

CHILE TRIP REPORT

2023

viranatura 
tours

Day 1 26 Nov To Chile & Curacavi

The group arrived on various flights, with Kate heading off with my Chilean friend; Marcela to relax at her nearby country home. We all convened for and delicious lunch and enjoyed looking at Marcela's lovely garden she had created over a number of years. There was time afterwards to enjoy our first botanical foray into a nearby area with plenty of fiery orange *Alstroemeria ligtu* subsp. *simsii*, more subtle and lovely pink and purple *A. pulchra*, as well as the pale yellow discs of *Calceolaria nudicaulis*, sulphurous and shrubby *C. thyrsoflora* and rosette forming *C. corymbosa* subsp. *santiagina* to get the *Calceolaria* ball rolling. This genus is very widespread and diverse in Chile and in the end we saw 22 different taxa. There were quite a few woody plants too with *Cestrum parqui*, *Podanthus mitiqui*, acacia-like *Vachellia caven* and large *Drimys winteri* trees. The delicate climbing stems of both *Tropaeolum kingianum* and *T. ciliatum* were strung from the stems of trees and shrubs.

Saying farewell to our excellent hostess we drove onto sleepy San Felipe, our home for the next three nights. Relaxing pizza and wine at the hotel was the ideal fare after a long journey.

Day 2 27 Nov Portillo

The morning mists soon cleared as drove east towards the high Andes, passing orchards and farms and then climbing into a deep, rocky valley where abundant *Alstroemeria pulchra* lined the stony slopes along road. Given the propensity for windy conditions at Portillo, we drove straight to the ski centre and set off for our walk on to the slopes in calm conditions, soon finding the remarkable *Viola atropurpurea*, the leaves tightly overlapping to form exquisite discs. One or two were found in flower too, each deep-violet petal flecked with white waxy appendages. It was clearly a late season so to find violets in bloom was a bonus. A further bonus was finding a few *Barneoudia major* in flowers too, the unusual brown leaves beset with yellow buttercup flowers. Driving a little bit lower and we came across plenty of *Sanicula graveolens* and abundant pink *Olsynium philippii* growing on rocky slopes with a fair bit of *Latace andina*.

Lunch was by a gully with golden *Tropaeolum polyphyllum* in flower on trailing



Viola atropurpurea

stems with attractive leaves. Higher on the slope *Calceolaria corymbosa* subsp. *mimuloides* grew with more *Olsynium philippii*. Better specimens of *Tropaeolum polyphyllum* were found when we stopped for a stand of lovely *Schizanthus hookeri* lower down. Our penultimate stop was where we found the trailing stems of red-flowered *Mutisia subulata*, growing in an area of stony matorral, the open areas studded with some superb little barrels of the cactus; *Eriosyce curvispina* in various colours from greenish-yellow to coppery. Joan also found a *Malesherbia linearifolia* coming into flower. Lower down it was hard to resist the big stands of *Alstroemeria pulchra* that filled the roadside banks and when we found a place to stop for them there was also plenty of Chilean glory vine; *Ecchremocarpus scaber* scrambling over the shrubs and trees with plenty of fiery tubular flowers.

A good dinner was had in an Italian restaurant.

Day 3 28 Nov La Campana

Again there was a misty start, but this time it lasted all morning and this was to our benefit ensuring a cool walk to the magnificent palms at La Campana. On the approach road there were wonderful flower-laden trees of *Senna candolleana* (and *Cestrum parqui*) and the first towering palms. Our walk took us up to a grove of large especially large palms seeing on the way; *Loasa placei*, *Conanthera campanulata*, *Schizanthus porrigens*, as well as the tall cactus *Leucostele chilensis* in flowers. At a viewpoint across the large palm population, intermixed with clumps of puya, cactus and *Senna candollei* a rampant dodder was smothering a shrub through which grew spikes of dark red *Lobelia polyphyllum*. Its larger-flowered cousin; *Lobelia excelsa* was not far away as were masses of *Alstroemeria pulchra* and some good stands of *A. ligtu* subsp. *simsii* too. The Chilean palms (*Jubaea chilensis*) were very impressive, with massive smooth grey trunks. Around them grew trees of *Crinodendron patagua*, *Aristotelia* and various ferns. The misty conditions seemed to suit the birds and we were serenaded



Alstroemeria ligtu subsp. *simsii*

by rich bird song on the way back to the vehicle.

A nice cool picnic lunch and then we drove around to the eastern slopes of the mountain and made lots of stops, first for the shiny mauve pouches of *Calceolaria purpurea*, then the silvery rosettes of *Puya coerulea* with two plants in good flower right beside the road. Bushy pale yellow *Calceolaria polifolia* was followed by a lovely cascade of *Mutisia rosea* and the latter was common for much of the way as we climbed higher. Another area of matorral had bright red *Zephyranthes phycelloides*, *Eriosyce curvispina* and *Eccremocarpus scaber* as well as the spiny branches of *Colletia spinosissima*. A few *Alstroemeria angustifolia* were seen before we had a longer stop to photograph the lovely orchid; *Chloraea bletioides* growing near tumbling *Mutisa latifolia*. A colony of cream *Sisyrrinchium striatum* and then the distinctive and lovely *Alstroemeria zoellnerii* completed a productive day.

