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| |  | | --- | | All members-in-good-standing of the Teddy Roosevelt fan club know that he almost died on a famous trip in 1914 to explore the River of Doubt in Brazil. My wife Lynn and I knew that Roosevelt had gone to Argentina in advance of his expedition to Brazil, but we only learned of his sojourn to Chile and the crossing of the Andes when we made the same Andean crossing this February. Once our guide told us this story, we could compare Roosevelt’s trip to ours, deepening our appreciation of what we were seeing.    The Andes mountain range is a formidable barrier between Chile and Argentina. One of the few passages involves four lakes between Puerto Varas in Chile and Bariloche in Argentina. While initially a commercial way, Ricardo Roth turned it into a tourist route in 1913. One of his first clients was Theodore Roosevelt. Prior to meeting up with Cândido Rondon in Brazil, Roosevelt went from Argentina to Santiago, Chile and then to Puerto Varas on Lago Llanquihue (pronounce it as “Yankee way”).  Following Roth’s tourist route, Roosevelt took a steamer on Lago Llanquihue to Petrohué. There he went by horse to a get a boat on Lago Todos los Santos to Villa Peulla, where he spent the night at a “thoroughly comfortable hotel”. The next day, Roosevelt and his party went overland across the border to Puerto Frias, a boat on Lago Frias, overland from Puerto Alegre to Puerto Blest, and finally a boat on Lago Nahuel Huapi to Bariloche. While Roosevelt traveled overland on horse, his luggage was carried in ox carts along specially designed tracks.  Roosevelt described this trip in “From Ox Cart to Motor Car in the Andes” (*The Outlook*, May 23, 1914, pp. 171-185). The article includes photographs by Frank Harper and Kermit Roosevelt. The lakes are overlooked by snow-capped volcanoes, and there are no less than four photographs of the impressive Tronador Volcano *(Figure 1 top)*.  This tourist route remains popular more than a century later, and it is still run by the Roth family, now in its fourth generation. The boats remain, but the horses and ox carts have been replaced by buses and cargo trucks. Now, there is a road from Puerto Varas to Petrohué, eliminating one of the boat trips, but otherwise, it is the same. When Lynn and I made the crossing, our luggage was put into a large metal crate in Petrohué, and we were told not to expect to see it again until we were in Bariloche 10 hours later. | |

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| |  | | --- | | The terrain is still rugged, the lakes are still beautiful, and the volcanoes are still spectacular. The view of the symmetric, snow-capped Osorno Volcano from the Lago Todos los Santos is breathtaking *(Figure 2)*, and the Tronador Volcano looms over the landscape *(Figure 1 bottom)*. At Villa Puella where Roosevelt spent the night, there is a large, modern tourist hotel, where we had a delicious buffet lunch. There is little else there, and the hotel caters to tourists interested in outdoor activities like hiking, horseback riding, and kayaking. | |

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| |  | | --- | | The road from Villa Puella to Puerto Frias winds through the forest along the sides of cliffs. The horizon and even the huge Tronador volcano are obscured, so how someone figured out this route is a marvel. It may have originally been a path of native Americans.  The road crosses the Chile-Argentina border, so shortly after Villa Puella, we cleared Chile Immigration. That left us and our group (and all tourists) in a potential no-man’s land. Our passports had been stamped with the “salida” from Chile, but we were in a forest, and not yet in Argentina. The Argentina Customs and Immigration awaited us further on at Puerto Frias. The metal crates with luggage somehow were there now on a truck, and some of our luggage was randomly selected for customs inspection. Fortunately, this is Chile and Argentina in 2020, so we were not too worried. The last time I was in Chile was 1980, when Pinochet was in charge and Argentina was under the control of a military dictatorship, infamous for the “desaparecidos”. The inspection was indeed perfunctory, and the luggage was returned to the metal crates to continue on its way to Bariloche.  Our last boat cruised the fourth lake, Lago Nahuel Huapi. I am afraid that we were so saturated by all the beauty we had seen that we could not appreciate this final lake. The next day however, we went to the top of a hill near Bariloche and had a glorious view of its remarkable lake and mountain surroundings *(Figure 3)*. This is how Roosevelt described the last lake crossing: “The lake is of bold and irregular outline, with many deep bays, and mountain walls as standing as promontories between the bays. For a couple of hours, the scenery was as beautiful as it had been during any part of the two days, especially when we looked back at the mass of snow-shrouded peaks.”  How great that this description remains true more than a century later! | |

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