

Having documented 20 separate polar journeys so far, **Martin Hartley** is the world's most sought-after expedition photographer. He talks to **Keith Wilson** on the eve of the Scott 2012 expedition to the South Pole

Martin Hartley speaks with the quiet, deliberate voice of a man who has plenty of time to think before he talks. That's not surprising when you consider that it's not unusual for him to spend 90 days on the polar ice with only his thoughts and his expedition party for company. On the eve of his greatest challenge yet, he contemplates how he came to this point...

How old were you when you got hooked by photography?

I got my first camera when I was five. It was a Christmas present and came pre-loaded with film in an adventure kit, along with a pen-knife, a water bottle and a compass. My grandparents used to send me copies of a magazine called *Zoo News*. My bedroom was covered in the front covers because I originally thought about being a wildlife photographer.

So which interested you first: photography or wildlife?

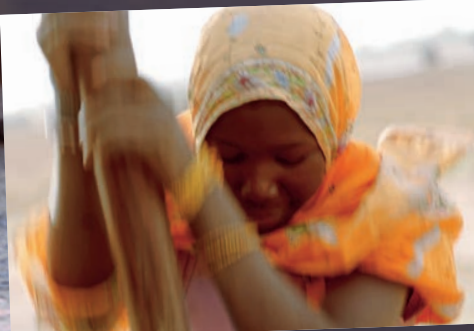
Wildlife came first. I read all the James Herriot books and thought about becoming a vet. When my careers teacher looked at my O-level grades and I said I wanted to be a vet, he said, "Have you thought about becoming a nurse?"

How did you respond to that?

I was lost about what to do for a career, and then I entered the Wildlife Photographer of the Year competition, ►

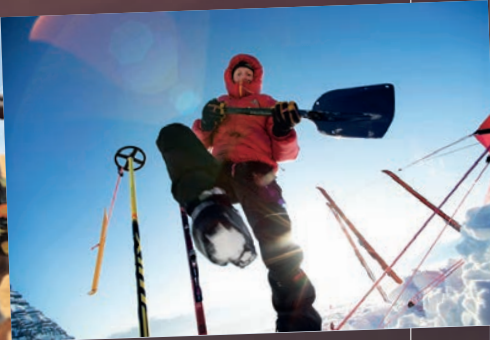
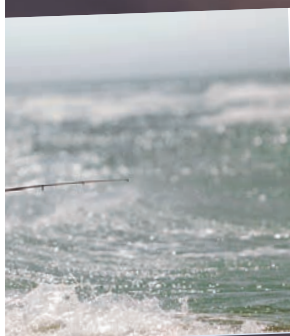
CLOSE UP

MARTIN HARTLEY





ACROSS THE ICE
Nikon D3x, Nikon AF-S
VR 70-200mm f/2.8G IF-ED,
1/800 sec, f/3.5, ISO160





ROSIE STANCER TRAINING IN THE CANADIAN HIGH ARCTIC
Nikon D3x, Nikon 20mm
f/2.8D, 1/640 sec, f/7.1, ISO100

“With my Arctic work, the response I want to stir up most within the viewer is their awe for the beauty of the place”

Martin Hartley Expedition Photographer

in the junior section, and came runner-up. I'd just turned 17, and my Dad said, “Why don't you think about being a photographer?” It clicked that maybe that was something I could do. I got a place at Bournemouth and Poole College of Art and Design to study photography. I did a national diploma for two years and realised

I didn't have the patience or the motivation to become a wildlife photographer.

What happened after college?

I got a job doing scientific photography for British Nuclear Fuels and the UK Atomic Energy Authority. Then, after seeing an article on a special effects photographer called Phil Jason Smith, I went to work for him. I got to photograph everything from miniature explosions to landscapes, then made composites by piecing everything together in the darkroom.