Day 4 29 Nov Farellones

A clear morning saw us driving south towards the capital and then up towards the Andes. We stopped to drop off our bags at the hotel and had a revitalising coffee before continuing. The winding road was not without interest including a striking dark red colour form of *Salpiglossis sinuata* and *Cistanthe xxx* and then as we climbed there were increasing quantities of California poppies. A non-native invasive it may have been but it looked amazing, creating sheets of orange and bright yellow that smothered the slopes. Among them grew *Schizanthus hookeri* and the pretty white *Leucocoryne ixiooides*. We pushed on to La Parva, parked and then walked higher to where we found a fine patch of *Calandrinia affinis*. Crossing the adjacent stony slope there was plenty of *Olsynium junceum* (with lovely pink veining on the reverse of the tepals) and a scattering of *Tristagma bivalve* and then we found the jewel in the crown, the delightful *Viola phillipii*, with some of the rosettes of crinkled leaves ringed with pretty pink flowers. A gem.

We had lunch in some shade and then explored another road finding an abundance of a taller form all white of *Olsynium junceum* along with fine tufts of *Calceolaria corymbosa* subsp. *mimuloides*. Back on the main road there were stops for a stony slope with *Salpiglossis sinuata*, *Loasa prostrata* and robust *Sisyrrinchium nigricans* and then a lovely area swathed in California poppies and patches of



Rhodophiala phycelloides

sweet-scented *Leucocoryne ixiooides*. A fine finale. It wasn't far to drive back to the hotel and then enjoy a pleasant dinner on the large terrace beneath the cedars and overlooking the snows of the Andes.

Day 5 30 Nov Cuesta Dormida to Vilches

We enjoyed a pleasant breakfast in our out of the city hotel and then plunged into the network of roads that took us quite swiftly through the metropolis and on our way south. The Andes were still visible to our left as we drove, with a prominent snow-lined ridge running alongside, though the height was decreasing and the landscape greening as we travelled. After a coffee stop and then a supply stop we made our way into the countryside and stopped at a vibrant mixed colour population of *Alstroemeria ligtu* with a scattering of white and yellowish forms among the predominantly pink colour forms. As we drive we could see the bulky form of Volcan Decabezado, the centrepiece of the park we would visit tomorrow. Lunch was in a convenient layby which gave us the first chance to look at *Nothofagus*, the tree genus which would become a main component of the plant communities in the south.

Moving on there were some flowery trees of *Drimys winteri* (and a frustratingly hard to get to *Azara*) and then we found the first of many striking golden-yellow *Chloraea gaviu* growing on steep roadside banks. There were more a better further on together with both *Calceolaria dentata* and *C. angustifolia* and the climbing stems of *Bomarea salsilla* with clusters of pink bells flowers. Also in the same area were the last flowers of *Sophora macrocarpa*, *Haplopappus microcephalus*, a pink *Oxalis arenarium* and the last flower of *Gavilea venosa*.

From here we drove the last hour to our pleasant hosteria, nestled among tree filled grounds.

Day 6 1 Dec Siete Tazas

It was an overcast, misty morning as we drove north, passing through the same area as yesterday but noticing different things. A large clump of *Chloraea gaviu* brought us to a halt and as we looked more closely we also found *Calceolaria corymbosa*, the attractive shrub *Otholobium glandulosum*



Bomarea salsilla

with violet and white flowers, plentiful *Bomarea saxilla* and the pretty golden discs of *Solenomelus peduncularis*, all gently dressed in fine droplets from the mist. Continuing towards the national park we stopped at the bridal veil falls which were in thunderous flow this wet year. *Gunnera tinctoria* encrusted the cliffs next to the cascade and several immense *Hydrangea serrata* produced their own cascade of leathery foliage from hefty *Nothofagus obliqua* trees at the viewpoint.

We pushed on to the park entrance and set off on our walk, seeing fine shrubs of *Fabiana imbricata* and lots of *Ribes trilobum* before we reached the old growth forest. Inside the forest there was a flowery bush of *Corynabutilon viride* and as we walked we found a succession of interesting things, beginning with the pretty necklaces of *Tropaeolum tricolor* which became increasingly common and lovely as we walked. There were also the rosettes of *Viola subandina*, pink *Cissabryon elegans* and a golden-flowered *Senna arnottiana*. The path entered a rockier area where we found some immense *Austrocedrus chilensis* and lots of *Nothofagus dombeyi* (some of which were also very large). In one place the cactus; *Eriosyce curvispina* grew among bamboo (*Chusquea coleou*). The path reach the river where crystal-clear torrents raced over the rocks. We searched for orchids and eventually found a couple of *Chloraea viridiflora*, but there was no sign of *C. apinmula*. Lunch was beside the river, where I would normally find *Viola congesta*, but alas the heavy rains had changed the course of the river and swept away the colony!

We walked back through the pleasant warm forest and then drove a short distance to the siete tazas themselves, a series of bowls scoured into the rocks, creating a pleasing multiple cascade. Close to them were a few *Chloraea collina* and we also found *Pasithea coerulea* and a solitary *Gavilea venosa* as we walked out. There was time to stop for a good colony of *Alstroemeria ligtu* on the way out with fine shrubs of *Calceolaria angustifolia* nearby as well as a rather unusual upright (almost climbing) pink *Oxalis rosea*.

Day 7 2 Dec To Antuco

Leaving the pleasant tree-filled grounds at Vilches we drove a few kilometres and then stopped for a large population of *Calceolaria thyrsiflora* on a steep roadside cuttings. This was our only plant stop for the morning as we had some distance to cover before the action started again. After stopping for shopping, then essential coffee we made it to an area of young pine plantation. In the past this had held many stately, pure white *Chloraea crispa*, and there were still some fine specimens around the edge. Lunch was semi-sheltered among the pines.



