



## Zorro in Tierra Del Fuego

*John Lawrence*

Jerry McMahon, my brother-in-law; Lucas, our guide and horse wrangler; and I decided to do a horse-packing trip into the back country of Tierra Del Fuego, getting to know the “land” a little before we set sail on our chartered thirty-five foot cutter, the Unicornio, for an adventurous trip around Cabo de Hornos (a.k.a. “the Horn”). We also planned to cruise up the Beagle Channel to explore the incredibly beautiful and remote fiords, glaciers, etc. of this southernmost part of Argentine and Chilean Patagonia.

We were traveling light and so had no extra pack animals. Our goal was to ride and explore around Mt. Susanna, becoming familiar with the area, camping, and eating meals that were well-prepared over a camp fire. We planned to ride our horses to the top of the mountain itself.

We had ridden most of the day, skirting the mountain at a higher elevation, and by late afternoon dropped down to sea-level and continued on close by the beach. Along the water’s edge, flocks of sea birds made raucous outcries as we approached them. Along the rocky coast, we could see huge mats of floating kelp and many islands, large and small, further out to sea. Beyond these were the islands of Chile.

Ahead of us, beginning just a few feet back from the high water mark and extending for a considerable distance along the rocky beach, I spotted large hummocks, mounds covered in low, green vegetation, in what was otherwise a generally

green, meadow-like area sloping upward toward the forest that covered the mountain’s flank. I was sure that these were shell, bone, and ash middens left by the Yamana Indians who had lived here for thousands of years before European sailors and explorers brought disease and other gifts of Western civilization to these southern-most peoples of the world. I got off my horse to examine one of the middens. I had read how the Indians’ rough tipis had been constructed on the beach and, as they lived on shellfish and other marine animals and native plant species, each camp site, century by century, grew slightly higher atop its own refuse pile. Now, these ancient hillocks were the only reminder of a number of tribes who had once lived here within living memory, but were no more.

Charles Darwin had done much of his research here over a period of several years in the 1830s, acting as naturalist aboard the British exploration ship, the Beagle. He had taken a very dim, culturally biased view of these natives and made no bones about his critical views of the locals and their culture. Correctly, he observed that the peoples living here wore nearly no clothing year-round. Sometimes they wore just a skin thrown over one shoulder. Even in winter, with snow and the almost incessant wind, they lived this way in these extreme southern latitudes (equal in latitude to the Aleutian Islands off the Alaskan coast in the northern hemisphere). Major ethnic groups in Tierra del Fuego were the Selk’nam, Afacahuf, Haush, Yamana, and Tehuelche.

Not far beyond this ancient village site that had belonged to the Yamana, there was a rocky point running a little way into the sea. On it, a grove of trees provided shelter near the beach and would afford us a level place to camp that night. At this point, however, we were intent on having a late lunch and taking a break at the camp site before we rode further.

As we sat around on logs, talking and eating our snack, we were very surprised to see a fox boldly enter our camp and look us over. "Zorro," which is Spanish for "fox," checked out the periphery of our camp and then came warily, and yet almost fearlessly, closer to us. He boldly approached to within a few feet. Even the "fill" flash of my camera did not seem to frighten him. I was able to shoot a series of photos of Zorro. I was excited to get a chance to get so many shots of a fox in his natural habitat.

We made sure to hang all of our equipment and provisions high up in a tree before we left to continue our horse-back explorations. Going several miles further, we were able to look down on the Beagle Channel and clearly see some of the many small islands we would eventually be sailing around after we left Argentinian waters and entered Chilean territory aboard Unicornio.

After our outing, we returned to camp, retrieved our hanging equipment and food, and enjoyed our now-cool beer which we had earlier placed in the small stream that ran through camp. We relaxed, watching our wrangler prepare a great meal of very tasty, lean, grass-fed, Argentine beef grilled to perfection over the open camp fire. We also had fresh salad, vegetables, a very good, local, red wine, and of course, dessert.

After story-telling and a late walk on the beach under the stars, I decided to stretch out by the camp fire. Jerry and Lucas decided to sleep in their cramped, stuffy tents. It was an unbelievably beautiful night, with a clear sky and very bright stars. It had been years since I had been able to gaze into the nighttime sky of the Southern Hemisphere and see the Southern Cross.

