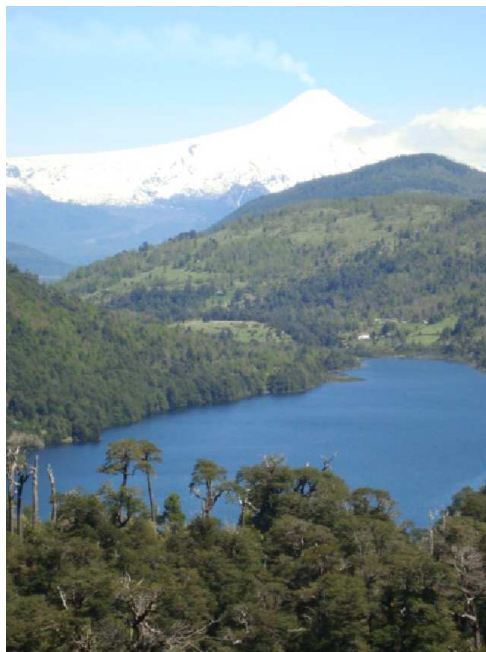
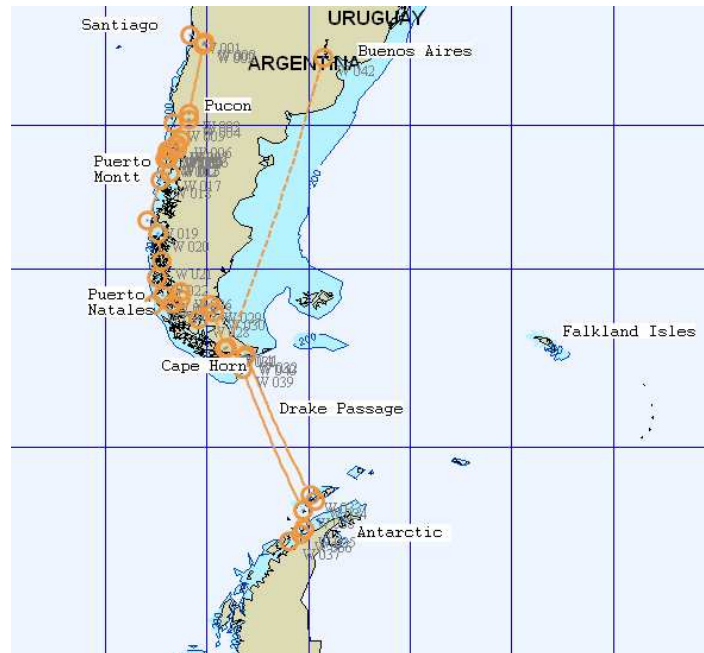


Darramy on tour No 15: Land and Sea Travel – Chile, Patagonia, Antarctica and Argentina (phew!) October - November 2010

Greetings,

We are not sure where to start this as we have just completed an unbelievable 6 ½ weeks in South America, and do not want to bore you too much, but to give you a taste of what we have been doing we want to share this with you.

We flew back from the UK for a quick stop to Darramy in Panama to change over bags etc before heading off, on our trip. Then we flew to Santiago Chile, and explored the city for a couple of days. This was Sue's first visit to Chile and I had promised her that she should enjoy some of the places I had visited previously. We had only one deadline and that was to go on the Navimag Ferry down the coast of Chilean Patagonia.. This was the only trip we had pre booked, we hadn't even bought a return air ticket to Panama as we did not want to be restricted by any deadlines.



Pucon National Park & Villarica volcano

We went up the coast to Valparaiso which is the main sea port for Santiago, and originally a very important port for ships to call to after rounding Cape Horn. Its prosperity declined somewhat after the Panama Canal opened although it is still a major port for the Chilean Navy. On visiting the Naval Museum it was interesting to note how many of the Admirals etc were of British descent, but some did seem to have a shady past! Later on it was funny to note how Sir Francis Drake was described by the Spanish as a pirate. (Just because he pinched some of their stolen gold)! We then went by bus to Pucon in the lake district where you find Villarica volcano, which I climbed last year, we had a great hostel and the balcony from our room overlooked the volcano which was still smoking.

We hired a car and visited loads of fantastic scenic spots, walking in the National park, soaking in the thermal springs, and generally enjoying the area. I caught up with Christian from Amity tours who looked after me so well on my previous two trips to Chile, he invited us to the local chillie fest, we tried 12 different chillie meals. Hot stuff!

Having the car was essential as we were able to visit some areas which were unaccesssable by public transport, we visited the Huilo Huilo (Willow Willow) National Park, I had to show Sue the fantastic designed hotels there, and we stayed a couple of nights by the lake in Puerto Foy. We took the ferry which connects to Argentina, and enjoyed a pleasant day on the lake, when the Captain found we were English and sailing type folk he invited us up to the bridge for the return leg. He wanted to practice his English, At one time he ran the ferry hard astern to stop it as he had spotted some people on the lake side with cattle so he manoeuvred the ferry to the lake side and 3 pairs of oxen in harness were ferried back to Puerto Foy. They also left a fair bit of mess on the deck!



