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LETTERS

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THE AMERICAS

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Yendegaia and El Rincon More Parks From the Esprit Guy

Chilean and Argentine Patagonia

By Peter Keller

JANUARY 15, 2001

Yendegaia and El Rincon are both private protected areas financed by Douglas Tompkins (co-founder of North Face and Esprit Clothing). They are both difficult to access and adjacent to national parks. However, the level of development in these parks compared with that at Pumalín Park, the northern-Patagonia flagship of a fleet of parks started by Tompkins, is a world apart. Yendegaia, on the southern edge of Tierra del Fuego, and El Rincon, in southern Argentina, protect some of the most remote southern vestiges of Patagonia wilderness.

Unlike Pumalín, well known in Chile due to various controversies since its inception in the mid-90's, Tompkins' other half-dozen privately protected areas are relatively unknown. Technically, he does not own these lands; rather, they were purchased in part or as a whole by the Conservation Land Trust, a California-based nonprofit land trust, under the auspices of the Foundation for Deep Ecology (a foundation Tompkins initiated and funds). In some cases, land titles have been, or will be, deeded to local conservation organizations or to the State, so the land will eventually be managed as a national park.

Considering the variety of options for managing these protected areas, each spawns a series of questions. What are the management objectives? How will they be financed now and in perpetuity? Will the public be involved in the decision-making process? This newsletter describes the background and general direction of these two privately-protected areas, while answering broad questions and recognizing detailed questions that still need to be answered by project proponents.

Yendegaia

Managing to reach Yendegaia is an accomplishment in itself, one I have not yet achieved. In any attempt to visit Yendegaia, located along the north bank of the Beagle Channel between Argentine Tierra del Fuego and the Darwin mountain range, an obligatory first stop is Punta Arenas (population 109,110) and *Hostal El Bosque, Centro de Difisión Ecológica.* As a Hostel and Ecological Center, it serves as a font of environmental information in the far south of Chile.

Hostel owner Ivette Martínez, along with her husband Julio Contreras, directs the Yendegaia Foundation, a Chile-based conservation organization that purchased the land with support from Tompkins' Conservation Land Trust and other groups. In addition to making an emotional investment in directing the project, they have also made a financial commitment. They bought a 400-hectare ranch north of Yendegaia to develop an ecotourism business. Their desire is that the ranch, Caleta Maria, will help fund work at Yendegaia through ecotourism business opportunities such as lodging and guided trips.

Yendegaia, on the island of Tierra del Fuego, is sandwiched between Chile's

Alberto de Agostini National Park to the west, Argentina's Tierra del Fuego National Park to the east and the Beagle Channel to the south. Located across the Strait of Magellan from Punta Arenas, Tierra del Fuego — land of fire — received its name from early European explorers who spotted constantly burning fires on the island. Historically, Yahgan Indians, who wore little or no clothing in a climate that is close to winter, even in summer, lit these fires to keep themselves warm. Today, bottled-gas heaters and wood-burning stoves are used to keep people warm — and everyone I saw was wearing clothes!" They do use natural gas from pipes in this section of the country, but that is on the Argentine side of the island. Bottled gas is more common.

The geography of Tierra del Fuego is split between north and south. Driving through the northern portion, you feel you are in North Dakota because the terrain looks like an endless prairie. The southern half, where the Darwin Mountains run into the sea, evokes images of southeast Alaska. Politically, Tierra del Fuego is divided between east and west along a straight line that cuts through the middle of the island, with Argentina holding the more populated eastern half.

Since the Yendegaia project is relatively new, consistent access routes have not been developed. When I met with Ivette Martínez upon her return from a conference in New Zealand, she was able to confirm what I suspected — getting to Yendegaia is difficult.

Besides private airplane, the only legal access to Yendegaia is by passenger ferry or cruise ship. The passenger ferry docks at Yendegaia once a week after a 30-hour trip from Punta Arenas, and occasionally the cruise ship *M/V Terra Australis* drops anchor. Not having a plane and not relishing a long boat ride, I thought one could gain access to Yendegaia from the Argentine side, where a road comes within six kilometers of the international border, and a trail fills out the remaining distance. However, a travel agent told me it would be illegal to cross the border here because no official border station exists. Weeks later, an adventurous traveler told me he had hiked to Yendegaia along Rock Lake, which connects the two countries, but added that there would have been stiff

Downtown Punta Arenas with the Strait of Magellan in the background. This city was once an important shipping center before the opening of the Panama Canal.

