

# A network of trails for the Araucarias Biosphere Reserve

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## Towards standards and management of the Araucarias Biosphere Reserve



Some of the most spectacular areas of the Araucarias Biosphere Reserve have limited access and need additional infrastructure and better paths and bridleways in order to generate alternative economies for members of the local community.

In June 2010, the UNESCO Man and the Biosphere Programme approved the expansion of the Araucarias Biosphere Reserve, opening up possibilities for sustainable development within the Andes of the Araucanía region of Chile. Parques para Chile has continued efforts to support rational land use on private lands found within the Araucarias Biosphere Reserve. The Namoncahue Biological Corridor has proven to be a replicable model for public-private cooperation and a living example of how private land owners can play a pivotal role in protecting key “buffer” areas around national parks and reserves.

This year Parques para Chile has established a regional network of community organisations, indigenous groups and local tourism boards in an effort to coordinate and develop new

opportunities for community involvement in the Araucarias Biosphere Reserve. The demand for, and interest in, participating in conservation-related tourism and ethnotourism is high throughout the territory, but these individuals and associations require support and training. Our recent work has focused mainly on developing linkage between private lands and public protected areas, which is key for biodiversity protection. Parques para Chile has organised workshops and town meetings supporting community participation in conservation and sustainable activities within the Araucarias Biosphere Reserve.

The landscape and culture of the Araucarias Biosphere Reserve are no doubt amongst the most diverse in Chile. The reserve boasts 11 national parks and reserves as well as several

thousand hectares of private protected areas, which together protect a diverse ecosystem home to volcanoes, ancient forests and beautiful lakes and rivers, as well as the araucaria trees which give the region its name. The outstanding cultural and ecological traits of this territory seem to imply that ecotourism and ethnotourism would be a viable job option for campesinos living near protected areas and other areas with high landscape value. Unfortunately, many of the most beautiful areas lack proper infrastructure and trails, meaning that most visitors never get to visit these special places. Therefore, campesinos more often than not turn to extractive land use. Rodrigo Calcagni, Parques para Chile’s president, is leading an effort to bring together local stakeholders in town assembly meetings as well as the whole network of participants in the Araucarias Biosphere Reserve Programme.

Other team members are leading the effort to provide methods which standardise the use of paths and the creation of adequate connectivity linking private lands and indigenous communities to national parks and reserves. This could provide a platform for new economic activity without implying the exodus of locals to population hubs.

Most of the rural population of the Araucarias Biosphere Reserve depends on subsistence farming, production of timber and firewood and the sale of cattle in order to make ends meet. This means that local residents must remain close to their land the whole year. If these farmers and their children are to participate in special interest tourism, they must do so in areas near their home, so that they can lower living costs and participate regularly in household chores and tending to the land. For this reason, tourism must connect to these people's lives in a way that does not disrupt other economic activities already in place and at the same time offers a viable economic future to younger generations.

### Why develop a network of paths and bridleways?

Trekking, cycling, mountaineering and equestrian sports have become increasingly popular in the region, and generally these activities are top on many visitors' lists when touring the area. At present, the Araucarias Biosphere Reserve contains many roads which take visitors to key places, economic hubs and the main tourist centres, but getting to those special places often means crossing private lands, or in other cases there is simply a lack of adequate infrastructure and social organisation, making it nearly impossible for tourists to gain access to these destinations. Parques para Chile is developing two projects with the National Park Service and the Tourism Ministry which aim at linking existing main public roads and minor rural roads to new, scenic roads, bridleways and footpaths where there are gaps in connectivity.

At present, the Regional Government does not recognise the necessity of developing paths and more ecologically sensitive means of transport

within protected areas, and, more often than not, seeks road building as the only viable option for development of the region. For this reason, it is important to offer an alternative to road building by developing a network of paths and bridleways which connect visitors and the rural population to the regional landscape in a sensible and sustainable manner. Parques para Chile is involved at regional level in the development of agreed standards for scenic roads, footpaths and bridleways, in the establishment of legal rights of way agreements for use throughout the Araucarias Biosphere Reserve, and in the development of a manual for construction and maintenance of paths, signage and infrastructure. A visitor's atlas for the Araucarias Biosphere Reserve is also in the planning.

### Namoncahue: The Araucarias Biosphere Reserve training centre

The Namoncahue Biological Corridor will be the site of the first official "flagship" public-private path system in the Biosphere Reserve. This first set of paths will provide access to some of the Corridor's finest landscapes, on easily passable, safe and sensitively designed paths. By building a series of footpaths and bridleways, local indigenous campesinos, rural farmers and regional tourism industry stakeholders will have a permanent site for hands-on training in the building of paths, as well as a place to receive knowledge about biodiversity, field biology, local and regional history and how to communicate important aspects of the natural and cultural landscape to visitors whilst promoting the conservation of nature. These flagship paths developed within the Namoncahue Biological Corridor will be used as a prototype network,



Mapuche guides participate in a "geotagging" expedition

providing a real-life example of how to apply standards in the development, maintenance and use of paths. Participants in the training courses will come away with concrete knowledge of how to develop a system of paths to Biosphere Reserve standards and will receive continued support for implementation in their home counties.

Infrastructure built with funds received from the Planet Foundation and Rainforest Concern is being used to house 20 students during each field-based training seminar. This summer alone Namoncahue will host over 60 students and we look forward to expanding the programme in the near future in order to accommodate over 100 students per year. We are looking forward to the development of special interest tourism standards and training of the local community in order to reach sustainability and conservation goals within the Araucarias Biosphere Reserve for future generations. More information on the Araucarias Biosphere Reserve can be found on our website: [www.rbaraucarias.cl](http://www.rbaraucarias.cl)



Site restoration in progress with construction of refuge for student accommodation