Chloraea gavilu

Moving on a bit further we reached another area with plantations, but also patches of native vegetation and open, stony tracts, dominated by grey mosses, tufts of native grasses and hundreds of stunning golden-yellow *Chloraea barbata*. This little corner was orchid paradise and spent an hour searching for the best specimens, not only of these but also two other species, the unusual looking (with strongly reflexed sepals) *Chloraea parviflora* and small flowers (white of yellow) *C. stenantha*. What is more they all hybridised to produce a fascinating range of intermediates. The shorter grassy areas also held abundant *Conanthera bifolia*, pretty yellow *Sisyrinchium chilense* and a smattering of the iris-like *Herbertia lahue*. Star of the show though we the oh-so dainty *Trichopetalum plumosum*, the inner tepals dissected in fine plumes, a gem of a bulb. Moving to a second area close by, a marshy patch had hundreds of pretty *Nothoscordum bivalve* and the stony flats on the other side were if anything even better, with a great many orchids (most in perfect condition too), hybrids and two more species, *Chloraea crispa* and shorter white-with-green; *C. collicensis*. A truly delightful, hidden corner.

We drove the final stretch stopping for various views of the impressive bulk of Volcan Antuco, which rather loomed over the landscape and arrived at our rustic cabanas set among a spectacular landscape.

Day 8 3 Dec Laguna de Laja

It was a cool morning, but once the sun appeared it started to warm. We stopped first for a wonderful bank of interesting plants, dominated by big tufts of pampas grass; *Cortaderia araucana*, the coarse rhubarb-like leaves of *Gunnera tinctoria* and patches of *Blechnum chilense*, many with gracefully unfurling fronds. Water chutes and cascades broke through the vegetation and these were lined with yellow *Mimulus luteus*, whilst bushes of *Fuchsia magellanica* hung out over the bank along with cinnamon-trunked *Luma apiculata*, bushy plants of *Calceolaria meyeniana* and *Azara serrata*, the latter festooned in yellow pom-poms of flowers. Stately *Nothofagus dombeyi* clung to the bank, more than likely holding it up and glancing up there were stark cliffs of basalt columns. It was a verdant textural composition.

Driving on and into the park we climbed to the lake and stop beneath soaring



Trichopetalum plumosum

cliffs. It was windy, but this didn't stop us finding *Calceolaria pennellii* and patches of lovely *Lathyrus multiceps*. On the steep turf was plenty of golden-orange *Senna arnottiana* and *Calceolaria corymbosa* subsp. *montana*, whilst below we found a flowering *Nastanthus spathulatus* and *Oxalis squamata*. The season was clearly a week later than normal, but we still found most species and the large hummocks of *Calceolaria meyeniana* above the lake were in good flower. Unfortunately, the road was closed beyond this point (the border post was unmanned) so we opted to walk to see more, passing through stark lava fields and onto more vegetated parts where we found *Caiophora prietia* flower. Bushes of box-like *Orites myrtifolia* were everywhere among the rocks and the first colonising trees of *Nothofagus dombeyi* were making a go of it as were the few most northerly *Araucaria araucana*. *Blechnum microphyllum* filled the crevices in the lava as we followed a sinuous section that then opened out, dominated by the metal monolith to commemorate the (forty-five) fallen soldiers in the 2005 disaster. Not far beyond here we achieved our goal and found a strong colony of *Viola volcanica/congesta* in the ash fields some with a few white flowers on. There were also a few spiny mats of *Mahuenia poeppigii* studded with large yellow flowers, but these were rather eclipsed by the beauties on the ash slope above, with some spanning over three metres. The climb up the slope also passed good clumps of *Anemone multifida*, lots of *Euphorbia collina* and then reached the belt of *Viola cotyledon* with a several plants in good flower. The views all around were stunning, with the snow-streaked caldera walls swathed in emerald green forests above the turquoise lake.

All that remained was to walk back and the wind had almost completely died down by now and if anything we got too hot. An invigorating coffee/tea back at the vehicle had us ready again and we made a couple of stops for the shrub; *Discaria chacaya* and pretty *Nierembergia repens* before reaching our comfy and relaxing base. The late afternoon light slowly crisped up the mountain views as crickets and birds called in the woods.

Day 9 4 Dec To Villarica

The weather had definitely warmed up a bit and we set off on a pleasant morning stopping not long past Antuco for a couple of *Chloraea crispa* that grew beside the road with an assortment of interesting grasses. From here



Mahuenia poeppigii

we drove for a while, stopping for a coffee boost and then continuing through ever greening countryside to the turn off to Villarica. Roadworks looked set to delay us until we noticed a field full of orchids next to the road. A quick U-turn and we climbed into the field where there were hundreds of spikes of *Chloraea* af. *barbata*. By the time we had finished the queue had gone right down and we weren't delayed at all, continuing all the way to the turn off for the volcano and ascending into dense vegetation with plenty of fiery *Embothrium coccineum* and dramatic views of the perfect snow cone of Volcan Villarica. Lunch was with a view of the volcano and higher up we found more good woody plants with *Berberis montana*, orange *B. trigona* and *Ovidia andina* all in flower together under *Nothofagus pumilio* forest. The late season meant too much snow higher up the road closed so we drove back down stopping for *Buddleja globosa* in flower, mauve *Solanum valdiviense*, the unusual proteaceae; *Lomatia hirsuta* and then a first spike of handsome *Gavilea odoratissima*. There was more of this fine orchid close by and growing with pretty *Codonorchis lessonii*, a distinctly different orchid with a solitary white flower on a slender stem.

A good dinner and excellent pisco sours were enjoyed back in town.

