

THE END OF THE WORLD STRIKES OIL

BY CARLETON BEALS

It's a great day down at the tip of South America as boom towns spring up and gushers dot the sheep ranches. Tens of thousands of prospectors are moving into this forgotten part of the globe, and there's even a tourist rush under way

The sun broke through heavy storm clouds and momentarily illuminated this Dantesque scene, the face of a glacier at the end of the South American continent. Here new icebergs are born as sections of the glacier break away and plunge into the sea

ROBERT GERSTMANN

CHILE recently drilled the southernmost oil well in the world. The derrick rises in the rolling sheep meadows of Tierra del Fuego—Fireland—below historic Strait of Magellan. About the near-by ports of Porvenir and Punta Arenas, in bars and gambling joints, you see booted, sheep-jacketed oilmen, a breed previously unknown hereabouts.

"Hell," said one touslehead. "The whole Isla Grande floats on oil." Isla Grande, the biggest island in the Fireland archipelago, is twice as big as the Netherlands.

A freckled Scotch sheepman spoke up. His burred accent clashed against the soft Spanish like changing gears. "With my own eyes I've seen *chapopote* (tar seepage) down near Cape Ewan, a hundred miles on south."

"They'll be drilling wells right out in the Loma Bay mud flats," claimed the other. "Ever see the rainbow scum at sunrise?"

A half-breed herder rolled a cigarette and wiped his palm on his baggy Gaucho trousers. "Oil isn't the half of it," he said solemnly. "When they crack the Darwin Range on south, they'll find every metal known, uranium too, mark my words. Then watch the scramble."

Fireland these days is full of such wild conjectures.

A Yugoslav storekeeper in Porvenir on the strait—and mostly it is a Yugoslav town—shook his bullethead knowingly. "You come like I did 23 years ago to a bleak empty place, and it's been hard, but look at the little burg now! The guys who first came here and called this wilderness spot Porvenir—Future—knew their onions. The country is filling up, population doubled in ten years. And now with oil and a few other things . . ."

Today Punta Arenas, which started as a tough Chilean prison colony, is a singular combination of the primitive frontier and modernity. It is a cosmopolitan city. Besides Spanish, Indian dialects and much English, one hears Russian, Yugoslav, French, German, Norwegian, Chinese.

The city has electricity, telephones, wireless and cable services, an airfield, paved streets, half a dozen movie palaces, a regular theater, and one of the most comfortable provincial hotels in South America. The stores are showy and well stocked; there are restaurants and many tearooms. A morning daily, *Prensa Austral*, presents the latest international cable news as promptly as does New York. The Museum of Natural History,

Ethnology and Anthropology is important and painstakingly catalogued. The best-appointed British club in all Chile is found here.

There's a mean, whistling wind down here, that eternal pestiferous Patagonian wind that sweeps the plains free of trees and keeps the *coirón* grass combed all one way. Sometimes in drier Argentina, the wind brings dust clouds. Sometimes it whirls down cutting ice particles off the mountaintops.

Winters Not Too Severe

There's no real hot summer here. It's kind of chilly always, but you get in horse racing and football, and in Punta Arenas you can play golf nearly all year—the most southern golf course in the world. Winters here are not too tough. Now and then there's a little snow, but it melts right off. Punta Arenas, the chief port in this way-south world, has milder winters than the Connecticut shore line. In upper Patagonia you often get forty- or fifty-degree winter averages, few frosts.

Four centuries ago Magellan, passing through this area, named it Patagonia—"Big Foot Land"—after the enormous feet of the gigantic natives

he found north of the strait and who now are almost extinct. The first Big Foot he met swilled down a bucket of water at a gulp and wolfed a whole hamper of sea biscuits.

Tourists are much catered to here. Venders and stores display ostrich robes, leather goods, carved ostrich and guanaco bones, precious stones, beads, and the inevitable painted shells. Muskrat, silver fox, guanaco and sable furs are on sale. At the docks an insistent mestizo, with droopy mustache, insists on carving your name and portrait on bones or a sheep skull—or, if you prefer, he will etch in a nude mermaid.

Soccer, tennis and golf matches are important annual events. Five miles away on a snow mountain are an excellent ski refuge and ski run, and the local ski club is quite a social institution. There are touring and explorers' clubs, and membership in the supererficient volunteer firemen's corps is considered a social honor open only to the elite, that includes bids to fine balls and the right to wear a gaudy uniform and gold helmet. A carnival in May is celebrated by special costumes and the hurling of colored eggs filled with cologne water. The more hilarious and ambitious manage to get hold of an ostrich egg or two, and

Collier's for August 2, 1947



Spectators at a Chilean rodeo wear the traditional poncho and remain on horseback during the entire performance. The cowboys are called "huasos"

when one bursts over your pate you won't forget it.

