



PROJECT REPORT
Volunteer Trip
Torres del Paine National Park, Patagonia, Chile
February 19 – March 3, 2018

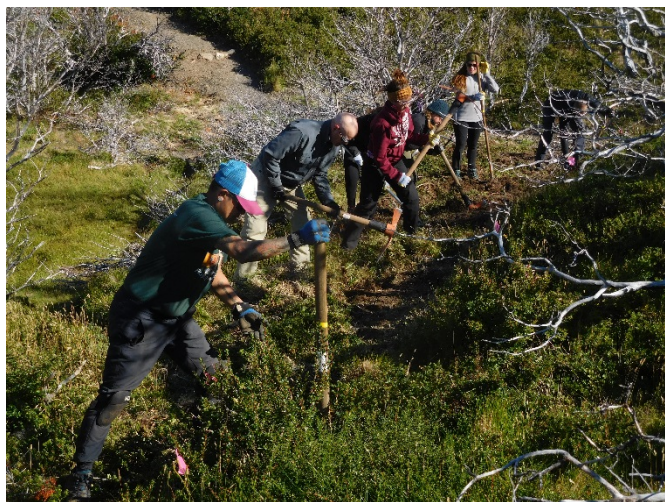
SUMMARY:

Eleven volunteers from Conservation Volunteers International Program (ConservationVIP®), including two trip leaders, traveled from the United States to construct a segment of a new trail between Refugio Paine Grande and Campamento Italiano in Torres del Paine National Park, Patagonia, Chile. These volunteers were joined on the project by ten Chilean volunteers from the local Torres del Paine (TdP) Legacy Fund. Also joining in on some days were park rangers from Corporacion Nacional Forestal (CONAF) and three young volunteers from the staff at Paine Grande Refugio.

The volunteers extended the construction on the new trail that ConservationVIP® and TdP Legacy Fund volunteers and CONAF rangers, started in February 2017. The group also improved sections of the trail previously built in November 2017. In addition, the entire group worked one hour every day helping with the construction of a new suspension bridge across the outlet from Lago Skottsberg, being built by ConservationVIP and CONAF.

ConservationVIP® volunteers contributed 519 hours of volunteer labor. CONAF, TdP Legacy Fund and the refugio staff contributed approximately 330 hours of labor.

SPECIFIC ACCOMPLISHMENTS:



Working together, the group constructed about seven-tenths of a mile of new trail. Work consisted of determining the trail location, cutting small trees and brush - - with special care needed to cut the calafate bushes with their impressive thorns - - and removing vegetative material - - no small task as some sections of trail had brush with a deep root mass - - and removing soil and rock to rough-in the trail tread. After the brushing and roughing in of the trail

tread, the “finishing” followed, making the walking surface smooth by raking and, where necessary, spreading shale gravel on the trail surface.



Fifty-five feet of rock walls were constructed to support the downhill side of the trail on steep slopes, 35 rock steps were installed in a very steep “chute”, forming a very impressive rock ladder to make this section safe for hikers, and seven rock water bars were constructed to minimize erosion of the trail tread.

On the last work day, the volunteers worked to improve some small segments of the trail built during ConservationVIP's® fall 2017 trip. Three important re-routes were constructed and several small changes in alignment and/or elevation were completed. This work will greatly improve the trail for hikers with heavy loads.

Our hike to the work site each day was interrupted by a one-hour work period at the new bridge mentioned above. Volunteers gathered tons of rocks and piled them near the cable anchor points on each side of the river. In addition, they cleared vegetation, moved construction materials to the tower and anchor sites on both sides of the river, and dug holes for footings.



One ConservationVIP® volunteer, Tom, took on a leadership role doing rock work on the trail. Volunteers who worked with Tom greatly appreciated his leadership and teaching style and all agreed his work was excellent.



