



Patagonia



EXTR3ME COLD SWIM CHALLENGE

STRAIT OF MAGELLAN
BEAGLE CHANNEL
CAPE HORN





FROM **CAPE POINT** TO
CAPE HORN

an extreme swimming odyssey - **FEBRUARY 2011**

Cape Point

Here we go again -- and this time it's again and again. It's time to explore another continent, experience another wild place and attempt new "ice" swims. After a few years dreaming about South America, lots of research by Andrew Chin, and the confidence we've built from previous ice swims, five of us are off to South America. We're heading from Cape Point to Cape Horn -- or from 34° S to 55°S, approximately 2200km further south of Cape Town. Few have attempted to swim the **Beagle Channel** or the **Strait of Magellan**, and of the handfuls that have attempted these, nobody has ever done them in the same year. Then finally, the ultimate South American challenge to swim around **Cape Horn** as never been attempted before. There's a good reason for this, as I'll explain later...

THE TEAM



From left: Ryan Stamrood (37), Kieron Palframan (35), Toks Viviers (47), Ram Barkai (53), and Andrew Chin (41)

We are the same, insane team that swam in Alaska and Alcatraz in 2009.

In Alaska we were joined by Lelane Rossouw, who added real quality to the motley crew, and Joel Barnette who managed to drop the team standards by a few notches ☺.

All five are accomplished cold, open water swimmers and have all completed at least one “ice” swim (a mile at sub 5°C). This entitles them to become members of the [International Ice Swimming Association](#), founded and chaired by Ram Barkai.



Ram also holds a [Guinness World Record](#) for the furthest most south swim – 1km in an Antarctic lake. They are all regular adventure swimming companions, having completed the 13.3km Pennock Island race in 2009 at about 12°C. Ryan and Kieron are accomplished English channel swimmers and both crossed Robben Island channel many times.

We all train together frequently without wearing swimming caps in order to acclimatise in the chilly Atlantic off Cape Town, where the water sometimes plummets to 9°C. They are all regular participants in the annual extreme 7.5km [Cadiz Freedom Swim](#) between world famous Robben Island and the mainland, Cape Town, South Africa. The temperature during this race can vary between 10°C and 14°C.

Inspired by [Lynne Cox's book, "Swimming to Antarctica"](#), Ram started this icy madness (or movement as it's turning out to be) by following Lynne to Antarctica and swimming 1km at 70S (**Guinness World Record for the most Southerly swim**) at 1°C. Then, Ram dragged Andrew (literally) to Zurich during one of Europe's coldest winters to swim in icy **Lake Zurich**. Ryan, Toks and Kieron joined them in **Alaska** which wasn't nearly as cold but the distance was much longer -- 13.2km around **Pennock Island** by the town of **Ketchikan**. By then, the team was hooked on cold water, or rather, on “ice” swimming. The reality, however, was significantly difficult and often excruciatingly painful. In July 2010 we all participated in the **Speedo Ice Swim Africa** at 4°C in a small dam in **Fraserburg**, Northern Cape, South Africa.

Andrew had been dreaming about the **Beagle Channel** since reading Lynne's book. As far as Ram was concerned, it was a step beyond even Antarctica and not yet on his “to-do” list. However, the mile swim in Fraserburg at 4°C was a great “ice breaker” for Toks, Kieron and Ryan, so, with a little persuasion and a few pensive drinking sessions the decision was taken: We were off to South America! **The question was, which swim?**

THE DREAM

As always, dreams start through inspiration or through aims to achieve the “impossible”; or from others taking on the impossible. The cost and logistics to get there are too immense to travel all the way for one swim. So, after further discussion we decided to do all three swims. We have, however, since noted that everyone who has swum Beagle or Magellan have done it in different years. Most spent weeks preparing and training for just one of these swims. Now, a bunch of mad South African extreme swimmers are attempting all three over a just a few weeks -- the pinnacle of which is **Cape Horn** where hardened sailors of times-gone-by received gold earrings for successfully rounding this treacherous point. **The mind boggles about what swimmers could get for successfully rounding the horn!**

FOR THE RECORD: We are all well aware that we may be attempting too much. And, we'll be over the moon if we successfully complete just one of these swims with the team intact. These swims are in water temperatures between 3°C to 6°C and the shortest one – Beagle -- is around 2km, which is 400m longer than the Speedo Ice Swim Africa which took a serious toll on some of us. Ram is the only one among us who has swum over 2km (2.2km in Lake Zurich) in similar conditions and admitted afterwards that he actually did get cold! To our (we hope) advantage, is the fact that it's the end of the summer in Patagonia (it's not accessible in winter) and air temperatures can reach 10°C with sunny skies.

