

## Trip to Chile Spring 2009

The objective of the trip was to strengthen the Chilean temperate collections on public display at Royal Botanic Gardens Kew, The National Arboretum, Westonbirt and the National Pinetum Bedgebury and to conserve seed in local, national and millennium seed-banks.

We left the UK on 7<sup>th</sup> March, returning almost a month later. Whilst in Chile, we travelled by 4x4, speedboat, car ferry and dinghies, covering almost 3,000km. We collected from sea/fjord level to as high as 1800m in the Andes, making a total of 95 collections. The range of habitats we collected in varied widely, from the coastal temperate rainforests of Valdivia to the top of dormant volcanoes up in the Andes on the Chilean/Argentinean border. We collected a range of plants from pioneering/colonising alpine plants, *Loasa nana*, on year old lava flows, near a town called Longquimay to Monkey Puzzles, *Araucaria araucana*, *Fitzroya cupressoides*.

Along with one other plant, *Pilgerodendron uviferon*, these plants made up the three species protected under C.I.T.E.S, (Control of International Trade of Endangered Species). The collections we made of these were hugely important for both in-situ and ex-situ conservation. The timber of these trees has been so heavily logged that in some areas, entire populations have been lost.

50% of the seed we collected will stay in Chile, as part of an in-situ plant conservation program, and the majority of our share is now back in the UK, ready to be propagated.

*The following is an extract from Dan Luscombe's blog of his trip to Chile.*

Stage one - Heathrow to Madrid, Madrid to Santiago, Santiago to Temuco, Temuco to Valdivia.

After a long but uneventful flight from Madrid we flew across Argentina and caught our first glimpse of the snow capped peaks of the Andes through the clouds. As we neared Santiago the cloud cleared and we got a fantastic view of the desolate moonscape, only broken by small patches of green where plants were just managing to eke out an existence in this harsh land. As the mountains gave way to plains, the familiar site of fields and towns appeared as green oases.



*The team from left Dan Luscombe, Ben Jones and Chris Stubbings, Wakehurst Place. Jo Wenham the Wakehurst Place propagator is behind the camera!*

A brief stop in Santiago, then a short flight to Temuco where we got to step out of the airport for the first time - we had actually arrived in Chile! It was over 30 degrees and being British we were all inappropriately dressed in jeans, jumpers and trainers. Gratefully picking up a nicely air-conditioned 4x4, we wearily made our way out onto the highway towards Valdivia.



Llaima  
Volcano

It was not what we expected. Instead of the temperate Chilean flora, we were greeted by a more antipodean feel of Eucalyptus and Acacia and the world's mostly commonly-planted species - Pinus radiata. Forester's heaven! All the hillsides were covered with these plants. Not very inspiring, until we saw the snow-capped Llaima Volcano (3125m) peaking out. Now we were really in Chile!

#### Alerce Costero National Monument - 12th March

After a short drive from Valdivia along more seemingly endless dusty gravel roads through pine, Eucalyptus and occasional Sweet Chestnut plantations, we entered the park (via a few fords). This was to be our first opportunity to see the Alerce (*Fitzroya cupressoides*) - one of the oldest and largest conifers in the world and one of the most exploited trees in Chile. Because of its size and the fact that its timber is very durable and easily split, most of the trees have been logged out over the last century.



Dan  
collecting  
seed.  
Note the  
Friends  
polo shirt!

The timber was frequently used as roofing shingles and one of the first sights that greeted us was an old farm building with Alerce shingles. The drive through the park was fantastic, with lots of great plants. But the highlight had to be seeing *Fuchsia magellanica* with its beautiful flowers and the hummingbirds flitting from flower to flower. We were promised the chance to see an old Alerce during our visit, but nothing really prepared us for the tree we went to see. Standing 30m tall with a diameter of 4.6m and a circumference of 11.40m, it is estimated to be 3600 years old - making it the second oldest species in the world (after the Bristle Cone Pine from the USA).



Dan always  
was a tree  
hugger!!  
This shows  
the size of  
the tree.

Naturally thinking it would be great to grow seed from this individual, we got the throw line up in the tree - only to find it was male! Amongst stunning scenery the team made a really good seed bank collection of Alerce, utilising Ben's skills with the throw line and then shaking the branches onto a tarpaulin. We also collected the tiny insectivorous Sundew (*Drosera uniflora*) and the coniferous *Podocarpus nubigenus*. A truly great day!

Part two of this blog will appear in the Autumn/Winter issue.