

right-hand path goes down almost to the village of Las Gaviotas at the lake's south-eastern corner.

Las Gaviotas has no accommodation or store, and there is no particular reason to go right into the village unless you need a public telephone, which it does have. There is a nice **campsite** (camping per tent CH\$3000), with picnic tables and firewood provided, a 10- to 15-minute walk west, near where a stream enters the lake; a landowner collects the fee. Other camping possibilities exist along the black-sand beach a short way from where you meet Lago Rupanco.

Day 3: Las Gaviotas to El Poncho

2¼–2¾ hours, 12km

Follow the dark, sandy shore west through the front yards of lake-side holiday houses. The wide, graded track rises and dips around the often very steep banks of Lago Rupanco, past rustic shacks and through patches of forest fringed by blackberry bushes. Cross a large, dry gully and head up to the left, past the remains of a suspension footbridge, just before you come out above a lovely lake-side pasture after one to 1¼ hours.

The trail climbs away left over scrubby slopes high above the lake, bringing into view the bare volcanic ridges surrounding Volcán Puntiagudo to the south. Drop down behind more holiday houses around a broad tranquil bay, its western side now scarred by an unsightly road extension, to cross a major stream on a sturdy log bridge, 30 to 40 minutes on. On the far side of this bridge the dirt road begins. Follow this around the bay, past a *kiosco* (store) and across the Puente Río Blanco, then past the exclusive Bahía Escocia Fly Fishing Lodge, to reach the tiny settlement of **El Poncho** after a final 40 to 50 minutes. El Poncho itself has a small store and a bus stop but little else.

PARQUE NACIONAL NAHUEL HUAPI

With craggy ranges, deep forested valleys and big lakes, the great Parque Nacional Nahuel Huapi (nah-well-wah-pee) is the largest national park on either side of the

northern Patagonian Andes. One of South America's finest climbing destinations, it lies to the west of the popular tourist hub of Bariloche in the Argentine Lakes District. Nahuel Huapi's rugged interior is accessible via an extensive network of well-maintained trails – as well as numerous rougher, unmarked routes – supported by many excellent alpine *refugios*.

HISTORY

Formally established in 1934, Nahuel Huapi is the oldest of Argentina's national parks. The original park (whose title was Parque Nacional del Sur) was first granted to the pioneering explorer Francisco Perito Moreno for his services to the Argentine Boundary Commission. Perito Moreno donated it back on the condition that it be turned into a national park.

Today's park once formed a large part of the Mapuche heartland, with tribes inhabiting the eastern shores of the great lake. Several low Andean passes in the park, such as Paso Vuriloche (near Pampa Linda) and Paso de Pérez Rosales, linked the many Mapuche tribes on either side of the Cordillera. Christian missionaries later used these passes as a safe route to Chile.

The name Nahuel Huapi is usually translated from the Mapuche as 'island of the tiger'. This refers to the spotted South American jaguar, or *yaguarete*, whose vast range once included northeastern Patagonia.

ENVIRONMENT

Parque Nacional Nahuel Huapi's northern boundary fronts Parque Nacional Lanín. The park includes 7580 sq km of prime wilderness, whose heart is the 557-sq-km Lago Nahuel Huapi itself. With its numerous fjordlike branches, Lago Nahuel Huapi is unquestionably the finest example of a major glacial lake anywhere in northern Patagonia. This enormous lake lies at 765m above sea level – the lowest point within the northern four-fifths of the park, which is drained by the Río Limay and is therefore part of the Atlantic basin.

Approximately 20% of the park's area is covered by water. Numerous sizable lakes lie in the park's deep valleys. The largest of these are Lago Traful and Lago Espejo to the north, and Lago Mascardi in the park's most southerly zone; this drains westward



via the Río Manso and Río Puelo into the Chilean Pacific.

The other dominant feature of Parque Nacional Nahuel Huapi is the icy crown of Monte Tronador. At 3478m above sea level, Monte Tronador is the highest point within the entire Lakes District, and stands almost 1500m above its nearest rivals. The loftiest of Monte Tronador's four summits, Pico Internacional, marks the Argentina–Chile frontier. This massif is smothered by some 60 sq km of névés, glaciers and icefalls, and is the only significant glacially active area found in the park.

Parque Nacional Nahuel Huapi is one of the few areas in Patagonia where the Andes are more extensive and rugged on the Argentine side than on the Chilean side. (Although individual volcanoes do form higher summits in Chile, the ranges surrounding them are relatively low.) This is particularly evident in the mountains to the south of Lago Nahuel Huapi, where the 2405m Cerro Catedral – the highest nonvolcanic peak in the Lakes District – rises up in craggy, steeple-like columns of granodiorite, favored by climbers. Many other peaks in the area surpass 2000m. There are no real glaciers left on this eastern side of the park, but in many places intense frost shattering has formed large scree slides on the higher slopes.

Flora

Three main types of forest are found in Parque Nacional Nahuel Huapi: wet temperate (Valdivian) rainforest in the park's most westerly valleys, deciduous alpine forest at higher elevations, and coniferous forest in the drier eastern sectors of the park.

