

Date: December 14, 2003

Location: Puerto Natales, Chile

Subject: Update #18 – PN Torres del Paine – Days 3 & 4

Dear Friends and Family,

After four exhausting, but very worthwhile days trekking through *PN Torres del Paine*, I've returned to civilization and am finishing up my Patagonian adventure. In another three days, I'll be back in Santiago and another three days after that, back home to Mexico City.

Anyway, I thought I'd share one of my favorite and most useful acquisitions while in Chile as my random picture for this update. =)



<left> My “adventurer” hat that I found in Santiago months and months ago and that has faithfully kept my head covered in my journeys north and south and east. =) Some of the best things in life are free... and this is one of them. Ask me about it sometime, if you like. =P I'm sure you've seen this hat on my head in enough pictures to believe that there are people who identify me by this hat... and more specifically, with my shades sitting on top of it. =) As it turns out,

it turned out to be very useful and instead of having my shades on top, served me today with a headlamp on top! =)

<right> This map of *PN Torres del Paine*, and more specifically, the “W”, was also in Update #17, but I figure it doesn't hurt to refresh your memory and also make it easier to reference where along the trail I was as I share about the past two days. =)



After two days of mostly light day excursions, the third day would be the hardest of them all. Our goal was to make it to *Campamento Chileno* (where the Blue route meets the

rightmost Orange route), and if possible, continue to *Campamento Las Torres* (where the Orange route hooks left) carrying all of our equipment on a trail that was mostly uphill for the final stretch. After waking up early enough to pack up our gear, we left camp at about 0730.



<left> As we were hiking eastward around the *Cuernos del Paine* and around *Cerro Paine Chico Sur* to get to our destination, we got to see the sun slowly make its way up and light up the *Lago Nordenskjold* that we would follow most of the day.

<right> As we headed across the terrain, we made several stops to fill up our water at the river crossings that we came across. There really isn't anything like ice-cold, fresh mountain spring water to refresh you as you trek 18 kilometers carrying 25-30 kilos! =P



<left> Around 0950, we began making our way around the *Cuernos del Paine*. You can see the smaller peak in front right below the larger peak to the right side.

After about 2.5 hours of hiking from *Campamento Italiano*, we made it to *Refugio Cuernos* where we stopped to make lunch and rest for a bit before heading out again. I don't believe we would've made it to *Campamento Chileno* had we tried to go on without that food break! =P

<right> As we trekked across the longest stretch of the "W" carrying our full packs, we were able to see many rivers flowing down to the lake below with snowcapped peaks in the distance. The landscapes throughout this long 7-8 hour trek were amazing and absolutely worth the effort. =)





<left> By noon, our view of the *Cuernos del Paine* was behind us as we made our way across the hillsides of the park.

Over the course of the four days that we hiked and explored the beauty of *PN Torres*

del Paine, we saw many different and colorful flowers.



<right> One that really caught my eye however was the *Zapatito de la Virgen* (*Calceolaria uniflora*) which happened to be one of the examples of the flora that appeared on the map and information pamphlet provided by the park administration when we first entered. It was a pretty neat discovery! =)



<left> You cannot understand the relief that we felt as we made our way into the campgrounds at the *Campamento Chileno* at about 1800. We'd finally made it after starting out at 0730 with several rest stops along the way. =)

Anyway, we set up camp, had an early dinner, and went to sleep early... because the next day would truly be a spectacular and incredible adventure!

<right> Day Four began for me officially at 0155. I actually woke up a bit before that but tried to stay in my sleeping bag until then. It tends to be cold at night... especially in Patagonia. =)

At 0200, we met outside in the pitch black with two flashlights between the three of us to make the 3-4 hour hike from *Campamento Chileno* to the lookout at the base of the *Torres del Paine* (rightmost Orange route on the map).





<left> From the moment we headed out, we were looking for the orange marks that would guide our way in the darkness. There were several moments in which we lost the trail and were wandering in the dark looking for the orange mark that would guide us towards our goal. What a fun game to play at night! It actually reminded me of looking for green flags (which are harder to see in a forest) at my first NIKO in 1999. =)

<right> I was wearing my orange NIKO shirt so that I wouldn't get lost and so I could see myself. =P Anyway, we made it to *Campamento Torres* by 0320 and had another hour to scramble up rocks and boulders to get to the lookout. (I took another picture later that I won't share right now of what you can see in the background after the sun comes up... for now, all you see is black. =P)



<left> We got to the *mirador* around 0430 and patiently waited for the sun to shine and light up these magnificent granite towers.



