

AT WORLD'S END WITH GAUCHO GRINGUITO



PATAGONIA NOTES – FEBRUARY 2011

PROLOGUE - FLASHBACK TO FORESHADOW

CROWE FLIES SOUTH (AGAIN)

‘#&^@#(#!@^#&\$!’... ‘\$*@&(#!@^%’... ‘^%#(!@^\$!^##’...

- ME: WAIT A SECOND DIDN'T YOU START A TRAVEL JOURNAL ABOUT A YEAR AGO WITH THE SAME QUOTATION?
- MYSELF: HA! YOU DID! YOU'RE GETTING STALE SEAN. I CAN'T BELIEVE YOU ACTUALLY PLAGIARIZED YOURSELF.
- ME: AND YOU PROBABLY WENT TO LATIN AMERICA AGAIN LIKE IN SOME OF YOUR OTHER WRITE UPS. I AM SURE YOU GOT ANOTHER FREE FIRST CLASS FLIGHT UPGRADE TOO... YAWNNN
- MYSELF: NO WONDER IT TAKES SO LONG TO WRITE AND EMAIL THESE SHAMELESS CRIES FOR ATTENTION AND ENVY.
- I: COME ON IT'S NOT A BLOG OR A CHARLIE SHEEN TWITTER RANT. AND LAST TIME I CURSED ‘%#\$@(&\$&%@#*’...‘*&#%\$@&’...’%*!#@#\$^&*’. TOTALLY DIFFERENT! THIS TIME IT EVEN HAS SOME SPANISH INFUSED INTO THE PROFANITY. PLUS THE CAUSE OF THIS CUSS IS COMPLETELY CONTRARY AS WELL. FOR INSTANCE LAST YEAR I SLIPPED ON SOME ICE AND FELL AND DAMAGED THE INSIDE OF MY RIGHT ANKLE. THIS TIME I SLIPPED ON SOME ICE AND FELL AND HURT THE OUTSIDE OF MY RIGHT ANKLE.
- MYSELF: I AGREE, BOTH ARE TOTALLY DIFFERENT.
- ME: HOW EXACTLY DID IT HAPPEN?
- I: GOOD QUESTION, I THINK BETWEEN THE 3/‘WE’ OF US WE KNOW, BUT FOR THOSE WHO WISH TO FIND OUT; THEY MAY HAVE TO READ ON...

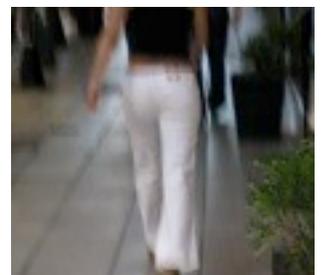
ACT 1- CONFLUENCE

DELUSIONS OF GRANDEUR

IF YOU ASKED ME WEEKS, EVEN DAYS PRIOR TO DECIDING TO GO, WHERE WOULD I GO; RETURNING TO ARGENTINA & CHILE WOULD NOT HAVE COME UP. BUT IF THERE WAS AN OPPORTUNITY TO TAKE 3 WEEKS, VENTURE TO THE END OF THE EARTH ONLY TO STAND ON THE VERY TOP OF IT. SUCCESSFUL OR NOT, CONDITIONED OR ILL- PREPARED... IT'S AN OPPORTUNITY ONE CANNOT PASS UP.

PARIS OF THE PAMPAS

THERE ARE ONLY A HANDFUL OF CITIES THAT DEFY GEOGRAPHICAL PLACEMENT AND ARGUABLY DO NOT BELONG WHERE THEY PHYSICALLY ARE. MONTREAL IS SUCH PLAUSIBILITY AND SO IS BUENOS AIRES WITH ITS GRAND AVENUES AND ARCHITECTURE, EURO INFUSED INHABITANTS AND CUISINE IT ONLY EXISTS ONLY BECAUSE IT DOES AND REALLY DOES NOT BELONG IN OUR BROADER AMERICA. HAVING BEEN FORTUNATE TO VISIT THE CITY A HANDFUL OF TIMES IT HAS NOW BECOME LESS WONDERFUL AND MORE ROUTINE. AS SUCH I ONLY SPENT HALF A DAY IN TRANSIT, BUT IN THE HALF DAY TURNED MORE INTO AN ACADEMIC EXERCISE THAN MOMENTS OF IMPENDING ATHLETIC PREPARATION.



(SUB) PRIME TIME

REVISITING ARGENTINA IN THE WAKE OF THE WORLD'S RECENT FINANCIAL CRISIS PROVIDES INTERESTING PERSPECTIVE ON WHAT MAY BE IN OUR YEARS TO COME. ESSENTIALLY A DOMESTIC ECONOMIC LANDSCAPE OF HIGH RELATIVE PRICES, LOW WAGES, STAGNANT FUTURE; WHO'S BEST AND BRIGHTEST OF WHAT SHOULD BE THE PROCREATING GENERATION HAVE PROBABLY VACATED. FOR A MIDDLE CLASS SOCIETY THE AVERAGE MONTHLY WAGE IS REFLECTIVE OF WHAT SOME OF US EARN IN A DAY – AS THEY CONTEND WITH A SIMILAR BIG MAC INDEX.

