

WELSH
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PATAGONIA EXPEDITION
2005



Cerro Aguilera

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INTRODUCTION

When one returns from an expedition friends and colleagues ask “ Did you have a good time?” When one says “Yes” they then assume one reached the top of ones objective and look very confused when I say “We didn’t get as high as last time.” It took 14 days last year 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. This year with the route in place at least up to the final summit massif and a strong team we expected to waltz up to last year’s high point without any trouble and then head for the top. That was without taking into account the famous Patagonian weather. However the company was great and the fishing was good enough to keep us trying.

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 mountain with MEF, BMC and Sports Council of Wales sponsorship. Our team was made up of myself, Chris Smith, David Hillebrandt, 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 Dave 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.

In 2004 Dave and I returned, unfortunately Allan Richards had to drop out at the last minute due to the sudden death of his mother. We used the hut as our base and after trying to force a route through the forest for a few days we climbed the ridge again to make a sketch map of the forest and swamps from above to try to find links to the open leads through the trees. During the recce we climbed another unclimbed minor peak and got close to the major unclimbed twin peak mountain further south before retreating in strong winds.

Armed with the sketch map, after 14 days we eventually broke through to the hidden valley and glacier below the South Face of Aguilera. We found a route up the glacier and then up a steep stream gorge to a hanging valley where we camped before trying a summit bid the next day. We were up early in good weather and after wallowing up deep snow for 6 hours we were below a short ridge leading up to the plateau below the summit. At that point Dave did not feel able to go on so we headed back to the tent and the Following day back down to the valley.

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 2005 EXPEDITION

The original team for the trip had started at 4 or 5 and after a couple of changes for various reasons we were a team of three with a very experienced long time friend and colleague, Steve Hartland, joining Dave Hillebrandt and myself for the first time in Patagonia. This was my 6th and Dave's 10th visit to the region.

The expedition started well and progressed quicker than any previous one, partly due to the fact that we are very well acquainted with the itinerary and the various shops, supermarkets and contacts required to provision the needs of the team. Thus after just four days we set off on the 'Foam' from Puerto Natales. We had met Captain Conrado earlier on that day (1 Oct) and delivered the hydraulic steering gear for the Mama Dina which we had bought for him in Britain. We were slightly concerned when we found out that we were to go on the 'Foam' but there would be a slight delay because they had only just completed fitting a new engine in it to replace the old Landrover engine and were conducting the first sea trials! However apart from us loading our gear and boarding and then being left on board alone for a couple of hours for some unknown reason, everything was ok and we set off at about 22.15.

The weather had been good since arriving in Chile and the Cordillera Sarmiento range had been visible from Puerto Natales, not a common occurrence. The good weather continued throughout the voyage, which was most enjoyable but as we arrived in the lower reaches of Fjordo Peel darkness was approaching so we moored up for the night so that the ice in the fjord from the glaciers could be negotiated in daylight the following morning.

We set off at daylight and after only one hiccup in the ice, (something fell over and jammed the steering chain causing us to hit a substantial block of ice luckily with no damage), arrived at BC by midday and after sorting gear and lunch we made a recce of first hour of the route to find everything ok and the red wool markers from last year still visible.

The following day we packed gear and five days food and set off in fair weather, arrived camp 1 18.00 and there was a slight shower as we pitched the tent so we dived in and had some food.

We were up at 7.30 the next morning but the weather not good with 8/8 cloud so we waited a few hours, during which we found we had forgotten tea bags and porridge so we decided to return to BC to pick up more supplies. After arriving back dry at 16.00 it was raining by 17.15 and heavy overnight.

For the next eight days the weather was not conducive to moving so we spent the time around BC reading, fishing, eating and listening to music etc. On the 14 Oct the weather was better, cloudy with blue patches so still not brilliant but we decided to head up to camp 1 after lunch with an extra four days food. After 4 hours we reached the camp to that the tent had lots of holes, obviously chewed, maybe mice or rats, in groundsheet and flysheet, which we managed to patch, after a fashion with fabric and glue. The dry-bag hung in tree with the food in was also damaged, but most of the food was ok.

