

ARCHAEOLOGY DOWN SOUTH: BETWEEN BUENOS AIRES AND PATAGONIA

June 29, 2012 María José Figuerero Archaeological Prospection, Community Archaeology, Day of Archaeology, Day of Archaeology 2012, Education, Environmental Archaeology, Excavation, Expeditions, Survey Argentina, Buenos Aires, Chile, Edinburgh, Facebook, General Carrera Lake, geographer and a geologist, Ghio-Columna rivers, GPS, Jeinemeni-Zeballos rivers, lago Buenos Aires, Los Antiguos, Orinary Peoples, Patagonia, Patagonia Right now, Provinces of Argentina, Santa Cruz, Santa Cruz Province, social anthropologist, Southern Patagonia, Stirling, Tehuelche, Universidad de Buenos Aires

Right now it's winter here in Argentina and we are nearing the end of the first term at the **Universidad de Buenos Aires** where I teach a year long course in Research Design. Facing me is a pile of my student's projects to finish correcting by Monday, our last class before the winter break. It is often frustrating but, then again, immensely satisfying when our students finally develop the knack and learn how to put together a solid research proposal. What I most enjoy are the original ideas they bring each year, and being able to keep up with new subjects or research in regions I have little time for otherwise. I enjoy teaching and tutoring.

My time in Buenos Aires is mostly dedicated to carrying out analyses and writing about our research in the **archaeology of Orinary Peoples in Southern Patagonia**. The research year for me "begins" in April after our return from the field and I have to begin to download, classify and label all our digital information (photos, GPS data) as well as digitize our field notes. A lot of this goes into Dropbox so all our team can easily access our database. All this last week I have been going over our field notes trying to inventory and choose more samples to date the archaeological deposits. We also have to plan for time writing up our research as well as preparing for two conference presentations programmed for October. All of a sudden the year seems already too short.

Our research area is located in Southern Patagonia around lago Buenos Aires, along the Jeinemeni-Zeballos rivers on the border with Chile and the Ghio-Columna rivers flowing into lago Ghio in the area also known as Paso Roballos. Our main goal is the **history and rhythm of occupation** in the area studying the nature of repeatedly used locations through time and how this relationship with the landscape is played out at different scales in the research area in order to see if whether resource availability or cultural choices are guiding the choice of places to settle.

Within **our team** there is a PhD student analysing the lithic artefacts and another undergraduate training in animal bone analysis. Since continuity in the history of occupation is another guiding concept, another PhD student, a social anthropologist, is analyzing archival material and carrying out interviews to make visible the presence of Orinary Peoples in the area during the last two centuries. We are also working with a geographer and a geologist from the Universities of

Stirling and Edinburgh to study past changes in the environment and interpret the present day landscape.



Lunch break while surveying in the field in Paso Roballos, Argentina

The small border town of **Los Antiguos** in the Province of Santa Cruz is our base. It means “the Ancient Ones” which seems very appropriate. We are collaborating with the tourism and culture areas of the local Municipality to make a characterization of the archaeological places and objects in the landscape in order to evaluate the management and public use of these resources. Agronomists from the local chapter of the INTA are also involved. This kind of work has just recently placed us in touch with biologists studying the rare endemic Hooded Grebe.

It is hard to maintain our presence in these isolated communities. We are typically only there in the summer for our fieldwork and have to dedicate special time to work in town with all these collaborators. It is also the moment we carry out workshops or talks with different groups in the community (e.g., children, teachers, tourists). We are striving to continue writing or producing multimedia material that can be used in schools or for visitors. It helps that the internet has improved and we can now keep in touch all year round by Facebook. There has been a tremendous change in how we are received each year. It has proven invaluable in strengthening our ties and friendships in Los Antiguos.

We look forward to the “end” of the year and our long summer field season. It is so far away from Buenos Aires and yet so present all through the year. It is our escape valve from the daily mayhem of the city. Only 6 months to go!



One of the rockshelters we are excavating in Paso Roballos, Argentina