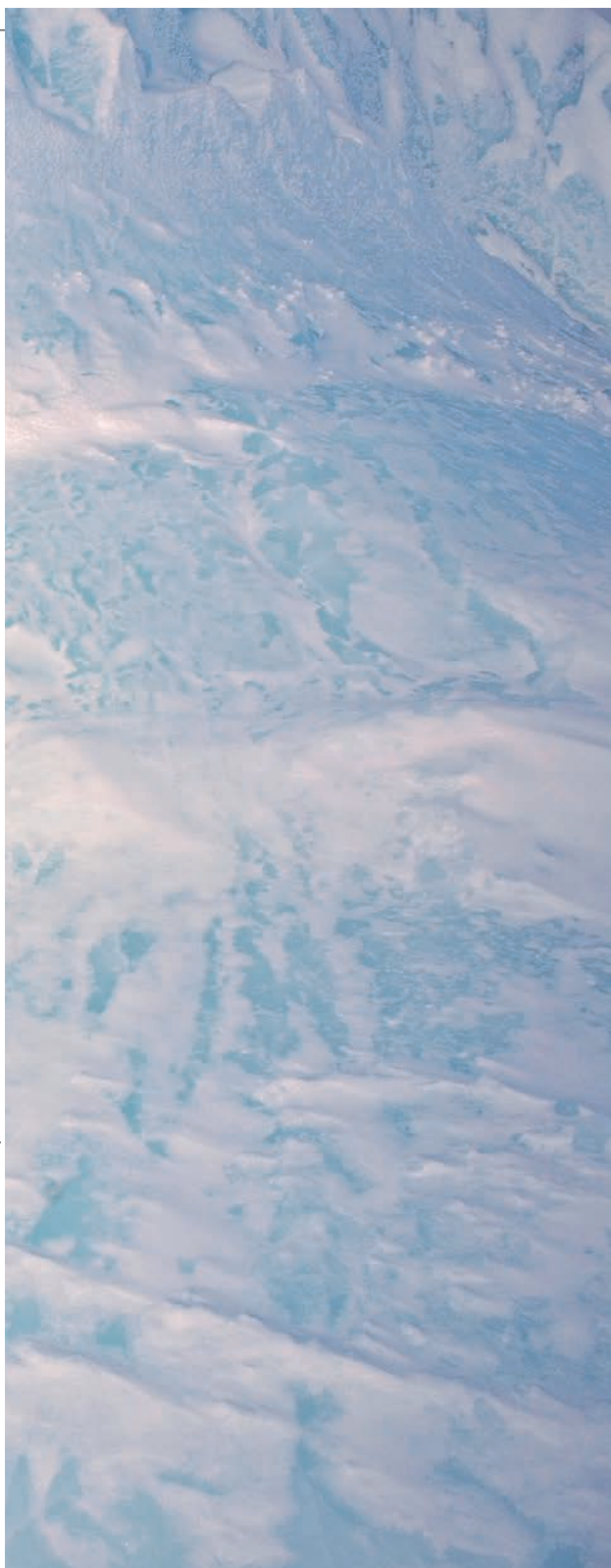
What was your first big break as an adventure photographer?

It was 1993. I won a writing competition to join the DHL Everest 40th anniversary

expedition to put Rebecca Stephens on the top of Mount Everest as part of the Duke of Edinburgh Award scheme. I didn't start writing until the weekend before the deadline. I had to drive to where the entries were being sent because I didn't have time to post it. It was 11 o'clock at night – the deadline was at midnight – and a guy called Paul Deegan opened the door. He was picking people for the scheme based on their writing skills. We became friends, and he was probably the single, biggest factor influencing everything I have done since.

There have been a lot of expeditions since. Which is the most memorable?

The Eastern Pamirs in 1999. To have a whole mountain range to myself, which



**BEN SAUNDERS TRAINING
AT RESOLUTE BAY FOR
NORTH POLE EXPEDITION**
Nikon D3, Nikon 17/35mm f/2.8D
IF ED, 1/60 sec, f/2.8, ISO1250



CHARLIE PAYTON: OFF TO THE NORTH POLE Nikon D3x,
Nikon 14/24mm f/2.8G ED, 1/320 sec, f/5.0, ISO100

had never been explored by Westerners, was living the dream. I could wander off in any direction, and there'd be nothing else around but the mountains. I could go back with my mates and say, "Let's go climb that – it hasn't been climbed before." The sense of adventure was enormous.

If you weren't an adventure photographer, what would you shoot?
I think if I hadn't met Paul I would have plodded along doing relatively normal photography, but still gone on holidays to climb mountains and find experiences.

