



## PARQUE NACIONAL VILLARRICA

Crowned by the snowy dome of Volcán Villarrica (2847m), one of Chile's most popular parks is the 610-sq-km Parque Nacional Villarrica. It features a stark lunar landscape crafted of lava flows, scoria and pumice, and scattered with alpine lakes. About 30km southeast of the tourist resort of Pucón, it was created in 1925 from a forest reserve originally set aside in 1912. Among the most accessible national parks in Chile, it stretches along a broad volcanic range running southeast from Volcán Villarrica as far as the 3776m summit of Volcán Lanín on the Chile–Argentina border. This extensive plateau was created several thousand years ago with the explosion of Volcán Quetrupillán.

Recent and older lava flows on Volcán Villarrica tell of a battle of natural forces, as the local vegetation struggles to survive against recurring, intense volcanic activity. Névés and glaciers cover Volcán Villarrica's upper slopes, and its northern slopes have been developed for winter skiing.

### ENVIRONMENT

The lower slopes of Parque Nacional Villarrica are clothed in rich virgin forests, where montane southern beech species such as *raulí*, roble and the evergreen *coigüe* predominate up to an elevation of approximately

1000m. Above this altitude *lenga* and *ñirre*, alpine species of southern beech, coexist with superb forests of araucaria trees.

The araucaria is often found in pure stands that form the tree line (at around 1600m above sea level).

Typical southern Andean wildflowers, such as the *añañuca* and the Chilean field orchid, or *orquídea del campo*, are well represented. Hardy shrubs, including the *michai*, a thorny member of the *Berberis* genus (similar to *calafate*) with yellow flowers, and *chauras* thrive on the upper slopes of these volcanic mountains. Usually present in alpine herb fields of the Araucanía are numerous species of yellow groundsels, or *senecios*. The volcanic soil also favor *brecillo*, a small shrub that produces edible purple berries (often seen in the scat of native foxes).

With the exception of birds, which are relatively easy to spot, the shy native fauna is seldom seen in Parque Nacional Villarrica. A bird common in the park is the Chilean pigeon, or *torcaza*, a large grey bird that the Mapuche call *conu*. Although this species seemed dangerously close to extinction in the early 1960s, populations of Chilean pigeon have recovered dramatically in recent decades. The austral parakeet, or *cachaña*, feeds largely on araucaria nuts, splitting them open with its sharp beak. The luxuriant forests also provide an ideal habitat for the Magellanic woodpecker, often seen tapping about the tree trunks.

### VOLCÁN VILLARRICA

The indigenous Mapuche people knew Volcán Villarrica by the name of Rucapillán, meaning 'house of the spirits', and believed the mountain to be the abode of their ancestors. The volcano is extremely active and unpredictable. From the crater rim, molten magma is visible deep down in the core, and at times red-hot lava spurts up. Its smouldering volcano smoke is visible from all over the northern Lakes District.

The volcano has experienced repeated catastrophic eruptions over the centuries, most recently in 1971, when a 4km-wide fracture opened, releasing massive lava flows that destroyed the small township of Coñaripe and only just spared Pucón. Smaller eruptions are even more common – such as in September 1996, when Volcán Villarrica shot out columns of thick gaseous smoke that covered its northwest slopes in a fine layer of ash.

Both despite and due to its continuing activity, Villarrica is the most climbed – and studied – mountain in Chile. Seismic and volcanic activity are now carefully monitored, and any increase can result in 'closure' of the mountain until activity subsides. Residents surrounding the volcano live in a permanent state of alert, ready to evacuate their homes with little notice.

The **Proyecto de Observación Villarrica** ([www.povi.cl](http://www.povi.cl)) is a scientific organization that studies Volcán Villarrica.



## CLIMATE

Parque Nacional Villarrica's elevated topography ensures that it has higher average precipitation levels and lower temperatures than the surrounding Araucarian lowlands. Summer temperatures generally range between 9°C and 23°C. Reaching nearly 4000mm annually (concentrated between May and early September), precipitation is highest on the western slopes of Volcán Villarrica, which lie directly in the path of the moist Pacific airstream. The winter period brings frequent and heavy snowfalls above 1000m.