Of these, the rainforest is easily the most species diverse, with several dozen different types of trees forming the canopy, including alerce (or *lahuén*), *arrayán*, *avelano*, *canelo*, *ciprés de las Guaitecas*, *coigüe*, laurel, *mañío*, *olivillo* (or *teque*), *tineo* and *ulmo*. The deciduous forest of the highland valleys is dominated by *lenga* mixed with *ñirre* and occasional *luma blanca*, a bush of the myrtle family. The *lenga* forest is interspersed with areas of *mallín* (wet meadow) country where the local drainage is poor, but the mountainsides are barren and sparsely vegetated above 1700m.

Parque Nacional Nahuel Huapi has some of the best-preserved coniferous forests in

the southern Andes. These are composed of *ciprés de la cordillera*, a graceful cypress species that forms pure stands on the dry and exposed ranges around the eastern side of Lago Nahuel Huapi.

Alpine and subalpine wildflowers are abundant. One of the most lovely and widespread species is the *amancaes*, or *liuto*, found in forest clearings, where its orange blooms carpet the ground. Various members of the *Mutisia* genus, collectively known by the popular name of *clavel del campo* (carnations of the countryside), are climbing opportunists that produce orange, pinkish-white or purple daisy-like flowers. They often grow along sunny roadsides or where the forest has been disturbed.

Hidden among the rocks on drier slopes, you may spot the *estrellita de la cordillera*, a small composite perennial whose flowers have numerous white clustered petals. *Capachitos*, various herblike plants with yellow flowers, are also found here. The *cuya colorado* is a small alpine shrub with clam-like leaves; its white flowers have pink-tipped petals around a yellow center. Other common wildflowers include the *coxinea*, an annual that grows as a single reddish stalk crowned by a clustered head of tubular yellow flowers with five crimson petals, and a ground orchid whose flowers have a bluish tinge. The *chupa sangre* (literally 'bloodsucker') is a spiky cushion-like plant, found still further to the east where the park fringes the semiarid Patagonian steppes.

Fauna

Ground-dwelling birds, such as the *chucaco*, *churrín* and *huet-huet*, inhabit the forest floor, where hummingbirds flutter madly around nectar-yielding flowers. The forests also provide the habitat for the *carpintero negro*, or black woodpecker, often seen hammering tree trunks; the *torcaza* (or *conu*), a large grey pigeon; and the austral parakeet *cachaña*. Countless waterbirds, including native ducks such as the *quetru*, *pato cuchara* and *pato real*, live in the park. Mammals sometimes spied in the rainforest are the shy pudu and the *monito del monte*. The puma and the far smaller *huiña* are the main terrestrial predators, while the amphibious *coipo* and the carnivorous *huillín* inhabit the waterways of the park. North American red deer have multiplied greatly since their



introduction early in the 20th century, and this is a major factor in the increasing rarity of the *huemul*, or Andean deer.

Parque Nacional Nahuel Huapi is the only place where the rare tucotuco colonial, which was only discovered in 1983, is known to exist. A small ratlike creature, it lives in big colonies, unlike other members of this genus. On the rare occasions when it leaves the warren, the tucotuco colonial gives out a peculiar cheeping call that sounds more like that of a bird than a mammal. Two other species of tucotuco also inhabit the park.

CLIMATE

The park's relatively high elevation and isolation from the Pacific means that a cool and dry 'continental' climate prevails. At low elevations, mean temperatures in winter are around 2°C and in summer they're around 18°C. Summers tend to be relatively dry and most of the annual precipitation occurs in winter and spring, when areas above 1000m are covered by a thick mantle of snow.

The high ranges on the international frontier – most of all, Monte Tronador – cause a typical rain-shadow effect, with steadily diminishing precipitation levels towards the east. It is very wet close to the main continental divide, and the eastern sectors of Parque Nacional Nahuel Huapi are semiarid. For example, Puerto Frías, on the border with Chile, has an annual average rainfall of around 4000mm, while the Cerro Catedral area receives less than 2000mm and the eastern outskirts of Bariloche less than 800mm.

PLANNING

When to Trek

As most scenic routes in Parque Nacional Nahuel Huapi take you well up into the mountains, there's not much scope for trekking before mid-November or any later than early May. The period from December to April offers the best chance of encountering favourable conditions. Early- and late-season trekkers are cautioned that if there is any breakdown in the weather it is likely to bring snowfalls on the ranges. In January the trails and *refugios* are crowded with trekkers.

Books

Spanish-reading trekkers can find the locally-produced guidebook *Las Montañas*

de Bariloche, by Toncek Arko & Raúl Izaguirre, in Bariloche book stores.

Permits & Regulations

Nahuel Huapi visitors entering through an official park entrance gate pay a fee of AR\$15. This fee does not apply if the road is a public right of way, as in the case of the Villa Catedral and Llao Llao roads, but visitors to the park's Pampa Linda, Río Manso or Lago Steffen sectors will have to pay it.

Camping within the park is allowed only at designated campsites. In most cases these are clearly indicated on trekking maps and by official signs at the park-approved campsites themselves. Away from the more travelled trails, however, wild camping is generally tolerated as long as trekkers take care of their surroundings (see boxed text, p36). Lighting fires is prohibited throughout the park.

ACCESS TOWN

See Bariloche (p124).

NAHUEL HUAPI TRAVERSE

Duration 5 days

Distance 36.5km

Difficulty moderate–demanding

Start Villa Catedral

Finish Puente López

Nearest Town Bariloche

Transport bus

Summary A classic trek with a challenging middle day that hops over passes and mountain ridges amid some of the finest scenery in the Argentine Lakes District.

