

BRITISH

AGUILERA

2004

EXPEDITION

TO

CHILEAN PATAGONIA

SPONSORS

MOUNT EVEREST FOUNDATION

SPORTS COUNCIL OF WALES

JOURNEY LATIN AMERICA

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INTRODUCTION

When one returns from an expedition friends and colleagues ask “ Did you have a good time?” On this trip I could honestly say it was one of my most enjoyable expeditions. They then assume one reached the top of ones objective and look very confused when I say we were thrilled just to reach the bottom of our chosen peak. It took 12 days to find the route for the 9Km from the sea to the start of any climbing. We had a “Boys Own” adventure with swamps, temperate jungle, river beds, glaciers, river crossings, gorges and amazing fauna and flora. The company was great and the fishing excellent.

AREA & MOUNTAINEERING HISTORY

Cerro Aguilera was named by the Italian Explorer Alberto de Agostini when he saw it as a distant but shapely peak viewed from the summit of Cerro Mayo during his first ascent 1933. Interestingly it was named after Abraham Aguilera who was the first curate for Punta Arenas and the Falkland Islands from 1916 to 1925 so, despite our fantasies, the name has no relationship to the current equally shapely north American singer Christina Aguilera.

The area around Cerro Aguilera came to the attention of British mountaineers in 1957 with the publication of H.W. Tilman’s book “Mischief in Patagonia”. He describes the grounding of his boat “Mischief” in the narrows where Fiordo Asia leads into Fiordo Andrew, whilst he and his team of Charles Marriott from Cornwall and Jorge Quinteros from Chile made the first return crossing of the Southern Patagonian Ice Cap from Fiordo Calvo.

In 1985 Matthew Hickman led the Cambridge based joint Anglo/Chilean Expedition “Patagonia 85” to attempt Cerro Aguilera and further explore this part of the Ice Cap. They had an extensive scientific programme and approached this complex peak from the northeast, but never became established on the peak. On leaving in good weather they saw a possible ridge approach from the south. They produced a well researched expedition report, which is still available through the BMC office and at the Alpine Club and Royal Geographic Society libraries.

Hickman’s research suggested that Cerro Aguilera may well be of volcanic origin which would explain its isolation from peaks of similar height (estimated to be 2438m) and very complex topography. It is guarded by steep glaciers to the north and south. Hickman’s team’s fieldwork was unable to confirm this geology but some rock samples suggested that it might be correct.

Skip Novak visited the area in his boat “Pelagic” in the 1990’s and used an untitled photograph of Cerro Aguilera on his website (www.pelagic.co.uk). He mentioned this to me and it whetted my appetite to find out more about this relatively unexplored area.

In 2003 we made our first visit to the area with MEF, BMC and Sports Council of Wales sponsorship. Our team was made up of myself David Hillebrandt, Chris Smith, Nick Banks and Allan Richards. We established our wood sheltered base camp in the driest area of a bog just above sea level (S50o 30.233 W 73o 44.948). This was south of Cerro Aguilera and near to the base of the ridge identified by Hickman as a possible route onto the mountain. During this trip we climbed a minor unclimbed peak on the ridge that gave a tantalising glimpse into the complex country to the SE of Aguilera, which we felt might give eventual access to the base of the mountain. The trip finished with a massive storm and snow dump but Chris and I managed to undertake an early reconnaissance of the river valley, swamp and forest along the Carl (Moore) River. We were convinced that this was the key to success and also made an assessment of the deserted Chilean Navy hut near the mouth of the Carl (Moore) River which was to provide a secure base in 2004 compared with the rat infested base camp we used on that first trip.

The Wilcox Peninsular is located on the west side of the Southern Patagonian Ice Cap about 200 nautical miles sailing through the complex fiords from Puerto Natales. The approach passes the western side of the Cordillera Sarmiento to Fiordo Peel, into Fiordo Asia and then passes the entrance to Fiordo Calvo to the east.

- **All names in this report are taken from the Helio Patagonia Sur map produced by Prof Louis Lliboutry in 1961 at the Laboratory of Glaciology in Grenoble.**

THE 2004 EXPEDITION

Our first trip to attempt Aguilera in 2003 fizzled out with a massive dump of snow and then a frustrating wait in the rat infested bog, which passed as our Base Camp. The Penguin could not come to collect us due to exceptionally bad seas and high winds that closed the port at Puerto Natales, so we had a wait of five days before a fishing boat was diverted to pick us up and we made our plane with 2 hours to spare. During that time we had good weather but were expecting to be picked up any day so could not move! It is not surprising that Nick Banks and Al Richards said they would never return. Possibly Chris Smith and myself suffer from a pathological degree of optimism since we were already pondering a change in route and tactics for 2004. During 2004 Al Richards gradually changed his mind. I never was certain if this was when he got his photos back and remembered the beauty of the place, when he realised that he was still well ahead in the “Rats killed with bare hands competition” and might lose his hard won title or simply through an alcoholic blur in the “Office” in Llanwrst.