THE REASON WHY OUR POST-BOOM 'CRATER' COUNTRIES SHOULD PAY ATTENTION IS ARGENTINA WENT THROUGH A VERY SIMILAR FINANCIAL CRISIS NEARLY 10 YEARS BEFORE. PERHAPS LIKE ANY GREAT (OR GREEK) TRAGEDY ALL THE SIGNS WERE CLEARLY VISIBLE, BUT HISTORY IS FORGOTTEN AS MUCH AS HUBRIS IS BLINDING. AFTER PEGGING THEIR DOLLAR 1:1 WITH THE \$US (THEIR SUB-PRIME) AND ENACTING A SERIES OF ECONOMIC REFORMS THAT WOULD MAKE ADAM SMITH'S THEORIES SEEM ALMOST COMMUNIST - ARGENTINA BET THEIR LIVELIHOODS IN SIMILAR CASINOS TO THOSE LOCATED IN OUR RESPECTIVE BUSINESS DISTRICTS SUFFIXED IN THE NAME OF 'STREET OR CITY'. IN THE END A FEW MADE BOATLOADS OF MONEY, BUT MOST HERE LOST MUCH MORE THAN THE 30% LOSS MANY OF US AVERAGED – WE AT LEAST HAD A BETTER CHANCE TO MAKE IT (AND ALREADY HAVE MOST LIKELY MADE MORE) BACK.

IF THERE IS ONE THING ARGENTINA IS GOOD AT, IT IS KEEPING UP APPEARANCES AND WHEN ONE LOOKS AT BUENOS AIRES, IT CLEARLY HAS. HOWEVER, LIKE ANY WORLD CITY OR GLOBAL HOTSPOT THE ENGINE IS LESS OF INDUSTRY AND MORE OF RESORT MUNICIPALITY. BUT I SHOULD NOT BE SO DISMAL AS TECHNICALLY I AM ON HOLIDAY...

DIVINE FRONTIER

I HONESTLY BELIEVE PEOPLE ROUTE THEIR NOTION OF HEAVEN WITH WHERE THEIR CHILDHOOD YEARS ARE SPENT – IT DOES NOT HAVE TO BE PERFECT, WARM, OR GRAND BUT WHEN ONE STEP'S INTO HIS ELYSIAN FIELD THE LANDSCAPE WILL TAKE THE SHAPE OF HIS FORMATIVE YEARS. FOR ME, GROWING UP IN WESTERN CANADA WITH THE PRAIRIE, FOOTHILLS, MOUNTAINS ALL SHADED IN BROWNS, GREEN, BLUE AND WHITES UNDER A ENDLESS SUN IS REFLECTIVE OF THE PATAGONIAN FRONTIER (IT EVEN HAS IT'S OWN INDEPENDENCE MOVEMENT TOO), EXCEPT PATAGONIA IS LITERALLY THE DREAMSCAPE OF MY VALHALLA AS ITS BEAUTY IS FERAL AS A CHILD REPRODUCING HIS SURROUNDINGS WITH A BOUNDLESS IMAGINATION AND A BOX OF CRAYONS.



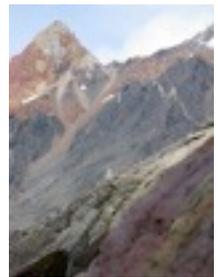
BLUEBERRIES, DINOSAURS, & THE CURRENT ICE AGE

FROM BUENOS AIRES I FLEW INTO THE PROVINCIAL CAPITAL OF SANTA CRUZ, CALAFATE , NAMED AFTER A LOCAL BLUEBERRY THAT FABLE STATES ONCE CONSUMED WILL ENSURE YOUR RETURN TO THE REGION. CALAFATE IS A SMALL MUNICIPALITY THAT HAS GROWN FROM HISTORIC PIONEER AND RANCHING SETTLEMENTS TO A TOURISM CENTRE FOR EXCURSIONS TO THE FAMED PERITO MORENO GLACIER AND THE SOUTHERN ANDEAN OUTPOST OF EL CHALTEN. IN BETWEEN TOURISM, THE AREA SEEMS TO SERVE AS THE COMMERCIAL AREA FOR PETROLEUM DEVELOPMENT AND DINOSAUR FOSSILS. THE COOLEST OF THEM ALL IS THE PREHISTORIC MYLODON – WHICH APPEARS TO BE HALF-BEAR, HALF-DINO AND ALL SLOTH, HENCE WHAT IT EVOLVED INTO.



