

*Gonsalo Costa Hoewel dwarfed by a fortress of blue ice deep in the south of Argentina. The Heading South crew certainly paid their dues to score these images but in the end the hard work was all worth it!*

Story & Photos JOHN CARTER

PART 2:

# ARGENTINA ICE AGE

Last issue JC and the Heading South movie project crew explored two incredible contrasting lakes in Argentina. Their mammoth road trip continues – this time far south to a spectacular land of glaciers.

*By the time we finally reached the stunning city of El Calefate in the very south of Argentina we had already clocked up 5000 km on the road, surely we had sacrificed enough already for some luck on our side for the last part of the challenge? Ahead of us we still had another 2700 km back to Buenos Aires, but for now we could concentrate on the final part of our mission, sailing in front of the daunting glaciers of southern Patagonia.*

# HEADING SOUTH

*Scenic locations don't come any more spectacular than this, Gonzalo heads back to base camp with mission accomplished.*



## ICE COLD STEALTH

The Patagonia ice field extends approximately 350 km across the Andes and feeds numerous glaciers with most famous of them all, the Perito Moreno glacier, located around 80km from El Calefate. Covering a total area of over 250 km and 30 km in length, this huge body of ice flows down into the Lake Argentino - with a 5-km wide face, averaging 70 m high above the water and a further 100 m below the surface. In others words, it's absolutely massive! Our host in Patagonia was local trekking guide, Billy Zabellos, who knew the area like the back of his hand and promised us that he could get us close enough to the southern glacier face to complete our objective. The only other person known to have sailed at the Moreno Glacier is an Austrian pioneer, Thomas Miklautsch who has a famous clip on YouTube where is he was almost killed by ice caving from the face of the glacier. Now it was our turn to try and get as close as possible. Not easy in a national park where, strictly speaking, any water sports are forbidden. We would have to try and somehow sail up the lake below the radar, stay safe and hopefully score our video and photographs. I knew right from the start this was never going to be easy, but now all the planning and hard work organizing this expedition depended on whether we could pull this mission off!



*The Perito Moreno Glacier, one of the natural wonders of the world!*

## WONDERFUL WILDERNESS

Fortunately for us, Billy runs an Eco Camp in a remote farm on the undeveloped shore of Lake Argentino. Aside from eagles, wild cows and the odd puma, this place is wild and untouched by any other humans, so for a base camp it was pretty much perfect. Driving out of El Calefate we hit a dusty trail and an hour and a half later, after passing through some spectacular rugged scenery, we arrived at the Eco Camp. Now, if you ever want to escape from the world, in a place that's absolutely pristine and unspoiled, with what must be one the best views on the planet, then this is the place for you! A short walk across the grass from our camping domes and boom! Suddenly we were gazing out across the milky waters of the lake straight towards the southern face of the Moreno Glacier, with its sheer wall of ice shimmering in the sun. Seeing pictures of this natural wonder is one thing, but when you actually witness first-hand the enormous white ice field and its massive jagged wall hitting the lake, it's truly awesome. From our camp 12 km away you could already feel the power and beauty of the Glacier. Now we were all really itching to get up close and experience this phenomenon as close as we could push it.

According to the forecast, the only real wind on the horizon was for the very following morning after we arrived in camp with a solid twenty knots predicted in the afternoon fading to six to nine knots for our remaining days.

# HEADING SOUTH



Marco Lang working his way 12km upwind towards the glacier.



Camping under the stars.



Taking no chances Marco Lang suits up in his ION dry suit ready for the icy cold water in front of the glacier.



Chunks of ice the size of houses explode into the lake as the glacier advances forward.

It looked like we only had one shot at it and we would need to be ready and prepared.

Camping under the stars in the domes was a sheer pleasure and it was refreshing to be in an environment without electricity, internet or computers. We were out in raw nature, watching eagles fly overhead in the day, witnessing wild cattle and horses grazing in the pastures and could even hear the growls of Pumas as they hunted at night. Come the morning the wind was already pretty strong and we set about organizing a small RIB, fuel and preparing the rigs. Living in solitude did have a few disadvantages as poor Gonzalo had to make a 3-hr round trip back to town just to get fuel for the boat - and then help launch it another half hour drive away!

## UPWIND STRUGGLE

By the time we were ready it was late afternoon and finally Gonzalo and Marco launched into the lake - both on 8.6s - and headed for the long slog over 12 km upwind. Meanwhile myself, Stefan, Motz and Billy loaded into the tiny rib and started punching into the chop with the wind blowing straight in our faces. An hour of hard graft later, after dropping Stefan on the land, we were almost there, hugging the coastline to keep clear of the worst chop.

By this time it was blowing easily 30 knots and Gonzalo and Marco had flown ahead of us and were already close to the glacier.

