

THE BRITISH EXTREMELY CHILE EXPEDITION 1992/93

EXPEDITION REPORT

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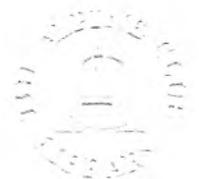
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Acknowledgements

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The British Mountaineering Council - finance

The Mount Everest Foundation - finance

John Rees British Consul Punta Arenas - permission

Troll Safety Equipment - harnesses

Rivory Joanny - ropes

Cotswold Camping - equipment

Ian Tatersall - advice

Frank Bennett - food

Alan Kearney - advice

Jackie Topham - food

Buffalo - clothing

Macpac (UK) - tents

Lichfield Tents - tents

Grivel - ice axes

Paul Pritchard - advice

Introduction

The main aim behind the British Extremely Chile Expedition was to set up a small lightweight expedition that would be entirely self-supporting and climb in fast alpine style on technical mountain terrain. This was in marked contrast to the majority of teams operating in Patagonia, who use multi-day fixed rope tactics. In order to do this successfully, the correct selection of personnel, equipment and objectives were essential.

Thus, I approached Andy Perkins in July 1992 with the concept of the expedition. I had selected Andy because, as one of Britain's leading Himalayan mountaineers, I knew he was well versed in all the problems of expedition organization. In addition, I thought his dedicated approach to climbing over the years, together with his proven technical ability, would be of invaluable assistance during the expedition. I was not to be disappointed.

For equipment, an appendix gives the details but it is worth making note of several vital items which made a significant difference to our performance on the hill. Sixty metre dynamic ropes gave a much appreciated increase in speed, with minimal increase in weight, though their flimsy construction fared poorly on Patagonian granite. The 200 metres of static line packed at the last moment, while corrupting the purity of our alpine style motives, in the end proved essential to access the start of the route at the first sign of improving weather.

The objective was the key - we needed something which could be done feasibly in a day or two. Our preference was for rock rather than mixed, though we were more than competent in both departments. We selected the North ridge of the Shield. At 2,400 m this mountain is situated towards the northern extremes of the Cordillera Del Paine National Park. It received its first ascent from two Italians, M. Curnis and M. Dotti on January 31st 1968. Research has shown that since that date it has not received another ascent. Though we know expeditions have tried from the Rio Ascencio.

We decided before we left the U.K. that the most sensible approach would be via this valley. Information from various sources revealed the possibility of a direct approach to the North Ridge of The Shield from the Ascencio side. From shots obtained from the Loughborough Students Andes Expedition 1989 we knew that once we were established on the ridge, the climbing would be almost entirely on rock, and it looked like it might "go"! Paul Pritchard had tried the ridge earlier on in 1992, and considered the route feasible. The great Patagonian expert, American Alan Kearney, confirmed this to me during consultation.

The whole trip was put together in 3 months and we flew out to Santiago in early December.

Getting to the Paine region

There are a number of airlines flying to Chile. We flew World Airlines, booked via Trailfinders and it was a pleasant change to have 2 items of luggage allowed rather than a fixed weight limit. And, a free bar (arf!)

The following day we flew down to Punta Arenas, at an exorbitant price. Parties with more time and less money could probably get the tickets cheaper.

As our permission was not quite in order, we spent a day in Punta Arenas doing Asian bureaucratic body swerving. The British consul, John Rees, was extremely helpful in this respect, and well worth contacting if you have any problems.

An afternoon bus ride to Puerto Natales followed, and a mad evening dash round the supermarket to buy the scoff for four weeks before the public holiday on the following day. Fortunately the buses were still running and we were able to get up the the park.

Approach to Base Camp

Due to confusion and Jerry staying on in Puerto Natales to sort the final rubber stamping of the 'permission', we left 2 tents on the bus. It is a tribute to the honesty of the Chileans that these were retrieved 2 days later at the bus station! Chile is not Peru.

Andy went on to the park headquarters to check with the rangers, which is a vital part of the protocol.

Meanwhile, Twid and Louise who were travelling with us arranged the horses with Pepe at the Estancia del Paine. The horses carry 60 kg each and take less than half a day to reach a point about 10 minutes walk short of Campomente del Torres, the base for the routes on the East face of the Central Tower. Pepe does not believe in morning starts!