## VILLARRICA TRAVERSE

**Duration** 6 days

**Distance** 81km

**Difficulty** demanding

**Start** Refugio Villarrica (Centro de Ski Pucón)

**Finish** Puesco

**Nearest Town** Pucón

**Transport** bus

**Summary** A classic longer trek along the rugged volcanic spine of Parque Nacional Villarrica.

This incredibly scenic, high-level trek traverses virtually the whole length of the national park, giving constantly changing views. The route first leads around Volcán Villarrica's glacier-shrouded southern sides, then along a complex volcanic plateau of alpine lakes, small calderas and lava flows that extends as far as Volcán Lanín. The mostly rocky, open terrain provides sensational vistas, although the route dips repeatedly into beautiful highland araucaria and *lenga* forests.

Most trekkers complete a three-day section of the traverse starting at Guardería Chinay or Termas de Palguín (see the Day 3 Alternative Start). The Villarrica Traverse is marked by colored – yellow, red and then green – stakes that identify various sections of the trail. The guided ascent of Volcán Villarrica (see More Treks, p70) is itself an unforgettable experience, and can be done on the first day of the trek.

Note that early in the day and late in the season, only larger streams can be relied on to have running water so you may have to plan to bring your own.

## PLANNING

### When to Trek

Early in the season, snow may still cover large areas of the route. Summer (December–February) can be surprisingly hot. From about late December until early February, bothersome *tábanos* are out in force, although they are almost absent above the tree line.

### What to Bring

Trekkers should bring a tent, warm clothing, food supplies and camp stove. Bring enough water for a full-day hike, it can be replenished at campsites. (Ice axe and crampons are not necessary for the traverse). The box below talks about weather conditions.

### Maps

Conaf has produced a 1:110,000 color-contoured map of Parque Nacional Villarrica that, for the most part, shows routes correctly. Most trekkers will find it detailed enough for the Villarrica Traverse.

Otherwise, four 1:50,000 Chilean IGM maps cover the trek: *Pucón* (Section G, No 104), *Curarrehue* (Section G, No 105), *Liquiñe* (Section G, No 113) and *Paimún* (Section G, No 114). An additional map, *Villarrica* (Section G, No 103) is optional. These maps do not show the track (or Laguna Blanca) but they are topographically accurate.

### Permits & Regulations

Visitors to Parque Nacional Villarrica pay a daily admission (foreigner/Chilean CH\$3000/1500) or for an indefinite longer