Day 10 5 Dec Villarica

We headed east towards Argentina, passing through green pastures and woodland patches and into ever more dramatic scenery with densely forested hills and snowy mountains growing every larger. The road snaked up higher into old growth mixed *Nothofagus* forests with abundant bamboo and *Gunnera*-clad flushes. There were a couple of short stops; the first for a flowering *Berberis darwinii* growing together with *B. trigona*, *B. montana*; then a stop for the mirrored lake views. *Fragaria chilensis* was common on the ground and on the wet rocks behind was large-pouched *Calceolaria crenatiflora*. Reaching the lake shore there were the first magnificent *Araucaria araucana* set amidst lush mountain landscapes, crowned by the immense bulk of Volcan Lanin (3776-metres), which dominated the landscape.

From here we took a very pleasant walk in beautiful mixed forest with various *Nothofagus* and *Araucaria* of all sizes, from gangly youngsters to venerable giants clad in very thick corky bark and draped with lichens. It was magical place. Along the rushing stream we found fine tufts and patches of intense red *Ourisia ruellioides*, whilst along the trail we saw *Vicia nigricans*, many bluish-green lizards and lots of golden-flowered



Embothrium coccineum

Berberis montana as well as *B. serratodentata*, *Ribes magellanicus* in fine flowers and the orangey discs of *Quinchamalium chilense*. We walked to where we had an amazing views of volcano framed with big monkey puzzles. The return leg gave us a chance to photograph *Viola maculata*, the textured barks and any other detail we had missed on the way up.

Lunch was in the shade of more magnificent *Araucaria araucana* and afterwards another impressive stand also held the remarkable porcelain orchid; *Chloraea magellanica*, possibly the loveliest of all Chilean orchids. Heading back we made a series of short stops for large-leaved *Nothofagus alpina*, diminutive *Calceolaria tenella* that crowded a seep with hefty clumps of *Gunnera tinctoria*, a fiery mixture of *Buddleja globosa* and *Embothrium coccineum* and then superb bank of *Calceolaria valdiviensis*, each corymb in perfect condition with a dozen or more brimstone shells. A final stop near the town was for the impressive spikes of greenish-white *Chloraea piquichen*. We could only reach a few today ut the adjacent airfield held hundreds!

Day 11 6 Dec PN Conguillio

Cutting across country we wound through smaller roads and a green landscape with abundant *Libertia chilensis* along much of the roadside. A large ringed kingfisher was perched on a wire over a river and as we neared Melipeuco the clouds parted and disappeared, revealing the towering snow cone of Volcan Llaima. Entering the park an immense volcanic landscape opened up with vast lava and ash plains beneath the volcano and lava flows of various ages clearly visible on the slopes. Islands of emerald vegetation within the black flows were a stark contrast. It was possible to see the succession of revegetating these initially devastated areas went through, with first a thick layer of silvery *Rachometrium* mosses developing, before other plants managed to get a root hold. Somehow the golden-flowered mounds of *Senecio chionophilus* thrived in seemingly inhospitable ash. Elsewhere we could see small trees establishing and clumps of shrubs such as *Gaultheria mucronata* supported the climbing stems of the lovely *Lathyrus magellanicus*, all with the magnificent snow cone backdrop. Suddenly the road veered from stark lava plains to lush green forest in a very abrupt ecotone. In here *Nothofagus alpina* lined the route with *Calceolaria corymbosa* subsp. *tetraphylla* on the rocks. We passed the blue waters of Lago Arcoiris and continued to into an area dominated by tall and architectural *Araucaria araucana* emerging from



Lathyrus magellanicus

the low multistemmed *Nothofagus antarctica*, in a somewhat surreal landscape that only required a rumbling dinosaur to complete the picture.

Lunch was in the shade and then we took a walk through gorgeous tall forest of *Nothofagus dombeyi* and *Araucaria*, the understorey filled with bamboo (*Chusquea quila*) and small shrubs of *Drimys winteri*, with orange flowered *Berberis trigona* scattered throughout. There were many mighty trees, but none more so than the 1800-year old female *Araucaria* we walked to, a breath-taking sight soaring fifty metres into the canopy. Magellanic woodpeckers arrived on a dead tree next to the monkey puzzle and we saw there handsome bird well before they flew over us and away. Unfortunately, we were in a bit of a rush as one short section of bad road meant we could not take the direct route to Curacautin, but instead had to do a long detour back the way we had come and around. If only the park staff had the initiative to wheel barrow a few loads of stone two hundred metres!

Day 12 7 Dec Malalcahuello & Tolhuaca

The impressive volcanic landscape of Malalcahuello was where we began the day, driving up through beautiful *Araucaria* forest that framed the broad snow cone of Volcan Lonquimay. A side track took us higher until a large snow bank stopped us. The views were superb and below on the ash slopes was abundant *Nassauvia revoluta* (almost in flower). Joan and I crossed the snow bank and pushed onto a further viewpoint with a grand spread of the volcanic Andes and forest clad slopes in front of us. The contrasting dark ash and snows created a striking, contrasting image, sweeping down to the araucarias below. Returning we then drove down to said araucarias and had a coffee before continuing to our next national park; Tolhuaca (which is actually contiguous with Malalcahuello).

We stopped on the way for a fine *Azara serrata* in full flower beside a stream and then for some alpacas grazing in a field. Lunch was in the shade and then we took a walk into a lovely tract of *Nothofagus dombeyi* and *N. alpina* which also took in a pleasant waterfall with *Pseudopanax laetevirens* next to it. This plant was to prove very common as we walked also seeing two more species of *Azara*; *lanceolata* and *microphylla*, as well as the twining stems a pretty pink striped cream flowers of *Elytropus chilense* and some superb *Blechnum magellanica* with elegant unfurling young fronds. The path climbed higher reaching some magnificent and ancient giant *Nothofagus dombeyi*. It then swung around



Elytropus chilensis

and became more uneven, reaching the first araucaria with views across to snowy hills, wending up eventually to the calm waters of Laguna Verde where the monkey puzzles fringed the lake and continued up the lava terraces.