I climbed into my light sleeping bag fully clothed, removing only my boots which I placed next to my head. I carefully put my mountaineering headlamp at my right hand, and feeling very happy after such a day, I listened to the regular, sonorous sounds coming from Jerry's distant tent, whose inhabitant "does not snore." I had stoked the camp fire and it was great to settle comfortably down beside it. I fell asleep while looking through a small

*Figure 1. John Lawrence and his brother-in-law, Jerry McMahon, in the Glenn Zorro. (Photo by Lucas, guide.)*





*Figure 2. The wiley Zorro.  
(Photo by John Lawrence.)*

opening in the tree branches at an unbelievably clear, DARK sky (there is as yet no light pollution in the night sky of Tierra Del Fuego).

Some time later, I was aroused by what I somehow “knew” to be the fox. The fire had died down to embers, but my head lamp was at hand right where I had put it. I switched it on and the fox quickly departed in the powerful beam of my lamp. I was groggy with sleep and still in my sleeping bag, but was able to pile some more wood on the fire, which soon burst into flickering flames as I dropped back off into a deep sleep.

Again, I was awakened by something happening in camp, and as I reached for my headlamp, I discovered that it was not where I had left it! In the now total darkness I felt all around for it, but it was simply gone. At first, I could not believe that it was not there. I got up and found the small, LED light attached to the zipper of my mountain jacket. With it, I was able to see that indeed, my headlamp was truly gone. Then, I decided to get my boots, which I had right by my head, and put them on before going into the wet grass and brambles to search for my head lamp. It was then that I found, to my utter disbelief, that my boots were both gone also! In my half-conscious mind, I truly could not comprehend or believe that my wonderful, trusty boots that had been on so many expeditions with me were simply

not there, that they had vanished. Finally, I was awake enough to face the fact that the fox – Zorro – must have taken them, and that he also must have removed my headlamp so that I could not aim its powerful eye at him as he did his thievery and made good his getaway.

I awakened the nearly comatose Lucas with great difficulty and we began a systematic search of the camp and beyond. I found my head lamp about thirty feet out from camp where the fox had partially disassembled it, his tooth marks plainly visible in the plastic lense. Fortunately, he had not damaged it and I soon had it back together and carried on with my search for my boots. After about an hour of fruitless effort, we gave up and went back to sleep.

In the morning, I awakened to shouts of disbelief from Lucas. He kept saying in his very broken English that the “#\*\*^@% Zorro” had stolen his new, expensive, gasoline backpacking cook stove which was still in its new, nylon drawstring bag. Lucas was very upset at his loss as the stove had been a recent acquisition and had been for him a luxury that was very expensive in Argentina. Soon, after he had calmed down a bit, he discovered that his riding quirt, which had been attached to his saddle by its wrist strap looped over the saddle horn, also had been taken. On closer examination, I discovered small tooth marks on the saddle horn where the fox

had deftly lifted off the wrist strap of the heavy wooden-handled quirt.

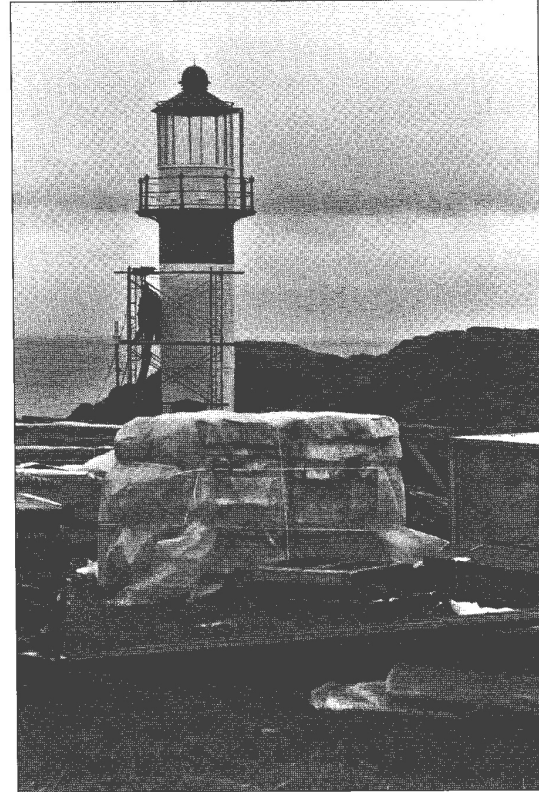
Later, when we began saddling up to prepare for our mountain ascent, we discovered that my tough, rawhide saddle girth cinch had been neatly cut off by razor sharp teeth, leaving only a few inches still attached to the girth ring of my saddle. We had to fashion a makeshift girth for my saddle before I could ride.