MISTY MOUNTAIN HOP

THE REAL ADVENTURE KICK STARTED IN THE ANDEAN OUTPOST OF EL CHALTEN ('SMOKEY MOUNTAIN' IN NATIVE TELUCHE), A DUSTY CITY SITUATED IN A GLACIAL CARVED VALLEY AND DWARFED BY THE GRANITE PEAKS OF PARQUE NACIONAL LOS GLACIARES. RISING OUT OF AN ARID STEPPE, THE PARK ASCENDS FROM 500M TO OVER 3000M THROUGH A MIX OF VARIED WATER, GLACIAL, FORESTED TERRAIN. IT WAS HERE THAT I MET UP WITH KLEMEN (GUIDE, MOUNTAINEER, AND ALL ROUND GOOD GUY), AND WE BEGAN THE LITTLE ADVENTURE THAT ONLY EXPERIENCED DIRT-BAG DIEHARD CLIMBERS AND ARROGANT COCKSURE YUPPIE MOUNTAINEER WANNABEES SEEM TO TREAD. I WILL LEAVE IT UP TO YOU TO DECIDE WHAT CATEGORY ENCOMPASSES MYSELF.



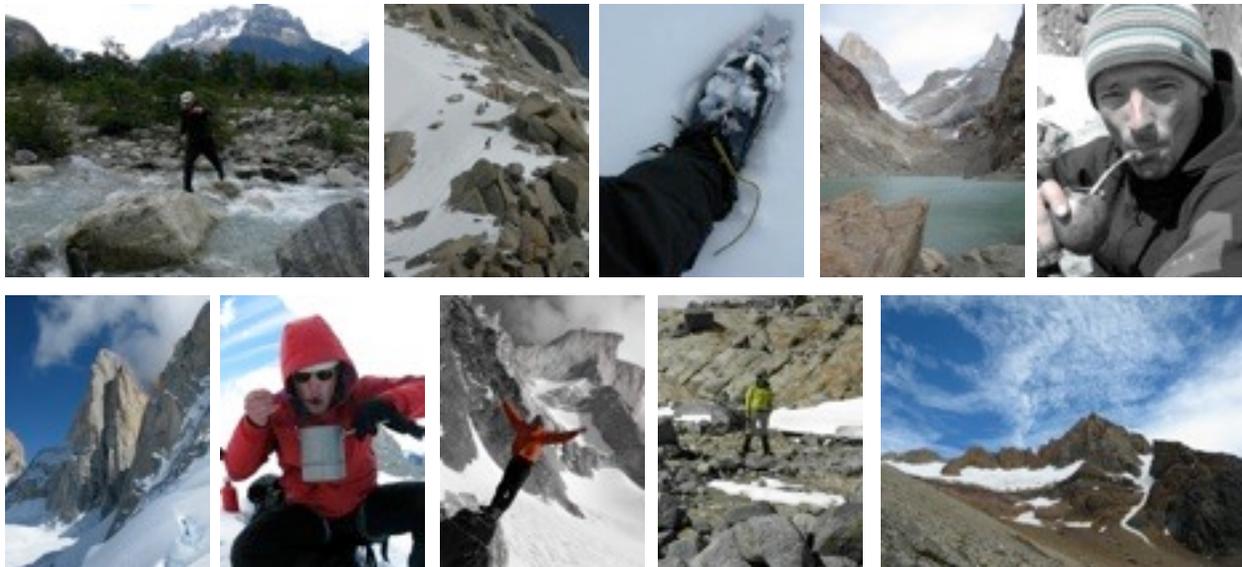
NO HORSE, NO DONKEY, NO MULE; JUST A JACK ASS

- 'WHAT DO YOU MEAN WE HAVE TO CARRY ALL THIS STUFF?'
- 'WHERE ARE THE HORSES? YOU TOLD ME WE WERE SUPPOSE TO RIDE IN? BUTCH CASSIDY, SUNDANCE KID, AND PROBABLY EVERY OTHER TOURIST ALL GOT SOME SORT OF EQUESTRIAN TRANSPORT WHEN THEY VISITED PATAGONIA.'
- HOW CAN I BE GAUCHO GRINGUITO IF I DO NOT HAVE AT LEAST A MULE?

THERE WAS A TIME NOT LONG AGO WHEN PATAGONIA ALLOWED EVERYONE TO BE A GAUCHO FOR AT LEAST AN HOUR, BUT THEN CERTAIN AREAS BECAME A NATIONAL PARK AND DECIDED TO PRESERVE THE HABITAT. THE GREEN THUMB IN ME SAYS GREAT, BUT THE INHERENT LAZINESS (ALTHOUGH I PREFER THE WORD EFFICIENCY) IN ME HAD MY MIND SET ON ANYTHING BUT I BEING MY OWN BEAST OF BURDEN. ANYWAY TREKKING IN AND OUT ALMOST 15KM TO CAMPARTAMENTO FRAILE WITH A GOOD CHUNK OF MY OUTDOOR POSSESSIONS WAS A GREAT BURST OF EXERCISE EVEN IF THE LACK OF ANYTHING EQUUS WAS COMPLETELY HORSESHIT.

