



The Perito Moreno Glacier in Parque Nacional Los Glaciares, Argentina, is one of the world's most active. Huge chunks of ice from the glacier regularly calve off into the waters of Lago Argentino.

Glaciar Perito Moreno

Front row seats to one of nature's most spectacular events



Editor's note: This is the second in a three-part series of stories and photographs Chronicle Out-There Editor Ben Pierce will file exploring the connection between Patagonia and Montana.

PARQUE NACIONAL LOS GLACIARES, Argentina — Patagonia's humbling ice fields are nowhere more accessible than at the Perito Moreno Glacier in Santa Cruz Province.

Located 80 kilometers west of the gateway town of El Calafate, Argentina, the Perito Moreno Glacier is one of the planet's most active. Each day thousands of tons of iridescent blue ice calves off the 180-foot face of the glacier into the emerald waters of Lago Argentino. For the hundreds of visitors that make the pilgrimage to the Perito Moreno Glacier each day, the experience is often overwhelmingly visceral.

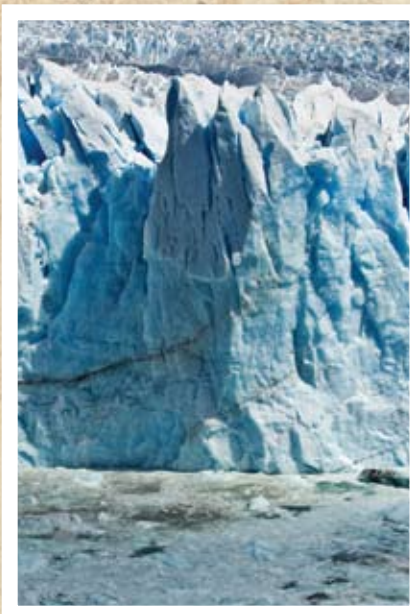
"The contrast between the glacier and the ground you are standing on is incredible," said Jammie Taylor while visiting Parque Nacional Los Glaciares on Monday with her fiancé Emerson Lenon. Taylor and Lenon, of Bozeman, are travelling through Argentina, Chile and Peru for several months. "It looks like someone made a magnificent piece of artwork and hung it in front of you — until it calves. Then it becomes reality and you realize this huge glacier is right there before you."

The scale of the Perito Moreno Glacier is truly staggering. At 30 kilometers long and 5 kilometers wide the glacier extends as far as the eye can see. Visitors to the park can take in the view from recently constructed catwalks and viewing platforms that circumnavigate the glacier's face.

"Having seen glaciers from a distance at (Montana's Glacier National Park) the Perito Moreno Glacier did not immediately strike me as impressive," said Lenon. "But once you are up close, you are confronted by a wall of ice that seems almost unearthly. The scale is completely overwhelming, dominating the horizon in an impressive display of natural power."

The enormity of the Perito Moreno Glacier is dwarfed only by the Hielo Sur — the southern icecap off which it flows. The ice field is fueled by tremendous amounts of moisture driven inland from the Antarctic landmass and the Pacific Ocean. Outside the polar regions, the Hielo Sur is the largest ice field on the planet, its glaciers forming at low points in the Andean Cordillera.

(More on **Glaciar Perito Moreno**, Page C2)



The Perito Moreno Glacier is one of the planet's most active. Each day thousands of tons of iridescent blue ice calves off the 180-foot face of the glacier. An ice chunk the size of a 15 story building calves into the emerald waters of Lago Argentino in this photo sequence.

STORY AND PHOTOGRAPHY BY BEN PIERCE CHRONICLE OUTTHERE EDITOR



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Conrad Anker: Climbing Patagonia's Cerro Torre

By **BEN PIERCE**
Chronicle OutThere Editor

On the wall behind his desk at his West Lamme Street office, Bozeman-based alpinist Conrad Anker hangs a vividly-hued photograph of the famed Patagonian peaks of Cerro Torre, Torre Egger and Cerro Standhardt. A pink cloud sores over the iconic granite towers found at the southern extent of the Andean Cordillera in Parque Nacional Los Glaciares.



Conrad Anker

"When you have that orographic cloud over the top, you know the winds are just cooking up there, absolutely cooking," Anker said. "There is sand blowing everywhere and no chance of getting in and doing any climbing. You have to strike when the iron is hot, when the weather is good."