In the meantime, I had continued my search for my boots. Jerry had been up very early and had already spent an hour looking, but found nothing. Lucas offered me his size-eleven running shoes. Since my feet are size-fifteen, I had considerable trouble even getting into them. With all my toes turned under, I began my own extensive search for the missing boots. As I write, one of my big toe nails, which soon turned black, is coming off.

Realizing that Zorro had not simply carried our gear off some distance and dropped part of it after losing interest, I decided I would search for the entrance to his den. Before I began my limping foot-search, I calmed my thoughts, especially after I kept hearing Lucas repeat over and over that he was going to get a gun and come back and “kill the #&0{+%ing Zorro..” His threat upset me somehow and I decided to use my shamanic sight as best I could to locate the fox den. I could sense it under a rocky overhang, well camouflaged by shadow and vegetable matter. But, the area was well supplied with literally dozens of rocky outcrops and the majority of the land not underneath the trees had huge, head-high thickets of thorny gorse, heather, and other tangled and nearly impenetrable vegetation.

So, I closed my eyes and called to the fox. I told him of his danger from Lucas and his gun and of my desire to have my boots back. I did not want harm to befall him. I also told him that for stealing my boots, “he owed me one.” I said to Fox, “I want from you, in trade, fair weather on our voyage around Cape Horn—and I want to be able to land and go ashore there.”

It is well-known to mariners that the Westerlies blow unabated and uninhibited all the way around



*Figure 3. The Cape Horn light house which was under repair and reconstruction when we were there. (Photo by John Lawrence.)*

the Earth at this latitude. There is no land mass in the wind's path anywhere in the weather's circumnavigation of the globe, and so seas, winds, and storm fronts only grow larger as they revolve around the antarctic polar land mass, making this sailing route from the Atlantic to the Pacific a very perilous journey. Asking for help from Fox seemed entirely appropriate, considering what I had lost.

As I began my limping inspection of every conceivable den site, the words of a song I had remembered the night before came back to me:

*Oh, The fox went out on a chilly night,  
He prayed to the moon to give him light,  
For he had many a mile to go that night,  
before he reached the town O- town-O...*

The song goes on to tell how the fox took a grey goose and ducks, flung them—legs dangling down—across his back and carried them off. It suddenly made sense to me that he could have carried away our belongings in the same way.

After we had ridden back to the estancia (ranch) from which we had begun our horse trip, we encountered incredulity, though not outright disbelief, concerning my stolen boots. Even though they have been provisioning and leading horseback trips for many years, none of the wranglers or staff had ever heard of a fox stealing anything but food. All were incredulous that Zorro had done what he had. Weeks later, after we had returned from our sailing adventure around Cape Horn, Lucas told us he had ridden all the way back to our old campsite and had searched for two more days for our lost equipment, but again had found no trace -- nothing.

A few days later after clearing customs, health, immigration, and the Harbor Master's office in Ushuaia Argentina, we sailed to Puerto Williams on the far side of the Beagle Channel, where we again

went through the same protracted official paperwork (presided over by the Chilean Armada ) clearing us into Chilean Waters.

