

Willis's Walkabouts: Patagonia 2016

Carretera Austral Southern Chile: 25 January to 27 February

Update: June 2015

These notes should be read in conjunction with the first version.

We changed our normal start date in order to allow one of the participants to tie the trip in with another to Antarctica. Our original itinerary had us finishing on 25 February. That did not allow for any weather days so we extended the trip by two days to try and make sure we could do all the walks.

The itinerary

Everyone needs to arrive in Coyhaique on or before 25 January. The guide will try and arrive at least one day earlier to make sure that he can do all the necessary food shopping. Coyhaique is well worth a look around. There is even a good walk in a park on the edge of the city which offers great views – if the weather is good.

The last time we stayed in the Hostal Gladys. <http://www.hostalgladys.cl/>

A fair number of the reviews on Trip Advisor are from my 2013 group.

[http://www.tripadvisor.com.au/ShowUserReviews-g317798-d4915839-r190766811-Hostal Gladys -Coyhaique Aisen Region.html](http://www.tripadvisor.com.au/ShowUserReviews-g317798-d4915839-r190766811-Hostal_Gladys-Coyhaique_Aisen_Region.html)

It was excellent value for the price so I'll try and book us all in again. Please have a look at the different types of rooms and let me know what you want. If the Hostal Gladys website comes up in Spanish, click the British flag in the top right corner to see it in English.

From Coyhaique, we drive straight through to Cochrane, a full day's drive on the main road, even though it is only slightly over 300 km. If I haven't been able to organise it before hand, we'll stop at Parque Patagonia on the way as this will, if a car shuffle can be organised, one of our major walks.

From Cochrane, we drive to the end of the road at Villa O'Higgins, a small town of about 500 people, somewhat over 200 km further down the road. If I've been able to organise the through walk from Parque Patagonia, we'll probably give the boat and the original southernmost walk a miss. Weather can affect the boat. On a trip this length, it would be better not to cut things too tight.

From Villa O'Higgins we'll do an overnight acclimatisation walk up the Río Mosco Valley to a refugio (bushwalkers' hut). In 2011, most chose to pitch tents. One slept inside. Doing a short walk first allows people to get used to their packs and see what they might want to add or remove for the much longer trek which follows. You can download a brochure, half Spanish, half English, about the Río Mosco walk at <http://www.thisischile.cl/Recursos/documento/03.pdf>

Another good acclimatisation walk is the day walk to the Tigre Glacier. We've now done it twice. We should do it again.

Caleta Tortel is an amazing fishing village built mostly on stilts. I've now been there twice but have yet to spend a night. Although there isn't any real walking here, I think it would be interesting.

On our way south at the end of December 2012, we spotted a sign advertising camping and accommodation at a small property on the Ñadis River. We thought we'd investigate. It was so good that we went back in 2014. Besides the fresh produce straight from their garden, they had a lovely camping area, some nice, basic accommodation and two great day walks. I'd like to go back and do them again. Depending on what people think, this might be good to do on the way south before we put on the full packs.

While 4WD vehicles were useful to this point, they hadn't been strictly necessary. To get to our next walk, we needed them.

Cerro San Lorenzo is a mountain that beckons serious climbers from all over the world. For those not so keen on mountaineering, there is a great one or two night walk up to the base. I'd recommend a walk up to the refugio and spend two nights there with a moderately high altitude day walk on the full day at the top. The people whose farm we stay at before and after the walk give you a chance to experience a traditional Patagonian banquet.

San Lorenzo is only a short distance from the town of Cochran. Closer still is the Tamango Nature Reserve, one of the few places where it is relatively easy to see the rare and endangered huemul, a Patagonian deer. We did a day walk in 2012 and a four day walk in 2014.

Moving north again, we turn off to visit the relatively new Parque Patagonia. Here we find a number of pleasant day walks. See www.patagoniapark.org/hiking.htm. If we can organise it, the three-day through walk to Jenimeini National Park is a must. Most of the group did this in 2014 as we were able to get one of the park staff to drive one vehicle while another of our party took the other to the end of the trail. See www.patagoniapark.org/overnight_backpacking.htm for a bit of information about the walk.

The environment in the northern part of Jenimeini is semi-desert, totally different to anything else we encounter on the trip. The walk to see some indigenous cave paintings gave us fantastic views over this amazing landscape. The paintings may not look like much compared to some of the rock art in Australia, but the fact that they include much more than hand prints makes them very unusual in Patagonia.

