



-The three amigos at the awards party - Guess how they finished?

# Tres Amigos en Chile

## or "How I Spent My Summer Vacation"

-BY CRAIG THAYER

This story began for me last spring with a phone call from my oftentimes skipper Dick Hallagan asking if I might be interested in sailing the South American Championships in Antofagasta, Chile. I think my first remarks went something like Anto what?? Anyway, apparently my friend and crew person to be, Lori Foster, had been busy E mailing and surfing the net for info about Chile and the regatta, so after a couple of phone calls and faxes I was ready to sign on. We would be sailing on Dick's old boat, 14255, which he had previously sold to Rodrigo Zuazola, and who in turn had graciously offered it to Dick for this regatta.

It's now June 30th and we're set - reservations for a flight leaving Toronto on September 12 have been made and the boat will be pre-registered in time to qualify for the \$25 entrance fee (more on that later). Summer in Central New York is a wonderful but all too short period of time, so next thing I know it's September 1st and I haven't done anything towards getting ready for the trip!!! Better make a list - shorts (I hope not), film, passport, Spanish book, sailing gear (the Pacific shouldn't be too warm in early spring in the southern hemisphere), etc., etc., etc., etc..

D- DAY...It's Friday morning, and somehow I've managed to get everything into my bags,

and have been studying my Spanish phrase book off and on since I bought it two days ago. My vocabulary is at least ten words by now so I'm confident I won't stumble into the



-The rugged desert terrain and the snow capped Andes in the Background on the way to San Pedro

Another quick stop in Rochester to pick up Lori and Toronto here we come! Our flight to Miami doesn't leave till 7pm so I've got a couple hours to refresh my college French once we arrive at the airport.

WE'RE OFF...Our two and a half hour flight from Toronto to Miami leaves and arrives right on schedule and we board our plane to Santiago. Dick's wife Anne is to join up with us there for the final trip to Antofagasta. The next eight and a half hours provides time not only for semi sleep, but more cramming of vocabulary. I discover another not to be forgotten phrase -

"Donde esta el bano?" (Where is the bathroom?). About two hours before our arrival we can see a vast desert and a big bay off the Pacific which we believe to be Antofagasta. Later, the rugged snow capped peaks of the Andes majestically appear, and eventually give way to the green but mountainous outskirts of Santiago.

-The Yacht Harbor at Antofagasta - taken from our room



WE ARRIVE... It's sort of an odd feeling to land at 8:15 AM Chile time, about 60 miles from the Pacific Ocean, and still be in the same time zone as New York. It was a sunny but cool (about 60F) day as we walked down the steps from our plane. Ahead was a five and a half hour wait for our flight on Lan Chile to our final destination. After clearing customs we walked about an 1/8 of a mile from the international to the domestic terminal to check in at Lan Chile. It was here that we met a group of scientific types from Colorado en route to Antarctica! A little later Tito and his crew of Pablo and Rodrigo appeared, and later, Guillermo (Willy) from Uruguay. After some cafe con leche and a partially failed attempt to translate the menu in the coffee shop, Lori and I went exploring, reading signs and looking in the gift shops- our pocket dictionaries were already getting a workout. Even with a population of about 4.5 million people, the airport had a very relaxed atmosphere. Seeing families and friends waiting in the coffee



-The Coca-Cola girls with some of the cadets

tive too, as while enroute, they handed out a customer survey (in Spanish of course), and would have skipped over Lori and myself had we not protested (it was probably Lori's blonde hair that may have caused our attendant to mistake us for dumb gringos). By the end of the flight we were both pretty proud of ourselves, as with the help of our magic books we were able to complete most of the questions (a prime example of on the job training?).

ANTOFAGASTA... It's nearly 3PM when we touch down at Antofagasta's airport which is situated between the ocean and the coastal mountains, about 20 minutes north of the city. It's bright, cool, and the wind is humming about 20 knots out of the southwest. Hmmm - maybe eating those two dinners on the flights down

wasn't such a bad idea? The ride to the hotel is via a minivan that the Chileans had contracted for that purpose. Most of the luggage was lashed securely on the roof except for one of Tito's sails which became airborne about 2 miles into the trip, but was picked up by another car going to the hotel.

The Hotel Antofagasta is a four star hotel, nicely appointed, with our rooms having a small balcony overlooking the ocean and the boat storage area, as we are staying next door to the Club de Yates. After a short nap we hit the hotel lounge's outdoor balcony for a few cervezas and snacks, then it's bedtime for Bonzos as sleeping on the plane leaves a lot to be desired.

