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On Chile's Southern Highway, the Views—and History—Are Cinematic

Fifty years since Chile's Carretera Austral was built, the road's stunning scenery remains remote, but its history has become complex. Here, what it means to take a drive.

BY JOSÉ CORONADO
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One of the world's most critical tipping points (it sees the existence is a dictator's dream, and a democrat's nightmare) is the Carretera Austral, a 1,000-mile-long ribbon of asphalt that winds its way through Chile's Patagonia. Fifty years ago, it was the most ambitious road-building project in the country. Among his greatest fears was that the isolated south might one day drift into Argentina's orbit. So, in 1976, he started the construction of an ambitious highway connecting Southern Chile's Puerto Montt to Cochrane, a village in the region's far south. Although it was only 700 miles long, Pinochet's project was a feat of engineering, which involved 10,000 workers, 3,000 bridges and dozens of ferries, some the size of Puerto Montt, and under-170-mile-long fjords. Today, the road is a mecca for adventure seekers, who come for the

The Carretera Austral runs through Chile's Southern Patagonia, in Aysén, Chile. Photo: Courtesy of Sernatur/Aysén Region

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