Travelling Cattle class



Chiloe and the Pacific Ocean

We then travelled to Valdivia, but did not find anywhere nice to stay so drove on to Puerto Varas, and the Orsono volcano. We had about 4 days here in very cold weather before heading to the island of Chiloe, an island which was so colourful with yellow gorse out everywhere. These island people are quite different to the mainland, but this is something we have found on many islands, these folks were Chiloean first and Chileon second. (if you can get your reading around that one!)

We were staying in hostels most of the time and really enjoyed the friendliness of other back packers, that's right we are now officially OBP's (Old Back Packers). The hostels were really good we had our own room and private bathroom everywhere we went. Anyway we headed back to Puerto Montt, to catch the Navimag to Puerto Natales in Patagonia, 3 nights and 4 days, but first we had to return the car we had rented in Pucon. We had rented from a chap who had a fleet of 3 cars, when we asked about the one way hire he said "Si Si, no problemo". I was worried how this would work but with the aide of the Google translator on his computer, I learnt that he would send someone on the bus 500 kilometres to pick up the car, well you have to have a

bit of faith, and sure enough his mate turned up on time, checked the car and returned our deposit and drove off back to Pucon. – Amazing!

At 1.00pm we checked in for the Navimag, only to be told it would be late and come back a 7.00pm. Well, what do you do for 6 hours in the freezing cold and rain? We used the time to our advantage; we found a Mall and went to the pictures (movies for you foreigners reading this)! We then boarded the ferry which makes one stop halfway down Patagonia at Puerto Eden. Although the Lonely Planet guide slated the trip, we found it pretty good, we awoke and saw islands all around us the bird life was amazing, we were starting to see the large southern ocean birds in their glory. We had lectures each day about nature in Patagonia and although they occasionally became a bit heavy especially on the geology bits it was generally informative and delivered by Percy a Chilean of German descent who had a great passion for his subjects.



Blowing up rough, Gulf of Penas

was promised to us in the itinerary, they even contacted all the hostels and accommodation to inform them of our late arrival. Don't forget there were about 100 people booked on the return trip as well so what a logistical nightmare. We travelled through some amazing scenery, the ferry nudging its way through some very narrow passages, it was quite overwhelming to be able to see how the Captain handled the ship in such confined space. All the time we were allowed onto the bridge to observe first hand everything that was going on. We eventually arrived in Puerto Natales, nearly the southern tip of Chile.

We were due to arrive at Puerto Natales on the 4th day, but due to severe weather in the Gulf of Penas, we were well behind schedule. With typical British cynicism, we thought we would lose out on a few of the highlights like visiting a glacier which came down to the sea, and various other bits of the trip which were to make it so magical. Any way at 4.00pm the captain announced that the ferry would be 24 hours late in its arrival so we could enjoy all that



Magic Mountains, Torres del Paye



Reflections in the Park

Here we disembarked and went to hire a car again for a few days to visit the famous Torres del Paye National Park.

was again amazing, we were fortunate enough to have really fantastic weather, the lakes were a beautiful blue green in colour and with the snow capped mountains reflecting in the water made a perfect photo shoot, our photo's don't do them justice but we had to give you a taste. Also the mountain range itself was magnificent, the lines of granite in the rocks sparkling in the sunshine. We saw Condors flying around, icebergs that had broken from the glacier, floating in a river, it was again absolutely stunning. The down side was that all the roads were unmade so each day that we visited it was 100 kilometres each way on unpaved roads (sorts out those bones I can tell you)! Whilst driving we got charged by a herd of Llamas who decided to play a game with the motorist by charging out on the road from behind a big rock. Christ! it frightened us nearly to death, but we escaped without hitting any of them. On our way further south to Puerto Arenas, we called at a Penguin breeding area, here we saw our first Penguin colony of Magellanic Penguins, they were in nesting mode, but were really cute little chappies.



Which way up? Torres del Payne

From Puerto Arenas we caught a bus to Terra del Fuego we got a ferry across the Magellan Straits, and eventually arrived in Ushuaia, Argentina. This is the most southerly town in the world, sitting on the Beagle Channel, just north of Cape Horn.



Gentoo Penguins, Niko Harbour

sea areas in the southern hemisphere, There were many of the big birds we had seen previously, but many, many more. We arrived at Aitcho Island 36ish hours later, where we were taught how to board the Zodiac (inflatable dinghies for going ashore) safely, because the water is so cold to fall in may mean no return trip on the ship. Also the crew wanted to avoid unnecessary paper work

After a couple of days we joined our Ship to the Antarctic the "MV Expedition", we only booked this last minute and saved 50% on the normal price, so we were off to a good start!