The plan was for four of us to go and to use the Naval hut we had discovered as a secure base. However, despite interest from a number of people we could not get a fourth member to commit to the trip. We decided to go for longer to optimise the chance of good weather, to approach through the bogs of the Carl River Valley and to work on a rope of three to minimise weight per person. Unfortunately about two weeks before departure Al's Mum died unexpectedly and he felt unable to come so Chris and I were faced with the concept of each others company for over a month. In the event we did not see a boat or any people from the moment we were dropped off until the moment we were picked up. We are still talking to each other, we had fun, we found a route onto the peak, got higher than any other expedition, managed one minor first ascent that gave valuable information on other objectives and enjoyed some good fishing.

It took us 14 days from arrival to work out a route through the swamp and temperate jungle to the glacier snout where we first donned crampons. During this time we had made persistent forays up the valley exploring all the route options and during one short spell of good weather re-climbed the peak we had ascended in 2003 to look down on our route and to make a sketch map which was to facilitate route finding. We also used this opportunity to further explore this southern ridge and had hoped to climb the prominent twin peaks at its end but the terrain proved to be more complex than expected, the wind was rising and we turned round after the ascent of Top Two. Snow shoes made this movement much easier than in 2004 but we were thrilled to find that we did need crampons for the final Grade 1 pitch to the top.

When we eventually reached the Hidden Valley below the Aguilera Glacier it was a personal feeling akin to being the first people to enter the Nanda Devi Sanctuary. Our route involved following the Carl River using the river banks and bed, fording side streams or using fallen trees as bridges, wallowing through bogs, traversing a landslip on a gorge side, crashing through dense forest over mossy rotting tree trunks and

several false routes. One and a half Kilometres an hour when fully laden with camping and climbing gear, food, mountain boots, snow shoes and food was good progress.

The Hidden valley itself is a magnificent camping haven. There are sheltered sites, good water and stunning views (when clear) up to the peak. We made several trips on to the glacier which has an easily angled snout and central section but which becomes a complex maze of seracs and dry crevasses as one moves SW towards a prominent stream which in turn gives scrambling access to a Hanging Valley (three hours from camp to bottom of stream and up to three hours up stream bed). One only one occasion we descended the true right back of the glacier from the base of the stream to its snout. Initially this is a picturesque route over alpine meadows and on easy terraces but towards the snout one is forced into unstable boulder filled valley between the moraine on the right and the glacial cliffs to the left. Loose rock is constantly coming down both sides and the large boulders in the base move alarmingly. We both moved as fast as possible. Both fell or had boulders moving onto us at times and both left the area independently muttering that we had no intention of using that route again and risking "A Lindsay".

I am sure a very fit party who knew the route could move from the Base Camp Hut to the Hanging Valley in one day but we split the journey, always being seduced by the campsite in the Hidden Valley.

As it got dark we arrived in the Hanging Valley on snowshoes and found the only area between boulders that was free enough of snow for our tent. It was a clear night but despite this and the relative cold a couple of large avalanches came down gullies from the south side of the valley. The nearest was not much more than 150m away but our site seemed relatively safe when we assessed the protecting cliffs above in daylight. The next morning we were blessed with some frozen snow and plodded up loose scree and snow to our first col. Looking back to the east we were pleased that we had not attempted to approach this spot via its ridge which was narrow and loose. We traversed west and behind one small lump to the snout of a glacier and the start of the main climbing on the summit mass of Aguilera. We roped up and Chris led up in soft unstable snow. It was steeper than it looked and he wallowed strongly up, often up to his waist. We wound round seracs until we reached a plateau and should have headed up and left to find a gully through the prominent cliffs just above us. The way to the right was covered in avalanche debris. At this point I was feeling extended, exhausted, and a long way from home and after a short discussion we turned round and headed down to the tent. I am sure the top is at least seven hours above this point and we would not have reached it in daylight, but Chris had been going well. It was almost 24 hours before I could admit to myself that our attempt had petered out and we agreed to head back down the valley over two days with massive sacs.

What made it such a good trip? The total isolation, the exploration, the pure adventure, the mental challenge of forcing the route day after day, the wildlife, the tranquillity, the comfort of the hut, the ability to fish when not climbing, the history and tradition of the area and the friendship. 2005????

DIARY

Thurs 30th Sept: Heathrow.

Fri 1st Oct: Arrive Punta Arenas.

Sat 2nd Oct: Shopping.

Sun 3rd Oct: Pack and bus to Puerto Natales.