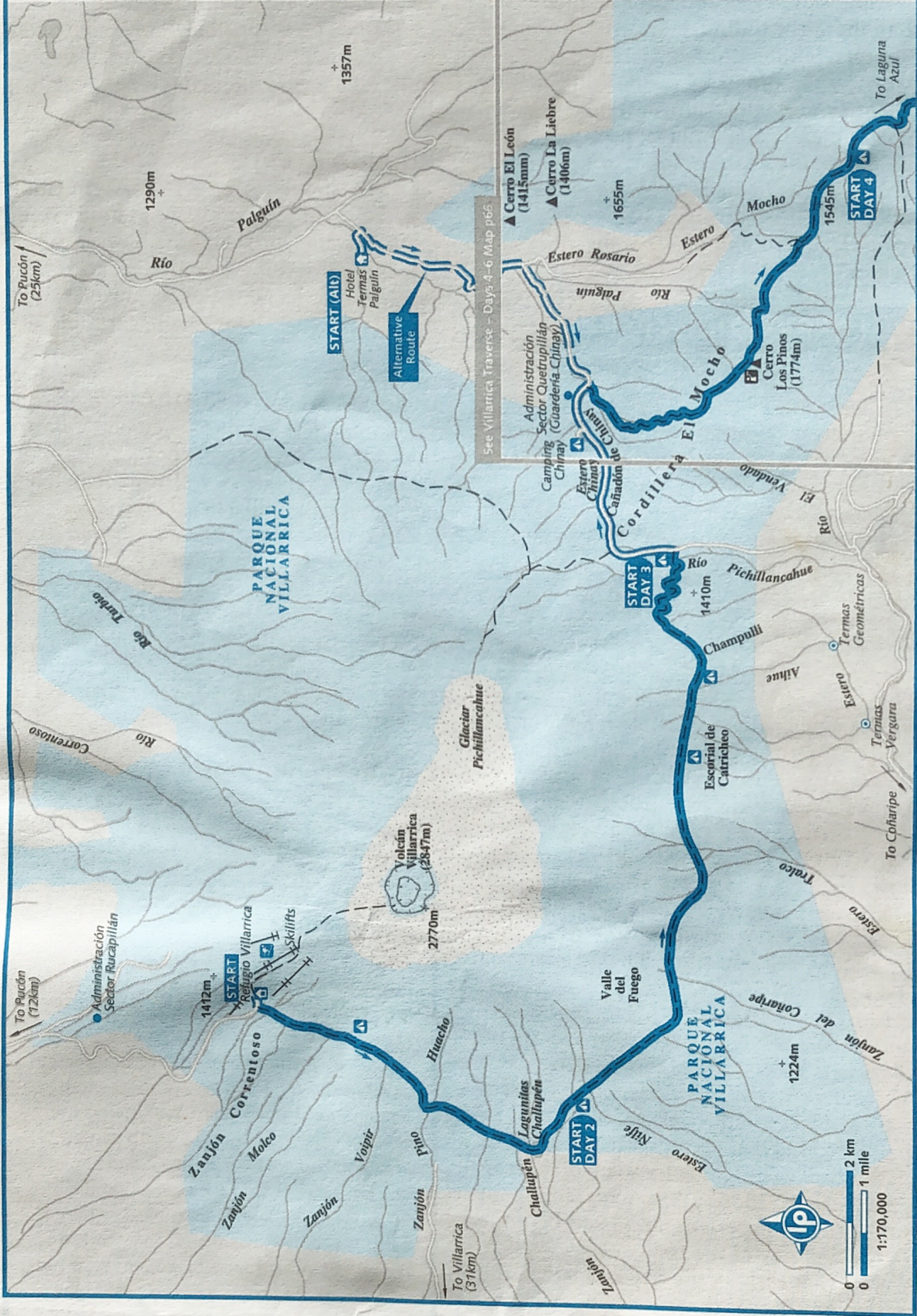
## WARNING

Although the Villarrica Traverse is well marked and well trodden, it is a long, high-level route almost entirely above tree line. There are no *refugios* (huts), so all trekkers must carry a sturdy tent. The central section is very exposed. Deep winter snow often remains well into January, but among the extensive fields of lava the going can be very hot. Bad weather or low cloud can quickly move in to make navigation difficult. Finding water is often hard as the earth is very porous and streams tend to flow underground (and/or streams stop running overnight because of the cool night temperatures).



THE ARAUCANÍA

### Villarrica Traverse – Days 1-3





stay (foreigner/Chilean CH\$7000/5000). Pay fees at Administración Sector Rucapilán, 8km from Pucón on the road to the ski area or Guardería Chinay (Day 3). Apart from several Conaf-organized campsites, camping is only permitted in the park at least one hour's trek from the nearest road. Trekkers are strongly encouraged to carry a stove rather than light fires.

## GETTING TO/FROM THE TREK

The trek begins at Refugio Villarrica (also known as Centro de Ski Pucón), a ski lodge (closed in summer) roughly 18km from Pucón on the northwest side of Volcán Villarrica. There is no public transport, but taxis can be chartered up to Refugio Villarrica for – depending on your bargaining skills – around CH\$12,000. You can walk to Refugio Villarrica from Pucón in around five hours.

Many local outdoor-adventure companies (see p74 for details) organize guided ascents of Volcán Villarrica. In fine weather in the main tourist season (January and February), several guided parties are likely to make the climb each day. These trips include transport by the companies' own minibuses to and from Refugio Villarrica, and if there is extra space, a ride may be negotiable.

The trek ends in Puesco.

## ALTERNATIVE START

It is also possible to start the trek roughly midway on Day 3 at the Termas de Palguín (see p65), on the Palguín Bajo–Coñaripe road. From Pucón, you can either take a taxi (CH\$20,000), or a shuttle (CH\$5000) with **Sierra Nevada** (☎ 045-444210; Av O'Higgins 524), with daily 7am departures in summer. The taxi can leave you at the Administración Sector Quetrupillán (Guardería Chinay). Alternatively, a local bus from Pucón to Curarrehue or Puesco goes past the turn-off at Palguín Bajo, from where it is a pleasant 3½-hour trek up the valley to the Termas.

For those wanting to continue further up the valley, it is also possible to join the Villarrica Traverse from the Guardería Chinay, another 3.5km up the Palguín Bajo–Coñaripe road from Termas de Palguín. This alternative start is described later in this chapter.