LET THE GAMES BEGIN... Unlike some cities, the approximately 240,000 inhabitants of Antofagasta are not awakened each morning with swarms of two cycle motorbikes in the streets. In fact, I'm not sure that I even saw any during our stay. Our alarm clock was usually a couple of pigeons cooing on our balcony (one was sitting on an egg in a potted plant), or pelicans flapping their wings against the surface of the water in a



shop to watch out the window for someone's plane to take off, or waving good bye from the outside observation area, took me back to when I was a kid in the 50's, and people doing those same things at NY's then Idlewild Airport.

Anne arrives and we board our flight which will take us about 800 miles north, where we will be sailing on the edge of the Atacama Desert, the driest desert in the world. The last time it rained in Antofagasta in any measurable amount was about four years ago when it rained for an hour, causing many people to lose their homes. While it was often cloudy and/or foggy in the morning, we never felt more than a few drops. It would be negligent of me if at this time I failed to mention that Lan Chile's flight attendants were some of the prettiest, and wore very striking red, white, and blue uniforms with red shoes. They are also percep-



-Lori and Leonardo at the cookout



-Several of our hosts and yours truly at the awards dinner

tidal pool opposite our room. A sign in the bathroom reminded guests to conserve water as it must be piped in from the Andes and desalinization plants, so sailor showers were in order. "Continental Breakfast" was included in the room rate. It turned out to be a beautiful buffet with all kinds of fresh fruits, pastries, and juices in addition to the usual varieties of eggs, meats, and cereals. In addition, our usual waiter, "Nelson"

coached us each day of our stay on various words and their correct pronunciation.

Breakfast over, we walked over to the club to rig the boat. A few hours later, with this project complet-

ed, we head to the yacht club's restaurant for some lunch. Something light was in order as we were still working off our breakfast. Soup and fruit salads seemed to fit the bill with a gentleman playing the harp providing entertainment during our meal. We decided to launch the boat for a sail. There wasn't a whole lot of wind, but there were large swells left over from yesterday's winds - not exactly the conditions we normally sail in here in central NY. At the conclusion of a very pleasant afternoon, I notice that I'm starting to not feel too well. I decide to pass on a few beers before dinner and lie down. By dinner time it's obvious I am now feeling worse and decide to skip dinner. This turned out to be a very wise move as I spent the next several hours becoming intimately familiar with a particular piece of porcelain. I managed some tea and toast at breakfast next morning but told Lori I didn't think I would be ready for the practice race that afternoon. Fortunately, Dick found Sebastian, one of the naval cadets from Argentina to take my place, and finished second. I lay low all afternoon and muster enough strength to attend the opening ceremony and a little bit of the cocktail party which followed before hitting the sack.

It's now Tuesday and while not at janitor strength, I'm feeling good enough after my bout with "Gringitis", as Pablo has labeled it to try races 1 and 2. One of the regatta sponsors is Coca-Cola, and they have provided two young ladies with short, tight red dresses adorned with the Coca-Cola logo to deliver the lunches and drinks to each boat before the day's racing begins, as well as be there with refreshments when the boats come back. This was a system that to the



-Victor, cadets, and us, at the Naval Academy - Valparaiso

best of my knowledge, no one had problems adapting to. The winds are light, the sea is flat, and we finish the day with a 1,2 - not bad, but I'm still not ready for a celebratory beer, even though I have no problems retaining my lunch.

Wednesday is an "off" day for racing, but not for activities, as a bus has been chartered to take us to see the Escondida copper mine - about two hours southeast of Antofagasta. We catch the Mercedes bus in the yacht club lot, and ride through the coastal hills into the desert, crossing the Pan American Highway.

At a very well done orientation session complete with hors d'oeuvres, we learn that this huge approximately one mile pit has only been around for seven years, and unlike the much older copper mine to the north at Chuquicamata which can smelt its own ore and ship it via railroad to Antofagasta, the ore here is crushed, and then pumped to the coast just south of the city as a slurry for awaiting freighters. The giant trucks used to transport the ore at the site cost approx. \$1.7 million each. The workers here are bussed to and from their homes in Antofagasta, and live at the facility during their shifts of four days on, three off. We were then transported to the pit itself, fed a great meal in their dining hall, and shown around the rest of the campus which was complete with a library, gym, and pool.

More wind and a sizable chop didn't agree with us on Thursday, and could only muster a 5.8. That night though, following the races, the yacht club hosted a cookout in a nice shelter there on the club grounds. Here we got to sample a variety of local dishes complete with vino tinto or blanco and a live guitarist.