Finally we were almost there with just one headland to clear before we came in sight of the ice. Billy smiled and told us to get ready for the best view of our lives! As we popped out from behind the land, the glacier was right there about 1.5 km upwind, glowing ice blue despite the cloudy skies. I managed to grab a few frames before the atmosphere suddenly changed on the boat when Billy realized we were almost running on fumes. I couldn't believe it! We were so darn close, the wind was howling and we were almost out of petrol, meaning there was no way we could go any closer. Unaware of our plight Gonzalo and Marco were sailing closer and closer to the ice blue wall while we drifted back down the lake in a bid to conserve fuel. I don't think I have ever felt so frustrated in my life as that moment. We had come so far, were so close, everything was in place and there we were drifting away. Half an hour later Gonzalo and Marco blasted back down the lake now fully maxed out as the gusts hit 40 knots! They had no idea why we were drifting back towards camp and that our morale was totally deflated. Regardless of the filming they were totally stoked to have managed to sail so close to the incredible south face of the Moreno glacier.

# HEADING SOUTH

This was probably one of the most amazing windsurfing sessions these guys had ever experienced and despite our failure, at least we knew now that this mission was possible if the wind Gods would shine down on us again. That evening in the camp, our spirits were pretty down. The boat had used double the fuel we'd anticipated with four of us on board motoring into the wind and waves. Billy was confident it would be clearer weather the following days and just as windy, but I must admit I was almost resigned to the fact that we had blown our one shot at the scoring the goal we had travelled so far to achieve. I would have to say, I was pretty much at rock bottom!

## SECOND CHANCE

The next morning we woke up early to crystal clear skies and twenty knots. Maybe our luck had changed? Billy seemed un-phased, as if this was just a normal day on the Lake. Apparently the westerly airflow of the Pacific loses its humidity over the Andes and then accelerates and dries on reaching Patagonia. Forget Windguru in this place, the weather makes its own rules and the power of this narrow pass through the mountains casts huge influences over the local strength of the breeze. The first light in the morning looked amazing as the sun cast its rays on the ice white face of the Moreno glacier. One thing I was starting to realize, was that this huge chunk of ice has many different moods, colours and appearances and, whatever the weather, it has its own special glow as it reflects the light. Once again, poor Gonzalo had to drive the 3-hr trip off-road to buy double rations of fuel and hopefully today was going to be our day. By 1 p.m. we were ready to roll and headed upwind once again for the arduous journey back. Today we had plenty of fuel on board and decided to be much bolder and just go for it. This time we dropped Stefan much closer to the ice face and continued boldly forward in the boat right up less than 500 m from the face. Close up, the spikey iced wall is even more impressive than from a distance, almost like something straight out of Lord of the Rings. Strangely enough, despite the terrible forecast, the wind was even stronger today with both Gonzalo and Marco opting to take 7.0s for the massive slog back upwind. Gonzalo was first to reach the glacier and all of a sudden we were right there scoring the shots we'd been hoping for, without another soul in sight. Marco wasn't far behind and now we had both sailors cruising up and down right in front of this utterly amazing backdrop. Morale was definitely back on the up now, that was for sure!

*Marco Lang gives the tourists some surprise entertainment as he cruises in front of the glacier.*



**" ASIDE FROM EAGLES, WILD COWS AND THE ODD PUMA, THIS PLACE IS WILD AND UNTOUCHED "**



*Up close to the glacier you can hear the whole thing creaking and grinding from deep inside, Gonzalo blasts past some huge cracks in the ice while checking out this incredible back drop.*

*The Heading South crew ice trekking on the Moreno Glacier.*



*Marco Lang cruising in Patagonia*

We stayed for close to an hour at the south face of the glacier before deciding not to push our luck any further. We also had the slight problem that Billy had forgotten the bung for the boat and by the time we were ready to leave it was almost full of water, which was pretty precarious to say the least. By 6 p.m. we were home and dry back at the camp, spirits back up after scoring the session without any hassle. That night under clear skies we feasted on grilled steak, fresh salad and a few icy Quilmes beers to wash it all down. Ideally I would've loved to have gone back and tried to score more shots over the next days, but we all knew that the smart move for now was not to push our luck. Maybe the guys in the park had turned a blind eye and we didn't want to blow our cover and possibly upset the authorities.

## TREK OF A LIFETIME

We decided to play tourist instead, pay our money and take the classical tour of the Moreno glacier with a boat ride and an ice trekking tour as our final experience.