## THE TREK

### Day 1: Refugio Villarrica to Estero Ñilfe

4½–6¼ hours, 11.5km, 350m ascent

The road ends at a parking lot beside Refugio Villarrica (a winter ski lodge that's closed in summer), a short way above the tree line at around 1500m. Walk 200m back down the road to the start of the track, which begins just beside the first ski-lift post on the first bend near a large tin shed. The first several meters are marked off in stones. Follow yellow-tipped, metal marker-stakes south across the first eroded gully, the **Zanjón Correntoso**. The route rises over mostly dry streambeds on the open slopes of hardy Andean heath and wildflowers to cross the **Zanjón Molco**, 25 to 30 minutes from the *refugio*. There is fair **camping** by this stream among the bare rock.

The well-formed track climbs on steadily leftward through lava fields and occasional snowdrifts and on to sparse tussock-grass ridges. The shining blue waters of Lago Calafquén gradually move into view down to the southwest. Cut back down through a rocky gully between the lava, into the scrub, to reach the **Zanjón Voipir**, 1¾ to 2¼ hours from the Zanjón Molco. There is a good view up this sediment-filled stream (flowing underground in places) to the snowy crown of Volcán Villarrica.

Head on across another trickling gulch into mature *lenga* and *araucaria* forest, whose *quila* understorey has perished (a curiosity of its life cycle; see the boxed text The Quila Cycle, p87). The trail passes a signposted turn-off going down to the Villarrica township (33km – a useful exit route in bad weather) just before it drops into the **Zanjón Pino Huacho**, 50 minutes to 1¼ hours from the Zanjón Voipir. A deteriorated wooden pipe ducts water from a tiny spring trickling out of the sandy embankment at the base of the canyon.

On the other side, continue left (ignoring a minor path along the left bank) and begin an undulating traverse through more beautiful forest and pockets of red-flowered *notro* scrub. The route passes a signposted trail turn-off (leading down 28km to the town of Lican Ray) to reach the **Zanjón Challupén** after 30 to 40 minutes. Cut 300m left, diagonally up through this wide streamway that (when flowing)



washes scoria down from the slopes of Volcán Villarrica.

Pick up the trail on the other side and head 200m through lava rock before you cut away to the right up a steep embankment (ignoring a rough, paint-marked route going off left to a glacier). Stay to the right as you continue to climb. Eventually the path turns left into the trees to reach the ponds known as the **Lagunitas Challupén** (approximately 1250m), 30 to 40 minutes on.

Climb on southeast over a minor forested ridge, descending across a dry gully to jump an unnamed stream (with reasonable **campsites** on tiny terraces along its south side). The trail continues briefly through *ñirres* to arrive at the **Estero Ñilfe** (GPS 39° 27.486 S, 71° 58.712 W), a glacial stream 25 minutes from the Lagunitas Challupén. These open slopes give a clear view south toward the snowcapped double summit of Volcán Choshuenco and Volcán Mocho, rising behind forested ranges. The best **campsites** are sheltered by low lengas on the stream's north bank.

## Day 2: Estero Ñilfe to Río Pichillancahue

4–5½ hours, 16.5km, 330m ascent, 35m descent

Follow yellow marker-stakes across a broad tundra basin scattered with *chaura*, yellow groundsels and other tiny wildflowers under glaciers on Villarrica's southwest face. Traverse past recent lava flows in the area known as the **Valle del Fuego** (Valley of Fire), over a minor crest, then cut across an upper channel of the Zanjón del Coñaripe.

Well defined by stone borders, the trail climbs slightly north of east to reach a saddle (1516m) between a reddish side crater (2006m) and another smaller cone (1646m), 1¼ to 1¾ hours from the Estero Ñilfe. From here you get the first clear views southeast toward the exploded crater of Volcán Quetrupillán and Volcán Lanín's 3776m ice-encrusted cone behind it.

Descend via a ridge leading around to the right and cross a trickling stream, then climb over a steep grassy ridge to meet the **Estero Tralco**, after 15 to 25 minutes. Cut up left across the stream through a deep, sometimes snow-filled trench. Head toward a rock marked with a white-paint circle, then continue eastward into the **Escorial**

**de Catricheo**. The trail avoids the worst of this large field of black scoria, following an easy route through gaps in the coarse, gnarled rock that resembles petrified tree trunks. Past the lava the trail passes a large boulder called *Piedra de la Junta*. Down to the right, araucarias stand silhouetted against the outline of Volcán Lanín.