This spectacular route offers ever-changing scenery of craggy mountain summits, lovely alpine lakes, waterfalls and forests. Not surprisingly, it's one of the most popular treks in Argentina.

PLANNING

Most parties opt for a shorter version of the full traverse presented here, which can be done in four to five days. An additional day or two allows for rest or short side trips. Popular shorter variations include:

- the three-day Circuito Chico, which combines Day 1 (or the Alternative Route via



Arroyo Van Titter), Day 2 and the Alternative Route: Refugio San Martín (Jakob) to Ruta Nacional 79

- a shorter circuit that combines Day 1 and (in reverse) the Alternative Route via Arroyo Van Titter, either as a long day walk or in two short days
- a combination of Days 1 to 3, exiting via Arroyo Goye (Alternative Route: Refugio Segre (Italia) to Colonia Suiza), for a 3–4 day trek



LAKES DISTRICT

Most sections of the route are well marked and well trodden, and route-finding is relatively straightforward. The exceptions to this are Day 3, between Refugio San Martín and Refugio Segre, where trekkers must navigate extremely carefully, and on Days 2 and 4, where the terrain is too rocky and/or steep to hold a proper path.

Many other tracks intersect with the traverse route, allowing you to shorten or vary the walk as you like. On all stages of the trek it is possible to walk out in one day. Less experienced parties are advised to opt for the Circuito Chico mentioned above.

Apart from Day 3, which is rated demanding, and Day 4 (moderate–demanding) all sections are of a moderate level of difficulty.

When to Trek

Many sections of this trek are well above the tree line. The route's relatively high altitude generally makes it unsuitable for inexperienced parties until around the beginning of December, although in places snow may remain right through the summer. The area is somewhat sheltered by the mountains to the west (chiefly Monte Tronador), and bad weather tends to be slightly less extreme than on the other side of the Andes. Nevertheless, many parts of the route are very exposed to the elements, so if conditions are poor you should wait for the weather to improve.

What to Bring

The four *refugios* along the route make it possible to do the trek without carrying a tent. Nevertheless, trekkers are advised to carry a tent and stove for greater safety. Huts also become overcrowded in January and February, particularly in spells of bad weather. *Refugios* are generally open from early December until mid-April.

Bring a sleeping bag. The *refugios* offer basic bunks, with little or no bedding apart from, perhaps, a mattress. With the exception of Refugio López, the *refugios* belong to CAB, although they are generally run by a private concessionaire who acts as a *refugiero* (hut keeper). Guests pay a fee to overnight and an additional charge to use the cooking facilities. Simple meals, refreshments and supplies are available from all of the *refugios*.

The deep and steep-sided valleys often require heavy climbs and descents through loose rock or scree; it's most comfortable to wear gaiters or long pants that cover the tops of your boots.

Maps

Recommended is the contoured 1:50,000 *Trekking 1* map in the *Refugios, Sendas y Picadas* series, which is an extract (with additional topographical information) from the larger-format 1:100,000 *Refugios, Sendas y Picadas Parque Nacional Nahuel Huapi* color map. This latter map covers a much wider area and is perhaps a better alternative if you plan further treks elsewhere in the park. All are available from the CAB in Bariloche. Unfortunately, these maps are inaccurate in a few short (but very important) sections of the route.

Permits & Regulations

Trekkers attempting Day 3 from Refugio San Martín (Jakob) to Refugio Segre (Italia) are asked to fill out a form at Refugio San Martín before they leave and hand it in on arrival at Refugio Segre. The *refugiero* at San Martín will advise staff at Segre by radio to expect you. At the same time, trekkers are strongly advised to view the photos of the day's route held at Refugio San Martín.