THE AREA PATAGONIA - THE SOUTHERN TIP OF SOUTH AMERICA

Patagonia is a geographic region in the southernmost portion of South America. It is located in Argentina and Chile, integrating the southernmost section of the Andes mountains to the south-west towards the Pacific Ocean and from the east of the cordillera (coastal mountains) to the valleys it follows south through the Colorado River towards Carmen de Patagones on the Atlantic Ocean. To the west, it includes the territory of Valdivia through to the Tierra del Fuego archipelago.



The name **Patagonia** comes from the word **patagón** used by Magellan in 1520 to describe the native people that his expedition thought to be giants. It is now believed the Patagons were actually Tehuelches with an average height of 180 cm compared to the 155 cm average for Spaniards of the time.

Tierra del Fuego (Spanish for "Land of Fire") is an archipelago off the southernmost tip of the South American mainland, across the Strait of Magellan. The archipelago consists of a main island, Isla Grande de Tierra del Fuego, divided between Chile and Argentina with an area of 48,100 km² (18,572 sq mi), and a group of smaller islands including Cape Horn. Initially discovered by Ferdinand Magellan's expedition in 1520, the islands were not settled on by people of European descent until the second half of the 19th century, at the height of the sheep farming and gold rush booms. Today's economic activity in the northern part of Tierra del Fuego is dominated by petroleum extraction while in the south, tourism, manufacturing and Antarctic logistics are important.

REGION	AREA	POPULATION	DENSITY
Argentina	2.73 million km ²	41 million	15.0 per km ²
Chile	0.74 million km ²	16,6 million	22.3 per km ²
Patagonia	1.00 million km ²	2 million	1.9 per km ²

Due to its rugged and remote terrain, Patagonia is not a very popular place to live for Chilean or Argentineans. Tierra del Fuego is even more rural and barren but has its own raw beauty and personality.

PHYSICAL GEOGRAPHY

Argentine Patagonia is for the most part a region of steppe-like plains, rising in a succession of 13 abrupt terraces about 100 metres (330 ft) at a time and covered with an enormous bed of shingle, almost bare of vegetation. In the hollows of the plains are ponds or lakes of brackish and fresh water. Towards the Andes, the shingle gives way to porphyry, granite, and basalt lavas. Animal life becomes more abundant and vegetation more luxuriant, acquiring the characteristics of the flora of the western coast, and consisting principally of southern beech and conifers. The high rainfall against the western Andes (aka Wet Andes), and the low sea surface temperatures offshore, give rise to cold and humid air masses, contributing to the ice-fields and glaciers -- the largest ice-fields in the southern hemisphere outside of Antarctica.

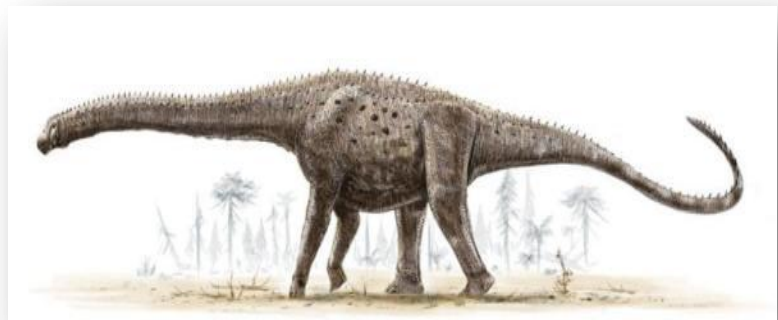


GEOLOGY

The geological constitution is in accordance with the orographic physiognomy. The Tertiary plateau, flat on the east, gradually rising on the west, shows upper cretaceous caps at its base. First come lower cretaceous hills raised by granite and dioritic rocks, undoubtedly of Tertiary origin, as in some cases these rocks have broken across the Tertiary beds, rich in mammal remains; then follow on the west, metamorphic schists of uncertain age; then quartzites appear, resting directly on the primitive granite and gneiss which form the axis of the Cordillera. Porphyritic rocks occur between the schists and the quartzites.

