

Route Descriptions

This book contains 32 route descriptions ranging from day trips to multiday treks, plus suggestions for more treks, side trips and alternative routes. Each trek description has a brief introduction outlining the natural features you may encounter, plus information to help you plan your walk – transport options, level of difficulty, time frame and any permits required.

Day treks highlight areas of uncommon beauty. Multiday treks include information on campsites, *refugios* (mountain huts), hostels or other accommodation, and places to get water and supplies.

TIMES & DISTANCES

These are provided only as a guide. Times are based on actual walking time and do not include breaks for snacks, taking photographs, rest or side trips. Be sure to factor these in when planning. Distances are provided but should be read in conjunction with altitude gain. Significant elevation changes can make a greater difference to your walking time than lateral distance.

In most cases, the daily stages are flexible and can be varied. It is important to recognize that short stages are sometimes recommended in order to acclimatize in mountain areas or because there are interesting features to explore en route.

LEVEL OF DIFFICULTY

Grading systems are always arbitrary. However, having an indication of the grade may help you choose between walks. Our authors use the following grading guidelines:

Easy – a walk on flat terrain or with minor elevation changes usually over short distances on well-travelled routes with no navigational difficulties.

Moderate – a walk with challenging terrain, often involving longer distances and steep climbs.

Demanding – a walk with long daily distances and difficult terrain with significant elevation changes; may involve challenging route-finding and high-altitude or glacier travel.

TRUE LEFT & TRUE RIGHT

The terms ‘true left’ and ‘true right’, used to describe the bank of a stream or river, sometimes throw readers. The ‘true left bank’ simply means the left bank as you look downstream.

Planning

It's the stuff of legend: a million square kilometers of iconic peaks fast rivers and hurling winds. Let's face it, even clothing catalogues wax poetic about this place. And rightly so. A trip to Patagonia is a dream for most trekkers. It is strangely marvelous, low key, and even easy to organize, but hard to do without a hitch, particularly the first time around. Given Patagonia's remoteness and seasonality, it is important to plan your trip here carefully.

While the luxury travel market has transformed Patagonia into a gold card destination, with careful planning budget travelers can still do well. For small budgets, think camping, family lodgings and self-catering, with the luxury of the occasional bottle of red. Those seeking guided trips will find package tours priced to international standards, though local services may not meet the same lofty rates. Food quality and price particularly suffers; remember that hard pink tomato traveled nearly as far as you did to get here.

There are challenges: weather can be unstable, Patagonian transport is unreliable and the distances are tedious and large. If you're doing it all on your own, remember your happiness will increase in direct proportion to your patience and flexibility. Logistics are most challenging in Central Patagonia, where transport connections are infrequent and subject to change. With the great exception of Parque Nacional Torres del Paine, trekking infrastructure is more developed in Argentina, where trails tend to be well-marked and accessible by public transport.

For general travel information, consult Lonely Planet's *Chile & Easter Island* and *Argentina* guides.

WHEN TO TREK

Trekking in the Patagonian Andes is possible from early November until late April. In colder years, snowfalls may close trails a month earlier or later. Although each month has its own charms and drawbacks, for peak season services and better weather, February and March are the best months to trek.

The Patagonian summer lasts from early December to late February. Trekkers should be prepared for variable conditions, though hot

DON'T LEAVE HOME WITHOUT...

- Warm waterproof gear
- Sunblock, lip block and sun hat
- Polarized dark sunglasses for glaciers
- A cozy sleeping bag
- Camping gear – it's available but expensive, so best bring it from home
- A pocket knife with corkscrew
- Extra memory cards for digital snaps – they're hard to find outside cities
- An adapter to plug in battery chargers
- Zoom lens or binoculars to capture Chile's more bashful wildlife
- Medical items – see p254

BEST IN SHOW

- A purebred consoles an out-of-work mechanic in *Bombón, El Perro (The Dog)* (2004), directed by Carlos Sorin, set on the Argentine steppe
- Chaos descends on a remote fishing village in Chilean Patagonia in *La Fiebre de Locos (Abalone Fever)* (2001), directed by Andres Wood, set during the lucrative abalone harvest
- A visually delicious homage to travel, *The Motorcycle Diaries* (2004), directed by Walter Salles, recreates Che Guevara's cross-continental journey
- Chilean and Argentine troops share a war and a soccer match in *Mi Mejor Enemigo (My Best Enemy)* (2004), an original take on the 1978 Beagle conflict

weather sometimes prevails, particularly in the Araucanía and Lakes District. During the busy local holiday season (January to mid-February), lodging and transport are often heavily booked. On the other hand, services start to wind down after the end of February. Another seasonal problem are *tábanos*, these horseflies proliferate on low-level routes in the Araucanía and Lakes District for a couple weeks during January.

Early fall (autumn), from March to mid-April, typically brings cooler but more stable weather. The red-gold colors of deciduous trees make this an especially pleasant time to trek. Toward mid-May, the days become short and temperatures fall steadily, yet conditions are often still suitable for trekking in the Araucanía and Lakes District. Parties undertaking treks at this time should be equipped for possible heavy snowfalls.

COSTS & MONEY

Prices in this book are given in Argentine Pesos (AR\$) or Chilean Pesos (CH\$), unless quoted in US Dollars (US\$). Though not cheap by South American standards, Chile and Argentina remain more economical than Europe or North America. Prices can double during the late-December to mid-March high season, but bargain accommodations or airfares appear in low season.

Shoestring travelers should budget a minimum of CH\$20,000 in Chile or AR\$80 in Argentina per day for food and lodging, though costs are considerably lower while trekking (factoring transport, park entry fees and provisions).

BACKGROUND READING

Reading anything on Patagonia is sure to enrich your experience of it, though apart from ship logs, this part of the world is underrepresented. The literary first stop should be Bruce Chatwin's classic *In Patagonia*. This fun, enigmatic book is dubbed Cubist synthesis of Patagonian characters and landscape. For more about the modern challenges of rural life, read Nick Reding's *The Last Cowboys at the End of the World: The Story of the Gauchos of Patagonia*.

To understand this region's short but phenomenal history, first check out E Lucas Bridges' classic memoir *Uttermost Part of the Earth*. Bridges grew up the son of a missionary in the Wild West days of Tierra del Fuego. He played with seafaring Yahgan and later sought out the nomadic Selk'nam. The book tells of his adventures with these fascinating now-extinct cultures – its perspective on these 'savages' stands in stark

HOW MUCH?

Camping (per person)

US\$8

Dorm bed US\$18

B&B (per person sharing)

US\$30

Box of wine US\$3.50

contrast to Charles Darwin's. Those who can't resist comparison can read Darwin's *Voyage of the Beagle*.

Che Guevara's iconic *Motorcycle Diaries* gets readers behind the scenes in the making of a revolutionary. Che counted his continental journey as formative. The 'school of hard knocks' includes a hypothermic crossing of the Lakes District in winter. To bring the story up to date, try Patrick Symmes' *Chasing Che*.

Armchair andinistas should read *Against the Wall* by Simon Yates (of *Touching the Void* fame). This ripping yarn describes Yates' punishing climb of the world's largest vertical rock face, Paine's 4000-ft (1220m) central tower in Chile.

Visitors to Patagonia inevitably wonder what it would be like to see Torres del Paine through Victorian eyes. So satisfies Lady Florence Dixie's *Across Patagonia*, which takes her from British high society in 1880 to the ends of the earth to 'taste a more vigorous emotion.'