GOD BLESS THE CHILEANS

FROM CAMPARTAMENTO FRAILE WE MADE SEVERAL ATTEMPTS UP (AND DOWN) THE GUILLAUMET ROUTE TOWARDS THE GREAT GRANITE SPIRES. THE VERTICAL RISE IS AN IMMENSE HIKE UP (AT ANGLES OF 45 DEGREES) THE SIDE OF A GLACIER CUT VALLEY WHOSE LANDSCAPE CHANGES FROM PASTORAL HIGHLANDS TO ERODING ROTTEN LAVA SCREE WHERE EVER STEP UP SEEMS TO TAKE YOU A FEW MORE DOWN. JUST AT THE POINT WHERE YOUR FRUSTRATION AND HEAVY PACK CUTS INTO YOUR HIP – WE BUILT A CAMP COMPLETE WITH A GLACIAL STREAM, BANSHEE WINDS, AND THE OCCASIONAL MORNING OF FRESH SNOW. OUR NEIGHBORS’ CONSISTED OF COOL CLIMBERS, TREKKERS, AND SOME CHILEANS WHOSE EARLY RISE AND EAGERNESS HELPED BREAK GLACIAL TRAIL MANY MORNINGS. WHEN WE WERE DONE WITH THEM; WE ATE THEM... IT’S THE ANDES AFTER ALL.



CLIMBING GRADES AND ROCK STARS

5.7, 5.9, 5.13, ARE THESE REALLY INDICATIONS OF SUBJECTIVE DIFFICULTY OR ARE THEY LOGARITHMIC VALUES BASED UPON DISPOSABLE INCOME THAT RATHER THAN DETERMINE THE DIFFICULTY OF THE PITCH, PROJECT THE PURCHASING CAPABILITIES OF THE CLIMBER? ONE CAN DEBATE, BUT ALSO OPT FOR THE LATER AS AKIN TO ALL MOUNTAIN SPORTS – THE TIME, PRACTICE, EQUIPMENT, AND TRAVEL ALL HAVE A DOLLAR VALUE ATTACHED THAT IS DEFIANTLY MORE EXPENSIVE THAN SITTING AT HOME - EVEN IF YOU HAVE A STELLAR CABLE TV PACKAGE.

MANY YEARS AGO THERE WAS A MOMENT TO STOP DAMAGING ROCKFACES WITH PITONS AND OTHER LITTER AND ANCHORING EQUIPMENT WAS REINVENTED TO ENSURE ONLY NATURAL EROSION COULD WEAR IT AWAY. THIS IS NOW KNOWN AS ‘CLEAN CLIMBING’; IRONICALLY THE WORD CLEAN DOES NOT APPLY TO WHAT SOME DIRT-BAG DIEHARDS

PUT INTO THEIR BODIES. THERE ARE HILARIOUS FIRST-HAND TALES OF PROFESSIONAL CLIMBERS WHO SEEM TO FUEL THEMSELVES WITH RED BULL AND PRESCRIBED STIMULANTS ON THE WAY UP, AND WHISKEY AND CODEINE ON THE WAY DOWN. LITERALLY THESE GUYS ARE 'ROCK STARS'.



EVOLUTIONARY LOGO

RODEO DRIVE AND OTHER STREETS MAY BE A COLLECTION OF LABELS AND FRANKLY SO DOES EL CHALTEN. WHERE THE FORMER MAY HAVE GUCCI, PRADA, ARMANI, OR FORD (THE CLOTHES NOT THE CAR), OUTPOSTS TEND TO HAVE ALMOST EQUALLY EXPENSIVE MAMMUT, ARCTERYX, SCARPA, SPORTIVA, AND OF COURSE, PATAGONIA. THERE ARE FORD'S TOO – BUT HERE THEY ARE ONLY CARS. WHEN YOU LOOK AT THE LOGOS OF ALL THESE OUTDOOR LABELS; MAMMOTS, FOSSILS, SABER-TOOTHES, DIAMONDS, MOUNTAINS, AND SUCH; ONE CANNOT WONDER WHY SO MANY EXTINCT OR ANCIENT REMNANTS DOMINATE CLOTHING MADE FOR THOSE WHO TEST THE ELEMENTS OR DEMONSTRATE THE SURVIVAL OF THE FITTEST.

HOLY TRINITY

MOVING BEYOND A LABEL, WHEN YOU EXPERIENCE 4 SEASONS IN A DAY (ALTIMETER/ BAROMETERS ARE USELESS HERE), IT IS VERY IMPORTANT TO SAY YOUR PRAYERS EVERY EVENING TO THE DIVINE TEXTILES ONLY SCIENCE AND SEAMSTRESSES CAN CREATE:

- IN THE NAME OF THE VIBRAM;
- HIS SON THE GORE-TEX;
- AND SOME FORM OF HOLY BASELAYER/ LONG UNDERWEAR (POLYPROPYLENE, CAPILENE, OR PERFORMANCE WOOL - YOUR BUSINESS, YOUR FAITH).
- AMEN.

AVOIDING IRONY

AS PATAGONIA, IN PARTICULAR THE ARGENTINEAN SIDE IS SUCH A FIERCE AND FORBIDDING LANDSCAPE NO TOO MUCH CHOOSES TO LIVE HERE DESPITE MASS QUANTITIES OF FRESH WATER, SUNSHINE, AND VOLCANIC ENRICHED SOIL. EVEN THE DANGEROUS AND POISONOUS CREATURES HAVE FOUND THE PLACE FORBIDDING. THE ONE EXCEPTION IS THE PUMA. THANKFULLY I DID NOT ENCOUNTER ANY AND TOOK ALL THE PRECAUTIONS AS I DO IN MY VANCOUVER BACK-YARD AS THE POETIC JUSTICE WOULD BE TOO STRONG IF I MET MY END AT THE CLAWS OF WHAT IS EFFECTIVELY A 'COUGAR'.

