

▼ Ushuaia to Puerto Williams in the Beagle Canal, entering Chile from Argentina

Patagonian Empire

Cruising Chilean Patagonia onboard Bavaria 42 Empire

One thing is certain; nature is at its most beautiful in Patagonia. When the sun is shining and the temperature is higher than the usual 10°C, the grey and rainy days are easily forgotten. However, only masochists sail north in Chilean Patagonia, against the current and the prevailing winds, or so we had been told...

We celebrated Christmas and New Year's Eve in the world's southernmost city Ushuaia in Argentina. All the yachts at the AFASYN Yacht Club were dancing in the choppy waves. Ushuaia is windy. It changes rapidly from calm to strong gusts. In one moment the sun is shining from a blue sky. A few minutes later it disappears behind grey clouds of rain or snow. It is not unusual to experience all four seasons in a single day!

Before proceeding north into the Chilean channels and fjords, we just "had to" round the Horn. The weather forecast predicted calm winds for a short period, but long enough for us to sail south. For once the weather stayed calm. Heidi even got the chance to row ashore to get our passports stamped by the lighthouse keeper at Cabo de Hornos. Soon after Heidi's return onboard the wind increased and we could sail around the Horn. Cape Horn looks just like an ordinary rock, but it was still a strange feeling to sail south of this infamous Cape in our own boat.



▲ At Cape Horn our passports were stamped by the friendly lighthouse keeper.



▲ Empire sailing westbound around Cape Horn.



▼ A beautiful day, sailing under spinnaker in the Beagle Channel.



Now we can "piss to windward" well, at least that is what the old windjammer crews would claim, however neither the mate nor the skipper have tried this yet, but be sure, we will!

In 1832 Captain FitzRoy and HMS Beagle sailed these waters for three months. He surveyed the channel and the islands around Cape Horn. The Beagle Channel is 100 nautical miles long and connects the Atlantic Ocean to the Pacific Ocean. The Beagle Channel is shorter and smaller than the Magellan Strait, which parts Tierra del Fuego from the mainland further north. The Beagle Channel is beautiful. On one side the mountains rise with snowy peaks, on the other side the islands protect the channel from the violent weather coming from south and southwest.

In the waters of the great explorers

In Chilean waters it is necessary to obtain a ZARPE, a detailed sailing permission, before cruising. From other sailors, and also from the different guide books, we knew that it could be difficult and time consuming to get a ZARPE. Luckily, that was not our experience. Before entering the Armada office we had prepared a list of fjords and channels we wanted to sail. 10 minutes later our notes were written almost directly into the ZARPE, with some approximate dates along the channels.

Mid January we set off from Puerto Williams, heading west in the Beagle Channel. It would be 8 weeks until we could go shopping again. Fortunately it is easier to store food onboard in the low temperatures of the south, than in the tropics.

The first days in the Beagle Channel the weather was like a nice Norwegian summer. The second day we could even fly the spinnaker. It is a spectacular view, sitting on deck with the spinnaker flying and the glaciers passing by. The Beagle Channel



▲ *Yacht Club Micalvi in Puerto Williams is a meeting place for boats waiting for weather to sail around Cape Horn. The Club "House" is an old naval ship.*

has a well deserved nickname - The Avenue of Glaciers.

One afternoon we dropped the anchor in Seño Pia, which can be entered from the Beagle Channel. The short fjord is narrow with steep mountains rising on both sides. On our way to the anchorage we passed a lot of ice of different sizes in the water. The fjord divides into two branches with three calving glaciers. When entering the anchorage Caleta Beaulieu, the fjord opens and the glacier is a spectacular sight. The landscape is similar to the Norwegian west and northwest coast, only rougher and more dramatic in Patagonia.

The dinner we missed

After three nights in Bahia Mussel at Isla Carlos III, northwest in the Strait of Magellan, we wanted to proceed west. In Caleta Notch, the Swedish yacht Yaghan was expecting us



▼ *Early morning heading west in the Magellan Strait.*

for dinner, if the weather allowed us to get there.

After 8 hours we had only 2 nm left. The wind increased earlier than predicted and finally we had 32 m/s in the nose... We hardly made any progress and the engine was not much help.

We had to turn. After two hours we were back where we started. Empire was surfing on the short waves back to the safe anchorage with a speed of 10 -11 knots. Because of the storm we were weather bound at Isla Carlos III three more days. We were well tied up with two lines ashore and two separate anchors.

