

MICHAEL CLARK
PHOTOGRAPHY



NEWSLETTER



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WINTER 2008 NEWSLETTER

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To the end of the world...

THE WORLD MAY BE LARGE BUT OUR COMMUNITY IS QUITE SMALL, NOTES FROM THE ROAD



Please note I am extremely tardy in getting this winter edition of the newsletter out. This spring has been incredibly busy and I hope to get a Spring edition of the newsletter with a full update of my adventures in Patagonia out here in the next month or so.

As I write this I am on a plane to Santiago, Chile making my way down to Patagonia to cover the [Patagonia Expedition Race](#) which starts in Tierra del Fuego near Punta Arenas. Traveling to Patagonia has been on my list of places to visit ever since I started rock climbing and mountaineering fifteen years ago. The tales of Patagonia are legend. I have read countless books detailing fantastic battles with the weather and the steep unforgiving Fitzroy, Cerro Torre and Paine formations that rise like giant teeth into a stark sky. On this trip I'll be visiting the Torres del Paine National Park in Southern Chile and while shooting the Patagonia Expedition Race, exploring some extremely remote and rarely visited spots at the very tip of South America including the Karukinka Nature Preserve which has been off-limits to all but a handful of scientists for most of the last century.

As it turned out on my flight from Albuquerque to Atlanta I happened to be sitting next to David Muench, the world famous landscape photographer who lives in Corrales, NM not too far from Albuquerque. He is on his way to Patagonia as well to teach a landscape workshop in the Fitzroy region. I have long admired his large format landscapes and what do you know I end up sitting right next to him - the only two blokes on the whole plane going to Patagonia and we happen to be sitting right next to each other. It is a small, small world out there.

On that same note, [Joe McNally](#) emailed me last week from the Philippines and told me his new book was coming out - and wow, it hit with a bang! Last time I checked it was up to #10 on the Amazon bestsellers list beating even the latest Harry Potter book. I wrote an extensive [review](#) of that book on my blog which has gotten a fair bit of attention. In this web 2.0 world, Joe was kind enough to thank me on his brand new

blog and even [Scott Kelby](#) made mention of it on his fine blog - Photoshop Insider. I am amazed at the tight community of incredible photographers that work together for each others benefit. And it has just been reinforced this last week or more with all of the blogging activity.

In other web related news, my [website](#) got a complete makeover in January - it was updated with brand new Flash portfolios and a new, cleaner and simpler look. And just to reinforce the small world I have been experiencing, when I first launched the website it had some issues that I was unaware of. Some of the drop down menus were disappearing behind the portfolio images when viewed on Firefox. I immediately checked it out and tried to find a solution but could not. Earlier that week I wrote in my weekly blog post for O'Reilly's [Inside Lightroom](#) about how the portfolios were created using Lightroom and SlideShowPro. A reader from England emailed me the day I found out about the issues with my website and sent me the Flash code needed to fix the problem that same day. It turned out to be a little extra code that had to be pasted into a very dense Flash auxiliary file. I would have never figured it out in a million years. But thanks to the power of the internet and a very kind soul twelve hours later my website was good to go!

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Michael gets 1st Place in Sportsshooter.com Photo Contest

RECENT IMAGE FROM THE BALLOON FIESTA WINS 1ST PLACE IN THE FEATURE CATEGORY



Michael's 1st place image in the October Sportsshooter.com photo contest was shot at the Albuquerque Balloon Fiesta in early October of 2007. The team inflating this balloon was pushing the sides up to make sure it inflated correctly.

In October I finally got the chance to shoot the Albuquerque Balloon Fiesta at sunrise with no clouds. I have gone to the sunrise mass ascension at the Albuquerque Balloon Fiesta five times now before I got a morning that was completely clear. As the old adage goes, patience pays off. A good friend of mine, Leslie Alsheimer, had shot an image a few years ago while I was with her that sparked my imagination -- she shot from inside a hot air balloon and waited for people to walk by outside the balloon thus creating a shadowy figure. I was on the look out for just such a situation the morning I shot this image. As it turned out I got lucky - and I knew what I was looking for. I found a bright balloon that would fill up with light and as it so happened the rest of the balloon team went to one side to push up the balloon as it was being inflated. I couldn't have predicted this would happen and that the figures would look so

worshipful in a million years. This is one of those images that just came together and I was giddy as a school boy when I saw it happen. I must have shot 70 images in a matter of two minutes. No chimping, save to check the histogram, just concentrating on the image.

I was very happy to see that this image won first place in the October Sportsshooter.com clip contest in the Features category. This image was also featured in the last issue of the newsletter and has also been added to my portfolio - both on my website and in my print portfolio. Image specs: This image was shot with a Nikon D2x, ISO 500, a 17-35mm f/2.8 AF-S Nikkor lens and at 1/320th of a second at f/5.6.

