



At New Years Eve we had a tiny joyful party at the banks of *Rio Luján*. Ruth, Kyall, Anne and Cara, Henk and Cornelia and last but not least we too. We made an evening picknick, enjoyed sparklers, some funny games and some sparkling vine, *claro*. In *Rio Luján* the *Porteños* started a boats korso: most of the people wanted to watch the fireworks of *Buneos Aires* from the riverside.



You can imagine how difficult it was, to leave some days later. Cara had to return to South Africa, we want to travel on *Rio Paraná* and *Rio Paraguay* heading north as far as possible and Ruth, Kyall and Anne will jump in Boo's shoes to explore the inner wild of South America. But who is Boo? Do you know?

Our first step is not a big one, roundabout 550 yards. Just in front of *Yacht Club Barlovento* we drop the anchor and spend there a quiet and relaxing day. Next day saw us beginning our travel to the "unknown country". We are following small and narrow channels to reach one of the mayor arms of *Rio Paraná*. On the banks are a lot of houses and huts, most of them standing on piles. After a while they become smaller and smaller and more and more picturesque. Everywhere fishing people. Here a vaporetto – a kind of swimming omnibus – maintaining public traffic and and there a drifting minimarket. A lot of new impressions but nevertheless all the time one eye is fixed to the echosounder because there are no valid and safe soundings of the channels. Only once we get stuck but we can free ourselves within a few minutes. Then we reach *Rio Paraná de las Palmas*, one of the numerous



arms in this gigantic delta. Suddenly the landscape is wide and open and we feel lost. But it's currents don't let us time for practicing philosophy or just enjoying. Within seconds it sets us on a sandbank. But luckily again we can free ourselves. Continuing on this wide stream we reach the little town of *Zarate* dropping the anchor close to a tiny beach. The entrance channels of both of the clubs are to shallow. We get stuck with the first attempt.

Next morning presents a nice surprise. The engine waterpump is only fixed with two screws out of four which too are coming loose. The mechanic in San Fernando has destroyed two of the four threads. "Fix is followed by loose" (a German saying). Fortunately the material is strong enough and Martin can cut two new threads for bigger screws. Meanwhile Cornelia and Henk with MATAHARI are showing up. We can't stop Henk who wants to help. And in spite of our protests he informes the *Prefectura* about an averaged yacht anchoring in the river. So it happens what must happen and we get some vistics of two boats of the *Prefectura* and an invitation to enter the little port of the *Prefectura* -Training-Center in *Zarate*. Really nice but now we have no chance to avoid the paperworks of clearing in and out. At least the story becomes funny because the officials do not find the correct blanco-formulas. Do we have some? We? Of course not! But the officers are polite and friendly and offer cold drinks to refresh their rare visitors. Can you imagine a German office serving coke and sprite to it's clients?



Short time later we enter the river again. Temperature is rising up to 40° C and even the waters of the river in which we dip every evening don't cools our hot bodies

down. Only the chilly white wine of *Bodega Fin de Tierra* from Patagonia makes our minds moving far south to more refreshing areas. We are staying in a nearly perfect idyll. Small wooded banks, heons, *Martín Pecadores*, a larger brother of the european Icebird and a lot of *Caracaras*. Next day we try a shortcut. The *Prefectura* officers recommended the *Rio Baradero*, a small channel leading directly to *San Pedro*. So again we spend a day between narrow banks. Again and again fishermen´s huts and little camps. Some huts are constructed out of old oil drums. They look very colourful, advertisement included. We would like to know what the people are catching. In the evening we reach *San Pedro* and – we didn't expect – a very pretty Yacht Club. We can stay for free - electricity and water inclusive and enjoy the comfort of the services and attractions. Just arrived and without any time to clear our minds Madame Pili is introducing herself. She offers help and support and we are invited to drink some *Mate* and – tomorrow – to share an *Asado*. The beginn of a wonderful friendship. Next days see us joined together. Madame Pili invites us to visit her *Rosario Rowing Club* in *Rosario*. *San Pedro* is small but beautiful and really a vivid town where we enjoy the next days. Bad wheather makes it impossible to continue.