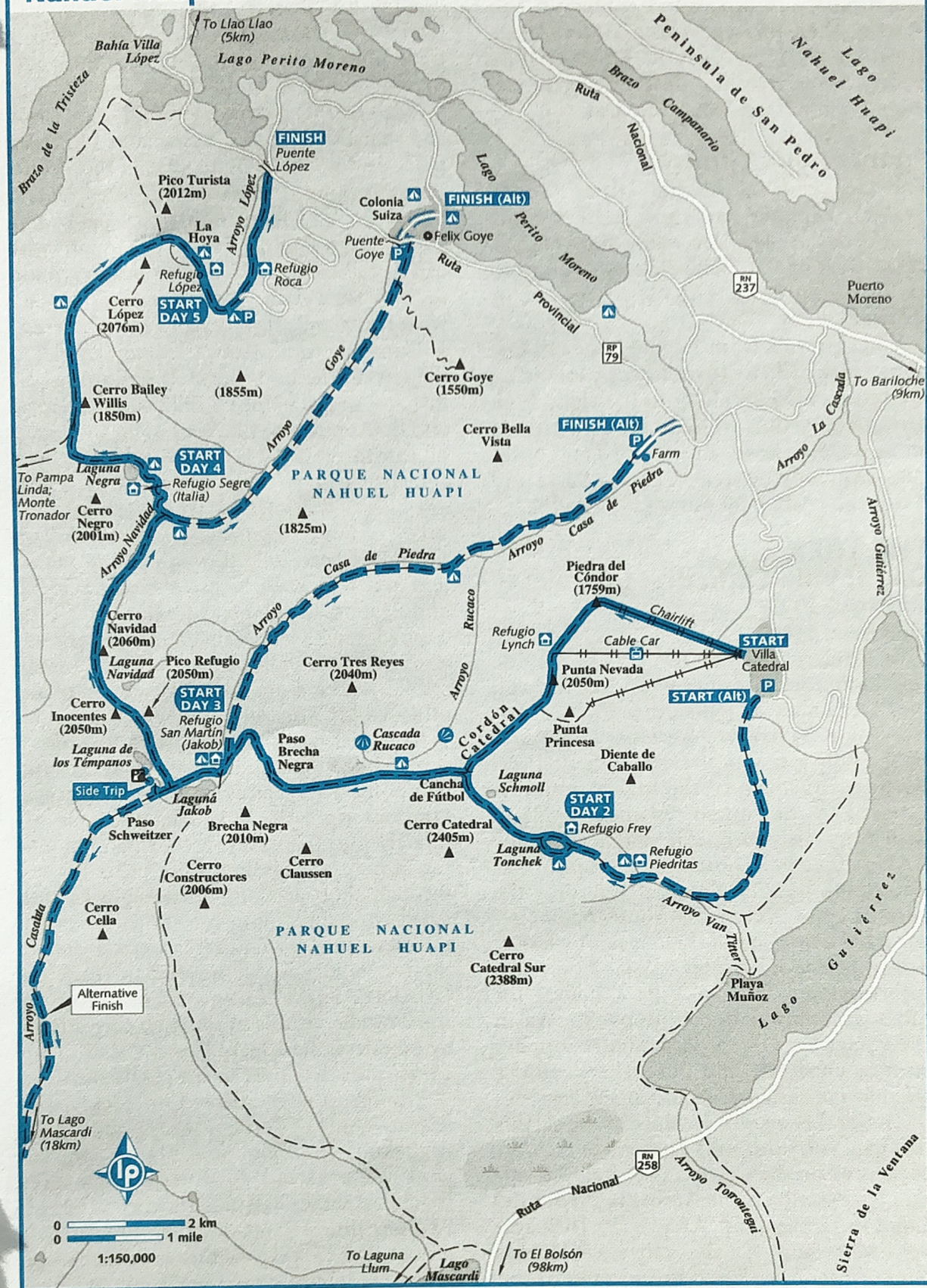
GETTING TO/FROM THE TREK Villa Catedral (start)

The trek begins at Villa Catedral, a ski village about 20km by road from Bariloche.

BUS

Throughout the trekking season, **Ómnibus 3 de Mayo** (☎ 02944-425648; Perito Moreno 480) goes from Bariloche to Villa Catedral (AR\$1.10, 30 to 40 minutes, hourly). Buses depart from the bus

Nahuel Huapi Traverse



LAKES DISTRICT

terminal at the eastern edge of Bariloche and call in at the center, including two stops on Moreno and one opposite the national park administration center on San Martín, then proceed along either Av de los Pioneros or Av Bustillo. Buses operate during daylight hours, all returning almost immediately from Villa Catedral.

Puente López (finish)

The trek ends at Puente López (López Bridge), a picnic area and kiosk on the road between Llao Llao and Colonia Suiza, 22km west of Bariloche. The No 10 or No 11 bus to Bariloche (AR\$3) passes five or six times a day.

You can walk from Puente López to Colonia Suiza in 30 to 40 minutes by following the bitumen 150m along to the right, then turning off southeast (ie to the right) along an unsurfaced road. Buses No10 and No11 run frequently between Colonia Suiza and Bariloche (AR\$3, 50 minutes, 14 daily).

THE TREK

Day 1: Villa Cathedral to Refugio Frey

2¾–4 hours, 8.5km

This exhilarating high-level route may be impassable because of snow and ice through mid-December, in which case the Alternative Route via Arroyo Van Titter (p107) will be the only safe way to reach Refugio Frey. Fortunately, much of the higher option is exposed to the sun so the snow tends to melt away fairly early. If in doubt, ask in the CAB's office in Bariloche or at its information booth in Villa Catedral regarding the current condition of this route. Villa Catedral has a number of ski lodges which may accept guests in summer. Ask at the CAB information booth in Villa Catedral for other accommodation options. Kiosks in the village are OK for last-minute supplies such as chocolate and film. There's also a selection of restaurants and snack bars.

The day begins with a choice of two ski lifts that haul you from Villa Catedral to the start of the trek on the Cordón Catedral. The option we describe is the **Aerosilla Piedra del Cóndor** (adult/child AR\$40/28; 10.30am–6pm Mon–Sun). An alternative, which cuts out even more walking, is the combination **Cablecarril y Aerosilla Lynch** (adult/child AR\$40/28), which goes to Refugio Lynch.

If the fares, or the very idea of chairlifts, put you off, you can trek to Refugio Lynch on a foot track that spirals up below the cable car. The trail is steep and exposed to the sun (carry water), and the climb takes around three hours. We only recommend this route to save money or build character.