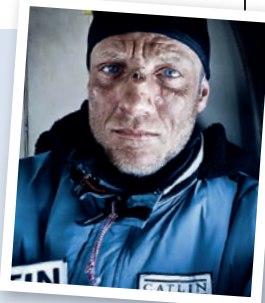
What makes your shots memorable?
I try to link people to where they are or what they do. With my Arctic work, the

response I want to stir up most within the viewer is their awe for the beauty of the place. If there's a person in the image, I normally try to get them at the peak of physical despair. If it's a shot of local indigenous people, the picture needs to look as close to a painting as possible.

What's your 'desert island lens' – the one you could never do without?
On the next trip, Scott 2012, weight is going to be the biggest influencing factor on what I take. It would be a 24mm lens because you can do everything with that – landscapes, portraits and everything ▶

PROFILE

Your at-a-glance guide to Martin's career, from magazines to awards won



■ Martin Hartley's work has appeared in major international publications and on television.

■ In 2009 he was nominated as one of *Time* magazine's Heroes of the Environment

■ Martin is twice winner of the Spirit of Adventure category of the Travel Photographer of the Year competition, and his work has been exhibited at the Royal Geographical Society.

 **SIR RANULPH FIENNES**
Nikon FM2, Nikon 35mm
f/20, 1/60 sec, f/4, ISO100



in between. The only thing you can't do is anything that's distant, or throw the background out of focus. But it's better to get the picture than to get the effect.

How heavy is your typical day's kit bag?
It's about 13kg. I don't normally carry a

“The other thing I carry on polar trips is an MP3 player with British garden birdsong on it. Robins, blackbirds and skylarks are my favourites”
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tripod because the return I get on it isn't really worth the weight.

How many bodies do you currently use?
Six. A D4, D800, D3x, D2x, D2xs, and Fujifilm S3. I also use a Leica MP. It's a beautiful camera. At -43°C the shutter still works, so it gives me the highest probability of getting a shot when it's really cold. I also load it with black and white film to record a modern day expedition in black and white and compare it to scenes that were taken a hundred years ago.

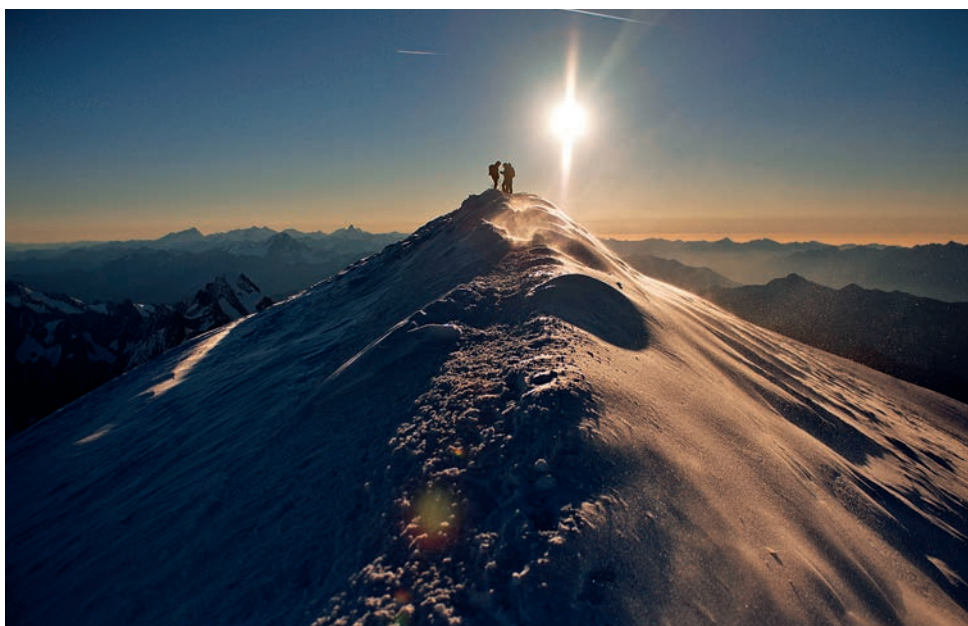
What's the most unusual thing in your camera bag?
It's a tiny cloth drawstring bag from Guatemala, with three little effigies of a

mother, father and child. You tell them your worries, then put them away in the bag, and while you're asleep they will look after your worries. They weigh about six grams – a tremendous power to weight ratio! Not sure if they work because I still lie awake at night worrying. The other thing I carry on polar trips is an MP3 player with British garden birdsong on it. Robins, blackbirds, and skylarks are my favourites.