<right> By 0455, it's getting brighter... I went down to the lake at the base of the *Torres* and took this picture of the moon and *Cerro Paine* being reflected on the lake. Pretty, isn't it? =)



For the next hour and a half, I spent my time running up and down the side of the mountain by the *mirador* to get the best pictures that I could. As you would have it, my camera battery died when I got to the top... good thing I had a spare sitting by the lake with the girls. Ran down to swap out and back up to take more pictures. =) (Oh yeah, all

that running around kept me nice and warm... if you stay still... it's freezing cold up there!)

<right> As the sky started to brighten up, I sat by the lake at the base of the *Torres* and awaited the pink light that would light up the towers shortly.



<right> From the top of the hill next to the lake, I was able to get a nice



glimpse of the reflection of the *Torres del Paine* on the lake. During these early, pre-

dawn hours, the lake was calm with not a ripple or wave in sight! That would change once the sun came out.

<right> At around 0530, the first glimpses of light came over the ridge to hit the *Torres del Paine*. It was breathtaking.



<left> Looking out over the other side of the ridge, I could see the sky brightening as

the sun came over the horizon to bring another day. This one's for all of you who ask me why I like sunsets so much when sunrises represent... a new day, a new beginning. This one's for you! =D

<right> Pink clouds and pink light quickly lit up the *Torres del Paine* producing a spectacle for my eyes to enjoy.





<left> But it was over almost as soon as it began. By 0550, the *Torres* were being lit up with the normal yellow light of the sun. The *Torres* don't get completely bathed in the pink light because of where the sun comes up... I think that there must be a certain time of year when the sunlight comes through the valley just right to completely bathe the towers in pink... that must be something to see. =)

<right> I spent until about 0600 enjoying the sunrise and a beautiful new day... I spent a while trying to emulate the picture on the back of my NIKO shirt... =D



<left> As I sat there, the sun peeked its head over the ridge and brightened up the entire valley.

<right> After a very fulfilling early



morning hike and spectacular sunrise view of the *Torres del Paine*, I began to



head down around 0600... by then, the fog began to move in and hid the *Torres* from anyone who woke up too late to be there for the sunrise. So, don't forget, if you ever get a chance to visit the *Torres del Paine*, be there before light! =)

<left> The walk back to *Campamento Chileno* through

the woods was a lot easier and nicer with sunlight coming through the trees than in the pitch black through which we had come up earlier. As I came down from the mountain though, I couldn't help but sing...

Lord of all creation
Of water, Earth and sky
The heavens are your tabernacle
Glory to the Lord on high
God of wonders beyond our galaxy
You are holy, holy
The universe declares Your majesty
You are holy, holy
Lord of Heaven and Earth
Lord of Heaven and Earth

Early in the morning
I will celebrate the light
When I stumble in the darkness
I will call Your name by night
God of wonders beyond our galaxy
You are holy, holy
Precious Lord reveal Your heart to me
You are holy, holy
The universe declares Your majesty
You are holy, holy, holy, holy

- *God of Wonders*, Marc Byrd and Steve Hindalong, © 2000

The universe and all nature just cries out the wonder of creation and I was privileged to have been able to spend four days just marveling at God's work and enjoying His creative masterpiece. =)

After we got back to camp, we climbed back into our respective tents and slept a good 2 hours before having lunch and packing up our gear to head out.

<right> The final trek down was a relatively easy but steep downhill march with what was left of my gear (all the food had been eaten by then. =P) and enjoying the final landscapes before I would get carted back to civilization and stuff later that day.



After all was said and done, my four days spent in *PN Torres del Paine* had to have been one of the best experiences that I've had while down in Chile. =)



<left> Not only were there tremendous landscapes that astounded me around every corner, but I was well-equipped with about fifteen granola/cereal bars to keep me energized throughout the trip (which I was definitely lacking at Machu Picchu... see Update #14). The fact that I had two left over when we got ready to get on the bus shows that I was very well prepared for this adventure. =P By the way, I had originally planned to do this entire thing eating only granola bars... bad idea. Pasta and soup

packets definitely gave us relatively light-weight food that filled us up and warmed us up after long hard days. =) And don't forget the cans of sardines. Haha, I wish I just had my NIKO food allotment. =P

<right> To wrap up this adventure, I decided one of the first things I would need when I got back to civilization would be a nice, juicy steak. I didn't end up getting it because I wanted to try the regional "grill for one" so I wound up having a delicious dinner of salad, potatoes... and of course, lots of different parts of lamb. That was partially interesting. =)



I still have about three days left to spend down here in Patagonia and have a few things left I want to and need to get done before I head back to Santiago on my way back home...

Hope this update finds you well and that you'll be eagerly awaiting my return so that you can tell me all about what I've been missing out on while I've been away! =)

- Dan