



JUNE 1999

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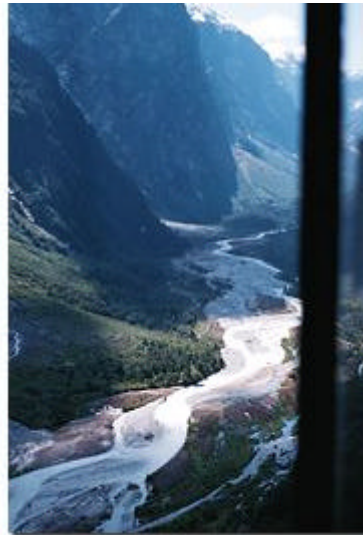
**H**ERE in the Chilean forest the fires had ended. A rain fell on Reñihué in heavy sheets that deepened the night. The generator switched off on schedule, at 11:30. I went outside with a flashlight and walked up the trail toward the upper pastures, feeling as alone and exposed to the weather as any animal in a storm. Tompkins would have understood that walk. A Chilean who had known him for years had said to me, "He had such an easy life, traveling the world in pursuit of beauty, that he started to think of everything in those terms -- started to think that the whole world can be beautiful, or that it should be." But Tompkins described a different start -- a mountain climber's pursuit not of extravagant beauty but of just the sort of primordial darkness that surrounded me now. He said, "I'd go back somewhere, and I'd be hanging off the wall in my hammock and I'd look out and suddenly I'd see lights I'd never seen before: shit, they'd built something here, too. This went on for years. I saw the wilderness disappearing."

He saw the darkness disappearing. In public

he insisted that his goals were limited to creating Parque Pumalín -- the nicest national park in Chile -- but in private his thoughts were grim and determinedly apocalyptic. He was convinced that a global collapse was already well under way -- a catastrophic unraveling that was so much a part of our time that people had trouble recognizing it. His own employees wanted to turn their kids into computer operators. Tompkins was fighting here at the end of the world for nothing less than the last perfect nights.

He was not exactly a survivalist. He assumed that he and his grown children in California would share the fate of society. But he understood Parque Pumalín in a desperate, post-apocalyptic way, as a place that might demonstrate to future generations what the earth had lost, along with, perhaps, holding the seeds for what it might be again.

I saw the park through his eyes in the morning, when we went for a flight in a tandem-seat Husky -- a small bush airplane, which Tompkins flew at extremely low altitudes -- away from the tourist facilities at Gonzalo, away from the demonstration farms



**Glacial runoff, linking the Andes and the sea**

on the Reñihué fjord, past the scorched mountainside of that "stupid guy" to the north, and on into the wild and untouched core. Tompkins was an excellent pilot, with a fluid backcountry style. We flew lower than the forest top up violent rivers and over gravel banks and boulders, and then climbed the sides of V-shaped valleys past soaring condors and precarious stands of trees, and squeezed through barren passes, and wandered in high mountain air among the snowy peaks and the rock-soiled glaciers of the Argentine border.

Across the far northern border of the property we descended into a forested valley where a family of settlers stood in a clearing and waved. They lived in a cluster of cabins by a split-rail corral, three days upriver by horse from the nearest boat landing. Tompkins was giving them money and technical assistance to improve their farm. His purpose was to keep them off the preserve and to sustain them here against the incursions of other settlers who, like agents of the apocalypse, were filtering into the valley below. They served as his sentinels. He was paying them to build a runway in one of their pastures. Their greeting pleased him.

We ranged again through the park, and came eventually to its upper coast, which we followed south toward Reñihué, past strings of settlers' cabins along the gravel beaches. Tompkins knew the people here by name, and had reached agreements --

however expensive -- with most of them. He suggested in his ironic way that the price was right if it meant that somehow the wilderness might yet survive. But a problem remained, and it was a big one. He gestured toward a cluster of cabins by the mouth of a river, and to the valleys and mountains that lay beyond.



**Douglas Tompkins at the controls of his Husky**

This land was called Huinay, an inholding of 125 square miles that belonged to the Catholic University of Valparaíso and sliced through the wildest part of

Tompkins's land, dividing Parque Pumalín in two. Huinay contained a fortune in unexploited forests, and possibly also in hydroelectric power and minerals; though it was still wild, it was unlikely to remain so if it fell into the wrong hands. Moreover, because of Huinay's potential to disrupt the watersheds and divide the preserve into biologically undersized units, Tompkins believed that any development there would weaken or even kill the entire project. It was crucial, he said, that he acquire Huinay.