INTERNET RESOURCES

Argentina Turistica (www.argentinaturistica.com) A great source of general information.

Buenos Aires Herald (www.buenosairesherald.com) An English-language newspaper based in BA.

Setur (www.turismo.gov.ar) The official Argentine state tourism board site.

Chile Information Project (www.chip.cl) Umbrella for English-language *Santiago Times*.

Chiloé (www.chiloeweb.com, in Spanish) Terrific information on the island of Chiloé.

Go Chile (www.gochile.cl) General tourist information.

Interpatagonia (www.interpatagonia.com) All things touristy in Patagonia.

Sernatur (www.visitchile.org or www.sernatur.cl) Chile's national tourism organization.

Latin American Network Information Center (www.lanic.utexas.edu/la/chile or www.lanic.utexas.edu/la/argentina) Links to Chilean and Argentine government, politics, culture, environment and more.

Lonely Planet (www.lonelyplanet.com) Has travel news and tips. Consult fellow travelers on the Thorn Tree bulletin board, see trekking and mountaineering discussions.

SUSTAINABLE PATAGONIA: RURAL TOURISM

Rural Patagonia offers a rare and privileged glimpse of a fading way of life. To help the rural economy, government and nonprofit initiatives have created local guide and homestay associations in Chile.

These family enterprises range from comfortable roadside hospedajes and farmstays to wild multiday treks and horse trips through wonderland terrain. Prices are reasonable, starting from CH\$10,000 per day for lodging and CH\$25,000 for guided day trips, although extras include horses, and only Spanish is spoken.

Casa del Turismo Rural (☎ 214-031; www.casaturismorural.cl; Dussen 357b, Coyhaique) operates from Palena to Cerro Castillo, south of Coyhaique. Further north, the tourist office in the **Municipalidad de Cochamo** (www.cochamo.cl) arranges similar trips in the Puelo Valley. It's best to book a week or more in advance, as intermediaries will have to make radio contact with the most remote hosts. That's right – no phones, no electricity, no worries.

TOP FIVES

PATAGONIA'S GREATEST HITS

Bucket listers and soloists seeking company will hit pay dirt with these popular favorites:

- The W, Parque Nacional Torres del Paine (p186)
- Circuito Chico, Parque Nacional Nahuel Huapi (p103)
- Around Monte Fitz Roy, Parque Nacional Los Glaciares (p169)
- Huerquehue Lakes, Parque Nacional Huerquehue (p57)
- Volcán Villarrica, Parque Nacional Villarrica (p61)

FEELING HOT HOT HOT

Thermal features, geysers, bubbling mud pits...there's something about a rugged climate that makes you long for a little steam. Satisfy the urge at:

- Baños de Caulle (p89)
- Termas de Callao (p97)
- Huerquehue Lakes (p57)
- Laguna Termal (p41)
- Termas de Lahuen Co (p85)

BEST WILDLIFE WALKS

Bring binoculars and tread lightly to spy the shy Patagonian fauna. With luck, abundant birds, endangered *huemul* deer, guanaco and puma may cross your viewfinder at these locations:

- Parque Nacional Torres del Paine (p194)
- Chepú, Parque Nacional Chiloé (p124)
- Valle Chacabuco (p193)
- Parque Nacional Conguillío (p69)
- Reserva Nacional Tamango (p192)

REMOTE & RUGGED TREKS

If life's a stroll since retiring from the Special Forces, we have the solution. These treks lack shelter, trail markings, hand railings, etc. Five great excuses to test your top gear:

- Dientes Circuit, Isla Navarino (p217)
- Sierra Valdivieso Circuit (p205)
- Lonquimay Circuit (p50)
- Reserva Nacional Jeinimeini (p192)
- Parque Nacional Perito Moreno (p194)

IN THE PRIMEVAL FOREST

One of Patagonia's main attractions is its fresh, cool forests. Those seeking a lush green scene will find bliss under canopy at these parks:

- Parque Nacional Alerce Andino (p117)
- El Cañi (p70)
- Parque Nacional Puyehue (p88)
- PN Tierra del Fuego (p202)
- Parque Pumalín (p131)

BACKYARD WILDERNESS

If it's the icy beer, hot stone massage or hot tub at the finish line that motivates you, on these treks, civilization never lies too far behind:

- Villarrica Traverse to Pucón (p61)
- Around Cerro Hielo Azul to El Bolsón (p136)
- Campamento De Agostini to El Chaltén (p163)
- Valle Francés to Cabañas Los Cuernos in Parque Nacional Torres del Paine (p177)
- Paso de la Oveja to Ushuaia (p212)

GUIDED & GROUP TREKS

With this guidebook, trekkers have the necessary tools and information to trek independently, but those less confident in mountain terrain may opt to join an organized trekking tour. A wide range of foreign operators organize guided treks in the Patagonian Andes. Some of the best are listed below. Readers can also find local operators in their respective chapters.

International Operators

Andean Trails (☎ 0131-4677086; www.andeantrails.co.uk; The Clockhouse, Bonnington Mill Business Center, 72 Newhaven Rd, Edinburgh EH6 5QG, Scotland) Torres del Paine, Los Glaciares, with some winter trips.

Andes (☎ 01556-503929; www.andes.org.uk; 37a St Andrew St, Castle Douglas, Kirkcudbrightshire, DG7 1EN, Scotland) Southern Patagonia treks as well as climbing and ski trips to volcanoes in the Chilean Araucanía.

Aventuras Patagónicas (☎ 888-2039354; www.patagonicas.com; 1303 Sumac Ave, Boulder, CO 80304) This adventure group does 18-day trekking tours to Torres del Paine and Los Glaciares as well as climbing and skiing trips in Patagonia.

Backroads (☎ 800-4622848, 510-5271555; www.backroads.com; 801 Cedar St, Berkeley, CA 94710-1800) Biking the Lakes District and hiking Southern Patagonia.

Hauser Exkursionen (☎ 89-2350060; www.hauser-exkursionen.de; Spiegelstrasse 9, D-81241 München, Germany) Chilean Araucanía and Lakes District and Southern Patagonia, Tierra del Fuego.

Mountain Travel Sobek (☎ 888-8317526; 510-5946000; www.mtsobek.com; 1266 66th St, Suite 4, Emeryville, CA 94608) The usual suspects plus Central Patagonia's Aysen Glacier Trail and Southern Ice Cap.

Off the Beaten Path (☎ 800-4452995; www.offthebeatenpath.com; 7 East Beall St, Bozeman, MT 59715) Highly-regarded tours to the Argentine Lakes District and Los Glaciares.

Wilderness Travel (☎ 800-3682794; www.wildernesstravel.com; 1102 Ninth St, Berkeley, CA 94710) From Chile's Lake District to Tierra del Fuego, with interesting remote options.

Willis's Walkabouts (☎ 08-89852134; www.bushwalkingholidays.com.au; 12 Carrington St, Millner, NT 0810, Australia) Original, off the beaten path itineraries including Cerro Castillo, Cochamo Valley.

World Expeditions (☎ 613-2412700; www.worldexpeditions.com) 78 George St, Ottawa, Ontario, K1N 5W1, Canada. Lakes District, Southern Patagonia and Southern Ice Field.

