

Date: August 24, 2003

Location: La Serena, Chile

Subject: Update #4 – Un Viaje a la Región de Coquimbo (aka Región IV)

Dear Friends and Family,

I hope enough time has passed between my last update and this so that it doesn't feel like I'm inundating your mail box like the viruses that have been running rampant during the past week or so... CNN said that it was probably the fastest spreading virus that's ever hit in the history of computers and I've got to say that even though I personally wasn't infected, I felt the effects as my inboxes got overwhelmed by hundreds of virus e-mails per day! Anyway, continuing into my update #4... =)

There are lots of random things that I've been taking pictures of (or thinking of taking pictures of) that I think I'll be fine sharing one at a time through my numerous updates I probably will end up sending to you...

Those of you who spent any time around me probably remember that you could always depend on me to have mints in my pocket... more specifically, I always had those Certs Pocket Packs or whatever they're called... =) I even received a whole bunch of packets of Certs for my birthday once. (Thanks! =P)

To put a long story short, I left the U.S. ill-prepared for 5 months of life in Chile...



namely, I expected to be able to find my beloved Certs when I got down here. =D

<left> After over a month of searching everywhere for anything resembling my Certs (and failing to find anything like it anywhere), I finally discovered "PocketMint" in a small pharmacy in the middle-of-nowhere Santiago... =)

Now... it's been less than a week since I bought 4 packs and I've already gone through one pack... These "PocketMint"s are definitely weaker than Certs and have a diameter of about 4mm compared

to Certs' 6mm (meaning that I get 70 mints in the same size container in which I would get 50 Certs). Almost like Certs... but not quite cutting it. =)

So... I wonder if there's any way I could get some Certs down here... <cough cough> Daniel Park, c/o CIEE, Diagonal Paraguay 265, Torre 15, Oficina 1701, Santiago, Chile <hint hint> =D

Anyway, now that I've shared my quest for Certs and the resulting disappointments, I've come to realize that I'm on my fourth update and that I've been sharing about places that

you probably know nothing about. Having failed to provide you with adequate information, this 4th update will contain a brief geography lesson. =P

Using my notes from my Chilean Realities class, I will now proceed to give you some information about Chile's geography. =)

<right> Chile is a long narrow country covering 2,006,806 square kilometers. That's because Chile claims 1,250,000 square kilometers of Antarctica, 180 square kilometers in Easter Island, and 756,626 square kilometers in South America.

Chile is additionally divided up into twelve (13 including the Metropolitan) regions ranging from the desert up north to the glaciers in the south. Santiago is located in the Metropolitan region between Regions V and VI.

You can see La Serena on the map where I visited the past weekend.

<below> I also thought it might be nice for you to know whereabouts in Santiago I'm running around... From the previous updates, you'll note two arrows:

- 1) "To Portillo" which leads up the Andes where the ski resorts are, and 2) "To Cajon Del Maipo" where I was for



Update 3...

If you look on the right side of the Santiago map, you'll find the word "Providencia" and directly above that "Jardin Zoológico".

In case you were interested, I'm currently living right

about at the spot between the first "I" in "Providencia" and the "I" in "Zoológico" on a street called Alberto Magno.

I live in a pretty central location so it's not too bad getting around using public transportation. =)

Now that you have a somewhat better idea of what Chile (and Santiago) looks like, I feel better continuing my update on this past weekend's trip into the Chilean north. =)

To start at the beginning, the trip began as a last minute thing in which I decided to go about 6 hours before we left from Santiago. After a night of bowling and movies last Thursday night, I agreed to head up north to La Serena on the promise that we'd get to see penguins. Considering that I have no classes Fridays and Mondays, I figured I had nothing better to do so why not go. =) So I got home around 0330 (which is really early because the night life, or should I say early morning life, is pretty much from 1AM to like 7AM) and don't think I fell asleep until 0600ish because I was checking e-mails and ended up watching some sci-fi movie till then...



By about 0830, everyone arrived at the Los Heroes metro stop (which is located right above the "de" in "Museo de la Solidaridad" on the Santiago map above) to head over to the bus terminal.

<left> The nine of us (Allison, Britt, Cecily, Dan, Dan, Danilo, Katie, Lauren, and Shelly) journeyed for about 7 hours (each way) on Tas Choapa International Bus Lines to La Serena.

