



8349 El Huecu | Provincia Neuquen | ARGENTINA

7 Day Mountain Pack Trip into the Andes

Introduction

Each year, T.A. Carrithers takes groups on treks into the heart of the Andean cordillera. These are the lands he knows and loves.

TA writes of the Andes: "Each place has its story - its light at each phase of the day, its sounds, unique scents, the cadence of language, particular tastes, and how the elements of the landscape contour the hearts of its people. And each landscape also holds its secrets, its mysteries and music, and its challenges for the human body, mind, and spirit."

His *Heart of the Andes* trips are designed to bring you in direct contact with the landscape, animals and people of Patagonia.

Dates and Prices

Seven Day Mountain Pack Trip: January 12-18, 2010 and January 20-26, 2010, \$1600

Ten Day Mountain Pack Trip: February 10-18, 2010, \$2250

Our Planned Itinerary

Day 1: We will meet in the town of Zapala, in the Province of Neuquen at 10:00 a.m. We will then drive 4 hours up into the foothills of the Andes to a place called "Buta Mallin". This is a cattle outpost on the estancia and the end of the road for most vehicles. Here we will have a mid-afternoon lunch with the gauchos - either an asado or traditional *guiso* or stew served with fresh bread. Then you will have your first experience saddling and packing the horses for the 2 1/2 hour ride into the heart of the estancia where the lodge is located.

"Ranquilco is literally out of this world: one day's ride from the nearest Argentine town and 4 days ride to the Chile border, you'll find the estancia perched on a cliff overlooking a canyon and the river below, with the Andes all around..."

Mountain trip guest, 2009.

In the evening, settle in to your cottage or room and then join us on the terrace of Casa Grande for wine, traditional Patagonian food, and good company.

Day 2: Enjoy a hearty breakfast at Casa Grande featuring homemade yogurt, granola, and fresh eggs cooked to order. We'll spend this day at Ranquilco getting familiar with the horses, the tack, and the landscape. We'll talk about trail safety, extended horse travel, and specific considerations of the local geography, weather, and culture. You will learn to saddle and care for your horse. There will also be time to enjoy the river, the lodge, and the scenery. An optional half day trail ride will be offered in the afternoon. Lunch and dinner will be served family style and will feature traditional Argentine dishes.

The views were indescribable. We kept climbing till we thought we could touch the clouds. The valley floor fell away and the path became lava rock, steep and challenging. Never frightening though. We could see forever.

Mountain trip guest, 2008

Day 3: After packing up, we will head out into the *Cordillera*. Today will be an all day ride up to *Laguna Negra*, a high mountain valley surrounded by jagged peaks, waterfalls, and hanging meadows. This is as pristine a spot as any you could find, deep in the heart of the Andes. We'll ride about six hours this day, up out of the Trocoman river valley, across a high plateau, and finally dropping down a breathtaking trail into the valley.

We will make camp at our gaucho's puesto and enjoy our meal around the firepit. Learn to picket and care for your horse out on the range. Sleep on your saddle blankets under the stars like our gauchos, or stretch out in the hut at the puesto.

"On the day of departure we set off in single file with our sturdy pack horse threading our way through pine forests, rivers, valley floors and mountain paths. About two hours in I turned back to see the far-off cluster of poplars that marked the estancia, the last mark of civilization. From now on it was just us, our supplies, and perhaps if we were lucky, the odd slaughtered goat from an obliging lone gaucho. Facing the direction we were heading in - the Chile border - all I could see in the distance were snow lined peaks that resembled shark teeth. That would be the half way mark. The homeward journey would be looping back down through valleys, past lakes jumping with trout, plains and mountains."

Mountain trip guest, 2009

Day 4: This is a base camp day for exploring and enjoying this amazing place. We'll ride up to the end of the valley and up to a ridge to see a spectacular view of the cordillera stretching to the north and south of us and the Chilean volcanoes to the west.

On the way back to camp we'll stop in to visit with the local gauchos who spend their summers in the mountains tending their herds. These are the only other people we'll see on our journey. One of the highlights of a trip out here is to stop at a twig hut and sip mate (tea) with these wonderful people. Riding back along the lake, we may stop to fish or swim the horses. We will spend another stunning evening at the puesto, surrounded by our horses, slow roasting our asado over the fire.

We stopped at the puesto of a neighbour named Julio. He invited us to camp, and sent his son out for supper for us. It is amazing to send someone to the goat flock (located at the top of the canyon) to fetch supper. This only took a couple hours to find, catch and kill in the mountains. It was the most awesome meal. The best chivo asado we had while at Ranquilco. These people are incredibly welcoming, sharing and happy. We played football or soccer with the kids while waiting for supper to appear. Their existence is simple by our standards, but they are happy.

Mountain trip guest, 2008.

Day 5: We'll make our way back down to Ranquilco, following a different trail that takes us along the edge of the Picunleo Valley, and presenting sweeping views up the Trocoman River to the Copahue Volcano. This evening we'll be reunited with the wonderful hospitality of the lodge - hot showers, cold beers and clean sheets, followed by an excellent meal paired with local wines.

Day 6: We'll have a full day to rest and relax and enjoy the comforts of Ranquilco. Sauna, swim in the pool or the river, or just relax in a hammock. An optional afternoon ride up the confluence of the Picunleo and Trocoman rivers will be offered.

We recommend this experience to anyone who seeks the peace of the mountains, good food and good company. You don't have to be an experienced rider to enjoy this experience. You only need a sense of adventure, a willingness to go with the flow and the ability to enjoy simplicity.

Mountain trip guest, 2008

Day 7: On the last day, we'll ride back to Buta Mallin, and drive back to Zapala, to arrive by 4:00 pm. From there, catch a bus back to BA or head to Bariloche or San Martin... or even over to Chile.

The experience is awesome!! I would do it again in a heartbeat.

Mountain pack trip guest, 2008

More Information

Who is this trip for?

Previous guests have included a 72 year old retired navy man and a 14 year old new rider! This trip is for beginner or advanced horse enthusiasts who want challenging, adventure filled rides. It is for those riders who want to immerse themselves into the landscape of Patagonia and the Andes.

What's included?

Prices includes transportation to and from the city of Zapala, your guides, transportation of luggage and food with mules, all meals and alcohol, tents & camping equipment, and personal horses. While at the Estancia, it includes day rides, accommodation in our guest cottages, all meals and wine, and ranch activities.

I have a traveling companion who is a non rider?

The estancia has lots to offer. E-mail TA to ask about special rates and activities for partners, children and parents.

Difficulty:

This trip is of moderate difficulty. The weather in the mountains is highly changeable, from warm sunny days to rain and hail and often strong winds. Although no previous horse experience is necessary, we would recommend spending at least a little bit of time on a horse before taking this trip. We'll be traversing mountain trails that are sometimes narrow, steep, and rocky. Our horses are strong, sturdy, calm and surefooted, and are very familiar with these trails, but from a novice rider's perspective, some of the places we'll go might be daunting. Getting off and walking on these spots is always an option.

Our trek went deep into the Andes. Sometimes along tracks the width of a pencil above snow line and other times across lush plains with Condors swirling above us, we would stop for lunch and then head off again reaching camp in the late afternoon. Camp would be a plain of grass large enough for the horses to feed overnight and with access to spring water, sometimes by a lake other times sharing it with cattle and the odd puesto. *Mountain pack trip guest, 2008*

Questions and Reservations:

E-mail TA at tac.ranquilco@gmail.com directly with questions or to reserve your trip.