

# INTO THE ANTARCTIC: ANALYZING THE TRENDS OF COMMERCIALIZATION

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## **ABSTRACT**

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Despite its reputation as one of the last great frontiers on the planet, Antarctica's commercialization over the past century has increased exponentially. To what extent is the development of the southernmost continent similar to the commercialization of other locations? The objective of this paper is to analyze thematic similarities between the commercial development of different sites, with a focus on three locations: Argentinian Patagonia, Chilean Patagonia, and Antarctica.

On December 29, 2018, I travelled to the southernmost city in the world – Ushuaia, Argentina – with the objective of purchasing a last-minute ticket on an icebreaker ship to Antarctica. In the pursuit, I studied the commercial development trends in the surrounding territories before successfully embarking on an expedition to Antarctica. Using a framework that I created, known as the Commercialization Life Cycle, I analyzed trends that led to the commercialization process of the three regions.

## **Acknowledgements**

I would like to acknowledge E. Lee Walker for his role in supervising and inspiring me through the thesis process, for his dedication to empowering students, and for teaching me countless lessons that I will carry for the rest of my life. Dr. Gleeson has also been an incredible mentor and guide; his expertise challenged me to strive for excellence. Without these two gentlemen, I would not have had the confidence to research such a topic nor the ability to form the scope of this thesis. Thank you to Laura Landsbaum for graciously using her copy editing skills to improve the thesis. Much appreciation to Nicole Bluth for lending her GoPro for the duration of my research adventure. To all the travelers and researchers that I met along the way, our friendship is cherished and I am grateful that our paths crossed. To my parents, thank you for the ever-present support and love. Finally, I would like to acknowledge the researchers in Antarctica who sacrifice so much in the pursuit of answers to some of the world's most challenging problems. Thank you for your dedication to the pursuit and for your hospitality on the planet's most inhospitable continent.

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This two-part thesis explores the process by which a location commercially develops over time. In the first part, I explore six distinct periods over time that contain specific characteristics pertaining to commercialization that persist across locations. I describe these six periods by utilizing the Commercialization Life Cycle, a curve that illustrates how a location's rate of commercialization changes over time.

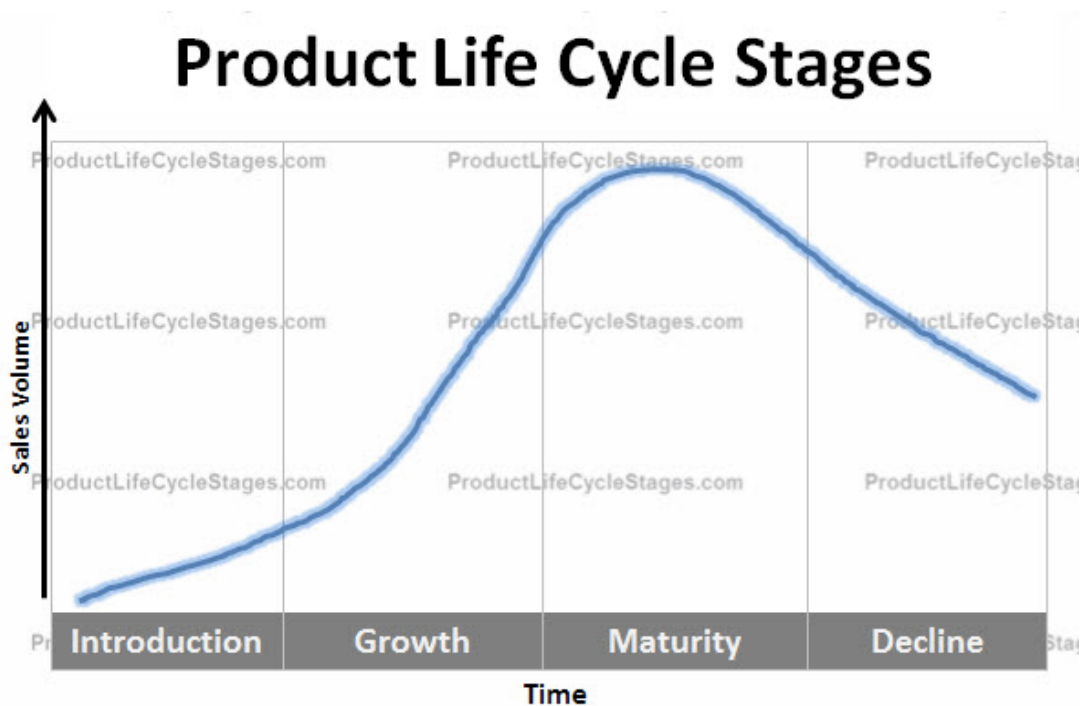
The second part of the thesis uses the Commercialization Life Cycle to analyze the development of Argentinian Patagonia, Chilean Patagonia, and Antarctica. After seven months of documenting my experiences researching, and then a month of traveling through these three sites, I compare the rate of commercialization and difficulty for each area to progress to the next stage of commercial development. Of particular interest in the second section of the thesis is the journey I took to find a last-minute ticket to Antarctica, the process. This rarely-documented experience provided critical insight to a unique cottage industry and served as the primary objective to my 30-day solo adventure over the 2018-2019 winter break.

By studying the history and present situation of these three locations, I analyzed what commercialization trends exist and how those trends impact local communities and the global population. The Commercialization Life Cycle is then used as a framework to recognize current efforts and to predict the forthcoming trends as development continues over time.

### Part 1: The Commercialization Life Cycle

The product life cycle is a fairly elementary way to illustrate the relationship between a product's sales performance and its maturity over time. There are four distinct stages, each with its own set of characteristics: Introduction, Growth, Maturity, and Decline. **Figure 1** provides an example of the product life cycle, which demonstrates the change in rate of sales over the course of a product's life<sup>1</sup>.

**Figure 1**



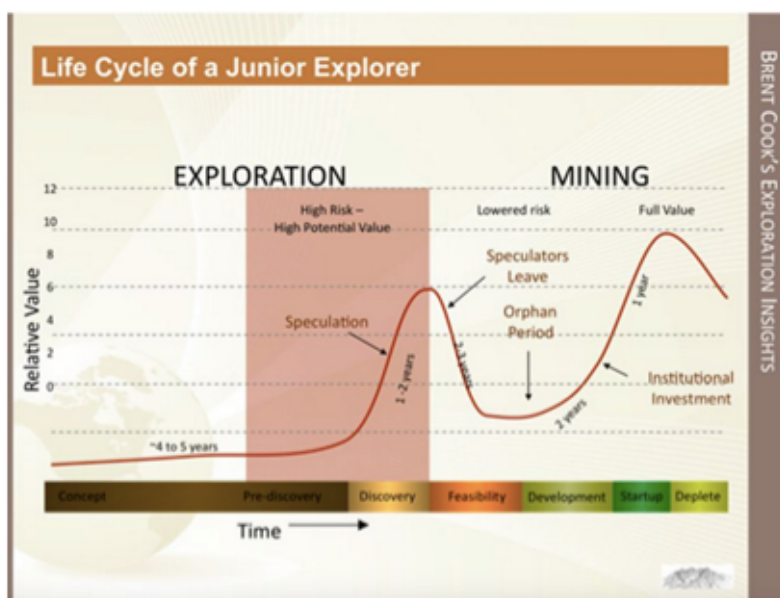
Similarly, there are graphs that provide insight on the value over time of natural resources such as Brent Cook's life cycle of a mine, seen in **Figure 2**<sup>2</sup>. However, there is not a clear analysis of the relationship between a landmass and its commercialization over time. This

<sup>1</sup> *Product Life Cycle Stages* (Living Better Media, 2019).

<sup>2</sup> Brent Cook, *Life Cycle of a Junior Explorer* (Exploration Insights, 2019).

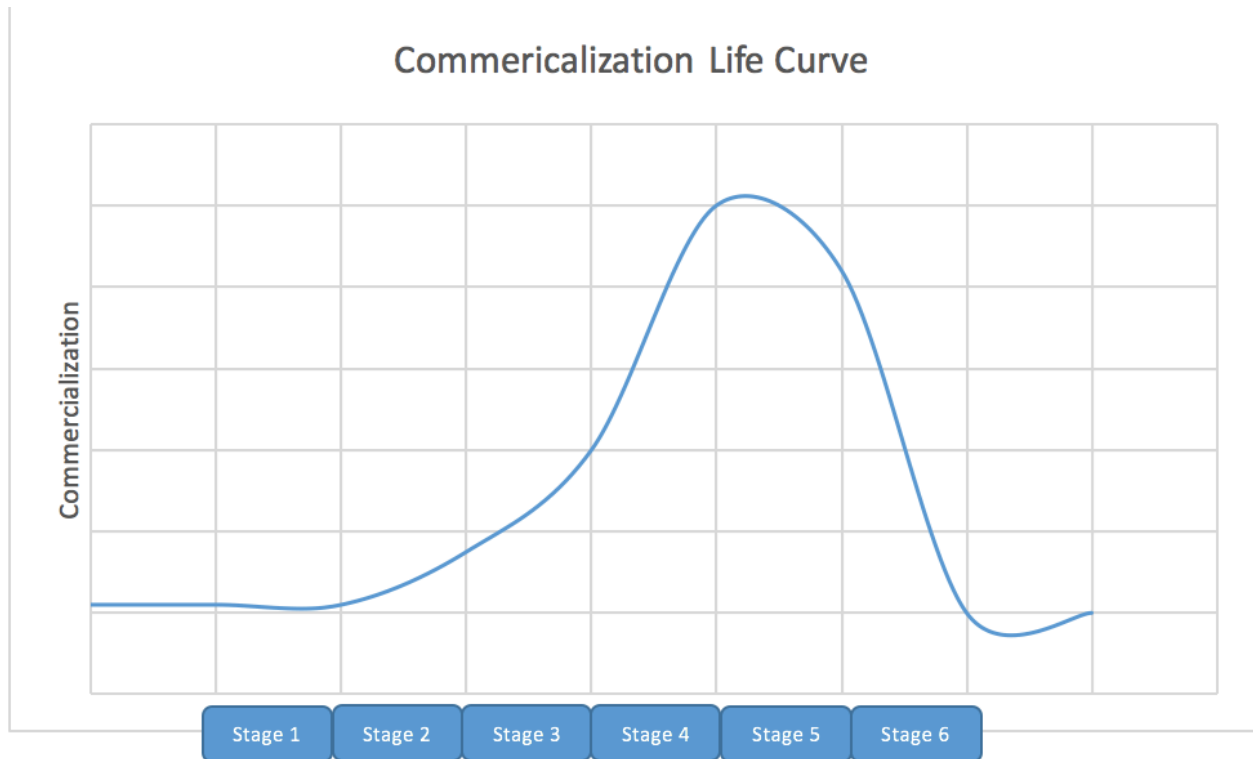
realization came as I began to research the exploration and commercial efforts in Antarctica. Early in the process, I had trouble understanding the level of commercialization of the southernmost continent compared to other underdeveloped areas like the deep sea or the other planets near Earth. There appears to be a distinct pattern for the development of natural locations and we are at a point where different landmasses are at different commercial maturities. Therefore, it seems possible to develop a graph that details the distinct stages. For now, I will call this the Commercialization Life Cycle.

**Figure 2**



### **Six Stages of Commercialization Life Cycle**

The Commercialization Life Cycle features six stages, with a curve shaped similarly to the product life cycle in Figure 1. The stages include Uncharted, Discovery, Resource Valuation, Development, Hyper-commercialization, and Over-exploitation. Time serves as the X-axis while the level of exploration effort serves as the Y-axis.



### *Stage 1: Uncharted*

The first stage, Uncharted, is fairly self-explanatory. The amount of fundamental understanding and knowledge of the location is relatively minimal: we know that it exists, but we lack a comprehensive understanding of what is there and how humans could exploit its resources. A current example of a location in this stage would be V616 Monocerotis, a black hole approximately 3,000 lightyears away<sup>3</sup>. Astronomers recognize that the black hole exists and they believe that they know its approximate location, but not much else is known for certain.

Because of the lack of knowledge, there is minimal commercial effort involved in exploring these uncharted territories, since there requires more understanding of the potential resources and opportunities before it may be worth commercializing. Because it was British

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<sup>3</sup> Frasier Cain, *Where is the Closest Black Hole Today?* (Universe Today). 21 March 2016. Science X Network.



Explorer James Clark Ross's documentation of whales that prompted interest in Antarctic whaling in 1842, I would argue that the southernmost continent was in the Uncharted stage until the end of the 18th century<sup>4</sup>. At that point, not much was known about Antarctica, and what was determined to be "known" (such as its size) was incorrect.

### *Stage Two: Discovery*

The second stage, Discovery, can be broken up into Early Discovery and Heroic Discovery. In this first period, commercialization is still limited to none, but individuals begin to explore the uncharted territories. The period of Early Discovery is marked by tales of great danger. It serves to inspire the heroes soon to follow, but comes at the expense of the first discoverers. Especially for territories explored after the preliminary advancement of cartography, there is a better understanding of its geographic features after a territory enters the Discovery stage. Parts of the Antarctic continent were identified in more detail at this point and the slope of the commercialization increases exponentially as potential resources are discovered.

Whalers flocked to the Antarctic waters – specifically South Georgia – in search of the massive mammals in 1904, signaling the rise of commercialization in the islands further south.<sup>5</sup> Even into the period of Heroic Discovery, commercialization had not yet reached the continent. Ernest Shackleton's primary source document from his 1914-1917 expedition on the *Endurance* mentions that the whalers on the island of South Georgia dared not venture much further south, for fear that the whaling vessels would not fair well under the pack ice conditions. This is a

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<sup>4</sup> Kieran Mulvaney, *The Whaling Season: An Inside Account of the Struggle to Stop Commercial Whaling* (Washington, DC: Island Press, 2008).

<sup>5</sup> Ian B. Hart, *Whaling in the Falkland Islands Dependencies 1904-1931* (Cambridge University Press, 2006).

notable account because it emphasizes the whalers' desire to continue their commercial efforts further south but are thwarted due to a lack of technology. Therefore, the commercialization of a location during the period of Heroic Discovery is only as steep as technological advancements will allow. This limitation in commercialization can also be attributed to the negative reports from the heroic explorers. Historically, explorers have shared tales of danger and brought fear into the hearts of ordinary citizens. However, many early accounts do not exactly reflect the reality of the situation.

Regarding space exploration, the Discovery stage has occurred across societies at different times over the past millennia. From the Nebra sky disk dating approximately 1,600 BCE to Galileo's use of the telescope in the early 17th century, space exploration remained in the Discovery stage for thousands of years<sup>6</sup>. The Heroic Discovery period, often known as the Space Race, brought the world out of the Discovery stage and into the third stage in the curve.

### *Stage Three: Resource Evaluation*

The next stage on the curve, Resource Evaluation, has the shortest time period of all the stages. After receiving information from the early and heroic explorers, eager entrepreneurs quickly evaluate the feasibility of wealth accrual in the untapped region. Surveyors join explorers on journeys or somehow tap into existing expeditions to receive more information about potential commercial endeavors.

