

Letter 9

Rentboy: 14th: El Calafate [ARG] - Torres Del Paine [CHILE] Walk to Torres & expensive beer. Golden Nuss! Grey glacier. Circular saws and bits of horse. Swimming in lake Pehoe for the mad.

I know I keep wittering on about the scenery but its worth wittering about. We journeyed to Torres Del Pain national park and set up camp. Our tent is down by the lake. In the morning you got to see the sun on the snow capped mountain, perfectly reflected in the lake. Each morning I went wow, and took more photo's. We were there for four nights and each morning it was wonderful to get up to. I think it would still have been wonderful after four years.

So, day one and we set off to walk to Torres (a mountain). The lovely Helen has warned me that there might be edges. About half way along the walk she's proved very correct. Not good, the track is narrow, it's blowing a gale and there's an edge and a half. I consider crawling but I know that I would have to come back the same way and I know I won't enjoy the rest of the walk with that in my mind. I do the sensible thing and chicken out. I go for a very pleasant stroll along the river to the lake. Have a fairly tough walk back (tired and into the wind) and go to the bar in the hotel by the start of the trail. The beer is horrifically expensive but hey, its beer. We return to the campsite. Some get disgustingly drunk but not I.

Day two it's a boat trip across the lake and an 8 hour hike to glacier grey. The fit, young and stupid go yomping off. I take a more leisurely pace. The trail runs through woods, crossing streams and providing occasional views of the lake where bright blue icebergs drift majestically. It's nice. After four hours I reach the glacier viewing point & meet up with the crazies. It's our last glacier and a rather dark and brooding affair compared with the sparkly white ones we've had previously. Still rather nice. Then it's a brisk stroll back to the ferry.

Day three is horse riding. We arrive at a farmstead. Outside the barn is a large and bloody circular saw. Scattered around are red rubbery chunks of ex horse, being chewed upon by dogs so sore ridden and mangy the even Helen does not want to befriend them. We get horses. One is a bit lively. The guide says it needs a competent rider. No one wants to volunteer. Unfortunately this conversation took place in Spanish so I just stand there smiling like an idiot as Brendan says 'this ones yours Rich'. No sooner are we out of the gate than 'El Loco Bastardo' (I think he meant the

horse, not me) assumes I want to go a galloping. I decide to hang on. The other horses all join in. The girls are screaming, whooping and waving hats in the air, so now loco thinks it's a race. I discover that although there are no brakes the steering is ok so we zig zag back and forth trying to avoid the larger trees. Eventually some form of normality is restored but this episode is repeated every time we reach an open space. My one attempt at stopping loco by directing him at a fallen tree got me a round of applause from the guide as we cleared the tree and some screams from me as I practically burst a testicle on landing. The rivers were better, ok, so I was thigh deep in freezing glacial run off, but at least loco was a big horse, Many people were groin deep. In the trees the horses took great joy in trying to dislodge their riders against various branches or rub them against thorn bushes. I think there were three fallers and numerous bleeding wounds, still, I was relatively unharmed so that's ok. Finally 5 hours of having 14 stone of fat bloke bounce on his spine got to Loco and I was able to limit him to a brisk trot. Now there's a comfy motion for a non-rider. Finally we return, sore but happy. It's about a three hundred-yard walk to the truck. It takes an hour.

Finally, after four days Adam, Mark and myself succumbed to the lure of the lake. Not warm. Once again my evening alcohol consumption is moderate. Maybe sobriety and exercise is the way forward (just kidding).

Rentboy: 18th: Torres [CHILE] - Piedra Buena [ARG]. via Rio Gallaegos & adios to 11 of the group. Dinner at the bus station. Good tv. Slept in the truck. Brendan snored.

Some of the group are leaving us. Steph wants to continue south to the pointy bit, others want more time in Buenos Aires, some are just truck fatigued. This has resulted in a certain amount of division and bitchiness. I have joined in and stirred with enthusiasm. The idea is that we will all meet up again in Buenos Aires. I am taking bets as to who we will never see again. We drop people off at the airport and head off. Were going North and East for the first time. It really feels as if the trip is on its final leg. Any sadness is mitigated by the fact that we now have a seat each in the truck.

Some of the girls decide that the excesses of the previous weeks may have added a few unwanted pounds that must be removed prior to the beaches of Brazil. They embark upon a diet and fitness regime known as 'the road to Rio'. We reach the first snack opportunity and its suspended until tomorrow.

That evening we eat in a bus station. I'm sure there was a good reason for this but it's slipped my mind. The TV is in Spanish but I'm confident that all the scantily clad large breasted ladies are essential to the plot. That night people decide that everyone can sleep in the truck. Hmm. Share a truck with a bunch of overweight, sweating, farting and snoring monsters (and that's just the girls 😊). I resist the temptation and put a tent up.

Rentboy: 19th: P.B - Bush camp south of Camarones (Golfo de San Jorge). "It shouldn't be too windy" [Helen] - Steak, corn & baked potato on the bonfire.

Today we hit the Atlantic for the first time so everybody has a swim. We camp for the night in a quarry and have a huge feed. One of the advantages of losing a few people (although deep down we miss them all) is that the food budget has not changed and we can rather go to town. Anyway, since we are in a quarry there is no chance of getting tent pegs in but it's not windy, we probably don't need them.

Rentboy: 20th: San Jorge - Puerto Madryn (Valdez Peninsula) One lost tent. Laura tipped over in her tent. Penguin Reserve, Cabo dos Bahias. Road to Rio called off. Massive camp site. Guided round Valdez Peninsula by Nora. Sea lions, Elephant seals, penguins, burrowing owls and an armadillo.

I wake up early. It's blowing a gale. Fortunately I have tied my tent to the truck. Better still, the others have not. Both Emma and Chippy have their tents flip over with them inside. Much screaming from within, much laughter from without. Finally the tents are down, only there's one missing. It's finally located half a mile away in a thorn tree.

On to a penguin colony. What to say, there are penguins and the smell isn't as bad as some I've been to.

The next day we visit the Valdez peninsula. Seals and Sealions abound. (no I can't explain the difference – look it up). We see burrowing owls and are entertained at lunchtime by a dancing armadillo. I take dozens of photos and then leave my camera in the toilets. Ho hum.

Rentboy: 22nd: P.M - Bush Camp. Early start for a 1000km drive. Snacking began at 7:15am.

Even by the fairly grotesque standards of the truck the snack consumption is impressive. By 10am I have had three ice creams, a bag of crisps and

about twelve pounds of peanuts. And I'm strictly a B team snacker. There is definitely a lot more to love about some of the girls.

Rentboy: 23rd: Bush camp - Buenos Aires. Sara made honorary bloke for a night out. Steaks. Tango.

Ah, Buenos Aires. I think that must wait for another day. (or possibly century)