

To: Subject: Scholes Cabin 5 (p): Learning video

21 February 2010 0021 UTM -40.0301, 10.5602

Dear Stirling,

That fancy camera I bought before I left for Antarctica has been worth every cent. All my other cameras are going to be very jealous when I get home, because I have a new best friend. Not only does it take stunning still photos, but the high-definition video is really impressive. The problem is I have had to learn a whole new set of techniques.

Obviously the photographic basics are the same - focus, exposure, white balance and all that stuff - and composition to a degree. But there are other things that you need to unlearn if you have been a lifelong stills photographer, or learn from scratch. Like that you can't compose a video picture with vertical framing, unless everyone is going to turn their TVs on their sides when they watch it! Getting the sound right at the same time as capturing the picture takes a lot of mental multi-tasking - that is obviously why camera crews usually have a person who just looks after the sound.

The biggest change was trying to think in terms of movement. In still photography you are trying to freeze out movement, but in video, movement is the whole point - that is why they are called the movies, after all. A video picture without action in it is boring- it may as well have been a still. So if there is no action in the shot - someone walking in, or a bird flying by or whatever - you have to make action by moving the camera. And that is where the professionals are just so much smoother. Getting a pan shot or a zoom-in without jerkiness is much more difficult than it looks. The solid tripod I have was a great help, but I soon found out that having a fixed tripod on a wallowing ship gives you a wobbling horizon that makes you want to throw up. So for a lot of shots on board I have been hand-holding the camera and compensating for the roll.

I started off shooting video for the South African Environmental Observing Network to use. Then I had the idea of putting together a documentary about the research we have been doing here. So in addition to the clips I already have, I wrote a script and we have been shooting the scenes of people explaining their work. Another lesson is how hard it is to follow a script without sounding as if you are lecturing or reading from notes. Spontaneous talk sounds much better. I will need professional help editing the clips, but I think we have some nice material.

I haven't forgotten to take plenty of pictures of Antarctica, South Georgia, the wildlife, the midnight sun, the ship, the helicopters and all that cool stuff to show you. And, unusually for me, lots of pictures of people, too.

Love,

Dad