Early maps from explorers are embellished with drawings of natural resources such as gold, silver, and other metals. This apparent proclamation that Antarctica hosts a wealth of

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<sup>6</sup> Brian Haughton, *The Nebra Sky Disk - Ancient Map of the Stars* (Ancient History Encyclopedia, 2011).

precious resources was soon debunked<sup>7</sup>. If there were any metals to be extracted from the barren continent, many geologists argue that the costly extraction process would outweigh the financial gain<sup>8</sup>. Although most have determined that Antarctica does not hold natural resources that are valuable enough to be capitalized at the present, Great Britain was first to recognize that there is a non-natural resource to be gained from the continent: the geopolitical value<sup>9</sup>.

For Antarctica, the Resource Evaluation stage took a different shape when the continent became a geopolitical resource. The British Antarctic Survey, responsible for most of the UK's scientific research in Antarctica, was created during the second World War. An attempt to "deny Antarctic waters from enemy ships," Operation Tabarin serves as one of the first instances of a nation taking a major national interest in Antarctica<sup>10</sup>. Since then, other nations quickly evaluated the continent as an important geopolitical resource. By 1959, the Antarctic Treaty was signed by the 12 nations whose scientists were active during the previous year<sup>11</sup>. The signatories agreed that the current claims on the land would be final; the treaty was a proclamation of peace and unity. This treaty, combined with the environmental protections sanctioned through the 1991 Madrid Protocol, ensured that Antarctica would not be exploited for its natural or geopolitical resources<sup>12</sup>. Even so, nations continue to be mindful of the activity of other nations in case there is an opportunity available to gain control of additional land. The "use it or lose it" policy in the Madrid Protocol means that any base not used by the home country must be removed from the

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<sup>7</sup> United States Congress, Office of Technology Assessment, Chapter 4: Potential Mineral Resources in Antarctica. *Polar Prospects: A Minerals Treaty for Antarctica* (1989).

<sup>8</sup> US Congress

<sup>9</sup> British Antarctic Survey, *Our History* (2015).

<sup>10</sup> British Antarctic Survey, *Our History*

<sup>11</sup> Secretariat of the Antarctic Treaty, *The Antarctic Treaty* (2011).

<sup>12</sup> British Antarctic Survey, *Protocol on Environmental Protection to the Antarctic Treaty*

continent. This rule provides other countries with the opportunity to potentially spot an unused base and assume it in the name of the protocol.

With little to no natural or geopolitical resources available in Antarctica, there appear to be just two other types of resources worth evaluating during the third stage of the Commercialization Life Cycle: science and tourism. Although there is a wealth of science to be completed in Antarctica, the spinoff technologies will be further discussed in the next stage. Tourism has proven to be a valuable resource in Antarctica.

#### *Stage Four: Development*

This recognition of Antarctica's valuable tourism resource segues into the fourth stage of the Commercialization Life Cycle, Development. The 12 nations with claims to Antarctica recognized the potential for tourism to disrupt scientific research and destroy the pristine environment of the continent. For this reason, the Madrid Protocol created environmental protections for tourism through the creation of IAATO, or the International Association of Antarctic Tour Operators<sup>13</sup>. In order to operate in Antarctic waters with a tourist on board, the operator must be a member of the organization and adhere to all regulations. Because IAATO tightly regulates tourism in Antarctica, they are able to provide important information regarding the development of the tourism resource. According to the association, there were 293 voyages in 2017/2018 compared to 253 the previous year<sup>14</sup>. Based on this statistic, it would appear that the development of the tourism industry is accelerating at a rapid pace.

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<sup>13</sup> International Association for Antarctica Tour Operators, *Objectives* (2019)

<sup>14</sup> IAATO, *Report on IAATO Operator Use of Antarctic Peninsula Landing Sites and ATCM Visitor Site Guidelines, 2017-2018 Season* (11 May 2018).

With this in mind, I was curious to see for myself how developed the tourism industry was in Antarctica. As a climate change adherent, and recognizing that a traditional career/life path would leave me unable to travel to the southernmost continent until my retirement (for I figure it would be selfish of me to put my travel aspirations ahead of my future children's college fund), I recognized that my opportunities to visit Antarctica are limited. My desire to understand the development of Antarctica, not just from an academic perspective but also from personal experience, pushed me to go on the adventure of a lifetime. In a later section of this thesis, I will discuss my experience and provide analysis.

To continue using outer space as an additional reference point for the stages, space currently lies in the Development stage. There are many untapped resources that can be of potential value, but adequate technology has yet to be developed to allow access to these resources at a reasonable cost. Development by both the public and private sector allow for rapid growth opportunities. As technology provides more opportunities for commercial endeavors, there is the definite possibility of a transition into the fifth stage. Until then, further development is necessary for outer space to move further along the curve.

#### *Stage Five: Hyper-Commercialization*

The penultimate stage in the curve, hyper-commercialization, occurs when capitalism is in action to its fullest. When goods or services are exchanged from a private owner for profit, a location approaches peak commercialization. As a commercially-mature territory reaches this stage, people and businesses are able to thrive in a robust economy without heavy interference by a public entity. The perfect example of this stage would be an uninhabited island that was discovered, determined to have a source of freshwater and other necessities for life, developed

into a resort, and then commercialized where people exchanged a currency such as US dollars for a host of goods and services on the island.

Because humankind is still in the development stage of space exploration, only predictions can be made as to what a fully commercialized outer space will look like. One will recognize that space has entered the commercialization stage, however, when humans in space are participating in a market outside the framework of a governmental agency. Until then, humans continue to develop the technologies necessary to utilize the resources available in space.

#### *Stage Six: Overexploitation*

The sixth and final stage of the Commercialization Life Cycle is overexploitation. This occurs when the resources that were discovered, valued, and developed become depleted to the point where full commercialization is unsustainable. The carrying capacity of commercialism is surpassed. At this point, fewer resources are available due to overexploitation and the commercial activity will be reduced naturally until the utilization or extraction of resources is no longer economically viable. This is the doomsday situation that some fear; the situation that inspires some explorers to desperately search for resources elsewhere or develop technologies to utilize resources on other planets.

In the same way that people move on to the next product when the original product reaches the end of its product life cycle, it is expected that people move on to the next territory or physical location when the original location reaches the end of overexploitation. Otherwise, the Malthusian Theory of Population indicates that the human population will rapidly decline until there are enough resources to support the reduced populace.

## Part 2: Analysis of Antarctic Development

As noted earlier, the current process of touristic development in Antarctica places the continent in the fourth stage of the Commercialization Life Cycle. Still, however, there are still expeditions today that rival some of the most heroic journeys down south. In December 2018, Colin O'Brady became the first person to trek across Antarctica solo, unsupported and unaided by wind<sup>15</sup>. That being said, the Development stage appears to be a better fit for the continent in the long-term.

Antarctica is known for being the last untouched frontier on Earth's land. I'm not a specialist in any scientific field, which I had heard was a necessity for exploring the white continent. As the tourism industry grew in Antarctica, however, I began to explore that avenue. I thought, since I am writing my thesis about exploration and commercialization, what better way to gain a better understanding than to have a personal perspective on the matter? I am incredibly grateful for my numerous privileges, one of which is that the financial support of my parents has allowed me to save my money from the past five years of internships and jobs. My savings, however, would be no match for the tens of thousands of dollars required to purchase a ticket as a tourist. This trip would test my abilities to finesse a ticket and not crack under pressure. If I could pull this off, I thought to myself, this would be my greatest feat to date.

After convincing the Plan II Office that they were not approving of a clueless student to travel solo to the bottom of the earth, I officially set my mind on going to Antarctica during the 2018 spring semester of my junior year. Lee Walker and Dr. Austin Gleeson, professors at The University of Texas, generously accepted my wish for them to be my supervisor and second

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<sup>15</sup> Adam Skolnick, K.K. Rebecca Lai and Denise Lu, *Tracking the Race Across Antarctica*. New York Times (26 December 2018)

reader, respectively. With the summer internship quickly approaching, I wrote in my 3.5 x 5.5 inch Moleskine notebook on 6/8/19:

*"Success! Finally purchased plane tickets to Buenos Aires today. I was ready to pull the trigger yesterday but my ideal flight on Google Flights was actually sold out on LATAM."*

In that same journal entry, I mention my discovery of a woman named Sarah who has written online about last-minute tickets to Antarctica. *"Seems like there's a cottage industry for explorers looking to jump down to Antarctica at the last minute"*, I write. I had read in four or five blogs about the possibility of securing a ticket onto an icebreaker at significantly cheaper rates if you are able to be patient and flexible. To go from tens of thousands of dollars to less than five thousand would seem well worth forgoing my own ease of mind. At this point in the summer, I had not yet started my internship and thus did not have an accurate prediction of my savings account for the end of the year. Nevertheless, my spirits were high and I was enjoying reading *Into The Wild* (although it neither stoked nor extinguish my sense of adventure).

Flash forward to September 2018, the beginning of the fall semester:

*9/2/18 0 11:43 90° partly cloudy  
Bought hostel bed for Ushuaia! \$17/night, 6 bed mixed dorm  
Got a little stressed yesterday over ship availability but I'm sticking with last min strategy.  
Need to book \$300 plane from Buenos Aires to Ushuaia  
Look at Texas Exes as sponsor?  
Schedule Chat with Lee Walker + Gleeson*

With the purchase of the hostel bed, I was one step closer to having a solid plan. As I did more research on explorers during the Heroic Age, I found it interesting to see the financing of the expeditions. I would not get the complete perspective if I didn't at least seek external funding from another source, so I reached out to the Texas Exes – the UT alumni network.



Funding through Texas Exes, I had not placed much hope in that coming into fruition. It didn't hurt to ask, especially since I got to chat with Lewis – an employee of Texas Exes who had traveled to Antarctica last January 2018. He gave me a better understanding of weather conditions and what gear to bring, which was very helpful. I decided to wait to buy gear until Black Friday and Cyber Monday's big savings. I asked Lewis about the idea of funding through Texas Exes, but he thought that it would never happen. They are very tight on money for external projects and Lewis was fairly confident that it wasn't going to happen. Fair enough; I have had experiences with the organization through Camp Texas and I definitely understand that Texas Exes prefers to financially support larger projects that can impact many students.

Ten days after this September entry, I had the opportunity to sit down with Dr. Austin Gleeson, my second reader. He visited Antarctica a number of years ago and has taught a number of my friends in the Plan II Physics class. Like my thesis supervisor, Dr. Gleeson is a visionary who is well-accomplished. On the 12th of September 2018, we talked about the Army Research Laboratory and other federally-funded programs such as the FFRDC and the National Antarctic Program. We discussed everything from electromagnetic communications to the historical significance of the Falklands.

The following day, I biked over to Spider House Cafe to chat briefly with Lee Walker, my thesis supervisor. Lee introduced a riveting and terrifying concept to me: the snow leopard. In Peter Matthiessen's two-month search for a snow leopard in the Tibetan Plateau in the Himalayas, he enjoyed many different experiences. The entire adventure is documented even though he never saw the snow leopard. I am only slightly terrified that such an occurrence may be my fate: all of this documentation of my adventure but ultimately no ticket to Antarctica. I think that Lee wanted me to appreciate the beauty in the situation, as he says that Matthiessen's

book has a twisted sense of wonder. At the moment, it is hard to see how an elusive icebreaker ticket could be more beautiful than the experience of going to Antarctica. I truly hope that I don't have to learn that lesson this time. Flash forward a month to October 16th, 2018:

*Bought my Sawtooth's at REI !!  
Feeling good, feet are warmer  
got quality socks, \$180  
40-degree weather w/ heavy rain right now, feels like training*

I spent the next two months breaking in my Sawtooth hiking boots, trekking around Austin and the surrounding trails. By mid-October, I recognized that there was still much preparation to be done. Meeting with Professor Walker helped me mentally prepare and get in the right frame of mind for the trip, which sometimes felt overwhelming due to its uncertainty.

Meeting with Lee Walker is consistently the most peculiar activity of the week for me. Sometimes there is a delayed reaction: we will discuss many different topics without time to digest each one, requiring my brain to play catch-up for hours after we have parted ways. We also discussed my thesis prospectus, which needed some help in the first paragraph – all else looked great. Lee Walker suggested I talk to Dr. George Schorn, who was generous enough to give her time and expertise when I met with her six days later. She helped me develop many ideas for ways to go about the research process, of which I will spare the details. Flash forward a month, to the 25th of November:

*Money is flowing, both ways! Secured \$500 from Plan II office*

I also mentioned in my field notes that I was able to finesse some gear for under \$200, after heavy discounts from Black Friday and Cyber Monday. Even with the generous grant from the Plan II office, I was concerned about my financial situation. After the costs for the hostel and

estimated food expenses, I held \$5500 in my free savings account. When I messaged with Sarah, who lived in Ushuaia, she told me that it would be very difficult for me to find an icebreaker ticket for \$4000 or less. The stress of uncertainty grew with each day, as I started thinking more and more about the trip. A November entry described my state of mind:

*I had a dream I pretended to be a cook to get on a ship. I'll be very relieved when I have my ticket. This is a test of my patience and risk tolerance.*

On December 4, 2018, I met Lee Walker at Trudy's. He provided me with another prediction – this one, he told me, was more of a déjà vu moment. Lee told me that in 28 years, he will have a mentee who will want to do something but will be on the fence. Lee, the mentor, will be able to say that he was once the mentor to a young man who had a crazy idea for his thesis and decided to go to Antarctica. What was meant to be a month-long trip turned into nine months of adventure until he was able to safely return home. This story of a man from 28 years ago would inspire the mentee to go forward with their own dream.

Lee explained that he is the mentor, I am the mentee from the past, and the other mentee is to be determined in 28 years. Many years after this younger mentee is inspired to pursue their dream, this mentee will be at a dinner party with me but we will not know each other. My ears will perk up, however, when I hear someone say "took a boat to Antarctica." At that moment, we will meet and realize how this is actually the second time our lives have crossed paths – the first being when Lee told my story to the mentee.

Lee then told me that this is how he met Will, a man who has become his good friend. For Lee, it was when he heard Will utter the words "boat to Africa" at a dinner party that caused Lee to talk to him. The details of Lee's adventure had been slightly fabricated when the mentor of Lee and Will had told the story to Will, but it was the inspiration that matters. At the conclusion

of this story, Lee told me that he felt somewhere that this would be the case for me in 28 years.