The Upper Cretaceous and Tertiary deposits have revealed a most interesting vertebrate fauna. This, together with the discovery of the perfect cranium of a chelonian of the genus *Myolania*, which may be said to be almost identical with *Myolania oweni* of the Pleistocene age in Queensland, forms an evident proof of the connection between the Australian and South American continents.

The Patagonian *Myolania* belongs to the Upper Chalk, having been found associated with remains of Dinosauria. One such dinosaur to be found in Patagonia is **Argentinosaurus** which may be the largest of all dinosaurs. Other specimens of the interesting fauna of Patagonia, belonging to the Middle Tertiary, are the gigantic wingless birds, exceeding in size any hitherto known, and the singular mammal **Pyrotherium**, also of very large dimensions.



In the Tertiary marine formation, a considerable number of cetaceans have been discovered.

Glaciers occupy the valleys of the main chain and some of the lateral ridges of the Andean Cordillera. In general, these glaciers flow into lakes towards the East and into Pacific Ocean fjords towards the West.

Some lakes located to the east of the glaciated Cordillera include: General Carrera Lake, Cochrane/Pueyrredón Lake, O'Higgins/San Martín Lake, Lake Viedma, Argentino Lake and many other smaller lakes. In turn, some of these lakes, as is the case with the first three mentioned, drain into the Pacific Ocean through short mountainous rivers, while others, the latter two lakes flow to the Atlantic Ocean through longer and slower moving rivers. These glacial lakes are often strewn with icebergs.



In Patagonia, an immense ice-sheet extended to the east of the present Atlantic coast at the close of the Tertiary epoch, while, during more recent glaciation, the terminal moraines have generally stopped, 30 miles (50 km) in the north and 50 miles (80 km) in the south, east of the summit of the Cordillera.

**In so far as its main characteristics are concerned,
Patagonia seems to be a portion of the Antarctic continent,**

the permanence of which dates from very recent times, as is evidenced by the apparent recent emergence of the islets around Chiloé, and by the general character of the pampean formation. Some of the promontories of Chiloé are still called huapi, the Araucanian equivalent for "islands"; and this may perhaps be accepted as perpetuating the recollection of the time when they actually were islands. They are composed of caps of shingle, with great, more or less rounded boulders, sand and volcanic ashes, precisely of the same form as occurs on the Patagonian plateau.



THE SWIMS

The order of the swims may vary subject to logistics.

We are taken care of by History Professor Claudia Molkembuhr who looks after mad swimmers in her spare time. We'll be using local transport and staying in small lodges or with local families – it's rustic but we've heard the hospitality is great which is what really counts.

1. Strait of Magellan

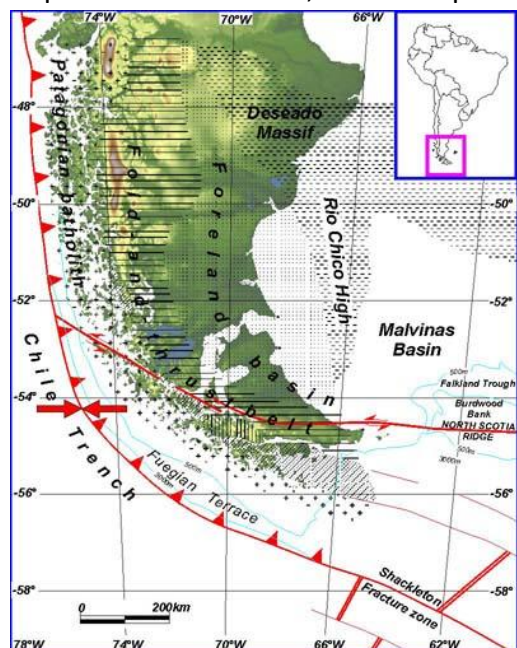
Ferdinand Magellan (original name, in Portuguese, Fernão de Magalhães), a Portuguese sailor in service to the Spanish King, became the first European to navigate the strait in 1520 during his global circumnavigation voyage.