In New Zealand, Ivette Martínez met with other environmentalists to discuss a conceptual project called Gondwana. This is a proposal by nongovernmental organizations to protect forests and waters south of the 40th parallel. An international network of 200 organizations has come together to form the Antarctic and Southern Ocean Coalition. In Chile, Argentina, New Zealand and Australia the coalition is developing an inventory of remaining unprotected areas that should be conserved. Yendegaia can be considered an early Gondwana success story. One particular goal of the coalition is to create a southern whale sanctuary to put muscle in the fight against illegal fishing in the often-uncontrolled southern seas.

Why "Gondwana"? If you think back to Geology 101, you may remember that around 250 million years ago the earth's one mass was called Pangea, and its one ocean was called Panthalassca. About 200 million years ago Pangea broke in two. The northern half became Laurasia; and the southern half remained Gondwana. Some 135 million years ago, Gondwana divided into Africa and South America, with the Atlantic Ocean forming between them.

penalties if border police had caught him. If not by land, I thought, could it be possible by water along the Beagle Channel from Ushuaia, some 30 kilometers east of Yendegaia? No, this too was considered an illegal crossing.

In the end, I made it to Ushuaia, the southernmost city in the world, but never risked crossing the border illegally. Next time I will be thoroughly prepared, but for this trip I continued to research the Yendegaia story without visiting the area itself.

Estancia Yendegaia is a 38,780-hectare ranch purchased for $2.4 million in December 1998 by cooperating foundations, including Tompkins' Conservation Land Trust. Over half of the property is mountainous, with rocky peaks nearly 2,000 meters high and glaciers. The valley floor and slopes have old-growth forest of *lenga* and *coigüe*. Both trees are members of the *Nothofagus* genus, known as southern beech, although *coigüe* is evergreen and *lenga* is deciduous with leaves that change color in autumn — a Southern Hemisphere rarity.

The ranch was established nearly 100 years ago by Jerónimo Serka to raise livestock. The management objective of the Yendegaia Foundation is to preserve these sub-

Antarctic forests — one of the last and most extensive cold-temperate rainforests left — in the face of growing pressure from forest-extraction projects.

One such timber-harvest proposal is the Río Cóndor project, developed by Savia-Trillium, a U.S.-based company that arrived here in 1993. The project, located several kilometers north of Yendegaia, proposes to sustainably manage 272,729 hectares of Tierra del Fuego forest. Chile's Conama (equivalent to the U.S. EPA) approved the project in 1995 and 1997 with two separate environmental-impact statements. Not all of the land is scheduled to be harvested (nor is it commercially harvestable) and some portions (close to 67,000 hectares) have been set aside as biological reserves. No cutting has yet begun, but — this summer Savia plans to build a 43.8-kilometer road from Puerto Arturo to Lake Escondido in the heart of the project area. When harvesting does begin, Savia has projected to cut from 1,000 to 2,750 hectares per year. A local sawmill that supplies wood products to the United States, Europe and South Korea will process the logs.

To ensure protection of their land, Yendegaia board members are working with the Chilean government to secure nature-sanctuary status. I spoke with Tito Gargari, a lawyer from Santiago representing the Yendegaia Foundation, about this process. He said the Board submitted its proposal to the National Monuments Council in May of 2000 and he believed that "a positive outcome will be delivered in June of 2001." Currently, only the Ministry of Public Works has reservations about the proposal, questioning whether the status will interfere with a 60-kilometer road the Ministry is building from Vicuña south to Yendegaia. Officials at Tompkins' Pumalín Park, in northern Patagonia, are also seeking nature-sanctuary status but Pumalín is controversial; Yendegaia isn't. Tito predicts that it will be approved in less time.

Currently, only one employee is stationed at Yendegaia Ranch; he spends his time ordering materials to repair worn-out buildings and managing the privately protected area.

But that's one person more than at adjacent, government-managed Alberto de Agostini National Park in Chile. A massive park of fiords, glaciers and forests, de Agostini covers 1.4 million hectares. If you combine the 63,000-hectare Tierra del Fuego National Park in Argentina with Yendegaia and de Agostini, these three protected areas are one-and-a-half times the size of Yellowstone National Park. Tierra del Fuego National Park, comprising mountains, lakes and marine coastline, offers various trails, but none that reach the park's remote corners. Currently, the park is probably more famous for being the end of the road from Buenos Aires, some 3,065 kilometers north, where everything Argentine begins. However, I saw no reason why the entire three-park complex could not be known as a place where Chile, Argentina and private organizations like

In Argentina's Tierra del Fuego National Park, you can see across Rock Lake in the direction of Yendegaia in Chile, but you can't get there from here – legally.

Yendegaia Foundation might jointly develop a world-class international peace park.