Mon 4th Oct: Further shopping.

Tues 5th Oct: Boat delayed.

Wed 6th Oct: Meet Conrado. Plan early start by boat tomorrow.

Thurs 7th Oct: Sail 0930 after further delay. Wind ++. Pressure 980.

Friday 8th Oct: Arrive Hut Base Camp. P 990-1000 Little snow am. Then overcast & dry.

Sat 9th Oct: Low level route following River Carl. Sun+++! P 1012.

Sun 10th Oct: Low level route to first Moraine Gap. Sun+++! P 1013.

Mon 11th Oct: Up Ridge for view to route. Camp high. P 1014.

Tues 12th Oct: Along ridge. First Ascent Point 1543m (S 50o 27.929 W 73o 47.951) and back to high camp. Weather deteriorating.

Wed 13th Oct: Descent to Hut. Overcast, sun and light wind pm. P 1008 dropping.

Thur 14th Oct: Hut. Fishing. Chess. Constant Drizzle. P 992 – 998.

Fri 15th Oct: Walk to second river 9 hours. P 991 –999.

Sat 16th Oct: Rain +++ . Fester at hut. P 994 - 989

Sun 17st Oct: Fester at hut. Heavier Rain easing pm. P 992 – 999

Mon 18th Oct: Walk and reach Hidden valley! 11 hours. Dry and windy then to very heavy rain. P 1004 –1005.

Tues 19 Oct: Base Camp Hut. Dry out. Windy and dry am. P 1004 – 998.

Wed 20th Oct: Fester Base Camp Hut. Mega Storm Rain ++++ & wind. P 990 – 999.

Thur 21th Oct: Base Camp Hut. High wind then rain. P 994.

Fri 22nd Oct: Base Camp. Fish P 991 – 998.

Sat 23rd Oct: Aguilera Glacier. P 1003 – 1004.

Sun 24th Oct: Base Camp. Rain +++ pm. P 992 – 987.

Mon 25th Oct: Base Camp. Fish. Cold. Snow to 150m. P 997 – 1000.

Tues 26st Oct: Walk to Hidden Valley. Warm and dry. P 1007.

Wed 27th Oct: Hidden Valley tent day. Rain +++.

Thur 28th Oct: Hidden Valley Camp, Aguilera Glacier to Stream entrance to Hanging Valley. Rain.

Fri 29th Oct: Base Camp Hut. Retreat in Rain. P 998.

Sat 30th Oct: Base Camp. Fester. Intermittent drizzle. P 1005.

Sun 31st Oct: Back up to Hidden Valley. Hot and warm. P 995 – 993.

Mon 1st Nov: Aguilera Glacier, Up stream bed, Camp Hanging Valley.

Tues 2nd Nov: Main attempt on Aguilera. Reach 1291m then retreat to Hanging Valley camp.

Wed 3rd Nov: Wait until midday then down to Hidden Valley site.

Thur 4th Nov: Walk out to hut with full loads. See Wildcat. Overcast. Negligible wind. P 1020.

Fri 5th Nov: Base Camp Hut. Occasional Rain. Sunny spells. P 1022.

Sat 6th Nov: Cloud 8/8. No wind. P 1009. Pick up by Penguin. Condor Convention.

Sun 7th Nov: Indigo, Puerto Natales.

Mon 8th Nov: Nena. Punta Arenas. Party with Jorge Quinteros, Alejo Contreras et al.

Tues 9th Nov: Santiago.

Wed 10th Nov: En route Home

Thur 11th Nov. Arrive Heathrow.

Fri 12th Nov: Sally Hillebrandt's 50th Birthday.

TRAVEL

As on many previous trips we booked our airline tickets via Journey Latin America who understand the needs of mountaineering expeditions. Their staff were again excellent, they arranged a ticket refund when our third member dropped out at short notice and they generously supported the expedition with a £200 reduction on each ticket.

We were booked with Iberia which is now a partner with Lan Chile. The initial flight to Madrid was on a cheap European leg where we found we even had to pay for drinking water (medically dubious practice). We then flew to Santiago where we had a three hour wait before flying on to Punta Arenas with Lan Chile. In the past we have had excellent service from Lan Chile on this route. Since their joint venture with Iberia the standard of service has dropped dramatically. They made every effort to charge us as much as possible for excess baggage on every leg. This resulted in us having to wear boots and have our ropes under jackets. One of their staff at Madrid airport on the return leg managed not only to give wrong information but also exceeded all normal limits of rudeness to us and other passengers. In future I would seriously consider travelling via the USA.

We used the luxury of a taxi from the airport to our Residencia in Punta Arenas.

We travelled from Punta Arenas to Puerto Natales by coach which is cheap and efficient and they are happy to carry climbers baggage, if booked separately at a non peak time.