Bugs in Paradise

The Chilean fjords are a paradise of unspoiled anchorages. Empire was often the only yacht around. We can count on one hand the other yachts we met during the cruise. When it comes to fishing boats and cargo ships we might have to use two hands.

We were prepared to be alone. We knew that it could be wet and cold, and that we would have to fight the wind and the current in Patagonia. But we were not expecting the swarms of small flies we experienced during a very annoying two-week period. The flies were eating us as soon as we got close to the shore. After anchoring we had to batten down the hatches, light the mosquito-spirals and vacuum clean the flies that still were onboard, before we could calm down. One day the skipper had more than 50 itching bites!

However, the flies were quickly forgotten when the sails were up and the sun was shining. Then we could enjoy our "normal" life, thinking how happy we were to be here.

The mighty wall of ice

We will definitely remember Seño Eyre and the glacier Ventisquero Pio XI. Half way up the fjord we passed several icebergs of different sizes. The ice was heaving and sitting in the water and occasionally rolling. The last nautical mile we had to keep watch from the bow to avoid the ice. The air temperature dropped as we approached the glacier, the icebergs got bigger and more frequent. Then suddenly the sun came through and the scenery was fantastic. The wall of 1000 year old ice was glimmering in blue, turquoise, bright white and transparent tones in front of us.

Ventisquero Pio XI is 3,5 km wide where it meets the fjord and up to 50 meters high. The glacier made a lot of noise when big ice blocks fell into the sea. As we passed through belts of small ice we could hear the sparkling sound from compressed air being released.

We anchored in Caleta Sally nearby, safe from drifting ice. On the way to the anchorage several dolphins played around the boat in the cold and pale green water. A curious sea lion followed the Zodiac when Heidi rowed the lines ashore. Of course we had ice from Ventisquero Pio XI in our cocktails that evening!

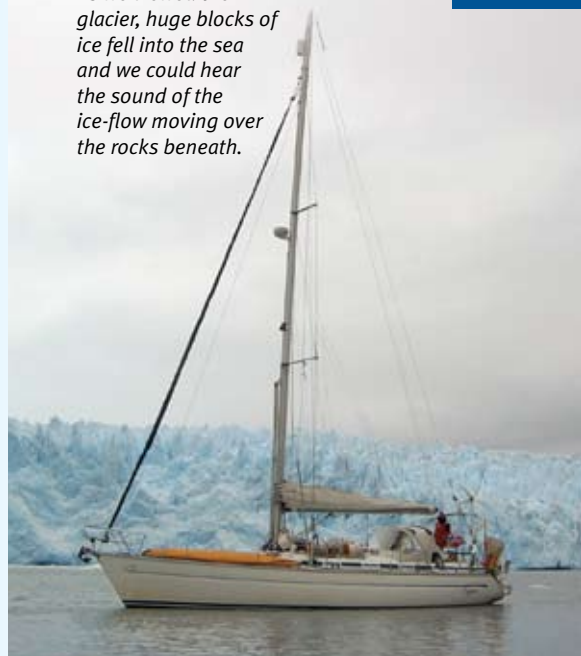
Outpost

After five weeks sailing we anchored in Puerto Eden. The little fishing village is one of the most isolated settlements in Patagonia. Today 173 people live on the island. Fishermen with their families, one Armada station with their officers, lots of barking dogs and some hens. The ferry which connects Puerto Eden with the mainland drops by twice a week. Except for visiting sailors like us, the ferry is the only direct contact the village has with the mainland. In Puerto Eden there are no cars and no streets. A wooden bridge or path serves as the "main road".

Channel Messier meets Golfo de Peñas about 100 nm north of Puerto Eden. Before entering Golfo de Peñas, we had to wait for favourable winds for a few days in Caleta Lamento del Indio at Isla Zealous. A very well protected anchorage in an enclosed and beautiful bay, though the entrance is difficult to spot if you don't know where to look.

We crossed Golfo de Peñas in nice SW wind,

▼ *As we viewed the glacier, huge blocks of ice fell into the sea and we could hear the sound of the ice-flow moving over the rocks beneath.*



▼ *Exploring Seño Eyre.*



▼ *Exploring the main street in the small fishing village Puerto Eden.*



200 nm with a taste of the Pacific Ocean, before we could sail in Bahia Darwin to sheltered waters. The bottom rises steeply outside Golfo de Peñas, from 3-4000 meters to 50 meters. The sea easily becomes very choppy, with seas coming from all directions. Empire was jumping and dancing until we reached deep waters. A long time had passed since we last experienced the seas from a big ocean.