From the Campomente del Torres, we walked for a further 50 minutes to reach the much quieter Campomente Japanese, much quieter than the Torres and more of a wilderness experience. Even so, the paths are well trodden compared to descriptions of the bush whacking required when approaching the Fortress in 1977, let alone the original British ascent of the Central Tower to the sixties. The base camp has a shelter, though if this is occupied you would need plastic sheet and string, a griddle and ingenuity to make one. One vital piece of equipment we didn't have was ovengloves for lifting pans on and off a blazing fire!

The path up to the Ascencio glacier is well cairned, and it took half a day to reconnoitre and establish an A.B.C. under a large block directly under the East face of the Shield. The site of this camp was the key to our success. Providing good shelter and, amazingly, running water within reach of the tent door enabled us to hang out within 10 minutes of the base of the route in total safety and comparative comfort! In addition, a certain degree of mental resilience and/or a frontal lobotomy is also called for to weather the 2 week storms.

The weather dominated our efforts, though the east facing aspect of the approach gully enabled us to fix this section of the route when other parties on North ridges were being shredded by the wind.

The Climb

The lower slab barrier provided a couple of bold slab pitches with sparse gear in an objectively threatened situation, seracs on the left and rockfall from above. Rapid progress up the snow and ice slope above took us to the entrance of the gully, which was surprisingly free of stonefall. The first 100 m of string was left on the slabs and the second day saw us back at the gully entrance. A tough waterfall pitch saw us past the bergschrund, and some hard mixed climbing took us to below the final blocky finish. This pitch on huge stacked blocks and vertical snow was very worrying and it was a relief to top out on the col. Here it was cold and windy and we were forced to wait for better weather.

We jugged to the col twice after this, only to be rebuffed by bad weather. Then on December 29th the altimeter dropped by 200 m, the skies cleared and the wind dropped.

What to say about the route? It is essentially an alpine rock climb rather than a big wall, often on dubious rock but taking an excellent line, possibly the most striking line in the Ascencio valley. It is characterised by slab, groove and chimney climbing on a broad buttress, with some icing in the cracks making life exciting.

After 10 hours of climbing from the col, we reached the rubble ledges, thankfully dumped the huge sac, changed into our plastics and romped across screes towards the summit. A few hundred metres on, we were brought to an abrupt halt by a step of the ubiquitous shale which tops the peaks on this side of the valley. A 20 minute discussion eventually led to a decision to go down and we reversed the line of ascent using nearly 10 m of abseil tape but with the loss of only 2 pieces of hardware on the ridge.

We left a few pieces in the gully but stripped the fixed rope out, taking advantage of their 100 m lengths to descend the slab barrier in a single abseil and returned to the tent at 11 pm after 22 hours of continuous climbing to complete "The Adventures of Don Quixote", 1000 m ED1, 5.10 and A2.

We rested most of the 31st and then on New Year's Day we raced up the South Ridge of Torre Norte (2250 m) to witness the whole of the Patagonian Ice Cap and the Paine National Park in perfect conditions. The wind was blowing a very light 10 m.p.h. and if I had had my paraglider with me I could have easily flown off. It was the perfect end to a thoroughly enjoyable expedition and a great way to start the New Year!

