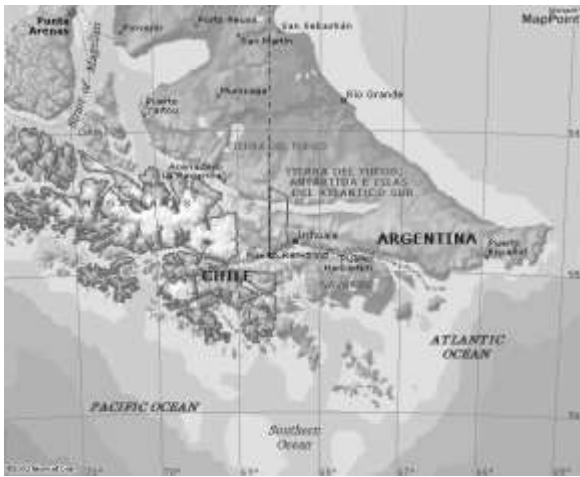




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DISCOVERING TIERRA DEL FUEGO



Tierra del Fuego is located at the southern tip of South America, beginning at approximately the 52nd parallel south. It is bordered by the Strait of Magellan to the north, the Beagle Channel to the south, the Atlantic Ocean to the east and the Pacific Ocean to the west. This giant island is shared by Chile and Argentina, to whom the western and eastern parts correspond, respectively.

The name of this great island comes from the sight that the first sailors saw when they were exploring its coasts. From their ships they could make out surprising, continuous fires, which were the hearths used by the native peoples to protect themselves from the southern cold. The

indigenous Onas and Yámanas hardly wore any clothing despite the harsh climate. Only the fires and their special metabolic adaptation (a body temperature one degree higher than ours) kept them warm. They even took lit hearths with them in their lenga-bark canoes, which they used to fish and hunt marine mammals.

MIGRATIONS

There are several theories that speak of the arrival of humans in America, the most recognized one being that of the Czech paleontologist Aleš Hrdlička (1869 - 1943). According to this theory, the humans who came to America originated in Mongolia, from which they entered America by way of an ice bridge over the Bering Strait during the last glacial period approximately 13,000 years ago. These people moved south using a land corridor between the Cordilleran Ice Sheet that began in the Aleutian Islands and ended in central Canada and the Laurentide Ice Sheet, which began in the Atlantic Ocean in northern North America, covered as far as the Newfoundland area, and then extended to the Great Lakes region of central Canada. Proof of this are remains found in Alaska, dated at approximately 13,000 years. One of the most solid pieces of evidence is the Clovis culture, remains of which were found in New Mexico in the United States. Today, most American archeologists are fervent defenders of a late entry to the continent by the Clovis and Folsom Indians, who correspond to the oldest cultures to first set foot on American soil. These archeologists believe that occupation occurred only some 11,500 years ago, based on dozens of Clovis points found throughout North America.

INDIGENOUS SETTLEMENT

The Yaghan (or Yámanas)

Historically speaking, the Yaghan have been known since 1624, but archeology has established that their ancestors began to live in the Beagle Channel region at least 6,500 years before the present. Their origins are still a mystery. In the 19th century, their estimated population was some 3,500 people, dispersed between the Beagle Channel and Cape Horn.



The Selk'nam (or Ona)

The Selk'nam were descendents of continental tribes and began to populate Tierra del Fuego Island 8,000 years ago. They were "discovered" by Magellan in 1515. They have been shown to have had a sporadic presence on the north shore of the Beagle Channel for at least the past 6,500 years.

Yaghan

THE PRECURSORS



Although the Beagle Channel was first named, described and mapped by English expeditions in 1826 and 1832 (see below), we have solid reasons to believe that at least a part of the channel was known earlier. For example, its outline was sketched on several maps from the 1590s. The famous James Cook, while looking for the continent of Antarctica, explored the southern part of the Tierra del Fuego archipelago on two occasions (1769 and 1774), but we are not certain that he saw the Beagle Channel in its entirety. Various names of places remain from his voyage (Cook Bay, Christmas Sound, etc.). Furthermore, it is highly probable that the sea lion

hunters that crossed these waters between the 18th and 19th centuries were familiar with the Beagle Channel, but they did not leave any documents in reference to it.