A view of the Darwin Range in Yendegaia Ranch, a private protected area of nearly 40,000 hectares purchased by an assortment of foundations including the Conservation Land Trust – an organization funded by Doug Tompkins. Photo courtesy of Ivette Martínez

One of the better examples of an international peace park exists in North America. In 1932, Canadian and U.S. legislators recognized an opportunity to extend cooperation between the two countries by designating Glacier National Park (1910) in Montana and Waterton Lakes National Park (1895) in Alberta as an International Peace Park. Today visitors can roam across the border easily; even a boat tour is offered on Waterton Lake connecting the two countries and is guided by Rangers from both park agencies. This model is gaining popularity, most recently in southern Africa among the countries of Zimbabwe, South Africa and Mozambique, which cooperatively manage Gaza-Kruger-Gonarezhou Peace Park. South African Anton Rupert and his Peace Parks Foundation catalyzed this initiative.

I introduced the peace-park idea in a meeting with Conaf Department Chief of Wild Heritage Pedro Araya in his Santiago office. As he searched his office for a map of Tierra del Fuego, he commented, "The situation is complicated. It would take cooperation among many different government ministries — just in Chile alone." I have heard the phrase, "It's complicated" dozens of times while in Chile. However, I think that what people are really telling me is, 'It's out of my control.' This I can understand, coming from mid- and high-level bureaucrats who are part of the process, yet don't feel they have control of the outcome. On the other hand, Araya had grounds for believing the situation was complicated, mostly due to Chilean-Argentine history.

Although it may seem to many like ancient history, among the reasons the two governments have been reluctant to cooperate is the fact that memories and physical evidence are still strong 23 years after the Falklands War between Argentina and Britain. One sure-fire way to rile an Argentine is to call these islands, located 300 miles east of Tierra del Fuego, "Falklands" instead of "*Malvinas*." Even though all governments involved have changed leadership, some Argentines are still leery of Chileans because the government of Chilean strongman Augusto Pinochet provided information to Great Britain about the Argentine military.[1]

In parts of southern Argentina I saw billboards still claiming the *Malvinas* as Argentine property. During my drive through Argentine Tierra del Fuego to Ushuaia, I came upon two spots where the road widened and was paved all the way to the edges. These sections continued for about a mile and then detoured off to space where a hangar might stand. They were used as airstrips during the war. Later, I met two college-aged men who were only three years old during the war, but they still held grudges against the British and Chilean governments — as if they had been pilots who navigated this stretch.

Argentines and Chileans maintain a friendly relationship, yet a "little brother/big brother" struggle continues between the two countries. Many Chileans see Argentina — a country with twice the land area and population of Chile — as a domineering aggressor. During Pinochet's time land mines were even placed along the border, to prevent a possible invasion by Argentina. Some of these minefields are still active today.

North of Punta Arenas, where Highway 9 parallels the Argentine border, triangular signs warn of antipersonnel mines, in case anyone was thinking of going for a hike. Months before this trip I had heard rumors of antipersonnel mines within various national parks along the

[1]In a "politics-makes-strange-bed fellows" twist of fate, British authorities last year held Pinochet for 18 months of in-house arrest while trying to decide whether to extradite him to Spain. He eventually was allowed to return to Chile.

Chilean / Argentine border. In a Chilean newspaper (*La Tercera*, November 9, 2000) military sources confirmed that land mines had been laid in seven different parks. They also disclosed that nearly 250,000 mines in 293 minefields were still active throughout the country. They estimated the cost of clearing the minefields at U.S.$300 million and the time to complete the process at ten years — if they had the funds to proceed.

Back at Yendegaia, active management as a nature sanctuary can't begin until the Ministry of Education approves the request and the Yendegaia Foundation makes two more bank deposits for full ownership of the property. (They've already made three.) At that point, Martínez told me, "Citizens can become involved in the management of Yendegaia." Whether public involvement will be funneled through the foundation or through the Ministry of Education is still unclear, but more than likely it will be locally driven.

El Rincon

Although I was not successful in reaching Yendegaia, I did manage to visit El Rincon. However, without directions, a truck and plenty of supplies, the journey would have been a failure. The last stop for supplies along these windswept, high grasslands of Argentine Patagonia could be missed in the blink of an eye. Before the turnoff to the 90-kilometer access road to El Rincon is the "Hotel Las Horquetas." At least that's what it's called. At first glance, I thought the "Hotel" was an abandoned ranch and perhaps some gas station was farther up the road. I kept driving, but found nothing. When I turned around, I missed the Hotel again because a strong tailwind carried me past the turnoff. When I finally "arrived," I opened the creaky door to the adobe structure — half expecting to find nothing but cobwebs — to find a family huddled around the TV eating lunch. They had gasoline (called *nafta* in Argentina), hidden in blue barrels, and were able to fill the gas tanks.