The following day the pressure was down and there was some cloud but some blue patches so we decided to go up. It took 6 hours up the glacier and the stream gorge to hanging valley where it was windy and we could not find shelter. With snow covering the boulder field it was a fruitless task trying find a large boulder to dig in behind before dark so we decided to camp on the flat in the open and hope for the best. The wind continued all night and the next day with sleet and rain and I did not leave the tent.

On the morning of the 17 Oct I awoke early, it was still dark and the wind was very strong. I think that we were all dozing on and off with the noise of the wind and then suddenly at about 07.30 there was a noise like an explosion as all the tent poles snapped. Luckily we had the inner tent doors partly open so we were all able to grab the flysheet before it disappeared down the valley, even though it had been held down by large alloy snow pegs hammered into the moraine. Whilst Steve and Dave held onto the tent, in the mayhem I managed to get dressed, out of my bag and into boots and Paramo and into the maelstrom to start retrieving gear. I got the fly secured under some rocks and gathered up other gear, which had been but had luckily stuck in the snow and the boulders below us. We were very fortunate that it was light by this time but there was some concern when Steve thought one of his boots had gone and I could not find it but found other gear. It was however just hidden in the rest of the gear under the flapping inner tent. Steve packed his gear into his rucksack and got followed it outside. I was freezing by this time and I got back inside the inner to find my gear and pack it and put some extra clothing on. Steve crawled back in to gather some other gear only to find when he got out, that his full rucksack had been blown away, luckily again, to get stuck in the snow and boulder-field about 50 metres away. Dave then appeared and we got everything we could find packed away and set off back down, retrieving other bits and pieces as we found them on the way.

We used the snow-shoes down the snow covered boulder-field until we reached the edge of the snow at the top of the stream gorge. Part way down the gorge, descending a steep rock step Dave pitched forward and landed on his head with a loud smack. He had a small bruise on the temple but what we did not see at first was that under his hat was a lump the size of an egg higher up on the RHS. It sent him a bit dizzy and nauseous and we sat him down and applied snow and then a glove soaked in freezing water. After resting for a while we set off down again with Steve and I manhandling Dave's rucksack down the steep and awkward terrain. When we got back down almost to the glacier Dave was feeling better and thankfully was able to take his sack back for the rest of the journey back to BC which took 10 hours including a brew stop at camp one.

The next three days were spent drying and fixing the gear and tent and hoping for the weather to improve for another attempt on the mountain. We did more reading and fishing but time was running out. As a last ditch attempt we decided that if the weather became even half decent then we would go as light as possible without the tent direct to camp 2 to bivvi, because if the weather became good then we could try for the summit and if it came bad then we were coming down anyway. We set off again on the on the 26 Oct in good weather but no rise in pressure and reached the hanging valley after 10 hours with high cirrus filling the sky. A lot of snow had melted after our last visit and we found an excellent bivvi site under a cave but it needed a lot of work to make it level and to get the three of us in. So as it was to be our last night and then either up or down we bivvied on a perfect flat area sheltered from the wind by a 10ft high boulder.

We had some food and got down for the night at about 19.30 but it soon started to drizzle and by 04.00 I was soaked so got out of my bag and into dry clothes. We were enveloped in cloud so I made a brew and we had some food and as it got lighter the others emerged from their dry cocoons and we headed down, this time without mishap. We were back at BC by 16.00 with all our gear after a brew and food at camp one.

The following day, the 28 Oct was excellent weather, the best since arrival and we wandered around enjoying the sun. It was so hot that I managed to strip off and ford the Carl river to walk along the shore of Seno Andrew without clothes whilst I dried off. The following morning the Penguin arrived to pick us up on another beautiful day, Sod's Law I suppose.

We had good cruise through the fjords, another amazing and exciting passage through the Kirke Channel in the dark and a stop for a few hours sleep in a tiny inlet between high cliffs before our final leg back to Puerto Natales.

Two nights in Puerto Natales, two in Punta Arenas and one long afternoon and evening in Santiago with plenty good food and wine and that was it-----for this year??????????