We arranged charter of the Mama Dina and the Penguin from the UK by E mail and Capitan Conrado Alvarez D and his son were as helpful as ever. We have used the Penguin on several previous trips. It is a renovated British boat previously used in the Falklands. About 100 years old it has real character, a 150 HP engine and space for 6 and crew in comfort with some equipment stored on the deck. Since our last trip Conrado has had a new boat built. It is a true workhorse and makes a fantastic expedition boat for up to 10 people. When not used for expeditions it carried fish from small boats working in the Fiords back to Puerto Natales. Once the hold has been scrubbed it is a luxury expedition boat with a powerful 238 HP engine that copes with almost any sea.

ACCOMMODATION

In Punta Arenas we again stayed at the Hospedaje Nena. This has always been popular with British mountaineering expeditions and the hospitality is exceptional. Nena is like a mother to us and she is very relaxed as we spread all our equipment and a months

food over the floor to be packed in taped plastic bag covered boxes for the journey into the mountains.

In Puerto Natales we used the Concepto Indigo on the sea front. It is slightly up market but has an amazing view to the hills, excellent food and is run by a local climber and his staff who again understand the needs of expeditions. They speak English.

We were able to remain operational on more days on this trip than on any other I have ever done in Patagonia. This was mainly due to the unwitting generosity of the Chilean Navy whose hut we used as a Base Camp. The hut is located near the mouth of the Rio Carl. It is about 300m from the beach and 4m above sea level. It is on stilts to avoid any flood tides and is about 7m x 5m with a porch and shower area. It is sheltered from the Northerly winds by trees and from the west by a low ridge. It has not been used by the Navy for years and had not been opened since our previous visit in 2003. The wood and corrugated iron structure is slowly rotting but was still comfortable in 2004. It remains to be seen how long it lasts but we took some hardware for repairs so we are hopeful it will offer shelter for at least another two years.

It is called "PVS Cosasco" and has the Chilean flag painted on the roof. On one external wall it states "Territorio de Indesputable Soberania Nacional" " Armada de Chile Campos de Helio Sur". Having noted that the flag was getting tattered on our previous visit we purchased a new Chilean flag in Puerto Natales and hoisted it on arrival. It remained flying as we left as a gesture of thanks for the shelter. During our visit we cleaned the hut, repaired walls and the window and door. We added nails to hang food and equipment and even made a radiator out of scrap metal which worked on MSR power and enabled us to dry socks and gloves!

PERMISSION

The area we were visiting was outside the boundary of the Paine National Park and expeditions should register with the Ministerio de Relaciones Exteriores in Santiago. This may sound daunting but in reality is very easy and the staff seem very keen to help. We did this about two months prior to departure but I would suggest initially applying as soon as ones full team and dates of travel are known. The whole process can be done by E mail and the form is available on their website. They like to see details of insurance. Prior to final departure the team has to log in with the local official who was the Captain of the Port of Puerto Natales. The ministry had informed him of our expected arrival. We had met the captain on a previous trip and he has always been very helpful although Conrado understandably finds the beaurocracy frustrating when he is trying to run a tourist business.

It is refreshing in a time of increasing international bureaucracy to find a system that works quickly and efficiently, and is designed primarily for expedition safety but without unnecessary regulations. Our satellite phone was checked and we agreed not to have any system of regular calls to minimise battery use and also guard against false worries if we were high on the mountain sitting out bad weather.

When passing through Punta Arenas we always book in with Mr John Rees, the local British Consul. He has become a friend to many climbing expeditions and although one always hopes not to need his services we give him a full list of expedition members with passport, next of kin, insurance and communication details.

COMMUNICATIONS

Having done several trips over the years with no communications system this now seems silly when efficient and relatively cheap satellite phones are available. I think the Chilean authorities would be reluctant to let an expedition proceed without a phone and if I were lying a base camp with a fractured femur and a fortnight to wait until pick up I would agree with their attitude.

The expedition purchased a fairly compact Motorola satellite phone in 2003 with one normal and one long life rechargeable battery. It works via the Iridium Satellite system and accepts text messages. Our policy was not to use it for outgoing calls except in an emergency. We did switch it on for a few minutes every three or four days when at base camp to see if there were any urgent text messages for us to phone home. The battery power was almost full after a month in the hills.

It is now available for hire on a monthly basis by other expeditions (E mail for details)!

We also took two very compact line of sight Motorola hand held radios that do not require licences and are available through many outdoor shops in the UK. We were surprised how well they worked on the few occasions when Chris and I separated to explore different routes. With two of us being the only people for many miles in any direction it felt silly to adhere to normal radio procedure.

MAPS, GEOGRAPHY AND GPS.

