

Antarctica Expedition to the Bottom of the World

Insights From Four Who Made the Journey

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This past February, an intrepid group of photographers joined an expedition to the bottom of the world to experience and capture Antarctica. With fine art landscape photographer and publisher **Michael Reichmann** at the helm, 45 photographers—including six professional photographers who served as speakers—experienced one of our planet’s most awesome environs.

For the eco-conscious photographers who completed the journey, the lasting value lies in the visual impressions, perspectives gained, bonds forged, lessons learned. When Studio Photography asked the pros to share insights with our readers, here’s some of what they told us. . .

“Antarctica is a unique locale not only because of its stark beauty,” says Reichmann, “but because of the clarity of the air and the water, which leads to some remarkable photographic opportunities,” says Reichmann, who had led an expedition to Antarctica in 2005. “I leased our ship from Quark Expeditions. Since Quark provided parkas and boots, little preparation was needed, except for backup cameras and lenses. As it turned out, some heavy rain and salt spray in South Georgia knocked out at least a half dozen cameras.

“I brought along a Canon EOS 1Ds Mark II with an assortment of long stabilized lenses, and a Hasselblad H2 with medium and wide lenses. A Phase One P45 back was my primary tool, and it provided excellent service with no issues related to cold or moisture in the field. I brought my Apple MacBook Pro with Adobe Lightroom for RAW processing and editing, and Photoshop CS2 for touchups. I used four 160GB firewire drives for storage, and every card was copied to drives simultaneously for secure backup; the drives were transported home separately to ward against loss, theft, and head crashes. I traveled with the new ThinkTank International and a Lowepro Dryzone 200. My tripod was the new Induro C413 from the MAC Group with a RRS BH55 ball head.

Over a three-week period in the Falklands, South Georgia and the Antarctic Peninsula, I shot 7,024 frames, totaling 182GB out of my 250GB of storage, which didn’t allow for a complete backup. I ended up borrowing space on my colleague Chris Sanderson’s hard drives, so I could have a full backup at all times. “I shot roughly equally with the Canon and Hasselblad cameras, and ended up with 92 frames I consider worth printing, 12 of which are exhibition

grade, and three are among the best work I have ever done.”

For details, visit www.luminous-landscape.com.

The pro shooters on the trip who had been to Antarctica before were quite taken with the effects of climate change over the past two years. Quark Expedition staff, who have been going to Antarctica for five or six years, commented that they were noticing the effects of global warming. Areas that were icebound are now considerably more free of ice than in past years.

Expedition member **Tim Wolcott** (www.galleryoftheamericanlandscape.com), of Big Bear, California, who specializes in forest landscapes, went to Antarctica to experience the beauty and majesty of a place that is still pristine and wild.

“I read and rented every video I could find about Antarctica,” he says. “We all went to classes to learn about everything in Antarctica and had to follow a number of rules to guard against transporting germs or bacteria from one colony to the next. I packed all the camera gear I could fit into my large Lowepro pack, including the new Phase One P45 medium-format camera, and brought every lens Mamiya makes for the AFDII.

“My most powerful moment was seeing the Parthenon (facing page, bottom). I’m not likely to see anything like it again in my lifetime. I used the best digital camera in the world—the Phase One P45 with the Mamiya AFD II camera and lenses—to capture that image.

Long before the trip, Wolcott was an advocate for the environment. “I’ve shot for the Nature Conservancy pro bono and lent my images to most environmental groups free of charge. I’m starting a chain of fine art galleries with the most environmentally safe products in the marketplace to show that not only can you make it in America, but you can do the right thing and still make a profit. We are only showing photographs printed in pigment, the only green photographic process. I’m green and always will be.”

Stephen Johnson (www.sjphoto.com), whose photographic work on wild, endangered spaces, and whose expertise in digital printing and digital workflow are legendary in the industry, was among the onboard lecturers.

“How can I describe the experience of being among 10,000 penguins—their sound, their sheer numbers, their fearless curiosity,” asks Johnson. “We were clearly in their world, and they really didn’t seem to mind. Looking down from a hill at Gold Harbor, the sight of penguins carpeting every open space, huge fields of them, hearing their calls from high above, seeing them surf the waves, brought an inevitable sense that I was in a very different reality.

“My photographic mainstay was my Canon EOS 1Ds Mark II with a few lenses. I used my BetterLight scanning camera once, and the Phase One P45 back for a day. When the seas weren’t too rough, I offered presentations on Lightroom, exposure and composition, metadata, color management, creativity, along with portfolio reviews and group critiques. Since coming back I’ve continued to work as a director of the Pacifica Land Trust and have worked intensely on finishing my book on national parks.”

For details, visit www.sjphoto.com/newsletter_march_2007.html.

John Paul Caponigro (www.johnpaulcaponigro.com), fine art photographer, writer and teacher, says the trip was "a succession of overwhelming moments, filled with grandeur and wonder, accumulating into an experience that was much greater than the sum of its parts.

"The 2007 and 2005 voyages were the fulfillment of a long-standing wish to visit Antarctica, made while watching my mother shepherd the production of Eliot Porter's book, Antarctica. Whereas on the first voyage, I put aside research materials I collected to approach the subject as freshly and personally as possible, on this second voyage, I did extensive research.

"I packed layers of clothes to stay dry, a cover to protect my camera from weather, hard drives to back up files, dark chocolate to lift the spirit, and malt scotch, a marvelous antiseptic. I used the Canon EOS 1Ds and 1Ds Mark III, one with a 100-400mm IS lens, the other with a 28-135mm IS lens.

"Since returning from Antarctica, I've been looking for ways to raise environmental awareness. To date, I've featured the work on my website, in my free e-news, made presentations to local schools, lectured in gallery openings and slide shows, and made statements for publication in numerous periodicals."

For more, visit www.johnpaulcaponigro.com/lib/statements/index.php.

A final thought from Reichmann: "Antarctica is one of the most exciting locations on the planet for landscape photography. It also is a fragile ecosystem. As stewards of the planet, we need to pay closer attention to the changes that are clearly taking place at the bottom of the world."



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