

Argentina and Patagonia, outline.

Argentina An outline of the country

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The first europeans to set eyes on Argentina, who discovered the Rio de la Plata -where Buenos Aires is located - and who navigated the coast of Patagonia, were Nuño Manuel and Cristóbal de Haro, sent on a clandestine portuguese expedition in 1514.

Spain, sent Juan Díaz de Solís in 1516 to assert their territorial claims.

Historia de la Nación Argentina - Ricardo Levene - Vol.II 2nd Ed. 1939

What is Argentina?

Argentina is an inverted and tapering triangle, embracing the major portion of South America's temperate zone. The base of this triangle lies at Argentina's northern boundary (with Bolivia and Paraguay), it is nearly 1,600 km (1,000 mi.) long East to West. To the south, Cape Horn and the eastern half of the island of Tierra del Fuego forms the apex of the triangle, only 1,000 km (650 mi.) from the Antarctic. Between these two extremes, is Argentina, stretching 3,700 km (2,300 mi.) from North to South, nearly thirty three degrees of latitude, lying almost entirely within the temperate belt.

Argentina thus shares with Australia the major portion of the southern hemisphere's temperate zone.

Argentina in the world.

Only 40million people live in this country which covers an extension of over 2.7 million square km. (1 million sq. Miles) - more than eleven times larger than the U.K., five time larger than France, four times the size of Texas- spanning from the sub-Antarctic tundra in the south to the subtropical jungles in the north east and the towering desertic Andean peaks and plateaus in the north west. It is the eighth largest country in the world but comprises less than 0.6% of its total population.

Although temperate climate is predominant, Argentina offers a wide variety of climes : The barrier of the Andes, with a mean altitude of 4,000 mts. (12,000 ft.), infringes deeply on the northwestern provinces, defining the border with Bolivia and northern Chile. This arid northwestern plateau drops sharply towards the east, giving way to the Chaco flatlands. The scrub forests, flood plains and subtropical swamps of the Chaco region create another boundary to the north, with Paraguay. Northern Argentina is at the same distance from the Equator as the Bahamas.

To the east lies the Rio de la Plata river basin. The Paraná river, flowing from the Mato Grosso swamps in Brazil

and the Uruguay river, meet at the River Plate by Buenos Aires and define the eastern frontiers with Brazil and Uruguay. This is a well watered region with prairies and grasslands where a large share of Argentine agricultural output is generated.

The western limit with Chile is marked by the Andes, which here attain the highest altitude in the Americas and the western hemisphere: Mount Aconcagua with 6,995 mts. (22,935 ft.). Argentina's Andes has 36 mountains of more than 6,000 meters height. This area is arid, as the Andes block the rain bearing winds from the Pacific Ocean.

In the center of the country, between these natural boundaries (and the Patagonia to the south) lies a vast plain sloping gently towards the east, the Pampas, covering 600,000 sq. km (235 thousand sq. mi.). This is the main economic area of the country, concentrating 70% of its population and 85% of its industrial output. It is also Argentina's principal agricultural region.

On the Pampa's eastern rim, by the River Plate, is Buenos Aires, Argentina's capital. Twelve million people, over one third of the Argentine population cluster in the Greater Buenos Aires metropolitan area, the economic core of the nation.

Argentina has a large urban population : 85% of its people live in towns and cities, while the interior of the country is sparsely populated (60% of the population lives within 800 km. (500 mi.) of Buenos Aires). The overall population density is only 11 inhabitants per sq. km - 28/sq. mi. (equivalent to Germany having a population of only 3.9 million!)

Patagonia, Origin of the word The Name.

Patagonia. Named by Magellan, in 1520 when his fleet (which was the first to sail round the world) stopped over at San Julian Bay on the Patagonian Atlantic coast to spend the winter.

The word comes from the name that they gave the native Tehuelches: PATAGONES. Which means: People with Big feet .

The word derives from PATACHI [1] due to the enormous size of their feet. Which probably seemed larger than they actually were, due to the fur boots that they wore.

The native Tehuelche Indians seemed gigantic to the small sized sixteenth century Europeans. Pigafetta, who sailed with Magellan, described one of them as:

"the giant... a man of gigantic figure appeared... their women are not as big as the men... "

Pigafetta, regarding their height, also says that he could only reach up to the Indian's waist.

In the Bariloche and Nahuel Huapi area, the native Americans were the Araucano also known as Mapuche.

Size and Population Enormous & empty. A Vast and Empty land.

Patagonia is the southern part of Argentina, it covers over 787 thousand sq. km, with a population of only 1.48 Million people.

That is equal to the combined surface of: Germany, Belgium, Denmark, Netherlands, Switzerland, Luxemburg, Austria, Hungary, Czech Republic and Slovenia (but these European countries have nearly 145 Million inhabitants). Patagonia has 100 times less people crowding it.

The population density in Patagonia is only 1,88 people per sq. km (4.8/sq. mi.).