GENERAL INFORMATION:

The eleven ConservationVIP® volunteers ranged in age from 30 to 77, with the average age about 55. They came from all over the United States, each with a passion for caring for public lands. Work days began around 6:15 am, with breakfast at Refugio Paine Grande at 7:00, and “assembly” at 8:30.



Assembly consisted of a de-briefing of the previous day and a briefing on the day's activities and individual work opportunities, a safety discussion, and a personal “check in” on how everyone was doing—whether they had any issues or concerns, or anything to share with the group.

The group then hiked approximately 3-4 miles to the work site, returning to the refugio no later than 5pm. Individual work crews were usually a mix of ConservationVIP® volunteers, TdP Legacy Fund volunteers, and local CONAF rangers. Dinner was at 7 pm followed by visiting, reading, and getting ready for the next day. The ConservationVIP® volunteers clearly enjoyed working with the Chilean volunteers and the park rangers.

The weather on this trip was not typical Patagonia weather. Two afternoons we quit early due to high winds, but we never had significant rain. On several days, the temperature was unusually warm for Patagonia - - in the high 60's Fahrenheit. - - so, volunteers were encouraged more frequently than usual to keep up their water intake and take rest breaks to avoid overheating. As always, the ConservationVIP® volunteers were impressed with the beauty of Torres del Paine, so rest breaks were a perfect time to enjoy and photograph the wonderful display of unique cloud formations and stunning mountain peaks and valleys.

One challenge for volunteers on this trip was that the entire group had to cross Rio Skottsberg



every day going to and from work, hopping from rock to rock. It became an event of sorts, bringing out grins, laughter, a bit of nervousness, and some damp feet. On the windy days this crossing was challenging, causing the volunteers to value the need for the soon to be completed bridge.

Working with the TdP Legacy Fund is always a joy. The executive director and each of their Chilean volunteers worked very well with the

ConservationVIP® volunteers. The executive director also arranged for free passage on the catamaran for all the volunteers, greatly reducing our expenditures.

To allow rest time for ConservationVIP® volunteers, they were provided two days off. Most of the volunteers used that rest time to visit some of the most impressive geologic and scenic wonders of the park, hiking to the iconic Towers and to French Valley. Some hiked to Grey Glacier. One ConservationVIP® leader used his rest time to scout ahead and evaluate the best way to tie the new trail into the old trail, and to search for a new location for a bridge to cross Rio Frances. On our last day in the Park, on our way to overnight in Puerto Natales, our group stopped by the Park's headquarters where the volunteers had the opportunity to enjoy the interpretive exhibits. Acting Park Superintendent Michael Arcos met with the group and was very complimentary of and thankful for their work. The group also met and enjoyed hearing from Gonzalo Cisternas, one of the senior park managers.

The travel logistics and other arrangements worked exactly as planned, thanks to the support of CGH - Gestión Hotelera & Turística. The staff at Refugio Paine Grande were helpful and supportive of our entire group, even providing our trip leader with free access to the staff internet. As in the past, the bag lunches provided by the refugio were monotonous,

but the dinners and breakfasts there continue to improve and generally the volunteers had positive comments about the food.

Our transportation was via a newer intermediate sized bus driven by a safe and courteous driver. Luggage was loaded in an enclosed trailer towed by the bus. Our night in Puerto Natales was spent in Hotel Natalino, which provided very nice accommodations. We had a final celebratory meal at Restaurant Bahia Mansa, whose outstanding food and wine were especially appealing after the time in the park.

FINAL THOUGHTS:

The trip was successful. The volunteers worked and traveled safely. While there were no accidents there were some sore ankles and backs—as is usual on this trip. A lot of work was accomplished. We all enjoyed working with and appreciated the support of the Torres del Paine Legacy Fund. We also appreciated the CONAF support, especially providing park rangers to work with the volunteers. The beauty of Torres del Paine National Park is world class and incredibly captivating. Most importantly, we very much appreciate CONAF's role in protecting this magnificent place—they have immense challenges and limited resources. Their welcoming spirit towards our volunteers is uplifting and heartwarming.