He then asked me if I was fine with not returning home for nine months, for one reason or

another. After a brief pause, I decided that I would be fine with that outcome. As 2019 nears, I

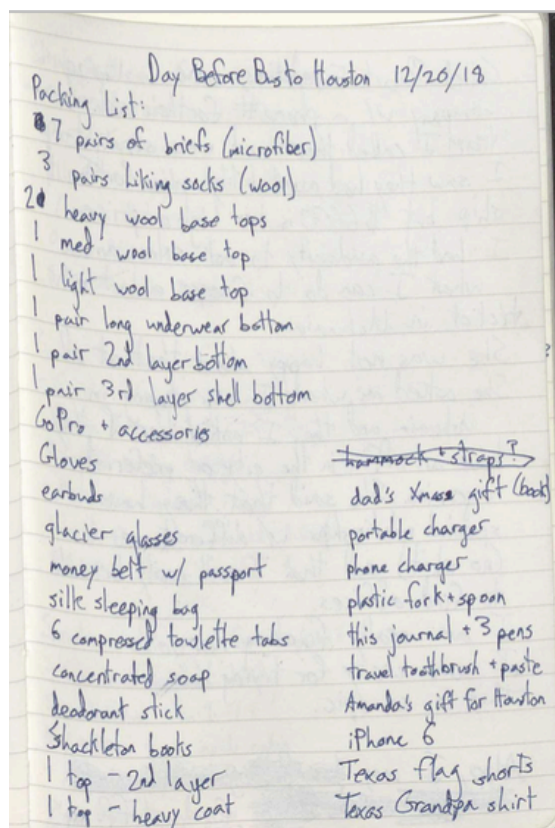
journalled a brief update on my financials and gear:

12/12/18

*With 18 days until I touch down in Ushuaia, I have increased my communication efforts with Sarah, my plug in Ushuaia. She's sending me some deals in the \$6k-\$7k range, which I'm holding firm against. Even though I have \$7,100 if I liquidate all savings, I still want to get there for \$4,000. Very nervous but this is half the fun. I told Sarah about my goal – I think earlier this season she told me that \$3500 would be very difficult. My gear is working well; I'm very pleased.*

*Nicole Bluth is letting me borrow her GoPro camera, so I'm very excited to document this with video, even if that is not in line w/ the original explorers. Very grateful for generous friends!*

On December 20, I packed my gear into my backpack and documented my packing list, as seen below. I opted against taking the hammock with me, knowing that I would likely need the extra space in my pack for additional items purchased along the trip.



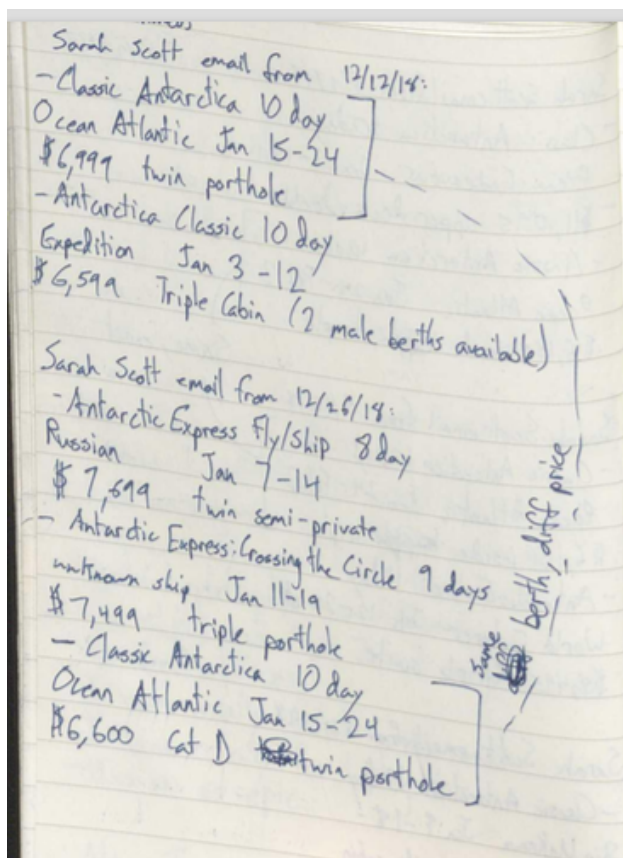
The following day, I took a bus to Houston and stay the night in Houston with my sisters before meeting up with my parents in Hobby airport on the 22nd. The six of us then flew from Houston to Mexico City, then took a bus to Querétaro before jumping in a van to San Miguel de Allende. We stayed there for a week, then returned to Mexico City on December 29th. From the airport in Mexico City, I parted ways with the family and began my solo journey south. After 31 hours of travel, I arrived in Ushuaia – the southernmost city in the world, on the tip of Argentina. Considered the southern part of Patagonia, the Tierra del fuego region is known for its stunning beauty and is labeled "the end of the world" due to its location on the continent.

While in Mexico, I seized the opportunity to enjoy wonderful food and culture to alleviate the stress of my uncertain fate. I continued to analyze the last-minute tickets that Sarah sent my way, recognizing patterns. As part of the research process, I was interested in learning as much about the ticket sales process as possible. Earlier that month, I had called the ticket sales hotline for a high-class expedition company. On their website, it appeared that there were still a select number of tickets available in January, although the price was far above my range. I called the hotline and briefly explained to the sales rep that the current price was higher than I was willing to pay. I told the woman that I was interested in purchasing a last-minute ticket for a rock-bottom price, and that I would love to know if I would be able to purchase directly through them or if they pass their extra tickets off to a different agency.

The sales representative was absolutely shocked that I was so up-front about my intentions to not pay the expedition company's sticker price. This strategy was advantageous because it caught her off-guard. She responded that the company has special relationships with agencies in Ushuaia but that tickets will be all sold by then, so I should buy now. She then asked which hotel I would be staying in and what dates I would be there; I gave her my dates but only

told her that I was staying at a hostel in Ushuaia. Given my previous experience in phone-based sales at my freshman internship, I was able to pick up on when she went back to the standard lines. "You'll be able to see the agencies when you're down there, but all tickets will be sold by then." She asked for the date of departure for the ship I was looking at and quickly replied "yes that ship is actually filled up completely, but I am able to provide you with another ship at this other date..." I had gotten all the information I needed: there are agencies in Ushuaia that should be fairly prominent. The sales rep inadvertently gave me confidence.

On December 28, I analyzed the emails that Sarah had sent to me from earlier in the previous months. Through this process, I was able to observe certain tickets remaining on the list while others were quickly scooped up. Some of the offers mentioned how many berths were available and some were limited to a specific gender. As seen in the scan of my notebook below, I wrote down the general name of the trip, number of days, ship name, dates, price, and the bed's location on the ship. Something that was not provided in the emails were the expedition companies – presumably so that I would not go to the source and remove the middleman.



As illustrated, tickets had not yet broken the \$6500 mark. However, I was surprised by how far in advance the tickets were selling. My original expectation that I would be jumping on a ship the same day as purchased was not accurate. I would not need to pack my backpack each day with the possibility of not returning. While this provided some mental relief, knowing that I wouldn't need to call up the hostel and cancel the rest of my stay on the day-of, this meant that my window of opportunity was diminished.

My strategy remained the same: secure a last-minute ticket onto an icebreaker ship to get to Antarctica. My primary tactic, however, had changed: I would watch the ticket prices fall as the date of departure approached. I would need to guess how low the ticket price would go without being snagged by another budget traveler, and then pull the trigger before someone beat me to it – all while staying within budget. When it comes to strategizing, I had learned from the

best: military strategist and war games expert Austin Bay teaches a course on military strategy that I took during my junior spring semester. During the final week of hunting for a ticket, the game was certainly exhilarating. I knew that once I touched down in Ushuaia, I would need to quickly establish relationships with Sarah and others to have every advantage possible.

After 31 hours of somewhat rough travel, I made it to Ushuaia. Multiple turbulent landings combined with the usual Latin American airport chaos meant that I arrived to "the end of the world" certainly not in prime mental or physical condition. With temperatures at 40° F and slight drizzle coming from an overcast sky, Ushuaia had a magical feeling. My field notes describe the small city as such:

*I think Ushuaia has a profound effect on people. I feel moved.*

With a semi-circle of snow-capped mountains creating a natural boundary on one side and the coastline encircling the rest of the city, Ushuaia is a magical place. At this point in my travels, I had read a considerable amount of Ernest Shackleton's primary source document *South!* from his fateful and disastrous journey on the *Endurance* in 1914-1917. One goal in reading Shackleton's primary source document was to be able to pick up on the nuances of his documentation process and replicate the style to some degree. Whenever possible, I include time, temperature, and weather conditions when taking notes. I also attempted to use similar diction and writing style.

Over the next seven days, I acclimated quickly to life in Ushuaia – which included a routine fairly different from that of my traditional student life. My new home felt like the stereotypical hostel: large open common area with plenty of sofas, national flags hanging from the ceiling, and a spacious kitchen with a wide array of cookware. It is worth noting that there



are multiple hostels in the 75,000-person city of Ushuaia; booking site HostelWorld lists five hostels. Based on the geographic distance from any major city, I was surprised by the level of commercialization of Ushuaia. Tourism plays a major role in the city's economy – Ushuaia is more than just a port for Antarctic travelers. On the Commercialization Life Cycle, the southernmost city would be placed in the fourth stage, Development. There remain plenty of opportunities for Ushuaia to further develop and grow before reaching maximum commercialization, but the city is set at a rapid pace to increase the number of commercial activities available to citizens and tourists.

To my surprise, most tourists who visit Ushuaia are not merely stopping over before their journey to Antarctica. While many of the more popular and well-photographed locations in the Patagonia region are further north, the Tierra del fuego region provides untouched, off-the-beaten-path nature scenes. I met a variety of travelers in Ushuaia: mountaineers who would spend days at a time away from civilization, the typical backpacking travelers, and even the occasional "Patagucci bro", Americans sporting the Patagonia clothing brand, looking to check Patagonia spots off the list. Another demographic that was present in Ushuaia were the Israeli young adults who had recently finished military service. Below is my first encounter with a group of Israeli guys in the hostel.

*Shared a liter of IPA with Lea and met a Canadian and his British girlfriend who are staying in another hostel. They said they felt uncomfortable because their hostel was only Israelis who don't talk to them. He is Jewish but from a small town so he was sad they couldn't relate. He then brought up how there were so many Jews/Israelis in Patagonia but he doesn't get it.*

*At that point, Tomer entered the conversation. He was sitting nearby and is Israeli and friendly so he said it's the trendy and exciting place to go. His two other Israeli friends were less outgoing but still kind. Tomer joined us for the rest of the conversation for an hour and a half or so. Super cool guy, was a paramedic for 4 years and just finished.*

Tomer would be the first Israeli of many that I would befriend in my South American adventure. I would not go into so much detail except that Tomer opened up a world that I had not expected to find in Ushuaia. After he shared a wealth of information with me about different nature spots, I asked him how he knew so much. He showed me an extensive Facebook group for Israeli young adults who have already, are currently, or will soon be travelling throughout Patagonia. Files are posted that document best practices for adventure-seekers so that by the time Tomer and his friends arrived in Argentina, they knew exactly what to do and where to go. This, in a way, reflects an indication that the "heroic exploration" age has passed for this group of people. Now, the Resource Valuation stage has been completed and the photos and suggestions help to guide others to the best spots.

This example provides evidence that although a location can be placed on the Commercialization Life Cycle in terms of its general progress, smaller communities can also be privy to information that may enhance the commercial value of the location. If more groups of people had the subject matter available to them, the "trendy" aspect that Tomer described would encourage waves of people from other demographics.

### *Minimizing Expenditures*

Although I had budgeted in my food consumption into the budget, I recognized the importance of stretching my dollar to the limit. With a well-equipped kitchen in the hostel, self-cooked meals provided the perfect opportunity to save money. Free breakfast each morning consisted of fresh bread, jam, and juice. My first stop after checking into the hostel, therefore, was the grocery store.

After purchasing potable water, high-caloric hiking snacks, lentils, pasta, and sauce, I felt well-equipped for at least the New Years' holiday closures. For the last and first day of the years, most stores and restaurants close for the celebrations. Cooking in the kitchen allowed me to save a fair amount of money, even though my bank account looked fairly healthy at the time. Not knowing the price of my ticket south led me to be as scrappy as possible. Also, the kitchen served as a great location to meet other travelers. Lea, a 24-year-old German who ended up becoming my travel buddy for most of my pre-Antarctic adventures, is an example of a friendship made in the kitchen.

Another way to reduce expenditures in Ushuaia was through transportation. Although taxis are fairly inexpensive, I found that other methods would suit my interests and minimize the amount of cash outflow. Walking throughout Ushuaia was fairly easy given the city's small size and constant, though overcast, sunlight. At longer distances, hitchhiking served as an opportunity to travel for free and meet locals. On January 3, I documented my experience hitchhiking with Lea to Laguna Esmeralda, a beautiful hiking spot only 15 minutes from the city gates:

*Took 15-20 minutes to get picked up by a guy who went out of his way to move stuff around to make space for us. Super nice, has family in Ushuaia so came to celebrate New Years, now driving an hour home. Super cool. On our way back, it literally took 15 seconds to get picked up. We were still waiting to get picked up. We were still walking to the spot where we were going to stand when an older couple from LA picked us up in their rented pickup. Even drove past their Airbnb 2 minutes to drive us closer to the hostel. Successful first hitchhiking experience!*

This was the perfect opportunity to begin my hitchhiking career: there was only one major road at the city gates, with a single opportunity for cars to turn onto a separate road instead of passing by the Laguna Esmeralda trailhead. Because of how friendly the Argentinian people had been to me during past experiences, I decided that this was a low-risk situation. Indeed, this

was a positive experience and one that would lead me to hitchhike even greater lengths of distance in the future.

Although I made a clear effort to minimize expenditures in food and transportation, no peso was saved when it came to beer consumption. Two local breweries, Beagle and Cape Horn, provide tasty craft beers that were too good to pass up. Throughout my time in Ushuaia, I would share a liter or two each night with Lea as we carefully ranked each variety. I do not regret the seemingly-necessary outflow of precious pesos.

### *Ticket Hunting*

Due to my untimely arrival to Ushuaia at the end of the year, I would have to wait until January 2 for the city to reopen. On the last day of the year, I tried looking for any open agency offices to no avail. Sarah has a "bunker" a few short blocks from the hostel so I dropped by to get my bearings straight. Although the door was locked, a piece of paper had a list of five or six available tickets (at that time, a ticket on the ship I used was running for \$6,600 USD). I inputted the new data into my field notes and continued my search.

My search led me to the coast, where three ships were docked. The *Eclipse* was a massive South American cruise ship from Celebrity, likely providing a quick day of shore excursions to its tourist passengers. The second ship, a small fishing liner. The third appeared to be an Antarctic icebreaker. I was unable to gather information on the ships online but I was interested to see if the city would shine under the presence of a Celebrity cruise. Most stores, such as the Movistar shop and grocery stores, were still closed for the holidays.

However, there were a handful of tourist kiosks near the port that provided cruise passengers with the opportunity to see penguin colonies or take a boat ride to the lighthouse. Just

west of the city, Tierra del fuego national park provides tourists with the opportunity to enjoy the natural beauty of Southern Patagonia. A small kiosk served as the "bus station" where tourists could purchase a ticket for a transport van to the park. Another popular excursion in Ushuaia is a train ride that was once used by prisoners to transport timber. Now, an electric train puffs steam in order to replicate the black, billowing smoke. Locals dressed up in the traditional yellow and black striped prisoner jumpsuit greeted cruise passengers as they stepped off the boat onto land. After observing the interactions in this tourist hub, I concluded that Ushuaia has a well-developed tourism industry. Companies operate transports and small passenger boats that run on time. Ushuaia had already grown out of the cottage industry, as evident by the privatization of the companies. Because the tourism industry in Ushuaia is so commercially mature, and because the city seemed to revolve around the cycle of tourists entering from the port, it would seem unfair to place Ushuaia in any stage other than Hyper-Commercialization on the Commercialization Life Cycle.