MUSCLE MEMORY

IF YOU EVER WATCH A BABY LEARN TO MOVE FROM KICKING, ROLLING OVER, CRAWLING, CLIMBING UP, WALKING... YOU CAN SEE THESE ARE INSTINCTIVE

MOVEMENTS ROUTED BEYOND OUR BRAIN AND IN OUR VERY CHROMOSOMES. AS ONE LITERALLY USES AND EVOLVES BACK AND FORTH WITH THE ABOVE MOVEMENTS TO ASCEND A MOUNTAIN, ONES MEMORY MAY FLASHBACK TO THE VERY FIRST INFANT ACCOMPLISHMENT OF EACH... IT ALSO FLASHES BACK TO ANOTHER INSTINCTIVE MOVEMENT...HOLDING ON!



ACT 2: GLACIAL TOLL

DELUSIONS OF GRANDEUR

LIFE IS ABOUT THE FINAL 1% AND BY ACHIEVING THIS DETERMINES THE FLOP ON SUCCESS/FAILURE, GLORY/GUILT, PROFESSIONAL/ AMATEUR, OR SUMMIT/ SLUMP. IN MY CASE IT WAS A SLUMP. I AM A COMPETENT MOUNTAINEER, BUT NOT A STRONG CLIMBER AND AFTER 6 DAYS OF EXCRUCIATING PHYSICAL ACTIVITY, EXTREME WEATHER, POOR FOOD, AND REDUCED ALCOHOL INTAKE (ITS HARD TO CARRY ADEQUATE SUPPLIES DUE TO HAVING TO MINIMIZE WEIGHT) IT WAS OUR CHANCE TO SUMMIT GUILLUMET. IF WE WERE SUCCESSFUL HERE, POINCENOT, AND PERHAPS THE MYTHIC CERRO FITZ ROY (POIGNANTLY NAMED AFTER THE CAPTAIN OF CHARLES DARWIN'S BOAT) WOULD BE CHALLENGED. AFTER MAKING IT LITERALLY 99% UP WE CAME TO A PITCH WHOSE ICED CONDITIONS INCREASED THE GRADE TO SOMETHING BEYOND MY COMPETENCY. AFTER 6 ATTEMPTS, EACH ONE INVOLVING A FALL AND VERTICAL VIEW OF WHAT 500+M LOOKS LIKE DIRECTLY BELOW – I HAD TO CONCEDE. I FELT I FAILED MYSELF AND MY ONLY SOLACE IS THAT WE WENT FURTHER THAN ANYONE ELSE ON THE MOUNTAIN THAT DAY: BUT IT STILL WAS NOT THE TOP.

'#&^@#(#!@^#&\$!'... '\$*o&(#!@^%'... '^%#(!@^\$!^##'...

AFTER THE FAILURE OF GUILLUMET, WE MADE PLANS TO ATTEMPT IT AGAIN, HOWEVER THESE PROVED TO BE TENTATIVE. IN THE SPIRIT OF TRILOGY OR MISFORTUNE PRESENTING ITSELF IN 3'S THE NEXT INSTANCE OF DOOM CAME WITH AN AWFUL FEVER THE NEXT MORNING. AND THE FINAL, A GLACIAL MISSTEP ON ROUTE TO THE BASE CAMP OF THE FAMED CERRO TORRE PEAK. TO PREVENT MYSELF FROM DISAPPEARING INTO AN ICY ABYSS I REDIRECTED TRAJECTORY BY JAMMING MY CRAMPON-SOLED RIGHT FOOT AS I SLIDE SEVERAL METERS DOWN THE FROZEN EMBANKMENT. MY ANKLE ENDED UP ROLLING AND I WAS LEFT WITH A SEVERE SPRAIN. TO ADD IRONY AND INSULT TO INJURY; NOT ONLY DID I HAVE TO WALK OUT 20 KM, THIS INCIDENT OCCURRED (+/- DAY) ONE YEAR TO THE DATE I REMOVED THE CAST FROM MY PREVIOUSLY BROKEN RIGHT ANKLE! I CONTINUED MY JOURNEY WITH A LARGE SWOLLEN FOOT – FITTING AS MAGELLAN NAMED THE REGION 'PATAGONIA' AFTER NAMING THE INDIGENOUS PEOPLE 'PATAGONS' FOR THEIR LARGE STATURE AND GIANT FEET.



SELECTIVE SUN-BURNING

NO MATTER HOW ONE SCREENS OR BLOCKS THE OZONE-LESS SUN OF THE SOUTHERN HEMISPHERE FINDS A WAY TO NIBBLE, BITE AND BURN IN THE MOST OBSCURE OF PLACES; UNDER ONES NOSE, THE BOTTOM OF AN EAR LOPE, THE TOP OF THE HANDS, OR MY PARTICULAR FAVORITE ON THE BACK OF ONE'S RIGHT CALF. IT WAS A RARE SHORT ADORNED DAY AS I STEPPED OUT WALKING NORTH IN THE MORNING WHERE THE SUN IS IN THE EAST, AND RETURNED WALKING SOUTH IN THE AFTERNOON WHERE THE SUNSET IN THE OBVIOUS WEST. S P F%#K.