The chairlift heaves you up into the stony and sparsely vegetated alpine zone to **Piedra del Cóndor**. At 1759m, this is the northernmost point of the Cordón Catedral, and offers an excellent unbroken panorama across Lago Nahuel Huapi. A rough road can be followed for 30 to 35 minutes around to **Refugio Lynch** (year-round), at 2042m, where you can get meals and refreshments.

Continue southwestward along, or just to the left of, the bare ridgetop, following yellow and/or red paint markings (lots of spots and dots on rocks) that lead up to the hump of **Punta Nevada** (2050m), where winter snowdrifts linger well into summer. There are fine views down to your right into the valley of the Arroyo Rucaco, whose stream meanders peacefully through alpine moors and over rock slabs before entering a gorge, and beyond to the great glaciers of Monte Tronador, which rises up on the western horizon. The route dips down to reach a small saddle, not far from the upper station of another ski lift, after 45 minutes to one hour.

Sidle rightward off the ridge to cross a scree slide, then make your way around below the rock spires of **Punta Princesa**. On your right the land falls away almost directly into the valley. Minor hand climbing is necessary as the route picks its way through short sections of rock blocks with small chrysanthemum bushes sheltering in the crevices. Keeping to this western side of the range, make your way on to reach the **Cancha de Fútbol**, one to 1¼ hours from the small saddle. At this sandy shelf surrounded by boulders, the 2388m Cerro Catedral Sur comes into view over to the south.

Prominent signs painted on rocks point left to 'Frey' (Refugio Frey) and right to 'Jakob' (Refugio San Martín on Laguna Jakob). Head down to **Refugio Frey** (bookings at the CAB in Bariloche; ☎ 02944-527966; dm AR\$30; kitchen use AR\$10; dinner AR\$25; year-round) as described (in reverse sequence) at the beginning of Day 2. Walking time from the Cancha de Fútbol to the *refugio* is 40 to 50 minutes.



The *refugio* stands at 1700m in a particularly scenic location on the eastern shore of **Laguna Tonchek**, looking out across the lake to the craggy spires of Cerro Catedral (Cathedral Mountain). The lake takes its name, which you may also see spelt 'Toncek', from the late Slovene andinist and CAB member Toncek Pangrec. The neat two-storey hut is built of local stone, and has sleeping space for 40 people upstairs. It can get very crowded, particularly during periods of poor weather in the main tourist season. There are sheltered but cramped and uneven **campsites** in the *lenga* scrub just across the outlet creek on the southern side of the lake, and less sheltered but more spacious and level sites on open ground further round the southern shore.

ALTERNATIVE ROUTE: VIA ARROYO VAN TITTER

3½–4½ hours, 12km

This stage is longer than Day 1 and has no lifts to haul you up the mountain, but ascends at a more leisurely rate and is more sheltered. It is the only safe route when the high-level option is snowed over or icy.

From the CAB lodge at the southern edge of Villa Catedral, cut across the parking lot below a minor ski tow and take an old road up left to a signpost at the trailhead. The broad foot track goes southward through *ñirre* and *quila* scrub on a kind of wide terrace above Lago Gutiérrez, then rises gently into the forest below overhanging cliffs to a fork 1½ to two hours from the village.

Continue up, heading right (the left-hand route leads down to the lake), turning up northwest through moist forest, and cross the **Arroyo Van Titter** on a footbridge. The first authorised **campsites** along the route are by the stream just after you cross this bridge. Ascend at a leisurely pace through the tall *lenga* forest with an understorey of herbs and wildflowers to pass **Refugio Piedritas** after 50 minutes to 1¼ hours. This quaint little *refugio* belongs to the local Club Andino Esloveno and has been constructed by building a log wall across the opening of a large overhanging boulder just to the right of the path. Refugio Piedritas only has space for about eight people and is basic. You can find numerous good **campsites** in the forest nearby.

Climb on through the forest, which soon changes into lower and denser *lenga* scrub, granting views of the peaks on the Cordón Catedral. The route crosses the now much smaller stream on stepping stones shortly before you reach **Refugio Frey**, beside Laguna Tonchek, after a final 50 minutes to 1¼ hours.

Day 2: Refugio Frey to Refugio San Martín (Jakob)

5–6½ hours, 8.5km

Make your way easily around either shore of Laguna Tonchek to its northwestern side, then begin ascending to the right (northwest). The path winds up the loose-rock slopes beside a splashing stream to **Laguna Schmoll**, a smaller and shallower lake that occupies a sparsely vegetated terrace opposite the impressive craggy columns of Cerro Catedral. Cross the tiny outlet and climb on more steeply into a rock gully. Early in the season, snow here may make this section dangerous. Look back for a final view of the lovely upper valley behind you, then continue up through a small sandy basin to reach the **Cancha de Fútbol** after one to 1½ hours.

A sign ('Jakob') and an arrow painted on a boulder indicate where the route descends into the next valley. Follow red splashes on rocks down a short way to the right, then traverse back briefly leftward. Now begin a long and very steep descent more or less straight down through dusty, raw talus, continuing down via a dry gully into the scrub. As the gradient eases, head off to the left along a good trail where the beautiful *lenga* forest fringes the grassy valley floor. The path ducks in and out of the trees to cross a stream below a tiny cascade at an excellent official **campsite**, 50 minutes to one hour from the Cancha de Fútbol.