### *Analyzing the Last-Minute Industry*

Compared to Ushuaia's impressive tourism foundation, the last-minute Antarctica industry still has some room to grow. Sarah clearly knew what she was doing: the American expat invited expedition-hopefuls to her "bunker," a small office that featured maps and photographs of the southernmost continent. Complete with Wi-Fi and a coffee maker, the bunker appealed to the traveler longing to venture further. Over the course of my time in the bunker, I attempted to piece together the history of the industry. Sarah, a graduate from UNC Chapel Hill, still has family in North Carolina while her business partner and husband, Gabriel, is from Ushuaia. They stay in Ushuaia during the warm months then stay with family in the States when

the sun travels north. I visited the bunker during what I believe to have been their fourth summer season. Legitimate enough to have earned a TripAdvisor page (which is an important step indicating the company's level of development and credibility) in the 2017/2018 season, Sarah's business is growing at a fairly rapid pace.

As with most businesses, relationships are critical to the success of Sarah's industry. To source tickets from the official expedition operator, Sarah must have an agreement to protect against losses. Sarah provides insurance, guaranteeing that any unsold or cancelled tickets are able to be sold at a reasonable price. Because the Antarctic tourism industry is still developing, Sarah is able to build and grow relationships as different operators gain the ability to join IAATO. In essence, Sarah has filled a need in the industry and has at least a four-year head start over any competitor that may decide to enter the industry. The tour operators cannot do what Sarah does, since it would look unfavorable to sell lower-priced tickets and each operator has such a small inventory of last-minute tickets. As a result, Sarah has a cash cow that provides a service advantageous to all.

### *Securing the Ticket*

Early on the second morning of 2019, I dashed over to the bunker. Gabriel greeted me and I explained my desire to secure a ticket to Antarctica for under \$5,000 within the next 25 days. Although the offers posted a few days earlier were at least a thousand dollars more than my budget, I told him that I'm a patient, flexible solo male traveler. He told me that he'd see what he could do and then made a phone call. I'm not sure who he called or what their relationship is, but he hung up and turned towards me. "We may need to go slightly above your budget. How does \$5,200 sound for a 10-day?" I immediately jumped on the opportunity. Some Aussie had an extra

ticket through Chimu, an Australian travel agency. Gabriel walked me through the details about the ship, my berth, and the few details available. In truth, I had already had a conversation via email with Chimu and had been offered a ticket on that ship for a much higher price. All the details provided by Gabriel had already been scoured over in the previous weeks.

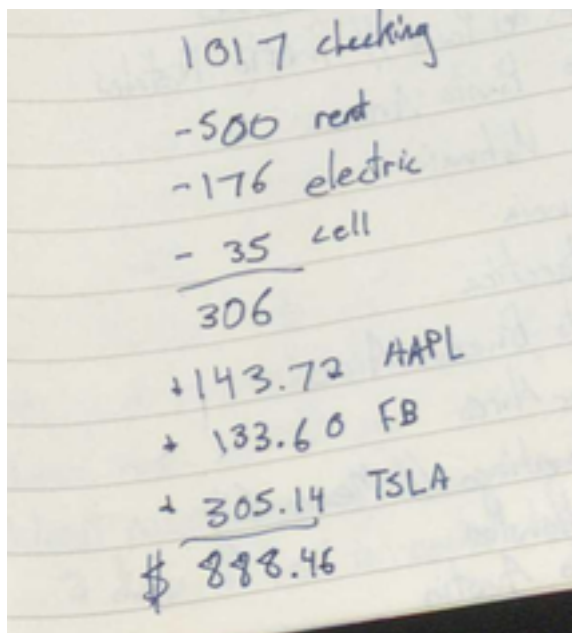
When I verbally agreed that I was interested in securing the ticket, Gabriel scanned my passport and then told me that he'd send me an email immediately with wire transfer information for payment. Then he paused and told me that it may be best if we wait for the Aussie to confirm that the ticket is still available before I wire the money – just in case. I would like to believe that it was good nature and not a well-played move on Gabriel's part that he emailed me late that evening saying that the current ticket from the Aussie was already sold. He told me that after doing more searching for me, he was able to find another ticket for me, this time for \$5,800.

The day before, I had decided while walking over to the bunker that my fill-or-kill for a ticket would be \$5,500. Although I was pretty good about keeping my emotions in check on January 2, I decided that I could find a way to squeeze every dollar out of my account. My textbooks escrow account? Not entirely necessary, I decided. The savings for car insurance really only needed the two January payments. If there's a will, there's a way! So even though the \$5,800 price tag was above my price range, I decided to pull the trigger on the ticket.

Another advantage to securing this ticket was that I had a week and a half before departure. It would take a full day to organize finances and create a new itinerary, but I would have the opportunity to potentially enjoy other parts of the world outside of Ushuaia. The following day, I visited the bunker to finalize everything before hiking in the national park. Afterwards, I would dive into logistics.

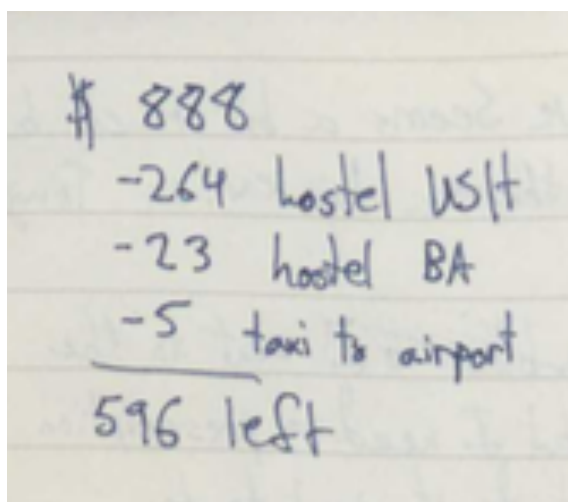
### *Pre-departure Decisions*

Without question, I knew that I would want to spend my last two nights after the expedition in Buenos Aires. I purchased my plane ticket up north and secured a bed in a hostel before looking for pre-departure adventures. Rent, utilities, and cell phone bills were subtracted before I looked at the current prices of some stock that I planned to offload. With \$596 left in my checking account, it looked like I would be able to pull off this adventure.



Handwritten calculation on lined paper showing the initial funds and expenses:

1017	checking
-500	rent
-176	electric
-35	cell
<hr/>	
306	
+143.72	AAPL
+133.60	FB
+305.14	TSLA
<hr/>	
\$888.46	



Handwritten calculation on lined paper showing the remaining funds after travel expenses:

\$888	
-264	hostel US/t
-23	hostel BA
-5	taxi to airport
<hr/>	
596	left

With ten days to explore the most southern parts of South America, and with nearly \$600 in my pocket after all known expenses, I decided that this would be a perfect opportunity to research the commercial stages of another beautiful location: Chilean Patagonia's Torres del Paine region. A day or two of travel north, the adventure would allow me to analyze another popular spot and get a better understanding for the framework of my Commercialization Life Cycle from the Chilean side of the continent.



To travel to Torres del Paine National Park would be no easy feat: I would need to navigate the national border before crossing the Strait of Magellan to get to Punta Arenas. From there, I would take the highway further north towards Puerto Natales – the base camp for the park, since it is the closest town to the park. Finally, a two-hour bus ride delivers nature enthusiasts to the park each morning. Ultimately, I decided that the trip to Torres del Paine would be an experience too good to pass up, especially since prices in Puerto Natales are comparable to Ushuaia.

I talked to Lea, who was also keen to visit Patagonia's most popular park. She presented an idea to me: why wait for a bus when this is the perfect opportunity to hitchhike? A fourteen-hour bus ride would cost over \$80 USD compared to a free twelve-hour (at best) car ride. She had heard that hitchhiking is not the most unsafe thing you can do in South America, and it would be quite the adventure. Buses only run twice a week, so hitchhiking would provide more time before I would need to return to Ushuaia. After thinking about the opportunity for the rest of the day, I decided to seize the opportunity in the name of research. This served as the perfect opportunity to travel low to the ground and see just how responsive Argentinians are to young travelers in need.

My belief is that if individuals frequently encounter tourists, they are generally less likely to offer help and be welcoming. There are certainly caveats to this notion, such as the idea that adventurous travelers are fairly likely to help a fellow globetrotter. Another factor that may come into play is the sheer remoteness of southern Patagonia. Someone all the way out in the middle of nowhere may be less likely to be a major threat compared to someone in a city. I quickly found that due to the number of factors involved, this question would not be easily answered by my single hitchhiking adventure. I was, however, interested to see how this would play out and what

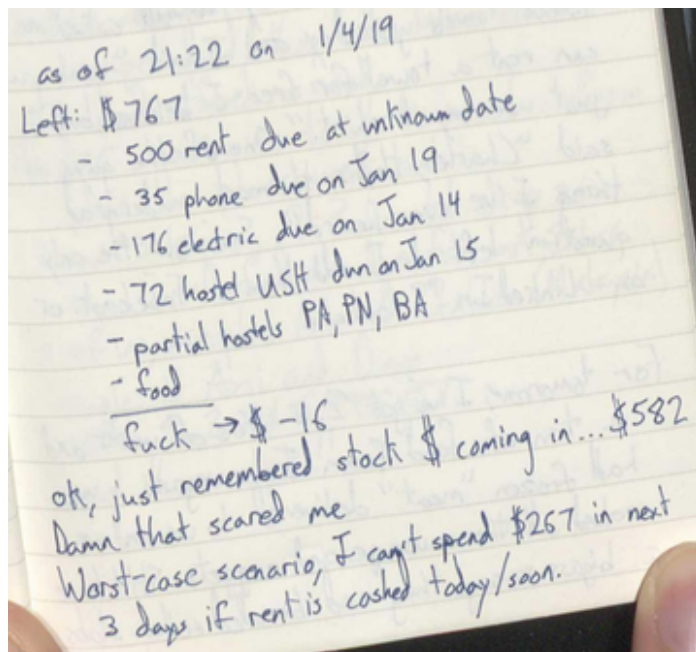
would happen on the following day. With my plan in place, I mapped out the next three weeks of travel in my Moleskine notebook:

Adventure itinerary is set!! Oh baby.  
 Jan 5 - hitchhike to Punta Arenas  
 Jan 6 - hitchhike to Puerto Natales  
 Jan 7-~~10~~7 Torres del Paine // Puerto Natales  
 Jan 10 - bus to Punta Arenas  
 Jan 11 - bus to Ushuaia  
 Jan 12-14 - Ushuaia  
 Jan 15-24 Antarctica  
 Jan 24 - fly to Buenos Aires  
 Jan 24-26 Buenos Aires  
 Jan 26 - fly to Santiago // Mexico City  
 Jan 27 - fly to Houston  
 Jan 27 - bus to Austin

Bus: Punta Arenas - Ushuaia	= \$65
Bus: Puerto Natales - Punta Arenas	= \$13
Hostel: Punta Arenas #1	= \$16
Hostel: Punta Arenas #2	= \$15
Hostel: Puerto Natales	= \$59
Hostel: Ushuaia	= \$72
Hostel: Buenos Aires	= \$26
	<hr/>
	\$266 USD

The trip provided me with the ability to go to Torres del Paine National Park over the course of three days – plenty of time to hike and explore. By taking the bus back to Ushuaia on the 11th instead of the 14th, I would be sure that the last-minute ticket to Antarctica wouldn't become a last-minute ticket for someone else, should there be problems with the bus. I purchased the bus tickets back to Ushuaia, which requires me to stay a night in Punta Arenas on the return trip. Next, I secured my bed in hostels in Puerto Natales and Punta Arenas (for both sides of the journey). After talking with the receptionist at my Ushuaia hostel, I finally paid for my previous nights, cancelled the January 5-10 nights, and booked the four nights leading up to my Antarctica trip. After liquidating other savings funds, I was left with \$767 to forecast my cash flows and ensure that I did not get into financial trouble. To my knowledge, I have never been in this situation before, where I'm looking at bill due dates to see how close to zero my bank account will fall. Clearly, I tend to save fairly well since I was able to save enough for this monthlong trip around two continents. Below's journal entry elucidates the process of forecasting my

financials for the next three weeks. As illustrated, I was quite concerned when I briefly thought that I had already drained my account without even including food. Luckily, my sale of stock would keep me from feeling too financially distressed.



After the financial planning was completed, Lea and I began our preparations for the following day. I found cardboard on the street that we would use to make signs saying "Punta Arenas" while Lea looked for hitchhiking tips online. While one source said that hitchhiking in South America is "easy and fun", another person mentioned that drug mules are often quality drivers for long-distance drives. Although I am sure that it would be entertaining to cross the border with a drug mule, I would rather spend my time in the national park instead of in prison.

I chatted with the man who I believe owns the hostel in Ushuaia, just to get additional feedback from someone who is maybe not as crazy as Lea. He did not flinch at the idea of us hitchhiking from the gates of Ushuaia to Punta Arenas in one day. I shared my itinerary with

him so that he would be knowledgeable of the situation, in case anything happened but he said I did not have anything to worry about. As long as I'm smart and willing to take the risk, things would play out in a favorable way. Although my parents knew of my hitchhiking trip to Laguna Esmeralda, I decided to hold off on sharing details of this trip until after I was safely in Punta Arenas. Instead, I messaged my sister and told her to call the hostel if she didn't hear from me. The following entry into my field notes describes further preparation for the big day:

*For tomorrow, I've got 2.5 liters of water and a ton of food from Isla vegana... he had frozen "meat" delivered to us and we cooked all the sausage and nuggets. Still have a bigass sausage thing and breaded seitan slabs that are frozen for Punta Arenas/Puerto Natales.*

The plan for the subsequent day would be as follows: Lea and I would meet up with another traveller, Chelsea from Malaysia, and reach the gates of Ushuaia before 7:30am. From there, we would hitchhike north on Ruta 3 for 284 kilometers before crossing the border into Chile. From there, an additional 150 kilometers would take us to Cruce Bahia Azul, where cars are transported across the Strait of Magellan by ferry. sixteen kilometers after the ferry, a fork in the road splits northeast and west; I would veer west to complete the final 150 kilometers of the journey. After just over 600 kilometers, the plan was to arrive in Punta Arenas in approximately 12 hours. I did not know if the three of us would journey together or how many different rides it would take to reach the destination.

### *Journey to Torres del Paine*

With an official time of sunrise at 5:06 on January 5, 2019, my 6:00 wakeup felt the same as any other morning. With fresh bread, jam, and juice already available in the kitchen, I quickly ate and saved a few jam containers for the future. Lea and I met Chelsea at 6:40 and the three of us took a bus to the city gates, arriving to our hitchhiking spot at 7:20. We were unsure as to

when would be the peak traffic time, but I was grateful that we were the first hitchhikers out on the highway. By the end of the hour, other travelers and vagabonds had lined up behind us. The wait was brutal: fierce winds and chilly temperatures tested my mental strength. Having a positive outlook was critical and there were many points where we needed to verbally affirm that this was going to be a successful endeavor.