Regional Operators

Andes Mountain Expediciones (☎ 02-2074699; www.andesmountain.cl; Nuestra Señora del Rosario 1411, Vitacura, Santiago, Chile) Torres del Paine and Los Glaciares.

Azimut (☎ 02-2351519; www.azimut360.com; Gral. Salvo 159, Providencia, Santiago) Central and Southern Patagonia, with trips to Cerro Castillo and Glaciar La Leona with base in Terra Luna (p194).

Compañía de Guías (☎ 02901-437-753; www.companiadeguias.com.ar; San Martín 654, Ushuaia) Glacier trekking, Paso de la Oveja and Ushuaia-based trips.

Escuela de Guías (www.escueladeguias.cl; Casilla 73, Coyhaique) Not an operator, this community NGO trains guides but also incorporates

client trips. Treks in central Patagonia, including San Lorenzo trek and Cerro Castillo (see p145).

Patagonia-Argentina (☎ 011-4342-0931; www.patagonia-argentina.com; Venezuela 574 loft C, Buenos Aires 1012, Argentina) Argentine Patagonia.

Patagonia Adventure Trip (☎ /fax 011-43432048; www.patagoniaadventuretrip.com; Room 162, 6th Floor, Maipu 42, C1084ABB, Buenos Aires, Argentina) Torres del Paine, Los Glaciares and Tierra del Fuego.

Patagonia Guide Service/Salvaje Corazón (☎ /fax 067-211488; www.patagoniaguideservice.com; Casilla 311, Coyhaique, Chile) For Central Patagonia.

Environment

Glaciologists calculate that each snowflake that falls on the continental icecaps is trapped for 300 years or more before being finally released at the termination of a glacier.

The Carretera Austral runs 1240 mostly unpaved kilometers through Chilean Patagonia. Completed in 1996, it took US\$300 million and 20 years to build, and cost 11 workers their lives.

Active volcanoes, temperate rainforest, tumbling glaciers and sprawling steppe that make up the diverse landscapes of Patagonia inspire human passion. As a region it has been explored, colonized and very much popularized, but the sense of its potential never seems to diminish. Perhaps it's all that space – over a million square kilometers – and its sparse population (about two people per square kilometer) that remind us what a unique environment this is. While most of the world is depleted of forests, water and glaciers, here these precious features persist in obscene abundance. At least for now. In recent years, mining, salmon farming and hydroelectric proposals have put many parts of this once-pristine environment under imminent threat.

For information about trekking responsibly, see p36.

THE LAND

Young, as mountain chains go, the Andes were created over the last 70 million years as the oceanic Nazca plate was slowly wedged under the continental South American plate. So mountain ranges gradually rose, blocking the passage of moisture from the Pacific, which in effect dried out the Andes' eastern side. This division is still noticeable when traveling in northern Patagonia from the dryer Argentine side to the wetter, green landscape of Chilean Patagonia.

Volcanic activity centers on the Andes' western edge in Chile, where most of the dormant and active volcanoes are located, their cones scattered along the divide between 36°S and 43°S, with one volcano roughly every 30km. Though the region is stable, there are eruptions; the most recent being Volcán Llaima and Volcán Chaitén (see p133). The volcanic past is written into the landscape, in features like lava flows that have dammed rivers to create large new lakes, and the hundreds of thermal springs which dot the countryside, most still undeveloped.

DEFINITIONS OF PATAGONIA

In its widest definition, Patagonia comprises around one million square kilometers. The region represents just under one-third of the land area of both Chile and Argentina, but less than 5% of either nation's population actually lives there.

Chilean Patagonia is geographically very different from Argentine Patagonia. While the coast of southern Chile is a wild and wet strip of densely forested mountainous country, the greater part of Argentine Patagonia is a broad semiarid plateau out of which rise eroded tablelands (called *mesetas*).

In Argentina, Patagonia officially includes all the land south of the Río Colorado (at 36°S), from the Argentine Lakes District in the provinces of Neuquén and Río Negro, to the provinces of Chubut and Santa Cruz and the territories of Tierra del Fuego and the Falkland (Malvinas) Islands. In Chile, the situation is less definite. Only the strip of land extending south from Puerto Montt (which Chilean geographers call the Sur Grande) is normally considered Patagonia, a definition that excludes the Chilean side of the Araucanía and Lakes District and the island of Chiloé.

Even this narrow definition would come as a surprise to some Chileans, many of whom use the term Patagonia exclusively for the southern steppes of the Argentine known as *la pampa*. However, since the Araucanía and Lakes District on either side of the Andes show a high degree of geographical homogeneity, this book uses 'Patagonia' to include all the Chilean territory south of the Río Biobío (at roughly 37°S), in addition to the 'true' Patagonia of the Argentine steppes.

PATAGONIA'S UNESCO WORLD HERITAGE SITES

- Parque Nacional Conguillo (p69)
- Torres del Paine Biosphere Reserve (p177)
- Cabo de Hornos Biosphere Reserve (p203)
- Parque Nacional Los Glaciares (p169)

In the Lakes District, dozens of great lakes were gouged into the precordilleran landscape during the last ice age, complemented by the hundreds of alpine lagoons set among snowcapped peaks. Lush native rainforest still covers the higher ranges and large parts of the coast, but the Chilean valley has been largely cleared for farming and grazing. Flanked by smaller islands, Chile's largest island, Isla Grande de Chiloé, hangs off the continent here, battered by Pacific winds and storms. This region is drenched by high rainfall, most of which dumps between May and September, but no month is excluded.

Argentine Patagonia begins south of the Río Colorado, which flows southeast from the Andes and passes just north of the city of Neuquén. Blocking wet Pacific storm systems, the eastern Andes are notably drier, with snowfalls suitable for winter skiing around San Martín and Bariloche. Here too, volcanoes have left their mark in fascinating formations, including the petrified forests further south where thick layers of volcanic ash smothered forests of protoaraucaria and other coniferous trees.

Descending the backbone of the Andes, Chile's Aisén region is an intoxicating mix of fjords, raging rivers, impenetrable forests and high peaks. To the east, mountainous rainforest gives way to barren Patagonia steppe. Here South America's deepest lake, the enormous Lago General Carrera (or Lago Buenos Aires), is shared with Argentina.

For such a southerly location, temperatures on the eastern slope are relatively mild, even in winter, when more uniform atmospheric pressure moderates the strong gales that blow most of the year. The cool, arid Patagonian steppes of Argentina support huge flocks of sheep, whose wool is almost entirely exported to Europe.

Heading south, the landscape hits a frozen curtain of glacial ice – the most extensive outside the world's polar regions. With 19 major glaciers, Campo de Hielo Norte (Northern Ice Field) stretches 100km. Its 4500 sq km include Monte San Valentín (4058m), generally considered to be the highest peak in Patagonia. Almost triple in size, the Campo de Hielo Sur (Southern Ice Field) stretches 320km from north to south and is shared with Argentina.

Fed by extremely heavy snowfalls, these icecaps are kept from melting by almost continuous cloud cover. The great icebound ranges are southern Patagonia's highest peaks (over 3000m) – coveted classics like Cerro Torre, Monte Fitz Roy and Cerro Paine Grande.

South of the Hielo Sur, the Patagonian Andes rapidly diminish. At Puerto Natales the dry zone of Patagonian steppes extends westward right to the Pacific coast. The barren eastern pampas stretch through northern Tierra del Fuego, abruptly halting by the Cordillera Darwin.