Ona - Selknam Family

Parker King and Fitz Roy

Between 1826 and 1830, the British Admiralty organized a hydrographic survey expedition in Patagonia. Under Commander Philip Parker King and Captains Robert Fitz Roy and Pringle Stokes, on board the *Adventure* and the *Beagle*, the enormous task of defining thousands of kilometers of coastline from Brazil to Valparaiso, including the Strait of Magellan, Cape Horn and the Beagle Channel, was carried out for the first time with surprising precision. This is how the latter became known to modern geography and how the Murray Channel (which separated Navarino Island from Hoste Island) was discovered, thus giving "birth" to Navarino Island in geographical terms. It was at the end of this trip that Fitz Roy took four Fuegian natives back to England: Fuegia Basket, York Minster, Boat Memory (who died during the journey) and Jemmy Button. Fitz Roy's aim was to attempt to "civilize" the natives, but this would have unsuspected consequences years later in the slaughter at Wulaia.

At the end of 1831, the *Beagle* set sail once more, this time alone, for the second survey campaign in Patagonia. Fitz Roy, accompanied by the young naturalist Charles Darwin, returned to Tierra del Fuego to refine the details of coastline, as well as to return the three Fuegian natives to their homeland after more than a year of "education" in England. After finishing its work in Tierra del Fuego, the *Beagle* continued northward, crossed the Pacific Ocean and returned to England in 1836, circumnavigating the globe in the space of five years. This long voyage allowed Darwin to gather an enormous amount of information that he used to publish his famous work *The Origin of Species* 23 years later in 1859.

The Romanche

In the context of an international program whose goal was to observe the passage of Venus from various points around the globe, the French government organized an important scientific expedition to Tierra del Fuego. Under Commander Luis Martial, and aboard the steamship Romanche, a land mission was established for one year (September 1882 – September 1883) in Orange Bay (Hoste Island, Hardy Peninsula, just a few kilometers north of False Cape Horn). Prefabricated houses and laboratories were set up to allow some of the scientists and crew to live on shore while the Romanche carried out hydrographic explorations in the Tierra del Fuego archipelago, the Strait of Magellan and the Falkland Islands. Thanks to this expedition, it was possible to map the parts of the Fuegian coastline that Fitz Roy had not been able to define in detail, particularly the area between the Beagle Channel and Cape Horn. Many names were given to places along the channel (Martial Mountains, Les Eclaireurs Island ...), Hoste Island (Dumas, Pasteur and Cloue Peninsulas...), and Wollaston Island, among many others.

The observations of the Yaghan natives are to this day one of the best sources of information about this people. The over 400 photographs taken constitute the first photographic record of Tierra del Fuego's landscapes and inhabitants. With respect to the expedition report published between 1885 and 1891 in nine thick volumes, its table of contents demonstrates the breadth of the work carried out: History of the voyage, Meteorology, Terrestrial Magnetism, Geology, Botany, Zoology (three volumes) and Anthropology. In addition, several expedition members later published numerous articles in their respective specialties.

MODERN SETTLEMENT

The Missionaries



Padre de Agostini 1938

The first attempt at evangelizing the Yaghan was made by Fitz Roy when he disembarked in Wulaia, Navarino Island, together with the young missionary Richard Matthews (January 1833). Fitz Roy's idea was to take advantage of the return of the three Fuegian natives "educated" in England to try to establish a bridge between the Yaghan and English civilizations. In the face of the Yaghan's aggressiveness, the experience failed after 10 days and Fitz Roy took Matthews back aboard.

In 1841, a retired official of the British Navy, Allen Gardiner, founded the Patagonian Missionary Society in London. After a failed attempt in the Strait of Magellan, Gardiner disembarked on Picton Island with six volunteers in December 1850. Since the first contact with the Yaghan was not entirely peaceful,

they took refuge in Aguirre Bay (on the south coast of Tierra del Fuego Island) where, one by one, they finally died of hunger.