EL COMIDA DE LOS CONDORES

SICK, SORE, SUN BURNED, SPRAINED, AND STARVING: IT WAS AT THIS POINT IN THE TRIP THE PLOT INTRODUCED A POTENTIAL ROMANTIC ELEMENT. AT A PICNIC TABLE IN A DUSTY CAMPGROUND I MET A GORGEOUS ARGENTINE MOUNTAIN GUIDE WHO ECHOED ANGELIC MUSIC WITH HER OWN HAND-MADE MANDOLIN. I ALSO HAD AN ECHO OF ANYTHING BUT ANGELIC ESPANGRINO AND MY TRADEMARK DARK, DRY (AND ARGUABLY INSENSITIVE) HUMOR. WHILE IN CONVERSATION ABOUT THE RECENT DEATHS AND HANGING BODIES ON SOME NEARBY PEAKS COMPLETE WITH CIRCLING CONDORS (WHICH ARE NOTHING MORE THAN A LARGE VULTURE) I HAPPENED TO POETICALLY BRAND THEIR DIRE CIRCUMSTANCE THE CASTILIAN TRANSLATION OF 'CONDOR FOOD'.

DOS PENGUINS POR FAVOR

AS APOLOGY I INVITED HER TO JOIN OUR GROUP FOR DINNER WITH THE ULTERIOR MOTIVE TO STACK THE DECK IN MY FAVOR WITH HOUSE WINE. AT A PRILLA RESTAURANT CALLED COMO VACA; MIXED MEAT WAS SERVED BY THE PLATTER, AND THE VINO DE LA CASA BY THE PENGUIN (ONE LITRE PITCHERS SHAPED LIKE PENGUINS). WE ENDED UP EATING AND DRINKING TO OUR HEARTS POTENTIAL HINDRANCE. I DID GET A KISS GOODNIGHT – BUT SO DOES EVERYONE WHO BECOMES AT LEAST AN ACQUAINTANCE IN THE LATIN WORLD.



UNIVERSAL TRUTHS

AS I HAD TO FORSAKE CLIMBING, MY FINAL TREK IN EL CHALTEN PROVIDED SOME INTERESTING TRAIL PARTNERS. THE FIRST 2 WERE SOME MID-TWENTY MODERN IRISHMEN WHO DECIDED TO TAKE A ROUND THE WORLD TRIP BECAUSE THEY BOTH RECENTLY LOST THEIR JOBS AT A BANK DUE TO THE CURRENT STATE OF THE COUNTRY'S BALANCE SHEET. THESE WOES AND EXPORTED IRISHMEN ARE NOT NEW TO IRELAND, HOWEVER WHAT IS NEW IS THIS TIME AROUND THESE FELLOWS ARE JUST WAITING OUT THE RECESSION AND HAVE EVERY INTENTION ON RETURNING. THE OTHER MEMORABLE CHARACTER WAS A SWISS FELLOW WHO WAS VISITING WITH HIS FAMILY AND DECIDED TO SNEAK OFF TO EL CHALTEN FROM HIS WIFE, CHILDREN AND IN-LAWS FOR SOME EXERCISE AND PHOTOGRAPHY. WHEN I ASKED HIM 'YOU'RE MARRIED TO AN ARGENTINEAN?' HE PROVIDED THE SAME STATEMENT THAT I AND EVERY MAN I HAVE EVER KNOWN WHO HAS DATED, MARRIED, OR BEEN INVOLVED WITH AN ARGENTINEAN WOMAN HAS REMARKED; 'ALL WOMEN ARE DIFFICULT, BUT

ARGENTINEAN WOMAN ARE ESPECIALLY DIFFICULT.'

MORE UNIVERSAL TRUTHS

UPON MY EXIT OF THE REGION, I CROSSED PATHS WITH VANCOUVER ACQUAINTANCES' AND KLEM'S OTHER RECRUITS KRISTIN AND KATHLEEN. I KNEW THEY WOULD HAVE A MORE SUCCESSFUL TRIP (AND THEY DID – CONGRATS ON SUMMITTING FITZ ROY) NOT BECAUSE OF MORE CLIMBING EXPERIENCE; BUT BECAUSE OF BOTH SCIENCE AND MYTHOLOGY. ON AVERAGE WOMEN MAY MAKE BETTER CLIMBERS; THEIR STRENGTH TO WEIGHT BODY RATIO AND PAIN THRESHOLD IS HIGHER THAN THAT OF MEN (SO MUCH FOR BEING THE LESSER SEX). AND THEIR PREPARATION AND DETERMINATION FOR SUCH EXCURSIONS TEND TO BE MORE POIGNANT, WHICH ALLOWS WOMEN TO STAY THE COURSE. I SUPPOSE MOST MEN (INCLUDING I) SUFFER FROM WHAT I TERM THE SHIVA SYNDROME; WHERE LIKE SHIVA WE CREATE AND DESTROY, OR MORE PROUDLY: MEN ARE DESIGNED TO DO LITTLE MORE THAN FUCK AND FUCK THINGS UP.