The Andean Patagonia, is the forested mountain area. It covers a slightly larger area than New Zealand, and only has a population of 272 thousand people, while New Zealand has 3,5 million inhabitants.

Nepal, half the size of Andean Patagonia, has a population that is 78 times larger! (more people mean more pollution).

Less than 1 person per sq. km lives in Argentina's Andean Patagonia.

Argentina's Patagonian Region is much less populated than Chile's: Southern Chile has a total population of 3.69 Million people packed into 377 thousand sq. km., with a population density of 9.8 people per sq. km.

Geography Patagonia's wild nature .

Patagonia forms the southern tip of Argentina, from a latitude of 38° south (its northern limit is the Colorado river) to Cape Horn (55° south).

Its eastern boundary is formed by the Atlantic Ocean. Its western limit is the Andes, which here, lose height (to a mean altitude of less than 2,000 meters) and are cut from east to west by valleys and lakes carved out by glaciers during the last ice age 10,000 years ago. Most of the area is at an altitude above 500 meters.

The Patagonia has two distinct regions:

1. Andean Patagonia.

With deep forests of birches, cypress and many other local trees

[see below: Biology] that thrive in the rain carried by the humid winds from the Pacific Ocean which is less than 160 km (100 mi.) away towards the west. This region is very similar to other cold-temperate forests of the world (Canada, Alaska, Scandinavia, New Zealand). The winter snows and year-round rains drain from the mountains into the lakes and then either to the Atlantic or Pacific oceans.

2. Patagonian steppe.

Further to the east, leaving the mountains, rainfall decreases rapidly towards the coast of the Atlantic Ocean, defining the cold and arid Patagonian steppe.

Charles Darwin, who visited the area in 1833 said:

"..Here and there scattered tufts of brown wiry grass are supported, and, still more rarely, some low thorny bushes... "[2]

The population here, other than at the scattered sheep farms and at the oil and natural gas fields, lives on the coast, at the provincial capitals and ports.

Biology. The Andean Forests.

Plants

The rainy western border of the Andean Patagonia (3 to 4 meters of rainfall per year) forms the Valdivian Jungle,

dense and humid forests.

Here, from 750 to 950 meters altitude grows the Coihue, the ñare, the Alerce, the Colihue, the Fucsia, Laurels, Maniu, Canelo, Arrayan.

Above 950 meters, the Lenga and Ñire prevail.

Further east, as rainfall drops off, grow the Cypress, Retama and Radal.

Then, in the steppe, small dry bushes such as Neneo, Calafate, Corion.

Above 1600 meters, the Alpine [actually: Andean] High Altitude Vegetation is dominant: shrubs and grasses with colorful flowers in summer, and some reeds in the peat bogs (called Mallin).

Animals.

Mammals :

Huemul, (*Hippocamelus bisulcus*) is a local deer which lives in the high mountain valleys, coming down in winter to the lower forests.

Pudú (*Pudu pudu*) the smallest deer in the world, only 30 to 50 cm high. It is on the endangered species list, and Argentina's National Park Service breeds them in the protected Victoria Island, on Nahuel Huapi Lake.

Guanaco, a relative of the Llamas, lives in the steppe.

Gray (*Dusicyon griseus*) and Red Foxes, (*Dusicyon culpaeus* - which can grow to be over 1 meter long).

Puma (*Felis concolor*). Covers all Argentina, and is not too abundant in the Nahuel Huapi area. Can grow to a length of 1.5 meters.

Huiña cat (*Felis guigna*) a spotted wild cat, which lives exclusively in the subantarctic forests of Argentina and Chile.

Llaca (*Dromiciops australis*), a marsupial

Coipo (*Myocastor coipus*), is an aquatic rodent, known as false otter.

Huillín (*Lutra provocax*) a local otter.

And many others such as Mara or patagonian hare, Racoons, Chinchillon, etc.

Birds :

The lakes attract birds such as the Cormorant (*Phalacrocorax atriceps*), the Sea Gull (*Larus dominicanus*) and the Huala .

In the forests, lives the Red Headed Woodpecker (*Campephilus magellanicus*), which is the largest woodpecker in South America.

Other birds are the Patagonic Hummingbird (*Sephanoides galeritus*), the Chucao, Zorzal Patagonico and the Garza Bruja.

The high Andes are the domain of the Condor (*Vultur gryphus*), a large bird, with a wingspan of 2.75 meters and a length of 1 to 1.5 meters. This is one of the largest flying birds in the world. It preys on smaller birds, ñandú (American ostrich), and rodents.

Amphibians:

Cow frog (*Rhinoderma Darwini*) or Sapito Vaquero is a natural curiosity, this frog is unique to the Nahuel Huapi Park. The female lays her eggs in the ground and the male swallows them. When they molt into mature frogs, it

regurgitates them. A similar species existed in Australia (both continents were once joined as "Gondwana"), but is apparently extinct.

We will update this page with more information on geology and the original american natives.

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