In Puerto Aguirre, a small fishing village with a population of 1200, we planned to fuel up. After some calculations, Eivind found that we could make it the last 250 nm to Puerto Montt. But we were happy to stock up with fresh tomatoes, carrots and avocados. At this point the fresh food remaining onboard was pretty lousy after seven weeks in "no man's land".

The return to civilisation

It was obvious that we were getting closer to civilisation as garbage was floating in the sea and ships passed by more frequently. The weather was also changing; warmer than further south, but still wet. The last miles before Castro, the main city on Isla Chiloé, we navigated in dense fog and pouring rain. To our delight

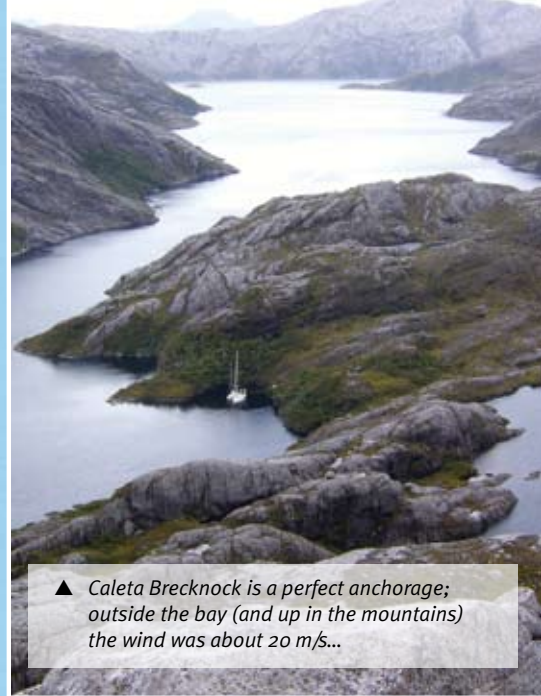
picas are not marked on the charts, so it is necessary to keep a good look on the echo sounder. The tide is also worth having in mind since the difference in this area is seven meters in some places!

It is not often that we look forward to marina or yacht club life. After two fantastic months in "no man's land" it felt exotic to be moored at Marina del Sur, just south of Puerto Montt. Again we could take a warm shower in fresh water and relax in a café with WiFi, meet new acquaintances and finally the possibility to choose if we would like to dine onboard or in a restaurant. Puerto Montt was not that exciting in itself, but we enjoyed meeting new people and eating fresh fruit and vegetables again. Empire also got a well-deserved scrub-up, as one year had passed since last time we had given her a real massage. Once Empire was lying at the dock shiny and newly polished, we felt that it was time to move on.

The last "safe" port"

With a great view to the snowy peaks of the volcanoes in northeast we cast off from Marina del Sur. We dropped the anchor outside a small fishing village a few nautical miles from Channel Chacao to wait for the tide. The channel separates Isla Chiloé from the mainland. Huge amounts of water pass through the 12 nm long channel and the tide can set with as much as 10 knots.

With the sunrise next morning the visibility was almost zero and there was no wind. On our way to the channel we passed several oyster and salmon farms. The tide-table was accurate and we proceeded with



▲ *Caleta Brecknock is a perfect anchorage; outside the bay (and up in the mountains) the wind was about 20 m/s...*

of an old wreck. The ship got stuck after the big earthquake in 1960. Club de Yates Valdivia is a very friendly yacht club. Here we met several other bluewater voyaging sailors, en route north and south. The employees and the members of the club were very friendly and welcoming.

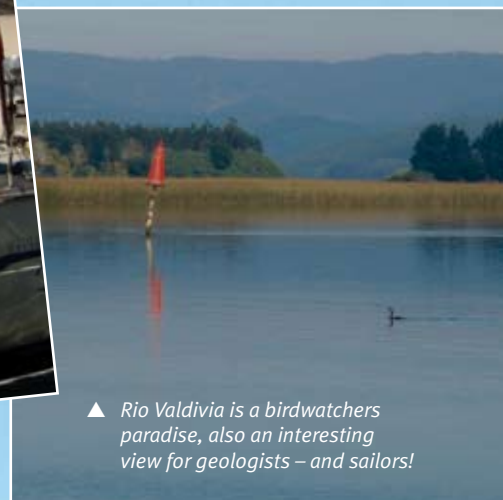
The importance of good pilot books

The high mountains of Patagonia increase the strength of the wind in the fjords. This effect can create strong williwaws. The williwaws often come from an unpredicted direction and with a speed of up to 50 m/s. It does not last for long, but can cause great damage if you are not prepared.