The world's southernmost permanently inhabited territory, Tierra del Fuego, consists of one large island (Isla Grande), unequally divided between Chile and Argentina, and many smaller ones, some of which have been a long-running point of contention between the two countries. When Europeans first passed through the Strait of Magellan, the fires stemmed

Visiting a national park may be child's play, but creating one certainly isn't. Converting **Valle Chacabuco** from an *estancia* to park required dismantling 644km of fencing so native guanaco and huemul could return.

Overgrazing has serious consequences: Argentina's Ministerio de Agricultura estimates around 30% of Patagonia to be in some stage of desertification.

from the activities of the now endangered Yahgan people; nowadays, the fires result from the flaring of natural gas in the region's oil fields.

The northern half of Isla Grande, resembling the Patagonian steppes, is devoted to sheep grazing, while its southern half is mountainous and

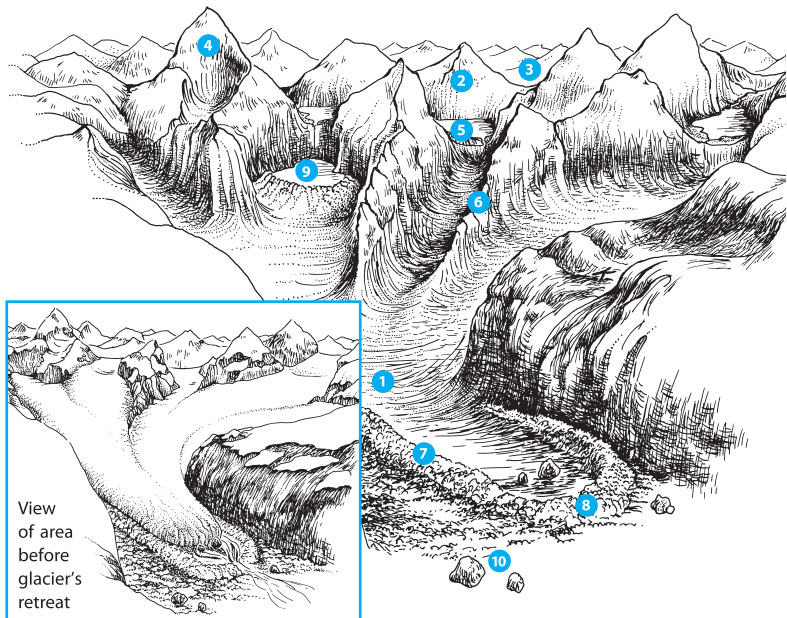
READING THE GLACIAL LANDSCAPE

Patagonia was sculpted by several periods of intense glaciation over the last two million years. During these ice ages, an ice sheet hundreds of meters thick blanketed entire ranges and part of the lowlands. Retreating glaciers released enormous quantities of debris known as 'moraine' over the steppes of southern Argentina.

Many of the world's finest treks lead through landscapes substantially shaped by glaciers. The most obvious is the U-shaped valley (1), gouged out by a glacier moving downhill, often with one or more bowl-shaped cirques (2) at its head. Cirques are found along high mountain ridges or at mountain passes or cols (3). Where an alpine glacier – which flows off the upper slopes and ridges of a mountain range – has joined a deeper, more substantial valley glacier, a dramatic hanging valley (4) is often the result. Hanging valleys and cirques commonly shelter hidden alpine lakes or tarns (5). The thin ridge, which separates adjacent glacial valleys, is known as an arête (6).

As a glacier grinds its way forward it usually leaves long, lateral moraine (7) ridges along its course – debris mounds deposit along the flanks of the glacier or remain from sub-ice streams within its heart (an esker). At the snout of a glacier is the terminal moraine (8), the point where the giant conveyor belt of ice drops its load of rocks and grit. Both high up in the hanging valleys and in the surrounding valleys and plains, moraine lakes (9) may form behind a dam of glacial rubble.

The plains surrounding a glaciated range may feature a confusing variety of moraine ridges, mounds and outwash fans – material left by rivers flowing from the glaciers. Perched randomly, erratics (10) are rocks carried far from their origin by the moving ice, and are left stranded when it melts.



View
of area
before
glacier's
retreat

partly covered by forests and glaciers. As in Patagonia, winter conditions are rarely extreme, although trekking and outdoor camping are not advisable except for experienced mountaineers. For most visitors, though, the brief daylight hours during this season may be a greater deterrent than the weather.

FLORA & FAUNA

Compared to temperate South America, Patagonia is not a wildlife-driven destination. The destruction of forest and loss of native habitat through livestock grazing have had a strong impact on the populations of native species. Yet, visitors can still enjoy and engage with the unique flora and fauna found here.

Animals

Many of Patagonia's native animals are shy, nocturnal and increasingly scarce, and are thus seldom seen. It's not uncommon to spot dropping or hoof print but sightings are fleeting, so don't expect shots of that puma or *huemul*. Guanacos, foxes and many bird species are easily sighted, however, and there's a fair chance of spotting a *coipo*, *huillín* or *pudu*. The following animals may be seen in a range of parks.

SMALL MAMMALS

The **coipo**, an aquatic rodent, has prominent, sharp front teeth useful for chomping herbs and roots. To deter predators it burrows under the banks of lakes and slow-flowing streams and rarely comes out before dusk. Once trapped almost to extinction for its pelt, the coipo is now protected by law.

The tawny grey mouse **oopossum** (*monito del monte*) is one of the southern Andes' few marsupials. The female nurtures young in a belly-pouch. This tree-dwelling 'little monkey of the mountains' has highly adapted, monkeylike hands with four fingers and an opposable thumb to facilitate climbing. You can see it in Parque Nacional Vicente Peréz Rosales (see p96).

For the scoop on Chile's foundering salmon industry, check out **Fundación Terram** (www.terram.cl), which closely monitors the industry.

Among the world's 25 biodiversity hot spots, Chile's **Parque Tantauco** (www.parquetantauco.cl) is home to whales, otters and foxes. Just created in 2005, you won't even find it on most maps.

LEAVE IT TO BEAVERS

Forget guns, germs and steel, Canadian beavers (*Castor canadensis*) have colonized Tierra del Fuego using only buckteeth and broad tails.

It all goes back to the 1940s, when Argentina's military government imported 25 pairs of beavers from Canada, hoping they would generate a lucrative fur industry in this largely undeveloped area. Without natural predators, the beavers did multiply but, in turn, felted beaver hats skidded out of fashion.

These days there are some 250,000 beavers on Tierra del Fuego and the surrounding islands, where they are officially considered a plague. Beavers' damaging effects are many. A sole beaver couple has the chewing power to create their own lake, felling hundreds of trees. Flooding from beaver dams destroys roads and meadows, ruining infrastructure and creating havoc for livestock. Beavers also pass giardia into the lakes, which can get into water supplies and work its black magic on human intestines.

Yet, since beavers must live in water, they can only spread so far across the land and they don't reproduce as wildly as rabbits or other rodents. However, there is great concern that they have already crossed the Strait of Magellan, spreading the beaver plague to the rest of the South American continent.

If you're eager to do your part, look for beaver meat on Fuegian menus.

The omnivorous **Patagonian skunk** (known locally as *chingue*) has typical skunk features and, like its cousins, protects itself by ejecting an acidic liquid with a powerfully unpleasant odor from under its tail.

