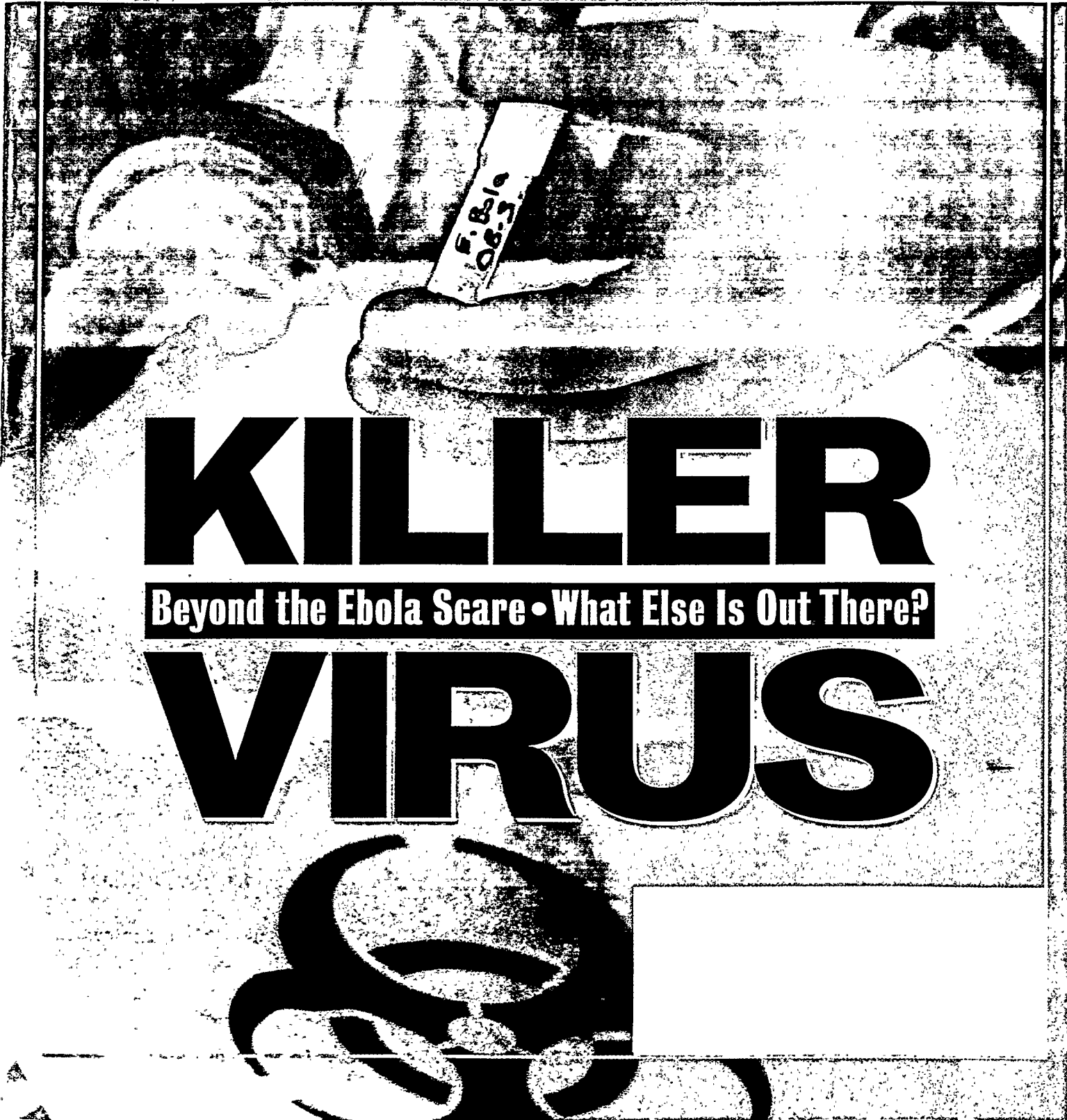


CALIFORNIA DREAMING: PETE WILSON'S CHALLENGE

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DANIEL DANCER

'Conquered territory': 667,000 controversial acres of fjords, peaks and cedars

## Firestorm in Paradise

Chile: An American businessman makes enemies

**B**ANKING HIS SINGLE-ENGINE CESSNA sharply to the right, Douglas Tompkins smiles at his newest acquisition, 6,000 feet below. A stunning landscape glides into view: jagged fjords, ice-capped peaks, a green carpet of ancient cedars. The cofounder and ex-president of hip San Francisco clothing maker Esprit de Corps has spent four years and \$15 million quietly buying up this 667,000-acre swath in remote southern Chile. The silver-haired magnate, a committed environmentalist, wants to turn his pristine Xanadu into a national park, protecting this fragile land forever. There is only one problem. The locals think he is crazy.



FELIPE ORREGO

Crazy? McDivitt, Tompkins

With his New Age musings and open wallet, Tompkins, 52, figured Chileans would decorate him for being a good guy. After a 10-year economic boom, the South American nation of 14 million has discovered environmentalism. Last year it even adopted a law encouraging private investors to create nature preserves. But Tompkins's effort to preserve a sizable slice of paradise has stirred up a firestorm. A Roman Catholic archbishop has called him an anti-Christian pagan: a weekly magazine tags the park Tompkins's "independent republic"; neo-Nazis are spreading anti-Semitic tracts around southern Chile and claiming that Tompkins is plotting to turn his acreage into a Jewish state—despite the fact that Tompkins is not Jewish. Says government official Sergio Vergara Larrain, "He's never understood Chilean idiosyncrasies. He thought he'd come to conquered territory."

Tompkins's venture in Chile dates from 1991, when he sold most of his Esprit stake for \$125 million. A lifelong outdoorsman and

adherent of "deep ecology," a philosophy advocating that human activity have the least possible impact on nature, he abandoned San Francisco for sparsely populated Palena province, 600 miles south of Santiago. Tompkins and his wife, Kris McDivitt, the cofounder of Patagonia clothing, bought up vast tracts of forests and mountains, mainly

from absentee landlords. To keep prices down, they kept their purchases quiet. When word leaked out that 20 percent of the province was in the couple's hands, not even publicity about their recycled-wood home and their hiring of local families could stave off protests from salmon fishermen and subsistence farmers fearful for

their livelihoods. Chilean congressmen are demanding an investigation.

Nature lovers see potential tragedy in Tompkins's lack of diplomacy. Chile's rich, rare forests are being decimated at an alarming rate by loggers feeding foreign demand for wood chips. Huge flatbed trucks piled high with massive logs rumble along the roads near Puerto Montt, the regional center. Chilean environmentalists are counting on Tompkins's deep pockets to preserve vast areas from the threat of chain saws. But Tompkins's stature may be too seriously damaged. "He has a very bad public image," says a supporter in Puerto Montt, a 15-hour boat trip from the would-be park. Tompkins admits to bewilderment. "The idea of having wild areas for their own sake is incomprehensible to [Chileans]," he says. Tompkins's neighbors think the foreign ecologist is the one who's confused. Says one farmer, "It should be Chileans here."

DAVID SCHRIEBERG in Puerto Montt