Before anchoring we always considered the site thoroughly. It is important to be well prepared, to be able to row the first line quickly ashore. Experienced sailors advised us to look for areas with healthy trees with fresh leaves. If you anchor where there are no trees or the trees have lost their leaves, it means that the wind easily could get a good grip on the boat.

It is also important to get reliable weather information on the way. We mostly used GRIB files from Saildocs and USGrib, which we downloaded via Iridium satellite telephone. The predictions were good, as long as we added at least 25% to the predicted wind!

Before we left Puerto Williams Heidi had a long hard look at the "big blue bible" - Patagonia & Tierra del Fuego Nautical Guide, written by Mariolina Rolfo and Giorgio Ardrizzi. The book contains good information on about 500 anchorages in Patagonia. If we had needed to find safe anchorages solely by looking at the chart, our daily progress would have been much slower. Everyone we met in Patagonia had the big blue book in their ships library.



▲ *Rio Valdivia is a birdwatchers paradise, also an interesting view for geologists – and sailors!*

good speed on our way to the Pacific Ocean. We do not know how strong the current was, the log had been broken since we left Mar del Plata, but our GPS showed SOG at 13 knots!

Valdivia is the last safe natural harbour en route north in Chilean waters. The landscape along the 10 nm long Rio Valdivia is beautiful and a birdwatchers paradise. One of the many curiosities of the area is the Blacknecked Swan. The river is crowded with red and green marks and the depth varies between 4 and 8 metres. Half way up the river lies the remains



▼ *Ropes tied ashore were often essential to get the boat close in and out of the wind especially as many of the safe anchorages were too small to allow Empire to swing at anchor.*

the sun was shining when we rowed ashore, the day after, to look around.

Our last anchorage before Puerto Montt was a bay on Isla de Mechuque. The place reminded us of times past. Even though the fishermen were speaking on cellular phones and had left the traditional fishing for working on fish farms, some farmers still used bullocks as draught animals.

Earlier the people in this area used to build small walls (picas) in bays that dry on the ebb tide. The fish swim over the picas at high-water and become trapped when the tide runs out. The

▲ *The Andes became more and more visible the further north we came. Sailing in the canals we only saw the nearest mountain...*

Often we referred to the different anchorages only by numbers from the book while speaking to other sailors.

We also used the pilot book "Chile, Arica Desert to Tierra del Fuego" by Andrew O'Grady in contribution with Maggy and Ian Staples. Together these two books gave us the information needed before and on the way in Patagonia.

In Valdivia we were lucky to meet the authors Maggy and Ian at their farm. In 1983 they left Great Brittan with their yacht Teokita. After cruising along the Chilean coast they fell in love with the diversity of the nature, landscape, culture and the warmth of the people. They sold the boat, bought the farm and settled in Chile. Their intention was to live happy hippie days on Fundo Chacaipulli. Today they have three employees responsible for the cows, sheep and horses. Ian is also running the South American Sailmail-station and provides the sailors in the area with communication via e-mail. The latest development on the farm is honey production. We enjoyed two interesting days at the farm together with Ian and Maggy, while we were waiting for favourable winds.

A small piece of Patagonia

Patagonia is enormous. The fjords, channels and bays are almost unlimited. It is necessary to sail these waters for a long time to really get to know the area. The distance we sailed from Puerto Williams to Valdivia, is comparable with the total distance of the Norwegian coastline. 650 litres of diesel, 600 litres fresh water and lots of dry- and tinned food were consumed.

We did most of the sailing during daylight due to partly unreliable charting and narrow channels with unreliable lights. Since the wind and the current mainly come from the north, we calculated to sail 25-50 nm a day. Some days we were lucky with the wind and the current setting our way, other days we hardly did any progress at all.

There are many safe and sheltered anchorages to choose between and it is not necessary to fight against the elements. Some days we hoisted the anchor and brought in all the lines, only to sail a few nautical miles before we again headed back to where we came from. A calm day at anchor is quite good when the weather is heavy.

In many of the anchorages we visited it was difficult to get ashore. The vegetation along parts of the Patagonian coast is very dense. Fighting our way through the bush to find a tree to attach the lines was sometimes nearly a day's work. Most of the anchorages get high score for safety and protection from the strong winds, and the surroundings are amazing, but unfortunately inaccessible in many places.