DIARY

Tues 27th Sept: Heathrow depart 22.00

Wed 28th Sept: Arrive Punta Arenas 23:30 transfer to Hospedaje Nena

Thurs 29th Sept: Shopping for food and supplies

Fri 30th Sept: Picked up rest of supplies and white gas and got bus at 13.00 to PN

Sat 1st Oct: Picked up remaining fresh food, gas heater, met Conrado set off 22.15

Sun 2nd Oct: Stopped overnight in Fjordo Peel to wait for daylight

Mon 3rd Oct: Negotiated ice in fjord in daylight settled in to BC by lunch

Tues 4th Oct: Packed five days food, camp 1 18.00 and there was a slight shower.

Wed 5th Oct: Up at 7.30 not good 8/8 cloud waited a few hours then returned to BC

Thurs 6th Oct: 8/8 cloud fishing, Me 1 haddock, Dave 1 haddock, heavy rain

Friday 7th Oct: Press dropped, cloudy, windy, Steve caught 1 haddock and 1 sea trout

Sat 8th Oct: rained all night, rain and wind all day

Sun 9th Oct: Weather still crap

Mon 10th Oct: Low cloud, crap, Steve caught one haddock

Tues 11th Oct: Raining then cleared a bit then raining again

Wed 12th Oct: Rain, thin snow low down then rain overnight

Thur 13th Oct: Crap, cloud on tops, I caught 2 haddock 1st sight of Aguilera for a week

Fri 14th Oct: Weather clear in morning but cloudy with blue patches, up to camp 1

Sat 15th Oct: Pressure down windy all night, up to camp 2 in hanging valley

Sun 16th Oct: Strong winds, sleet and snow all day. I did not leave the tent.

Mon 17th Oct: Tent exploded retreated, Dave fell on head, back to BC in 10 hours

Tues 18th Oct: Got all gear outside to dry, fixed tent poles with good ones sewed fly

Wed 19th Oct: Fixed other poles with tent pegs and 40 holes in groundsheet

Thur 20th Oct: Raining on and off 1 rat in trap and Steve caught 1

Fri 21st Oct: Weather not good Dave caught BIG haddock with his foot Steve 1 rat

Sat 22nd Oct: 8/8 cloud cold raining found phone not operational!!

Sun 23rd Oct: Wet Dave caught 4 haddock Clear starry night and cold

Mon 24th Oct: Cloudy some wind and rain then thin cloud stars visible

Tues 25th Oct: Good morning blue sky, warm but high cirrus go light in morning

Wed 26th Oct: Good weather but press not high 10 hours up to camp 2 and bivvi

Thur 27th Oct: started to drizzle last night, soaked by 04.00 back to BC 10 hours

Fri 28th Oct: Excellent day, best since arrival, I crossed Carl river to Fjordo Andrew

Sat 29th Oct: Boat arrived 07.30 Stopped in tiny inlet by Kirke channel

Sun 30th Oct: Arrived Puerto Natales

Mon 31st Oct: Puerto Natales

Tues 1st Nov: Puerto Natales to Punta Arenas by bus

Wed 2nd Nov: Punta Arenas, Agostini Museum

Thur 3rd Nov: Punta Arenas to Santiago, Fish market

Fri 4th Nov: Departed Santiago

Sat 5th Nov: Arrived UK

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 and gave us favourable rates.

We were booked with Varig to Santiago via Sao Paulo (where we had a six hour connection wait), after disappointing treatment with Iberia over the last couple years. The baggage allowance was very generous, 2x 32kg for each person, with the possibility of booking another 3x32kg per person for a fee of US\$120 per item which we did not need.

However the internal flight with Lan Chile was still a problem and even wearing all our clothing and boots etc we still had to pay excess but we were carrying some hydraulic steering gear for Conrado. We wore everything again on the return to Santiago and did not have to pay anything, and of course there was no problem on the return flight with Varig when all the gear was in the barrels again.

We were very fortunate that Alejo Contreras kindly picked us up from the airport at 11.30 at night and delivered us to Marias.

