



# Pepito's Adventure

Story and Photos  
by Shawn Hamilton

I peered through my coral fence at the tourists stepping out of their van. My mother explained to me that they come from all over the world. My mother is a beautiful dun-colored Criollo mare. She was born here in Los Andes, Chile, just like me.

My friend Jack the mule has told me many stories about his adventures. He carries supplies for our guests. They've come to our ranch for a horseback ride to



the Argentinean border. Jack will guide them through the Andes Mountains. Jack says they will climb three miles (4,500 meters) into the sky.

I want to go too but Mom insists I am too young. I'm just six months old. Jack stood stock still as the Huasos – that's what we call the cowboys here in Chile – loaded chairs and cooking stuff on his back. "It looks heavy," he says, "but it's not once you get used to it."

I neighed "good-bye" to my friends and turned to my bed of straw for an afternoon siesta in the warm sun.

Whoa! The sliding stop on the hot dirt burns my heels. The skinny path snakes through the river. It's a historic trail but it's scary. "Get ready Pepito," Jack brays over the noise of the pounding water. He nods his head making his long ears flop. "Time to cross!"



We are on the very special path that General San Martin took in 1817. He and 5,000 other men rode from Argentina over the Andes Mountains to fight for Chile's independence.

My little hooves keep sliding on the rocks. The tourists are walking beside their horses. "The footing is too unstable to ride," warns Jack. Rain has made the narrow trail very slippery. I am very nervous. "Just keep moving Pepito," Jack reassures.

Water rushes across my legs. It's up to my tummy and the strong current almost pushes me over. "Stay on your feet," Jack yells, "or the rapids will take you downstream."

My legs are shaking when I reach the other side. I see the Huasos get off their mules. We've made it to camp! It is beautiful up here.

The sweet grass in the river valley fills me up fast. Jack shows me the layers of volcanic rock pushed up by glaciers. I find it hard to breathe at this high elevation. I step in something white and cold. "It's snow," Jack laughs.

Mom was right. This is a tough trail for a yearling. I wish she was here with me. "Look," Jack exclaims. "We're here." I lift my head to see a magnificent monument. "These heroes freed Chile," shouts Jack just like it's his first visit too. "There were 1,600 horses and 9,000 mules that helped them pass through here almost 200 years ago!" he explains with excitement.

Wow. I kicked up my heels and started to run. But I was slipping and sliding and getting nowhere. Then I heard her voice. "Wake up. Wake up Pepito. You're dreaming," nuzzled mom. My eyes were still heavy. I let out a big Yaaaaawn. What an adventure! I can't wait to live my dream for real.

Learn more about trail rides in Chile and Argentina at [www.pioneros.com.ar](http://www.pioneros.com.ar). See more of Shawn's photos at [www.clixphoto.com](http://www.clixphoto.com).