Cars zipped past us, sometimes waving apologetically as they signalled that they drove a full car. Eventually, I decided that it would be in Lea and my best interest to split up from Chelsea. Although I had a small backpack, both of my companions each had a small backpack plus a massive one. Cars driving past could probably take two passengers, but I worried that many potential rides were turning us down because there were three of us. Lea and I ate little protein nuggets to avoid getting too hungry. The confidence of the hitchhikers around me was diminishing while I danced around in an effort to both warm up and attract a friendly driver. The wind and misty rain tested the quality of my gear and my mental fortitude.

After nearly three hours in the cold, my heart raced when I saw a car pull over. I yelled at Lea to run as I scurried over to the front passenger window. We spoke in Spanish briefly and they explained that they couldn't get me all the way to Punta Arenas but could take Lea and me for the first 434 kilometers to the Cruce Bahia Azul. That sounded warmer than waiting outside any longer, so I thanked the couple and jumped in their small SUV with Lea. Before we left, the woman in the passenger seat saw that Chelsea was the next hitchhiker in line. "Soltera?" she asked me. Next thing I knew, my new Malaysian friend – whom I admit I had sacrificed for the comfort of a ride north – was in the back seat with us! At 10:10, the road trip had officially begun.

Diego and Ani, our heroes, were just beginning their three-day road trip from Ushuaia to Córdoba and decided that our friendly faces looked like good company for the journey north. In their mid-30s, they were visiting Ani's family for the holidays. Of the three hitchhikers, I was the only one able to speak Spanish so I enjoyed chatting with Ani and Diego. I shared our plan to go to Torres del Paine and we talked about Argentinian culture. Over the course of the eight hours together, we enjoyed mate (a popular drink) and admired the wonderous beauty around us. The border crossing was not bad, with only two hiccups. There was some confusion regarding the fact that one car had five people with four different national passports, but we were able to sort it out. Then, as our immigration details were being processed, the power went out in station. The pens came out and we ultimately filled out paperwork in order to cross the border. Overall, I would call it a success since we eventually returned to our car and sped off into the distance.

With two hours left until the Strait of Magellan, Ani pulled out a map and we began strategizing. Originally, the plan was that our wonderful car-hosts would drop us hitchhikers off at a small town before the Strait instead of at the fork in the road after the strait. Although the town has a small cafe and would possibly have somewhere to sleep (if not a motel, at least a building to stay behind to protect against the wind), the empty fork further down the road provides no back-up plan if challenges with getting picked up arose. In addition, cars would likely be in a mad dash after crossing the strait; odds of a car stopping are slim. After careful analysis of our options, we strategized a third option.

To cross the Strait of Magellan, passenger cars and commercial trucks must be transported by ferry. After approximately 25 vehicles drive onto the ship, the ferry completes a 30-minute trip to the other side. The plan was to drive aboard with Ani and Diego then search for a new ride while the cars remained parked on the ferry. As long as we were willing to risk

getting stranded at the fork if no driver was willing to help out, this plan had the opportunity for us to have a seamless transition. Although the risk of being stranded seemed far higher than the benefit of saving time (after all, there was approximately 8 hours left of sunlight that day), we decided it would be quite the accomplishment. This was an opportunity for adventure.

This was also an opportunity for me to analyze the commercial activity on the route. As the car approached the water, a line of cars were parked since the ferry had yet to reach the on our side of the strait. This seemed like the perfect opportunity to get out and begin the search for a new vehicle. Surprisingly, I saw two vans that serve as private transports from Ushuaia to Punta Arenas. When I researched transportation options, I looked at public buses but never considered the possibility of using a transport (although this may be due to the fact that I was looking to keep expenditures low). In the same way that I secured a last-minute ticket to Antarctica, I probably could have purchased a last-minute seat on a private van. I was certainly not expecting *that* level of commercialization in southern Patagonia.

I approached one of the drivers, who was admiring the Strait of Magellan while smoking a cigarette. After explaining my situation, he said that his van is full but there is one coming soon that may have a seat or two available. We didn't discuss price, but I figured it would not be cheap. To them, we were stranded and desperate for a ride. However, I was in no position to fall prey: my health and happiness levels were still relatively high. If I couldn't get a ride soon, waiting for a few hours was within the scope of possibilities. I partly wish that I had asked for a price just to have that data available, but I know that I would have gotten tied up with negotiations if I asked. I thanked him for the help and declined to inquire further about the second transport. Soon the ferry arrived and the cars shuffled onto the deck. The following passage from my field notes describes my attempt to secure a ride.

*Rode with Diego and Ani onto the ferry then, while the cars were all parked on the ferry, I walked around with my sign. I saw a car that had an empty backseat so I went up to the couple in the front seat, waved at them, and they indicated that they're going there. I stuck out my thumb and they laughed and nodded. I asked if my two other friends could come too and they said yes.*

*So we grabbed our bags and said thank you again to the Argentinian couple.*

In an incredible streak of luck, I managed to secure another ride while on the ferry. This meant that I lost absolutely no time between the two car rides, a rare and impressive accomplishment for a hitchhiker. My new ride was with an Italian couple who had rented a car for their holiday. In their early 30s, I spoke Spanish with them until we decided to speak English so that my Malaysian and German hitchhiker friends could join in on the conversation. Not only was the trip enjoyable due to the interesting conversation with our drivers, but we also stopped along the way to see different sights. Driving along the coastline, my new Italian friends pulled over for a 10-minute excursion to the *Amadeo*, a cargo steam ship that ran aground in 1892. Rusted but relatively intact, the attraction is popular enough for there to be half a dozen cars parked but not popular enough for any commercial activity to crop up around the ship. Guides were not camped out nor were there vendors in the area. My guess is that the site experiences a wave of 5-10 cars once an hour after the ferry docks on this side of the strait, which means that the six vehicles (including the two transport vans) would be the most activity for the hour. With six cars per hour stopping at by the ship during the peak season, I concluded that the site's appeal to the tourism industry was weak. Thus, it is safe to say that others before me had likely reached the Resource Evaluation stage of the Commercialization Life Cycle before concluding that the roadside attraction fell short on the resource of tourism.

After arriving in Punta Arenas, the Italian couple delivered us to the hostel and we kissed goodbye. I had low standards for the port city; other travelers had told me that there was no



appeal and that the hostels were of the lowest quality. In a quick look around the hostel's neighborhood, I saw a dozen strip clubs. The area did not seem dangerous, however, and I buzzed the hostel's doorbell. After confirming with the voice on the other side of the speaker, the click of the door bell signified by welcome into the hostel. Through the dark hallway I walked forward, towards chattering voices. Finally, I turned the corner and saw someone who I assumed to be the hostel owner's son. In his early teens, I recognized his voice from the doorbell system. He checked me in with a computer from the 20th-century and then requested cash for my night's stay. Card is not an option, which I had expected from this caliber of a hostel. After reading reviews claiming to have experienced bed bugs, my standards were quite low. To my surprise, however, the Wi-Fi throughout the hostel was exceptional. Overall, the hostel was not nearly as bad as I expected. In fact, I think it could benefit greatly if management could simply learn the best practices for hostels. If the check-in process was improved and the owner worked to improve the critiques posted on reviews, the 7.3/10 hostel could be the only 9/10 hostel in a city full of 6s and 7s.

### *Commercialization Stages of Puerto Natales and Punta Arenas*

The following day, Lea and I checked out of the hostel and roamed the 125,000-person city before our afternoon bus to Puerto Natales. Our Malaysian friend couch surfed in Punta Arenas and would message Lea if she decided to move on to Puerto Natales in the near future. After walking along the coastline, we set out for food and ended up at a super market (the equivalent of a Kroger, in terms of size and selection). After taking note of the store's inventory, I purchased the following goods: 1.6 liters of water, 3 apples, 2 kiwis, 2 peanut packets, bread

from the bakery, a pack of lemon cookies, and a 9-ounce box of orange juice. This would serve me well for lunch, plus food for the bus and beyond. I have begun to be careful to carry 24 hours' worth of food when on these buses, just in case. There is a litany of reasons why the three-hour bus ride to Puerto Natales may be delayed significantly. Before jumping on board, I had the pleasure of reconnecting with my Israeli friends, Tomer's gang who call themselves "the chunim". They had just purchased gear for their hike on the "O" in Torres del Paine National Park and were taking a bus to Puerto Natales as well. We chatted for a few minutes before getting on separate busses, the last time I would see them (on this trip, at least).

In my experience, the bus system has been a relatively positive one: clean seats, a fair amount of leg room, and power outlets above head. For the first fifteen minutes, the external storage compartment repeatedly opened while the bus was on the highway, resulting in the bus driver having to over and play with the compartment door for a couple minutes before pulling over a few minutes later. I always keep my backpack by my feet so this challenge was not of great concern. Especially in Southern Patagonia, the threat of terrorists taking over the bus is minimal.

Lea and I arrived in the Puerto Natales bus station and recognized significant differences between Punta Arenas and Puerto Natales. Whereas the former focused on shipping, the latter served as a tourist hub and base camp for anyone going to Torres del Paine. The national park is a two-hour bus ride north of Puerto Natales but everyone must go through the city to get to the park. As such, I expected to see a handful of hotels catering to tourists. While there were a good number of hotels, I was especially surprised by the number of hostels available to visitors. Most were standard hostels but there were a handful of specialty hostels that found ways to differentiate themselves from the pack. For a few nights, Lea enjoyed staying at an eco-hostel,

which branded itself as the best hostel for those seeking ecologically-friendly accommodations. My hostel is known as being *the* place to be if you are a rock climber. What was once a garage is now a high-quality practice room; rock walls provide indoor training with a thick mat covering the floor. Gear can be rented for hiking and climbing in the park, with free backpack storage for the nights in Torres del Paine. The hostel's receptionist had coffee, tea, and toast ready starting at 6:00 each morning and offered to cook eggs for travelers who will surely need the nourishment before the long hikes ahead.

I provide a detailed account of the hostel's features because it provides a prime example of the Hyper-Commercialization stage of the Commercialization Life Cycle. The ability to profit from tourism has been realized and a sizeable period of development has allowed the region to reap the rewards of hosting tens of thousands of tourists a season. Hostels must find ways to be competitive and add value to the experience in order to keep each bed filled. Any more commercialization and Puerto Natales would be bursting at the seams – a product of decades of development. With barely over 15,000 inhabitants, the town is driven by the the economy of tourism.

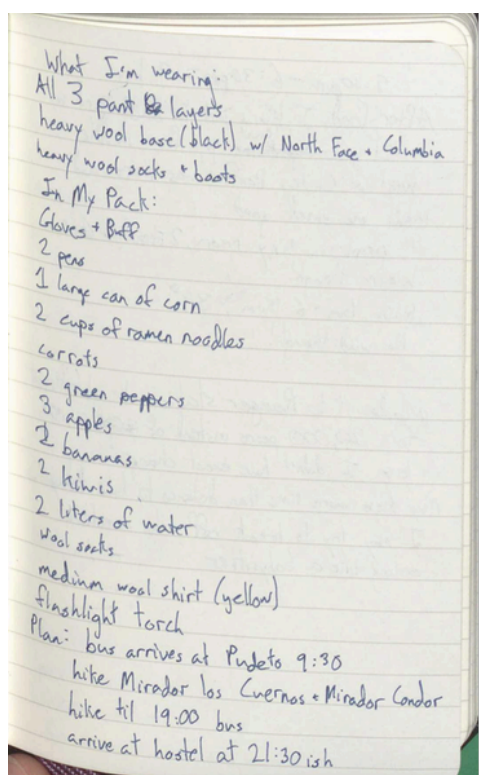
In regards to driving to the park, the bus system from Puerto Natales to Torres del Paine is another example of the impressive commercial development in the region. For a two-hour drive from the bus station to the park's administrative center, there are half a dozen private bus companies available. Every bus leaves at approximately the same time, 7:00 each morning, and return at 19:00 in the sunny evening. Although bus tickets are supposed to be 12,000 Chilean pesos at every ticket booth in the bus station, I decided to see if that was really the case. After scouting out the ticket sellers, I approached a woman who was probably in her early 60s. Smiling and energetic, I greeted her warmly and asked her how she was doing. Having been in Chile for a

little over 24 hours, I had adapted fairly well to the Chilean Spanish language and was able to pick up on a number of Chilean-specific words. We talked about the park and I told her that I wanted to go to Pudeto. She told me all busses go there and the company she works for would be happy to take me. I asked for the price and she pointed to a wooden placard that showed "12,000 pesos". I paused for a moment, thinking about if I had enough cash on hand verses money on my card to afford this adventure. During that brief period, the kind woman told me alright, she could sell the ticket to me for 11,000 pesos. Although I love the thrill of negotiating, that was not my intention and I was surprised at the offer. I thanked her very much and flashed another smile her way. After talking to others at the hostel, I was told by my new friends that they paid 15,000 pesos for the same ticket – just moments after I had purchased mine. Lea had the misfortune of paying the higher price as well when she purchased the ticket the morning of the trip. As a final testament to illustrate how Puerto Natales is hyper-commercialized, it must be noted that the 7:00 busses actually departed at 7:00. This blew my mind, since this was the first instance in South America in which my bus was on time. My bus to the park on the third day was also on time – a miracle. Ultimately, I found Puerto Natales to be in its own league, even above the transportation system between Aguas Calientes and Machu Picchu that I had experienced in the summer of 2014.

The national park had also already experienced rapid development and commercialization. Along the W and O trails, private companies managed campsites and "refugios," or dorm-like cabins. Reservations must be placed months in advance; warm meals with Chilean wine are served for weary hikers. What could have been an exhausting trek is now made easier since visitors need only carry the essentials needed for a day hike – camping gear

and food can be paid for at each point along the trail. As long as you planned in advance and had deep pockets, Torres del Paine National Park is a hiker's dream.

For those who had not planned on going to the most popular national park in Chile until a week in advance, the experience is slightly difficult. Luckily, one of the greatest Chilean climbing guides was hanging out in the hostel on the night before my first day trip to the park. After twenty minutes of back-and-forth, I felt better prepared to take on the park. The following photo of my field notes provide a detailed account of the gear and food I planned to bring, plus my overall strategy for my first day in Torres del Paine.



For the first day in the park on January 7, I wanted to enjoy some of the untouched land in the southern part of the park. After getting checked in at the administrative center at 9:00, I jumped back on the bus and arrived at Pudeto a half hour later. The rain that I had experienced

that morning had stopped, and the 1° Celsius felt slightly better with the sun out. My gear fared well and I began the walk to the trailhead. Almost everyone who starts at Pudeto takes the catamaran across the pristine glacier water – either to start the W hike on the left side of the W or to enjoy a day hike up the left portion. With a \$50 USD price tag for a round-trip catamaran ride, I decided that the left side would be something to look forward to when I come back in the future to hike the O trail. Due to the popularity of the catamaran, the Mirador los cuernos trail offers pristine views with minimal interference by other hikers. This meant that birdlife and guanaco, a close relative of the llama, are merely feet away on the trails. With stunning views, I was spoiled by nature on my first day. The temperature rose to 5° Celsius, or 41° Fahrenheit, with gusts of wind up to 90 kilometers per hour. I was glad to have the proper gear for the trip!