Two days travel to *Rosario*. Totally different. There the idyllic *San Pedro*, nearly paradise-like calm anchorage next to *Isla Infiel* (except of the tiny little *Pampero* which nearly struck our boat ashore early in the morning) and here the busy city of *Rosario*. First we don't dare to enter the *Rowing Club*. Seems to be too small. We prefere the *Yacht Club*. But some days later we change our berth and recognize that the *Rosario Rowing* is the better choice. Well...We are entering the city's nightlife and the „*Puerto del Aire*“ enjoying a very special program. During the evening at around eleven o'clock a young man starts singing. First nearly there are no reactions by the auditorium but then more and more applause starts. Then a well-proportioned middle-aged man is continuing the program. Looks like the boss of the bar: “The boss is entertaining himself”. But this is only a short intermezzo too. Now we introduce the godness, on stage: „*La diosa Rosarina*“. She or he is no friend of bordeom and only a few moments later she (or he) is sitting on Martins shoulder. Too fast for Ankes camera and too surprising for Martin to join the play in a more vivid manour because she came from backside and – our little problem – we could'nt understand one word of her (or his) high speed monologue. What a pity because she (or he) brings a lot of fun to the auditorium and one neighbour barely can't hide his emphazys.

Obsessed with Martins idea to stock up our vine cellar in *Mendoza* we don't use the cheap bus connection but rent a car. No wonder that our travel to *Mendoza* doesn't follow our first – straighter - plans. But we have a lot of unexpected experiences and little adventures. After a one days drive crossing the plane intensively farmed *pampa* (soja, soja, soja...) – we have to recognize that we are not familiar with the huge dimensions of this country. We turn right to some small midlands called “*Pampa Sierra*” due to the amazing introductions of our travel guide. But like often our experiences are totally different. We pass villages which do not exist (where we are or did we miss them?). Endless dirt roads, endless fences of barbed wire, desert like bushlands and then really surprising we meet the smallest and the



biggest of all the natural aeronauts: first metal-like shining hummingbirds and some time later the giants Andean Condors and Purple Vultures. We are fascinated and are glad that we didn't follow the planned route. Next morning we meet the first flock of Lamas. And for the first time after a long long time we rise Martins beloved old tent. That Martin isn't able to open the heater of his cooking stove is only a little blemish. Our neighbour on the campsite noticed our problem and only one minute later he supports us with – do you know? Correct, he supports our poor stomachs with freshly grilled meat. Is there anything left to be satisfied and happy?

We continue to *Mendoza*. Good weather conditions offers clear skies and fascinating sights. From extreme distance we can see the Andean mountains rising at the horizon, a giants wall alongside the coastline of the Pacific Ocean. First we try to discover *Mendoza* and to find out how to spend the time in this awesome landscape. It is a pity but we can not realize our idea to cross the Andean Mountains on horseback. It is too early in the year. The passes are still closed by snow! But it is only a cats jump to the *Aconcagua*, Americas highest peak. So we book a five-day mule-ride and a three days hike in the mountains afterwards. A really crazy rule of the national parks administration says that we need a guide and one muleteer for three mules. And so it works: we are 2 people and 1 guide which means 3 riding animals and 1 for our luggage, the *Gaucha*-muleteer needs a riding mule too (of course), in total 5 animals. But this means another muleteer and – claro - a riding mule and a second luggage mule! 7 mules und 3 staff to get us up the hills. Bureaucratic madness! Nevertheless we will dare it. The way to our starting point is breathtaking. Scree plains with sparse vegetation, mountains with huge debris flanks, in between the wildly streaming earthlike coloured *Rio Mendoza*. Then the first snow covered peaks. And still we are traveling up and up. Finally we reach 10.000 feet but the mountains around us still rise up further 10.000 feet! Our expectations are increasing. But then the surprise. We couldn't agree to the condition of our mules. Surely we didn't expect that these animals are treated in let us say European manour, but we cannot accept that four out of this seven mules need a longer break because of open wounds on their back, at their bellies and flanks. It's really ridiculous that the accompanying veterinary controls the weight of all the luggage and notes every amount of it but totally ignores the condition of the mules. We discuss the pros and cons and decide to refuse this four mules. To our surprise our guide shares our opinion. The *Gaucha* muleteers stay neutral. They will try to get new mules for tomorrow. We can spend the night in *Punta del Incas* for free. This little village close to the Chilean border still keeps an atmosphere of a frontier town. Some small houses, some military buildings, telegraf lines and a railway road. Wind and dust. Perfect surroundings for a remake of *Play the Song of Death*

On the same evening we are informed that it is impossible to get new mules. The travel agency offers a storno of the whole travel or to do the three days hike to the *Aconcagua* only. To keep their honour we have to mention that the agency gave back all the money for the horseback-riding inclusive the (expensive) national park fees. And we got one night in the *hospedaje* and the transfers fro free.

