

I'm Going to Antarctica

Fifteen months ago I put a deposit down on the trip of a lifetime: 13 days aboard [an ice-strengthened ship](#) touring the Antarctic coastline with [77 other photographers](#). After such a long wait it's hard to believe that I'll be getting on a plane in less than a month to head down South. Really, really, far down South.

As you can imagine, I'm a tad excited.

Along with that excitement is a healthy dose of fear as I look around my office at the pile of equipment that joins me for the expedition. There's no B&H Photo or Amazon to deliver if you forget something important so planning is key.

Over the next several pages I'll share with everyone the gear that I plan on taking for this once in a lifetime experience. I'll show you not only cameras and lenses but also the (rather large) supporting cast of accessories that will make the images I take possible. It will also force me to thoroughly think through what needs to come and make sure that I pack it all 😊 I hope you enjoy!

Camera Bodies

Since my upcoming trip is all about photography, and there's 20 hours of daylight available each day to take pictures, cameras have a rather important place in my bag. Here's 4 of 5 cameras that are coming along for the ride:



Yes, that's a lot of cameras. Why so many? Two reasons:

- 1) I shoot a lot of black and white film so I need a film body
- 2) There's no Canon repair shop in Antarctica so I need backups

My primary film body for the trip is a [Canon EOS 1n](#) (1) with a BP-E2 power drive booster (2) and a Really Right Stuff [L mounting plate](#) (3). I bought this camera for my film classes because it's the lowest end Canon film body I could find that has 1/3 stop exposure increments. The power drive is so I can use rechargeable AA batteries as a power source while on the trip and to let me shoot at 6 frames a second if I see some really fast penguins! The camera is also safe for IR film use, which is a nice added bonus.

My backup film body is a Canon EOS 10s (4). It cost me \$35 on eBay, works beautifully, and doesn't fog IR film. The downside is it only has 1/2 stop exposure increments.

My primary digital camera is the [Canon EOS 5D Mark II](#) (5). This body was not in my original plans for this trip but then Canon announced it and I looked at how far I was going and how unlikely I was to ever go back to Antarctica again. Oh, and that 1080p video thing. The Mark II gets a cute little conventional mounting plate (6) from Really Right Stuff to hold it on the tripod.

My backup digital camera is the Canon EOS 5D (7). I have a vertical grip and RSS L mounting plate for it but both those accessories are staying at home to lighten the weight of my carry-on bag.

Not pictured is the 5th body, a [Canon Powershot G9](#). It'll be my point and shoot for getting candid photographs around the ship when hauling out the other monsters would just be silly.

Lenses

All the bodies in the world are useless if you don't have a full complement of lenses to take the shots. I'm bringing a range of lenses with me that will cover 17mm through 280mm:



Based on what prior photographers have said about Antarctica my primary lens will likely be the 70-200mm f/2.8L IS (1) and its Really Right Stuff foot plate (2). In case the 200mm length isn't enough I also

have the 1.4x extender (3). To cover the wide range I have the 17-40mm f/4.0L (4). Filling out the middle is the 24-70 f/2.8L (5), although I doubt it will see much use.

The oddball lens in the front is a [Lensbaby 3G](#) (6). Again, it likely won't see much use, but barely weighs anything and fits easily into my case so it's coming along for some fun.

Rounding out the lenses are their associated hoods (7, 8, and 9). There's not much to say other than they'll keep the sun out and crap off the front of the lens.

Film

I'm taking classes at a [local photo school](#) where I do a lot of black and white photography. That means film is coming with me to Antarctica. A lot of film.



That's 100 rolls of Kodak T-Max 400 totaling 2400 exposures. It's the film that I have relentlessly tested with the EOS 1n and 70-200 lens so I know exactly how to expose it for different lighting conditions. By relentlessly tested I mean I've gone through a stack of film that big just shooting photos of a grey piece of mat board to get my ISO and development times down. Depending on the light it gets rated at anywhere from ISO 125 to ISO 250.

I can't say I'm looking forward to processing all that film when I get back, two rolls at a time.

While that stack of film is pretty to look at it also weights 2kg (4.4 lbs). I can't afford that weight or all the space it takes up, and I can't check the film due to fogging issues. So it all comes out of the boxes

and film canisters and goes in two bags:



That cuts the film weight to 1kg and means I can fit it in my laptop backpack. I'm also taking 9 rolls of Kodak HIE Infrared film (2) for fun. A light-safe bag (3) is along for the ride to hold the exposed IR film. Not shown (because I can't find it right now!) is a light-safe film changing bag so I can swap IR film in the field.

Digital Film

Before everyone starts flaming me about how I'll miss out on all the cool colour in Antarctica, don't worry. I'm shooting digital too! Here's my digital film:



To ensure I don't lose any of the digital images I'm bringing two separate backup devices. The first is a Western Digital 320GB portable drive (1). The second is a [Hyperdrive Colorspace](#) 320GB portable backup device (2) that I can dump cards onto in the field if necessary. Every time I copy images off my cards I will use Lightroom to copy simultaneously to both drives, and at least one of the drives will always be physically on my body when I travel back from the trip.

For in-camera media I'm taking three SanDisk Extreme II 16GB 30MB/s compact flash cards (3). These are for my 5D Mark II so I have enough room and speed to shoot video if I choose. The Canon G9 will run with two SanDisk Extreme II 8GB SDHC cards (4).

Accessories

For gadget geeks photography is a great hobby since there are so many little add-ons you can get to make things more entertaining. Here are the accessories that I'm bringing with me:



To get accurate white balance for the digital images I'm bringing a set of [WhiBal cards](#) (1). I've had them for years and they take up almost no space. To get accurate exposure for my black and white images I have a Pentax Digital Spot Meter. They don't make them anymore which is a shame since it's such a wonderful tool.