One of the attractions of this area is that no detailed maps are yet available. Most of southern Chile is well mapped at a scale of 1:100,000 and the majority of these maps are available to the general public through the Instituto Geografico Militar in Santiago. It is interesting that the sheets which should cover this area are not listed or available, even on specific request when visiting the Institute.

Rumour has it that there has been some dispute with Argentina over the exact position of the international border on the ice cap and this may explain the lack of publicly available maps and the evidence of Chilean Navy activity in the form of their hut which had obviously housed a temporary garrison of about eight men a few years ago.

For this reason we relied totally on sketch maps in Matthew Hickman's report, sea charts and old copies of Prof Lliboutry's ice cap maps. We carried a small Garmin Geko GPS but minimised use to preserve battery power in case needed in really bad

weather. After discussion with Conrado we set the GPS on the South American 69 Datum which is apparently used by the Chilean Navy, but datum details are not found on any of the maps or sea charts.

As we travelled into the area on the Mama Dina we were able to study some charts that we had not seen before. The Instituto Hidrografico de la Armada de Chile published a chart to the “Canal Wide a Canal Sarmiento” (sheet 914) in 1952 at a scale of 1:150,000. This shows some detail of the area and was obviously not know to Hickman’s party since the river named Rio Moore by them is clearly marked as the Rio Carl on the Chilean Map. In this report we revert to the original Chilean name.

As we passed through Punta Arenas on our return we met part of a Chilean antarctic expedition waiting for transport to Antarctica. They included several members of the Chilean Army, geologists and other experts on Patagonia and Antarctica. Within minutes one member had produced a magnificent Satellite Photo of Aguilera on his laptop and this fortunately confirmed that our chosen route was the most sensible. We had tried to obtain such photos via the internet one several occasions before we left the UK but with no success. Other military members hinted that more accurate maps might be available.

By a freak chance our flight back to Santiago passed directly over Aguilera during a lull in the cloud and we were able to get good photographs from the plane. In over fifteen years of making this flight on various expeditions I have never had such views. The mountain was teasing us.

KEY POINTS

Base camp Hut S 50o 29.618 W 73o 43.674. Altitude 4m.

Top 2 First Ascent S 50o 27.929 W 73o 47.951 GPS altitude 1543m, Barometric Altimeter altitude (in changing weather) 1600m.

Start of alluvial plain in Hidden Valley S 50o 27.131 W 73o 44.180 At GPS altitude 111m

Camp site in Hanging Valley S 50o 26.221 W 73o 47.471 . At GPS altitude 641m.

High Point on Aguilera S 50o 25.144 W 73o 47.640. GPS Altitude 1291m. Above seracs.



SOUTHERN SOUTH AMERICA



EQUIPMENT

We have borrowed Terra Nova Expedition tents on almost all my Patagonian trips and I would not consider using anything else in this type of wet windy climate. On this trip we used one standard Super Quazar. It is roomy for two and was fine on the sites we used. For more exposed ridge sites one might need a snow valance. We did use double poles on our only exposed site.

On the last three trips we have been really impressed with Paramo jackets and salopettes which seem more comfortable and effective than Gore Tex in the extreme wet conditions. They dry well and feel more comfortable when damp. They also make soft pillows. On this trip they were unable to support us with free equipment but we did buy some cut-price jackets, salopettes, sweaters and underwear. It all performed extremely well and some suggestion that we had made after previous trips had been acted on, especially in terms of the much improved zips in the salopettes.

At a simple but essential level Wellies remain the best footwear for use around base camp and in the forest and are best purchased in Punta Arenas.

After our experience of the unconsolidated snow on our 2003 trip we took a pair of snowshoes each. I used Grivel shoes and they were worth every ounce of their weight. Chris used French TSL shoes which were lighter, but just as effective. We could move so much easier on the wet snow especially when crossing half covered boulder fields or along the South ridge to Top Two.

Water and rat proof blue plastic chemical barrels are essential for the journey and for base camp storage, as are heavy Ortlieb dry bags or the lighter and cheaper but not as robust Exped versions. Rats can change an Ortlieb bag into a colander overnight if it is not hung up well out of reach but they were not a problem in our Base Camp hut which we rat proofed, protected with traps and liberally equipped with nails for hanging food and equipment.

A piss pot is useful high up and a plywood board essential for using the stove inside the tent.

We both used synthetic filled sleeping bags and I found the new light Rab bivvy bag really good for use in the tent to protect my bag from the damp. Half the weight of a Gore-Tex bag.

The Garmin Geko GPS was light and weatherproof but its battery life in these conditions is really too limited. We always had to carry spare batteries and changing them in bad weather (when most needed) is not recommended. I would prefer the extra weight of their eTrek range.