What's the technique or tip that you regard as essential for every shot?
Anticipation. Every photograph that's ever been taken is a direct result of the photographer anticipating something – be it for months, weeks, days, hours, minutes, seconds or milliseconds. If you look at



PEL SHADOW AT RESOLUTE
BAY Nikon D3x, Nikon AF-S
14/24mm f/2.8G ED, 1/160 sec, f/9,
ISO200



AT THE SUMMIT OF MONT BLANC Nikon D3x, Nikon AF-S
28/70mm f/2.8G ED, 1/8000 sec, f/2.8, ISO100

any great photograph, they've all been anticipated, and are not just reactions to things that have happened. If you're only reacting, by the time you take it the moment has gone.

In what instances do you use flash?

The worst thing about low light is having to use on-camera flash, because you end up with something that looks like a party picture. I haven't really embraced flash. It definitely has its place – you wouldn't be doing your job properly if you were to photograph a wedding without flash because without it everyone has black eyes – but personally I think it's better to make things look as natural as possible.

Have you shot weddings then?

I have! I quite like it because it's a good day rate and you know you're going to get paid. Also, it's really good training. I look at it in the same way as going to the gym. If you don't do it, you lose your sharpness.

So doing a wedding keeps you sharp?

There are lots of interesting scenarios at weddings. People let you photograph

them because you know they're there for a reason and they know you're there for a reason, so there's an interaction with the subject. It's quite stressful going to a wedding knowing you have to come away with a certain amount of shots. The bride and groom are the focus for the whole day, and if you're trying to give them something to remember the whole day with, it's quite a responsibility, and an interesting challenge.

What type of assignment presents the biggest challenge?

Being a white man in a Muslim country and photographing women. You have to develop relationships with people before you can take the picture, either on a very superficial level to put them at ease, or to get to know them and let them know that you're not there to make them look bad.

What are the biggest changes you've seen in your profession?

It's the adaptation from film to digital. I've enjoyed the process because it's made it

TAKING RISKS

Best known for his polar exploits, Martin Hartley finds it hard to avoid being pigeon-holed as a polar photographer, but admits it opens doors for other jobs

The golden age of polar exploration immortalised the names of Scott, Amundsen, and Shackleton, as well as photographers Herbert Ponting and Frank Hurley. For Martin, this is both inspiration and a hard act to follow.

How do you describe yourself? A polar photographer, adventure photographer, or travel photographer?

■ It depends who I'm talking to! Sometimes the corporate clients are attracted to my adventurous side because I've done some amazing trips. But being pigeon-holed as a polar photographer is well, it's a bit seasonal! It sounds quite nice, and two of my biggest heroes are Frank Hurley and Herbert Ponting.

Do you think you can be compared with them?

■ I can't be aligned with those guys because they were proper adventurers. Ponting had a beautiful way of looking at things, but Hurley was a true explorer in documenting things.

Have you ever done anything Hurleyesque without proper regard for your safety?

■ I don't think photographers do consider personal risk. Being a photographer on an expedition, you have to be an observer, while still being part of the team. There's always risk when you extract yourself from the group. On a polar expedition, you might go ahead where there's potential for whiteouts, so you might get lost, or fall behind because you want to do some stuff that the others aren't interested in, but you have to do that to get the pictures.

Have you ever looked back and said to yourself: 'What did I do that for?'

■ Lots of times! You're so possessed with getting the picture that you just forget where you are. There's been a couple of times when I've gone onto thin ice to get a shot.



PAUL LANDRY, ANTARCTICA Nikon D2h, Nikon AF-S
70/200mm f/2.8G ED VR, 1/4000 sec, f/6.3, ISO200



**SALT TRADER IN
TIMBUKTU** Nikon D3,
Nikon AF-S 28-70mm f/2.8D,
1/125 sec, f/2.8, ISO160



WOMEN WATCHING A WEDDING, YEMEN Nikon D2H,
Nikon AF-S 17-35mm f/2.8D, 1/160 sec, f/2.8, ISO200

easier in so many ways. The downside of digital is that years ago with film you could drop your test rolls at the lab, have a pie and a pint at the pub, pop over to the lab, look at the clip test and then go back to the

“The best place is not always the most exotic or the most extreme. The people you’re with make the place.”