Make your way on gently up valley through the forest, avoiding the soggy open area to the right. The route soon moves out into sporadic *ñirre* scrub, then crosses a stream coming down from the left. The **Cascada Rucaco** waterfall comes into sight on the slopes of Cerro Tres Reyes to the north, and red markings guide you up onto a flat, stony ridge dividing the upper valley. Behind you, on the adjacent range, the now familiar multisteepled form



of Cerro Cathedral rises up, looking just as spectacular from this angle.

The track leads across the broad ridgetop to a well signposted rock, then makes a final strenuous, but short climb west up through steep, loose rock to reach **Paso Brecha Negra** after one to 1½ hours. This is the broad ridge that connects Cerro Tres Reyes with Brecha Negra. There are superb views from here (better from a few paces downhill), with the *refugio* on Laguna Jakob clearly visible below to the southwest.

Sidle down towards the lake as far as a small outcrop, then descend steeply via (or beside) a loose chute of coarse gravel until below the scrub line. Turn left where the route meets the main trail coming up through the valley, and follow this through a few boggy areas to cross the small **Arroyo Casa de Piedra** on stepping stones just below where it leaves Laguna Jakob.

A short way on, the route intersects with the main path coming up through the valley. Follow this briefly to the left to **Refugio San Martín (Jakob)** (dm AR\$30; kitchen use AR\$20; dinner AR\$40; Nov-Apr), beside Laguna Jakob at 1650m, 45 minutes to one hour from Paso Brecha Negra. This timber and stone *refugio* stands near a tiny peninsula. It has a wood stove, toilet and sleeps up to 100 people. You can buy a few basic provisions and sweet luxuries from the hut warden. **Camping** is permitted in clearings in the *lenga* above the *refugio*; collect water from the spring water tap at the hut.

SIDE TRIP: LAGUNA DE LOS TÉMPANOS

1–1½ hours return, 3.5km

This easy side trip from Refugio San Martín should not be missed. From the campsite head up the steep ridge, then sidle on around westward over polished limestone slabs (note the scratch marks left by ice age glaciers) to reach Laguna de los Témpanos after 25 to 30 minutes. This spectacular little lake lies within a south-facing cirque with sheer rock walls that tower above its icy, blue waters. Return the way you came.

Day 3: Refugio San Martín (Jakob) to Refugio Segre (Italia)

5–7 hours, 8.5km

This section of the trek, following a high-level route, is harder and more hazardous

than other stages. Ideally for very experienced trekkers, it should not be attempted unless the weather is very good. At any time – most commonly, early in the season (until about mid-December) – crampons and an ice axe may be needed to do the route safely. The hut warden at Refugio San Martín (who has photographs that clarify the route) can give further advice, and will ask you to fill in a form and hand it in on arrival at the other end.

Follow the side trip to Laguna de los Témpanos (above) as far as a rocky spur that comes down from Pico Refugio, just before Laguna de los Témpanos comes into view. After carefully studying the route from this point, follow occasional cairns northeastward, with some scrambling as the ridge steepens, to meet a narrow ledge. Head left along the ledge for about 50m, then move up with care diagonally rightward through a steep couloir (rocky chute), which may be wet or snow-filled. After another 50m or so, ease back left across snowdrifts – or, if possible, below them – to gain the top of the ridge.

Taking care when negotiating more patches of old snow, head northwest along the ridge. After a short distance, a rocky pinnacle blocks the way. Avoid this by descending around to the right and traverse the slopes below the rock face. Continue through a stony area of gully cracks, where more snow may lie, towards an obvious narrow gap in the craggy range ahead, two to three hours from Laguna de los Témpanos. From here, move over onto the loose scree slopes on the eastern side of the range above Laguna Navidad. These lead to a low point in the main ridge line between Cerro Inocentes and Cerro Navidad. From here, make your way 500m up a spur on scree to the summit of **Cerro Navidad** (2060m).

Head 400m down the ridge on the northern side of Cerro Navidad. From here a rough route can be followed northeast down more steep and unstable slopes into the narrow canyon at the head of the **Arroyo Navidad**. Late-lying snow may make this section tricky to negotiate. Crossing the cascading stream wherever necessary, follow it down to meet the main path coming up the **Arroyo Goye**, two to three hours on.

Follow red-paint markings up through *lenga* scrub, before beginning a steep,



spiralling ascent adjacent to waterfalls where the Arroyo Goye spills over 300m cliffs. The path sidles on around westward over a low rock crest, from where Laguna Negra comes into view. Laguna Negra lies in a little trough directly below Cerro Negro (2001m), and was evidently named for its proximity to the black-rock mountain as its water is blue. To the north lies the paler-brown shale rock of Cerro Bailey Willis (1850m).

Cut down leftward across the lake outlet to arrive at **Refugio Segre (Italia)** (dm AR\$25; use of kitchen AR\$8; dinner AR\$30; Nov-Apr) after a final 60 to 80 minutes. This two-storey concrete construction (whose bunkerlike design can withstand heavy snows and small avalanches) lies at 1650m and has bed space for 60 trekkers. There are numerous sheltered **campsites** hunkering in the scrub as you come over the rock crest just before arriving at Refugio Segre.

ALTERNATIVE FINISH: REFUGIO SAN MARTÍN (JAKOB) TO RUTA PROVINCIAL 79

2¾–4½ hours, 13km

This is the normal access to Refugio San Martín and is the quickest exit route from the hut. It is also the final stage of the three-day trek known as the Circuito Chico.