Very little climbing hard wear is needed. We used a single 9mm everdry rope. Personal ice axes and hammers are sensible and most belays are off bollards, stakes or deadmen.

Rock gear is hardly needed. Both members carried two ice screws and appropriate prussic loops with two wild country ropemen for glacier work. Snow shovels are essential.

High the waterproof Canon Sure Shot A1 enabled us to take photos when other cameras remained in their bags. Chris carried a trusty old OM1 to our highpoint and I also used a compact Contax.

Next time? A paraffin stove for the hut!

MEDICAL

As my climbing companions and I get older the medical kit gets bigger with the addition of things such as a urinary catheter in case of prostate problems. On the hill we both carried our own small personal first aid kit and these remained unopened. They were designed to be combined in the event of a serious accident to give treatment until one member could bring the main kit from the Base Hut. Hill kits includes sterile pads, a crepe bandage, injectable analgesia, a days antibiotics. I carried one nasal airway.

The Base Camp kit weighed about 1 Kg and filled 2L Tupperware container. It contained medication to cope with most problems from Athletes foot to cleaning and setting a compound fracture under an injectable general anaesthetic (Ketamine). I am a general practitioner with specific interest in mountain and expedition medicine and Chris is a trainer for the REC remote area first aid course. Both members are involved in setting up the UIAA Diploma in Mountain Medicine in the UK so we were well supplied with official medical bits of paper. In reality if an accident or serious illness were to occur in this area mountain and evacuation skills would be more use than any medical qualification. The logistics of evacuation would be complex especially with only two members but the Chilean Navy has an excellent reputation for helping in difficult and truly serious circumstances. Insurance is vital.

In Punta Arenas we were lucky to Meet Alejo Contreras who was lunching with Nena at our residencia. He is an experienced climber and Antarctica traveller who speaks perfect English. Currently he works for DAP, a local airline who run flights to Antarctica. They also have a helicopter rescue contract for the Southern part of Chile and he kindly registered us on their database. He is a fund of local knowledge.

We did encounter several problems which we coped with ourselves. Initially the trip doctor developed a chest infection whilst in Punta Arenas which meant he was delirious for the drive to Puerto Natales where he started himself on treatment during a lucid period, kept the whole residencia awake with his coughing and was quite relieved to find that the boat departure was delayed to give him time to recover. To further reinforce his neurosis during the trip he started peeing blood stained urine which was very noticeable when using his piss pot at the campsite in the Hidden Valley. Painless haematuria should be taken seriously at any age but especially in the over 50's. He was scared of developing retention of urine due to blood clots and even more scared of the concept of being catheterised by Chris. This was incentive enough to drink plenty and

the problems self resolved, to be thoroughly investigated on return, with no serious cause found.

Chris fell in one particularly dangerous boulder field and developed wrist pain. Initially we did nothing but eventually the doctor wondered if it should be strapped in case he had fractured his scaphoid bone. On return to the UK two weeks later the X ray showed no bony injury.

Chris, the non-medical member, managed to remain otherwise healthy.

On booking out of Puerto Natales we were sensibly warned of the risk from potentially fatal neurotoxins concentrated in filter feeding shellfish such as muscles from the intermittent red algae tides in the area. Needless to say we avoided shellfish.

SANITATION & RUBBISH

It was a pleasure to note virtually no pollution on the shores of the Fiord. The Naval Hut is a potential focus for human pollution and we spent a lot of time collecting debris such as tins, bottles and plastic from partially covered holes and bushes. This had obviously been left by visitors. It was burnt as much as possible in the Oil drum incinerator provided and the residue taken out to Puerto Natales for disposal.

Our Base camp water supply was from a stream draining a nearby bog and flowed within 20m of the hut. It did dry up on a couple of occasions but we had anticipated this problem and had filled two blue 60L barrels before the short "drought". We had also dug a bog pool about 150m away in case of a prolonged Patagonian drought! We protected the stream supply by having an upper collecting area and lower washing area. The hut has a windproof shower room and we had brought a shower bag (ortlieb) which enabled us to enjoy warm showers when in residence at Base. A true luxury.

At base camp we elected to shit direct into the fiord well away from the hut itself. For a large population this would not be sustainable but the bacterial dilution factor seems to make this the most appropriate system in this climate with boggy ground at sea level. Up high we relied on crapping down hill from our campsite and leaving the residue to break up on the surface of the snow or rocks. Again this would seem most appropriate for a group of our size in a rarely visited region.

Our trip policy is always to take no pollutant toilet paper. In this climate it would soon become soggy. Half the world are anal washers and as long as hands are carefully cleaned after use this seems to work well. Above the snow line it becomes a pile tingling sensation.