It wasn't such an experience as the micro ride back from Cajon Del Maipo because there were assigned seats on this equivalent of a Greyhound bus back in the States. =)

<right> On the way to La Serena, our bus stopped briefly to let us get out, stretch, and take some pictures. I wound up taking a lot of pictures of the coastline between Santiago and La Serena but this one is my favorite (It replaced the Cajon Del Maipo picture as my background). =)



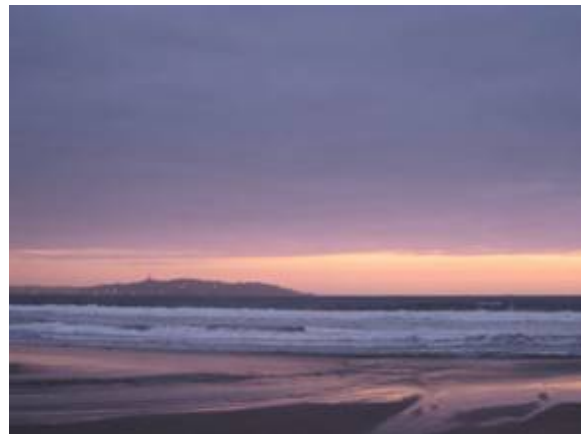
<below> Once in La Serena, we pretty much explored the city a little bit, looked for a



place to stay and began planning for seeing penguins and whatever other activities we wanted to do while we were in town... We discovered a few tour places that would have taken us to see penguins at the National Humboldt Penguin Reserve but the tours cost about US\$30 and we didn't feel that we needed to spend \$30 to see penguins. => So we wandered around some more trying to see if there was a cheaper way to travel the 2 hours to the north of La Serena to

see penguins. Given that we didn't want to (and probably couldn't with the resources we had) rent a vehicle and drive ourselves up farther north, we split up to look for alternate transportation (namely, *colectivos* which are bus-like taxis in that you pay a flat rate per person and the taxi can pick up additional people along the route).

<right> Anyway, we started walking towards the highway where we were told we could find *colectivos* but I think we must've walked too far because we arrived at the beach just after the sun had already set... =>D Ten minutes earlier and we would've seen the sunset... doh! =>



Still, it was an amazing sight and the beach was awesome... It got dark after that and we started walking back towards the city to meet up with the rest of the group... this is when one of the coolest encounters with Chileans I've had to date happened. => We were walking along the road towards the city and no cabs were going by so we were thinking about hitch-hiking when this car came by and stopped right by us and the driver asked us if we needed a ride... now, yeah, I know it's not a good idea to get into a strange car with strange people but there was a six-year old in the backseat so I figured nothing bad was likely to happen at the time. => Anyway, the driver and I started conversing and he told us that he wouldn't usually pick up people but we obviously looked like foreigners and he thought he could help us out. Turned out that Walter was part of the hostel that we had been told to find by other friends who'd been in La Serena before but we hadn't been able to find earlier in the day. Anyway, he gave us a lot of information on what to do in order to go find the penguins and provided us with maps and names and places to go. Too bad we didn't get to use the info as we eventually decided to put off finding penguins for a later date...

<right> We ended up in Vicuña in the *Valle del Elqui* on Saturday. (From left to right) First Row: Katie, Cecily, Allison, Lauren, Britt; Second Row: Dan, Danilo, & Dan.



We took this picture right before heading off to the Gabriela Mistral Museum where I learned a good amount about the life and works of Lucila Godoy.



<left> The museum was an old home where she had lived during her youth... we all got to wondering what it would be like if one day we returned to a childhood home only to discover that it'd been turned into a museum and all our stuff put out on display... only if we ever become famous I guess. =)

After the museum outing, we trekked out to the south of Vicuña where there is a Capel Pisco plant. Pisco, if you didn't know, is a Chilean alcohol that comes from grapes and is developed in a manner very similar to that of making wine. Anyway, if you ever come down to Chile, you'll be sure to be offered a Pisco-Sour (which is pretty much lemonade plus pisco, or pisco plus lemonade) or a Pisco-Cola (which is Coca-Cola plus pisco, or pisco plus Coca-Cola)...

<right> The tour of the plant ended in the final bottling and packaging of the final product for distribution... Anyway, I think that the Wharton-infected part of my brain started acting up because after we came out of there, I started talking about how they could cut costs by reducing some of the workers by automating some of the processes in the last part of the tour and be more cost efficient... yeah... it was cool seeing all those bottles flying around and going through the processes of being filled, capped, labeled, boxed and such though. =)



After the Pisco Plant tour, our group went to dinner before heading out on an observatory tour to see the stars... It was a beautiful night and we could see billions of stars in the sky... I got to see Mars (if you didn't know, Mars is at its closest point to Earth that it'll be for hundreds of years right now!), Alpha-Centauri, the Southern Cross, the Dolphin, and the penguin constellations in the sky... well, I guess the penguin isn't a real constellation but if you look up in the sky, I'm sure you'd agree it was a penguin, too! =P

<right> We went to the beach before heading back to Santiago in La Serena, from left to right: Shelly, Danilo, Allison, Cecily, Dan & Dan.



That was pretty much the story of my first venture



out of the Metropolitan region and into the other regions of Chile.

All in all, it was a welcome getaway from the smog-filled polluted air of Santiago and a nice time to hang out with friends since there doesn't exist a dorm life in this country...

To conclude this update, I wasn't able to find more *Carabineros* but we did find stray dogs even in La Serena. =)

<above> This dog followed us around and wanted to get into all our pictures while we were at the beach. Would've brought him back but I don't think he would've been happy on the 7 hour bus trip. =P

Anyway, that's all for now! Gotta get to sleep so I can wake up for class tomorrow! =)

Hope you enjoyed this update and write back soon! =)

- Dan