

# PATAGONIA 2013

In the Winter of 2014, our hiking group went to the southern tip of Chile to hike Torres del Paine National Park. This spectacular region consists of majestic mountains, huge glaciers, lakes, and streams.



**Andean Condor**

Thanks to MARY COLLIFLOWER, a client, and avid photographer for all these outstanding animal pictures. She visited here recently

Patagonia refers to the sparsely populated, southern region of South America shared by Argentina and Chile. It includes the southern Andean mountains, which is where Torres del Paine is located. The centerpiece of the park is the Cordillera del Paine, which in English means the 'Blue Mountain Range.'



The Torres (or towers) del Paine refers to the three distinct granite peaks that occur within the Paine Massif. They extend 8200 feet above sea level.





**The wild camelids that occur here are called guanacos. Native people hundreds of years ago domesticated them and through selective breeding, developed the llama as a pack animal and the alpaca as a source of wool.**







**On our first day in the park we hiked through the Ascencio river valley, then up a steep trail to the Mirador Torres, to get a close up view of the imposing towers. Mirador means view with wonder.**



**Satellite image of the Park. We hiked what's called the full or O Circuit in 9 days and 8 nights. 69 miles. From this view, you can see the Paine Massif in the center of the photo. The trail traverses around mountainsides, alongside lakes, rivers, and the Great Grey Glacier.**



**Caracara A large falcon common to the Andres.**





The circuit can be a very challenging hike. Weather conditions can be extreme, including cold temperatures, rain, and high winds.



The second day included a fairly easy 6 mile hike thru woods and open grasslands arriving at Seron campground.



Tents are essential and need to be four-season and double walled. They need to be able to withstand winds of over 60 mph.





**There were only four in our group. Unlike hikes in other parts of the world, a tour company (which may include guides, porters, and a cook) is not required. You hike on your own at your own pace. There was also no restriction on the number of hikers allowed...so as you can imagine, crowds and available campsites were problematic.**



**On the third day the sky was clear and blue. You can just see the tops of the towers from the backside of the Paine mountains (Above)**



**We are approaching the Dickson campground and refugio (hut). A massive glacier is seen behind Lago (Lake) Dickson. This place was breathtaking! I slept in the hut. The mosquitoes were unrelenting.**





**The fourth day we hiked to the next campsite...Los Perros. A relatively short walk thru forest and alongside a river. Look how the unrelenting winds have bent the trees over. Then the most difficult part of the hike...day 5...up and over the John Garner pass, with the potential of extremely strong winds**





**At the summit of the pass, one gets the first glimpse of the stunning Grey Glacier. It occurs in the Southern Patagonian Ice Field and flows into Lago Grey. We hiked on to Camp Paso that evening.**





**Day 6...on to Refugio Grey. The hike today was a little precarious, the path meanders up and down the steep mountainside overlooking the glacier hundreds of feet below. Breathtaking!**





**20 years ago the glacier occupied an area of 100 square miles. Today it is about three miles wide, 17 miles long, and up to 100 feet high.**



**The surface is anything but smooth. The uneven rough moguls are jagged and pointy all throughout.**





**Large chunks of ice 'calf' or break off from the edge of the glacier and float into Lago Grey. Glacier expansion leads to this ice ablation. Glacier ice appears deep blue in color. Pressure causes trapped air bubbles in accumulated snow to be squeezed out increasing the**



density of the created ice. As light enters the ice, the red end of the spectrum tends to be absorbed, while the blue end of the spectrum is refracted, so it appears blue. The denser the ice, the more blue it appears.

Glacial lake water tends to appear green or brown in color. Glacial water contains tiny bits of rock, clay, and minerals called "rock flour" in suspension from the grinding action of the glacier. These particles refract the green spectrum of the sun's light so it appears green. Excessive dirt in the lake will make the water appear more gray or brown in color. Algae growth affects the color as well.