Jerry Gore

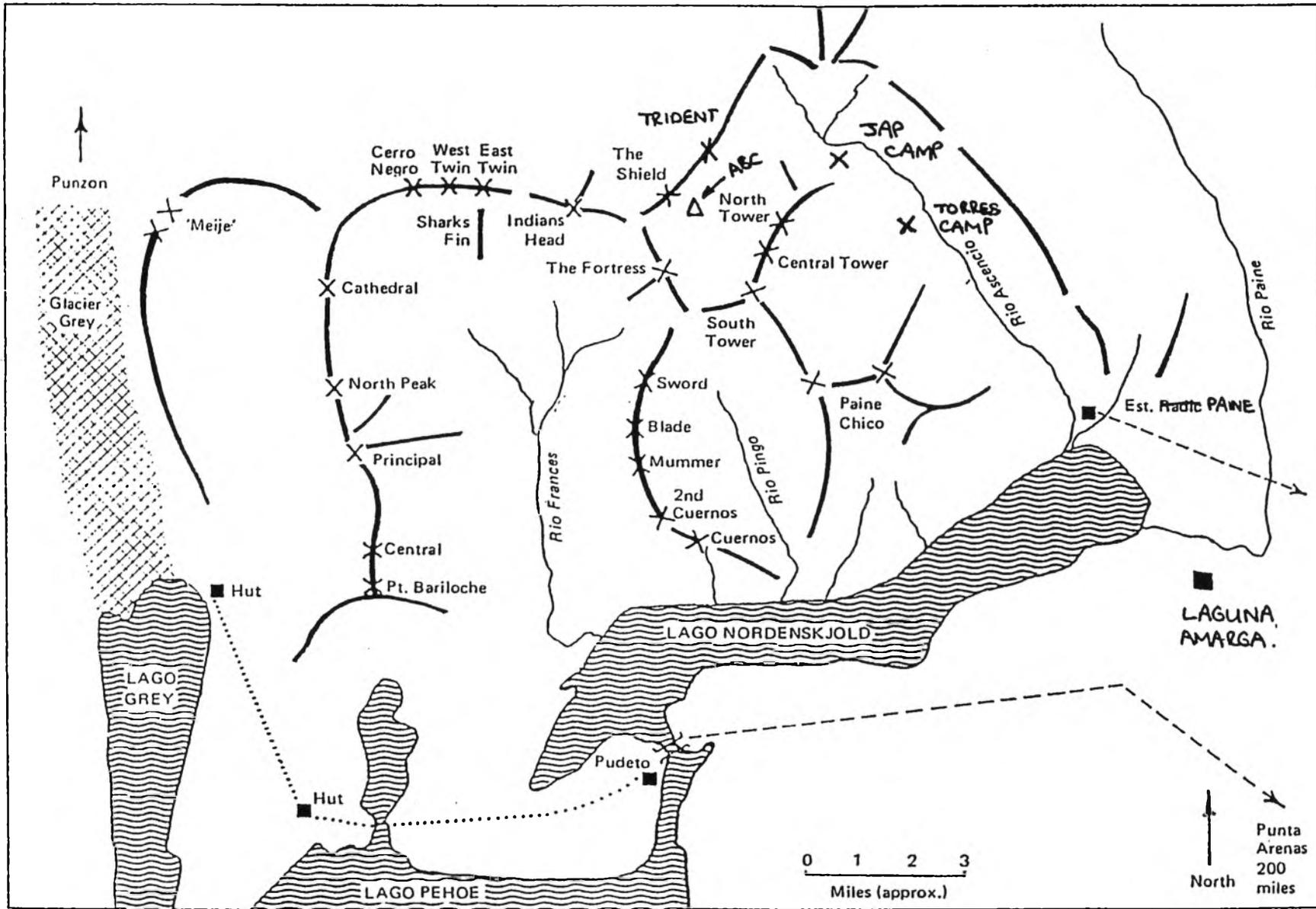
Andy Perkins

March 1993

Conclusions

The following related conclusions can be drawn.

1. Small teams are the business in Chile (or anywhere else for that matter). More flexible, faster, less environmentally damaging, they are undoubtedly the way forward.
2. It is vital to take every opportunity possible in Chile to climb when the weather permits. This inevitably means false starts and a regular pattern of waking up at 3 am to check the sky and the barometer, finding out that both are a disaster area and going back to sleep.
3. Fitness and an ability to crank up to maximum speed after a few days in a tent are useful assets.
4. Patagonia is a land of extremes. Go there with an extreme attitude and you won't be disappointed.