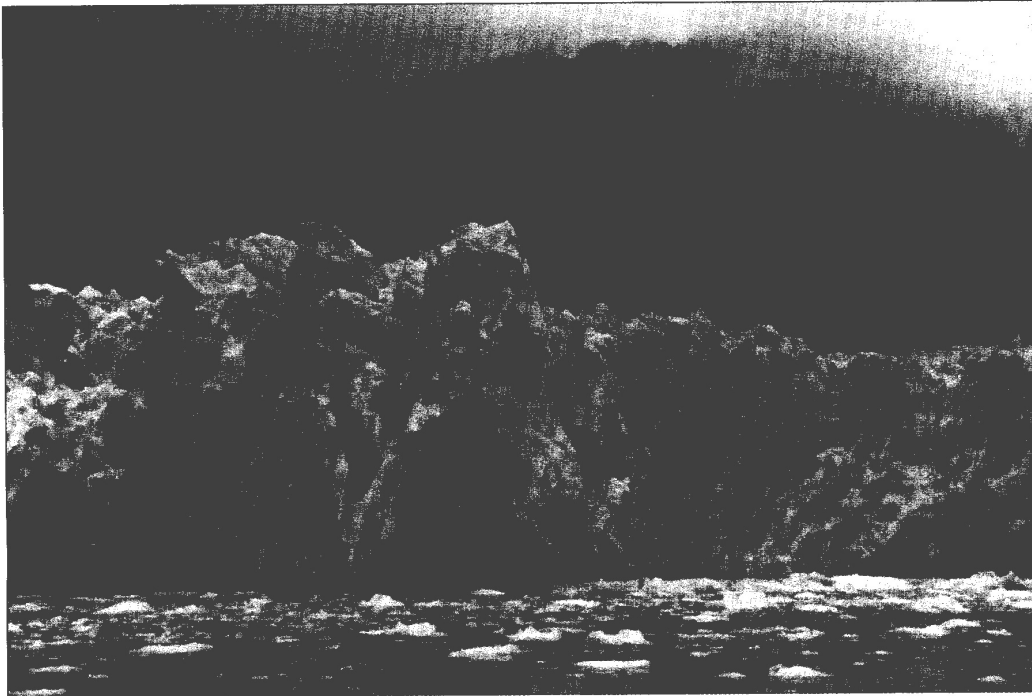
From there, we began our sea adventure of sailing 'round the Horn. We had our share of fair and foul weather and some that lived up to the reputation of this region. On the day before attempting to round the Horn, we were faced with gale-force winds and twelve foot seas, conditions under which we would not have been able to make the passage in our small sailboat or make a landfall to visit the lighthouse situated there. We got the weather we needed on the day of our passage and visited the lighthouse. We experienced the beauty and power of this place—and survived it! Thank you, Zorro!

After returning home to Seattle, and after a few days' rest, I resumed my healing practice. I was in my treatment room with a friend when the subject of my trip came up. I told Kris an abbreviated version of the Zorro story and suddenly realized that something in the room was missing. For many years, a large, signed, color engraving of a fox had hung conspicuously above my desk. It had been given to me by a client in exchange for shamanic work I had done for him. It was gone! I was at first shocked and confused. Then, I remembered that just before I had left for Patagonia, I had taken it down, for no particular reason other than I thought it was time for a change and to feature my own artwork. I had replaced Fox with a large, mounted photograph I had taken years ago. The fox picture, I can assure you, was soon back, hanging in its proper place. It is the first thing you see as you walk into my office.

I then walked down the hall to look at the photograph I had replaced Fox with. I well remembered taking it, over a quarter of a century ago, from



*Figure 4. Behind Lawrence is a memorial to Cape Horn donated by Australia. He is standing on Cape Horn. (Photo by Jerry McMahon.)*



*Figure 5. Bill Glacier calving off. (Photo by John Lawrence.)*

the wheel house of the tug boat on which I was crew. It is of a dark, stormy sea in the gulf of Alaska with the snow capped Mount Fairweather in the distance, gleaming in the dawn sun. (It was only at this very instant that I realized the meaning and relevance of the name of that mountain: Mount Fairweather-- fair weather to sail around Cape Horn!

In my ensuing shamanic journeys to Fox, he has shown me through clear steps going all the way back through my life how He has made repeated appearances. From my earliest childhood through puberty He appeared to me in folk tales. Later, in the 1960s when I was living in the south of England, He appeared when I was in a party of Englishmen on a foxhunt. On and on, the memories came forward, making me aware that this being's presence has been with me all of my life. I had just never been aware of it so poignantly and powerfully before.

"Don't let it happen again," Zorro warned!

Then, I recalled my earlier journey to him as I stood in my soaking-wet stocking feet in our camp in Tierra del Fuego. I remembered the campsite, nestled as it was in a quiet woods with a stream and

a green carpet of mosses covering the earth where we camped, framed by wild mountains and the sea surrounding all. I remembered feeling something, a deep recognition that this campsite seemed like an enchanted place. I sensed the many ancestors of the now extinct native peoples who inhabited Tierra del Fuego over the last twelve-thousand years. I had gone there believing that the ancient peoples were all dead. Feelings of sadness and remorse had filled me from knowing that it was the coming of Europeans with their diseases, religious zeal, and relentless acquisitiveness that sealed these native peoples' fates. I believed I would not be able to contact their shamans and healers, who were no more. I now know that it was their spirits whom I met in that glen in the mountain forests of Tierra del Fuego near to their old campsite recognized now only by its ancient middens of shell, bone, and ash, spirits which had greeted us as we first approached the glen where we camped. I now know where to again meet them in the NOR of the Middle World. Through all this, I feel welcomed and protected by my ally and companion, the cunning and wily Zorro, the Fox.