With both the main and auxiliary tanks full of *nafta* I was ready to drive through the Patagonian steppe to the jagged mountains barely visible in the distance**.** Months earlier Doug Tompkins gave me detailed directions to El Rincon, one of his favorite hiking areas. When I told friends I was going to see another Tompkins' park, the general response was, "Oh, that Esprit guy has another park?" They're obviously more current about clothing than I, because I used to think of him as "that North Face guy."

Tompkins bought El Rincon ranch in 1992 from local rancher René Negro. Located along the northern edge of Argentina's Perito Moreno National Park, the 15,000-hectare ranch is shadowed by Mount San Lorenzo, an unscaled peak of 3,706 meters. The setting is similar to the east side of the Sierra Nevada range in east-central California — with many fewer visitors, however. I saw only five people during my park tour.

At the entrance station I met Guillermo Mateo, a park ranger in his mid-30's with a sarcastic style and dry sense of humor. He had just arrived at Perito Moreno from his previous post at Tierra del Fuego National Park. Mateo was surprised and disturbed to hear that Tompkins also owned land next to this park, especially since his last assignment was in the park adjacent to Yendegaia. "What is his motive?" Guillermo asked me as he recited his suspicions of gringo foundations in Argentina. "Anyone who comes to help," he added, "should just stay home." He has not met Tompkins, but I think that when he does, he'll be surprised to find someone like-minded, and just as concerned about the "homogenization" of the world by U.S. products and culture as he is once Mateo gets over the fact that Tompkins is a gringo.

El Rincon, 'the corner", is a ranch with little development: a few fences, a shepherd's shack and a single-lane dirt road part way up the main river valley. Wide valleys, sparsely forested slopes and jagged peaks provide an environment that is the epitome of hiking freedom. From my campsite I saw a mountain ridge that promised to provide an awesome view of the entire area. Without any trails or bridges, I was free to pick my own route, crossing rivers and hiking along ridges where I chose. Under a clear sky with a backdrop of mountains, the warm sun and physical activity told me that this was the Patagonia I had always envisioned. Ranger Mateo knows the feelings as well as anyone, and thus should understand the motives of someone like Tompkins.

Driving through the Patagonian steppe to El Rincon offers spectacular views of the Andes and an occasional guanaco (Lama guanicoe) *crossing the road.*

When the political climate is right, Tompkins intends to donate El Rincon to the Argentine Government for inclusion into Perito Moreno National Park, which is managed by the National Park Administration. Discus-

A view of the mountain scenery in El Rincon private-protected area. This is one of several properties owned by Doug Tompkins' foundation in Chile and Argentina. El Rincon is located in southern Argentine Patagonia.

sions suffered an unfortunate setback recently when National Park Administration Board Member, José Luis Fonrouge, died in an airplane crash in late April 2001. An avid mountain climber (like Tompkins), he was the first Argentine to scale Mount Fitz Roy in southern Patagonia. The two were deeply into a series of discussions on how the transfer could take place. The Argentine government is willing to accept the land, but currently doesn't have funding to manage any additions at Perito Moreno National Park. Tompkins is not planning to provide funding with the land donation. At the moment the parcel is a "paper park," a term of that describes a park drawn on maps with no management presence on the ground. When the transfer takes place, I imagine the current "paper park" conditions won't vary greatly from those that exist at present. The transfer will not require an environmental impact study, thus public involvement will not be possible until the land is included within Perito Moreno National Park. And then, it probably will not happen until the management plan is revised.

The Key: Adapting to the Situation

Through wildland philanthropy, land purchases and management need to be adapted to each situation. Financial support can be international, but it is best when the initiative is local. In the two projects described here, Yendegaia is a better model to follow because it vests control in the local community, and is guided by local activists. Fostering a sense of ownership in a conservation project is as important as purchasing the land in the first place. The El Rincon model tends to alienate the very people who would normally embrace an expansion to a park.

Transparency is also important. If a philanthropist is purchasing land for conservation purposes, it is best to be open with this information. Some people love conspiracy theories and holding back information just adds to the story. If there's a fear of backlash, working with local land conservation groups seems to help alleviate aversion. Each situation is different and one must understand the community and political climate before designing a model to suit the conditions.