Definitely we want to hike the mountains and so the day later you could see us heading to *Confluencia*. The trail is not difficult but the unusual height makes us short breathing. But we really enjoy it! The mountains are so colourful - beige, sand und ochre change to earthy and brownish colours, here redish nuances and some warm grey there. Huge slopes of debris, loose sediments. On the path the material is pulverized by thousands of feet. Every footstep causes a little dusty whirlwind. The mule caravans travel in a big cloud of dust. But none of the mules we see is in a condition as bad as the mules we saw the day before. We feel affirmed in our yesterdays decision. About 2.200 feet in altitude later we reach the little plateau where we find camp *Confluencia*. There are a lot of big tents of several agencies, tents for cooking, tents for equipment, tents to rest and not to forget – how nice - toiletts. The park rangers maintain a little medical aid station where a obligatory health check of every hiker and mountaineer is undertaken.



We are welcomed with fresh melone and a big jar of fruit juice.

We do more than enjoy the juice. In this altitude it is very important to drink a lot. It is a pity that our tent turned out to be unsuitable to the conditions at *Confluencia* and we are really annoyed because we left Martins good old tent in *Mendoza*. It would have reduced a lot of crunching dust between our teeth and we believe the night would have been much cosier. Few Minutes after sunset nature starts a colourful painting. The last sunlight is moving up the mountains slopes becoming more and more intensive until it reaches the peaks where the light slowly turns down. A reddish golden glime in the sky over the western peaks remains, becoming pale and turning into the dark blue of the beginning darkness and shadows of the night are descending on the camp. But then one by one stars enlight the southern sky und all this little lights seem to approach more and more.

In the morning Martin is suffering from heavy headache but after breakfast and drinking a lot of water and juice he feels better again. We plan a day hike to *Plaza Francia*. The path is moderately rising. After half an hour we reach the mouth of a black glacier and follow its tongue up. Yesterday the hikers had very bad weather, a steady change of rain, snow, sleet and sun. For us the sun shines all day long but the wind is remaining frosty – no wonder cooled by glacier winds. But nevertheless in this altitude we still find little shrubs, herbs and some strange succulents. And – remember we are staying in Argentina – a little carnivor plant. One of its harmless looking flowers is promptly biting as Martin

puts one of his fingers into it. Ouch! Reaching the highest point of our hike we rest. First time in our life we reached 4.000 m (13.000 feet). We are very happy that our weak untrained sailors legs did their job so well and we enjoy the impressing view of *Aconcagua's* south face. Then we turn back. (It needs a little struggle with todays morning seemingly dead Martin to convince him that there is no need to walk the last two and a half kilometer (down!) to *Plaza Francia*. Half an hour later he got a good opportunity to have his fling. He lost his cap (not the first one) and can run an additional loop looking for it. Finally it is the first cap he got back. On sea they normally sink after a few seconds.

From *Mendoza* we continue and visit two other national parks: *Valle de la Luna* and *Talampaya*. Both are characterised by an unique geologic structure you cannot find at any other place on our planet. But because we are no geologists we simply enjoy the bizarre landscape. Desert-like scurril eroded valleys, rocky walls of rusty red towers of sandstone and rocky balls which must be thrown by giants hands. We meet condors again and big colourful parrots. Until that day we could not imagine that these birds are living in a kind of desert too. We always thought them to be inhabitants of rain forests.

Passing *San Juan* we return to *Rosario* to continue our travel on the *Rio Paraná*. But what about the vines of *Mendoza*? We can't explain why but we had no success. Entering a bodega's yard it allways was closed. And the simple *vino patero* which we bought in a 5 litres-bottle at a street stand didn't survive a nocturnal spontaneous *fiesta* in *Talampaya*. Caused by the dry desert winds? Who knows?

Meanwhile we are back aboard our JUST DO IT following *Rio Paraná* upstream. But this is another story.

Finally we have to report that Tatio has left. We gave him to Rosarios Zoo where he found a sweet little girl-friend. Both are young but we are sure that they know what to do when they are old enough. We still miss him though he mostly spend his time sleeping.

Hugs and kisses

Martin + Anke
SY JUST DO IT
In *Esquina, Rio Paraná km 855, Argentina*