After dinner, one of our hosts, Juan Arcos, broke out some of his private cervesa and Dick and I joined him for a few games of pool at the club table. By the way, Chilean tables all seemed to be big, with very narrow, unforgiving pockets, but it was obvious that Juan had spent a few hours in this sport.

Races 5 and 6 on Friday weren't much kinder to us even though we were going better, we just couldn't seem to get it together, finishing with a 5.7. It looked like we were destined for fifth place with only a final race on Saturday. Unfortunately, despite another day

-Dick and Lori with Sebastian, cadet from the Naval Academy of Argentina (my stand in)

-Juan Santos from Ecuador holding his foot, that's \$1,000!!





of great sailing conditions and a pretty well sailed race, we committed the fatal blunder of being over early so our third place finish vanished.

However, even though this was the last race of the regatta, and an important one for the standings, it was not THE RACE OF THE DAY! That's because there was to be a race back to the harbor breakwater from the windward mark where we had just finished, and the winner of this downwind race was to collect \$1,000 US, compliments of one of the regatta sponsors - the Banco De Chile I believe. Juan Santos of Ecuador opted for a course closest to the shore and snagged the victory. What a great way to end a regatta!!

The Awards Dinner and party that followed at the club later that evening can only be described as a continuation of the great time and hospitality that I had experienced all week. Manuel Gonzales had emerged the victor, closely followed by Tom Allen Jr. Juan Santos collected third and his \$1,000.

All skippers and each crew were presented with trophies or certificates, and Lori our crew received a huge flower arrangement for being the only female crew. The candlelit dinner and awards gave way to a short video of the week's sailing accompanied by the new Mission Impossible theme, closely followed by about three hours of non-stop salsa and meringue dance music.

**SAN PEDRO DE ATACAMA...** During the week just concluded, Dick, Lori and I (Anne opted to hold the fort) had decided that we would like to visit the ancient town of San Pedro De Atacama which is located close to the Bolivian border, about 185 miles northeast of Antofagasta. In pre-Columbian times, the Atacamenos tribes lived here, and a number of well preserved mummies can be seen at the local museum. To get there, I decided to rent a car. It's now Saturday afternoon after we're all done, and I approach Jaime, our bilingual clerk at the front desk. This is during the national holiday week featuring cannons firing on the hillside, parades, and zillions of Chilean flags of all sizes being flown on buildings, in buildings, and from antennas of passing cars, and of course businesses closing for the holiday. We tried Hertz and Avis - no answer. Finally, someone answered at Budget, but they would be closing in a couple hours. He gave me some quick instructions, as the girl and attendant did not speak English. They only had one car, an older Subaru with many miles, a cracked windshield, and numerous dents. But it ran BUENO, and we got a discount for the windshield, along with a lot of laughs between us during the transaction due to language problems.

Sunday morning is bright and beautiful as we head across the street to pick up the car. Dick asks if we checked the oil, fan belts, water. All good ideas since we will be venturing out into a desert. The car cranks over pretty slow, but sounds okay. We pull the car out into the sunlight where we can see something - water - rusty, fanbelt - cracked, oil - probably changed 15000 miles ago. Oh well, it only has to run for about 8 more hours. Our car runs like a champ as we marvel at the changing colors and the vast nothingness of this desert; so dry that we don't see



even a cactus or tumbleweed until we near San Pedro, an oasis in the shadow of the snow covered volcano Lincancabur situated on the Bolivian border with an elevation of 5900 meters. San Pedro has one alley where merchants, many of Indian descent peddle their wares- brightly colored jewelry, sweaters, baskets. The dozen or so streets in the town are unpaved, of sun baked dirt, with numerous mud houses and walls along their shoulders. There are a few restaurants in the town - a llama disappeared into one of them as we walked by. Some small boys armed with a snorkel and mask were playing in less than a foot of water that was flowing in one of the drainage ditches. The bartender at the spot we chose for lunch was playing a tape of an old US blues artist like Lightning Hopkins (sorry I couldn't nail it down for you blues fans).

We visited the old church there, the museum, and then headed back down a dirt road in search of the Vallee De La Luna (Valley of

the Moon), so named for its moonlike landscape where sedimentary rocks which often stood up on their ends were interspersed with expanses of windblown sand. Dick was in rock jock heaven. On the way back we crossed over the tropic of Capricorn again on the Pan Am Highway which seemed in some strange way to have made our journey complete (even though Dick proclaimed he didn't feel any different after crossing the line). Thus ended our stay in Antofagasta as we would fly back to Santiago tomorrow morning.