By the time I returned to the hostel that evening, all stores were closed and would remain so until after the 7:00 busses left for the park. Thus, I was required to rest for a day or otherwise return to the park without food. This provided me with the time to go to the supermarket, explore the town, and prepare for my second day of hiking. This time, I would take the bus to the administrative center, take a van transport to the bottom right point of the W, and then hike up the right side of the W to the base of the towers (the park's namesake). This trek, Base de torres, is the most difficult part of the W and includes a gruesome boulder-dash for the final hour of the hike. My friend Noah had hiked the O the previous year and assured me that this hike would be difficult but certainly possible. After returning to the bus station to purchase the bus ticket for 11,000 pesos and prepping my food for the hike, I hung out with some friends in the hostel. Two of the guys working at the hostel had started up a fire in the back yard so we chatted about life before I retired to my bed room.

On the morning of January 9, I woke up to a sunny sky and 0° Celsius temperature. I met up with Lea at the bus station – she decided that she wants to try the Base de torres hike as well, but we agreed that we would enjoy the trek at our own pace. Our Malaysian friend had done the hike the previous day and told us that it was snowing heavily at the top, so I brought many layers and wore my heavy coat. This would be an opportunity for me to push my limits. The following passage is from my field notes, written the day after the hike:

*Hiked to Base de Torres yesterday! Quite the trek. What I should have brought: polar fleece, North Face jacket, ski pants, waterproof pants, 3 apples, 8 soy nuggets, 2 L of water. Columbia jacket was too warm and too heavy. Brought too much food. Could've refilled water at Chileno camp sight. Incredible weather but didn't wear sunscreen so my forehead, nose, and cheeks are burned. First 50 min were rough, uphill in sun with full weight of gear. Made it to Chileno camp at 10:30, 90 min in. I left Lea because I wanted to go solo. Next bit was very beautiful, with a few short breaks. Final hour was a boulder dash, which was brutal. Definitely pushed myself harder than ever before. Passed a lot of people on way up. Insane views. Very exhausting. Need a better pack, but this one is sentimental.*

Feeling empowered and exhausted after the hike, I decided that I over-prepared for the excursion. I should have brought fewer clothes, less water, and less food. A lighter pack, and one that has proper weight distribution features like waist straps, would have made the trip significantly easier. Regardless, I completed the hike and was mesmerized by the trail's stunning beauty. Although there were times when the trails were "gridlocked" due to the sheer number of hikers on a single-track trail, this gave me some confidence that everything would be okay if something were to happen to myself or Lea since we were both hiking solo. In many ways, I viewed this hike as a primer for a future hike on the O. It was an incredible experience that will hopefully be enjoyed again on a larger scale.

On January 10, I said goodbye to my friends at the hostel and walked to the bus station. After only a few nights in the town, I had developed deep relationships with a handful of people in the hostel. As always, it was difficult to say goodbye. At the bus station, I had to say goodbye to another dear friend. After traveling with Lea for nearly two weeks, I departed on a bus going south while hers drove north. I said goodbye to one of my first friends from Ushuaia, who had encouraged me to make memories that I will cherish for the rest of my life. It was a sentimental moment but I hope to see her again soon. To quote my field notes, "what a ride."

To return to the southern tip of Argentina, I needed to take a bus to Punta Arenas on the 10th of January and then wake up early on the 11th to take the 13+ hour bus ride to Ushuaia. I didn't want to risk hitchhiking back south, fearing that I might not make it in time for my icebreaker ship. This itinerary meant that I would go back to the chaotic-but-enjoyable hostel, the one with the fantastic Wi-Fi. For the reader's amusement, I have disclosed the field notes entry that I wrote on January 11 regarding my "homecoming" of sorts:

*Made it to Punta Arenas yesterday and rang doorbell to get into hostel. Nobody came so I walked around the back to use the code for the back gate. As I walked through the backyard the owner's son, Ian, walked past me. He was excited to see me and cheered and shook my hand. Partially checked in with owner after 5 minutes and told him my name. "Ahh! Charles Hill!!!" He yelled over to Ian "Es Charles Hill!" and Ian cheered too. He told me that he was excited to meet me and they were waiting for me. What a warm welcome! Someone was using computer so I ran to supermarket to get snacks for bus to USH.*

*Later cooked pasta, sauce, corn, bread, and beer for dinner. I made friends with a group of Israelis who are going up to Torres del Paine. I brought out my map and explained how it all works. There is no good website that explains how bus system works! Also, day hikes and camping are not clear so I walked them through it for half an hour. They were very grateful, which made me feel good. It was only after I had talked to woman at bus ticket counter and the expert climber guide and Carlos the hostel owner plus experiencing it for myself that I understood how it all works. Very tricky stuff! Finally took a shower for first time in a few days. I'll wash my Craft Force pants tonight hopefully. Smooth sailing on bus.*



Although I was only in the hostel for a few hours aside from the time I slept, I made many friends and enjoyed the experience. I talked with Ian about his life in Punta Arenas and talked to my new Israeli friends about how to fulfill their dreams of experiencing the sunrise at the base of the towers. Nights like these feel the closest to self-actualization. The only thing to complain about is that my face is falling off; I should have used sunscreen on the high-altitude, sunny hike.

After arriving back in Ushuaia and checking into my hostel, I checked my bank account. With \$300 USD left, I was in the clear. January 12 and 13 consisted of reading the primary source document for Earnest Shackleton's disastrous adventure on the *Endurance* in Antarctica. I would find spots, either by the bay or in the mountains, to read and think about my experiences. Making friends was still a priority and there are always entertaining characters in the hostel. In my field notes, I documented a love story between Craig, a clueless but sweet Brit, and a beautiful Argentinian girl. A 59-year-old traveler from Idaho shared a riveting story from his experiences on the Bam, a non-touristy railway north of the Trans-Siberian railroad, with a group of Dutch and Brazilian backpackers.

I also had the pleasure of meeting two Danish guys, Jacob and Kasper, who are going to Antarctica on the same icebreaker as me. They also bought a ticket last-minute and have been traveling all over the world. The three of us hung out, drank beer, and jammed out with a guitar. Jacob sold me a 64gb microSD card for \$20 USD, which was below Ushuaia market price and gave me peace of mind for the upcoming Antarctica trip since I previously only had a 16gb card.

On the 14th, I visited the bunker again to borrow heavier gloves and pants. Two guys in their late 20s, an American and a Canadian, were there trying on gear before departing on the

same expedition as me. Also, I shared tips on Torres del Paine with Gabriel, who would likely share that information with travelers down the line. This passing down of information seemed archaic but there was not a reliable source of information on the internet. Even after my Torres del Paine adventure, I looked online to see if any website had quality information. Sites had incorrect information as to bus times and prices, while no site had any clear information about the ability to take a van transport from the administrative center. Passing along information to other travelers and inhabitants who deal with travelers is of importance, a part of the trade that has changed its medium with the rise of the internet. I am unsure as to why Torres del Paine remains, for the most part, stuck in its ways.

Kasper, a Danish carpenter who is soft-spoken when conversing in English but rowdy when talking in his native language, provided an interesting tidbit of information regarding the commercial nature of my icebreaker ship. Below are notes I took after speaking with him about his experience securing a ticket:

*Kasper told me yesterday that he realized that the boat is Danish so he called them to get info. Apparently they sell tickets wholesale for \$5700 to agencies, who can get even more of a discount if there's a relationship. Then the agencies mark it way up. So for me to get offered the \$5200 inside and then the \$5800 porthole cabin is pretty wild. Chimu must have wanted to cut losses and stay in the green. I wonder what the profit margin looks like for the ship, if the agencies are making so much money. I know Chimu is bringing along the equivalent of a Lewis, so he's probably getting a free ride.*

Chimu is the agency that block purchased a significant quantity of tickets aboard the ship, then sold the tickets after marking up the tickets over 300%. I am surprised that the ships sell the tickets for that little, leaving money on the table. This scenario seems too good to be true; I suspect that there is another side to this relationship in which the Danish ship company is able to make up additional revenue through the sales. There appears to be another layer to this situation

that needs to be peeled back, although I appreciated that information from Kasper since it provides an interesting piece of information to the puzzle am I attempting to decipher. We drank beer and sang in merriment on our final night on land – our icebreaker would cast away from land tomorrow afternoon!

### *South!*

On January 15, I woke up refreshed and excited for the next stage in my research. Beyond the sheer thrill of getting onto the icebreaker and knowing that I had reached the next milestone of this adventure, I was looking forward to gathering more data for my research. Jacob, Kasper and I were joined by Nicola, a Brit in her late 20s who had recently stepped out of her finance career to travel, as we marched to the ship.

Although I was a paying ticket-holder who had the right to board the icebreaker, I was interested in determining if it were possible to embark on the ship as a stowaway. Certainly, this occurred throughout the heroic age – one man on Shackleton's *Endurance* was hidden for two days before being discovered (he was fully integrated into the crew after a fierce tongue-lashing by the leader himself). At the port's gates, a security guard stood in front of a hallway. I handed him a piece of paper, a charter that I could have easily created on the computer in under a minute. He waved me through and I walked through a metal detector while my bag moved through a simple scanner. Then, I walked down the deck towards the ship where I was greeted by the crew. I told them my name and they gave me my room details and key. The crew offered to take my bag for me but I politely declined, since I only had my small backpack. Should I have wanted to sneak aboard, there would have been many ways to go about bypassing the crew on

the port. The only other concern I would have is that the hospitality crew on board likely has photographs and details of each passenger. If a crew member looks for my information but does not see my record, that would be a red flag. There is also a special card that each passenger receives as an IAATO member that is scanned whenever said passenger leaves the ship to go onto the Antarctic continent. That would likely be the most difficult part, since there appeared to be no way around that individual. If someone were to sneak onto the ship, it would not be worth the risk trying to go onto the continent. To quote Shackleton when he abandoned his mission to the South Pole in his 1907-09 expedition, "better a live donkey than a dead lion." I do believe that there are decent odds that one could successfully embark on an Antarctic expedition unnoticed. In fact, there was one passenger who I suspected in doing so, since he kept a backpack with him and slept on one of the couches in the lounge every night. Thus, I would like to recognize that it is possible to be a stowaway if one puts forth the effort to do so.

My ship, the *Ocean Atlantic*, has quite the history. After disembarking on January 24, I wrote the following passage while sitting on the shore:

*It's a medium-sized double-hulled icebreaker, built in Poland for the Soviet Union. If you look closely on the "fin", you can see the sickle and hammer. After the Soviet Union fell, the ship was repurposed to smuggle cars out of South Korea into Russia. It used to have stripper poles, which I would guess were active during this time period. Then it was transformed into a passenger ferry in Denmark before being used for Arctic and Antarctic expeditions. There are many different versions of the ship map in English, which includes spots like night club (now the piano lounge) and a beauty shop (which does not exist in the blueprint at all). Contains 16 zodiacs approximately and maybe 10 kayaks. The bridge still has Russian everywhere; the captain and bridge crew are all Russian. Albatross Expeditions is Danish, the researchers come from everywhere (including Denmark). Biologists, geologists, climate change scholars, all kinds of focuses.*

The ship certainly had character! The first afternoon on board was spent exploring the maze-like hallways, discovering different rooms. I imagined what it would be like to have stolen vehicles parked on the ship, with thick smoke clouding the spaces.

Having enjoyed a few cruises in my youth, I was interested to see what level of comparison my expedition might have with a pleasure cruise. The first parallel was noticed before setting foot on the icebreaker. As mentioned previously, the crew offered to take my luggage to my cabin. Some individuals brought massive suitcases which would not fit on the gangway – an unreasonable quantity of clothing except that the ship's laundry service was \$70 USD per load. Another key instance in which the expedition felt much like a cruise was during meals. With white tablecloths and the occasional a la carte meal, I cannot imagine Shackleton or modern research expeditions having a wait staff. When passengers are paying over \$20,000 USD, however, there must be at least some semblance of classiness.

Other aspects affirmed my internal desire for an authentic experience. The inherent lack of certainty due to situational elements such as weather provided an adventurous atmosphere. Reggae music did not encourage participants in a limbo competition. Instead, researchers on board were happy to talk to me about their experiences and share insights on their respective fields. There were individuals on board who specialized in a wide array of topics: glaciology, microbiology, telecommunications, geology, psychology, logistics, and many more. My conversations with these researchers helped shape my perspective on the continent and its importance to humanity. It also provided me a framework for which to base my analysis of Antarctica on the Commercialization Life Cycle.

After going through the safety procedures, I made a mental note to avoid unintentionally falling in the water. Fires, too. As the ship sailed out of the Beagle Channel, everyone mentally prepared for our passage across the Drake Passage, one of the most dangerous bodies of water in the world. Over two and a half days, the ship will brave strong gales and massive waves. Here is my summary of the experience:

*There are a few who handle the rocking boat well but most [people] still stagger. Vomit bags are dispersed throughout boat. I've got my gear on just in case the deck opens. Breakfast was delicious – beans, potatoes, pancakes, and a strudel means lots of carbs but not too unhealthy. Meals are the only time when this feels less of expedition and more cruise. Other aspects feel like a ferry gone wrong.*

With the ship rolling over the swells, all outside decks were closed off. Thankfully, I did not get nearly as ill as others on board. My roommate, a Dutchman who had little experience in rough seas, was constantly sick the entire crossing. His girlfriend and I would bring food down to the room for him, which he greatly appreciated. The passage, which is casually classified as being a "Drake Lake" or "Drake Shake", can vary in severity and I knew that the Drake that I was experiencing could be much, much worse. According to the Beaufort Scale, which measures wind speeds on a scale from 1 to 12, the icebreaker had experienced Force 9 conditions at the height of the turbulence, with consistent Force 8 winds and waves. On water, Force 9 winds typically lead to rolling sea and dense streaks of foam. The ship pushed through 10-meter waves like a champ. Chairs and tables were chained down to the floor; hand-rails were constantly in use. In the dining hall, cutlery would occasionally fly off the diners' plates as the rocking reached violent levels.

Along with the small zodiacs that each take ten passengers at a time to the continent, my icebreaker carried a dozen kayaks. The opportunity to kayak in the Antarctic waters is a fairly

popular activity for tourists and I had heard from many people that the sign-up list would fill up months before the trip. One woman whom I had met on the plane to Ushuaia in December mentioned that her agent told her that she was very lucky to book a ticket on a ship, six months ahead of time, where kayaking was still available. Her agent told her that the kayaking is usually sold out completely a year beforehand. For \$750 USD, kayaking adventures provide an unparalleled perspective. On the ship, the kayak master made an announcement that there were still plenty of spots available and that the price for kayaking was \$235 USD. Apparently, six travelers had secured spots early and paid over three times the market price because they listened to the advice of their agent and locked in the reservation early. When the trip is the adventure of a lifetime and a one-time trip, agents know they can take advantage of tourists and burn bridges. Referrals are not a popular sourcing channel for agents, so the companies are able to avoid worrying about the ramifications of burning bridges with the client. Needless to say, the six passengers who had heeded the words of their agents were probably not thrilled to paddle alongside others who had paid less than a third of their price for the same experience.