RECENT CLIENTS: Adobe, The Patagonia Expedition Race, New Mexico Magazine, Alp Magazine (Italy), Big Swing and O'Reilly Digital Media.

Cover of NM Magazine ON ASSIGNMENT IN THE OJITO WILDERNESS



While on a recent assignment for New Mexico Magazine I was privileged to check out a new wilderness area on the west side of the Jemez Mountains here in New Mexico. It is named the Ojito Wilderness and is home to several hoodoo spires and a grand landscape. Before shooting the assignment the photo editor told me to shoot some verticals just in case they wanted to consider some images for the cover. Covers are always nice and add substantially to the bottom line of any assignment so I was sure to shoot plenty of vertical and horizontal images for the opening spread and possible covers. I was also lucky enough to have a good friend in town at the time, Jessica Kilroy, who agreed to go with me.

Our plan was to shoot late the first evening and then get up early and shoot at first light as well. It was a very relaxed and enjoyable assignment and we wound up getting the cover as well. All in all, it was a very nice way to spend 15 hours or so out in the Wilderness.

ADOBE LIGHTROOM WORKFLOW A COMPLETE WORKFLOW FROM CAPTURE TO OUTPUT BY MICHAEL CLARK



\$24⁹⁵

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Nikon D300: First Impressions

THE NEW BATCH OF NIKONS IS IMPRESSIVE - HERE IS MY TAKE ON THE FORMIDABLE D300



I originally purchased the Nikon D300 to act as a backup to my Nikon D2x for an upcoming assignment in Patagonia. I used to have a Nikon D200 as a back up but sold that camera because it just didn't quite measure up to my D2x. I have to say the D300 in my brief experience far surpasses my D2x in pretty much every aspect. As I haven't had enough time with the camera to write up a complete review this is just an article relaying my first impressions of this sweet new offering from Nikon.

First off, I have to say I am very happy that Nikon did not increase the number of megapixels with the D300 (or D3). 12 MP for my work is more than enough and there have been several areas of improvement that I thought were much more important than an increase in

resolution as I outlined in my "Where do we go from here?" article in the [Fall 2007 Newsletter](#). The Nikon D300 incorporates many of the advancements I covered in that article including faster framing rates at 12 MP, more accurate and reliable autofocus, lower noise at high ISOs, higher bit depth and it is also a lighter camera than the previous equivalent (the D2x).

Now I can hear many of you asking why I didn't just buy a Nikon D3 instead of the D300. At the moment the D3s are pretty hard to find - the demand is very high. Plus, with a major assignment coming up I wanted to take a camera with a proven track record of reliability - and one I know extremely well - my D2x. I haven't heard any horror stories about the D3, in fact just the opposite, it seems to be the best camera Nikon has ever

produced. And it is turning quite a few heads even from diehard Canon aficionados that have been bashing Nikon for years. I will be picking up a D3 here at some point for sure but I am also waiting to see what the D3x is. I have heard many rumors of a 24 MP camera that might be a great compliment to the D300.

Back to the D300. At 12+ megapixels and with a framing rate of 8 frames per second (with the MBD10 grip), the D300 gets us back to the film standard set by my old trusty F5. It is very nice to have 8 fps again, especially for mountain biking and kayaking photography where the 5 fps of my D2x (for full res images) seemed a little lacking. And with incredibly low noise up to 3200 ISO on this new camera it opens up whole new world of photography that we Nikonians have not really had access to before. The autofocus also seems to be much faster and quite a bit more accurate than any other Nikon I have used. It is also much more complex than my D2x so it will take me some time to get used to it and figure out which settings work best for which types of shooting. I'll keep you posted on my experiences in the next newsletter.

One major gripe I have against the D300 is that in 14-bit mode, the framing rate slows to a pathetic 2.5 fps. Nowhere in the Nikon advertisements or specs is this pointed out - only deep in the owners manual does it tell you this little know fact. And while many may not think much of the 14-bit processing option it is one of the huge reasons to upgrade in my opinion. Shooting in 14-bit gives one a lot more flexibility when processing images - especially if the image was accidentally underexposed or needs some radical processing. More bits equals less noise in the shadows and much better color transitions, especially in the highlights. You can bet I'll be shooting in 14-bit mode all the time save for those moments when I really need 8 fps.

Out of curiosity I ran a test to see just how good the D300 performs at high ISO and I have to say that I am shocked how good it is! I found that all the way up to

ISO 3200 the D300 is very usable. Even on HI 1, at 6400 ISO, the D300 is not that bad. Compared to my D2x the D300 at 3200 ISO is the equivalent of my D2x at 800 ISO. See the comparisons on the next page to see what I am talking about. Basically I have no hesitation now setting the ISO as high as I need to go - at least up to 3200 ISO. And if this camera is that good with a DX sensor I can't wait to try out the D3 with its full-frame FX sensor. Another great feature new on the D300 (and D3) is the Auto ISO feature which lets the camera control the ISO just like the aperture or shutter speed which is great for fast shooting where light conditions are changing fast and you want to make sure your shutter speed stays where you set it.

