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BY MICHAEL GILTZ & FRIENDS

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In Patagonia -- Where Lying Isn't So Bad

I'll happily get on my high horse about memoirists who distort the truth or out and out lie -- the news has been filled with them lately, from a half-Indian gang banger in LA who turned out to be a upper class white chick who wanted to give voice to the voiceless (and get a lovely near \$100,000 advance in the process) to a Holocaust survivor who was not a Jew, not a Holocaust survivor and apparently was NOT sheltered by wolves who defended her from the Nazis. (I wonder what tipped people off?)

So here I am just finishing [Bruce Chatwin's](#) delightfully untrustworthy book "[In Patagonia](#)," which I suspected was half fabulist, half true and I couldn't care less. The tale of his travels in Patagonia (which encompasses Argentina and Chile and isn't a well-defined region -- see, even the geography is suspect), it is bursting with stories about dinosaurs, Butch Cassidy and the Sundance Kid (who cavorted in Patagonia while making half-hearted efforts to settle down), Welsh farmers who clung to their Welshness, history lessons, Germans who recreated the Rhineland, a Scotsman who had never seen Scotland but wore a kilt to dinner, seafarers, priests, mad poetry-quoting lingerie salesmen and really quite a bit more to do with dinosaurs than I expected.

I finished in a glow and read the introduction (which should always be read last, if at all, in any book) and it reassured me that in fact the book was indeed "colorful" with the truth -- Nicholas Shakespeare helpfully says, "He told not half a truth but a truth and a half." Chatwin himself did not want this posted in the travel section and freely admitted it was not a documentary of his journey, changing names of people, throwing in a fanciful detail when it felt right and so on. And that self-awareness of what he had created forgives a lot of sins. The label that Penguin uses on the back of my edition is even more succinct: "In Patagonia" is listed as "literature/travel." Indeed. And in the right order.

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