CORDILLERA DEL PAINE

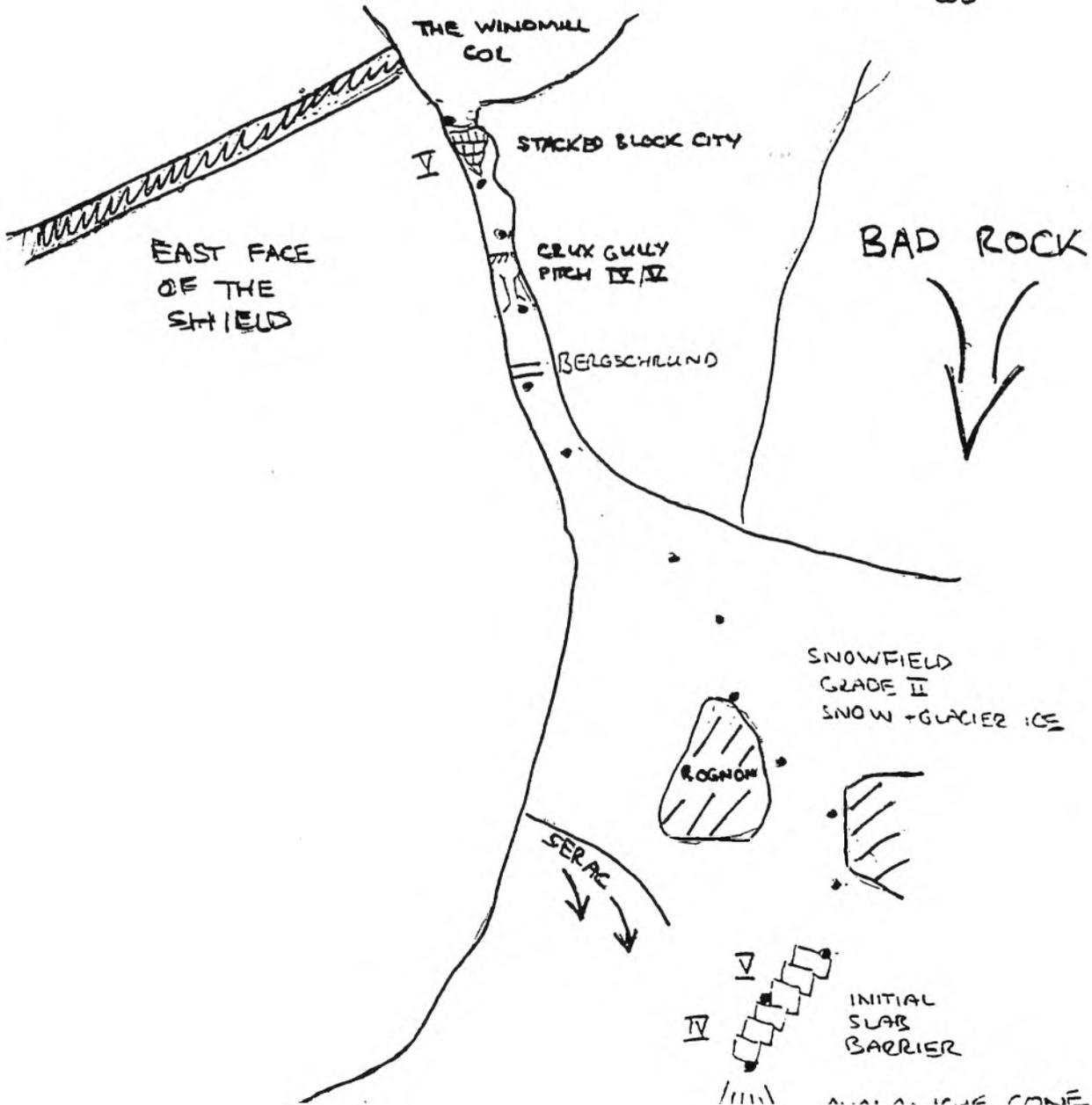
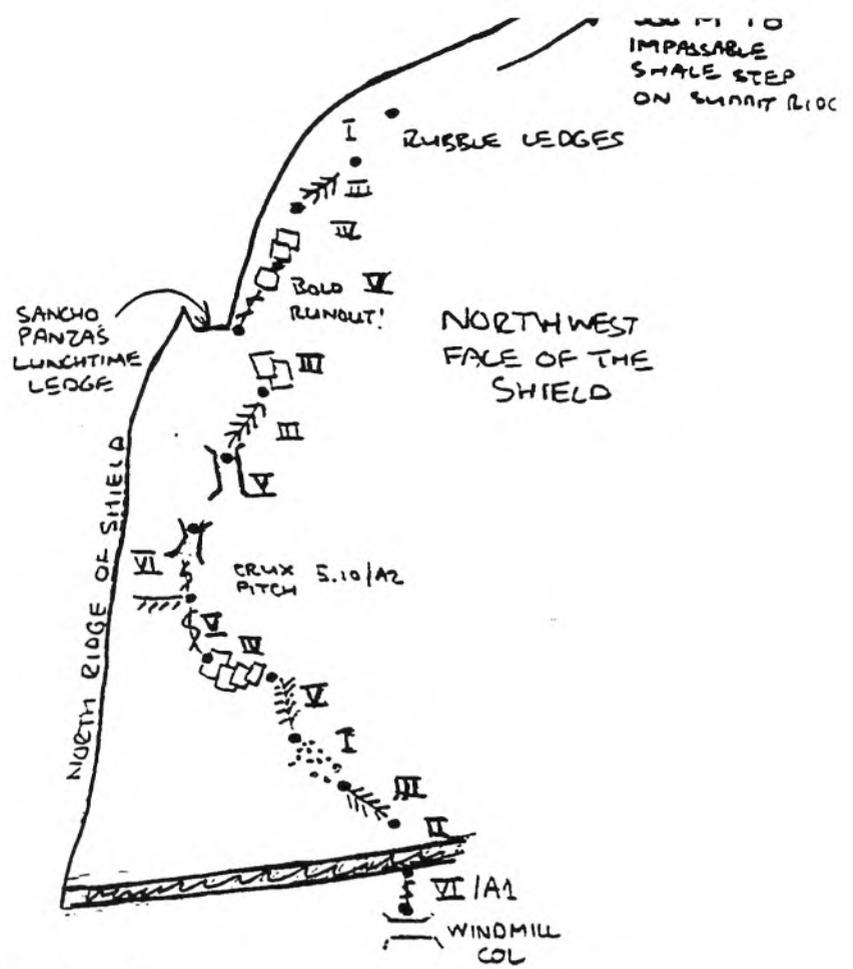
SHIELD, NORTH RIDGE