Just to remind everyone that I do actually like the digital side of things as well I'm planning on geotagging all my digital images. The unit I'll use for that is the [Amod AGL 3080 Data Logger](#) (3). It's so small I can wear it clipped to my jacket the whole time and it runs off AAA batteries. I gave it a test run locally and it was able to track my movements down to the aisle level in our local supermarket. I can't wait to see the tracklogs I get from it!

My lensbaby has a set of macro lenses and aperture discs (4). I certainly won't need the macro lenses, but they fit nicely in the case with the aperture discs.

Three filters will see varying amounts of use: a Tiffen Red #29 for IR shots, a Hoya Super Pro 1 low-profile circular polarizer, and a Tiffen Yellow #2 for black and white.

To fire the cameras without any camera shake I have wired remotes for both the 5D bodies (6) and the 1n (7). To connect the portable harddrives and Amod device to my laptop I'm bringing two USB cables (8).



For razor sharp images my trusty tripod and ballhead will go in my checked luggage. The tripod is a [Manfrotto carbon fiber 055MF3](#) (1) that is a dream to use with gloves on. It's easy to open the leg locks with mittens on! The ballhead is a [Really Right Stuff BH-55](#) (2) with the quick release clamp.

Power

All the bodies and other gadgets I'm bringing need a source of power. There's nowhere to buy batteries on the ship so I'm relying heavily on the new breed of rechargeable batteries.



All the outlets on the ship are 220v and euro-style plugs. To plug in all my chargers and such I have a [Wonpro universal power strip](#) (1). I can plug anything into it and the cord fits the outlet on the boat. I'm also bringing two Sanyo battery chargers (3) and chargers for the G9, 5D Mark II, and 5D batteries (9).

For actual batteries I'm bringing:

- 16 rechargeable AA batteries (4) for the EOS 1n (eight for the camera and eight spare)
- 3 LP-E6 (2) batteries for the 5D Mark II
- 4 BP-511 (7) batteries for the 5D. Although now that I look at the image I will likely cut that to two since I will probably never use them.
- 2 2CR2 batteries (8) for the EOS 10s
- 6 rechargeable AAA batteries (5) for the Amod datalogger (three for the device and three spare)

- 3 weird little non-rechargeable batteries (6) to power the Pentax light meter (one plus two spares since I can't recharge them)

I think I should buy stock in a battery company!

Cleaning Products

I have to admit that cleaning products are the piece of this trip I've thought the least about. Here's what I'm planning on taking so far, although it may change between now and when I go.



To clean lenses I'm taking [Formula MC cleaner](#) (1) and some standard lens cleaning paper (2). It seems to work well for me.

To clean the sensor I have a Visible Dust [Sensor Loupe](#) (3), [sensor brush](#) (4), and old school [LensPen](#) (5). It's not exactly high-end stuff, but I have a hard time spending upwards of \$100 on something like an [Arctic Butterfly](#). Plus I figure other people will have cleaning things I can try out while I'm on the boat if necessary.

Computer

For image processing and such while I'm on the trip I'm bringing a laptop.



It's a [Lenovo ThinkPad T61p](#) (1) with [Windows Vista](#) that is big and ugly but runs fast and can handle [Lightroom 2.2](#) quite nicely. I've spruced it up with a [nice skin from DecalGirl](#) to try and make it look a little more respectable. Its power supply comes along too (2), to charge the extended battery and extra battery that's in the DVD bay. I also have a cute little Microsoft Bluetooth laptop mouse (3) so I don't have to futz with a touchpad.

Camera Bags

Yes, that's right. Bags, as in more than one. Getting all this gear down South is primarily a problem due to airline carry-on baggage policies. As you can imagine I have no intention of checking any of my core camera gear. Batteries and chargers maybe. But not the bodies, lenses, film, etc. So I'm following the

[advice from Michael.](#)



To schlep gear through the airport I have a [ThinkTank Airport International v2.0](#) (1). Believe it or not I can fit all my cameras, bodies, cards, most of the batteries, and accessories all in the one bag. I still haven't weighed it yet but I will likely be very close to Delta's weight limit of 18kg.

The odd plastic thing in the top of the picture is an \$11 [Hydroliner duffel bag liner](#) (2). I'll just stick it inside my clothes duffel bag as a liner that takes no space, and then when I'm actually on the ship it will serve as the water protection for my main camera bag when taking the Zodiac boats to shore and back.

Once I get to Antarctica and start doing shore landings my gear will go in a [Tamrac Expedition 5](#) backpack (3). Mine is the older model without a laptop pocket, but it's big enough to carry the 5D Mark II, 1n, and all my lenses. I've added on two small lens pouches (4) to hold film, a medium accessory pocket (5) to hold the light meter, and a filter pouch (6) for the filters. This backpack will also go in my duffel as checked luggage and will probably be filled with socks and underwear on the way to and from Antarctica!

To carry a body around over my shoulder I have a [Black Rapid RS-2 Strap](#). This strap is the perfect way to carry an EOS 1n and a 70-200 monster over the shoulder. I'm not sure how much use it will get, but again it's pretty compact and doesn't weigh a lot so it'll go in my checked luggage just in case.



My laptop and anything else that I'm taking on the plane (books, food, etc.) go in my [North Face Surge](#) backpack. It may look small but it holds a lot of stuff.

Summary

So there you have it! I have to admit I'm amazed at how much stuff comes along on a trip like this, and seeing it all listed out will likely make me re-think whether I absolutely need it all. When I'm back from the trip in late January I will have a follow-up story that talks about what worked, what didn't, and what I wish I hadn't forgotten!