

Guasos believe that they are bred from it. I have observed in other places that extremely dry and sterile districts, where the soil is calcareous, are extraordinarily favorable to land-shells. At Carizal there were a few cottages, some brackish water, and a trace of cultivation: but it was with difficulty that we purchased a little corn and straw for our horses.

4th.—Carizal to Sauce. We continued to ride over desert plains, tenanted by large herds of guanaco. We crossed also the valley of Chañeral; which, although the most fertile one between Guasco and Coquimbo, is very narrow, and produces so little pasture that we could not purchase any for our horses. At Sauce we found a very civil old gentleman, superintending a copper-smelting furnace. As an especial favor, he allowed me to purchase at a high price an armful of dirty straw, which was all the poor horses had for supper after their long day's journey. Few smelting-furnaces are now at work in any part of Chile; it is found more profitable, on account of the extreme scarcity of firewood, and from the Chilean method of reduction being so unskilful, to ship the ore for Swansea. The next day we crossed some mountains to Freyrina, in the valley of Guasco. During each day's ride further northward, the vegetation became more and more scanty; even the great chandelier-like cactus was here replaced by a different and much smaller species. During the winter months, both in northern Chile and in Peru, a uniform bank of clouds hangs, at no great height, over the Pacific. From the mountains we had a very striking view of this white and brilliant aërial-field, which sent arms up the valleys, leaving islands and promontories in the same manner as the sea does in the Chonos Archipelago and in Tierra del Fuego.

We stayed two days at Freyrina. In the valley of Guasco there are four small towns. At the mouth there is the port, a spot entirely desert, and without any water in the immediate neighborhood. Five leagues higher up stands Freyrina, a long straggling village, with decent whitewashed houses. Again, ten leagues further up Ballenar is situated;