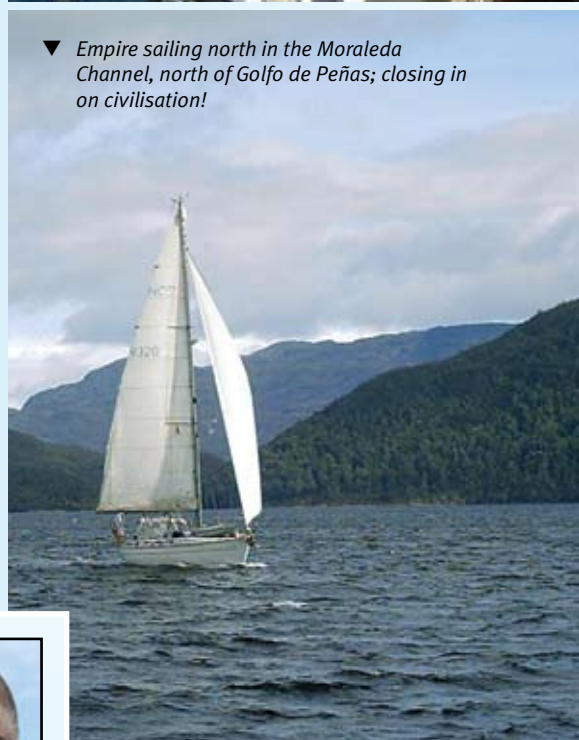
▲ The Albatross monument at Cape Horn

We had a long, humid and sometimes cold voyage on our way through Patagonia. But as soon as the sun was shining from a blue sky we would not dream of being any other place. The fabulous and dramatic nature and the great variety of animals in the sea and in the air will always be what we remember.

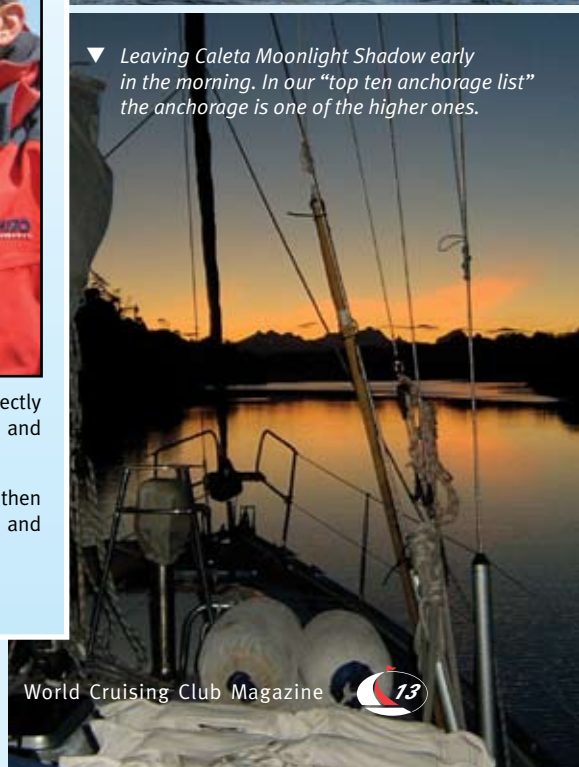
▼ Our modified sprayhood kept out the wind, rain, spray and mosquitoes!



▼ Empire sailing north in the Moraleda Channel, north of Golfo de Peñas; closing in on civilisation!



▼ Leaving Caleta Moonlight Shadow early in the morning. In our "top ten anchorage list" the anchorage is one of the higher ones.



About the Authors

Both yacht broker Eivind Bogerud and architect Heidi Våge had long dreamt of setting off around the world and when they met 4 years ago, their individual dreams became a shared plan. Eivind already lived onboard Empire, a 1999 Bavaria 42 AC, and Heidi moved onboard a short time later. Lives were decluttered, apartments and cars sold, and the remaining belongings stowed in the lofts of understanding parents.

In July 2005 the couple left Oslo with a plan to go sailing for the next five years and a flexible attitude to where their plan might take them. Having sailed across the North Sea and south along the European coast to the Canaries, they then crossed the Atlantic as part of ARC 2005. Since then they have cruising the southern Caribbean before heading directly to the islands of Fernando de Noronha in Brazil, and south along the east coast of Brazil and Argentina into Patagonia.

After Chile the Pacific and Indian Oceans beckon before they hope to cross to South Africa, then over the South Atlantic and back into the northern hemisphere, going home via Greenland and Spitsbergen - unless of course the winds and waves take them in a different direction.

Heidi & Eivind - www.sailboat.no/empire

