

Firsts – Part One

22 March 2008

This has been a week of firsts.

Some were invigorating, others interesting and a few downright spooky.

14 March 2008 – First Mountain Trek

Due to a sometimes bizarre combination of timing, location, illness, and injury we finally took our first real mountain trek, a 10 mile hike up to Mount Fitz Roy.



The hike left us in fine spirits, but not nearly as good as our next first.

16 March 2008 - First Rescue



Photo by Stephanie Hackney



Photo by Stephanie Hackney



Photo by Stephanie Hackney

We were motoring up Ruta 40 (Route 40) when we came across four Israeli kids with an old Peugeot having fuel problems. They were all 22, fresh out of their three year army stint, some with recurring combat nightmares, out on their traditional Israeli youth post-Army “trip of the lifetime” prior to beginning college, jobs and the other accoutrements of regular civilian life.

I had diagnosed about as much of the fuel issue as I could, with no happy results, when Luis Eduardo Lenzano, a scientist from the Argentina National Glaciology Center, stopped to provide assistance. He offered to give Alexi, one of the kids with some Spanish language abilities, a ride to the next town, about 80 kilometers / 50 miles away. The rest of the kids were planning to stay with the car and wait for Alexi to find a way back, a scenario I was unwilling to let happen.

We convinced them to have Luis use our tow strap to tow the Peugeot 15 kilometers / 10 miles to the next estancia (ranch), where they could get some hot food, have a safe place to sleep and plot a repair strategy for the car the next day.

That led us directly to our next first.

16 March 2008 - First Estancia



We took the kids to Estancia Angostura, a working sheep ranch that also had camping and guest facilities.

That night we enjoyed a wonderful, home cooked dinner, served family style, in the dining room lined with estancia and family memorabilia.

The following day Steph and I photographed some scenes around the estancia while Alexi went to town seeking auto parts and the other kids went horseback riding.

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Photo by Stephanie Hackney



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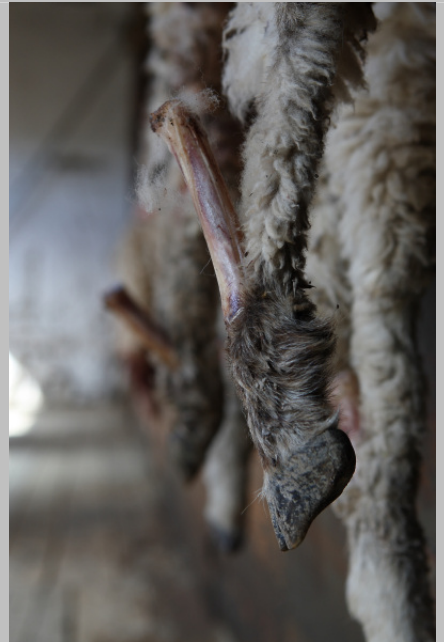
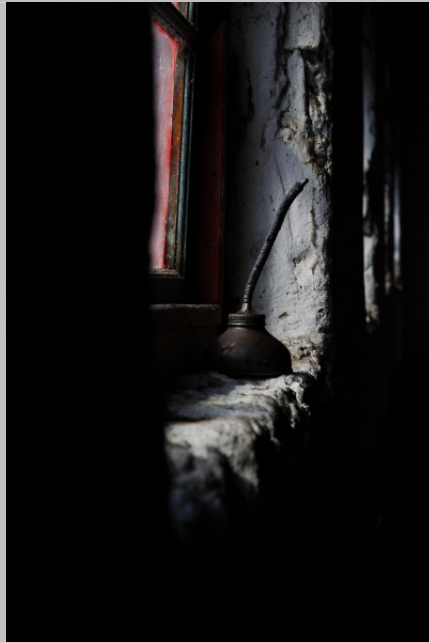


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Late in the day Alexi returned from town with some fuel hose and the location of a mechanic who could help them fix the fuel line on the Peugeot.

After confirming they would be able to limp the car into town for repairs, we headed out for our next first.

18 March 2008 - First Flat

We arrived at Parque Nacional Perito Moreno (Perito Moreno National Park) at last light so we decided to camp at the park entrance ranger station before moving deeper into the interior the next day.

We awoke to our first flat tire of the trip.



Photo by Stephanie Hackney



Photo by Stephanie Hackney

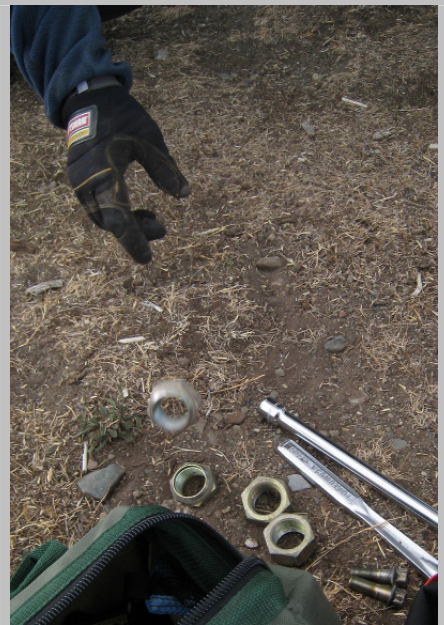


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We didn't know what caused the puncture, but we suspected road debris.

While I was changing the flat Steph walked around the parking lot of the ranger station and the road that fronted it to look for likely causes.



After her first two loads of nails and wire, we had a pretty good idea where we'd punctured the tire.

While I was under the truck placing the jack to fix the tire, I noticed our next first.

19 March 2008 - First Bush Repair

I designed the rig to have all systems equipment on the driver's side so we could enjoy the campsite under the awning on the passenger side with a minimum of fumes, noise, etc. When we built the rig we put a new stainless steel tail pipe on it to move the exhaust outlet over to the driver's side.

The muffler shop in Riverside that Mark had build the pipe did a great job on the pipe, but they used exhaust hangers made for SUVs driving to the mall, not expedition vehicles running Ruta 40. Neither Mark or I did a good job reviewing their work so these two exhaust hangers slipped through the cracks, only to crack and break down here.

In this regard, the flat was a blessing, because otherwise I don't know how long it would have been before I would have inspected the underside of the truck to see them broken. I also don't know if that would have been before the entire exhaust system dropped out on the road.



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While building the temporary exhaust hangers, I enjoyed the best shop view of my life.



Photo by Stephanie Hackney

The bush repair was done in our campsite, which was another first.

19 March 2008 – First Sub-Arctic Forest

If you find one of the remotest roads in the Argentine National Park system,



and you follow it all the way to the end,



Photo by Stephanie Hackney

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you end up here.



This is the view from your front yard.



And this is how a sub-arctic forest tree looks at sunrise.



The only thing that separated us from the Southern Patagonia Glacier Fields, the third largest on the planet, was this small lake.

The microclimate that surrounds the glaciers ended, literally, at the near shore of the lake. The transition zone between the glacier field microclimate and the sub-arctic forest climate was less than 100 meters / 328 feet during our visit. It was the narrowest line of demarcation between weather systems I've ever encountered.

Consequently, camped on the near shore, totally exposed, we were directly in the line of fire of the weather coming off the glaciers to our west. We experienced the strongest Patagonian winds of the trip and the just above freezing version of the snows falling on the glaciers, which led directly to our next first.

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Photo by Jorge Valdes

Douglas and Stephanie Hackney are on a two to three year global overland expedition.
You can learn more about their travels at: <http://www.hackneys.com/travel/index.htm>