THE ADVENTURES OF DON QUIXOTE

FIRST ASCENT:
 J. GORE + A. PERKINS
 30.12.92

LOWER GULLY FIXED
 BETWEEN 13 AND 15.12
 WITH 200 M STATIC LINE.

RIDGE CLIMBED IN ALPINE STYLE
 ROUND TRIP IN 22 HOURS.



Appendix 1: EXPEDITION ITINERARY

1992

- 5/12 Flight to Santiago, Chile on United Airlines. 70 kilo baggage allowance
- 6/12 Flight from Santiago to Punta Arenas
- 7/12 Bus to Puerto Natales. Completed all supermarket shopping in evening.
- 8/12 Perkins takes bus to Park H.Q. and arranges horses. Gore finalises documentation in Natales.
- 9/12 Gore and Perkins set up base camp at Japanese Camp at head of Rio Ascencio.
- 10-11/12 Gore and Perkins make carries from horse dump to base camp.
- 12/12 Advance base camp sited under large boulder at base of Shield.
- 13/12 The team fixed initial rock band on approach gully.
- 14-15/12 Approach gully fixed. Mixed pitches of Scottish 5 climbed.
- 16-22/12 Storm conditions. Gore and Perkins wait at advance base camp, fortified by Topham's Christmas cake and the compulsory Perkins diet of four Mars bars per person per day!
- 23/12 Up to the Col to find freezing conditions. Attempt No. 1.
- 24-25/12 Bad weather. Christmas Day celebrated with juggling balls and boomerangs.
- 26/12 Up to start of fixed ropes to find dangerous snow conditions. Attempt No. 2.
- 27-28/12 Storm!
- 29/12 Reached col, but gale force winds necessitate retreat. Attempt No. 3.
- 30-31/12 Climbed North Ridge of The Shield in 22 hour push.

1993

- 1/1 Climbed North Tower of Paine via South ridge.
- 2/1 Packed up ABC
- 3-5/1 Packed up B.C. Gore and Perkins move down to roadhead.
- 6-7/1 Gore explores Rio Frances and makes reconnaissance. Stays at base camp below the Cuernos. Perkins remains at Laguna Amarga.
- 8-15/1 Gore and Perkins leave the National Park and return to Santiago via buses through Argentina and Northern Chile.
- 15/1 Team flies back to London Heathrow.

Appendix 2 : FINANCES

We found Chile a very expensive Country to operate in. Compared with expeditions to Peru or Bolivia everything was twice as expensive but everything was also twice as clean, twice as secure and twice as organised. Take out Visa and Access cards if you have them and add at least 10% to your budget for contingencies.

