



# RAMBLING UP THE NORTH SIDE OF BATH

Iona Brandt

I walked up the path which snakes its way through our hilly back garden and picked one of the first and probably only ripe cherries. I thought about the cherry tree in Alejandro's garden, which sits at the foot of the cordillera mountains in Argentina, Patagonia. It is a rugged landscape with dry, craggy mountainous peaks which are shrouded in snow from March until November. But when the winter sets in on the Northern Hemisphere, summer is beginning in Patagonia. The snow begins to melt, the lagoons unfreeze, grassy pastures unfurl and the summer season's supply of orchard fruit is one of the greatest delights.

I begin my ascent up towards St. Stephen's Allotment in Bath. A journey not too dissimilar from a scramble up the south facing cordillera of the Andes! I was on watering duty for our newly sown tomatoes, sweet peas and runner beans; the ground was dry and crusty after a week of warm weather and I spotted an out-of-place looking yellow plant which was thriving on our plot. I realised there was one just like that on Huemules Reserve. The local guides called it the *Tabaco Indio* and it had these wonderful velvet leaves.


I decided to venture further up the hill, beyond the Lansdown Tennis Club, past Primrose Hill Community Woodland, towards Beckford's Tower. It is a breathing space among plains of grassy, open landscape where you can take in the vast expanse of sweeping valleys which lead to Wales and beyond. I squinted my eyes a little and Kelston Roundhill sat like a peak on the horizon.

I was about 1100 metres up in the mountains in Argentina. Another 100 metre vertical climb through dense woodland would take us beyond the treeline to *el Mirador*, the 'lookout' point. We'd sit and take in the whole of the eastern valley, the orange, red and pink hues of the rocky steppe, Cholila mountain range to the West, and the windy road peeping through the dense ñire vegetation. Esquel was 23km away, tucked into the mountainside and out of view. On a clear night you could see the faint glimmer of lights from the city. We were like Kings of a wild castle. 'Somos Ricos' Tobias used to say, 'we are rich', and we were.





Left, La Zeta, Esquel and right, the view towards Batheaston



My house in Bath sits at the top of the north edge of the city. We are about 238 metres high up and from the back of our garden, you can look over Bath and to the top of the south side, where Prior Park glimmers in the light and the sun sets behind the woodlands of Batheaston.

Upon my return to Bath at the beginning of spring, the woods were brimming with wild garlic. We filled our jacket pockets full of leaves and made wild garlic and spinach soup on a mission to boost our immune systems. Huemules Mountain Reserve was home to the *morillas* or wild morel mushrooms, which Mountain Guide Imanol used to make a veggie stew, which we ate with lamb on Christmas Eve. One of the more peculiar foraging delights were the *Llao Llao* (*Cyttaria hariatii*), which is also called 'pan de indio' or 'indian bread'. It has a sweet taste and chewy texture, a bit like how I imagine eating a sponge and it is strangely nutritious and filling.



Left *Llao Llao* and  
Right Wild garlic

I am always dreaming of jetting off to an exciting destination. It could be the nature of living on an island which gives us a natural instinct to explore. Or maybe it is a search for something that feels missing. However, what struck me about the people of Esquel was their connection to their landscape. They saw something new from every angle and looked beyond the surface layer to the minute detail. I think that lockdown has forced us to pause, reconsider what is important and value what is just outside our front door, which is so much here in Bath.



## ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Languages graduate, Iona, recently moved to Bath from Patagonia, where she was working as a Mountain Guide.