Anker was in his early 30s, an ambitious young climber just coming into his own, when he travelled to Patagonia. In all, he spent three austral summers from 1992-95 exploring the Patagonian Andes with climbing partners Jay Smith of Moab, Utah, and Steve Geberding of Joshua Tree, Calif.

Anker's objective was to climb the towering plutons of Cerro Torre, Torre Egger and Cerro Standhardt.

"These are sort of the toughest mountains, the most badass," Anker said during an interview on Jan. 13 in Bozeman. "I mean, Everest is a ski run. These are not ski runs. It is a huge, vastly different realm of climbing."

For decades, the shear granite walls of Cerro Torre were considered unclimbable.

That changed on Jan. 31, 1959, when Italian mountaineer Cesare Maestri

Bozeman-based mountaineer Conrad Anker captured this image of rime ice mushrooms near the summit of Torre Egger while climbing in the Patagonian Andes in 1995.



PHOTO COURTESY CONRAD ANKER

claimed he had summited the peak with Austrian climber Toni Egger. Maestri claimed that the men had scaled the peak in four days — a bold and shocking ascent that set the climbing world ablaze.

Lionel Terray, a famed French alpinist who was the first to summit nearby Cerro Fitz Roy with partner Guido Magnone in 1952, called Maestri and Egger's climb "the greatest mountaineering feat of all time."

Tragically, Egger died in an avalanche during the descent taking with him the camera Maestri said contained photographs of their accomplishment. The ensuing years raised doubts of Maestri's claim and it is now accepted that Maestri fabricated the story.

Maestri, infuriated by those who questioned the authenticity of the ascent, returned to Cerro Torre in 1970 with a pneumatic drill, placing more than 400 bolts on the mountain's southeast face. Still, Maestri failed to reach the top, turned back by overhanging mushrooms of rime ice 150 feet from the summit.

"It was sort of the murder of the impossible," Anker said. "When I was coming of age in climbing it was a much-debated story."

Anker, Smith and Geberding attempted a new route on Torre Egger in 1992. The team spent the season waiting for a chance to summit, but was stormed off by the unrelenting assault of Patagonian weather.

"The windstorms — it would probably average one day of good weather a month," Anker said. "It is so stormy. That's what makes those difficult peaks to climb."

Weather patterns in the Patagonian Andes are fueled by the saturated winds that circle the Antarctic continent. The southern reaches of South America are exposed to vast stretches of open sea to the west and south. These reaches of open ocean produce punishing and near constant westerlies that dump massive amounts of precipitation on the Andes.

The Patagonia Cordillera captures nearly all the precipitation produced by these westerly winds fueling the massive glaciers and wicked weather the region is known for. As a result, much of the Argentine side of the Patagonia Andes is left in a massive rain shadow with desert-like conditions extending to the Atlantic coast. Nowhere else on the planet do precipitation levels plummet in

such abrupt fashion.

"It is a really unique ecosystem, because on the other side of (Cerro Torre) you have the continental ice cap," Anker said. "It is at 8,000 feet so it chills the air and condenses and creates these katabatic winds."

Anker returned to Patagonia in 1993. He and his team were able to summit Cerro Torre and Cerro Standhardt that season. On Cerro Torre, Anker followed the Maestri route on the southeast face of the mountain.

"We were clipping those bolts (Maestri) had put in, so there was a bit of history there," Anker said.

The following year, Anker returned a final time to Patagonia to complete the new route the team had attempted on Torre Egger two years prior. They re-established an advanced base camp at Laguna Torre, waited for a spell of good weather and completed the climb.

Anker's success on Cerro Torre, Torre Egger and Cerro Standhardt was a monumental accomplishment for the young climber and would pave the way for future ascents in the great ranges of the world. In 1999, Anker would lead an expedition on Mt. Everest that led to the discovery of lost British mountaineer George Leigh Mallory, solving one of climbing's ultimate mysteries.

Still, Cerro Torre and the Andean Cordillera hold a special place for Anker — and Patagonia is a region he hopes to one day return.

"When you look at Cerro Torre, it is 7,000 feet of granite," Anker said. "It is the most spectacular mountain on the planet. It is singular and it stands out for what it is — a huge challenge."

"In 12 years when I retire — after I get the kids through college — it would be so nice to spend time down there. I really enjoy it."