Because Magellan's ships entered it on November 1, All Saints' Day, it was originally named Estrecho de Todos los Santos (Strait of All Saints). Later, the Spanish king changed the name to Estrecho de Magallanes in honour of Magellan.



Until the Panama Canal opened in 1914, the Strait of Magellan was the main route for steam ships traveling from the Atlantic Ocean to the Pacific. It

was often considered the only safe way to move between the Atlantic and Pacific Oceans, as the Drake Passage separating Cape Horn from Antarctica is notorious for turbulent and unpredictable weather, and is frequented by icebergs and sea ice. Ships in the strait,



protected by Tierra del Fuego to the south and the bulk of South America to the north, crossed with relative ease. The swim should start from a village in Chile called **Bahia Azul**. The distance to the other

side is around **4.5km** as the crow flies. There is a very strong tide, which, at 10 knots/h, could push us in any direction. Timing will be crucial. We

should also watch for a special phenomenon called a **williwaw** or **rachos**. In meteorology, a **williwaw** is a sudden blast of wind descending from a

mountainous coast to the sea. The word was earliest used by British seamen in the 19th century. The usage appears for winds found in the Strait of

Magellan, the Aleutian Islands and the coastal fjords of the Alaskan Panhandle, where the terms

outflow wind and Squamish wind are also used for the same phenomenon.

In the well-known Discovery channel "*Deadliest Catch*" episode "Finish Line", the ship Aleutian Ballad is struck by a **williwaw**, which knocks her on her side.

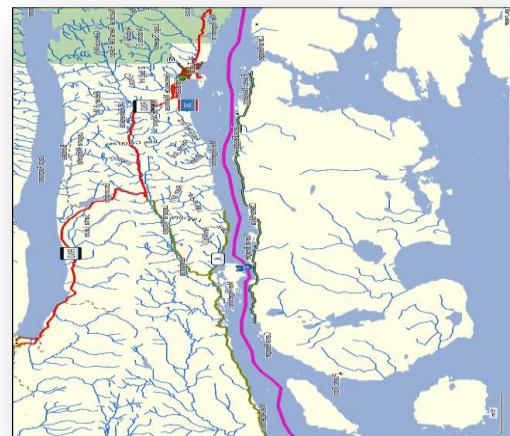
Apparently the **williwaw** can appear in 10min and reach 80m/h. We intend to miss both currents and wind through local knowledge and mostly, sheer luck. Water temperature can vary from 4°C (an ice swim is sub 5) to 8°C (just a cold swim). At 8°C, if conditions are good, we should finish in between 1:30 to 2 hours. Anything below 8°C will be a real test. We'll need to be very careful at these temperatures, especially with 5 swimmers participating at the same time.

Strait of Magellan Swim Route



2. The Beagle Channel

The Beagle Channel is a strait separating the islands of the Tierra del Fuego Archipelago, in extreme southern South America. It separates Isla Grande de Tierra del Fuego from the islands Nueva, Picton, Navarino, Hoste, Londonderry, Stewart Islands and other smaller islands to the south. Its eastern portion is part of the border between Chile and Argentina, but the western part is completely within Chile. The west end is the Darwin Sound and the east end is Nueva Island.



The channel was named after the ship HMS Beagle during its first hydrographic survey of the coasts of the southern part of South America, which lasted, from 1826 to 1830. During that expedition, under the overall command of the Australian Commander Phillip Parker King, the Beagle's captain Pringle Stokes committed suicide and was replaced by captain Robert FitzRoy.



The ship continued the survey in the second voyage of the Beagle under the command of captain FitzRoy who took Charles Darwin along as a gentleman's companion, giving him opportunities as an amateur naturalist. Darwin had his first sight of glaciers when they reached the channel on 29 January 1833 and wrote in his field notebook "many glaciers beryl blue most beautiful contrasted with snow".

Several small islands (Picton, Lennox and Nueva) up to Cape Horn were the subject of the long-running Beagle conflict between Chile and Argentina. Through a Treaty of Peace and Friendship of 1984 between Chile and Argentina, they are now part of Chile. From the 1950s to 1970s several incidents involving the Chilean and Argentine Navy occurred in the waters of the Beagle Channel. These include the 1958 Snipe incident, the 1967 Cruz del Sur incident and the shelling of Quidora the same year.