We left via the Beagle Channel, and headed south past Cape Horn to the Antarctic Peninsula. We had a smooth passage across one of the reputedly worst



Weddell Seal

with the loss of a passenger so we had to pay attention! We went ashore to Aitcho Island, here we saw more penguins in their natural environment, Elephant seals and Leopard seals, there, were even whale bones on the beach the size of dinosaurs. We



Go on, How about a kiss?

were both amazed as to the antics of the penguins, although they were wonderful to watch, the nesting area didn't half pong! We cannot emphasise enough how spectacular it was just sitting on the snow for quite a while just observing these lovely creatures going about their normal everyday life.

After few hours ashore it's back to the ship as we were kept moving all the

time. We did some unbelievable passages through narrow sounds between islands, this time though, the ice was quite thick and made a great crunching sound as the



A small iceberg, note the blue ice



On our own iceberg

bow of the ship broke through the floes. We were quite glad that we were on a ship, and not in Darramy, which is more equipped for the warmer climates!



Cheeky Chinstrap penguins



Penguins afloat on the iceberg

Whilst not doing shore visits we had the option of listening to wild life lectures about the various fauna in the area, all fascinating stuff when you are there amongst it.

The ship even had an ice master on board to advise the captain on where to go for safety reasons, but also to give us punters the

best possible views of the ice floes and glaciers. It just got better and better, we went off in the Zodiacs landed on icebergs, I even managed to get a stalactite of ice and get it back to the ship to have in my Gin & Tonic, the barman pointed out that the ice was at least 100 years old!



We did one landing on the Antarctic Continent itself, and smuggled a bottle of Champagne ashore to celebrate this great milestone of the trip (yes, we even cooled the bubbly in the ice ashore.)



We went to Port Lockroy a British Antarctic Base, where the hut had been restored by the Antarctic Heritage Trust, and lots of historical

items were on display, and guess what there was a gift shop and post office so we were able to mark our visit for Grandchildren with a post card from Antarctica.

We made one last landing on Deception Island which had the remains of an old whaling station there, but this was abandoned when there was a volcanic eruption in the 1960's. Quite a few fellow passengers even went for swim in the freezing water,

Sue and I thought it more prudent to observe the daft buggers, (in the interests of safety you understand!) or maybe we are feeling our age!

Port Lockroy, British Antarctic Base

The weather by now was taking a turn for the worse and the Captain wanted to get the ship into open waters and head back to Ushuaia. This time the Drake Passage was not so kind and there were quite a few empty tables in the restaurant during the next 24 hours! By the time we entered the Beagle Channel



Deception Island, abandoned whaling station

everything was back to normal, and on our final evening we headed up the

Channel back to Ushuaia ready for disembarkation the next morning. I should add that the ship and service on board was exceptional, we were treated so well, you could not fault it at all. So it was time to say cheerio to all our new found shipmates, especially the Antipodeans, and we headed north to Buenos Aires for a couple of days.

Buenos Aires is another

interesting capital city with a history to match, many Colonial buildings, the city was extremely vibrant, we did a Sunday Market, with Tango dancing in the street, a great open top bus tour, finishing the last night with a live tango show. Well, if I was a martial arts expert, I would be frightened at the speed these dancers moved, they were something else.



There is never enough ice cream for Sue!

This is only scratching the surface of what we experienced on the trip, but all we can say is if you have the opportunity to go, do it. Now, we are back in Panama, we launched Darramy and are now getting her ready for more sea adventures, heading up to Bocas del Torro for Xmas, then, we have to make serious plans for our future voyaging.

So have a great Christmas and remember this living bit is the real thing, life is not a dress rehearsal!!

So once again it s TTFN
(Delete as applicable)

Best Wishes *Kindest Regards* *Love and Hugs* *Cheers*

Brian and Sue

You can view this and our previous travelogues of the last five years on our OCC site

http://www.oceancruisingclub.org/component/option,com_mamblog/Itemid,102/task,show/action,view/id,2236/Itemid,102/

Our Panamanian phone number is 00507 6078 6328

When sailing you can check our position on Pangolin click on this link

http://www.pangolin.co.nz/yotreps/reporter_list.php We are listed under DARRAMY so click and see where we may be, we try to update each week, but on passage we try and do it each day

Here is a list of all the wild life spotted for those of you who are interested:

Birds:

Chinstrap Penguin
Southern Gentoo Penguin
Magellanic Penguin
Wandering Albatross
Black-browed Albatross
Light-mantled Sooty Albatross
Southern Giant-Petrel
Northern Giant-Petrel
Antarctic (Southern) Fulmar
Painted Petrel (Cape Pigeon)
Snow Petrel
Antarctic Petrel
White-chinned Petrel
Antarctic (Dove) Prion
Blue Petrel
Wilson's Storm-Petrel
Antarctic (Blue-eyed) Shag
King Shag
Rock Shag
Upland Goose
Patagonian Crested Duck
Chimango
Kelp Gull
Dolphin Gull
Antarctic Tern
South American Tern
Brown Skua
South Polar Skua
Chilean Skua
Greater (Snowy) Sheathbill

MAMMALS:

South American Sea Lion
Antarctic Fur Seal
Southern Elephant Seal
Weddell Seal
Crabeater Seal
Leopard Seal
Killer Whale (Orca)
Sei Whale
Minke Whal