Walking back down there was the chance to photograph things we missed and after a drink and snack we drove out stopping only for a perfect spike of *Chloraea magellanica* on a grassy bank.

Day 13 8 Dec Angol & to Vilches

Essentially a repositioning day, there was still enough time in the day to drive across to Angol and spend some time in the foothills of the coastal mountains. Almost as soon as we left the town we saw the first robust golden spikes of *Chloraea gavilu* and further up these were mixed with more slender *C. chrysantha* and the lovely white flowers of *C. longipetala*. Arriving at the first of the latter I was very lucky to see a pollinating bee entering the flowers and managed to photograph it with the pollinia on its back as it exited a flower. The area was also interesting for the hybrid mix, with intermediates of the three species growing together. There were also patches of starry *Anagallis alternifolia*, *Teucrium bicolor* and *Stachys* sp, whilst back at the vehicle a floriferous bush of *Lithraea caustica* was a buzzing with small shiny green bees. Moving on we stopped next for several spikes of *Gavilea venosa* and around these was more with the delicate mauve *Solenomelus segethii*, bright pink *Oxalis arenarium*, *Calceolaria meyeniana* bursting with flowers and then as we went to leave a few spikes of *Gavilea araucana* were seen followed by a decent-sized *Podocarpus salignus* that had been there all along. The main stop of the morning was a delightful meadow with hundreds of *Chloraea volkmannii*, together with a fine patch of about twenty *Herbertia lahue* and drifts of thousands of *Nothoscordum bivalve* in the damper ground lower down. An enchanting spot.

Then it was ears back and drive north, stopping for lunch and coffee on the way and arriving back into Vilches in time for dinner.



Herbertia lahue

Day 14 9 Dec Laguna del Maule

The Andes loomed ahead as we drove past the long waters of Lago Colbun and then the Rio Maule with its cobble strewn banks and braided channels. There was a stop for the pretty *Leucheria coerulea* growing with *Alstroemeria ligtu* and shrubs of *Sophora macrocarpa* with long daggling pods. The steep roadside banks were swathed in masses of *Calceolaria thyrsoflora* and drifts of pink alstroemerias and at another stony place had some superb plants of bright pink *Oxalis squamata* and these were close to where we found *Zephyranthes montana* and tumbling masses of *Mutisia ilicifolia*. A second climber; *Tropaeolum tricolor* laced the bushes and the delicate twining stems of *Loasa filicaulis* bore interesting orange and cream flowers. From here we pushed on to reach the higher elevation before the wind took hold (as it often does up here) passing cliffs adorned with hundreds of golden *Calceolaria integrifolia* (?) and seeps plastered with *Gunnera tinctoria*. Alas, the seasons heavy snows meant the border was still closed so customs and police were not there and the gates were shut. There was nothing for it but to walk and fortunately all the good stuff was within range of our legs. However, not far past the customs building and a bank had many fine clumps for grey-woolly-leaved *Calceolaria corymbosa* subsp. *floccosa* as well as a few patches of *C. polyrhiza* and the slender stems of white-flowered *Olsynium junceum*. From the dam wall there were superb views out across the placid blue waters backed by a dramatic volcanic landscape. On we strode looking at lumps of the various rocks including shiny black obsidian. The views were wonderful throughout and reaching a track we descended a little to where we found some pristine mounds of *Viola cotyledon* in full flower and in a variety of shades from near white to violet. Next to them were the gorgeous fine-leaved *Oxalis adenophylla* with large pink flowers. An added bonus as we left were some good accessible clumps of *Calceolaria polyrhiza* and then another excellent colony of *Viola cotyledon* with if anything a better colour range including some sumptuous deep violet forms.

We walked back and then drove a short distance to a scenic viewpoint of contorted eroded ash towers set within the dramatic lava landscape. A fine place for lunch. Afterwards the drive back down involved a few, productive stops, some for the amazing scenery another for *Berberis microphylla*. Our final planned stop was very good with first of all the intense magenta flowers



Montiopsis umbellata

of *Montiopsis umbellata* and the rich brick red of *Salpiglossis sinuata*, followed by a sprawling *Loasa placei*, *Tropaeolum tricolor* and the icing on the cake some beautiful clumps of purple speckled *Calceolaria cana*, in a variety of pink shades including a ravishing deep pink form. Not to be out done there was an unplanned stop for a stunning drifts of hundreds of *Montiopsis umbellata* with mountain and river backdrops to complete the day. All that was left was a final two hours in the saddle to bring us to a very comfortable hotel in Curico.

Bring on the pisco sours!!

Day 14 10 Dec Paso Vergara

Our final field day and another in the high Andes. Or at least that was the plan! All began well with a stop for the lovely *Mimulus naiandinus* growing on the wet rocks beside a waterfall. Not far from these were a few *Puya coereula* subsp. *monteroa* in flower at a convenient and easy height next to the road. Unfortunately, the very heavy rains Chile had endured this winter had clearly taken their toll on the river banks. Indeed, before we even reached this point we had driven past a section where almost the entire road had collapsed into the river. Reaching our planned stop for more *Mimulus naiandinus* it was immediately obvious there normally small stream had at some point swollen and torn a new channel, washing away virtually all vegetation. We continued, stopping for one of the many stands of abundant *Alstroemeria ligtu* subsp. *splendens* that lined the route, accompanied in places by cliffs and slopes adorned with floriferous bushes of *Calceolaria thyrsiflora*. The rather fine *Sisyrinchium cuspidatum* as also found. As we drove I could see a good spike of *Puya bertroniana* on a bank and thought it would be easily reachable. Sadly no, although the climb up did produce many orchids with *Chloraea chrysantha* and *C. campestris*, together with plenty of pretty *Clarkia gayana*. As is often the case, not much further up the road was an easily reached puya also in flower and we got a good close up look at this incredible bromeliad, decorated with flowers of a singular turquoise-jade.