From Chile Chico, it is a very long drive or a two hour ferry ride to get to the other side of the lake. We'll time it for the ferry. The ferry takes us to Puerto Ibañez, a short distance from which we stop for a look at Ibañez Falls. Anyone feeling energetic can do a walk to the top. If most have done the through walk, we'll do the drive as it's too spectacular to miss.

A drive of less than 50 km brings us to the small town of Villa Cerro Castillo and our final walk. In 2012, we were out of time and had to restrict ourselves to a day walk. In 2014 most of the group did the full four days. We were able to use one of the locals to assist with the needed car shuffle.

Very rough itinerary – this is just to give you a view of how it could possibly all fit together. The actual order will have to depend on weather, timetables and what we can do when.

25 Jan	Or earlier. Arrive Coyhaique.
26 Jan	Drive to Cochran or Parque Patagonia
27 Jan	Drive to Ñadis
28-29 Jan	Day walks from Ñadis
30 Jan	Drive to Villa O'Higgins
31/1-1/2	Rio Mosco Walk
2 Feb	Tigre Glacier walk
3 Feb	Drive to San Lorenzo
4-6 Feb	Up to base camp and day walk, return to farm
6 Feb	Special dinner at farm
7 Feb	To Cochran, resupply and on to Tamango park
8-10 Feb	On Tamango walk. There were rumours of a through walk to Parque Patagonia when I was there in January 2014. If that track is open, we might give it a go.
11 Feb	Back to Cochran
12 Feb	To Parque Patagonia
13 Feb	Long day walk at Parque Patagonia
14-16 Feb	Through walk to Jenimeini (some may drive)
17 Feb	Day walk to cave paintings then on to Chile Chico
18 Feb	Spectacular drive back toward Villa Cerro Castillo. Boat trip to the 'marble chapels'

19-22 Feb Cerro Castillo walk, final night in Villa Cerro Castillo
23 Feb Unallocated day. I'd put Caleta Tortel in on the way to or from Villa O'Higgins.
24 Feb Back to Coyhaique. It would probably be possible to get back to Coyhaique the day the Cerro Castillo walk finishes if we needed/wanted to.
27 Feb Trip ends. Back to Santiago or wherever you want.

I have not put the extra days in anywhere at this point. That will be done at a later date.

Both the Parque Patagonia to Jenimeini and Cerro Castillo walks are A to B. For Cerro Castillo, I can probably get one of the locals to drop us off and store the vehicles. If I paid them, I could probably get them to come in and meet us at the end. That would save a walk of about 10 km on a dirt road. Getting the vehicles from one end of the Parque Patagonia to Jenimeini walk is more of a challenge. The last time, two of the park employees wanted to do the walk and were able to drive one vehicle while I took the other. The walk was not particularly difficult but there were a lot of wet-foot river crossings. If someone is interested in doing the car shuffle, it should be relatively easy. If not, we may have to modify the itinerary a bit.

Note. Some of the places we will be staying are almost uncontactable during the season. No phone, no internet, just a scheduled radio service. When the owners are in town (Cochrane), they do have internet so I should be able to set things up.

Ñadis. This is one of the hard to contact places. A German woman married a Chilean man. During school terms, she has to live in Cochrane so the children can go to school. That means I can email her during school terms. They sometimes sell fresh produce from their garden which makes our meals there a bit better than normal. They have a four bed dorm attached to a common room. On the last trip, three of us chose to share the dorm, the others preferred sleeping in their tents. There are hot showers. Please think about whether you'd prefer to camp or pay a bit more and have a bed.

Transport. There are now ten of us. For comfort, I'll stop at 12 (myself and possibly an assistant guide included). That means we'll need three 4x4 twin cab utes. Dust gets in under the canopy so you'll want something to keep the dust off your pack during the drives. How many of you are happy to share the driving? Of those, is there anyone who prefers an automatic to a manual transmission? (Costs substantially more.) I will probably need to make a substantial deposit very shortly after I make the booking.

As mentioned earlier, the main roads are mostly gravel. 4WD is not totally necessary except for the trip to San Lorenzo. It does, however, give us a useful safety margin on the gravel.

Ferry. There is a ferry between Puerto Yungay and Rio Bravo on the road to Villa O'Higgins. The current schedule is three times a day during peak season. Both ends are a fair way from anywhere we can stay. Southbound: 10 am, noon, 6 pm. Northbound: 11 am, 1 pm and 7 pm. We do NOT want to have to catch the last one of the day.

Payment. The balance will be due as soon as practical after 1 July. Please not before. It is much better to have the income and expenses for the trip in the same financial year.