

PROPOSAL TO INCLUDE THE RUINS OF BSE PEDRO AGUIRRE CERDA ON THE HISTORIC SITES AND MONUMENTS LIST

The Pedro Aguirre Cerda Base, operated by the Chilean Air Force, was established on 12 February 1955 at Pendulum Cove, Deception Island, Latitude 62° 52`S, 60° 36`W. It operated mainly as a meteorological and communications centre until 4 December 1967, when it was destroyed by a volcanic eruption of unprecedented scale, followed by further eruptions in 1969 and 1970.

At its inauguration, presided by the Chilean Minister of Defense, the Base was baptised as Carlos Ibanez del Campo, the name of the incumbent President who, on his own initiative, suggested the change of names in order to honour the Chilean statesman responsible for the delimitation of the Chilean Antarctic claim.

This was not the first Chilean presence on Deception Island. Captain Andresen from the Sociedad Ballenera de Magallanes, accompanied by Betsy Rasmussen (first woman in Antarctica) had a successful whaling operation from 1906 onwards at Whalers Bay. In 1947 the naval vessel Angamos visited Deception and on the same year the Vought Sikorski plane flew on reconnaissance missions from Greenwich to Deception and Livingston islands. Some refuges were established in the early fifties. The installation, operation and development of the Aguirre Cerda Base reflect the characteristics of the pre-IGY period, and also the rivalry, moderated with Antarctic cooperation, which existed at the times between the Argentinian, United Kingdom and Chilean bases. Protests were routinely exchanged but did not alter the web of relations between the neighbors of Deception Island. When HRH the Duke of Edinburgh visited Deception Island he visited the Argentinian and Chilean Heads of Base who requested, as a condition he could not meet, that he visit their bases in return.

The base was endowed with a radar beacon (radiofaro) which allowed planes from the mainland to land with sufficient security. A slipway was built, the Navy installed a water deposit one at the dangerous entrance of Neptune's Bellows. Two Navy men perished in a fire at the Lientur patrol vessel and their funeral was attended both by the crew of the ship and personnel from the Aguirre Cerda Base.

Many aspects of the life at the Base are in contradiction with the Antarctic Treaty and Protocol practice. Sheep, hens and Eskimo dogs were brought to Deception Island and became part of its landscape. The inorganic growth of the Base doubled in 1963 the initial surface and obstruction to wind passage generated obstruction to accesses and accumulation of snow which prevented access to the Base.

However, the Base was, until the construction of the Base Eduardo Frei Montalva, the main meteorological Antarctic center of the Chilean Air Force. In 1965, the University of Chile established there the first Volcanological Observatory. Studies of flora, fauna and benthic communities, oceanography, geology assisted by the presence of the Bases damaged in 1967 and totally destroyed in 1969.

At a recent workshop on Deception Island, held at the Chilean Antarctic Institute in Santiago, a consensus emerged that the destroyed base, whose ruins represent in a most dramatic way the impact of natural phenomena on an Antarctic Base should be afforded the protection of a Historic Site. It should be preserved in its present state, as a ruin, probably with some clean-up of unnecessary debris; listed as a monument; and protected from tourist and other human interference through visual indications and a Code of Conduct.