TRAVEL COSTS

372 Pesos (\$) to U.S. \$1.00

500 Pesos (\$) to U.K. £1.00

Flight to Santiago	£720 per person return
Flight Santiago - Punta Arenas	U.S. \$250 per person single
Bus from Punta Arenas Airport to town centre	\$1000 per person single
Bus Punta Arenas - Puerto Natales	\$600 per person single
Bus Puerto Natales - Laguna Amarga (roadhead)	\$4500 per person return
Bus Punta Arenas - Osorno	\$20000 per person single
Bus Osorno - Santiago	\$4000 per person single

N.B. Taxi's worked out around £1.20 (\$600) for every five minutes of travel.

EQUIPMENT COSTS

Olympus Tent (Macpac)	£320
Boreal Invernales	£80 per pair
3 x 8.2 mm x 60 m ropes	£210
Lichfield base camp tent	£200
Buffalo System	£220 per person
Compact Grivel Tools	
Hammer and Axe	

MISCELLANEOUS COSTS

Park entrance fee	\$3500 per person
Accommodation	\$11900 per person
Food and kitchen gear	£253.66 for two people for 30 days in the field

One horse (50 kg)	US \$30 per day. Two horses up to base camp, one for the return journey at the end. Total cost \$90.
Food while travelling	£50.00 per person
Insurance (BMC Expeditions)	£70.00

Appendix 3 : EXTREMELY CHILE EXPEDITION REPORT

FOOD

The food for the trip was originally purchased with the idea of two of us spending 15 days at Base Camp, 10 days at Advanced Base Camp and 5 days on the hill. Components at each category would be upgradeable to the next i.e. some BC food useable at ABC etc. In the event, we never actually bivvied on the hill at all but spent 11 days at BC and 18 at ABC. As a result, more ready-to-eat food and less staples were consumed. For example, we ran out of biscuits and bread but were left with quite a bit of pasta, lentils, chick peas and porridge. Other than that, the quantities and menu seemed to work quite well. In particular, what appeared to be a mountain of chocolate was finished just before the end of our stay.

- We loved
- Chilean blackberry jam
 - Easter Cake
 - Chapattis
 - Manjar caramel spread
 - Cream with porridge (and manjar or jam)
 - Jackie Topham's Christmas Cake
- We hated
- a couple of packets of freeze-dried ground beef, well past their sell-by date
- We craved
- peanut butter, seemingly only available in the health food sections of Santiago supermarkets
 - raisins or sultanas
- We mistook
- Milo (a chocolate powder similar to Complan) for milk powder. Make sure you buy Nido. In the event, we managed to get some Nido, had Milo frequently and were left with 200 spare tea bags!

(*** great food; ??? what did we buy this for)

Purchased in UK

- 50 packets of Alpen in 50 g individual servings
- 60 Mars bars
- 60 Marathon bars
- 45 Ritter Sport chocolate bars in 5 different flavours ***
- 30 chocolate chip Tracker bars
- 30 cashew nut Tracker bars
- 200 individual sachets of milk powder ***
- 200 individual sachets of sugar ???
- 10 packets of electrolyte drink powder or tablets eg Dioralyte
- 10 packets of freeze-dried meals in a variety of flavours
- 10 Power Bars (overpriced and dehydrating) ???

30 packets of instant tomato soup
 30 packets of instant vegetable soup
 20 packets of instant soups left over from previous trips
 60 packets of flavoured chocolate drinks ***

Purchased in Puerto Natales

3.5 kg Porridge (1.5 kg left)
 3 kg Rice (1 kg left)
 7.5 kg Potatoes (2 kg left) ***
 6 kg Flour (mostly used for extended chapatti sessions at the end) ***
 50 Bread Rolls (initially 20, then a very welcome donation of 30 by an American trekking party)

8 x 400 g Pasta (3 left)
 4 kg Onions ***
 500 g Garlic ***
 1 Cabbage (used to make a humungous bowl of coleslaw. Jerry liked it).