A similar situation occurred at the 18:00 Daily Recap on January 16, the second evening on board. After the expedition director had completed her presentation on the likely weather conditions and itinerary for the following day, the floor was open for questions. An Australian man raised his hand and asked, "What is the difference between Chimu Travels and Albatross Expeditions?" Chimu is the Australian travel agency that had block-purchased the tickets to sell to Australian tourists, while Albatross is the Danish expedition company that handles the Antarctic expedition-side of the trip. In essence, the price markup by Chimu was a service charge that had zero value once passengers were on the ship. For the average Chimu customer, there was very little value ever, since it would have been just as easy to send the passport information

and money to Albatross directly. Passengers on the ship began to recognize this fact: that they had overpaid the unnecessary travel agency. At this point, I imagine that many pairs of eyes bore down on the Chimu representative, who was on board to assist. His assistance was unnecessary, however, since any issues that might arise on the ship would be out of his domain. The representative did not provide any value to the experience; I would be upset too if I had paid \$20,000 USD. Chimu had successfully operated a tourist trap, once again, yet every tourist would return home with nothing but positive things to say about the trip.

Aside from holding on for dear life, my days crossing the passage consisted of talking to researchers about their work, reading Shackleton's primary source document on his expedition on the *Endurance*, and playing chess with Jacob. There were a few required information sessions that provided information on the logistics for Antarctic excursions, plus a biomedical screening for all gear that would be taken onto the continent. The journal entry below describes my experience with the screening:

*Biomedical screening was hilarious. First time my backpack, which has been used thoroughly in 4 continents, was cleaned. We found coins in at least 5 currencies, papers for immigration, and many other things. One of the screeners used the vacuum and asked "what is this, sand from the Sahara?" to which I responded "actually, yes it is!!"*

*I felt like a spy unloading all the weapons hidden on my body, except with travel gear. They did not know what next to expect to see. I want to get a pic of the backpack on every continent, a reasonable task if I bring it with me this summer. I don't think I will take a pill today. Waves are not as bad today, even if there's a decent amount of rocking.*

With the first sighting of an iceberg on the morning of the 17th of January, the ship was energized. Jokes referencing the Titanic were popular among the Albatross crew, since the odds of such a dangerous occurrence were relatively slim. The Formerly-Soviet ship had broken ice



for decades in both the Arctic and Antarctic; the crew had complete trust in our Russian captain. The jokes continued until January 22, when the change in humor was noticeable. On that day, a Chinese vessel in Antarctica had hit an iceberg after the navigation equipment failed to detect the massive block of ice. According to reports from state-owned China Global Television Network group, the crash "shattered the ship's mast and left 250 metric tons of snow and ice on the front deck"<sup>16</sup>. The Chinese ship resembled the icebreaker I was on, in terms of size and navigational/technological advancement. Although official reports from the Chinese government claim no injuries aboard, the event was a sobering moment that reminded everyone that there is still an element of danger in Antarctica, a century after expeditions of the heroic age.

### *Antarctica*

January 18 would mark the first day of adventures on the Antarctic continent. I woke up early, with the natural sunlight reflecting off massive glaciers and Gentoo penguins leaping into the air as they swam alongside the ship. My Dutch roommate and I were awestruck as we looked out of our porthole window. This experience seemed unreal: I was reminded of the paintings from the American Romantic period, with fairytale landscapes from artists like Albert Bierstadt. I was on another planet, a reality that I could not quite comprehend.

I got dressed and hurried to the dining hall for breakfast. Zodiacs, which are the equivalent of ten-person white water rafts with a boat engine in the back, were being lowered down to the water. Before any researchers or tourists landed on the continent, a few Albatross

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<sup>16</sup> China Global Television Network, *China's Antarctic expedition team safe after iceberg crash*. YouTube, 13 March 2019.

crew members scouted out the water and land. Making note of the water conditions, wildlife, and other important details, the information from the scouts would be used to determine where different researcher would land and where the tourist zodiacs would land. Tourists were then sorted into four groups for departure times. I am not sure what the system was like for the researchers. When it was time for my group to depart, we would go down to the mudroom to put on our gear and then line up to get onto the zodiac. Each 10-person squad would then either go directly to a landing site that the zodiac driver chose or the squad would seek out wildlife and glaciers in the water. After a period of time, squads would then switch places so that every squad had time to enjoy both land and water. Then, everyone returned onto the icebreaker, then zodiacs are brought back on board via crane, and the ship moves further south to a new area as lunch is served. The combination of the increased level of physical activity and the sheer pleasure of having free food available would lead me to eat at least three full plates per meal during the excursion days. I noticed myself gaining weight, which is uncommon for me but a welcome sight, in some ways. I did not want to find myself depleted of energy in Antarctica! The following entry describes my experience on the continent during the first afternoon:

*Expedition pushed back 15 min to 14:45 because rough waves, kayaks were pulled. Weather didn't clear up so they said f\*\*\* it and put us in the water. I was in final group to go out so I grabbed gear and went to mud room. Medium wool socks, long underwear with Columbia rental pants, red medium wool shirt, Columbia coat, Freestyle neck buff, Freestyle beanie, and Julbo glacier glasses.*

*I probably should have worn heavier layer wool shirt and socks. Getting into zodiac was a fun challenge but I was seated up front. British driver was less as insane as the Russian woman this morning. Zipped around for an hour at first. On first zodiac in the morning, I saw Gentoo penguins and Weddell seals, including a group of 100 Gentoos swimming together. On zodiac this afternoon, I saw many Gentoos but the glaciers were incredible. Landed on Cuverville and hiked along the coastline. Penguins waddled up to me, getting within 3ft of me! Very exciting! Saw many eggs and even more chicks, which must have hatched very recently. Saw the chicks feeding and chirping around, very cute. Also saw a few skewers fly around, trying to snatch a chick. Penguins don't band together, so it's 1 penguin vs 2 skewers. Saw the skewers snatch an egg after a fierce battle. Another pair of skewers flew off with a live chick and then gruesomely*

*pulled it apart while it was still alive, leaving a bloody stain in the snow. This is the real deal. Planet Earth s\*\*\*. Usually the snow has melted by now, but climate change has run its course. Hard winter for chicks and therefore hard for skewers and seals. Oh baby, I am hungry. I was on 2nd to last zodiac back and the expedition leaders were quite nervous. When I got onto the water with zodiac, I understood. 2m waves, crashing into us. No real fear of falling out, but certainly not safe waters. Chad was in front and I was next in, so we both got soaked. Jacket worked very well, rental pants did not hold up as well: long underwear was very wet. I'm happy with today's adventures. Felt very much like an expedition. I'll try to get on 1st zodiac out tomorrow, since my squad is 1st up tomorrow (I believe). Apparently Gerard has info on the store holder of Shackleton's expedition, who was almost killed by mutiny. He didn't want to stock up on seal because it looks as if they'll be staying long, hurting morale. When seals left early and food ran low, the crew wanted to kill him but Shackleton returned to Elephant Island that very day.*

This passage provides a perspective into the adventure of touching ground on the continent. Picking the right gear to wear was a fun challenge since weather could significantly change in a matter of minutes. Getting into a squad of healthy, relatively young people was also a priority since that would determine how much risk the driver was willing to take. When the crew decided to throw another zodiac on the choppy water, my squad was not inundated with unfit baby boomers. Our first day was the best weather of the trip, although we were fortunate to enjoy decent weather every day with temperatures occasionally in the negatives, Celsius. On several zodiac rides, the crashing into the waves would send a cascade of salty water down on us while heavy snow would blind those without proper eyewear. Holding on tightly but without serious concern of falling into the water, I enjoyed yelling out the occasional "yee haw" in a land that looked much different from the Lone Star state.

With the icebreaker's outside decks opened up due to the relatively calm waters, I enjoyed observing the wildlife in the air and below the water's surface. There was a checklist that showed what wildlife had been seen on each day, and the experience of not being walled in was enjoyable. I also visited the bridge a handful of times, where the captain and his crew – all Russian – navigated and steered the ship. They appeared to be very serious so a couple of my new friends decided to test the waters with the captain, so to speak.

*Dinner shenanigans last night were a good time. It was the captain's birthday but only I knew because Russian zodiac driver told me. Miranda went up to the captain's table and asked if it really is his birthday and he seemed humorously confused as to how she knew. Then, Chad bought Miranda a shot for fulfilling the dare. He also bought the captain a shot, which the waitress delivered. We waved over at him and he smiled, still a little confused.*

Although none of us witnessed the captain drink the shot of vodka, the dare was absolutely hilarious and brought much laughter to our table. As expected, the "young" people conversed together and created our own group. With an average age of 28 the group enjoyed time on the ship together and attempted to be in the same squad each expedition. I was the youthful outlier, at age 22, while most of the people in our young person group were between the ages of 27 and 30. Being the only undergrad of the group, I enjoyed providing youthful energy to this already comparatively-young crowd. The following happened after I made the decision to not spend money on alcohol on board:

*On the first evening, Miranda asked me if I'm drinking anything. I told her that prices are too high and I'm trying to save money since the expedition broke my bank. Unfortunately, (or fortunately), I became known in the group as the cheap guy. Granted, I'm the only student on a tight budget, but I was the stereotype schmuck. I thought that I could either 1) be ashamed, 2) give in and buy drinks, or 3) live it up. So let's see... I got 3 glasses of wine, 3 beers, and 5 mixed drinks from the wonderful friends I made onboard. Super kind of them :) I would have survived the expedition sober, but it was fun to drink and be merry. Many thanks to Miranda, Alex, Chad, Scot, Abby, and Elle.*

Of course, the large quantity of alcohol consumed by my friends led to some wacky experiences. Our group took over a small lounge and used that as our nightly hangout spot, playing games or creating the "Bathrobe Discoteca," with a strict dress code that required participants to wear the bathrobe that was provided in the cabin. This level of absurdity reminds me of the instance in which the entire crew on Shackleton's expedition shaved their heads.

Neither our Bathrobe Discoteca nor their haircut spree were necessary to the mission of the trip but it brought the groups together and created fun out of an ordinary situation.

As mentioned in the explanatory section from earlier in this thesis regarding the Resource Evaluation stage, Port Lockroy served as the first major instance of geopolitical valuation in Antarctica. For me to have the opportunity to explore the British base was an incredible experience, especially since one of the researchers on board (Gerard) had spent time living on base. Claiming the title as southernmost post office, Port Lockroy is filled with history. Gerard showed me his former bed and passed along interesting stories about his experience overwintering. I also had the opportunity to chat with one of the long-term researchers who was living in the base with four women. Here are my notes from that afternoon:

*Port Lockroy and Jougla Point were pretty incredible. Went to the post office and there was a man at the front desk. Since there's only one man at Port Lockroy, I knew that this man was the man I was looking for. "Are you Guillome?" He responded yes, and I explained that I had met his cousin, Raphael, in Ushuaia. He lit up and shook my hand before asking how his cousin is doing. I told Guillome that Raphael is well, with a full beard from travelling South America. Guillome told me that he had hoped to see his cousin after his 6 month shift if Raphael is still in South America, but that they are very close and he misses his cousin dearly. They even shared a bed in Paris. It was a pretty incredible moment and I'm grateful that I got to pass along the message between the two cousins.*

It was a magical experience, to travel this far and connect two people together. It would have been impossible, had it not been for the fact that Guillome is literally the only male inhabitant on the small base. I enjoy travel moments like this but doubt that I will ever again have a moment that is as crazy as the one I had with Guillome and Raphael, two cousins on two different continents who I had met without effort.

The morning of January 21 was probably my favorite morning on the expedition, aside from the moment I looked out of my porthole window to first see the continent. I got to be on the very first zodiac out to the shore of Deception Island and then ignored all common sense and enjoyed a polar plunge in Antarctica. The following passage documents my adventures.

*Busy morning, 6:15 wake up call. Ran up to top deck for view of Deception Island. 6:45 breakfast then back to top deck to watch ship squeeze itself into the ring. Deception is an island formed by the volcano that is classified as "restless, eruption eminent." Yellow warning. It is expected to erupt within the next 14 days, so we're going to check it out! British, Chilean, and Argentinian bases, the only three, have been evacuated after the 1968/69 eruption. The volcano erupts every 50 years, so we are right on time. Chad, Nicola and I were on 1st zodiac out, so we enjoyed hiking without any disturbances. No trail since no snow and nobody really goes to Deception Island so we had flags that the scouts had staked every 500 m or so that we loosely followed. We walked on ash, black from volcano. A biologist told me that there's some vegetation that's hard to see, but I was expecting more given the plant life that thrives around the volcanoes in Central America. I felt as though I were on the moon, so I got a video of me pretending to leap around with 0 gravity and plant a flag in the ground. Hiked up to a crater, where the last eruption occurred. Quite the trek but beautiful. I heard nothing but the howling of the wind. Chad did another photoshoot so I had the pleasure of photographing him in a leotard. Adele penguins on shore and a crab eater seal. Zipped back to icebreaker to attend a lecture from Dr. David McDonald on volcanoes, 10:15.*

Deception Island is a ring-like island with water in the middle. There is a sliver of an opening that connects the middle section with the ocean and I would later learn that the maneuver used by the captain to enter the center of the ring was incredibly risky. The squeezing of the ship past the sharp rocks did, in fact, appear to be a difficult navigational move at the time but I was more impressed with the geography of the island than the captain's abilities. My zodiac dashed to the shore and I set off with my friends towards a giant crater. Unlike the snowy land that I had walked on in the past, the ground crunched my boots as I hiked on the black volcanic soil. With blackened earth and gray skies, I felt as though I was on another planet. When I was told that the active volcano was under a yellow warning, I was not worried until I had heard the description included "eruption eminent" and that the next level of warning, orange, included

"explosive eruption occurring."<sup>17</sup> A couple of hunting and research bases had been abandoned exactly fifty years ago after eruption warnings were ignored and lava wrecked havoc. Yet here we were, once again ignoring the warnings that claim eminent eruption. That would be quite the way to die, on an abandoned volcanic island in Antarctica.

Hiking on the volcano was not enough of an adventure for one morning so I participated in the mind-numbing polar plunge after returning to the ship. Below are my field notes that I wrote after lunch, which included many spelling errors and scribbled-out words.

*At 11:15, I donned my bathrobe and TX flag shorts and went to mudroom. Time for the polar plunge!! I'm still not functioning properly; I need to rest my head. So cold. Water at +0.5° C, with wind of unknown speed (medium). Jumped in then swam to ladder and climbed out. Hyperventilated so tried to cheer + yell but it didn't work out well. Gladly downed a shot of vodka and grabbed a towel. Returned to mudroom, grabbed bathrobe, and enjoyed sauna. Shower then lunch with Miranda, Simon, Kasper, and Nicola. Now I'm here, writing. Exhausted but with a weird high. I have felt like this a couple times when I green out. I'm going to close my eyes now.*

It took nearly twenty-four hours to recalibrate and return to my normal self. After fifteen minutes of the sauna, I returned to my cabin and showered before walking up to the front of the ship for lunch. My friends later shared that I could only eat half a plate of food before I abruptly left the table and found the nearest couch outside the hall. Then, I tried to document the experience but had much difficulty in the mechanics of writing. I had trouble holding my pen and spelling words did not come easily. I required many breaks in which I leaned back in the couch and closed my eyes but then the voices of people across the hall would get louder and louder, as if they were right in front of me yelling in my ear. I was utterly discombobulated and

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<sup>17</sup> Deception Island Management Group, *Volcanic Activity* (2005).

frustrated that I was not in my right mind. After many attempts to write, I finally retired to my room to take a nap.