Climb to a ridgetop under crevassed icefalls on the southern side of Volcán Villarrica, descending on rightward through sparse alpine tundra strewn with tiny yellow, starlike *quinchamalí* to meet a grassy stream near a basalt bluff. The route continues quickly over a crest (marked by a pole) to cross the **Estero Aihue** (GPS 39° 28.630 S, 71° 53.149 W), one to 1½ hours from the Zanjón del Coñaripe. A scenic but unsheltered **camp** could be made downstream on grassy flats within the canyon.

Side left round past a prominent red ridge coming off Villarrica to reach a cluster of araucarias just above the normal tree line at **Champulli** (wrongly shown on the IGM map), after 20 to 30 minutes. These slopes overlook the wild upper valley of the Río El Vendado. Disregarding trails that descend right, traverse around northeast, slightly upward over grassy mountainsides scattered with pink *añañucas* opposite Volcán Quetrupillán. The foot track crosses a series of small, steep stream gullies (usually snow-filled at least until mid-December) before finally cutting down into the *lenga* scrub (GPS 39° 28.239 S, 71° 52.122 W), 35 to 45 minutes on.

A steep, switchbacking descent through tall forest leads to the **Río Pichillancahue** after a final 30 to 40 minutes. There is no bridge here, but this large stream can usually be forded with little difficulty a short way upstream. There are excellent **campsites** among *coigüe* forest on the true left (east) bank of the river, but be particularly careful with campfires as large amounts of dead *quila* here could set the whole area ablaze. Glaciar Pichillancahue is visible through the trees at the head of the valley.

## Day 3: Río Pichillancahue to Upper Estero Mocho

5½–7 hours, 16.5km, 1150m ascent, 700m descent

The path leads five minutes downstream along the east bank, then climbs left over a low ridge to come out at the Palguín

Bajo-Coñaripe road after 15 to 20 minutes. The trail turn-off is signposted 'Challupén' (GPS 39° 28.284 S, 71° 51.221 W). Turn left and follow this often-rough – almost 4WD-standard – road up through araucaria forest (past a left trail turn-off leading 3km northwest to a lookout under Glaciar Pichillancahue) to cross a pass at 1264m on the top of the main Villarrica range after 30 to 40 minutes.

Follow the winding road down for 30 to 40 minutes past a Conaf picnic area and **Camping Chinay** (Palguín Bajo-Coñaripe road; CH\$7000 per person, paid at the *guardería*/admin center). This is an alternative start point for the trek. About 1km up valley from the Guardería Chinay, this Conaf campsite has 10 organized sites with tables and fireplaces among lovely araucarias and *lengas*; there is also a toilet block with cold showers. The road descends through rich forests of mixed southern beech species, crossing and recrossing the rushing **Estero Chinay** to reach Conaf's Administración Sector Quetrupillán (**Guardería Chinay**), near the park boundary, after a further 25 to 35 minutes. Advise the officious *guardaparque* of your arrival. Park fees can be paid here.

Walk 50m past a swing gate on the road and turn off right at a red-marker stake. This trail quickly crosses the stream on a footbridge, then heads rightward over a minor crest to ascend slopes ablaze with red *notro* bushes. The gradient eases only briefly as you pass a short side trail down to a fresh spring (your only source of water for some time). Climb on steeply southward, through regenerating fire-cleared forest high above the Cañadón de Chinay, to finally reach grassy alpine slopes that give welcome views across the upper valley of the Río El Vendado to araucaria-clad ranges and volcanoes. The path traces the scrub line along the right side of the ridge, then cuts up left along a streamlet to a rocky gap (1688m) in the Cordillera El Mocho, 2¼ to three hours from Guardería Chinay.

Don't descend from the gap, but climb 15 to 20 minutes along the bare ridge to a flat **lookout** at 1758m that gives a fantastic panorama of the five surrounding volcanoes – Villarrica, Quetrupillán, Lanín, Mocho and Choshuenco – as well as many

more distant summits. The route traverses left below Cerro Los Pinos (1774m), following the scrubby ridge down into forest to intersect with an unsigned trail coming up from the Fundo El Mocho on a broad saddle (around 1435m) among araucarias, 1½ to two hours from the lookout.

Climb gently on for 25 to 30 minutes until the ridge finally ends by a small stream at the edge of the gently tilted plateau on the western side of Volcán Quetrupillán. Here, pleasant **campsites** can be found a short way right along the stream among the shelter of the scrub. The familiar puffing summit of Volcán Villarrica dominates the skyline to the northwest.