1.5 kg Cheese
 1 kg Chick Peas (0.5 kg left)
 1 kg Haricot Beans (unused) ???
 3 x 250 g packets of mashed potato powder ***
 25 x 1 litre packets of simmering soup
 2 kg Nido milk powder (see notes)
 2 kg Milo chocolate drink
 2 x 450 g Nesquik drinking chocolate
 420 teabags (200 left)
 100 g coffee
 25 x 1 litre packets of Zuko fruit drinks
 3 kg sugar
 1 kg salt
 1 small plastic bottle of mustard
 1 small plastic bottle of Aji Chileno chilli sauce
 1 packet paprika
 1 packet mixed herbs
 1 bottle ketchup
 7 x 120 g Salsa ***
 2 packets Ravioli (each serves 2. Note that salsa has to be added)

9 x 184 g Tuna
 1 x 425 g Sardines
 1 x 425 g Jurel (fish)
 250 g Semolina (not used) ???
 5 tins Nestle cream
 1 kg Dried Peaches
 2 kg Dried Apricots (all of these inedible and unused) ???
 1 kg Dried Apple
 3 Easter Cakes (particularly good with margarine & jam)
 5 x 250 g Margarine (1 left)

4 x 440 g Jam ***
1 small jar mayonnaise
1 small bottle lemon juice
5 packets chocolate mousse/jelly (unused) ???
15 packets biscuits
1 bar of soap!
1 small bottle of detergent
1 plastic brush

Note that all packaging was burned and all tins and bottles packed out to Laguna Amarga. Finally, 'grazie' to the Italian team on "Suerte por la Manana" for their bolognese, cappuccino, toast, granola etc.

Fuel

We bought 15 litres of Benzina Blanca and used about 10 of these during our 18 days at ABC, plus a small amount for lighting fires at BC during wet weather and burning rubbish at the end. A consumption of 0.5-0.6 litres per day between 2 would seem reasonable but it's important to note that we had a ready water supply at ABC rather than having to melt snow.

At BC we were very glad of the shelter, its attendant grate and the abundant wood in the immediate area. Apart from the first couple of days, we cooked only on wood fires at BC. However, looking into the future and towards an exponential increase in the number of expeditions in the area, it seems inevitable that climbers will at some stage have to bring their own fuel.

We used an MSR XGK which went like a rocket on Benzina Blanca, actually burning a hole in our windshield. By contrast, Whispalites used by other teams fared poorly. Note that Bleuete gas is available in Puerto Natales in limited quantities.

Appendix 4 : EQUIPMENT

Patagonia is all about diversity of weather. In one hour the mountaineer can experience everything from blue skies and +20C temperatures to full blizzards and sub zero conditions. Temperatures are never that cold, but clothing often gets soaked and continual storms mean equipment must be able to dry in often less than ideal conditions.

Such an environment dictates the exclusive use of synthetic materials. Natural fibres are not ideal. With this in mind, and needing a clothing system that is both lightweight and durable we chose Buffalo clothing. It worked brilliantly and seemed suited to virtually everything the mountains could throw at us. Additionally, it seemed well suited to our style of climbing, namely fast and technical alpine-style, so that it gave us ample freedom of movement over steep rock and dried out as we sweated soloing fast on ice. Our conclusion: For high activity rates in wet cold conditions, the system as a whole has no equal. For Patagonia it is De Rigueur!

Apart from the Buffalo clothing, and with this system I include a one-piece Pertex windsuit which we found very useful, we took nothing else of special note. Our Macpac Olympus tent did us proud, but it was fully protected under a huge rock. Experience would show that no tent, unsheltered, can withstand the battering a full Patagonian storm can produce. So don't bother. Build your ABC out of rocks, or use one of the many existing bivvy caves in-situ under the towers. Alternatively, take a Whillans Box! Good sunglasses and cream (factor 12+) are essential and ski sticks are a real luxury for long fast treks to and from base camps.

Finally do take some sort of pressure recording device such as an altimeter or variometer. These are essential in determining what the weather is doing so you are in exactly the right position when it clears up.