He came close in 1997, agreeing with the university on a price of \$2 million, but the deal was blocked by his opponents in Santiago, who claimed that they were in part concerned about the fate of the Huinay settlers, and who indeed probably were.

They disliked Tompkins in principle as well as in practice, and wanted Huinay to represent the Chilean wilderness as they saw it, not as he did. Backed by the U.S. embassy (which made noises about free trade), Tompkins argued that his rights had been trampled. The Chilean President intervened and the government imposed a cooling-off period of one year, during which Tompkins was to make no major purchases. Tompkins quietly promised the university that he would beat any serious offers that were made during that time. He had faith in the power of his money. But now, not quite a year later, it seemed that perhaps he had misjudged. *Qué Pasa* had again run his face on its cover, and in the story inside had attacked him over the standoff on Huinay. Something new was afoot. As we flew overhead, Tompkins admitted that he was worried.

Word came by radio to Reñihué that same afternoon, and it was worse than he had feared. McDivitt was the first to hear. She walked into the house looking angry, and handed Tompkins a note. He read it, glanced at her, and passed it on to me. The deal was done: Huinay had just been sold for about \$2 million -- to Endesa, a voracious Chilean energy company that had recently been thwarted on a major dam-building project by environmentalist groups funded in part by Tompkins. The symbolism of Endesa's move was immediately clear. This was a neatly reciprocative attack. Tompkins had split

Chile's territory, and now Chile had returned to split his preserve. Tompkins had fought to protect the darkness of the Patagonian night, and the people chosen to fight him back were precisely the bringers of light. They did not need to dam up the rivers of Huinay to achieve their purpose. In fact it was better that they did not try: the mere possibility of such hydroelectric projects could diminish Tompkins's plans in his own mind for the rest of his life. I did not expect Tompkins to appreciate the perfection of the attack. I asked him what he thought. He smiled grimly and said, "We'll have to see if this is real." He had the calm of a man with a knife in his gut. He did not feel the pain yet because he was in shock.

### **The End of Darkness**

**T**OMPKINS had a smart attorney in Santiago, an influential conservative named Pedro Pablo Gutiérrez, who disagreed with his politics but worried about Chile's. Soon after the fall of Huinay, Gutiérrez told me, "We are about to throw away a man simply because we do not share his beliefs. This we must not do." He was right, of course. He also said, "Tompkins is not a bad man, and even his enemies must know it. If anything he has shamed them with his generosity. He is honest, and honorable, and well-intentioned. But, please excuse me, he is also a typical innocent gringo." He was right about that, too.

Despite all the evidence to the contrary, Tompkins kept insisting that people

everywhere are the same. Depending on his mood, this could be a bad or a good thing. On the one hand, he worried about the "monoculturing of the world." On the other hand, he was persuaded that reasonable Chileans would come around to his ways. That conviction made their apathy -- or glee -- after Endesa's acquisition of Huinay all the more perplexing. For a few days he held out hope for a student strike at the Catholic University of Valparaíso, but unfortunately for Tompkins nothing of significance occurred. The students were busy with their studies.

In the final analysis, the opposition to Parque Pumalín seemed to be a mystery to Tompkins. He could shrug off the attacks of the ultranationalists, the little fascist groups that had put up threatening TOMPKINS OUT OF CHILE! posters in Puerto Montt. He could puzzle out the politics of power in Santiago. He could see through the greed of the various commercial interests. No doubt after a while he would be able again to eye Endesa evenly. But he could not understand the deepest of all the problems that he faced here -- the widespread Chilean discomfort with the way he had treated the local settlers. These were the very people with whom he believed he had been most fair. He recalled every detail of his dealings with them, and was very sure of his position. He retained his sense of irony, and never whined. Nonetheless, even before the fall of Huinay there had been a certain tone of bewilderment and hurt in his stories.

