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THE AMERICAS

*Peter Keller is a Forest & Society Fellow of the Institute, studying and writing about national and private parks in Chile and Argentina.*

## Cultivating an Environmental Ethic after 20 Years of Pino-chill

*An Interview with the Chilean National Parks Director*

By Peter Keller

JULY, 2001

SANTIAGO, Chile – Carlos Weber is not your typical modern-day parks director. First of all, he is not a politician, but rather a trained park professional. In the past 30 years park directors in the United States, Chile and Argentina have often come from outside the profession, usually selected for their party loyalty or political savvy. Weber doesn't speak in buzz terms like "adaptive management" and "conservation enhancement" or beat around the bush to avoid a controversy. He has strong opinions and is not afraid to express them. As Executive Director of *Corporacion Nacional Forestal* (Conaf), the Chilean federal agency in charge of managing national parks and forest reserves (equivalent to the combination of both the U.S. National Park Service and U.S. Forest Service), the stewardship of 90-plus parks, reserves and monuments are under his direction. In mid-June, I met Weber at his office in Santiago for an interview regarding the state of Chilean parks and conservation. He spoke extensively about the history of forest conservation in Chile and the need to influence public opinion to create a strong environmental ethic among current and future Chileans. For this newsletter I have selected interview highlights regarding park management and the status of the Chilean environmental movement.

*What is your educational background and what type of positions have you held with Conaf?*

"I am a forestry engineer. I graduated from the University of Chile in 1970. I have always worked in public service connected with Conaf, in such places as Arica, the central office and metropolitan region. Santiago is a Conaf region, but sometimes people forget that. In 1981 and '82 I went to Syracuse State University of New York and graduated with a Masters in Environmental Sciences. Since 1977, I have been an adjunct professor at the University of Chile teaching protected-area management courses."

*What are the challenges in your job as Conaf Director? Has the position been different from what you anticipated?*

"Yes and no. I had been a Regional Director for six years, so that was my preparation. I am the first regional director to become the national director. Traditionally, Conaf directors come from the central office or from outside the institution. Also, I am the first specialist in national parks to become director of Conaf. Before it had always been foresters or economists.

"No grand surprises, except for the current economic crises and reduction of budgets. It is difficult to re-direct the Conaf institution. We need to remodel the system. For example, Chile's forestry "boom," or the growth in the forestry products industry, was due to cheap land prices. However, now with the rise in land prices that changes the profitability of the business. Profits have decreased. Simi-



vince authorities on the national and regional level and people inside Conaf that the parks don't have the logic of a private farm; they don't generally produce income greater than expenditures. The purposes of parks are not about profitability. The services provided by a park to the national and international community cannot be captured in prices. This is a neo-classical economic theory. In an economic sense there is neither rivalry nor exclusion; to provide a service like biological diversity does not diminish the quantity of biological diversity for the rest of the inhabitants of the country or the world. And moreover, if someone were to pay for the benefits of biological diversity, there is not a form to charge for it. The logic of private businesses does not function in the national parks, just as it neither functions in the case of embassies, the military, nor courts of justice. There are a series of activities that share these characteristics and cannot be adapted to private-sector logic. It is impossible to contract for the good administration of a protected area with someone in a for-profit manner.

"The only solution that remains, which is used by everybody, is to administer totally through an institution, or administer privately without profit. In Chile, the only example of a non-profit, private-protected area with certain volume of quantity is Doug Tompkins' Pumalín Park. He has not fallen in well with the public and has received strong attacks, principally because some don't understand him. They don't understand at the local level why someone with millions of dollars is spending it to protect nature. Moreover, it goes against our mental logic that a millionaire who could make even more money, simply does what he likes to do.

"The state has to take on the responsibility of managing parks. Until the current administration of President Ricardo Lagos, there was a very strong current of thought, even within the government, that the parks needed to be self-financing. For that, they wanted to build hotels inside parks and have the owners pay concession rights for operating these hotels to finance operation of the park. This scheme doesn't work for one reason: The concessionaires in Chile, and for that matter the rest of the world, pay relatively low concession fees. This factor is somewhat important for income. Thus, to auto-finance a park, one would need something like 20 hotels, but there is not a sufficient visitor-count to sustain this, nor are businesses interested in constructing 20 hotels in a park. We need to change the

lar to the construction business, when the price of cement rises, then fewer houses are built. It is important to understand this relationship between land prices and forestry-sector productivity."

*What are your top three priorities, the principal components for improving the national parks?*

"There is a triple challenge. The first phase is to con-

*National Forestry Corporation (Conaf) Executive Director Carlos Weber at his office in downtown Santiago. He is the first Conaf director with specialized experience in park management.*



logic; this is the grand challenge, which contains three components.

