canadian Rockies, I served for 21 years in the Army where amongst other things, I taught mountaineering. I now mainly teach wilderness living skills as I am an instructor trained by Mors Kochanski, I am also a wilderness guide and board member with the Wilderness Guide Association (WGA), an organization based in Europe. Plus, I am a Master Guide with the Interpretive Guides Association here in Banff, Canada where I find your magazine offers us many period references to work with. In between my regular guide/instruction work stints, over the past three years, I have been working as one of the survival consultants on the *Alone Show*.

**Dave Holder**