

# PATAGONIA TREK

TREKKING AMONGST THE GLACIERS IN SOUTHERN ARGENTINA, MARCH 2022

Every year from 2003 to 2019, I have trekked to raise funds for Teenage Cancer Trust. This trek in Patagonia was first planned for November 2020, but postponed three times due to the pandemic. Charities which rely on fundraising activities have seen their income fall, and people involved with tourism in Argentina and elsewhere have had a tough time. So it was a great pleasure to get trekking again, albeit with a lot of form-filling, regulations and precautions.



Before the five main days of the trek, we had two days of warm-up mini-treks, the first of which was on the Perito Moreno glacier (if you can “warm-up” on a glacier?). This was the only day when we were in an area accessible to tourists more generally, and it is easy to see why this is a popular destination. The glacier is advancing at about the same rate (around 1-2 metres a day) as it melts and collapses into a lake, so the edge stays in the same place. The top of the glacier is about 70m above the lake; the glacier stretches back to the mountains beyond, and covers about 250 km<sup>2</sup>. As if to welcome us back to trekking, a rainbow arched across the lake and glacier.



Our second warm-up day was in remote hills that are eroded every year by melting snow, revealing yet more fossilised trees and dinosaur bones (where even the fossilised bone marrow is visible). Despite the fact that all the organic material has been mineralised and turned to stone, we all had an impulse to touch the tree trunks just to check that they were not the wood that they still appeared to be.

We transferred to the small town of Chalten, in a region dominated by the peaks of Mount Fitz Roy (3405m), and Mount Torre (meaning “tower”) with its impossibly sheer cliff edges. On the first day of the main trek, we walked uphill for several hours to a view point, at about 1500m.



To quote from a guide to the Glaciers National Park: “Glaciers change the Earth’s topography with their erosive power. They reshape valleys and transport rocky materials. When they retreat, big depressions are carved by the weight of the ice and filled with melting water, thus forming large glacial lakes.” The lakes were sometimes milky due to the minerals they contained. With the torrential rivers carrying pure meltwater, we were told we could fill our drinking water bottles from them. We were fortunate to spot a pair of Torrent Ducks, named after the fast flowing rivers which are their habitat.

After the first main day, we returned to Chalten, but for the next four days we were out in what a sign correctly called a Wilderness Area.



Covering about 20km a day, the terrain was tough on the steep mountain paths, strewn with fallen tree branches, roots and rocks.



Our efforts were rewarded by some of the most spectacular views of any of my treks. We were incredibly lucky with the weather, which for much of the five days was sunny and blue skies, with only light, high clouds at times. It was very cold at night, and by day we experienced a little of the icy, biting wind for which Patagonia is known. However, the sun carried some warmth.

We went to the glacial lake we had seen from the viewpoint on day one, with the rocky moraine around the lake seen in the photo, now seeming to overshadow three of our group. Once across the moraine, there was a breath-taking view of Mount Torre, and the lake with its floating ice.



In places, early autumn colours added a feeling of warmth to the frozen mountain scenery.



Our accommodation was in tents pitched in the forest, and in two mountain refuges, the first of which was very basic. There was no power at the camp or in the refuge dormitory, so we relied on head-torches (mine has been on every trek) and candles. The final night's refuge was more modern, with wood burners to provide hot water, and limited power - but the most impressive thing was its location beside a glacier and lake.



On the final day of the trek, we walked out of the hills and forest, across rickety bridges over fast-flowing streams, our heads full of the wonders we had seen. For me,



highlights included the sunlit face of Mount Fitz Roy appearing eerily and briefly through a short-lived gap in the clouds in the early morning, the bizarre and impressive peak of Mount Torre dominating the skyline, and the huge scale and variety of the many glaciers.



Teenage Cancer Trust makes sure young people do not have to face cancer alone. The charity's work ranges from giving straightforward answers about diagnoses and treatment, to developing specialist units in NHS hospitals, and delivering specialist nursing care. Much of this has been

possible through the generosity of people such as yourselves in supporting fundraising efforts like mine. At the time of writing, having recently returned from Patagonia, I have raised £2,935 (plus around £400 in Gift Aid). My fundraising page currently remains open at: [www.justgiving.com/fundraising/nigel-turner-patagonia](https://www.justgiving.com/fundraising/nigel-turner-patagonia)

This was my 19<sup>th</sup> trek for Teenage Cancer Trust. The regular pattern of annual treks has been disrupted by the Covid pandemic, and it's not yet clear when there may be an opportunity to consider a 20<sup>th</sup> trek. Fingers crossed that some sort of normality is returning, not least for the young people with cancer who have had the extra burden of the pandemic added to the huge challenge of dealing with a cancer diagnosis and treatment.



**THANK YOU SO  
MUCH FOR  
YOUR SUPPORT**

NIGEL TURNER  
[www.trekraise.org](http://www.trekraise.org)

*Nigel*