The road veered off onto a narrower dirt track and a few kilometres on more river damage had destroyed the road completely! End of the line and we would not be able to reach the pass. Luckily, we found a shady lunch spot



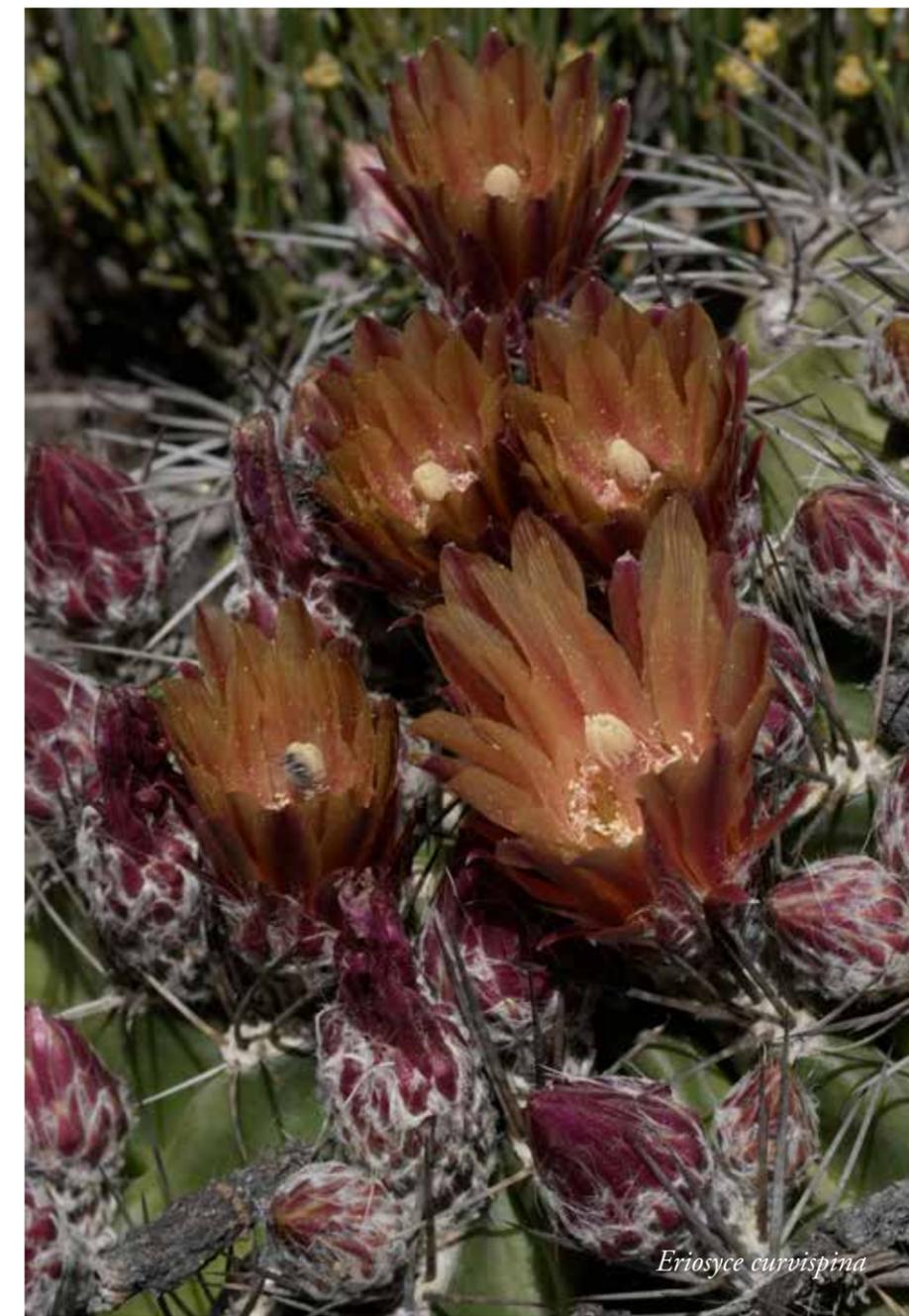
Puya bertroniana

and then afterwards the first of two productive longer stops on the way down. Another flowering puya was the lure but searching the area we also found fruiting parasite *Tristerix corymbosus*, a lilac form of *Salpiglossis sinuata*, superb shrubs of *Calceolaria thyrsiflora*, *C. cana* and many more orchids including a few spikes of *Gavilea glandulifera*. A couple of showy *Schizanthus grahami* were found along the roadside before we stopped for a colony of *Cortaderia araucana* with many feathery plumes. Losing time at the pass meant we had some time for elsewhere and an area of scattered matorral turned out to be very good with many tall *Chloraea incisa*, even taller *C. alaris*, golden *C. chrysantha* and *C. campestris*, together with a few superb *Eriogyne curvispina* with rich blood-orange flowers attended by fast-flying little black bees. *Clarkia tenella* was again abundant often mingled with the hundreds of *Conanthera biflora* and *Alstroemeria ligtu* in flower. It's hard to convey just how numerous the latter are and they provided constant splashes of colour along the route. Harder to spot were the slender stems of *Tweedia birostrata* with clusters of waxy flowers.