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Glaciar Perito Moreno/ from Page C1

Within Parque Nacional Los Glaciares, the Hielo Sur feeds the Perito Moreno. Upsala, Spegazzini, Bertachi and numerous other glaciers whose meltwater combines to form 1,600-square-kilometer Lago Argentino — the largest body of water in Argentina. The lake stretches from the base of the Perito Moreno Glacier more than 80 kilometers to the mouth of Rio Santa Cruz, eventually dumping millions of gallons of water from the Andes into the Atlantic Ocean.

While the scope of the Perito Moreno Glacier is truly awesome, what makes the ice field remarkable for glaciologists and visitors alike is its activity. At a point in time when many of the world's glaciers are receding from the effects of climate change, the Perito Moreno maintains constant.

"The Perito Moreno Glacier is the only glacier in the park that is in balance," said Lorena Salinas, information officer for Parque Nacional Los Glaciares. "All the other glaciers are receding."

Salinas said that the Perito Moreno Glacier is the park's most popular and most accessible. The other park glaciers that grind off the Hielo Sur may be accessed by boat, but require a guide to visit. Many restrictions are enforced to preserve the fragile ecosystem.

"We don't want to leave footprints," Salinas said on Tuesday. "We want to take care of the flora and fauna and the water for future generations."

Francisco Pascasio Perito Moreno, for whom the glacier is named, is recognized as the father of Argentina's National Park System. Perito Moreno served the Argentine government for many years to establish the border along the Andes Mountains between Argentina and Chile. As a gesture of thanks, the Argentine government gifted Perito Moreno a large parcel of land in northern Patagonia.

"Perito Moreno donated the land back to Argentina to create the first national park in Argentina — Parque Nacional Nahuel Huapi," Salinas said. "He had heard of Yellowstone National Park and established the idea here."

Perito Moreno's idea took root and Argentina's park system has flourished — especially in recent years. According to park superintendent Carlos Corvalán, visitation to Parque Nacional Los Glaciares has surge from 60,000 in 2000 to 300,000 in 2008. Many new visitors arrive by the recently constructed airport just outside El Calafate.

While the boom in tourism has helped establish a broader economic base for the people of Santa Cruz Province, it has put added strain on the park's ecosystem.

"We have separate areas for intensive use and less intensive use in the park," Corvalán said. "We have



BEN PIERCE/CHRONICLE

Jammie Taylor, left, and Emerson Lenon of Bozeman take in the view of the Perito Moreno Glacier in Parque Nacional Los Glaciares, Argentina, at dusk on Saturday.

trails, but do not allow horses and have eliminated one of the free campgrounds because of too much use."

Due to its ease of access, the Perito Moreno Glacier attracts crowds with its wild displays of raw power. According to park officials the glacier continues to advance by one to two meters per day.

"It is completely amazing to go and stay all day waiting for a particular chunk of ice to fall," Lenon said. "You can't help but think to yourself that that was it, that was the big one. But then you have to realize that this happens here every day and it is equally impressive and equally unique."

"I went to Glacier National Park in 5th grade and remember being awed by it," Taylor said. "But here the glaciers move meters a day, not just centimeters or inches. They cover the mountains and stretch beyond the horizon blending with the clouds."

While building-sized chunk of ice collapsing from the glacier's face draw big cheers at Parque Nacional Los Glaciares, other visual and auditory experiences are equally impressive.

As the ice field crawls down the Andes, huge chunks of ice calve unseen

within the glacier's depths sending thunderous pops and cracks echoing across the waters of Lago Argentino. The magnificently-sculpted surface of the glacier — shaped by time, weather and tremendous pressure — changes its face as the day progresses. Vivid blue hues unlike those seen anywhere else in na-

ture merge and shift with the sun's light.

"The ice is amazing," Lenon said. "Some of it is white and some blue and some emerald. It is so clear, like it is from the dawn of time."

The Perito Moreno Glacier's advance periodically blocks off an arm of Lago Argentino with a massive wall of ice. The ice dam prevents the flow of water into Lago Argentino creating a huge backwater lake. As the level of the lake water rises it builds a tremendous amount of force behind the dam until the ice wall erupts in a dramatic display of raw power. The last rupture of the ice dam occurred on July 9, 2008 — the first time the dam has collapsed during Argentina's winter months.

As the effects of climate change become more apparent around the globe, the grand ice fields of the Perito Moreno Glacier and Patagonia's Hielo Sur may join other glaciers in rapid recession around the globe.

"Seeing this glacier was one of the most spectacular experiences of my life," Lenon said. "I feel lucky to have seen it, but even if the glacier manages to survive climate change I think that people's experience here is going to change."

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