Standing just 45cm and weighing only 9kg, the **puhu** is the world's smallest deer. Males have pointed, branched horns. This shy animal is spotted in the dense rainforest of the Araucanía and Lakes District.

Half a dozen species of **tucotuco**, relatives of the hamster, are found throughout the Patagonian Andes and Tierra del Fuego. The tucotuco has powerful incisor teeth, which it uses to burrow through the earth. The endangered **mara**, also called the Patagonian hare, is actually another larger relative of the hamster that inhabits the Patagonian steppes.

The **vizcacha** (also called *chinchillón*, related to domesticated chinchillas) build extensive burrows in steep, rocky terrain. Resembling a bearded squirrel, it has thick greyish fur and a darker brushlike tail. Older members of the colony scan for predators, letting out a shrill warning at the slightest sign of danger. It can be spotted in Valle Chacabuco (see p193).

LARGER HERBIVORES

The **guanaco** is found mainly on the Patagonian steppes, but also inhabits mountainous areas of Tierra del Fuego. Closely related to the alpaca and llama, this camelid is sleek but powerful, with a tawny body and long neck. Guanaco herds have been drastically reduced on the steppes, but the animal manages to hold its own due to continuing human persecution of its main predator, the puma.

Chile's national symbol, the endangered **huemul** is an agile deer, once abundant in the southern Andes. Deforestation, hunting and habitat destruction for pasture have been the main causes of the decreasing numbers in southern Aisén, where only a few hundred remain. After several reintroductions into Parque Nacional Torres del Paine, the population there is still considered low. Your best bet to see a wild *huemul* is in Reserva Nacional Tamango (see p192), though chances even there are slim.

PREDATORS

The **huillín**, or southern river otter, inhabits inland waterways and coastal areas of Patagonia. Growing to over 1m in length and weighing 10kg at maturity, its long tail and broad, short paws make the *huillín* an excellent swimmer and diver, while its thick, oily fur insulates it from cold water. It ventures out at dusk in search of crabs and mussels.

The small grey Azara's fox or **pampas fox** (*zorro gris*) prefers open country and has few natural enemies, apparently due to its unpalatable flesh. Once prized by trappers, the larger Patagonian **red fox** (*zorro culpeo* or *zorro colorado*) lives primarily in lightly forested country. A subspecies, known as the Fuegian fox (*zorro fueguino*) is found on Tierra del Fuego.

The adaptable **puma** (North American cougar or mountain lion) can be found anywhere on the Patagonian mainland, with its only enemy being people. Sandy-brown with a white muzzle, it reaches over 2m from head to tail. Its prints are about the size of a man's fist. Pumas traditionally prey on guanaco or puhu. In spite of their taste for livestock, pumas are an illegal target for ranchers. Trekkers will be lucky to glimpse this mainly nocturnal animal.

Plants

The Patagonian Andes are divided into four vegetation zones – temperate, highland, alpine and continental – determined by altitude and

The docile *huemul* is the world's fifth-most endangered species of deer and could disappear from mainland Chile in the next few years if radical steps are not taken to protect it.

Before you hit the trail, you can check out the weather coming your way at www.meteochile.cl (in Spanish); click on [Pronóstico General](#).

distance from the coast. Temperate rainforest and highland forest zones appear at lower altitudes with the further south you travel.

The temperate zone is covered in **Valdivian rainforest** (*bosque valdiviano*), with mixed evergreen tree species. The most diverse of the four zones, it occupies all lower areas west of the Cordillera with strong coastal influence (and heavy rainfall). In the Araucanía and Lakes District, temperate rainforest is species-rich and grows from sea level up to about 1400m.

Above the temperate zone is the highland zone, which is covered by subalpine **Magellanic forest** (*bosque magellánico*), dominated by deciduous southern beech species (chiefly *lenga*). In southern Patagonia, where there is little undergrowth, mosses and herbs make an attractive 'park lawn' type landscape.

Above the highland forest is the alpine zone, an often narrow, thinly vegetated area extending up as far as the bare rock almost to the permanent snowline. Tundra species, including many alpine wildflowers, are found here.

The highland zone merges with the semiarid continental zone on the Patagonian Andes' lower eastern sides. Here, sparse steppe-like vegetation, such as tough, slow-growing tussock grasses known as *coirón* and thorny 'saltbush' plants called *mogotes*, is found. Sporadic clusters of low trees (especially *ñirre*) and *calafate* scrub grow in sheltered places and along the river courses.

SHRUBS & FLOWERS

Woody shrubs grow as heaths, and form thickets or stand on slopes and meadows.

Thickets of thorny **calafate** grow most commonly in the far south. Its bright-yellow flowers turn into sweet purple berries by late February.

The original species of all the world's fuchsia cultivars, bright red and purple **chilco** grows in the cool, humid rainforest, typically by waterfalls or streams. These distinctive flowers are a major source of nectar for hummingbirds.

Reaching up to 3m in a single growing season, **nalca** (also called *pangue* in Mapudungun) thrives in wet locations. The end of its 1m-wide 'elephant ear' leaf produces a half-dozen thorny succulent stems that can be eaten (see Wild Food, p233).

A distant relative of Australia's *waratah*, the **notro**, or Chilean fire-wheel (*ciruelillo*), is a large bush with spidery red flowers.

Separate species of native bamboo grow in temperate rainforest. Vigorous opportunist **quila** spreads out horizontally to colonize the opening left by fallen trees. This is normally the first stage of regeneration after a forest fire or landslide, when quilla can form impenetrable thickets up

Spanning 16,800 sq km, the Hielo Continental Sur (southern ice field) is the world's third biggest extension of continental ice after Antarctica and Greenland. Its first north-to-south crossing was accomplished by a Chilean team in 1998 and took a total of 98 days.

A good website to gather general information on Chile's and Argentina's big ski resorts is www.andesweb.com, which has photo essays, reviews and trail maps.

THE BACKYARD PHARMACY

A remarkable variety of wild plants are used in Mapuche medicine:

- The extract from **quilquil** stems, a giant fern, treats eye problems
- **Notro** leaves and pods contain natural agents to alleviate toothache and inflamed glands
- **Nalca** roots, with a gum rich in tannin, act as a stimulant
- The bark of the **radal** tree is a natural purgative
- Native tobacco, or **petrem**, is used as medicine and a ceremonial fix

to 6m high. The thicker **colihue** is used to make traditional Mapuche trumpets (*trutruca*), baskets and furniture.

December is the best month for viewing Patagonian wildflowers. Look for **añañucas** in the volcanic soils of the Araucanía and Lakes District – large pink or red goblet-shaped flowers at the end of a long succulent stem.

Orange **amancays** (known to gardeners as *alstroemerias*) typically grow in drier sunny clearings or along roadsides. *Amancay* means ‘eternal love’ in Mapudungun; according to indigenous folklore it is the reincarnation of a Mapuche girl who sacrificed herself in order to save her lover.

Chile’s national flower is the **copihue**, a climbing rainforest plant with delicate pink flowers and a yellow stamen.

TREES

Even when rain obscures mountain views, Patagonia’s superb forests offer a fascinating landscape. The primary species are listed below.