Follow the well-travelled path down the true left (west) side of the **Arroyo Casa de Piedra**, crossing the stream just above a waterfall. Descend steeply in a series of switchback curves (known as Las Serpentinás) into the *lenga* forest, then more gently on past a side valley that ends in a large cirque at Laguna Navidad. From here, the route enters the drier central part of the valley (which apparently lies in the rain shadow of ranges to the west). The path leads through *mogotes*, *calafate* bushes and *ñirres* – typical dryland vegetation – to cross the stream on a rickety suspension bridge, 1½ to 2½ hours from the *refugio*.

Continue down the stony riverflats past where the Arroyo Rucaco flows into the main stream, then climb away left and drop back to the riverbank several times to avoid steeper banks before sidling gradually down into pleasant stands of *coigüe* trees, and some good **campsites**, by the Arroyo Casa de Piedra after 50 minutes to 1¼ hours. The route soon leaves the riverside

again, ascending briefly through the forest onto slopes covered by thickets of *retama* as it goes over into a 4WD track. Ahead of you, across Lago Nahuel Huapi, are the snowcapped mountains of the Sierra Cuyin Manzano. Pass by a tiny car park and a kiosk beside a farm, after which a proper road brings you down to intersect with the Ruta Provincial 79 after 30 to 45 minutes.

Those travelling in the reverse direction should watch out for a sign marking the start of the track beside Ruta Provincial 79; going uphill the trekking time is around six hours.

It's possible to walk from here to the holiday village of **Colonia Suiza** (p125) in 1½ to two hours (turn left and follow the road), but easier to wait for the No 11 bus from Bariloche, which passes this point five times daily (between 9.30am & 8.30pm) on the way to Colonia Suiza.

ALTERNATIVE FINISH: REFUGIO SAN MARTÍN (JAKOB) TO LAGO MASCARDI 8-9hrs, 24kms

Use a compass or GPS unit to hike this little-used trail linking two of the region's finest trekking areas. The **Arroyo Casalata trail** requires good route finding skills and is best attempted when river levels are low, since there is one tricky crossing.

Following the trail to Laguna Los Tempanos, take the left side of the lake valley to **Paso Sweitzer**. On the pass the trail drops straight into the valley (west). Once you reach the valley floor, follow the trail south. The trail mostly takes the east bank (river left), with some river crossings. The trail is poor and overgrown, with swampy parts. Just before Lago Mascardi, there is a junction that follows the lake's northern shore; follow the indications to eventually get to a hanging bridge over the Río Manso.

Pass **Arroyo Casalata** and head west-northwest for at least 30 minutes until the trail meets the Río Claro. It can be crossed when the river is low by the facing hill where some abandoned measurement instruments lie. In high water, good jumpers only could go 100m upstream to a rocky gully (2.5m wide) to cross. Walk southwest on the main track, headed toward a pair of *álamos* (poplars) to arrive at Río Manso's hanging bridge. Cross to the road



to Pampa Linda, 17kms away. From here buses pass for both Pampa Linda (around 10am) and Bariloche (around 5.30pm) in summer.

Day 4: Refugio Segre (Italia) to Refugio López

4–5½ hours, 7.5km

Head along the eastern lake shore, dotted with chrysanthemum bushes and yellow daisies, making your way on around the northern side of **Laguna Negra** over cracked rock and perhaps some snowdrifts. There is a short section of rock here (probably with a fixed rope to hang on to) that requires some careful downclimbing. From the far end of Laguna Negra, climb a short distance up to the right beside the small inlet stream, then cross to its true right side and head up a broad open rocky slope towards the low point in the ridge between Cerro Negro and Cerro Bailey Willis.

Head up right along the ridge (guided by a few cairns, canes and paint markers), over a knob and down to reach a gap on the southern side of Cerro Bailey Willis (where snow may lie well into the summer), 45 minutes to one hour from Refugio Segre. From here, the now familiar form of Cerro Catedral can be made out to the southeast beyond Laguna Negra. Sidle northward for a further 15 to 20 minutes, across a slope of coarse *talus* above a snow basin, to reach another small pass.

From the slopes of **Cerro Bailey Willis** (1850m) you get an unobstructed panorama of the magnificent mountain scenery along the Chile–Argentina frontier. The great white rump of Monte Tronador, smothered by sprawling glaciers, completely dominates the views of the western horizon. The pointed peak visible to the north of Monte Tronador is Volcán Puntagudo in Chile, and the highland lake perched in a depression to the southwest is Laguna Lluvú (see More Treks, p123).

Drop down north from the pass, descending briefly rightward through loose rock before you sidle along the left side of a green, boggy gully. In places the foot track is less definite, but the route is marked with cairns and occasional red-paint splashes on rocks. Follow these down left on to moist grassy meadows to cross a brook at the head of a tiny valley (the northern

branch of the Arroyo Goye), 40 to 50 minutes from the pass. There is a small park-approved **campsite** here among low *lenga* forest.

Head on over a marshy clearing and up out of the *ñirre* scrub. The indistinct path leads northeast gently up the sparsely vegetated slopes to cross a small stream coming from an obvious rocky gap to the north. From this point, begin a very steep ascent up to the right via a gully of frost-shattered rock, whose large, loose, sharp fragments make the going strenuous (and slightly dangerous). Pass to the right of a rocky knob to reach a small dip in the range some way north of Cerro López's principal summit, 1½ to two hours from the campsite.