You can now reach Punta Arenas by plane in nine hours from Santiago, by frequent steamers from Valparaíso and Buenos Aires, by air and auto or train and auto from Buenos Aires. De luxe trains run out of Buenos Aires for the beautiful Patagonian lake region. On my train none of the sleeping cars dated earlier than 1943. Travelers continuing south to the Chilean border are transferred to blue and silver de luxe busses with reserved seats—a five-day run to Gallegos. Dilapidated touring cars carry on to Natales and Punta Arenas in Chile.

Boat Service to Cape Horn

Buenos Aires runs a special excursion boat that threads the most hidden south channels clear to Cape Horn. Otherwise local visitors must hire special boats or take passage on coal boats or the government Coast Guard cutters.

Back of the central plaza in Punta Arenas extends the tin-roofed workers' quarters, and mostly the port is a solid workmen's town: coal miners from Loreto and other mines five miles inland, employees of packing plants, small foundries, garages and gas stations, carpenter shops, tanneries and so on.

Everywhere there are bars, for here casual workers, *rotos* (seasonal workers), miners, prospectors, lumberjacks, the sailors of five continents, and now, oilmen, breeze in to blow off steam after lonely back-country stretches. Gambling is illegal but flourishing, stakes high, and there is agitation to establish a city-owned casino like that at swank Viña del Mar farther north. The dance halls and *casas alegres*, with the castoff women of Buenos Aires, are notorious. As in sheep and cattle towns in Wyoming and Oklahoma, the police don't much bother those who take their pleasures in a really determined mood. It's all right to shoot at the stars but not at your neighbor. It's all right to whoop, but not in the main plaza.

"The inflation?" A local storekeeper frowned at the question.

"Bad . . . bad . . ." he said. "We can't get things we need. Autos, trucks, hardware are tight, but Chile is making nearly all her own electrical goods now. And we always get cheap wood and coal. Plenty of mutton to eat, cheap as all get out."

He was certainly right about mutton. In Patagonia, beef is rarely seen, but you eat mutton even for breakfast. You eat it stewed, hashed, grilled, roasted, pickled; you eat it barbecued, from pits of red-hot stones. But folks are now beginning to eat chickens and eggs, too. One of the world's biggest poultry farms now sits right on the Strait of Magellan.

The nearest oil wells to the new Chilean fields are 450 miles north in central Argentine Patagonia: the great Comodoro Rivadavia field on the Gulf of St. George at the edge of sheep and ostrich plains that stretch west to the great snow-draped Andes. All the Rivadavia derricks gleam silver on the plain, with fresh aluminum paint—typical Argentine neatness and pride.

Now, since the Fireland strike, many technicians believe the whole intervening region may produce oil. Hard pressed for fuel during the war days, Argentina brought in new wells fifty miles south of the established Rivadavia field and boosted production 30 per cent. Certainly, also, the eastern folds of the Andes are rich in oil. The new inland Blue Goose Dome in Peru is reported to be one of the world's greatest, and the Neuquén field, north of Argentina's most beautiful lake country, lies in the northwest corner of Patagonia.

Chilean government experts believe also that much of Pacific Coast Patagonia has oil. The oil is deep but apparently is there. The new Springhill well in Fireland came in at 7,280 feet—a light oil, rich in gasoline and lubricants.

That strike caused more excitement than a new comet. Never again, cried the newspapers gleefully, will Chile

(Continued on page 38)



The eternal Patagonian tempest rages around these peaks of the Paine Cordillera range where wind and weather are so fickle they change every minute
Collier's for August 2, 1947



Araucanian women wear heavy silver ornaments handed down from mother to daughter. The silver coins on this girl's headdress date back centuries

THE STUDY OF MAN

Theoda was studying the customs and culture of the native population, with particular reference to the courting habits—as exemplified by Rufus Nutter, the guy next door

BY HENRY BEETLE HOUGH

THE hammock was faded and slouchy, and there were gaps in the adorning fringes; it was slung between two locust posts on the south side of the oldest house in the village of Baddow, and from it on any evening you could see the sunset, the Atlantic Ocean, and the early history of the Republic.

"Excuse me," murmured Barlow Crane politely, as he slid down for the fourth time against Theoda.

"Don't mind," said Theoda. "I suppose we could sit somewhere else, but I think it's nicer on this side of the house, don't you?"

"I couldn't truthfully say," remarked Barlow. "I don't get a chance to notice anything. I'm too busy trying to stay at my end of the hammock."