Southern Beech

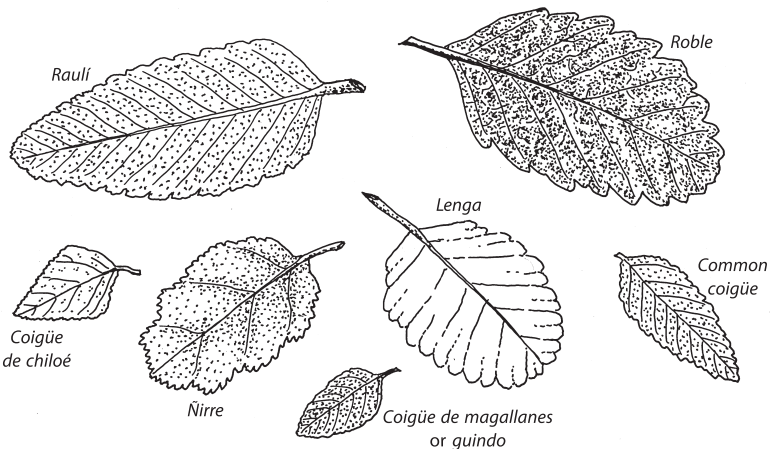
The Andean-Patagonian vegetation is strongly characterized by the (broadleaf) **southern beech** (genus *Nothofagus*). Seven species are found in the Patagonian Andes and, although many other tree species may also be present, southern beech forms the basis of the forest in virtually all areas.

Three evergreen species of southern beech known as **coigüe** (*coihue* in Argentina) are mostly found at lower elevations. The vigorous and adaptable **common coigüe** (*coigüe común*) has larger and more serrated leaves and grows (often in a distinct ‘stratified’ form) to well over 50m, often attaining a truly massive girth. Equally widespread is **coigüe de Magallanes** (*guindo* in Mapudungun, especially in Argentina), identified by its smaller leaves. Since the distribution of both these *coigüe* species overlaps considerably, novices may find it difficult to distinguish the two. **Coigüe de Chiloé** has scaly, almost triangular

For detailed stats, route descriptions and inspirational photos of mountaineering, volcanoeering and ice-climbing throughout Chile, visit www.escalando.cl.

Get a grip on Chilean culture with the dynamic website www.nuestro.cl, from the Chilean Cultural Heritage Corporation, with interviews, rich stories and profiles.

VARIOUS BEECH LEAVES & RELATIVE SIZES



PINING FOR PIÑONES

A dietary staple of dozens of insect species and the *cachaña* (parakeet), **araucaria nuts** also lured native Pehuenche to trek far to harvest them. This native nut, known as *piñon* in Spanish and *ngülla* in Mapundungun, is rich in complex carbohydrates. Mapuche still employ it to thicken stews or bake a nutty loaf.

leaves of a lighter color. It is found on the large island of Chiloé, and the adjacent mainland.

The bonsai-like **lenga** is the most common of the deciduous species of southern beech. Its 3cm-long leaves have neat, rounded double-indentations. It is commonly found right up to the tree line, forming low impenetrable thickets. In fall (autumn) the leaves turn a burnished red. In the mountains of the Araucanía and Lakes District, *lenga* is rarely found below 1000m, but in the far south of Patagonia and Tierra del Fuego, *lenga* often grows as low as sea level, where it may grow up to 40m in height.

A small southern beech species found throughout Patagonia, **ñirre** (*ñire* in Argentina) occupies difficult sites, from dry semi-steppe to waterlogged *mallín* country. When large enough to be considered a proper tree it is easily mistaken for *lenga* – particularly in fall when its leaves turn the same golden-red hue. *Ñirre* is easily distinguished from *lenga* by its crinkled, irregular leaves and much coarser bark.

Another deciduous southern beech species found only in Araucanía and northern Lakes District forests, **raulí** has leathery, almost oval-shaped leaves of up to 15cm and reaches a height of up to 40m. Relatively fast-growing, it is an ideal species for reforestation programs. Found in similar areas and also further south, **roble** has distinctive ‘oaklike’ leaves with serrations.

Other Broadleaf Trees

The **arrayán** thrives in wet coastal rainforests or along lakes and rivers. Covered with smooth almost luminescent cinnamon-red bark that peels off leaving strips of white, the *arrayán* typically produces multiple trunks and beautiful, dimpled, twisted branches. In January the tree is covered in white flowers that develop into edible purple berries.

Sacred to the Mapuche people, **canelo** (*fuñe* in Mapundungun) is a stunning rainforest tree belonging to the magnolia family. It grows in moist areas throughout the Patagonian Andes, reaching a height of 30m and a diameter of 1m. Canelo has thick, light-green elongated leaves that grow out radially around the branchlets, and in November it is covered with fragrant white flowers. The bark of the *canelo* (meaning ‘cinnamon’) is rich in vitamin C, mineral salts, essential oils and natural antibacterial substances.

Tepa (a relative of southern Australia’s sassafras) is a tall, straight tree with thick, serrated leaves that, when crushed, give off an intense aroma somewhere between eau de cologne and fresh basil.

Conifers

The Dr Seuss-like **araucaria** (*pehuén* in Mapundungun; ‘monkey puzzle’ tree in English), with its edible nut (see p234) typifies the Araucanía and northern Lakes District, where it grows from an altitude of about 1000m right up to the tree line. Individual trees have been measured at 50m in height and 2000 years of age.

Get your fix on Patagonian news (in English) at www.patagoniatimes.cl.

Travel delays can be a good thing... The planned two-year expedition of the *HMS Beagle* actually lasted five, giving Darwin ample fodder for his later-developed theory of evolution.

Handy to tell *hierba buena* from *hierba mala*, field guide *Flora Nativa* from Editorial Andres Bellow, is a comprehensive plant guide, found in Chilean bookstores.

For field guides, check out the fantastic bilingual selection from Editorial Fantástico Sur (www.fantasticosur.cl), available online, in Chilean bookstores and Fantastic Sur-run refugios in Parque Nacional Torres del Paine.

Waterproof and nearly indestructible, the valuable **alerce**, or *lahuén*, ranks among the oldest and largest tree species in the world, with specimens reaching almost 4000 years old. Although it's illegal to cut down living trees, some clandestine felling does occur. This protected species is seen within national parks such as Alerce Andino and Los Alerces.

Several species of **mañío** (often spelt *mañi*), members of the coniferous *Podocarpus* genus, grow in the forests of the Lakes District. *Mañío* is recognizable by its distinctive waxy elongated leaves and unpalatable red fruit. It grows to be a very large, attractive tree with a reddish-brown trunk that is often deeply twisted, although it yields excellent timber.

The hardy but slow-growing **Cordilleran cypress** (*ciprés de la cordillera*) produces male and female flowers on separate flattened, scaly branchlets, and when the trees are in bloom (in October) large puffs of pollen blow around the forests. Preferring a drier 'continental' climate, Cordilleran cypress is most widespread in the Argentine Araucanía and Lakes District, where it forms glorious tall, pure-stand forests fringing the eastern foothills of the Andes.

The world's most southerly conifer, **Guaitecas cypress** (*ciprés de las Guaitecas*) – in stark contrast to the related Cordilleran species – thrives in waterlogged ground in the intensely wet coastal areas of western Patagonia. The tree resembles the *alerce*, but is considerably smaller and without the same reddish bark.