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 boat 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. On our last trip Conrado had had a new boat built on Chiloe Island, the Mama Dina. It is a true workhorse and makes a fantastic expedition boat for up to 10 people at the moment and probably 20 after further conversion. 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. This trip we went in on his third boat, the Foam which is smaller and built in Denmark around 1930, it had just had a new 85 HP engine which was still being tested as we arrived in Puerto Natales. We were picked up by the Penguin.

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. Also as the young barmaid had difficulty in pouring our Pisco Sour they just gave us the blender jug and let us get on with it (at least that is what I think happened)

We spent a night in Santiago this year on the return to facilitate flight change and a meal in the fish market. Stayed at Hostal Americana which was very good and cheap.

As last year were able to remain operational on days of usual Patagonian weather. 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. We did some work on the outer ‘annex’ to try and keep rats out which we had this year although they did not give us any real trouble and did not get into the main part of the hut.

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. Also this time we had the gas heater.

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 usually informs 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. Last time however we were delayed by a few hours whilst there was communication between Punta Arenas and Puerto Natales so this year Conrado decided to book us in after he had dropped us off.

The permission to go actually arrived by e-mail two weeks after we had returned home!!! Manana manana

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. And on our return to Punta Arenas after the trip we had an enjoyable trip around the Agostini Museum with him.

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 had a fairly compact Motorola satellite phone in 2003 & 2004 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. However after one month when we tried to use the phone we got a message that only emergency calls could be made and in fact these could not be made as they contact through a cellphone network which was of course not possible in our location.

On our return we contacted Marconi Marine who told us that the £80 we had paid to top up the phone as usual before we left only lasts for a month now and then is lost!!! We are trying to clarify the situation as that has not been the case over the last two years and of course in an emergency after the first month we would have been stuffed.

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 had used them previously but not on this occasion.

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) and also used a . 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 in 2004 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 known 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.

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. (2005)

High Point on Aguilera S 50o 25.144 W 73o 47.640. GPS Altitude 1291m. Above seracs.(2004)

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 unfortunately they were not able to supply us with one by the time we left so we used a 'brick shithouse' Terra Nova Hyperspace with heavyweight flysheet and floor which Dave has had for a few years. It is very strong and a good size for three people.

On the last five 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 again took a pair of snowshoes each as in 2004. Steve and I used TSL shoes and Dave used Black Diamond and they were worth every ounce of their weight. We could move so much easier on the wet snow especially when crossing half covered boulder fields.

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. However we had problems after leaving one hung in a tree at camp 1.

A piss pot is useful but it is good to remember that the one you left in the hut last year has an inner closure under the cap before trying to use it in your sleeping bag in the dark!!!!!!!!!!!! and a plywood board essential for using the stove inside the tent.

We all used synthetic filled sleeping bags and Dave found the new light Rab bivvy bag really good for use in the tent to protect his bag from the damp, Steve had a good quality Artiach goretex bivvi bag whilst my very old goretex bag was found to be crap.

The Garmin Geko GPS taken last year 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. We decided to accept the extra weight of one 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.

PHOTOGRAPHY

I carried a trusty old Olympus OM1, Dave had compact Contax and a waterproof Canon Sure Shot A1 which enabled us to take photos when other cameras remained in their bags. Steve used a Canon digital and an Olympus

COMFORT

This time we bought a portable gas heater in Puerto Natales (£25) and borrowed Gas bottles from Conrado which we got filled which made the hut extremely comfortable and gave us the opportunity to dry out clothing and equipment in the worst weather.

MEDICAL (Dr Hillebrandt)

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 all 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 and Steve are trainers for the REC remote area first aid course. All three 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.