From here we drove directly to the airport hotel, negotiating some heavy traffic south of the capital but around the city itself the going was easy and we arrived in good time to prepare for the next day. A final round of pisco sours was in order.

Day 15 11 Dec To Torres del Paine

Duncan and Joan were returning to the UK, but Kate and I were Patagonia bound and we left at 8.30 for the airport, checking it and then flying south to Punta Arenas. The contrast was stark and immediate, with a big, breezy landscape spread before us. Driving out across the vastness of Patagonia, first along the coast and then cutting inland, with endless heaths. Pastures and woodlands in various states of repair, much of it heavily laden with mistletoe (*Misodendron punctulatum*) and heavily damaged. Area on the surrounding hills seemed much healthier by comparison. We stopped for a patch of *Olysinium biflora* (not realised quite how common they would become) also finding *Chloraea magellanica*, *Baccharis magellanica* and *Cerastium arvense*. Amazing snow-like displays of *Olysinium biflora* followed, matched only by the lovely *Oxalis ennaephylla* with some superb



Eriogyne curvispina

clumps alongside dense mats of *Bolax gummifera*.

Reaching the impressive fjord at Puerto Natales we had planned to buy supplies but the car park was packed solid so instead we drove on. Unfortunately, a combination of me remembering the location of the hotel wrongly and Google maps not working, meant a bit of detour and we rolled into our pleasant hosteria later than planned, but in time for a very tasty dinner.

Day 16 12 Dec Torres del Paine - Lago Toro trail

Honking ibises woke us at 5 am in time to see pink laced clouds over the hills. It was not that far back to Puerto Natales for essential shopping, after which we followed the back road into the national park, stopping first at a hill top with lots of fiery *Embothrium coccineum* in flower and great views across the fjord. In a sheltered spot there were also *Arjona tuberosus*, *Calceolaria biflora* and *Leucheria hahnii*, whilst flower-laden bushes of *Gaultheria mucronata* were widespread (and further on they were laden with reddish fruits too). Moving on there was a stop for the masses of *Lathyrus magellanicus* that lined the road mixed with *Trifolium repens* in a lovely combination. Pretty masses of *Calceolaria tenella* plastered the crevices and cracks on a section of roadside cutting and we also found a pale rose form of *Lathyrus magellanicus* here too. Next a small area of roadside heath between the plentiful *Nothofagus betuloides* held a wealth of orchids with *Gavilea araucana*, *G. supralabellata* and *G. litoralis* all growing side by side with a smattering of *Chloraea magellanica*. Flowery bushes of *Escallonia rosea* were common as we drove, as the views became grander and grander with good views of the Cuernos del Paine across blue lakes. The broad Rio Serrano formed the border of the park and after checking in we continued to Lago Grey where we found a nice sheltered spot among the nothofagus for lunch.

After, we took in walk in a pleasant tract of mature *Nothofagus pumilio* woodland where *Blechnum penna-marina* formed delightful coppery carpets speckled with many *Codonorchis lessonii*. *Viola reichei* was also common throughout. We walked to where we could see a large blue



Calceolaria tenella

iceberg washed against the shingle shore and returned, photographing an immense ginger-coloured bee pollinating *Lathyrus magellanicus*. The woodland was effective shelter from the increasingly strong winds, but despite the gusts we took a short walk in an area of rock knolls and low trees, finding the green spikes of *Correorchis leptopetala* and tufts of *Saxifraga magellanica*, before a quick look at the visitor centre. Finding sheltered spots was now the order of the afternoon and we succeeded several times, firstly for a great view of Lago Nordenskjold with the sculpted mountains beyond and fine clumps of *Lathyrus nervosus* in the foreground. We could see big patches of *Calceolaria uniflora* on some rocky banks (but sadly beyond reach) and bushes of *Adesmia boronoides* filled the steppe and rocky slopes, bursting with golden-yellow flowers. They were hard to ignore and we found a sheltered spot where they grew with spiny *Mulinium spinosum*. Not far away and we found mats of *Nardophyllum bryoides* and the diminutive golden trumpets of *Alstroemeria patagonica*. Here there was also a muddle of *Calceolaria* with *C. polyrhiza* and a swirl of hybrids between it and *C. uniflora*. The latter was finally located growing with aromatic (mint-scented) patches of *Clinopodium darwinii* studded with tiny, but pretty pink flowers. Red domes of *Anarthophyllum desideratum* followed, with impressive mountain backdrops, though the wind was strong here.

There was a final stop in steppe outside the park for the strongly fragrant bushes of *Junellia tridens*, mats of *Azorella monantha* and tufts of a *Festuca/ Stipa*. Then it was across the vastness with the light constantly altering its play on the mountains.

Day 17 13 Dec Torres del Paine - Laguna Azul

A clear day with lots of blue in sky, though the breeze was still strong. With that in mind we opted to visit parts of the park that had more shelter although we began with a wind-blasted viewpoint of lapis-blue Lago Sarmiento with a completely clear skyline of the Paine massif. The next viewpoint was much calmer and brought us a bit closer to the granite towers looking across Laguna Amarga with lots of fragrant *Junellia tridens* all around. The road climbing into the rocky steppe and onto the



Lathyrus nervosus

impressive Salto Grande waterfall with heavy cascade over tiered rocks again with the iconic towers as a backdrop. This time *Ademsia boronoides* provided the foreground interest (this bush was in profuse flower across the park and coloured the landscape along with the spinier domes of *Mulinum spinosum*). It was very pleasant to enjoy the falls virtually to ourselves, and this back road is on the whole a quieter option. A lone male guanaco posed in front of the towers as we left – clichéd but unmissable. We took a side turn that climbed to where we found an area of sloping bog with many rosettes of *Samsola spathulata*, *Arjona xxx* and a pretty pink *Olsynium junceum*. A condor flew across as we progressed stopping next for a clump of *Calceolaria uniflora* (you guessed it) with the towers once again. Continuing to Laguna Azul but not making it because of heath dressed in (truly) countless *Olsynium biflora* along with golden patches of *Viola maculata* and abundant *Calceolaria* spp. The sheer quantities of the various flowers in bloom were mind-boggling at times.

