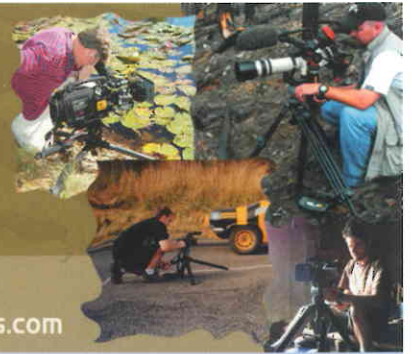


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The Penguin Diaries

WADE FAIRLEY, intrepid Antarcophile and Miller Camera Supporter has run off again to the Great White Continent to shoot the breeding habits of Emperor Penguins. This time it's footage for a new 11-part series, Planet Earth, to be produced by the award-winning team who brought you David Attenborough's Blue Planet.

Here, Wade shares his innermost technical thoughts via diarised emails with Miller Camera Support's own Heidi Tobin.

Wednesday 22nd September 2004 5:31PM

I'm about to head to Antarctica for a year on an extensive project for the BBC Natural History Unit. My principal mission is to record in unprecedented detail, on 35 mm film, the breeding cycle of emperor penguins.

The best footage of the bird's incredible survival is going to be in the worst winter weather, during temperatures down to -40 Celsius and howling blizzards. It's a shoot with vast technical challenges, including the need for a rock steady tripod.

The shoot is a year in duration, giving ample opportunity to gather plenty of data and experiences on long term usage of production equipment in this hostile environment. We'll be working out of the Australian Antarctic station, Mawson and have periodic access to email.

'Home sweet home' is a field hut that I and an assistant will be based out of on Macey Island, 50km from Mawson Station.

The Miller equipment I am taking will be a DS60 150mm fluid head with HD and HD Mini Alloy tripod, as well as the legendary Projib. I'll also have with me a Miller DS5 and a DS30 fluid head, which are trusty and well proven tools for this environment. I remember the -70° wind chill shots on the icebreaker near Macquarie Island a few years back.

Sunday 12 December 2004 2:48PM

I'm now on the ice at Mawson - getting here was a three week voyage and I didn't have access picking up email. All equipment arrived



>> >> There's snow business like ... Wade Fairley on location in Antarctica.

in Hobart safe and sound, just in time to get onto Cargo before I sailed.

All of my equipment arrives on the annual resupply voyage at the end of January. Because of normal heavy set ice at this time of year, we helicopter off ship at about 100km off shore, so had to travel light.

So, I don't have any kit with me yet and won't until the end of January when I get down to work properly.

Tuesday 3rd February 2005 10:34AM

Our cargo ship was due last week ... so I drafted an email saying the camera kit has arrived and I'm about to get started, etc ... then the ship got stuck in heavy pack ice, drifted around for a few days, gave up and went back to Hobart ... with all on board to resupply the station for the next 12 months and all of my camera equipment!

Heavy news as I'm sure you can imagine. We've been waiting for the counter plan and that was announced on Monday. A heavier ice breaker is now being rescheduled and will come in at the end of the month.

Tuesday, 22 March 2005 1:52 PM

All systems go here down south. After a rather nerve racking, delayed start we're away and filming. Phew! Things were shaping up there towards what could have been the longest winter of my life - a literal winter of discontent! To cut a very long story short: even with today's ordinarily minutely scheduled shooting routines, Antarctica still has plenty of major spanners ready to throw into the works. We've had an un-seasonally heavy sea ice this summer. This blocked shipping and Mawson station's annual resupply, including on board all our camera equipment! Yikes! However the last ship for the year broke through sea ice last week to resupply the station.

Just in the nick of time too. The autumn temperatures are now hanging steadily about -14 Celsius and we just had three days of clear, calm weather where the sea literally froze before our eyes! Incredible!

Recording this phenomena is a major component of our mission here, miss this one and next chance is in 12 months. So we've five different time lapse camera positions operating and up until 48 hours ago, when the sea set like a giant slushy, using a Pro Jib set up in a zodiac to shoot tracking shots of new ice formation.

Last night the weather closed in and at the moment the wind is blowing over 100kph and visibility is less than two metres. Needless to say, cameras are back in their cases for now, though I've left three Miller tripods in position, securely anchored with multiple ice screws designed for mountaineering. Those camera positions I'm confident will remain in place to the millimetre and be ready to resume time lapse shots when this blizzard blows through in the next days. Who knows what the landscape will look like then? Perhaps the new sea ice will have blown out, or the sea is now gone for the next 10 months!

Over and out for now ...

*Wade Fairley - Antarctica
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