

# IN PATAGONIA

Photographs by Derek Henderson

WORDS BY THOMAS CHATTERTON WILLIAMS

● The road from Paris to Patagonia, oddly enough, once ran straight through the living room of the iconic modernist designer Eileen Gray. It was in the then 93 year old's salon that Bruce Chatwin, a young British journalist for the *Sunday Times Magazine*, chanced upon a map of that stretch of land at the southern tip of South America, "the uttermost part of the earth," as he would come to describe it, which she had painted. "I've always wanted to go there," he told her. "So have I," she said, "go there for me." Two years later, in November 1974, Chatwin did just that, flying to Lima and reaching Patagonia a month after that. Upon arrival, he quit his magazine job and spent the next six months traveling up and down that desolate and sublime landscape of bogs in Tierra del Fuego and the glaciers beyond El Calafate, taking buses, hitchhiking and drifting, often walking for miles at a time from one destination to the next. The trip resulted in the instant classic *In Patagonia*, his 1977 collection, so vivid and perceptive it established his reputation among the greats of travel writing virtually overnight.

Chatwin's book, structured in 97 discreet entries ranging in length from a single paragraph to several pages, proceeds with minimal narrative momentum. In place of story and plot, he provides intricate and evocative patterns: images and motifs that appear and reappear and combine—like the terrain itself—into a sprawling tapestry far greater than the sum of its individual parts. These episodes are usually tied to a locale that Chatwin visits, which he has either

learned of from a native or passes through on the way to somewhere else. Other times, his interest has been piqued by a novel sight or ceremony. However they're sparked, the same incidents are frequently revisited.

Chatwin himself compared his writing technique in *In Patagonia* to the photographic process that seeks to frame large quantities of information, capturing and preserving only moments of consequence. In keeping with his writer-as-camera formulation, he consciously restricts his own presence within the text. Instead, the emphasis falls on the various people he encounters and the residues left by the myths that saturate this alien land with deeper human significance. That would include the maneuverings of Butch Cassidy and the Sundance Kid, legendary outlaws who hid out in Patagonian no-man's land after robbing banks and terrorizing the Southwestern United States. At other times, Chatwin searches far and wide for unicorn fossils. There are also colorful portraits of English sheep ranchers, the descendants of Falkland Island kelpers, Scottish shepherds and exiled Welsh nationalists who, in 1865, fled their failed independence movement. It turns out his British countrymen's presence in Patagonia is extensive.

We are told of the mining concern with its orders posted in English and Gaelic, of the homes where cucumber sandwiches accompany afternoon tea, of *The Magellan Times*, the Bank of London and South America and the British Club. We meet a rancher from Scotland who wears kilts and plays the bagpipes, an English

lady who grows strawberries in Tierra del Fuego, and another across the Chilean border who, when Allende seized power, was evicted from a farm her family had owned for generations. Recalling the fall of that regime, she tells Chatwin: "There was a bit of shooting in the morning, and by afternoon they had all the Marxists rounded up. It was beautifully done."

Drawing inspiration from Chatwin's singular but by no means exhaustive tour, the New Zealand-born photographer Derek Henderson—another subject of her majesty—set out with his Mamiya 67 and 4 x 5 field camera, using rich color negatives to retrace and recreate the essential patterns from Chatwin's masterpiece, resulting in this lush series of images for *Holiday*. "I started driving from Bahia Blanca and ended up in Tierra Del Fuego," Henderson recalls. "We drove as far south as you can go in a vehicle in the world—to the end of the earth, so to speak." And with these postcards from the end of the world—eternal images of rock, ice, water, grass and sunlight, as well as all variety of testament to the resilience of human civilization and life—Henderson has fastidiously captured the spirit of *In Patagonia*, its conflicting sense of adventure and boredom on the road, the lonely rhythms of walking and riding buses and even hitching rides on trucks. In turn, he has visited many of the same places Chatwin saw first. But he has also made the region—in its rugged expanse, in its pristine blue skies, red sunsets and dawns and straight, unceasing roads—something new and entirely his own. THE END





*Gauchos at Estancia Cancho and pick up truck in El Chalten, 4092km  
Opposite: Shrine outside of El Calafate, 3305km  
Page 187: A-frame houses at Fuentes Del Coyle, 4063km*





*Shrine on side of road, Tierra Del Fuego, 5705km  
Opposite: The bed Bruce Chatwin slept in  
at Estancia Via Monte, Tierra Del Fuego, 5744km*



*Perito moreno, National Park Los glaciares, 3651km*  
Opposite: *The hotel where Bruce Chatwin stayed in Rico Pico, 1852km*  
Next spread: *Lago Viedma, 3321km*







From top to bottom: *Lago Pueyrredon, 2591km, and a bridge over Rio Electrico, 3279km*  
Opposite: *Berberis Darwinii* flowering shrub discovered by Darwin in 1834, *Tierra Del Fuego, 5366km*

