

Eating Ants (On Purpose)

By Karen Catchpole - January 8, 2014



Eric Mohl

I was starving after a day spent hiking along the Camino Real from the stunningly preserved and restored Colonial town of Barichara, **Colombia** down to tiny Guane before catching a bus back up to Barichara. There had been no time for lunch and after a few cold Pilsens at sunset I was a bit tipsy as well. I was nervous too. I was about to eat ants. And not just any ants. In the central Andean region of Colombia **fat bottom ants** are on the menu.

The Guane people believe the ants are an aphrodisiac. Then again, they also say that about goat's milk. Anyway, the ants, which are about an inch long and fried up, are a traditional delicacy and can be purchased in plastic bags from road side vendors and town square hawkers for a few dollars. A number of restaurants offer dishes prepared with fat bottom ants as well. In Barichara I chose to eat ants (on purpose) at *Restaurante Los Cruces* which is part of the **Fundacion Escuela Taller Barichara**.

The foundation works to preserve local handicraft and culinary traditions, ants included. My *pernil de cabro en salsa de hormiga culona* (goat in fat bottom ant sauce) arrived coated with a thick, weirdly dry sauce speckled with ant bits. A half dozen crunchy whole ants were scattered on top for good measure.

The dish looked dry and ashy gray and entirely unappealing. I dug in. It tasted like dirt sprinkled over gamey, tough goat meat. There was something very.... *natural* about the flavor with an odd perfume-y finish. I felt tremendous pressure to eat every last one of the fat bottom ants sprinkled on top but I admit I left a few behind (get it?).

Then I went to the town square and got an aphrodisiac that's more my speed: chocolate ice cream.