SO MUCH FOR GLOBAL WARMING

WHEN I RETURNED TO CALAFATE TO LOCATED TRANSPORT TO CHILE, I ALSO HIRED A CAR TO VISIT THE FAMED PERITO MORENO GLACIER, AN ICE FIELD THE SIZE OF A METROPOLIS AND LIKE OTHER SOUTH AMERICAN GLACIERS CONTINUES TO SPRAWL DESPITE CLIMATE CHANGE'S BEST EFFORTS. THE GROWTH DOES HAVE ITS DESTRUCTION AND EVERY FEW MINUTES IN THE AFTERNOON YOU CAN WATCH AS THE SKYSCRAPERS OF ICE CRUMBLE INTO THE FRIGID FRESHWATER ABYSS. IT IS A TOURIST TRAP, BUT WORTH IT IN ALL RESPECTS ESPECIALLY IN THE REFRESHMENTS THAT CAN BE PROCURED; SINGLE MALT ON THE ROCKS! I LOVE TO DRINK AGED AND ORGANIC.



WORLD WIDE WAKE (WWW...)

ON MY FINAL EVENING IN ARGENTINA I LEARNED THAT MY GRANDFATHER PASSED AWAY DUE TO THE NUMBER ONE KILLER OF THE ELDERLY: OLD AGE. HOW I FOUND OUT WAS BY OPENING EVERYONE'S FAVORITE VOLUNTARY 1984 TOOL (AND ONE CLEAR HORSEMAN OF THE UPCOMING APOCALYPSE): FACEBOOK. THERE WAS A NUMBER OF CONDOLENCE MESSAGES FOR A 'HE', NONE OF WHICH SPECIFIED WHO EXACTLY HAD DIED. A CALM MOMENT OF PANIC OVERCAME ME AND I QUESTIONED WAS IT MY DAD, MAYBE MY BROTHER. I TRIED CALLING BOTH OF THEIR PHONES TO NO ANSWER! FINALLY AFTER A COUPLE MORE EXPENSIVE LONG DISTANCE PHONE CALLS, ALL WAS SADLY CONFIRMED. I FOUND AMUSING SOLACE THAT I WAS NOTIFIED OF MY GRANDFATHER'S PASSING DUE TO THE INTERNET, A MEDIUM HE FOUND INFINITELY INTERESTING BUT REFUSED TO USE AS HE WOULD OFTEN STATE HE HAD NO NEED FOR IT, BECAUSE HE ALREADY KNEW EVERYTHING.



ACT 3: DEGREES OF LATITUDE

GREAT DIVIDE

THE NEXT DAY I BOARDED A BUS TO THE COASTAL PUERTO NATALES, CHILE. THE TRIP WAS A 5 HOUR RIDE THROUGH THE ARID ARGENTINEAN PATAGONIA TO THE HUMID, COASTAL CHILEAN PATAGONIA. THE CHANGE IS NOT ONLY JUST IN LANDSCAPE, BUT CULTURE AND CANDOR. WHERE ARGENTINA IS FERREL AND UNORTHODOX, CHILE IS ORGANIZED AND PUNCTUAL. SIMILAR TO A RESPECTIVE COMPARISON OF ITALY AND GERMANY - WHICH IS SURPRISING AS I THOUGHT ALL THE NAZI'S ESCAPINLY EMIGRATED TO ARGENTINA.

2 NIGHTS, 3 DAYS AT THE W

TORRES DEL PAINE IS ONE OF THE WORLD'S MOST WELL KNOW NATIONAL PARKS. SITUATED ALMOST DUE WEST OF EL CHALTEN, IT IS ANOTHER WONDER OF CLIMATE & GEOGRAPHY. ALTHOUGH ALMOST INACCESSIBLE BY CAR, SEVERAL TRAILS BLAZE THE CHANGING LANDSCAPE OF GUANACO (WILD LLAMA) COVERED FOOTHILLS, PRAIRIE, FOREST, MOUNTAIN, GLACIER AND LAKE. AT THIS POINT, I HAD BURNED THROUGH A GOOD CHUNK OF MY HOLIDAYS, THUS MY TIME WAS COMPRESSED FROM BACKPACKING ALONG THE 10 DAY 'O' TRAIL, TO THE 5 DAY 'W' TRAIL. AS I HAD A SPRAINED SWOLLEN ANKLE, I DECIDED TO PACK LIGHT, PURCHASE FOOD, HOSTEL IT, AND COMPLETE THE TREK IN 3 DAYS. TO FURTHER ADD TO THE COMPLEXITY, I WAS ALSO WITHOUT PROPER HIKING BOOTS AS THOSE HAD WORN COMPLETELY OUT AROUND THE TIME OF MY FALL IN EL CHALTEN.