“One component is to improve ecological ties between protected areas and the surrounding environment. I am speaking about biological corridors and management of lands without significant damage that does not drastically change the structure and function of the ecosystem. In this sense, if you were to fly over a national park in Chile, you could not tell where the borders are. This is all about the management of ecosystems.

“The second component is the economic link. Local communities should understand that protected areas are an option for local development. In this sense it is similar to the logic of a resort or a tourist cluster, where many businesses exist and provide services like lodging, food, guides, etc. This model, where the infrastructure is located in the communities — not within the park — works best to protect the ecosystem.

“The third component is the social type. In this sense, the people, whether local or national, must view the parks with a sense of pride. People should be proud of their network of parks and all the parks that are near the place where they live. If people identify themselves with nearby parks, hopefully they will begin to understand why protected areas are established and why it is important to set aside some areas of natural and cultural importance. On a national level, many people are interested in parks and think parks have an important value while others are not so interested. In general, the evolution in the last ten years has been toward a greater respect for our natural and cultural heritage, although, we still lack much to achieve a higher level of respect.

“Chile was not a part of the environmental revolution that hit other parts of the world in the 1970s and ‘80s. For example, in 1972 for the Stockholm Environmental Conference, other countries sent high-level dignitaries, but Chile sent a low-level person from the Ministry of Exterior Affairs. He is now the chief of the environment division, but at that time he was a young bureaucrat. He had no influence to add to the meeting.

“When the 1990s arrived, we had the same direction as in the 1970s. Moreover, no one contradicted the dictatorship of Augusto Pinochet, thus no meaningful discussions ever took place about environmental issues. The environ-



*One of 31 national parks in Chile, Pan de Azucar National Park in north-central Chile along the Pacific Ocean protects a desert environment with cactus, guanacos and coastal penguins.*

mental leaders in Chile did not evolve during the 20 years of a closed society. I say 20 years because it really began with President Salvador Allende in 1970 and did not open up until democracy was reinstalled in 1990.”

*In Chile today, what type of education is necessary for professionals in the management of protected areas?*

“This is a question that has two answers. One is education, and the other is training /specialization. Our tradition is distinct from the tradition of the Anglo-Saxon educational system. We have followed the tradition of France with professional schools. Many of these schools are very good, but still some have the disadvantage of a straight focus. In Chile we have well-trained forestry engineers, whether they be from the University of Chile, Concepcion or University Austral in Valdivia. They compare quite well with any forester at the primary level in the United States. However, they know only this subject; they don’t have a wider education. For those with an interest in protected-area management, there is no profession that prepares them for that. One has to abandon the plan of their original education. We should have, and in certain aspects do have, distinct specialists like geologists, biologists, archeologists and civil engineers. However, it is very important to have various perspectives. It should be like that. There is no profession that prepares for management of protected areas.”

*What do you think about the park-ranger school in Argentina that is now in the city of Tucumán, but was originally in San Carlos de Bariloche?*

“I believe it is a bad idea, because it is impossible to

predict who will have success as a park ranger and who will not. There is no vocational test that enables a person to know whether they will function well as a park ranger or not. It is more difficult to predict a good park ranger than to predict a good engineer or a good doctor. First, because it is a profession or activity that is difficult to imagine for a person that does not know it first hand. It is easier to imagine what a doctor does or what an architect does. There is a vision of what a park ranger does — the simple, happy life — but after this, the reality is much harder. Some think you just go to the mountains and don't converse with anyone, just nature. But there is a tremendous amount of interaction; park rangers have to know how to manage people, not just possess intellectual knowledge of plants and animals. Also, they have to know how to be alone for several weeks. They have to know how to drive a vehicle,

operate a radio, collect firewood; there are many things one must know to be a good park ranger.

“That is one part. The other part is that a school for park rangers is tremendously expensive. I remember when the school was in San Carlos de Bariloche, the cost of developing a park ranger was around U.S.\$30,000 — and that was many years ago. That is a large investment. Many leave in the first five years, when they discover the life of a park ranger is not what they thought and not what they want. I think the example of chocolate chefs in Switzerland is a good one to follow. They slowly work their way through courses and real-life experience in a kitchen with a professional chef. Then in five, six or seven years they obtain the title, master in chocolates. Park rangers should do it like this, but start off with a month-long introductory course

When Director Weber told me he thought a park-ranger school was a bad idea, I was surprised and a little shocked. Several weeks after our conservation I had the opportunity to visit the Argentine park-ranger school and learn about the program. School Director Ricardo Pereyra led me on a tour of the campus and introduced me to several students. The school accepts 31 students for the ranger program, which takes 14 months to complete. Openings are allocated to 20 national park rangers, seven provincial park rangers and four from other countries. This year Cuba and Uruguay have sent candidates. After 14 months of classroom and laboratory education, students continue with two more years of field experience in various parks. Average cost-per-student during the 14-month period at Tucumán National University is U.S.\$12,000. This includes room, board, travel, professors and other related expenses. Of the 500 – 1,000 candidates that apply for the school, nearly all receive full-ride scholarships to attend the program. “In the past 20 years I can remember only one time Chile sent a student,” Pereyra told me and added, “Usually, the cost of non-Argentine students is picked up by the home country. However, Argentine officials have picked up the tab from time to time.”