#### ALTERNATIVE START: TERMAS DE PALGUÍN

4½–6 hours, 12km, 880m ascent

This route is easier and shorter (but less scenic) than the track via the Cordillera El Mocho. This route can also be driven in a taxi from Pucon (see p62).

The **Termas de Palguín** (☎ 045-441968; baths CH\$5000; 9.30am–7.30pm) are 12km along the Palguín Bajo-Coñaripe road from the turn-off on Ruta 119. A good place for a meal, **Hotel Termas Palguín** (r per person with full board CH\$41,400) was reconstructed after the historic building burnt down in 1998. Camping is possible nearby. (Trekking coming down valley from the Guardería Chinay – 3.5km and one to 1¼ hours – should turn right just after crossing the Río Palguín.)

From the Termas de Palguín, follow the Palguín Bajo-Coñaripe road up valley for 1¼ to 1½ hours to a Y-fork (recognisable by the signpost 'Al Parque 3km') and take a right toward the park. Walk all the way to the **Quetrupillán administrative center**, where the track begins.

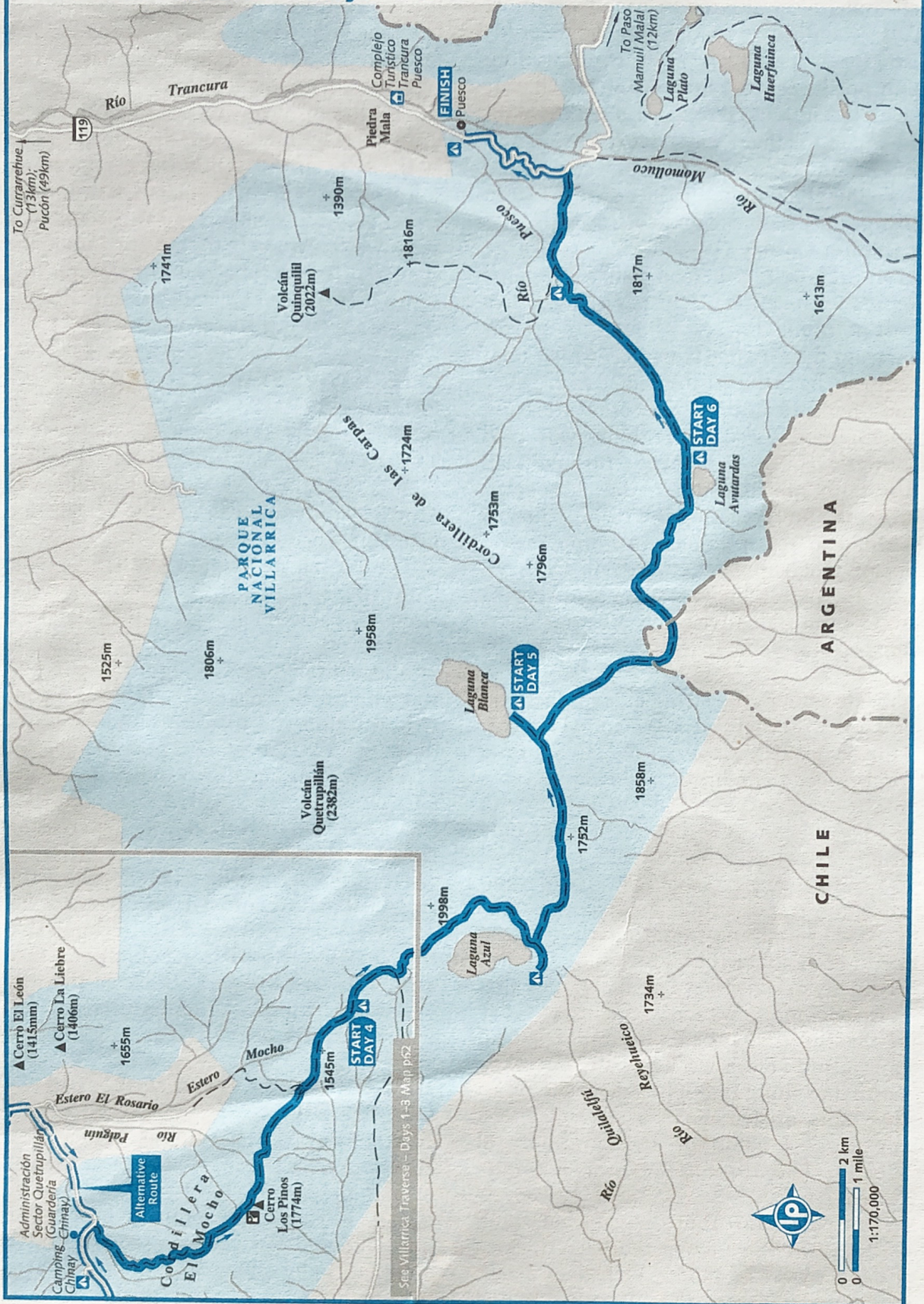
#### Day 4: Upper Estero Mocho to Laguna Blanca

