



Conservation Volunteers International Program

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A Non-Profit 501c3 Tax Exempt Organization CST 2089890-40

PROJECT REPORT

Santiago Metropolitan Park and Torres del Paine National Park, Patagonia, Chile Volunteer Trip - March 12-29, 2009 Executive Summary

Conservation Volunteers International Program (Conservation VIP) organized and led a volunteer trip totaling 8 volunteers to Santiago, Chile and Torres del Paine, Patagonia, Chile, March 12-29, 2009. The trip was done in collaboration with Santiago Metropolitan Parks and CONAF, the government agency responsible for administration of Torres del Paine National Park, Patagonia, Chile.

At the Santiago Metropolitan Park, Conservation VIP volunteers, working with park rangers, restored 1000 feet of existing trail – clearing, brushing, graveling, realigning, and weeding. Park staff expected this work to take 2-3 days, but it was accomplished in just over 1 day, so Conservation VIP volunteers, working with a park official, found a new location for a section of trail that had been severely disrupted by construction of a new highway. After the location for the new trail was marked on the ground, the Conservation VIP volunteers, park rangers, and college students constructed the new trail – clearing and removing the brush, and excavating the hillside to create a wonderful new sustainable trail.

Upon completion of the work in Santiago, the Conservation VIP volunteers traveled to Torres del Paine National Park in Patagonia. There, Conservation VIP volunteers, working with park rangers and AMA (a local Chilean non-profit) completely restored nearly 2 miles of trail within the park.

In total, Conservation VIP volunteers donated approximately 368 hours of time actually working on trails, plus travel time and time hiking to work sites. In addition, Conservation VIP provided leadership and training to park rangers and college students.

Conservation VIP wishes to thank staff at the Santiago Metropolitan Parks, CONAF, AMA, and the three refugios where we stayed for their hospitality.

Detailed Trip Report

SANTIAGO:

Eight volunteers, including Marcelo Diaz, transportation and logistics provider for Conservation VIP; Rich Tobin, Conservation VIP trip planner; and Gene Zimmerman, volunteer trip leader, arrived in Santiago March 13. Later in the day, we had the honor of having tea at the home of US Ambassador Simons, his wife Veronica and numerous local officials.

March 14 was the first day of work. Conservation VIP volunteers, accompanied by one Chilean civilian volunteer and approximately 8 employees of the Metropolitan Parks (some on their day off), began work on restoration and maintenance of an existing 1000-foot long nature trail. Park officials believed that this work could not be completed during the short time Conservation VIP had available. Work consisted of brushing the entire length of the trail and removing the brush to locations where it could be picked up via vehicle, some minor relocation of the trail in three locations, major relocation to replace two switchbacks, graveling of over 100 feet of wet trail surface, installing one major drainage, weeding the edges of the trail, and moving one directional sign. By late afternoon, it was apparent that the work on this segment of trail would be completed very early on the 15th, so additional work needed to be planned.

On the east side of the new highway recently built through the park there is a popular hiking trail that allows access from the city to a local mountain top overlook. However, highway construction seriously disrupted this trail, resulting in hikers having to scramble up a nearly vertical section to access the trail and continue towards the overlook. A decision was made to fix or replace the disrupted segment of trail. Conservation VIP volunteers surveyed various alternatives and presented a plan for a new 650-foot replacement for the disrupted trail segment, and park officials approved its construction.

Construction began on the replacement trail early March 15. Conservation VIP volunteers were again joined by park rangers, and at about 10am, approximately 20 local college students joined the team. By 1 pm, the new trail was complete. The trail location proved to be excellent, rolling nicely with the terrain. Conservation VIP provided training in location and construction to the park rangers, and the college students had a great opportunity to contribute back to their community.

The remainder of the afternoon was used for a city tour and a tour of the Metropolitan Parks. Dinner was at the wonderful Akarana restaurant, where we were again joined by a number of Chilean government officials. The newly appointed Minister of Foreign Affairs briefly joined the group for photo opportunities and to thank Conservation VIP volunteers for their work in his country.

March 16 was a travel day, ending up in Puerto Natales, where we stayed at Indigo, a boutique hotel built to look like a container ship, inside and out. That evening, we had dinner with Jose Linnebrink, Superintendent of Torres del Paine National Park. We discussed mutual plans for our work in his park.

March 17 was another travel day, bussing to Hosteria Las Torres. This development is a rather large operation, with an expensive hotel, camping areas, and a traditional (though higher end) refugio. It is located on a very large parcel of private land within the Park.