A short way northwest along the top of this ridge is a trig marker on the slightly lower summit of **Pico Turista** (2012m). This point offers another great panorama, which now includes Volcán Osorno (the perfectly symmetrical snowcapped cone visible beyond Monte Tronador in Chile), while to the north there are sweeping views across the islands, peninsulas and isthmuses that separate Lago Perito Moreno from Lago Nahuel Huapi. Condors often soar around these mountain tops.

Following paint arrows, drop down east from the dip in the ridge to skirt along the left side of a small glacial cirque known as **La Hoya**. A shallow tarn forms here once the snow melts, but by fall this basin is normally dry and snow-free. Descend more steeply towards the *refugio*, visible far below you, downclimbing repeatedly at short sections of rock, to arrive at **Refugio López** (☎ 02944-527966 in Bariloche for reservations; info@activepatagonia.com.ar; dm AR\$30; mid-Dec–mid-Apr), after 50 minutes to 1¼ hours.

The privately owned Refugio López is the most popular and accessible hut on this trek, and sits at around 1600m in a very scenic location overlooking Lago Nahuel Huapi. This two-storey red-brick building has modern amenities (but no hot showers) and there is sleeping capacity for 100 people. There are poor **campsites** near the hut, or you can camp on a grassy area below a waterfall about 15 minutes down beyond the *refugio*. Refugio López stays open for the entire trekking season.



ALTERNATIVE FINISH: REFUGIO SEGRE (ITALIA) TO COLONIA SUIZA

2½–3¼ hours, 12km

This is the usual access to Refugio Segre (Italia). It's also an easier alternative route out for trekkers who don't feel confident enough to tackle the high-level traverse of Day 4.

Head back down the switchbacks as described at the end of Day 3 to cross the Arroyo Goye and the Arroyo Navidad just above their confluence. The path dips down into the *lenga* forest beside the cascading stream to an official campsite after 40 to 50 minutes. Head gently downstream below high rock walls fronting the opposite side of the valley, crossing through a small area of *ñirre* and *quila* before you pass a side valley of the Arroyo Goye (barely visible through the trees).

Continue along the true-right bank, gradually moving down into evergreen forest dominated by *coigüe* to where the route joins a rough, disused road, one to 1½ hours down from the official **campsite**. At this point you'll see a signpost ('Picada a Laguna Negra/Refugio'), which indicates the way back up to the hut. Another trail branches off right (southeast) from here up to the 1550m lookout peak of **Cerro Goye** (1550m), a return side trip of 3½ hours.

Slide down above the rushing stream through patches of exotic North American fir trees, then turn right off the vehicular track at a gate and make your way along the right-hand side of a fence. The first part of this route ascends steeply; the last section takes you through stands of *ciprés de la cordillera* before dropping steeply through the *coigüe* forest to reach Ruta Provincial 79 at a parking area and a signpost ('Refugio de Montaña Laguna Negra...6 horas') after 35 to 45 minutes. Go left along this road, turning right into Felix Goye to arrive in **Colonia Suiza** (p125) a further 10 to 15 minutes on. Trekkers hiking up to Refugio Segre will find the signpost indicating the trailhead beside a black gate 400m east of the road bridge over the Arroyo Goye.

Day 5: Refugio López to Puente López

1½–2 hours, 3.5km

From just below the terrace of the *refugio* take a path that winds down through

low scrub before joining a broad track that comes in from the right. This crosses two small streams at the source of the **Arroyo López** and meets the end of a road after 15 to 20 minutes. Follow the road past a small car park, then turn off left on to a sign-posted foot track leading steeply down into the forest. The route twice crosses the road at hairpin bends, then leads down through previously fire-cleared slopes, now regenerating with *lenga* scrub and thickets of spiny *crucero*. It leads to **La Roca**, a *refugio* offering meals and snacks. Here, avoid picking up trails which diverge rightward back on to the road, and continue down north into the forest. (If you follow the road, you'll end up about halfway along Ruta Provincial 79 between Puente López and Colonia Suiza).

The last section of the route follows the right side of the Arroyo López before coming to a picnic area and kiosk at **Puente López** after a final 1¼ to 1¾ hours.

Trekkers who do this stage in reverse order should reckon on taking two to three hours to reach Refugio López from Puente López because of the steepness of the trail.

PASO DE LAS NUBES

Duration 2 days

Distance 23km

Difficulty moderate

Start Pampa Linda

Finish Puerto Frías

Nearest Town Bariloche

Transport bus, boat

Summary Links two river valleys through saturated rainforest and below hanging glaciers at the foot of the mighty four-summit massif of Monte Tronador.

The aptly named 1435m Paso de las Nubes (Pass of the Clouds) lies on a continental watershed, sending its waters into the Pacific on its southern side, via the Río Manso and Río Puelo, and into the Atlantic on its northern side, via Lago Nahuel Huapi. The route over Paso de las Nubes can be done as a trans-Andean trek by continuing over Paso de Pérez Rosales to the isolated village of Peulla on Lago Todos Los Santos in Chile (see the Alternative Finish, p117).