3¾–5 hours, 13.5km, 150m ascent

Head out over the open plateau to the left of a rounded rock bluff (an old volcanic plug). The track leads southeast over alpine grassland and raw volcanic scoria through a stream gully (filled with snow early in the season, but dry later in the summer) to cross the tiny source of the Río Llancahue after 30 to 40 minutes.



### Villarrica Traverse - Days 4-6



Follow the path five to 10 minutes downstream to where a marker stake (GPS 39° 30.763 S, 71° 45.181 W) indicates the point from which to begin climbing left. (Ignore another path that continues downstream (southwest) and eventually meets the Palguín Bajo-Coñaripe road.) Markings guide you up roughly south over tussock-grass ridges with sporadic clusters of wild orchids, then to the right up sparsely vegetated slopes into a rocky gap, 40 to 50 minutes on. From here there are more fine volcanic vistas toward the north.

Sidle southwest to get your first glimpse of the dark-blue lake directly below to your right, then cut back up southeast (left) on to the ridge. Here, the giant of the region, Volcán Lanín, and the lower, double cone of Volcán Choshuenco and Volcán Mocho (off to the south) come back into view, while Andean condors drift around above you. Maintain a high route over the coarse slopes and snowdrifts that persist well into summer, then drop down to the right in zigzags along a loose-earth ridge to reach the southeast shore of **Laguna Azul** (shown on IGM maps as Laguna de los Patos), 50 minutes to 1¼ hours from the gap. This impressive lake lies in a deep trough whose outlet stream was dammed by the large lava flow nearby. There are **campsites** here among the *lenga* scrub, but unconscientious campers have left them in pretty poor condition. Less sheltered spots exist across the small outlet on the grassy saddle a short way below the ruins of a *refugio*.

From the southeastern shore of Laguna Azul, head east between the broad band of lava and the ridge you descended. Occasional paint markings and small tree branches propped up with cairns lead easily through the broken rock. Climb over a minor crest, then cut through another regenerating lava field and continue northeast along a broad, barely vegetated ridge to a barren, rocky area. Edge down to the right of this into a silt-filled streambed before making your way left for 500m. (Winter snow tends to accumulate here, its meltwater temporarily forming a shallow lake.)

At this point head up northeast, immediately left of a tiny stream, to reach a narrow sandy gap, 1½ to two hours from Laguna Azul. From here you get a view across the desolate moonscape to Laguna Blanca, a

small lake lying at just above 1600m. Drop down the eroding slopes into the barren basin (if the gap is dangerously corniced, climb briefly around left), then head directly northeast across the raw, undulating plain to arrive at **Laguna Blanca**, 15 to 20 minutes on. Scenic, but only semisheltered, **campsites** can be found among boulders on the southern shore of this starkly beautiful alpine lake.

## Day 5: Laguna Blanca to Laguna Avutardas

3½–4¼ hours, 11km, 400m ascent

Return to the main trail and head on around to the right into a dry gully. Follow the gully until it turns eastward, then climb away around the eastern rim of a small extinct crater. Continue on generally south toward the distant twin peaks of Volcán Choshuenco and Volcán Mocho, before crossing to the left over a small spur marking the Chile–Argentina frontier. The path sidles around slopes overlooking the wild, forested valley of the Río Blanco in Argentina, dips into a bare bowl-like basin, then ascends northeast to reach a pass (GPS 39° 34.191 S, 71° 40.280 W) back on the international border, 1½ to two hours from Laguna Blanca. The Conaf map puts this section of the route inside Chilean territory!

At 1838m, this often-windy ridgetop is the highest point on the traverse, and looks out northeast (into Chile) toward 2022m Volcán Quinquilil, the major summit of the jagged Cordillera de las Carpas. Beyond the valley of the Río Puesto, further over to your right, stands an impressive saw-shaped range, which locals call La Peineta (literally, ‘the Comb’). You can also enjoy the last clear views of Volcán Lanín over to your right.

