

# The art of adventure



If there's somewhere in the world you can't find on the map, it's more than likely that **Martin Hartley** has been there or is making plans to go. He tells Keith Wilson what motivates him to photograph the ends of the earth

IN HIS UPSTAIRS flat near Kew Gardens, Martin Hartley is paying more attention than usual to the living room window. Having run out of space on the lightbox, he has begun taping 6x4.5cm trannies onto the windowpane, editing the images taken on a recent trip to Khatanga in northern Siberia. It's not the sort of place you will find marked on many maps, but then Hartley specialises in photographing places that most of us have never heard of.

It is late March, and only three weeks ago, he was photographing Ben Saunders as he began his ambitious attempt to traverse the Arctic Ocean via the North Pole, solo and unsupported. For many Arctic and Antarctic expeditions, Hartley is the first person approached to take the photographs. This time last year his pictures were being screened all over the world as Devon-based explorer Pen Hadow became the first man to walk alone and unsupported from Canada to the North Pole. And it was Hartley that Hadow again turned to six months later for photographs to support his walk to the South Pole, which he successfully completed in February.

So how did a young man of 35 born and raised in Rochdale attain this rare position of being the most sought after photographer in his field? 'This was the turning point,' he answers, pointing to one of his prints showing a range of snow-covered mountains, 'the Eastern Pamirs, in a part of Kyrgystan that no Westerners had ever been to. More men have walked on the moon than walked here.'

On this Motorola-backed trip in 1999, Hartley and his colleagues were making the first trip into this mountain range, inside the former Soviet republic. 'The purpose of the expedition was to climb five of the 6,000m peaks, all previously unclimbed, and to do a recce for future expeditions,' he recalls. 'We had no information on the place, no photographs, no maps – apart from

some dodgy Russian military maps – and we turned up in the dark. Then we woke up in the morning to this fantastic mountain range a hundred miles wide, we were the only people there.'

Months later, Hartley was giving a slide lecture on the expedition at a club in London when he was approached by Pen Hadow. 'Pen came round afterwards and said: "I'm heading to the North Pole sometime, would you be interested in joining me?" I heard nothing for a while, but then he got back in touch and said he'd got sponsorship and was heading North in two weeks time, and asked me if I wanted to photograph his expedition – that was solo to the North Pole.'

## The first adventure

Hartley had worked as a photographer's assistant and had just set up his own commercial photography business when he entered a writing competition organised by the Duke of Edinburgh's Award Scheme to mark the 40th

anniversary of the first ascent of Everest. He won the contest and in 1994 found himself at Everest Base Camp as a member of the expedition that culminated in Rebecca Stephens becoming the first British woman to reach the summit of the world's highest mountain. 'That was the first real adventure I photographed a n d I absolutely loved it and I thought: "This is exactly what I should be doing." It took me quite a while to get the contacts, do the networking, meet people, do exhibitions for free. It was quite a big outlay, I had to sell my darkroom to pay for this.'

Then came Kyrgystan and the virgin peaks of the Eastern Pamirs. Apart from leading to his first contact with Pen Hadow, that Motorola-backed expedition also taught him the value of sponsorship. 'I would have had to have sold that story four or five times with the pictures to break even if Motorola hadn't covered the costs,' says Hartley. 'There's not much money from printing material in this

**Left** Ben Saunders training for his Transarctic Solo expedition on a rubbish tip in Northern Siberia. Ambient temperature -48° celcius  
*Mamiya 645 Pro TI with 150mm f/2.8 lens with 2x teleconverter, Provia 100F rated at 200, 81b warm-up filter*

**Below** Elliot makes the first ever footsteps on a ridge high in the Eastern Pamirs of the former Soviet Union  
*Mamiya 645 Ppro TI with 35mm f/3.5 lens, Provia 100F rated at 200, 81b warm-up filter*





Above A local girl from Gjoa Haven joins in with the whole community during a treasure hunt to celebrate Hamlet day – the day when the village first gained hamlet status on 1 April 1981

Mamiya 645 Pro Ti with Mamiy Sekor fisheye 24mm f/1.4 lens, Provia 100F rated at 200, warm-up filter

“He points to one of his prints showing a range of snow-covered mountains: “This was the turning point – a part of Kyrgystan that no Westerners had ever been to. More men have walked on the moon than walked here.””

country. You can't earn a living just from that.’

He now describes himself as an adventure art photographer and is trying to establish a market for images of the world's remotest places that are more than pure documentary. In places far removed from Western influences, he believes there is greater scope to be more creative than a well travelled route such as Nepal's Everest trail. ‘It's just a great feeling being exposed to getting so close to nature that you can't be rescued – Well, you can, but it might take days or even weeks,’ he enthuses.

‘That makes you very conscious of what you're doing and where you are. And it does enhance the way you see a place because there's no distraction. There are no aeroplanes going across the sky, no roads, no motorway noise in the distance, and that's a real privilege.

‘When I was on South Georgia, which is the most remote I've been, before we got off the ship the captain said, “There's no rescue from South Georgia”. Now, when the sea is calm and the weather is fine you think, “Yeah, ok then”. But when they drop you off and the boat disappears over the horizon,

and then the weather gets really bad and you know the ship won't be back for two weeks, that's when you get a true appreciation of where you are in the world.’