WILDLIFE

Bird List

Compiled by Chris Smith

Becasina	Common Snipe	<i>Gallinago gallinago</i>
Tordo	Austral Blackbird	<i>Curaeus curaeus</i>
Churrín	Andean Tapaculo	<i>Scytalopus magellanicus</i>
Canquín	Ashy Headed Goose	<i>Chloephaga poliocephala</i>
Rayadito	Thorn-tailed Rayadito	<i>Aphrastura spinicauda</i>
Condor	Andean Condor	<i>Vulturgryphus</i>
Cormorán Imperial	Blue-eyed Cormorant	<i>Phalacrocorax atriceps</i>
Cormorán de las rocas	Rock Cormorant	<i>Phalacrocorax magellanicus</i>
Chorlo Chileno	Rufous-Chested Dotterel	<i>Zonibyx modestus</i>
Quetru no Volador	Flightless Steamer Duck	<i>Tachyeres pteneres</i>
Quetru Volador	Flying Steamer Duck	<i>Tachyeres patachonicus</i>
Gaviota Dominicana	Kelp Gull	<i>Larus dominicanus</i>
Chincol	Rufous-collared Sparrow	<i>Zonotrichia capensis</i>
Colegial	Rufous-Backed Negrito	<i>Lessonia rufa</i>
Diuco	Fire-Eyed Diucon	<i>Pyrope pyrope</i>
Picaflor	Green-Backed Firecrown	<i>Sephanoides galeritus</i>
Golondrina Chilena	Chilean Swallow	<i>Tachycineta leucopyga</i>
Zorzal	Austral Thrush	<i>Turdus falcklandii</i>
Pilpilín Austral	Magellanic Oystercatcher	<i>Haematopus leucopodus</i>
Gaviotín Sudamericano	South American Tern	<i>Sterna hirundinacea</i>
Traralco Carancho	Crested Caracara	<i>Polyborus plancus</i>
Churette	Dark-Bellied Cinclodes	<i>Cinclodes patagonicus</i>
Perdicita cordillerana austral	White-bellied Seedsnipe	<i>Attagis malouinus</i>
Pitío	Chilean Flicker	<i>Colaptes pitiús</i>
Cachaía	Austral Parakeet	<i>Enicognathus ferrugineus</i>
Salteador	Great Skua	<i>Catharacta chilensis</i>
Playero de lomo blanca	White-Rumped Sandpiper	<i>Calidris fuscicollis</i>

There were 30 + pairs of Ashy Headed Geese on the beach around the hut.

One day 50 + Cormorants flew in-line across the fjord.

Only two terns were observed near base camp but there appeared to be a large colony over by Tilman Island.

We frequently saw groups of up to five condors circling but on our last day a “condors convention” appeared over Base Camp with 13 birds circling at one time.

We were lucky to see one condor land on a snow patch whilst we were descending from our high point. It landed next to our ascent tracks and was obviously investigating them. Chris also saw one land close to him on the beach, but of course had not got his camera.

This species list is more varied than that compiled by Nick Banks in 2003. I suspect this was partly because we were in the area for longer and moved through more diverse habitats.

Mammals

With the exception of rats that infested our boggy base camp in 2003 this whole area is not known for its plentiful land mammals but those animals that do exist in this inhospitable area are tough and rare making any sightings more exciting.

En route to and from our landfall the boat was escorted by Dolphins (Tonina overa, Commerson's dolphin, *Cephalorhynchus commersonni* and Delfin comun, Common Dolphin, *Delphinus delphis*) frolicking in the bowave.

Whilst fishing we were watched by Seals and one one occasion were treated to a display of a seal playfully stalking an Huillin or Patagonian river otter (*Lontra provocax*). It was obviously not hungry since it could easily have caught the otter but did not bother. Previously I had followed the well worn track of some unknown mammal from our bay through rough ground to one of many inland freshwater lakes, passing obvious hiding places. I had picked up the track near the remains of a fish head and wondered if it belonged to an otter which would fit with a skull we had discovered on the beach. Chris was the one rewarded with the first sighting when he was out walking. The otter actually left the water and moved towards him. He returned to the hut cursing that he had not had his camera. But we both returned to the bay in case we got another sighting. The otter and seal obliged by repeating the performance and again the otter approached and posed for photographs.

Once when walking up the bed of the River Carl we saw cat prints in the sand and wondered if it could possibly be a rare Puma (*Puma concolor*). When sweating under heavy packs on the final trip from the Hidden valley to the our base Chris suddenly stopped just above a shingle back of the river that drained the Hidden Valley shouted and dropped his sac. A big cat had run from the river bank into the woods and we were both lucky enough to get a clear view of it as it disappeared. It was bigger than a domestic cat, had black short hair and was lean and muscular. It was smaller than we expected for a Puma. Research since we returned indicates that it may have been a Yaguarundi or Jaguarundi (*Herpailurus yaguarondi*).