Even as he spoke they slid inexorably toward each other again and began to settle gently together. Barlow's knees rose mysteriously.

"Um," he said.

"I'm glad you're more comfortable. It's a ridiculous old hammock, but Daddy is very fond of it because chairs don't fit him well and this always does. I think he courted Mummy bagged up on this very hammock the way we are now."

Barlow Crane rose as if he had been touched off with an electric spark, just as Theoda was shoving delicately to make the hammock sway as if rocked by an ocean zephyr. The ropes creaked, the reaction from Barlow's swift ascent magnified the zephyr into a squall, and Theoda went over backward, bare legs twinkling in the orange twilight.

However, she did not lose her self-possession. Her last thought as equilibrium slid away was what on earth she could have said to frighten a big guy like Barlow.

"Oh, I'm sorry," said he, helping her up, and then with transparent lack of candor, "I was just trying to get at my lighter. Cigarette?"

"The Yale people ought to give refresher courses in hammock management," said Theoda.

"Are you hurt?"

"Only in my higher sensibilities. Yes, I will have a cigarette."

"What's over there?" Barlow inquired, and together they walked to the white fence beyond which the land fell away toward the shore.

"That," said Theoda without enthusiasm, "is the home place of the Nutters. It's usually just crawling with them."

"What are Nutters?"

"People. Newcomers, actually. They settled here around 1690, whereas we Bearses had walked off the boat in 1642."

"Why do you call them Nutters?"

"Because that is their name," said Theoda. She was looking furtively for signs of Rufus Nutter, who had figured so largely and warmly in her old-style dreams—though she told herself she had never adored him.

"Oh, I see. I thought maybe it was their occupation. New England is all strange to me, you know."

She knew. She had met Barlow twice in the Pacific, once when they had occupied the same bus in Honolulu for twenty minutes, and once when they had eaten C-rations together while sitting in the tail end of a truck overlooking a nameless atoll. Theoda had been with the USO at the time, and he had been a brawny military figure. Meeting him under such circumstances had done something to her, and the second time had shown how the

world is operated in accordance with a great design.

He hailed from Butte, Montana, which influenced her a lot, since—to anyone brought up in Baddow—everything west of Chicago was rugged. She imagined him swinging a major part of the Pacific victory in person, but she learned later that he had fought only occasionally. Between engagements he had found plenty of time on his hands and had become interested in studying the primitive peoples. Then, separated from the Army, he had finished college and had at last come East for graduate work at Yale. He was becoming an anthropologist by degrees, as Theoda punningly put it.

She had learned something of the science herself; she and Barlow had corresponded since their second meeting, and she had no intention of living tamely at home with her memories, like an eagle grounded after a single flight, so long as she could keep in with the real thing. As for Rufus Nutter, it would be unfair to encourage him further. He was obviously not a part of the great design.

"You could come up for week ends," she said.

"What?" Barlow was startled.

"I mean if you *do* decide to do your thesis around an anthropological study of our village. I mean—the setup is perfect."

"Nothing of the kind has ever been done, so far as I know," said Barlow. "It is one thing to apply the scientific method to a tribal community in New Guinea, and another to apply it to a segment of our own society."

"That's hitting the nail squarely on the toes," said Theoda.

"Please don't confuse me," said Barlow. "I'm giving the matter serious thought." His brow furrowed.

"Yes," he said after a long, pensive moment, "I think I'll do it. Will you help me?"

"It's what I had in mind."

"The possibilities are challenging. My approach will be without preconception. Oh, of course I know about New England repressions and taciturnity and—conservatism."

"I suppose we have quite a bunch of that."

"Mark Twain said New England was a finished place, if I remember rightly."

"Let's finish it, anyhow," said Theoda.

THE details of Barlow's project began to fill in. Of course, he said, there was a good deal he couldn't hope to include, but the study could be a sort of trial flight for his career. He could run up at frequent intervals and stop at the inn, and meantime . . .

"I'll make notes," said Theoda.

"That's just what I was going to suggest."

"In fact I'll keep a regular journal, and put in everything, even the way personality reacts to culture up here . . ." She felt just a little like a traitor, but Barlow was grinning.

"Splendid," he said, and began to instruct Theoda in certain lines of anthropological observation.

Her mind wandered from the general, which was the subject of his dissertation, to the particular, which he represented on the hoof. He was a big guy, with crisp dark hair such as might have been worn by a bison, and Western blue eyes like the noonday sky over the Rockies. Theoda inferred these comparisons, for her single flight, naturally, had not taken in everything.



ILLUSTRATED BY REN WICKS