



PROJECT REPORT
Volunteer Trip
Torres del Paine National Park, Patagonia, Chile
February 29 – March 12, 2022



SUMMARY:

Ten volunteers from Conservation Volunteers International Program including volunteer trip leader Garry Oye, traveled from the United States to Torres del Paine National Park, Chile to work on trail construction and trail maintenance. They were joined in Chile by local guide Anita Antich. The focus of this trip was to commence work on a major reconstruction of the Las Torres trail, which is the heavily traveled trail leading to the Mirador where visitors can gaze at the Torres (Towers) for which the park is named.

For many years ConservationVIP® has had an interest in working in partnership with all those who would need to be involved to construct a new Las Torres trail. Coordinating this effort is complex because Las Torres Reserve manages the private land at the lower end of the trail and Corporación Nacional Forestal (CONAF) manages the public

lands at the upper end of the trail. This trip was the beginning of a multi-year effort to work with international volunteers and Chilean volunteers to construct a new trail to the Mirador.

DETAILS:

When the volunteers met in Punta Arenas on February 28th, you could tell they were happy to finally get to Patagonia. This trip was more challenging than most because it was ConservationVIP's first trip to Torres del Paine since the COVID shutdown and the implementation of new entry procedures by Chile. This group did a great job completing all the pre-trip requirements and were ready for the adventure of a lifetime. We started with our orientation in Punta Arenas and then travelled by bus to Torres del Paine National Park. Along the way we had lunch and a tour at Cerro Negro Estancia.

After they arrived in Torres del Paine National Park, our ConservationVIP® volunteers worked on both the Las Torres Reserve land and the land managed by CONAF within Torres del Paine National Park.

The existing trail at the lower end is steep and heavily eroded. Water and wind remove soil and leave behind loose rocks and slippery surfaces. This part of the trail has been used by both hikers and horses, with multiple paths. The first project the group worked on was brushing for a new sustainable horse trail. This new horse trail will separate horses from hikers and will allow us to restore the existing shared trail.



Clearing brush for horse trail

The second project the group worked on was to help locate and start construction on the new hiker trail. This new hiker trail will be much less steep than the old trail and will contour around the mountainside before dropping into the river canyon on the way to Refugio Chileno. The improvement in alignment will reduce the level of erosion experienced on the old trail, and the more gradual ascent will enable a better hiker experience.



Using Clinometer to assess slope for new trail location



Looking upslope with Clinometer to determine new trail location

The third project involved rehabilitation and other improvement on the existing trail on the upper section from Refugio Chileno towards Campamento Torres.



Erosion from heavy use of the trail has resulted in major tripping hazards from exposed tree roots.



Before

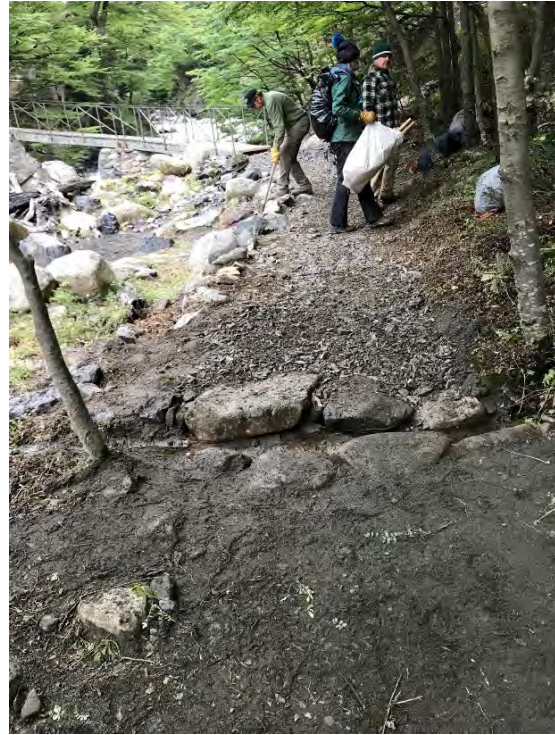


After tree roots removed

The group also improved sections of the trail where water had pooled up, which will encourage hikers to stay on the trail rather than stepping off trail which further damages the landscape.



Before repair



After repair

LOGISTICS:

Because the work was spread over a long distance, for part of the work the group was based out of Refugio Central and for part of the work the group was based out of Refugio Chileno. This provided us with two unique experiences and access to different sections of the trail. The volunteers especially liked the time spent and support from the staff at Refugio Chileno which is smaller than .

Key local support also came from two individuals in Puerto Natales. Bill Penhollow owns the local Erratic Rock Hostel and was a valuable source of ideas and encouragement. Bill recommended a local guide Anita Antich to serve as an Assistant Trip leader. Both Bill and Anita helped us make a much better connection with the community and we are very thankful for that.

SUMMARY:

This group of ConservationVIP volunteers completed brushing, root removal, tread work, drainage and new trail construction. The volunteers worked hard during these long Patagonia summer days. It was a team effort that could not go unnoticed. Hikers on the trail, guides, refugio staff and hotel staff all cheered and thanked us for the work we were doing.

Accomplishments

10 US ConservationVIP volunteers: 928 hours

40 meters of newly constructed hiker trail (tread and brushing)

100 meters of brushing on newly constructed horse trail and Cuernos trail

100 meters of trail tread widened (tread and brushing)

Improved National Park entrance (sign, photo point, access trail and interpretive area)



Volunteers at the Mirador



Trip Leaders Anita and Garry send thanks to all the volunteers!