*Wanna-be park rangers. Students and school director Pereyra (far left) at South America's first park ranger training program, now located on the Horco Molle campus of Tucumán National University. During an hour-long impromptu discussion with these students, the author answered a variety of questions about the U.S. National Park System and his impressions of Chilean and Argentine parks.*

Latin America's first park-ranger school began in 1967 in Argentina's Nahuel Huapi National Park and became known as Bernabé Mendez Institute.

Mendez was a park ranger who was killed in Iguazú National Park when he encountered a group of illegal hunters. In 1986 the program was moved to San Carlos de Bariloche — until 1994, when Argentine park officials developed an agreement with Tucumán National University. The school, known as the “Institute for the Administration of Natural Protected Areas,” is located on the Horco Molle campus about 20 kilometers from Tucumán. Surrounding the campus is a University-held, 14,000-hectare park. Student dormitories, dining room and classes are within the same building. Classes are five days per week from 8 a.m. to 6 p.m. with a two-hour lunch break. Courses include plant and animal diversity, ecology, geography, English,

human relations, protected-area conservation and management and laboratories for learning about firearms, horses, fire fighting and radio equipment.

In response to Weber's statement that it is difficult to retain students, Pereyra said, “Nearly 100% of students stay and graduate to receive a technical degree in protected-area administration. Very few, if any, graduates leave the park service. It is difficult to win a position, so no one wants to give up.”

The park-ranger school is a unique program within the Argentine federal bureaucracy — and with the current economic crisis in Argentina of 17 percent unemployment, a 13 percent pay cut for public-sector salaries and maturing foreign debt of U.S.\$128 billion (\$7.7 billion due in 2001),

Pereyra is beginning to feel pressure as budget-hawks eye his program. “The idea of looking for money outside the government is a new concept here in Argentina,” Pereyra tells me as he explains his strategies for outside support. “I am beginning to make contact with NGOs, other universities, World Bank programs and UNESCO to diversify our funding mechanisms.” In addition to maintaining the technical-degree program, Pereyra would like to develop a bachelor's-degree program and continuing-education courses specialized for park rangers and managers. I hope he is successful in his endeavors so the Argentine school can continue to develop the best-trained rangers I have encountered in South America. □

followed by work in the field. After each year or six months they could return to a continuing-education course. Then, after five or ten years they become fully capable park rangers. This is the advantage of investing in persons that will really go on to become park rangers. But certainly park rangers need the capability to be trained at the highest level."

*Within Chile's basic Environmental Law there is a section, Article 35, for the establishment of private parks. What is the status of the development of these regulations?*

"It is impossible to develop regulations for this article because the article contains the seeds of its own destruction. This article, and one other, provides the option of creating private-protected areas. However, this section of the law cannot be promulgated because it would change other laws — and regulations cannot amend laws. The reason for protecting an area is to assure permanent protection throughout time. If property owners want to protect their land they can do that without a declaration. The purpose of the declaration is only to continue given arrangements over a period of time. Douglas Tompkins is protecting his land probably better than the state, but he has more money than the government. He doesn't need, at this moment, the protection of a declared private-protected area, if that is what he is interested in. He could transfer it to his children and they could maintain it, but to obtain this declaration at the current moment doesn't make any sense for him. It doesn't serve any purpose until the owner changes his or her mind of what s/he wants to do with the land. [Author's note: Tompkins has two options for declaring Pumalín Park an official protected area recognized by the State. The first is the private-protected areas law, which has not and probably will not be promulgated into a regulation. Thus, this option doesn't exist. The second option is to declare Pumalín a Nature Sanctuary. Park officials applied for this status and the government agreed to declare Pumalín a Nature Sanctuary as of late June 2001.]

*What is needed to improve the national park system in Chile?*

"What we need is the work of a lobby that can explain the importance of parks, why certain decisions are taken and what the logic is of management. Still, many people have the vision that parks are tree farms and are badly managed if they are not making money. We need to demonstrate that parks are a good "business" for the country and each region, even when the income is less than expenses. We need to see the value of a park just as we value a bridge or an embassy

or an army or a police station. A good police station does not generate revenue, but rather ensures security for the citizens in which it is established. We have to begin this type of logic. For too many years we have been following the logic that we are trying to establish an enterprise, a company."