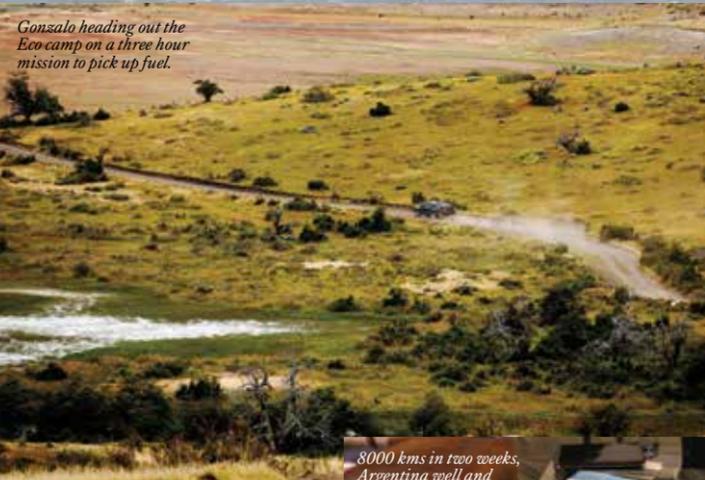
The view from the park is easily the superior vantage point and personally it would be no problem to sit on the gazing balconies for days on end, watching and listening to this huge beast, creak and groan as the ice inches its way into the azure lake. The highlight of the day was the ice trekking, where we were guided up the side of the glacier and over onto the ice wearing crampons to scale the jagged peaks. The colours, the sounds, the raw beauty and the weird feeling of walking on top of the glacier made for one special, unforgettable experience. After the tour we had half an hour or so sitting on some rocks right next to the southern face of Perito Moreno and we were lucky enough to witness two huge chunks of ice, both the size of houses, crash into the water sending metre-high waves way out into the lake. Back in El Calefate we had one final Argentinian Lomo steak meal, naturally supplemented with more icy cold beers. This was to be our last proper dinner before making the 2700 km trek back to Buenos Aires over the next two days.

# HEADING SOUTH

*The ice is so compacted the glacier absorbs all the colours of the spectrum except blue, hence the surreal icy turquoise appearance the face.*



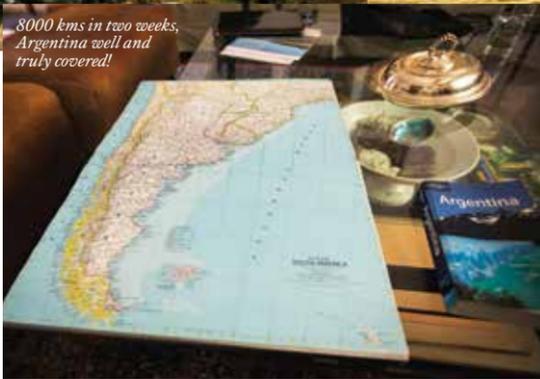
*Gonzalo heading out the Eco camp on a three hour mission to pick up fuel.*



*Marco and Gonzalo powered up on their 8.6m sails as they blitz across the lake.*



*8000 kms in two weeks, Argentina well and truly covered!*



I must admit the thought of the journey all the way up the coast of Argentina was not something I was relishing but at least we were returning to the capital with our mission accomplished rather than a failure, which could have been devastating. We managed to grab one night's sleep, plus a pleasant morning on the beach in Puerto Madryn before the final 1200 km charge back to the city. Gonzalo dropped me at the airport on my final day only for me to find my flight was delayed for fourteen hours as I watched his van drive away up the highway. Snow in Frankfurt had been the cause of the disruption and the travel chaos eventually cost me two whole days as I slowly made my way back home.

So there it was, almost 8000 km driving around this amazing country, covering three stunning lakes all with their own unique surroundings. The road trip was tough but we were lucky enough to see the whole country, through the flat farmlands out-

side Buenos Aires, over the arid dessert surrounding Cuesta Del Viento, across the alpine-like mountains of Bariloche and finishing at the glorious glaciers right down in southern Patagonia. Now I'm much more used to lengthy trips like this hunting down wind and special waves, but for me chasing down the glaciers was just as rewarding and an equally satisfying experience. All in all there was a tonne of driving, days on planes and countless hours waiting at airports which all made for some pretty hard-core travelling, but if you ask me whether it was all worth it, the answer would definitely be yes. They say that once you've tasted the berry that El Calefate is named after, you're almost guaranteed to return. I'm not sure if I sampled any of the berries during my stay but one thing is for sure, there is plenty more exploring to do down in Patagonia and one day for sure I will return for another taster! **JC**

**Thanks to:** Gonzalo Costa Hoevel, Rodrigo Costa Hoevel, Marco Lang, Stefan Csaky, Matthias Zimmermann, Fabersoft ([fabersoft.it](http://fabersoft.it)), Billy Zeballos ([nyca-adventure.com](http://nyca-adventure.com)).