Whilst flogging through bog at the end of the 2003 trip we found deer like tracks which I suspect were from Huemul (*Hippocamelus bisulcus*) but despite spending more time in this terrain in 2004 we were not lucky enough to see any.

Fish

This was the first trip that we had ever taken a fishing rod and we were well rewarded. Chris caught the first fish of the trip on a spinner which was our only Sea Trout. After that we tried various locations and found one deeper area consistently produced a magnificent local white fish, Roballo (haddock) which seemed to follow a spinner into shallow water and back off as it reached the shore. When we added muscle flesh to the spinner they took the bait without hesitation. Our largest was about 2Kg and at one stage we had so much fish that we had to construct a deep freeze out of bits of the small icebergs that ended up in shallow water so that none was wasted.

As a Christmas present after our return I was given a copy of the bilingual book “Field Guide Patagonia and Antarctica” edited by Marcello D Beccaceci, Boedo 90, Florida (1602), Buenos Aires, Argentina. mdb@wamani.apc.org ISBN: 98798652-0-0. It is a very simple and very useful well illustrated 20 page book to the local fauna, flora and ideal for the non expert

THE TILMAN LINK

As mentioned Bill Tilman had visited the area in the early 1950’s.

In 1970’s I had worked in Penzance and was a member of the Land’s End Climbing Club. The club had been founded in 1972 with Charles Marriott as its Chairman and despite his advancing years he remained active on club meets. I remember tying onto an old hawser rope on the Longships Ridge area of Pordenack Point with Charles. I knew he had an exploration pedigree but he modestly never mentioned his trips with Tilman. Just before our 2004 trip I reread Mischief in Patagonia and Charles’ part in the exploration of this area became apparent.

Imagine my surprise when on return to Puenta Arenas for only one night Alejo turned up and insisted that we should join him for a drink with members of a Chilean Expedition who were waiting for a weather window for their trip to Antarctica. They were part of a scientific and mountaineering expedition planning a trip to the South Pole whilst taking core samples from the glaciers. We were introduced to one very fit looking member of the land team who was Jorge Quinteros, the young Chilean from Tilman’s original ice cap team. The next day was his birthday and we managed to stay up talking, sharing mountain stories and drinking until he almost reached seventy. I told him of my climb with Charles. He is keen to record some of his memories of the trip and I have since endeavoured to put him in touch with the Alpine Club in London.

What a fantastic evening. We were honoured to be partying with many of Chile’s foremost Patagonian and Antarctic experts. Adventurers, geologists, doctors, glaciologists and mountain troops. The conversations crossed all international boundaries in the true ethos of mountaineering.

FINANCE

At the time of departure the exchange rate was £1=US\$ 1.61 and 1US\$=655peso.

This gave an approximate rate of 1000 pesos to the pound or 650 pesos to the dollar.

We carried almost all our money in US\$ cash spread round various money belts and hiding places. Some expensive items are best paid for in US\$. It is easy to change money at change shops in Punta Arenas or Puerto Natales. We both carried credit cards in case of emergency.

We had greatly appreciated financial support from the Mount Everest Foundation and Welsh Sports Council but did not seek other major sponsors preferring to be independent of commercial obligations. Journey Latin America made a donation against the cost of our air tickets.

Income:

MEF Grant.....	£650
Welsh Sports Council.....	£1600
Balance.....	members.

Major expenditure:

Total Flights 2 people return Heathrow to Punta Arenas.....	£1088.60p
Excess baggage.....	£400
Taxis in PA for shopping.....	£20
Accommodation PA 2 people 3 nights.....	£20
Accommodation PN 2 people 5 nights.....	£150
Accommodation Santiago 2 people one night.....	£20
Boat Charter into mountains and out (US\$3000 and gift GPS).....	£2000
Food for hills (US\$5 per person per day).....	£320
Food en route to hills and return plus beer bill.....	£320
Hard wear (fuel, pots & pans, cord, wellies etc).....	£270
Satellite phone (Part purchase).....	£1000
Insurance.....	£900
Tips.....	£60
Films.....	£300
Expected report costs & postage.....	£250
Approximate total costs.....	£7200.

THANKS

Our Families:

**Sally, Jenny and Tom Hillebrandt.
“M” Smith.**

Sponsors:

**Mount Everest Foundation.
Sports Council of Wales.**

Equipment:

Terra Nova. Carolyn Budding.

Supporters & Advisors:

**Twid Turner. MEF/BMC reference.
Martin Doyle. MEF/BMC reference.
John Rees. British Consul.
Paul Davies. Journey Latin America.
Hernan Jofre. Conceptio Indigo.
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