Martin Hartley Expedition Photographer



pub again. That’s all gone now. It’s quite hard being a photographer now because you spend all your time being alone, unless you can afford an assistant.

What would you say has been your greatest moment as a photographer?

For me it’s not just about being a photographer – it’s about being in a place with the people you’re with, enjoying the camaraderie. People ask, “What’s the best place you’ve ever been to?” It’s not always the most exotic or the most extreme. The people you’re with make the place.

What’s been the most embarrassing?

When I first went freelance I had a really good client, and he asked me to photograph

his Beaujolais party. They’d gone to the expense of converting their office with a Hawaiian theme, with desert islands, treasure chests, and palm trees. I went along, took a load of photographs and had a few glasses of Beaujolais. When I took the pictures round, the first 10 or 15 frames were shots of his clients mingling with each other, and the remainder were shots of me with his clients taken with the camera at arm’s length. Whoops! Thankfully, he saw the funny side of it. But when I go to corporate events now I don’t drink at all.

What’s the biggest lesson you’ve learnt?

The biggest lesson I’ve learnt on an expedition is having to bite your tongue. You have to do it because there’s so few of

FOLLOWING SCOTT

Martin Hartley's next major expedition is as part of the three-man team recreating Captain Robert Falcon Scott's ill-fated expedition to the South Pole.

In 1912, Captain Scott and his four fellow explorers reached the South Pole, but perished on the return trip. This October, the three-man team of Scott 2012 (Ben Saunders, Alastair Humphreys and Martin Hartley) will begin their attempt to complete the first return journey to the South Pole on foot. They expect to be on the ice for 116 days.

What is it that you're trying to do?

■ Trying to complete Scott's 1911-12 South Pole route in its entirety, unsupported. It's an 1800-mile round trip from Scott's Hut to the South Pole. If we're successful, it will be the longest unsupported polar journey in history. By that, I mean we're carrying everything we need.

What's the worst thing about being an expedition photographer?

■ Trying to get fit. I'm not getting any younger, and getting physically fit for an expedition takes longer, especially for this next expedition.

Will you be shooting video too?

■ Thankfully, Alastair Humphreys will be doing that. He'll be using a Nikon D800.

So you'll be concentrating on stills?

■ Yes, and I'm happy about that. I already know that if the expedition is successful, and if there's a film made, that is what people will remember, and not the stills.

Why's that?

■ Because it's a lot easier, without being disrespectful to filmmakers, to sit down and watch a film and get a feeling of what it is to be actually there on the day. With a still picture you're leaving the viewer with too much slack to try to communicate how the day was just from somebody's body posture.



LITTLE CORNWALLIS ISLAND Nikon D3, Nikon AF-S 14-24mm f/2.8G ED, 1/5 sec, f/2.8, ISO800



PUJA CEREMONY, NORTHERN INDIA Mamiya 645 Pro TL, Mamiya 35mm f/3.5, 1/60 sec, f/3.5, ISO200

you, and you can't let personal politics get between you. It has done in the past and it has ruined it. Generally, expeditioners are self-contained and don't appreciate your being there until after the event. Nowadays in my contract it says I'm there to take the pictures, and if a dangerous situation occurs I'm allowed to take photographs of it until I feel the need to put the camera down and help, or if someone calls me for help. Once it's on paper, it diffuses any argument. I can see when they need help, but I'm there to document the expedition.

So, what's the best piece of advice you can give to someone starting out? If you want to be a photographer, make sure that that really is what you want to

do. You have to devote everything in your life to being a photographer – you can't just dip in and dip out. You can't have a 9-to-5 job as well. Your life is going to be photography. And you're going to need to find yourself an understanding partner, otherwise you'll rip through relationships throughout your photographic career.

Martin Hartley is the official photographer of Scott 2012, which embarks in October to retrace Scott's 1911-12 expedition. Follow the team's journey at www.scott2012.org