



Map of the Republic of Chile showing location and approximate sizes of the 48 national parks in relation to the general pattern of vegetation. Cities are shown as follows: I = Iquique, A = Antofagasta, V = Valparaíso, S = Santiago, C = Concepción, Va = Valdivia, P = Puerto Montt, PA = Punta Arenas.

coastal desert at 17°20'S latitude to subantarctic forests, shrublands and moorlands at 56°S, with the high cordillera of the Andes running the full length and its crest forming the country's eastern border. Chile contains 48 national parks (see map) compared with our 10. The Chilean *parque nacionales* range widely in size; from less than 100ha to 1,761,000ha with 20 being less than 10,000ha, a size that is generally considered minimal for national parks in New Zealand. Two of the Chilean *parque nacionales* exceed the 1,212,000ha of Fiordland National Park — Parque Nacional Laguna San Rafael (1,350,123ha) and Parque Nacional Bernardo O'Higgins (1,761,000ha). The Chilean national parks cover some 9.4% of the country's total land area compared with 8.1% for New Zealand, but, more important perhaps than this feature, is the degree to which they



A typical view of the Atacama desert from near Calama (22°30'S) some 130km inland at about 2,400m elevation with a small patch of scrub in a moist hollow (left foreground) and the smoke, dust and slag heap from a nitrate mine obvious in the distance.

The coast of Easter Island or Rapa Nui, 3,700km west of mainland Chile, showing some of the gigantic carved statues of volcanic stone up to 10m tall that are mounted on a massive stone wall to face inland and fronted with stepped stone platforms. They are the central feature of the 7800ha Parque Nacional Rapa Nui.



represent the range of natural ecosystems.

The undoubtedly high tourist potential of the country, particularly the lakes district, seems to be barely tapped or promoted, despite modern, efficient and relatively cheap surface transport systems.

Although only eight of the 48 Chilean national parks were actually visited, a broad vegetation map of Chile, considered in conjunction with the location of each park, gives a reasonable indication of the main ecosystems they contain. This will be briefly considered in sequence from north to south.

In the far north of the country, north of latitude 20°S and extending to the crest of the Andes at over 5,000m elevation, along the border with Bolivia, are two large national parks in the high desert grassland of the puna where the endangered camelid, the vicuña, highly prized throughout the world for its dense silky fleece of the finest wool known, has been provided with a refuge and is now increasing in numbers. One of these parks is named after its prominent volcano, Isluga, which is generally similar to those seen from the ferrocarril (railway) as it climbs to the crest of the Andes in the vicinity of San Pedro between Antofagasta on the Chilean desert coast and La Paz, the capital of Bolivia at 3,600m.

At latitude 27°S and some 3,200km west of the Chilean mainland in the South Pacific Ocean, the island of Rapa Nui (Easter Island) contains a 7,800ha national park (Parque Nacional Rapa Nui), to preserve many of the 300 or so remarkable giant stone statues of mysterious origin, that abound here.

Four national parks (Parque Nacional Pichasca, Parque Nacional Fray Jorge-Pta Del Viento, Parque Nacional Valle del Encanto and Parque Nacional Talinay) are located towards the southern end of the

Atacama Desert at about latitude 30°S and, somewhat further south, in the zone of mediterranean-type dry shrubland, are two small- and two moderate-sized national parks of 6000–15,000 ha, one of which, Parque Nacional La Campana, about 40km northeast of the main port of Valparaíso, was visited. Notable here is the northernmost stand of beech in South America — the evergreen *N. dombeyi*, but more widespread is the dry shrubland in which thorny cactus and *Puya* (*P. chilensis* a colourful put spiny member of the pineapple family) are prominent. Here the cacti were parasitised by colourful mistletoes.

Some 700km east of Valparaíso at latitude 34°S, two islands of the Juan Fernandez group (Isla Alejandro Selkirk and Isla Robinson Crusoe) constitute the 18,300ha Parque Nacional Juan Fernandez in recognition of the island's unique

A mixture of giant cactus, (*Trichocereus* sp.) spiny *puya chilensis* and bamboo at about 1,100m in Parque Nacional La Campana in the zone of dry shrubland on the coastal ranges some 40km east of Valparaíso at 33°S latitude. The figure at lower right gives the scale. The northernmost stand of *Nothofagus*, the evergreen *N. oblique*, grows a short distance away at c. 1,500m.