Another chapter in the Pumalín book of controversies occurred months after this trip. Tompkins purchased a 3,095-hectare ranch just south of Pumalín for U.S.$275,000. The property, *El Triángulo*, was sold by bid through a local bank. Tompkins' most ardent opponent, the former provincial governor and current Mayor of Chaitén, José Miguel Fritis, happened to be part owner of the property — albeit with only a three-percent share. Upon hearing who bought the land, Fritis characterized the purchase as "vengeance" and "judicial terrorism." A coalition of Pumalín's political opponents, such as Senator Sergio Páez and Delegate Claudio Alvarado, retaliated by petitioning the government to squelch the Pumalín application for Nature Sanctuary status. They also asked the bank to freeze any more land sales. Government officials have not yet responded to their requests. The response by Tompkins' political opponents was predictable, yet it's disappointing that they continued to make it a personal battle as more widespread criticism of his management of the area is increasingly replaced by approval. ❑

INSTITUTE OF CURRENT WORLD AFFAIRS

FELLOWS AND THEIR ACTIVITITES

Shelly Renae Browning (March 2001- 2003) • **AUSTRALIA**

A surgeon specializing in ears and hearing, Dr. Browning is studying the approaches of traditional healers among the Aborigines of Australia to hearing loss and ear problems. She won her B.S. in Chemistry at the University of the South, studied physician/patient relationships in China and Australia on a Thomas J. Watson Fellowship and won her M.D. at Emory University in Atlanta. Before her ICWA fellowship, she was a Fellow in Skull-Base Surgery in Montreal at McGill University's Department of Otolaryngology.

Wendy Call (May 2000 - 2002) • **MEXICO**

A "Healthy Societies" Fellow, Wendy is spending two years in Mexico's Isthmus of Tehuantepec, immersed in contradictory trends: an attempt to industrialize and "develop" land along a proposed Caribbean-to-Pacific containerized railway, and the desire of indigenous peoples to preserve their way of life and some of Mexico's last remaining old-growth forests. With a B.A. in Biology from Oberlin, Wendy has worked as a communications coordinator for Grassroots International and national campaign director for Infact, a corporate accountability organization.

Martha Farmelo (April 2001- 2003) • **ARGENTINA**

A Georgetown graduate (major: psychology; minor, Spanish) with a Master's in Public Affairs from the Woodrow Wilson School at Princeton, Martha is the Institute's Suzanne Ecke McColl Fellow studying gender issues in Argentina. Married to an Argentine doctoral candidate and mother of a small son, she will be focusing on both genders, which is immensely important in a land of *Italo/Latino machismo*. Martha has been involved with Latin America all her professional life, having worked with Catholic Relief Services and the Inter-American Development Bank in Costa Rica, with Human Rights Watch in Ecuador and the Inter-American Foundation in El Salvador, Uruguay and at the UN World Conference on Women in Beijing.

Gregory Feifer (January 2000 - 2002) • **RUSSIA**

With fluent Russian and a Master's from Harvard, Gregory worked in Moscow as political editor for *Agence France-Presse* and the weekly Russia Journal in 1998-9. Greg sees Russia's latest failures at economic and political reform as a continuation of failed attempts at Westernization that began with Peter the Great — failures that a long succession of behind-the-scenes elites have used to run Russia behind a mythic facade of "strong rulers" for centuries. He plans to assess the continuation of these cultural underpinnings of Russian governance in the wake of the Gorbachev/Yeltsin succession.

Curt Gabrielson (December 2000 - 2002) • **EAST TIMOR**

With a Missouri farm background and an MIT degree in physics, Curt is spending two years in East Timor, watching the new nation create an education system of its own out of the ashes of the Indonesian system. Since finishing M.I.T. in 1993, Curt has focused on delivering inexpensive and culturally relevant hands-on science education to minority and low-income students. Based at the Teacher Institute of the Exploratorium in San Francisco, he has worked with youth and teachers in Beijing, Tibet, and the Mexican agricultural town of Watsonville, California.

Peter Keller (March 2000 - 2002) • **CHILE**

Public affairs officer at Redwood National Park and a park planner at Yosemite National Park before his fellowship, Peter holds a B.S. in Recreation Resource Management from the University of Montana and a Masters in Environmental Law from the Vermont Law School. As a John Miller Musser Memorial Forest & Society Fellow, he is spending two years in Chile and Argentina comparing the operations of parks and forest reserves controlled by the Chilean and Argentine governments to those controlled by private persons and non-governmental organizations.

Leena Khan (April 2001-2003) • **PAKISTAN**

A lawyer dealing with immigration and international-business law with a firm in the Washington, DC area, Leena will study the status of women under the "islamization" of Pakistani law that began in the 1980s and continues to this day. Born in Pakistan and immersed in Persian and Urdu literature by her grandfather, she is a Muslim herself and holds a B.A. from North Carolina State University and a J.D. from the University of San Diego.

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