March 18th was yet another travel day, this time on foot, with the destination Refugio Chileno which is only accessible by trail. Juliana Torres, the Executive Director of AMA, a local non-profit, working with CONAF, had facilitated getting the necessary tools to Chileno. She also made arrangements for some of our personal gear to be taken by horseback to Chileno. She and two of her volunteers joined our group for the next several days. We all arrived at Chileno around noon, and after lunch, we began work on the trail. Rich Tobin and Marcelo Dias, with several volunteers, began work on the trail heading back towards Las Torres. Gene Zimmerman and Richard Braunlich hiked the trail from Chileno to Campamento Torres, assessing our next

several days work assignment. The next morning Rich and Marcelo hiked back to Las Torres and left our group. The volunteers, working with local CONAF rangers, worked on the trail towards Campamento Torres through mid-afternoon on March 24, and hiked back to las Torres after lunch.

Accomplishments were amazing, and are approximated below:

Total Trail Worked*	9000 ft.
Total Trail Brushed	9000 ft.
Length of Retaining Walls Built	65 ft
Length of Totally Rebuilt Trail Prism	1520 ft
Total Number of Water Diversions	183
Stone Steps Installed	40
Log Steps Installed	5
Length of Trail Graveled	600 ft
Number of Stones/Boulders Removed	several hundred
Length of Obliterated Trail	450 ft

*Some relatively short but very steep short sections were bypassed, as they need more extensive work, likely re-routing.

The morning of March 25 we were driven to Pudeto, where we caught the mid-day catamaran to Refugio Paine Grande, where the volunteers had time to rest, relax, and hike, until we left on the mid-day catamaran on the 27th. While there, Gene Zimmerman, Richard Braunlich, and Chris Braunlich evaluated and did some maintenance on the trail section Conservation VIP worked in 2008. Overall, we found the work holding up well, but needing light maintenance. Drains had not been maintained, and the new construction needed attention due to “first-year” erosion. Additionally, there was one location where hiker traffic has developed a shortcut due to poor location of the new trail.

After leaving Paine Grande, we went to the CONAF Park Administration Building for a brief meeting with Superintendent Linnebrink. The Superintendent asked several questions about our accomplishments, and expressed his thanks for our work. Richard and Chris Braunlich stayed at Administration, as they stayed in the Park to survey potential bridge sites for CONAF, and the remaining four of us traveled to Puerto Natales, to start the long trip home.

ACCOLADES:

1. All travel arrangements worked like clockwork, thanks to Marcelo Diaz and Rich Tobin’s extraordinary skills in orchestrating all the “moving parts” associated with trips of this complexity.

2. The staff at the Santiago Metropolitan Parks, especially Theresa Rey and Francisca Fernandez, were enthusiastic, highly organized, and hard working. The lodging and food exceeded expectations.

3. Juliana Torres, Executive Director of AMA, and her volunteers, Jezra Beaulieu and Kate Evans, were a great asset to the overall effort – knowledgeable, hardworking and fun.

4. The Guardaparques who worked with us at Torres del Paine -- Erwin Aguilar, Manuel Carcamo, Alvaro Quesana, Gerson Frias, Francisco Garrientos, and Yasna Garay -- showed great enthusiasm for the work, they worked hard, and appreciated what was being accomplished. Alvaro even provided us a hot lunch at their camp.

5. The staff at Refugio Chileno took care of all our needs, and all of the volunteers were very complimentary of the food.

LESSONS LEARNED (some with recommendations):

1. Conservation VIP can be very successful with even a small compliment of volunteers, especially if supplemented by local rangers and volunteers.

2. Conservation VIP tools have been used for several years without sharpening. It is recommended that Conservation VIP purchase a battery operated die grinder, or equivalent, so heavy tool sharpening can be accomplished in the field. Bow saws are beyond repair and one or two should be purchased.

3. Conservation VIP volunteers have encountered plants that are either rare or irritants (similar to poison oak in the US). It is recommended that local officials provide Conservation VIP with several plasticized copies of photos of any plants that should not be disturbed.

4. Using horses or porters to move personal gear to Refugio Chileno offers the opportunity for gear to get lost or misplaced. It is recommended that someone (preferable a local contact) be appointed to stay with the gear until it reaches its destination and rightful owner.

5. Park rangers occasionally had poor boots. In addition, they almost always were without gloves. It is recommended that someone on the Board of Conservation VIP volunteer to work with wholesalers and retailers in an attempt to get a complement of these items donated for each trip.

MAJOR RECOMMENDATIONS:

1. CONAF needs to develop and implement a trail maintenance program in order to stop the continued deterioration of the park's trail system. Conservation VIP should formally approach CONAF regarding this issue, and offer to work with them to develop a strategic approach to solve this problem.

2. Conservation VIP should schedule at least one more trip to Refugio Chileno in order to complete the maintenance on the trail section from Chileno to Campamento Torres. A crew about the same size (counting AMA and rangers) as the 2009 crew could likely complete this section. Logistically, it would be advantageous if hot lunches could be provided at Campamento Torres.

3. CONAF should commit to providing materials for a boardwalk across the wet section of trail near Campamento Torres. This section is probably 150-200 feet long and could be built by Conservation VIP volunteers if materials were at the site. An alternative might be to gravel this section using natural gravel mined from near the junction of the trail that goes to the towers.

Gene Zimmerman