Refugio Grey is nestled among the trees along the shore of Lago Grey, a short walk from the Gray Glacier lookout point. It has 60 beds, dormitory style, shared bathrooms, a lounge, restaurant, and bar. The accommodation is basic and clean and located right off the trail. A shower, dry clothes, followed by a glass of wine....a good way to relax and unwind after a long day hiking.





**On day 7 we hiked seven miles of rough, rocky terrain to the Paine Grande Refugio, which is located on the northern shore of Pehoe Lake. The most comfortable of all the refugios, it has room for 100 hikers with a large canteen-style restaurant....and a bar.**





**We tented at the Paine Grande campground for 2 nights and experienced 60 mph winds. Not good for restful sleep. Several tents were destroyed. Morning sun with the Paine Horns in the background. On day 8 we did a boat excursion across Lake Pehoe for a more panoramic view of the Horns.**







**Los Cuernos or 'the horns' of the Paine massif, are a spectacular outcropping of eroded granite peaks. They are noted for their jagged, rocky shape and unusual coloring. The top of the horns are blackish in color (sedimentary stratus). The lower grayish-white is exposed granite. So renowned are these peaks that they are displayed on the most common beer can in Chile...Cerveza Austral. In English this means Southern Beer.**





Several species of psittacine birds live in Patagonia, but the southernmost inhabiting parrot in the world is the Austral conure...the Southern Parrot. It survives the cold weather found in the sub-polar woodlands and grasslands of Torres del Paine. Several other beautiful birds of Patagonia are shown below.



**Long-tailed Meadowlark**



**Southern lapwing**



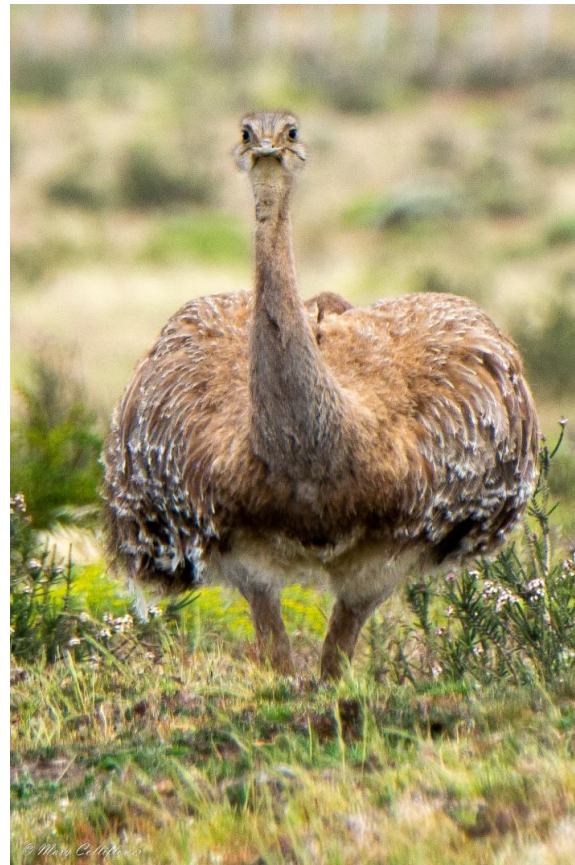


**Black-faced Ibis**



**Silvery Grebe**

**Darwin's Rhea**







**On day 9 we hiked along the base of the Los Cuentos to the entrance of the French Valley. We had to cross a raging river on a very questionable suspension bridge. The sign said 'only one person at a time!' Reminded me of an 'Indian Jones' kind of bridge. The French Valley extends into the heart of the Paine Massif. The side trail is steep and snowy with breathtaking views of mountains and glaciers all around. At the top of the valley is the Campamento Britanico which is used as a base for the few people that climb Las Torres. From the campsite it's another 30 minutes to the Lookout Point with one of the Horn pinnacles in the background.**





**Although it was cold and windy, we were blessed with little rain and a few sunny days to better enjoy our hike. For the world adventurer, this incredible place is worth the long trip to the southern tip of South America.**