*Do you have current plans to increase Conaf's budget?*

"We always have plans, and we are now looking for a way that they can be heard. The first phase is to establish higher visibility and credibility with the Minister of Agriculture and the President of the Republic. On a couple of the President's trips he has visited parks. Tomorrow we have an activity in the city of Talca with the President and the Minister of Agriculture to gain higher visibility. This is the first phase: To let them know what we are doing.

"Another phase that we are working on is to reduce the aspect of the park model with hotels. In reality, these are not places for constructing hotels. Now we are developing projections for the next few months and year regarding the regional economic impact of certain protected areas, in order to demonstrate that parks are essential elements of local economic development. Moreover, I think the government has to prepare investments to develop the capability for supporting needed infrastructure outside parks. I am convinced that our basic financial resources are going to come from the national budget approved by Congress and not from sales of goods and services. Without prejudice, one can charge entrance fees or concession fees, but we are not going to come to that. The base budget will come from Congress. Budget decisions made by the executive and legislative branches will hopefully be



*Fray Jorge National Park in northern Chile protects a small remnant of Valdivian Forest, a forest-type more common in southern Chile. Fog off the coast, called Camanchaca, provides moisture for the survival of this forest within a desert environment.*

*Humboldt Penguin National Reserve includes three islands off the coast of Chile 120 kilometers north of La Serena. Government officials are contemplating designating the area a marine park to expand protection for dolphins and sea lions off shore.*



encouraged by the public as a good investment.”

My hour with the Director came to a close and I still had a flurry of questions remaining, but they would have to wait until the next opportunity. Environmental leaders, like Weber, have always intrigued me — whether they are grass-roots organizers or directors of governmental agencies. I wonder what inspired them to follow their career path? How do they see their role within the field of environmental protection — as a motivator, think-tanker, obstructionist or team player? Unfortunately, I never made it to these questions for Director Weber. However, judged by his quiet, confident personality, I would say he is more comfortable in the think-tank role.

As far as his philosophies on park management, are concerned, for the most part I agree with him. Managing parks does not fit the confines of business logic. However, we can learn a few things from a well-run business — such as financial accountability, efficiency and customer service. On the other hand, the bottom line of a business is to make money by selling a product. In the case of national parks, what’s the product? Clean air, clean water, a quality visitor experience, inspiration, or habitat for flora and fauna? How can this “product” be quantified, and should it be? To play this game can be a futile exercise in mathematics and I think time is better spent educating people about the benefits of parks first-hand.

I differ with Director Weber about the usefulness of a

park-ranger school. I think Chilean park officials should send a small group of rangers to the Argentine school to test out their system. Unfortunately, living costs in Argentina are the most expensive in South America, and an outlay of U.S.\$12,000 (see box, p.4) is difficult to justify when some parks don’t even have a budget. Besides the education gained by park rangers, the intangible benefit of the enthusiasm and energy created in park-ranger school has developed a sense of unity among Argentine rangers that I have not experienced in many years. The value of *esprit de corps* can’t be underestimated, and it’s something Chile could use to break the thaw and catalyze its own environmental movement.

Recently I was encouraged to see seeds of change sewn in Chile on a trip to La Serena, in the northern desert. At the city center, the Plaza de Armas (the name given to just about every central plaza in the country) an environmental fair was taking place, akin to an Earth Day celebration. Each booth presented a separate theme, such as recycling, clean water, anti-littering, awareness of local parks and the struggle against desertification. Sponsored by the regional government, local school children produced colorful posters to illustrate each theme and what they had to do with protecting the environment. Moreover, during this trip I witnessed a First for me in this country: A Chilean friend chastised a fellow traveler for throwing trash out the window. My level of hope for a conservation ethic in Chile grows each day as I watch a few seeds of change begin to sprout. □

## INSTITUTE OF CURRENT WORLD AFFAIRS

### Fellows and their Activities

#### **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 MIT 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 U.S. lawyer previously focused on immigration law, Leena is looking at the wide-ranging strategies adopted by the women's movement in Pakistan, starting from the earliest days in the nationalist struggle for independence, to present. She is exploring the myths and realities of women living under Muslim laws in Pakistan through women's experiences of identity, religion, law and customs, and the implications on activism. Born in Pakistan and immersed in Persian and Urdu literature by her grandfather, she was raised in the States and holds a B.A. from North Carolina State University and a J.D. from the University of San Diego.

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