In 1855, Gardiner's work was taken up again under the name of the South American Missionary Society, with the establishment of a mission in the Falklands (Malvinas) archipelago (Keppel Island). The missionaries sailed the waters of Tierra del Fuego in a schooner baptized Allen Gardiner, establishing contact with the Yaghan. This is how they were able to find Jemmy Button, the same man who had been in England with Fitz Roy years earlier. The missionaries' strategy consisted of convincing Yaghan families to go for stays in the Falklands (Malvinas) to become acquainted with the virtues of English civilization and the Anglican religion before returning them to their homelands, thus establishing a sort of bridgehead in Yaghan territory.

This system worked well until 1859, when the Yaghan brutally murdered eight members of the mission in Wulaia. The only person able to escape was the cook, who later gave his account of the event after being rescued by a ship sent from the Falkands (Malvinas) in search of news. This slaughter (November 9th, 1859), for which the true reasons were never known, marked a certain freezing of the Society's activities in Tierra del Fuego. It was in this place that Thomas Bridges, the son of a missionary, continued to become familiar with Yaghan customs and language.

It was not until 1869 that the new leader of the mission, the pastor Waite Stirling, bravely attempted to establish himself alone amidst the Yaghan for eight months on the peninsula where the Ushuaia airport is now located. In light of his success, the decision was made to set up a permanent mission in Ushuaia under the direction of Thomas Bridges, who became the first white man to permanently settle in Tierra del Fuego (1870). He directed the mission until 1886, when he retired and independently founded the Harberton ranch, also on the Beagle Channel.

It was this extraordinary man who left us a Yaghan-English dictionary (first published in 1933) containing close to 32,000 words; and it is one of his sons, Lucas, to whom we owe an autobiography published under the title of "The Uttermost Part of the Earth" (translated in Spanish as "El último confín de la Tierra"). This book is a fundamental element of the historic literature about Tierra del Fuego.

Gold Rush

At Cape Virgenes (the entrance to the Strait of Magellan from the Atlantic) in 1884, gold that had been deposited by the sea under the beach sands for thousands of years was discovered by chance. This event unleashed a gold fever over the majority of the beaches in Tierra del Fuego exposed to the undertow of the Atlantic Ocean, until the famous Romanian Julius Popper set up gold panning sites and attempted to impose a strange sort of dictatorship in Tierra del Fuego. His story inspired several novels.

This gold rush mainly attracted Croatians, thousands of whom arrived at Tierra del Fuego Island, Lennox, Nueva and Hoste Islands and Cape Horn between 1888 and 1895. Some of these gold seekers later settled in Ushuaia, Punta Arenas or Navarino Island.

The colonization

The English missionaries living on the Ushuaia peninsula were the only white inhabitants of Tierra del Fuego until the Argentine government established a military post on the other side of Ushuaia Bay, considered to be the founding of the city of Ushuaia (1884) and the beginning of the colonization of the Beagle Channel. Starting at the end of the XIX century, several Ushuaia settlers and some Chileans set up livestock ranches on the coast of Navarino Island; the meat produced supplied Ushuaia and the wool was sold in Punta Arenas. In 1928, the Chilean authorities attempted to build a town across from Ushuaia by the name of Puerto Navarino, but did not have lasting success. It was not until 1953, when Ushuaia already had a population of 2,500 inhabitants, that the Chilean naval base in Puerto Williams (originally called Puerto Luisa) was founded on the north coast of Navarino Island.

CURRENT SETTLEMENT

Ushuaia (in Argentina) is today the most important city in the Tierra del Fuego region, with 65,000 inhabitants. Its main economic activity is tourism, and the city receives over 160,000 visitors annually.

The city of **Porvenir** is the capital of the Chilean province of Tierra del Fuego and the district by the same name. It is the most populated city on the Chilean portion of Tierra del Fuego Island, with 5,500 inhabitants.

Porvenir arose from a police detachment established in 1883 during the gold rush, and was founded in 1894 under the government of Jorge Montt Álvarez to serve the new livestock ranches. It was initially inhabited by residents from Chiloé and Croatia, who were motivated by the discovery of gold deposits. The city faces Punta Arenas across the Strait of Magellan in Porvenir Bay, also known as Karkamke (shallow waters) by the Selk'nam.

EXPEDITION TEAM



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