The Chilean navy will accompany us from the start to the middle of the channel where the water changes from Chile to Argentinean territory. From there, only a small zodiac will be available to take us to the other side and then back to the Chilean waters. Not very comforting when we expect the water to be around 4°C for an approximately 2km swim. However, all things equal, we should be able to complete this swim. Our main concern will be the conditions which can make



the swim less friendly, and a main concern will be our recovery from the earlier Magellan attempt. Some swimmers take up to three months to recover from an ice swim. We don't have that luxury so we'll have to be ice swim fit with a few days after Magellan. This is new territory and we'll once again be exploring new thresholds of pain, discomfort and mental ability.

3. Cape Horn

The last swim and certainly not the least is around Cape Horn. We have all swum around South Africa's Cape Point so it's a symbolic swim. Ram and Andrew were the first men to swim around Cape Point (**Lynne Cox** and **Carina Bruwer** beat us to it, but they're legendary swimmers, so we'll forgive them). Cape Point, although not the true or official most southerly point of Africa, does act as a partition between the Atlantic ocean and Indian Oceans. Text books claim the two oceans and the currents separating them part at Cape Agulhas. However, anyone who has swum the point a couple of times is aware of the extreme temperature swing (sometimes 4°C) within a few meters of crossing the point. This is characteristic of the meeting of the cold Benguela Current of the Atlantic Ocean and the Indian Ocean's warm Agulhas Current.

Cape Horn (**Dutch: Kaap Hoorn, Spanish: Cabo de Hornos**) is named after the city of Hoorn in the Netherlands. It's the most southerly point of South America and marks the northern boundary of the Drake Passage. For many years it was a major milestone on the clipper route, by which sailing ships carried trade around the world. However, the waters around the Cape are particularly hazardous, owing to strong winds, large waves, strong currents and icebergs. These dangers have made it a notoriously "sailors' graveyard".

The need for ships to round Cape Horn was greatly reduced by the opening of the Panama Canal in 1914. However, sailing around the Horn is widely regarded as one of the major challenges in yachting. Thus, a few recreational sailors continue to sail this route, sometimes as part of a circumnavigation of the globe, and almost all of these choosing routes through the channels to the north of the actual Cape (though many take a detour through the islands and anchor to wait for fair weather to actually visit Horn Island or even sail around it to replicate a rounding of this historic point).

Several prominent ocean yacht races, notably the Volvo Ocean Race, the VELUX 5 Oceans and the Vendée Globe, sail around the world via the Horn, and speed records for round-the-world sailing are recognized for following this route.



Cape Horn is located at **55°58' 47"S**, **067°16' 18"W**, on Isla Hornos in the Hermite Islands group, at the southern end of the Tierra del Fuego archipelago.

The dividing line between the Atlantic and Pacific oceans runs along the meridian of Cape Horn, from Tierra del Fuego to the Southern Ocean. It is located in Cabo de Hornos National Park. The cape lies within Chilean territorial waters, and the Chilean Navy maintains a station on Hoorn Island, consisting of a residence, utility building, chapel, and lighthouse. A short distance from the main station is a memorial, including a large sculpture featuring the silhouette of an albatross in honour of the sailors who died while attempting to "round the Horn".

Almost nothing is known about any swimming attempt around Cape Horn. There must be some reason for that and nothing excites us more than exploring this reason. We'll be staying in a small place on the mainland and we plan to take a 110km small boat trip to the last island representing the Horn. We will mark the most Southerly point and dive in for a mile swim around it. The land is not very friendly or accessible.



Water temperature should be around 3°C so it should be a great ice swim. Again, we'll be making this attempt after two very hard cold swim attempts.

We have no idea how capable we will be physically or mentally. Any unsuccessful attempt will play havoc on our minds, and possibly leave the body in shock for a while. Nevertheless, here we go!

I'm sure we'll discover a few new things about the places, the people, the swims and about ourselves.

It will be an awesome experience and as to the ice swims challenges

It is all in the mind!

We depart on February 11, 2011.



Follow us on our Facebook page: ["Patagonia Extreme Cold Swim Challenge"](#)