It lay just beneath the surface, for instance, of a story he told me of a patrol he had made with his boatman, Juan, up the preserve's northern coast, during which they had spotted a wooden fishing boat nestled against the shore by a tree that had been cut down. "Right on our property!" Tompkins said. "We get out our little binoculars, and my God, these guys are there in broad daylight with their axes. The tree is already down, and the crown has fallen in the water, and the rest of it is on shore, and there they are, chopping away, shaping this thing. Jeez, we steam up there, and Juan is outraged, so I figure I'll stay back and let him deal with it. Juan doesn't like to trifle with these guys. So he goes over and says, 'You're on private land. This tree doesn't belong to you. You're stealing it. So you'd better get out of here!'

"The other guy's a fisherman. Juan gets his name, and the boat's name and identity number, and so forth. The fisherman's from sixty miles away, across the gulf. He says, 'What do I do with the tree?'

"Juan says, 'What the hell do you mean?'

"Well, it's already cut down.'

"Are you joking? You can't take that tree! *Forget* that tree! Get the hell out of here!'

"So Juan and I go on inside the little fjord there to see what else is going on, because at the time another guy was renting a little piece of land there, and what do we find?



He's in there shooting birds! He's got a shotgun! We go up to him and say, 'Hey, you can't shoot these birds! It's illegal to shoot wild birds in Chile!' So we got *that* sorted out, and now we're steaming around the inner fjord, and all of a sudden we see the fisherman's boat coming toward us.

"I say, 'Well, here he comes, Juan. What's he gonna ask?'

"'He's gonna ask for the tree.'

"Sure enough! We slow down, the guy jumps out of his boat, he gets in his little rowboat, he rows over to us, he climbs up onto our boat, he throws out his hand, shakes hands with me. I say, 'You know you cut that tree on our land.'

"'Oh, I know,' he says. He's got his hat in his hands. 'I didn't think the land was owned by anybody.'

"'Not *owned*?'

"'I thought it was government land.'

"'Fine, but you're not allowed to cut down government trees either.'

"'Well ... '

"So I say, 'You know, I gotta tell you, we own a lot of land here. It goes all the way down the Comau fjord and almost to Chaitén.' I say, 'You know, the native forests of Chile are disappearing at an ever faster rate, and, ah, we're kind of in the

business of saving the trees.'

"The fisherman's standing there saying, 'Yes, sir, yes, sir,' and he's looking around, and I *know* what he's thinking. He's looking around, and everywhere he can *see* it's solid trees! And he's thinking, 'If you ask me, this guy's crazy. He's got five hundred million trees here, and he's hassling me about this one tree I need.'"

They negotiated. It was not just any tree the fisherman had cut down but one with a curved trunk that could be made into a replacement sternpost for his boat.

Tompkins asked him how much it would have cost him at his local boatyard. The fisherman tried 7,000 pesos, about twenty dollars, and when Tompkins laughed, he immediately doubled the figure, which was still too low.

"I say, 'Well, how much money do you have on you?'

""None, señor. I came over here without a peso in my pocket.'

""Is that right? What do you do?'

""I'm a fisherman.'

""Well, then, you got any fish?'

""No, no, we haven't fished at all. We just came over here to get this tree.'

""Oh, well, geez, you don't have fish, you don't have money -- I mean, what can we do

here? How can we settle the score?'

""But the tree's already down. And we've been working on it all day.'

"It's like he's got squatter's rights to it. I say, 'You know, you're lucky. We've got a caretaker up here, and Jesus, if he'd caught you and we didn't happen to come along -- I mean, that guy's tough. He's under orders to take no prisoners.'

""Oh, yeah.'

"I'm kind of joking with him in a way, but he's not sure exactly how much. I say, 'But you're lucky you ran into a gringo. We're a little easier.'

""Yes, *sir!*' he says. 'Yes, *sir!*'"

Tompkins finally gave the fisherman his sternpost in return for a promise to tell his friends about the new deal in Palena -- never again come to this forest to spoil a tree. When he told me the story, it still amused him. But I understood now that in some ways it upset him, too. He saw the sale of Huinay as an undeserved attack. Despite what his enemies were saying, he believed absolutely in his own goodness.

**Continued...**

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*The Atlantic Monthly; June 1999; Eden: A Gated Community (Part Three); Volume 283, No. 6; page 84-105.*

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