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>
Canquen comun	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>
Diucon	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>
Pilpilen Austral	Magellanic Oystercatcher	<i>Haematopus leucopodus</i>
Gaviotin Sudamericano	South American Tern	<i>Sterna hirundinacea</i>
Traro o Carancho	Southern Crested Caracara	<i>Polyborus plancus</i>
Churette	Dark-Bellied Cinclodes	<i>Cinclodes patagonicus</i>
Perdicit cordillerana austral	White-bellied Seedsnipe	<i>Attagis malouinus</i>
Pitiocomun	Chilean Flicker	<i>Colaptes pitius</i>
Cachana	Austral Parakeet	<i>Enicognathus ferrugineus</i>
Salteador	Great Skua	<i>Catharacta chilensis</i>
Playero de lomo blanca	White-Rumped Sandpiper	<i>Calidris fuscicollis</i>
Cachudito Comun	Tufted Tit Tyrant	<i>Anairetes parulus</i>
Cometocino Patagonico	Patagonian Sierra Finch	<i>Phrygilus patagonicus</i>
Petrel Plateado	Southern Fulmar	<i>Fulmarus glacialoides</i>
Dormilona Tontita	Dark Faced Ground Tyrant	<i>Muscisaxicola macloviana</i>
Cormoran Imperial	Imperial Shag	<i>Phalacrocorax (atriceps)atriceps</i>
Jote de Cabeza Colorada	Turkey Vulture	<i>Cathartes aura</i>
Garza Cuca	Cocoi Heron	<i>Ardea cocoi</i>
Carpintera Negro	Magellanic Woodpecker	<i>Campephilus magellanicus</i>
Yunco de Magellanes	Magellanic Diving Petrel	<i>Pelecanoides magellani</i>
Fio-Fio	White Crested Elenia	<i>Elaenia albiceps</i>
Jilguero Comun	Black chinned Siskin	<i>Carduelis barbata</i>

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

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

Referenced from Birds of Patagonia, Tierra del Fuego & Antarctic Peninsula
The Falkland Islands & South Georgia

By E. Couve & C. Vidal in Spanish and English

Fantastico Sur Birding 2003 ISBN 956-8007-04-0

e-mail: info@fantasticosur.com

www.fantasticosur.com

Mammals

With the exception of rats that infested our boggy base camp in 2003 and visited the hut annex this year, 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.

We saw seals and dolphins in the bay near the hut and discovered otter tracks in the mud on the beach and along the Carl river but did not see any this year.

Fish

As last year we took a fishing rod and we were well rewarded. Steve 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 Robbalo 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.

Dave also had 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

FINANCE

At the time of departure the exchange rate was £1=US\$ 1.71 and 1US\$=532peso in Punta Arenas and 1US\$=510 peso in Puerto Natales.

This gave an approximate rate of 900 pesos to the pound

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 all 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.....	£600
Welsh Sports Council.....	£1150
Balance.....	members.

Major expenditure:

Total Flights 3 people return Heathrow to Punta Arenas.....	£2787.60
Excess baggage.....	£60
Taxis in PA /PN /Santiago.....	£57
Bus PA-PN return including excess baggage.....	£36
Accommodation PA /PN / Santiago.....	£215
Boat Charter into mountains and out (US\$4000).....	£2340
Food for hills (US\$5 per person per day).....	£430
Food en route to hills and return	£345
Pisco sour(3 litres)on return.....	£30
Fishing gear	£27
Gas heater and gas.....	£40
Hard wear (fuel, pots & pans, cord, wellies etc).....	£130
Insurance.....	£428
Tips.....	£70
Films.....	£150
Expected report costs & postage.....	£250
Approximate total costs.....	£7400.

THANKS

Our Families:

Sally, Jenny and Tom Hillebrandt.
'M' Smith
Anne Radford

Sponsors:

Mount Everest Foundation.
Sports Council of Wales.

Equipment:

Paramo
Terra Nova

Supporters & Advisors:

Twid Turner. MEF/BMC reference.
Crag Jones. MEF/BMC reference.
John Rees. British Consul.
Paul Davies. Journey Latin America.
Hernan Jofre. Conceptio Indigo.
Maria Rivera. Hospedaje Nena.
Penguin & Foam :Capt Conrado Alvarez. Son Capt Conrado Alvarez Gonzales
Alejo Contreras, DAP.

Quote of the trip

“Is that a Braille camera”!!!!!!!!!!!!!!

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Charter of boat. Penguin & Mama Dina & Foam. Knows Area. Speaks some English.

John Rees, British Consul, Cataratas del Niagra 01325, Punta Arenas. Chile.

Tel: mornings 00 56 61 228783. afternoon (home) 00 56 61 211535.

E Mail: reesking@terra.cl

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