

# behind the pictures

LIFE AS AN ADVENTURE PHOTOGRAPHER IS A SURVIVAL COURSE IN ITSELF, SAYS MARTIN HARTLEY

Creepy crawlies and freezing temperatures – these are just some of the things I have to deal with as an adventure photographer. Like when I got a bug in my ear while taking the picture of the tree silhouetted against swirling clouds above. I had lugged half a ton of equipment up Mt Kinabalu in Borneo, then crawled for three days through the jungle to get to this spot – the bug was the final straw. I managed to get it out but went to my doctor when I got home in case it had laid eggs – he said to come back if I heard scratching noises, but happily I haven't yet.

My first foray into travel photography was when I won a competition run by the Duke of Edinburgh's Award scheme and

got to join an expedition to Everest base camp. That was the first real adventure I photographed and I loved it. Now I spend up to nine months a year in some of the world's most remote places. I've just returned from the Arctic, where I was photographing the inaugural expedition for a charity called Adventure Ecology.

Sub-zero temperatures are another challenge that comes with this job. I was on an Antarctic expedition when I shot the figure in the swirling snow overleaf. Our tents were nearly identical to the ones Scott used on his fateful journey to the South Pole back in 1912. I wanted to recreate the infamous moment where one of his men, Captain Lawrence Oates, realises he has become a burden and leaves the tent, with

the words 'I am just going outside and may be some time'. He was never seen again. I got a team member to pose for me – it took until 3am to get the right combination of wind and light.

People often think that photographers just snap away spontaneously, but my best shots are the ones I've planned carefully. My advice to budding photographers is firstly to use a digital camera so you don't worry about the cost of developing hundreds of pictures, and, more importantly, to think of picture ideas before you go away. Imagine the scene in your head, then go out and look for that shot. Of course, it's easy to say but harder to do – especially when you have to deal with freezing conditions. ►



During polar expeditions the temperature drops below  $-40^{\circ}\text{C}$  – at that point skin tissue freezes in just 90 seconds, so you don't have long to get your shot. I do as the Inuits and wear a pair of gloves inside mittens, which I slip off to take pictures. I've also got a heating element inside my camera, and my camera bag has a mini hot water bottle.

I had to lie on my stomach to get the shot of King Penguins in the Antarctic. There are no land predators here so the penguins are quite bold and come over to tap you with their beaks. I got lucky – you never see penguins all looking in the same direction, but a boat coming in to shore must have caught their eye. That trip was part of an expedition to follow in Shackleton's footsteps. We were dropped off by a Russian icebreaker. The captain told us that there was no hope of rescue if anything went wrong – the last boat of the season was due to pick us up five days later and if we missed it, that was it. Luckily, we all survived to tell the tale.

I took the picture of velvety green mountains (right) in more comfortable circumstances. I was in Kyrgyzstan, and managed to hitch a ride to Bishkek in the

president's helicopter. To be honest though, it was little more than a transit van with a rotor on the roof.

Up in the far north of Siberia, Khatanga is an out-of-the-way fishing village. Temperatures hover around  $-40^{\circ}\text{C}$  and the sun never gets much above the horizon. I was stuck there for weeks waiting for permits, eating reindeer and drinking vodka. I love the fact that the lady in the ankle-length fur coat in the shot above is carrying a handbag, as if she were just popping out to meet a friend for coffee. I suppose if you live here you get used to the harsh climate.

In Ladakh, northern India, cold weather brings out the crowds. Once summer's over and the tourists have gone, people come from miles around for the Gustor festival in Leh. It's a huge Buddhist celebration – the people in this picture (opposite, top) are wrapped up warm to watch a display of dancing monks dressed as demons. Looks like they've learned to handle the cold, too. ■

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