Drop to the right, and then ease down leftward beside the stream on to a wet shelf of shallow pools and alpine bogs, vegetated by water-loving plants such as native yellow buttercups known as *madecos*. Pick up the path at the northernmost edge of the shelf, where the stream tumbles over a low escarpment, before descending in a few quick switchbacks. The route doubles back right to cross the stream below the waterfall.

Continue upward under the cliff face across another waterlogged area into *lenga*





scrub to reach an open ridgetop separating two branches of the upper Río Puesco, 50 minutes to 1¼ hours from the pass. Up to your right, more small cascades tumble over the escarpment, while there are enticing glimpses of a welcoming lake down in the valley below you.

Follow the ridge to just before a rock knob, then watch out for markings on the right that indicate where the trail starts its steep descent to the southeast. Drop via narrow snow chutes down into taller forest to finally come out on a marshy meadow grazed by noisy flocks of black-necked ibis at the western corner of **Laguna Avutardas** (shown on IGM maps as Laguna Los Patos), after 25 to 30 minutes.

Make your way directly east, bounding across babbling brooks to pick up the trail again at the edge of the trees. This sometimes-indistinct track sidles through the forest above the lake's north side, before cutting through to **campsites** on an open grassy clearing at the eastern end of Laguna Avutardas, a final 20 to 30 minutes on.

Laguna Avutardas lies at around 1450m, and is enclosed on three sides by steep forested ranges. It has a narrow sandy beach, and in hot weather the water is just right for a leisurely dip (a welcome respite from the voracious *tábanos* of late December and January). Visitor impact has been high here; please light fires only in existing fireplaces and carry out all rubbish.

## Day 6: Laguna Avutardas to Puesco

3¼–5 hours, 12km, 775m descent

Rejoin the trail and continue gently northeast down through tall *lenga* forest and *quila*, crossing a small stream to reach a *mallín* after 20 to 30 minutes. Make your way 500m through the middle of this scrubby strip before moving rightward to where the route re-enters the trees (GPS 39° 34.109 S, 71° 37.047 W). Continue northeast, rising and dipping over low ridges, before you drop down through *coigüe* forest scattered with *quellén* (wild strawberries) and long-abandoned farm clearings to meet a disused old road, 1½ to two hours from the *mallín*.

(From here, a 4km orange-marked route leads off left to ford the Río Puesco before it climbs to the summit of Volcán Quinquilil. It is possible to **camp** near the crossing,

although sites are less than ideal unless you wade the knee-deep river.)

Turn right and follow this rough track through *ñirre* and *notro* scrub. The old road (closed to all motorized vehicles) sidles gently down in an almost easterly direction above the raging Río Puesco, crossing through a remnant cherry orchard to pass a small house just before it intersects with Ruta 119 (the international road between Pucón and Junín de los Andes), one to 1½ hours on. (This junction is signposted 'A Quetrupillán'.) Go left here and descend northward through the forest of *raulí* and *roble*, watching out for unmarked short-cut trails that lead down more directly between the road's numerous hairpin bends to arrive at Puesco after a final 40 to 50 minutes. The Conaf office now has free **camping** here, with fire pits and toilets.

As a courtesy, present your papers at the Puesco customs office. Make sure the staff realise that you have not just crossed from Argentina (although they may want to inspect your gear anyway).

## MORE TREKS

### CORDILLERA DEL VIENTO (ARGENTINA)

#### Ascent of Volcán Domuyo

By strict definition, the 4709m summit of Volcán Domuyo, in the Cordillera del Viento in the remote northern corner of Argentina's Neuquén province is the highest point in the Patagonian Andes. It is one of the few volcanoes entirely within Argentina that has significant geothermal activity, including fumaroles, geysers and thermal springs.

Volcán Domuyo can be climbed in around five days return from its south side. Although technically straightforward, this remote, high-alpine ascent, with the associated dangers of altitude sickness (see *Health & Safety*, p258), requires proper experience, equipment (including ice axe and crampons) and planning.

**Albus** (☎ 02942-432108) runs daily buses from Zapala to Chos Malal, roughly 110km south of Domuyo, but access to the volcano itself is by private (preferably 4WD) vehicle only. Some outdoor-adventure companies (eg Alquimia in Junin, see