TREKKING THE W WAS AKIN TO STAYING AT SOME GLOBAL LUXURY HOTEL. YOU DID NOT HAVE THE AMENITIES, BUT YOU HAD THE CAST OF CHARACTERS. THROUGH MY TREK I CROSSED OVER AND RE-CROSSED PATHS WITH:

- SOME FEMALE AUSTRALIAN STUDENTS WHO WERE IN PURSUIT OF A HIGHER EDUCATION BY MAKING THEIR WAY NORTH TO BOLIVIA FOR GOOD, CHEAP, PURE COCAINE.
- A FORMER CANADA CUSTOM'S OFFICER WHO TOLD ME THAT CUSTOMS IS EASING UP ON EMBARRASSING THEMSELVES TRYING TO COLLECT DUTIES ON PURSES, WATCHES, AND LIQUOR AND ARE NOW FOCUSING ON REAL ISSUES SUCH AS WEAPONS, FALSE REFUGEES, AND HUMAN SMUGGLING.
- SEVERAL GROUPS OF ISRAELI TRAVELERS - MOST OF WHOM WERE COOL, BUT SOME MAY RECEIVE A 2011 DARWIN AWARD FOR CAMPING IN A NO CAMPING ZONE AND HAVING A FIRE IN A NO FIRE ZONE AS THEY NOT ONLY BURNED A FOREST TO THE GROUND... BUT THEMSELVES TOO. THEY DO HAVE COMPETITION FROM ANOTHER GROUP OF ISRAELI'S WHO AROUND THE SAME DATE IN CENTRAL CHILE DECIDED NOT TO TAKE THE GUIDED VOLCANO TOUR AND FELL IN.

- SEVERAL GREAT PEOPLE OF EVERY AGE AND NATIONALITY
- AND MY PERSONAL FAVORITE: CHILEAN DIVORCEE'S ON THEIR REGIONAL 'EAT, PREY, LOVE' SABBATICAL. NEXT TIME I MAY HAVE TO SPEND A FEW MORE DAYS IN PAINE ;)

AT WORLD'S END

MY EXPLORATION ENDED IN PUNTA ARENAS, THE MOST SOUTHERN CITY IN CHILE. IT'S A MODERN PIRATE TOWN (PORT CITY, FREE-TRADE ZONE) ON THE SHORES OF THE FORMIDABLE STRAIGHTS OF MAGELLAN. STARING ACROSS THE CHANNEL TOWARDS TIERRA DEL FUEGO (SOUTHER AMERICA'S SOUTHERN MOST POINT) I MADE SURE I ATE A CALAFATE BERRY AND KISSED THE FEET OF A CERTAIN STATUE TO DOUBLY ENSURE A RETURN TO PATAGONIA.



EPILOGUE - FROM LLAMAS TO LAMAS

THE NUT FARM

MY REMAINING DAYS IN SOUTH AMERICA WERE SPENT AT MY GOOD FRIEND'S WEEKEND HOME/ ALMOND FARM OUTSIDE SANTIAGO. I WAS GRACIOUSLY HOSTED AND RELISHED IN THE FEW SIMPLE PLEASURES ONE SHOULD NOT HAVE TO TRAVEL FOR - BUT TRAVEL CAN MAKE IT ALL THE MUCH MORE REWARDING:

- I WAS INVITED TO A DINNER THAT FEATURED A TIBETAN LAMA ON ASSIGNMENT TO SOUTH AMERICA. THE MEAL WAS VEGETARIAN, BUT THERE WAS SUBSTANCIAL MEAT IN THE PHILOSOPHIES AND PERSPECTIVES HE SHARED.
- WE VISITED THE VINTNER NEXT DOOR AND SAMPLED A WINE VARIETY CALLED 'CARDON'. CARDON IS A THOUGHT TO BE EXTINCT GRAPE, HOWEVER UNLIKE OTHER WINES FROM LAZARUS VINES; I CAN ONLY DESCRIBE CARDON AS AKIN TO HAVING A MATURE, YET VIRGIN PALATE AND DRINKING GOOD WINE FOR THE VERY FIRST TIME.
- AND I PLAYED WITH THEIR WONDERFUL KIDS WHO CONFIRMED CHILDREN LITERALLY ARE THE ORGASMS OF LIFE; AND OTHER PEOPLE'S CHILDREN ARE THE MOST EFFECTIVE FORM OF BIRTH CONTROL.

RHYME AND REASON

TRAVEL IS ONE OF THOSE PASSAGES OF LIFE I HAVE BEEN VERY FORTUNATE TO DO AND HOPE TO CONTINUE TO DO SO. TRAVEL IS ACTUALLY BEST WHEN EVERYTHING GOES WRONG AND IN THESE CIRCUMSTANCES THE MENTAL, PHYSICAL, EMOTIONAL ARE NOT ONLY CHALLENGED - THEY ARE ACTIVELY EXPLORED. ALTHOUGH I HAVE NO REAL MEDITATIONS TO PREACH OR SHARE (OUTSIDE WHEN IT COMES TO MOUNTAIN ENDEAVORS - I MAY HAVE TOO MUCH SELF CONFIDENCE) FROM THIS ADVENTURE; I DO ENCOURAGE EVERYONE TO FIND THEIR OWN FRONTIER AND THEN PERHAPS PUSH IT.