

MEF Tower of Paine Expedition ref 17-05

Expedition members:

Calum Muskett: calum_muskett@hotmail.co.uk 07790513511
1 Swn y Dwr, Braichmelyn Rd, Bethesda, Gwynedd LL57 3RJ

Tony Stone: tvrstone@gmail.com 07920052267

Tom Livingstone: joetom@me.com 07990725009

Region:

Torres del Paine National Park, Chile

Additional Expedition Support:

BMC £850

Alpine Club £500

Overall Expenditure:

Flights - £3480

In Country Travel (bus) - £154

Food and expedition essentials (sun cream, gas...) - £378

Horses - £177

Accommodation between destinations - £167

National Park Entrance Fee - £76

Overall = £4,432

Access, permits and recommendations for future expeditions:

To climb in Torres del Paine National Park you must apply to DIFROL (Chilean government border agency) for a permit in advance of the expedition - they will need a scan of your passports sent to them via the following address: infodifrol@minrel.gob.cl This is required as you are close to the border with Argentina and it's recommended you apply for this at least a month prior to your departure.

You must also pay the park entry fee and take your entry card, DIFROL permit, insurance documents and passports to the park administration (the final stop on the bus route as you enter the park) so that you can be given a permit to climb and wild camp in the National Park. This is carefully controlled due to the high number of visitors and the devastating fire that the park suffered several years ago. The campgrounds on the classic walking trails now have daily quotas and must be booked well in advance.

We would also recommend future expeditions hire horses to carry bags in to base camp (or as close as they can get to base camp). Horses and a handler can be hired from Hotel las Torres and Es Stancia (stables at the end of the road/start of the 'W' trek) at reasonable

rates. We carried all our expedition bags into the valley over several return journeys from the road head to save money whilst the forecast was poor in the mountains. Whilst we did save money on the journey in it was a much more pleasant experience walking out at the end of the expedition relatively unladen! One horse costs Chilean \$60,000 and can carry 45 kgs, and will also need pre-booking.

It is also possible to hire porters through Fortaleza Expeditions who are based in Puerto Natales to ferry loads to base camp/advanced base camp.

We would also recommend booking accommodation in advance for a single night whilst in transit between Punta Arenas and Torres del Paine in Puerto Natales. The Patagonia Adventure hostel is run by helpful climbers and has cheap dorm style accommodation.

Pre-book a hostel in Puerto Natales for the night you arrive. Do a food shop the next morning, and then get the afternoon bus to the Torres del Paine National Park. You need to pre-book hostels online.

Ideally, arrive at Punta Arenas airport in the afternoon, so you can catch the bus to Puerto Natales. The last bus is at 9pm from P.A., and should call via the airport (double check though!).

The climbing permit needed for Torres del Paine is relatively straightforward. You need to take a bus to the Administration, where CONAF (the T. del P. base of the Chilean Environment and Food Agency, and Park Rangers) are located. You need to present your passports, rescue insurance and DIFROL. The DIFROL is due to the location of the Park (near the Argentinian border) and can be completed online (at least 3 weeks) ahead of your trip.

You need to pay Chilean \$21,000 to enter the Torres del Paine National Park, at the entrance.

Get some Chilean Pesos (\$) in the UK (cheaper), or in an ATM at a large airport (e.g. Santiago).

Plan how much food you'll need for the length of your stay. It sounds simple, but in reality, prior planning is useful and can save you time in the supermarket. E.g., 400 grams of pasta was enough between 3 people for 1 night.

Leave lots of unnecessary equipment in Puerto Natales! If you're planning to go somewhere after Paine (e.g. El Chalten), leave extra kit in your hostel. I took a laptop, chargers, too many clothes etc etc into the mountains, which was totally pointless and poor planning on my part.

Bring a big Base Camp tent (or more tarps/plastic sheets if going to the Bader Valley, to repair the Trash Shack). It's a lot more pleasant to have a large, dry, communal area to cook in and sit out the weather.

Take several large drybags for stashing your kit at ABC. 150L paddling-style duffle drybags work best.

Our Iridium Satellite Phone didn't work very well - texts didn't come through or send very often, or they'd be jumbled up. Calls dropped frequently. However, I think this is partly due to our location (in a relatively narrow valley, with limited satellite signal). It was very useful to have forecasts though - when they did come through! You can get wifi at the Refugio for £5 an hour (!).

One of the interesting points raised was the tactic of climbing a big route on the Torres in a 'stay in town' style:

An interesting option would be to stash all your kit at the base of the objective, then return to Puerto Natales and stay in a hostel/with friends. You could keep fit, live well, sport climb and the psyche would remain sky-high. When a 'very good' weather window arrived, you could get the bus in a few days before, or get a lift in (perhaps possible with a good local friend).

This does rely on you waiting for a very good window, which could take some time (or it may never arrive!). Being in a shack with constant mixed weather is fine, but it can begin to wear you down after a few weeks. However, it does give you a good idea of exactly what's happening in the mountains.

Chile is relatively modern, but not many people in Paine speak English. This is the same for Argentina (outside of Chalten). Learn some Spanish and embrace the culture.

Waste Disposal: all waste and rubbish was removed after the team descended from the mountains in Paine. It was carried out on horseback. All human waste was dealt with according to the expedition brief - buried, 200m away from all water sources, with waste paper carried out of the mountains.

There were no injuries or illnesses on the expedition.

The Bader valley appeared to have plenty of free climbing potential. However, on closer inspection the upper quarter/several hundred metres of all striking and impressive granite towers were topped with very loose, dark brown basalt. This looked very unappealing. The team heard of a previous expedition, who climbed to the end of the granite, but bailed and abseiled off due to the loose basalt top.

The expedition reached the base of the south face of the south tower of Paine, but did not climb a single pitch due to bad weather, heavy and frequent snowfall, and strong winds. The south face is very impressive, but the weather windows seem to be too short and infrequent.

Further Notes

Colin Haley and Rolo Garibotti remarked that the Patagonian summer season on 2016/2017 has been much worse than recent years, and it seemed the more traditional, 'appalling' weather had returned. Colin said this was the worst alpine climbing season for many years, in terms of good weather climbing days and actual number of routes climbed.

After Calum, Tony and Tom moved to El Chalten, they experienced bad weather until the end of Calum's trip. Tom and Tony stayed in Chalten for another three and a half weeks, and managed to climb Supercanaleta on Fitzroy just before their return flight. They walked into the mountains six times for attempts on alpine routes in Chalten, and only succeeded on one major alpine route once during their seven weeks in Patagonia.

The photos below show: (all photos by Calum Muskett).

The south face of the south tower of Paine, with the line of 'Wall of Paine' expedition (2013);

Tony Stone and Tom Livingstone battling poor weather to reach Advanced Base Camp - not free climbing weather!;

The condition of the south face of the south tower during the expedition.