Even after an extended period of rest, I still felt disoriented but would not let that stop me from an adventure to Hannah Point, the last trip to Antarctica. One highlight was getting to see 5-person geology team, whose research base consisted of two camping tents. My icebreaker was the first ship to visit the Bulgaria-based team all summer, since the aggressive elephant seals prevented landings, and one of our researchers who knew the team brought them a bottle of rum. After a close run-in with an elephant seal, I checked out fossilized wood from the Cretaceous period and jumped on the zodiac to return back to the ship. After another night of rest, I finally felt back to normal.

### *Returning North*

Back on the ship, the icebreaker pushed north. We were out of icy waters by the morning of the 22nd. I waved goodbye to the white continent with the hope that I would return to the magical place in the future. By 15:00 on that day, my field notes describe the water conditions as we returned to the Drake Passage:

*Currently, open waters in Antarctic sea are tossing boat around significantly. Feeling it quite a bit, and I'm lying on bed right now. Not sure how bad it'll be upstairs but heading up soon. I want to wait to take pill tonight so I don't pass out too early. Heading north, so weather is getting better. Maybe +3° C, heavy winds.*

Not quite the Drake Shake, the open waters marked a noticeable change in weather conditions. The rear decks remained open and I enjoyed the warmer temperatures as I watched



for feeding whales to pass by the ship. My appetite declined, likely as a result of less physical activity. On our return north, I had the pleasure of listening to some crewmembers from Albatross discuss a wide array of topics. On the logistics side, I learned about the process of charting the expedition's course and ensuring compliancy with global environmental regulations.

After a full night on the Drake Passage, I attended a lecture by one of the most senior geologists to do research in Antarctica. The topic: evaluating resources in the southernmost continent. This was a perfect way for me to learn from an expert and gain an academic perspective on the process of evaluating resources. Amusingly, I was wearing my 'Texas Grandpa' shirt that day and the geologist mentioned to the group that much of his research and much Antarctic research is led by UT Austin. As the saying goes, what starts here changes the world. The PhD provided a historical perspective on humankind's push to discover precious resources, highlighting the El Dorado analogy and the early maps that depicted strange animals and mines. Although ice is scientifically classified as a mineral, the lecturer emphasized the difference between resource and reserve – a contrast that is cause for a major energy corporation being sued for overstating Australian gas reserves that are not truly classified as reserves. The key takeaways from the lecture were that mineral activities are banned by the Madrid Protocol but are not economically feasible at this time anyway. Currently, there is no serious exploration of minerals and petroleum potential is low. Thus, minerals in Antarctica are not resources of significant value for the foreseeable future.

A lecture on Southern Ocean conservation provided insight on the commercial activities of the 19th and 20th centuries that continues to impact the continent. This lecturer discussed the rise of the whaling industry in South Georgia how regulated fishing now provides financial and logistical support for further research on the effectiveness of conservation movements. Whaling

in the waters surrounding Antarctica became illegal after whale populations were reduced to alarming numbers. However, whaling is still a profitable industry and therefore the restrictions on whaling can be viewed as an artificial acceleration of the Commercialization Life Cycle to the final stage. In an environmental sense, whaling has reached the level of overexploitation, even if the practice has not reached its peak in terms of economic feasibility. This artificially-designed decline in commercialization is expected to have positive environmental impacts for the entire ecosystem.

On the final night on board the icebreaker, I managed to write about a critical change that I had noticed while visiting Antarctica. In my cabin at 21:00 after dinner, laying in my bed, I drafted the following blurb:

*It is fascinating that Antarctica provides the most liberating feeling possible by limiting your choices and qualities that generally would lead to increased freedom. Currency and economics no longer matter, the body clock doesn't matter as time dissolves with the day/night binary, and the contrast between the internal and external locus of control increases (life becomes less chess and more checkers as relevant variables decrease).*

Three aspects of my life that seemed to be at the foundation of my living experience had dissolved while I was in Antarctica: currency, time, and visual perspective. All three concepts were still present to some degree; they were less pronounced or clear, however. Regarding currency, Antarctica clearly does not have a common currency nor is there a need for one, since there is no market for buyers and sellers to exchange goods or services. Aside from Port Lockroy's post office, which accepts Great Britain Pounds, there is no need for a financial infrastructure. Any transactions for tourists occurs on the other six continents as it is doubtful that plastics cards have any significance in Antarctica. Time was the most dissolved concept of the three. With constant sunlight and the lack of a clear schedule due to constantly changing

weather, my body clock was unable to function. Meals did not necessarily run on a set time since the kitchen could be operating significantly early or late. Departures and arrivals at drop sites on land would fluctuate based on the weather conditions. Time simply did not matter. The final foundational aspect which dissolved with my arrival to Antarctica was what I will call visual perspective. After returning to South America, I found that the way I looked at objects was different. I would stare, taking far too long looking at one object before moving my eyes elsewhere. My hypothesis for this is that in Antarctica, there was not a significant amount of movement around me so I would not need to look around quickly to capture my surroundings. The massive block of ice was not going anywhere and so I was able to study its details and engrain the image in my brain. Of these three concepts, the first two are societal constructs while the final seems to be a short-term adaption to the way I experienced my surroundings.

After a final night of shenanigans with my dear friends, I returned to my cabin in the early hours of January 24. After little sleep, the following passage documents my final hours on the ship.

*Wake-up call at 6:15 was brutal. Showered then made my way to breakfast after grabbing my gear in backpack to take to breakfast. Tried to get passport but receptionist said I still have an outstanding balance. I never put down a credit card so when the ship posted a notice that they'd auto-tip \$135 USD onto bills, I requested yesterday that I pay tip by cash. So when my outstanding balance was the \$135 from tip, I reminded them that I paid cash tip. I had left tip in cabin on bedside table, which I realized they don't like because someone can swipe and not share. As they called for someone to go to room to get the cash, I asked if I could go ahead and get my passport since there's a line. Receptionist said no, step to side and I can get passport when they come back with tip. Given the notice for tips clearly said tip was optional and that staff are paid a fair living wage, and given I know that I had tipped what I deem a fair amount, I think that it was unnecessary to hold passport hostage. Not sure what would have happened if the tip was gone.*

When I checked onto ship on January 15, the crew kept my passport as collateral to ensure that I satisfy any debts from purchases at the bar or gear store. As previously mentioned, I did not purchase anything on board and thus never provided my credit card information. This peculiar situation in which my passport was held hostage was an odd exchange that I found worth noting, as this thesis has closely followed the financial burdens related to my Antarctic adventure.

After my flight to Buenos Aires on January 24, I was excited to spend time in Argentina's capital city. The final days leading up to my return to Texas would not be as smooth as I expected, however. On my first afternoon in Buenos Aires on the 25th, I jotted down the following notes in my Moleskine:

*Easy flight to BA yesterday. Smaller plane and some turbulence but both could have been much worse. I took a taxi to hostel, chatting in Spanish to the driver about life and Argentina and the roads and driving style. I was also keeping an eye on the meter because I was running low on cash. Finally, I told him that stopping here would be good because I can only pay him up to here. He said it was no trouble and drove me the extra 4 minutes at no extra cost! Super nice, wished me good luck and welcome to Buenos Aires. I love it. Checked into hostel, receptionist asked English or Spanish and I went for Spanish and nailed it down perfectly. Feeling good! Ate Taiwanese food from Ushuaia for dinner then passed out after doing another run-through of internet. Sam from Australia is sleeping on bottom bunk; he is finishing 2 years of traveling tomorrow. North America, South America, Europe, and Africa.*

*I headed downstairs for walking tour this morning. 70° F but pouring rain, tour delayed 30 minutes. Grabbed cash and pastries and everyone was gone when I returned. I assume tour was cancelled. Took advantage of rain and got hair cut for only 200 pesos, or \$5. Chatted with the haircutter for a bit then told him that I don't want anything specific, I want him to do whatever he wants. Since my hair was pretty long, the possibilities were many. He spent nearly an hour and a half cutting my hair and doing different things. By far best cut I've had so far. Walked an hour to cemetery, straight out of Scooby Doo. 2 new roommates, couple from Canada - Sam & Graham. So now this room is 50% Sam. Imma go eat a pastry then grab some food. So many vegan spots here. Just messaged Ani and Diego, the couple who picked up up in Ushuaia for hitchhiking. They loved the photos I sent them and they returned the act with pics from the rest of their trip :)*

Running out of pesos on-hand was certainly not part of the itinerary! I am grateful for the kindness of my taxi driver who gave me a warm welcome and delivered me to the hostel in a timely manner by blatantly ignoring red lights and oncoming traffic. The hair cut was also a wild experience that provided positive results. My hair cut looked incredible and was less than a third of the price of a low-tier cut in Texas. It was a 24-hour period of making new friendships and reconnecting with old ones, as I had a lovely exchange with Ani and Diego over WhatsApp.

That evening, I continued the theme of friendship by reconnecting with some friends from the Antarctica trip. One couple from Virginia had offered to meet up with me in a market before we would walk together to a different hostel to visit more friends. The following passage comes from my notes, written at 1:15 on the morning of January 26:

*What an adventure this has been! Met up with Scott & Abby and went to a little market to grab empanadas and falafel. We then hung out for a bit on the back deck at my hostel before going to the other hostel to see the rest of the gang. Battery was at 25% but decided to log into Wi-Fi. Tried to buy Scott a beer but he was too fast. Hung out with Simon, Jeanne, and then Alex arrived from the airport and checked into hostel. Drank a quarter of my beer before receiving an email from LATAM saying that my SCL-MEX flight for 1/26 23:45-5:30 was cancelled so I'm pushed onto the 1/27 15:00 flight. My MEX-Houston is 1/27 14:00 so I was f\*\*\*ed. Called LATAM and after a little more than 1.5 hours, and with dad's help, I figured it out. 4:20 1/26 flight to Lima then 8:45 1/26 flight to Mexico City. I should arrive in MEX at 14:00 then take a 16:00 flight to Houston. Stay the night at Amanda's then take 8:00 1/27 bus to Austin. Good news is I'll make the 20:00 1/27 DSP meeting that I'm supposed to lead.*

*So I said my goodbyes to a great group of friends, grabbed my beer to-go and booked it to my hostel. Changed my transport to 23:45, packed up backpack (sub-2 min), and jumped in the van. Burned through security and passport control and am now hanging out at charging station. One is super free but I realized it's because it's 100m away from playground and screaming kids. I hope they leave soon. I think things are under control.*

Some lessons from the experience: keep your phone charged, don't drink too much before a logistically-challenging day of travel, and pack light to allow for swift actions. Thankfully, the only lesson I had not learned in its entirety was to keep my phone charged. I ultimately borrowed

a friend's battery bank to charge my phone while calling LATAM on another friend's phone.

With everything sorted out, I experienced about an hour of stress before life screeched to a halt when I had to wait for flight at airport. I am grateful that I took the opportunity to see much of Buenos Aires on the first day since I would not get to enjoy a second. Further into the night, my condition began to worsen:

*My body is broken. Right knee hurts to walk. Back muscles are too tight; posture is way off. Moved over towards gate, further from screaming kids. It would have been a solid travel experience without a good scare. I owe parents \$23 for Megabus and \$20 for Southwest flight change. No response from Amanda yet but I can definitely hit up Dan if need be. Would probably get some free beer out of it, too! Feels surreal that this is my final night outside the USA. Too busy enjoying the moment to be sad that the adventure is ending, until now since I'm hanging out in an airport. I'm thinking more than I usually do for this hour in the evening. I have officially started reading Endurance. There's a heightened experience now that I can relate to the very core: the breaking ice, the deep cold, the emptiness.*

I'm not quite sure what led my body to ache in such a way but I was certainly not in the most comfortable state. I learned long ago that my mind is much stronger than my body, however, and was confident in my ability to push forward with a good attitude. Sleeping would not have any major impact on my ability to travel, at this point, so I felt that this experience would only be improved if I remained positive. After a night without sleep, I wrote the following at half past noon on the plane:

*En route to Mexico City. Body aches. This has been an unreal experience. I'm interested to see to what extent this adventure defines my life or alters my course. I feel a weight start to be lifted off my shoulders, something that has been there since I decided to attempt this adventure. I have done it. I've actualized. This has been quite the accomplishment but I hope that I am not the only one who benefits from my action. There seems to be very little residual for anyone at home. I have my thesis and I hope to have impacted the people I met along the way. Those relationships are probably the most fulfilling aspect. Laughing with friends, having the hostel in Arenas cheer for me when I check in, helping backpackers figure out Torres del Paine, relying on the kindness of strangers as I hitch a ride north to Chilean Patagonia. Crazy moments, nonstop, that could not have been predicted in my wildest dreams. So grateful.*

After several months of increasing tension due to the uncertainty of this trip, I felt victorious. The trip was concluding in a cathartic fashion, complete with wonderful memories and new friendships. I touched down in Mexico then jumped on my final plane ride, to Houston. For having not slept in the past 36 hours, I was faring well and maintained a clear mind. I crossed through security seamlessly; unfortunately, the TSA agent did not ask where I was coming from. Amanda graciously hosted me for a night in her apartment before driving me to the bus station for the final part to my travels.

While the bus to Austin, Texas was uneventful in that the bus did not break down nor cross over any major bodies of water nor cross national borders (as busses tend to do, on occasion), I enjoyed the ride tremendously. Upon arrival, another student offered to split an Uber with me to West Campus. I opted to complete the fifteen-minute walk, since it had been a while since I had enjoyed the warm sun. After walking north for six blocks, I reached the tower and threw my hands in the air in the usual hook 'em horns fashion. My successful journey was complete and the knowledge I gained from the experience would make for a better life and a better thesis. This opportunity to gain a firsthand understanding of commercialization in Patagonia and Antarctica would impact me tremendously.

In conclusion, the Commercialization Life Cycle serves as a guide to understand how developed a location is compared to the standard trajectory. It can be used to compare the level of commercialization that can be expected of the location in the future and provides a foundation for the story that can be told of the place. On my solo trip (although trips are never truly solo if one makes friendships along the way), I studied Argentinian Patagonia in Ushuaia and Tierra del Fuego; Chilean Patagonia in Punta Arenas, Puerto Natales, and Torres del Paine National Park; and Antarctica. Through my studies, I analyzed each location's history and present situation in

order to better recognize commercialization trends. Finally, I documented my personal experiences in which the commercialization of the locations served as a foundation for my interaction with the place. It was a pleasure to complete this adventure and meet wonderful people who I would not have otherwise met.



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