EQUIPMENT LIST FOR THE BRITISH EXTREMELY CHILE EXPEDITION

PERSONAL KIT

Rock shoes (preferably insulated)
Plastic boots
Socks
Gaiters
Thermal Underwear
Mountain shirt
H.A. Salopettes
Belay Jacket Buffalo
Pertex windsuit
Insulated Hood
Pertex/Pile socks
Balaclava

Woolly hat
Altitude sunglasses
Ski goggles
Headtorch & 5 batteries
Trekking boots
Personal travel clothing
Wash kit
Towel
Mug
Ski sticks
Cigarette lighter
Bowl
KFS
Pen knife
Compass
Harness
Descender
Screwgates
Prusik loops
Helmet
Ice axe
Hammer
Crampons
Jumars
Rucksack (70 litres)
Rucksack (45 litres)
Camera and film
Walkman & batteries
Tapes
Reading/writing material
Sleeping bag (4 season)
Bivvy bag
Karrimat
Water/pee bottle
Suncream

COMMUNAL KIT

Large two-man tent
Small two-man bivvy tent
Snow shovel
MSR stove (and spare parts)
Windshield
Fuel bottles
Nest of billies
Pan grips
Ropes (3 x 8.2 mm x 60 m)
Fixed line (200 m x 8 mm static)
Set of friends
Quick draws (12)
Slings (4 x 4' + 2 x 8')
Pegs (20 assorted)
Ice Screws (5 assorted)
1 set of Hexes

Abseil tat (25 m)
2 sets of rocks
2 Barrels
Collapsible Water Container
Duct tape
Pliers
Wrench
File
Sewing kit
Para cord
Identitape & marker
Sealable plastic bags
First aid kit (base camp)
Hill first aid kit
Maps & Info
Binoculars
Travelling chess
Variometer (Prete1 V6)
Plastic barrels

Appendix 5 : MEDICAL

Chile is a very healthy country. Being more accustomed to the rigours of Asia, its high altitude and poor hygiene, a comprehensive kit as listed below was assembled. In the event, one of the drugs were used (at least, not for medical purposes) and we were able to avoid any major trauma. Our worst injury occurred in Osorno bus station when Jerry cut his hand on a Swiss Army knife while slicing melon! Other than that, minor cuts from granite climbing were the only injury worth noting.

Finally, it's interesting to note that, despite the lack of altitude, the intensity of sunlight in Patagonia is high. This may be due in part to the hole in the ozone layer above it. Pack a good pair of shades plus a spare between you, take plenty of Factor 15 suncream and stay off the CFC's!

Hill First Aid Kit

Paracetamol
DF118 (a.k.a. Dihydracodeine)
Oramorph
Various plasters
Gauze pads
Zinc Oxide Tape
Various Bandages
Throat Lozenges
Butterfly Dressings
Amethocaine Eye Drops

Base Kit

Immodium
Erythromycin
Septrin
Diazepam and Zopiclone
Aluminium Hydroxide
Flagyl
Ibuprofen
Maxolon
Chloramphenicol
Anusol
Calamine Lotion
Bandages, Safety Pins etc,
Swabs
Support Bandages

Appendix 6 : ELEVEN COMMANDMENTS FOR CHILE

1. Apply for official permission to climb in the National Park well in advance from the Chilean Consulate, 12 Devonshire St, London W1.
2. Take Visa/Access cards, you can use them in Chile.
3. Take Travellers Cheques in Dollars, and cash Dollars. They are exchangeable most places.
4. Be prepared for a charge to be levied to climb in the National Park, they are thinking of introducing this in 1993. Amount unknown.
5. Register your expedition officially once at the Park H.Q.
6. Overbudget. Chile is very expensive and should not be thought of as another Third World Country. It is arguably First World in many respects and far more organised than the Himalayan Countries.
7. Prepare a very interesting and diverse diet plan, and take along board games such as chess and backgammon. Storm periods can often be 10 days duration, or longer. Books and cassettes are essential.
8. Buy most if not all your food out in Puerto Natales at the supermarkets there (see food section).
9. Contact the British Consulate in Punta Arenas. He is very helpful and well connected: John C. Rees, British Consulate, Roca 924, Punta Arenas. Tel: 247020 or 241419.
10. Stay at "Nenas" Bed and Breakfast - Boliviana No. 366 in Punta Arenas. Tel: 242411.
11. Stay at Omar Oyarzo's Bed and Breakfast in Puerto Natales. The two boys there speak English, know where everything is in the town, and buy your kit when you return from the hill. They are also very cheap! Bories No. 315, Puerto Natales.