**Images for TV**

It may come as a surprise to learn that those still images we saw on TV last year to accompany the satellite phone interviews with Pen Hadow from the Arctic were all staged. When you think about it, this is perfectly logical. After all, the whole point of Hadow's quest was to walk unaided and alone to the North Pole, so he couldn't

really have Martin Hartley accompanying him, taking snaps along the way. ‘I didn't do any of the journey, north or south,’ he explains. ‘My job is to go there and photograph every scenario he might find himself in and get the film processed. Then, as he's doing the job of walking to the North or South Pole, the newspaper or magazine will have pictures to go with his words when he's interviewed on the satellite phone.

It was these types of pictures – hauling sledges, climbing over pressure ridges, crossing leads, lighting a fire on the ice – that Hartley was taking of Ben Saunders in the northernmost part of Siberia just a few weeks before this interview. However, finding a suitable spot to recreate Saunders hauling his sledge over a pressure ridge in the ice proved extremely difficult. ‘Khatanga is flat and the only place that had anything that looked like a pressure ridge was the local rubbish tip, covered in snow!’ he laughs.

There was nothing illusory about his trip to Elephant Island and South Georgia in early 1999 as part of an expedition to recreate the legendary rescue mission undertaken by Ernest Shackleton in 1916. Then, Shackleton and two others crossed South Georgia on foot, scaling a previously unclimbed ridge, to the whaling station on the other side of the island in order to raise the alarm about his crew who were stranded on Elephant Island more than 800 miles away. ‘It was a very risky, high profile expedition,’ Hartley remembers. ‘I don't know how Shackleton did it in 36 hours! Every single one of us was absolutely knackered by the end of the day. We took five days. Every two minutes someone fell into a crevasse, which wasn't a problem so long as no-one broke a leg. That's more of a problem than a dead body.’

**Interaction or intrusion**

It isn't just the Arctic regions or the high mountains of Central Asia that attract Martin Hartley. His best selling print is of a lone tree standing amid a swirling cloud of mist in the tropical rainforest surrounding Mt Kinabalu in Borneo, and he has photographed remote tribes and villagers in the Andaman Islands and Zanskar. Hartley never describes himself as an explorer and chooses his words carefully when outlining his intentions. This is how he defines



Left ‘Lone tree’ is a point in the high alpine jungle of Mount Kinabalu. To get to this fantastic ‘finger of rock’ takes three days of crawling on hands and knees through dense secondary jungle and scrambling over slimy granite precipices – but is worth the effort to watch the sunset over the South China sea. This is Martin's best selling image Mamiya 645 Pro Ti with 35mm f/3.5 lens, Provia 100F rated at 200

his work on his website: ‘Martin Hartley specialises in recording the people and places that are found at the ends of the earth. In some respects it is a race against time; when isolated communities make first contact with outsiders, many surrender their traditional values for the trappings of modern civilisation. As a photographer, Martin treads a fine line between interaction and intrusion. Gaining people's trust and friendship – whilst showing respect for their way of life – has allowed Martin to capture the images that are on the website today.’ ‘Wonderfully worthy sentiments, but I put it to him that through his photography, and particularly with the immediacy

and global spread of the Web, isn't he actually accelerating the demise of these ways of life that he's clearly concerned about?’

‘That's a very good question,’ he ponders and there follows a long pause. ‘It can be viewed as creating awareness or it can be viewed as exploiting them. For example, when I went to Zanskar, there's a little village called Padham, which you can only get to a few months of the year. The Indian Army is building a road there, and once that road reaches the village that culture will begin to evaporate. That road will go on to Leh and from Leh to Delhi, so they will stop being self-sufficient. I am aware of people pointing the finger and

Below This image of Stanzin and her mother was taken in the village of Padham in the Zanskar valley during the winter of 2001. I had spent a week photographing families and mothers with their babies Mamiya 645 Pro Ti with 35mm f/3.5 lens, Provia 100F rated at 200, 81A warmup filter





**Above** A team of British adventurers set off from Victory Point Cornwallis Island in an attempt to re-trace the footsteps of Sir John Franklin's ill fated expedition of 1845. *Mamiya 645 Pro T1 with 35mm f/3.5 lens, Provia 100F rated at 200*

**Right** Two adventurers endure a cold and desperately uncomfortable ride home in the back of a Komatik after an 18-day expedition around King William Island in the Canadian Arctic. *Mamiya 645 Pro T1 with 24mm f/1.4 lens, Provia 100F rated at 200*

saying I am exploiting those people by the fact I get paid, I sell prints, but when the pictures are linked with the words, in every single case it's mentioned how fragile the culture is. I try to be as careful as I can be, I can't be responsible for what people do behind me.

'You can't stop it (Western contact & development), but if you employ local people and use local resources throughout, then that community is getting something from that visit. And if it's managed properly and it's sustainable they're going to be happy with that.'

In the meantime Hartley is happy to continue adding to the red dots on a large map of the world marking the places he has visited. Rather mischievously, I suggest that some people may view him as being like a 'Munro bagger' with a tick list of peaks to reach.

'That would be a bit unfair, wouldn't it?' I ask. His reply is swift and surprisingly candid: 'No I don't think so! As you can see I've got little red dots on the map. I only started to do that a few months ago because I've been to loads of places

in the last year and I kept forgetting where I had been.' Given he's only 35 and determined to continue 'as long as my physiology is capable', there will be plenty of red dots to add to Martin Hartley's map in the years ahead. ❖

● Last year, Martin Hartley won the Spirit of Adventure category in the Travel Photographer of the Year Awards. The closing date for this year's competition is 17 September. For more information about how to enter, or to obtain an entry form visit [www.tpoty.com](http://www.tpoty.com)