NATIONAL PARKS & RESERVES

With the creation of the first South American parks in the early 20th century, Chile and Argentina pioneered continental conservation efforts. If you've ever wondered what kind of a difference one person can make, consider the regional history. The land area of Patagonia's first national park was given to the Argentine explorer Francisco 'Perito' Moreno for his services to the national boundary commission. Perito Moreno promptly donated this land back to the nation to form today's Parque Nacional Nahuel Huapi. At 7580 sq km, it is easily the largest national park on either side of the Andes in northern Patagonia. Today, private efforts again headline the race to keep Patagonia pristine, from Doug Tompkins' Pumalín Park, to other adventurous initiatives (see p131).

The region boasts many dozens of national parks, provincial parks and national reserves in the greater Patagonian Andes (including 22,000 sq km in the Araucanía and Lakes District) with a combined area of well over 100,000 sq km. By far the largest parks are in Chile, whose roughly 26,000-sq-km Parque Nacional Bernardo O'Higgins covers much of the Hielo Sur and the fjords or glaciated islands along the west coast of southern Patagonia. Two adjoining areas, Reserva Nacional Las Guaitecas, which takes in the Península de Taitao, and Parque Nacional Laguna San Rafael, which includes the entire Hielo Norte, are similar in size and character.

To the south in Chilean Tierra del Fuego is the 22,000-sq-km Parque Nacional Alberto de Agostini. These stupendously large wilderness areas have savage terrain and weather, however, and are inaccessible by land; there are almost no trails or other infrastructure. Argentina's largest park in southern Patagonia is Parque Nacional Los Glaciares, which abuts the Chilean parks of Bernardo O'Higgins and Torres del Paine.

While complete isolation has kept some parks and reserves out of the hands of predatory interests (such as logging or mining), it also makes

Today, 99% of European potatoes can be traced back to the island of Chiloé. In recent years, the island has been actively trying to rescue its some 200 indigenous spud varieties.

Around 7370 BC the Toldense culture made its first hand paintings inside Patagonia's famous Cueva de las Manos.

THE ULTIMATE TRAIL: TOP TO BOTTOM CHILE

Conceived as a cross-country adventure on the scale of the USA's Appalachian Trail, Chile's **Sendero de Chile** (www.senderodechile.cl, in Spanish) aims to create one of the longest pathways in the world, approximately 8000km, designated for hiking, mountain biking and horse riding. Starting in the desert north and ending at Cape Horn, it will pass through around 40 watershed systems and encourage a necklace of ecotourism projects along its path. However, not all is rosy with this mega project. Funding appears to be running out, infrastructure is lacking and some stretches follow gravel road instead of beautiful trails – in short, research the part that you wish to undertake. There are updates and maps on the website and in Chile's guidebook series, *Turistel*.

them almost impossible to visit (as in the case of Parque Nacional Bernardo O'Higgins).

In other cases, national parks have become essential to the economy of rural Patagonia. The Parque Nacional Torres del Paine for example, receives nearly 200,000 visitors per year. But even a few hundred trekkers per year can propel small-scale tourism on the sparsely-populated Isla Navarino, where the Dientes de Navarino circuit remains without reserve status, though it is part of a Unesco World Heritage site.

Argentine parks are run by **Administración de Parques Nacionales** (APN; ☎ 011-4312 0257, 4311 0303; www.parquesnacionales.gov.ar; Santa Fe 690). In Chile, national parks and reserves are administered by Corporación Nacional Forestal, or **Conaf** (☎ 02-696 6677, fax 6715881; www.conaf.cl; 5th Floor, Oficina 501, Av Bulnes 285, Santiago) Before leaving Santiago, visit their **central information office** (☎ 02-390 0282; Av Bulnes 265, Centro; 9.30am-5.30pm Mon-Fri) for basic maps and brochures.

Conaf and the APN have information centers (*centros de informes*) or ranger stations (*guarderías*) at, or close to, popular parks and reserves. Even if you do not speak enough Spanish to converse with staff, it is generally well worth visiting the local information center or ranger office before you set out on your trek.

Most Argentine, and some Chilean, national parks have restricted areas (*reservas naturales estrictas*) where public access is strictly controlled, and generally allowed only under the supervision of national park personnel (see Permits & Fees, p237).

ENVIRONMENTAL ISSUES

For centuries, Patagonia's isolation has been its best defense against environmental degradation, but improved access means those days are coming to an end. With Argentina and Chile striving to compete in the global market, it is inevitable that attentions would fall to the resource-rich south.

Dams

Water and energy have been key components of Chile's race toward modernization. Unlike Argentina, which has abundant gas reserves, the country has often had to deal with energy shortages, so successive governments have promoted hydroelectricity. Heavy spring snowmelt in the high Andes feeds raging rivers that pass through narrow canyons, making ideal sites for dams. However, these projects also have major social and environmental drawbacks. High-profile battles are underway over dams on the Río Baker and Pascua, among ten other Patagonian rivers (see the boxed text, p200). The Bachelet administration has come out in favor

The indigenous Yaghan began populating the southernmost islands of Tierra del Fuego around 4000 BC.

In 1865 over 150 Welsh immigrants, traveling aboard the clipper *Mimosa*, landed in Patagonia and established Argentina's first Welsh colony in the province of Chubut.

RESPONSIBLE TREKKING

Just experiencing Patagonia's magnificent wilderness can inspire you towards its stewardship. And why not? The region's environmental issues may be exasperating but each of us can do our part.

RUBBISH

- Remove packaging from food supplies before hiking to cut down on rubbish
- Buried rubbish is likely to be dug up by curious creatures; it also disturbs soil and ground cover and encourages erosion and weed growth
- Take out all garbage and help pick up any ugly remainders left by others

HUMAN WASTE DISPOSAL

- Always use toilets provided at campsites
- When there are no toilets, bury waste with a trowel or tent peg. Dig a small 15cm hole well away from streams, paths and buildings. Cap it with a good layer of soil
- Keeping your waste out of water sources prevents the transmission of giardia, a human bacterial parasite

CAMPING

- Always seek permission before camping near a farm or house
- Minimize impact by using recognized sites, and camp at least 30m from watercourses and paths
- Do not dig trenches – choose a naturally well-drained site
- Leave sites as you found them

WASHING

- Since even biodegradable soaps and toothpaste can harm fish and wildlife, keep them out of streams or lakes
- Wash at least 50m from the watercourse. Collecting used water and dispersing it widely helps it filter through the soil before it returns to the stream
- Wash cooking utensils with a scrub pad or gritty sand instead of detergent

FIRES

- Campfires are banned completely in many national parks.
- If fires are allowed, use a safe existing fireplace rather than making a new one. Clear away all flammable material for at least 2m. Keep the fire modest and use a minimum of dead, fallen wood
- Never leave a fire unattended
- Don't light fires in areas of highly flammable peat soils
- Extinguish your fire by spreading the embers and drowning them with water. Scatter the charcoal and cover the fire site with soil and leaves

of the dams, although, officially, approval depends upon the results of environmental impact studies.

Global Warming

Nowhere is global warming more apparent than in the world's glaciers, and Patagonia's abundant glacial reserves are at stake. Scientists have documented many glaciers doubling their thinning rates in recent years while the northern and southern ice fields continue to retreat. In particular, the Northern Patagonian Ice Field is contributing to rising

TRIAL BY FIRE

When colonists in the 1930s and 1940s set out to farm densely forested southern Chile, clear land was requisite for gaining its title. Government-sanctioned burning destroyed some 20,000 sq km of virgin forest in the southern Andes. With strong winds fanning the flames, some fires burned for entire summers, laying waste vast tracts of native forest. The results can still be seen today – a landscape radically altered from its origins, with dead trees and scarred mountains as enduring landmarks of the colonization.