The deep blue of Laguna Azul was backed by the ragged massif and after we had enjoyed a wind-free picnic in nearby woods we set off on a walk around its shore. A non-native *Myosotis* created a haze of blue near a smaller lake and there were many colours of equally non-indigenous lupines. The light woods and heath around the lake had some interesting flora with plenty of *Geum magellanicum* and fine clumps of *Anemone multifida*, areas with many *Saxifraga magellanica* in flowers and then the lovely deep pink of *Leucheria purpurea*. All the while there were superb views across the lake where a great grebe paddled serenely alongside us. Two male guanacos were squaring up for battle as we walked, but nothing much happened in the end.

Leaving the park we drove past Lago Sarmiento and then took a side road that cut back towards it, stopping a few times on the way. Firstly, for an area of short turf with abundant *Viola maculata*, then an exposed, wind-blasted rocky patch where there were superb cushions of *Nassauvia maeviae* in full flowers together with many golden trumpets of *Alstroemeria patagonica* and the tight mats of *Azorella monantha*. Mounds of *Mulinum spinosum* and *Ademsia boronoides* coloured the landscape, their colours enhanced by the deep blue lake beyond. There were many guanacos along the way too with lots of females with foals. There were large mats of *Nardophyllum bryoides* shortly before we reached the lakeshore where the peculiar rocky skeletons of

*Junellia tridens*

strombolite colonies were exposed. Driving out we had a good view of a grey fox running along the road and more guanacos, arriving back a bit earlier for once to relax out of the wind.

Day 18 14 Dec Torres del Paine - Lago Sarmiento

Patagonia becalmed! What a difference a day makes, gone were the knock down blasts, replaced by near windless conditions, all be it with a glowering grey sky, but the change in mood is what makes this region so special. We drove out via a back road seeing a couple of grey foxes, lots more guanacos and several brown hares sitting in the road. The calm conditions and perfect photographic light were irresistible and there was a stop for the glowing scarlet of *Embothrium coccineum*, growing together with abundant *Lathyrus magellanicus*, some fine *Calceolaria biflora* and floriferous shrubs of *Escallonia rosea* and sprawling *Discaria chacaya*. Reaching the park, we made our way to our trailhead and set off, only making a few metres before the first population of orchids stopped us. There were many *Gavilea suprabellata*, *G. litoralis* and among these a few *G. gladysiae* as well as the superb *Chloraea magellanica*. More orchids followed including *Gavilea araucana* and some fine clumps of *Chloraea magellanica* (the best had nine spikes), but it was not all orchids and we saw *Gunnera magellanica*, *Calceolaria uniflora* and higher up along the path beneath large slate scree were some attractive *Phacelia secunda*. *Embothrium* were well placed for photos across the landscape and as we walked up we frequently found interesting things.

On such a windless day it was possible to have lunch just about anywhere among the heath. There followed a drive to our second trail head, which took us up towards a large waterfall, seeing fine patches of *Calceolaria uniflora* on the way including one which was being pecked at (and thus pollinated) by a long-tailed meadowlark. Our walk to the Cuernos del Paine look out took quite a while as we were frequently distracted by the fine flora around us including perfectly positioned *Chloraea magellanica* with mountain backdrops, *Cerastrium arvense* and *Lathyrus nervosus* bursting from the domes of *Mulinum spinosum*, diminutive *Solenomelus segethii*, *Oenothera stricta*, flower-laden *Escallonia rosea* in various colours,

*Chloraea magellanica*

Oxalis ennaeophylla



Vincent de
Magellan
Woodworker

not the mention the constant procession of superb scenery. Upland geese swam out onto limpid lakes as we walked out. Our only stop on the way to Puerto Natales was for a cute hairy armadillo that was scuttling along the road, otherwise we just enjoyed the big landscapes of wonderful Patagonia.

Day 19 15 Dec Torres del Paine - Lago Sarmiento

A tranquil fjord had oystercatchers and gulls flying alongside as I took a morning stroll, taking in the fresh Patagonian air. After breakfast we drove back to Punta Arenas, passing through the vastness once again, past battered forests, bogs, heaths and endless pastures with sheep, some shorn some still woolly. There was a stop for more superb *Oxalis ennaeophylla*, which grew with the lovely *Hypochaeris incana* and *Senecio kingii*. The former were in a range of colour forms, some completely smothering the leaves with finely-lined flowers. We then had good views of a Darwin's rhea and his brood of six leggy chicks beside the road. Reaching the coast it was still very calm as we headed into town to refuel and then back to near the airport where we had our lunch among nothofagus and found a few *Perezia recurvata* in flower among the heath. That was it the wonderful world of Patagonia had reached its successful conclusion. Airport formalities were rather slow, but nonetheless we got on the plane flew half the length of this geographically remarkable country, catapulting from Patagonia to the Mediterranean. And then if one wanted too, one could continue fly north another three hours and land in the Atacama Desert, still in Chile!

Day 20 16 Dec Flights home

Long flights home, mine via London where I surprised my parents with a visit and then onto Turkey where Christmas-enthused young sons awaited me.

viranatura
tours

For information on our tours
please contact

info@viranatura.com



Mimulus natandinus