**SANTIAGO...** Our hotel was located in the heart of the business and shopping district, so after a short rest, Lori and I hit the streets. After walking around for awhile we found an empty park bench and people watched. We noticed that like Antofagasta, the people here were in general very neatly dressed - the grunge look of the U S was definitely not in here. Many of the women wore well tailored uniforms, as did school children.

Obesity was virtually nonexistent in all ages, and the younger women in particular all tended to wear a boxy shoe with thick soles and high heels.

A little more strolling and we came across a fast food place called "Embers" which also served Schop (draft beer) with their sandwiches. Look out Micky D's!! That afternoon we contracted with the hotel to supply us with a car and driver to go to Portillo the next day, as Dick wanted to see the lodge and felt it would afford us some spectacular





—Licancabur volcano from the streets of San Pedro.

views of the Andes. The day ended with all of us having a nice meal at a German restaurant right around the corner from the hotel.

**PORTILLO...** The ski resort of Portillo lies about 90 miles northeast of Santiago at an altitude of a little under 9000 feet, while the surrounding peaks go as high as 21000' (Cerro Aconcagua). The gradual climb in elevation brought us through very fertile areas, where vineyards were in abundance, past an alpaca and llama farm, and eventually into higher country which progressed from cactus to only rock and snow. The road we took was a major route between Chile and Argentina, and is kept open all winter despite a series of about 20 switchbacks and steep dropoffs with no guard rails. The ski lodge itself is nestled between a couple of imposing peaks, with the dining areas having a nice view of the frozen natural lake behind the structure.

After a nice cafeteria style lunch, we explored the facility and headed for our car only to discover a group of nuns throwing snowballs at each other in the parking lot. The remainder of the day was filled with more beautiful scenery, and as a finale, some last minute shopping in Santiago.

**VALPARAISO...** It was now Wednesday and we had until about 4 o'clock before we needed to be picked up for our flight back to Miami. We had met Victor Salas Serani at the regatta where he was in charge of the cadets who were there competing as students from Chile's Escuela Naval, located in Valparaiso. According to my calculations, we would have time to catch the bus to Valparaiso and attempt to hook up with Victor since he had been kind enough to extend an invitation to come visit their campus if time permitted. The two hour ride each way (for about \$3.30) would put us on a tight schedule, but one that was still feasible. We caught the very clean and on time subway to the bus terminal where we boarded our "Tur-Bus" for the journey.

Valparaiso is the port city for Santiago, and is the oldest and most important port in Chile. Besieged by earthquakes and pirates, it emerged as a commercial center due to the mining industry in the 19th century. Coastal mountains ring the har-

bor, with the houses and streets built right up to their base. After arrival at the bus station we tried to contact Victor by phone, but were unable to decipher their pay phone system. So - we started to walk, asking people for directions as we went; unfortunately with little success due to our limited Spanish. After about 15 minutes of thinking we weren't getting anywhere, we saw a man in a naval uniform who spoke a little English and told us to flag down the "M" bus and let the driver know our destination. Presto - a few moments later we're on the right bus (we hope) and after about five minutes we arrive at the school. We ask for Victor at the gate, but it takes several conversations and several phone calls inside by the guard to locate him. Finally he appears with a big smile on his face, and gives us a great tour of the campus. While there, we also renew acquaintances with several of the cadets with whom we had sailed in Antofagasta. Time grows short and we must say our good byes. The trip back to the bus terminal is a piece of cake. We grab an empanada and a coke to go, and hop aboard the bus back to Santiago, with the realization that our visit to Chile is sadly drawing to a close.

**EPILOGUE...** This was a GREAT trip! Chile is a country with a varied topography, and many interesting places to see and people to meet. Our hosts and the regatta sponsors in Antofagasta demonstrated a hospitality second to none. Regarding the \$25 entrance fee I mentioned earlier - in return, we received the following: Five days of great sailing and first class race committee work, lunches and drinks everyday via the Coca-Cola girls, tour of Escondida Mine, half price rooms with a super breakfast included, Thursday's cookout, opening ceremony party, awards dinner and party, trophies or certificates for everyone, Coca-Cola jackets, South American Championship posters, hats, and stickers, posters of the naval training ship "Esmeralda", \$1000.00 cash to the winner of the downwind race, and finally, fond memories that will last a lifetime. I hope that should a similar type of opportunity present itself to any of you, that you will take advantage of it. Until we meet again - Adios amigos!

—Photo credits: Lori Foster, Barry Ohlson, Craig Thayer







This Year's Events