Fires are still problematic in Patagonia, where fire fighting is volunteer-only, with scant resources for planes or fire jumpers. As a result, slow regeneration post-fire makes soil erosion a severe problem in Patagonia. The resulting loss of habitat is also responsible for an alarming decline in some species, including *pudu* and endangered *huemul*.

ocean levels at a rate one-quarter higher than formerly thought. In fact, reports suggest that glaciers are thinning more rapidly than can be explained by warmer air temperatures and decreased precipitation. While tour operators count the sunny days with a smile, this change also stands to impact plant and animal life, water levels in lakes and rivers, and overall sustainability.

Farmed Salmon

When a 2007 *New York Times* article revealed widespread virus outbreaks in Chilean salmon, Chile's \$2.2 billion salmon industry was rocked to the core. Though the species is not native, Chile had become the world's second-largest producer of farmed salmon. Responsible for polluting water, devastating underwater ecology, and depleting other fish stocks, the industry remains under questioning by regulatory agencies. Some areas, such as the Lakes Region Seno de Reloncaví, have become too polluted for sustainable production; sadly, farming operations are just skirting further south to Aisén.

Other Issues

Forests, fish stocks, water and soil have all been overexploited and continue to be so. Livestock grazing on fragile topsoil contributes to erosion and, ultimately, desertification. In times of economic hardship, these issues can take a back seat but they remain everpresent. The growing hole in the ozone layer over Antarctica has become such an issue that medical authorities recommend wearing protective clothing and heavy sunblock to avoid cancer-causing ultraviolet radiation in Patagonia.

On a positive note, environmental consciousness is rapidly growing in Chile and Argentina, and a number of conservation groups organize campaigns in opposition to over-the-top development or vandalistic forestry practices as well as positive campaigns to save native species. Most of these organizations welcome volunteers and can offer useful suggestions on how to help.

Environmental Organizations

Ancient Forest International (AFI; ☎ 707-923 4475; www.ancientforests.org) US-based organization with close links to Chilean forest-conservation groups.

Codeff (Comité Pro Defensa de la Fauna y Flora; ☎ 02-777 2534; www.co.deff.cl, in Spanish; Ernesto Reyes 035, Providencia, Santiago) Campaigns to protect the country's flora and fauna, especially endangered species. Trips, seminars and work projects are organized for volunteers. **Conservación**

Magellanic penguins, native to Patagonia and Tierra del Fuego, have approximately 27 feathers per sq cm – now that's a down jacket!

With a special focus on Latin America, Ron Mader's *Planeta* (www.planeta.com) is the most comprehensible online resource for exploring ecotourism and environmental reporting.

Chile's warm but powerful easterly winds are known as *puelches*. Southern wind (*viento sur*) presages stable weather.

According to Greenpeace, Patagonian glaciers are shrinking, as a whole, at a rate of 42 cu km annually – faster than anywhere else on the planet.

Patagónica (in USA ☎ 415-229 9340; www.conservacionpatagonica.org) An NGO dedicated to preserving unique Patagonian ecosystems, such as Valle Chacabuco, with opportunities for volunteers.

Defensores del Bosque Chileno (☎ 02-2041914; www.elbosquechileno.cl, in Spanish; Diagonal Oriente 1413, Ñuñoa) Defending the native forests through education, lobbying, promoting the planting of native species over exotics, and taking legal action against logging interests.

Fundación Vida Silvestre Argentina (☎ 011-43313631; fax extension 24; www.vidasilvestre.org.ar) Defensa 251 Piso 6 'K' (C1065AAC) Buenos Aires. Argentina's leading nongovernment conservationist organisation; owns nature reserves throughout Argentina.

Greenpeace Argentina (☎ 011-45518811; www.greenpeace.org.ar in Spanish; Zabala 3873 (C1427DYG) Buenos Aires. Focuses on forest conservation, ocean ecology and dealing with toxic waste.

Greenpeace Chile (☎ 02-6342120; www.greenpeace.cl in Spanish; Agromedo 50, Centro, Santiago). Focuses on forest conservation, ocean ecology and dealing with toxic waste.

Patagonia Sin Represas (Patagonia Without Dams; www.patagoniasinrepresas.cl) A coalition of Chilean environmental groups supporting the anti-dam movement in Patagonia.

Terram (☎ 02-2694499; www.terram.cl; Bustamente 24, Providencia, Santiago) One of the biggest-hitting pressure groups at the moment.

WWF (☎ 063-244590; www.wwf.cl; Carlos Andtwander 624, Casa 4, Valdivia) Involved with the preservation of the temperate rainforests around Valdivia, conservation in southern Patagonia, and protection of the native wildlife.

The Author



CAROLYN MCCARTHY

Writer Carolyn McCarthy first traveled to Torres del Paine on vacation. She returned to Chile seasonally as a trekking guide, and moved there in 2003 on a Fulbright grant to document pioneer Patagonia. In spite of her deep resistance to powdered coffee, she proudly calls Chile's magnificent south home. She writes on travel, culture and the environment. Her work has appeared in *National Geographic*, the *Boston Globe*, *Salt Lake Tribune*, and other publications. For Lonely Planet, she has authored guides to Argentina, Chile, Central America and Yellowstone & Grand Teton National Parks. You can check out her blog at www.carolynswildblueyonder.blogspot.com.

MY FAVORITE WALK

Patagonia is full of potent landscapes, but my favorite trek is the Dientes Circuit (p217). The southernmost hike in the world, this 53.5km loop winds through Austral beech forest, rusty moors, and teacup lagoons, but most of the time it travels a strange theater of rock above the tree line. Trail...what trail? True, the weather can be less than welcoming – at this latitude the landscape whinges gray for days, with sharp winds, hail and disappearing trail lines. But finding the track – and keeping it – is surely part of the fun. The rest is matching Isla Navarino with its storied past of sailors and nearby shipwrecks, Yaghan canoe communities and roaming guanaco.

PATAGONIAN PIONEER CLEM LINDENMAYER

Clem Lindenmayer, the creator and original author of this book, passed away in 2007 while hiking in China's remote Gongga Shan. Though we never met, walking in his footsteps has been an education. For starters, he knew wilderness. His directions were precise, his pace was tireless (those hiking times!) and his humor dry. I got used to subtle 'Clemisms' – when a steep scree traverse was described as 'mildly uncomfortable,' I got ready to suffer.

In addition to documenting popular routes, Lindenmayer pioneered some of Patagonia's most remote and wild treks. On Isla Navarino, locals credit him with creating the Dientes de Navarino circuit. The southernmost trek in the world, the wild high alpine traverse takes trekkers through mesmerizing landscapes of rock and spire. In 2001, Chile's Ministerio de Bienes Nacionales (Ministry of National Resources) took names Lindenmayer had christened for the Dientes Circuit and made them official, adding in tribute Cerro Clem and Montes Lindenmayer. In the Lonely Planet guide, Lindenmayer deferred credit for the route to the native guanaco.

Yet even an innovation as seemingly light and recreational as a trekking route has repercussions. In the sluggish economy of Isla Navarino, locals who provide transport, groceries and lodgings to trekkers in their own homes literally live off the route. Few of them have been able to do it themselves.

Not every trekker is a pioneer, but may we all journey with that same spirit of wonder and perseverance.