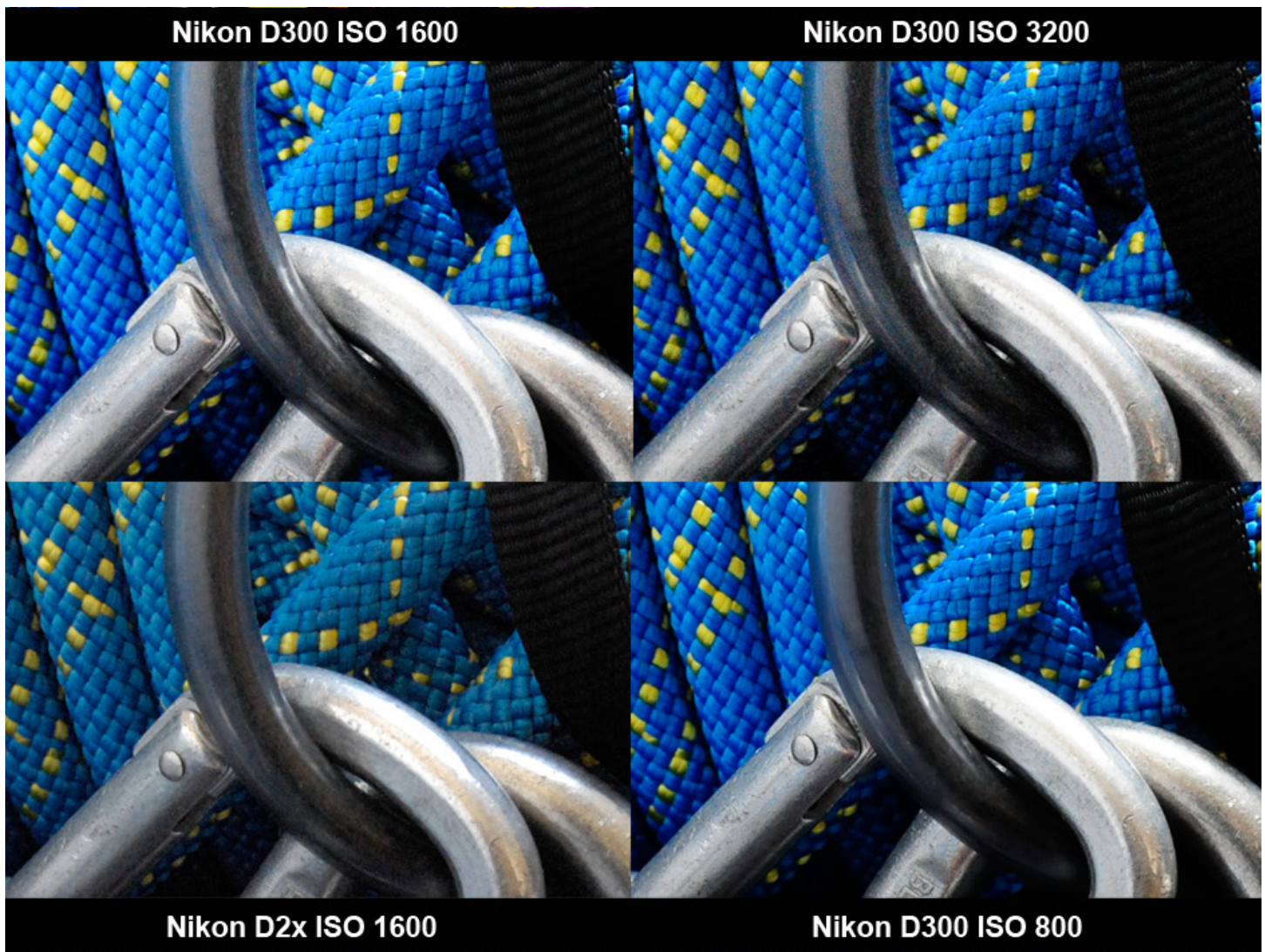
In terms of the noise reduction settings, I have done a test with those settings all the way up to 6400 ISO and find that I prefer the noise reduction in the off or low setting. In general, I leave the noise reduction off completely because I only shoot raw (or very rarely raw + jpeg) and I have more control - and better results - by using a program like Noise Ninja in post process-

ing to reduce any unwanted noise in the image.

The white balance in the D300 seems much better than in my D2x as well. I still use preset custom white balances so the white balance is pretty much dialed in on location but for those occasions where I don't have time to set a custom white balance the auto WB seems vastly superior than any Nikon before it.

The LCD on the back of the camera is also a vast improvement and better than any LCD I have seen on any other DSLR. You can actually check to see if an image is sharp and tell on the back of the camera if your autofocus is off. That is a first. And the D300's LCD is so big and detailed that looking at my D2x's rear LCD is like looking at a postage stamp in comparison. Once you go big it is hard to go back. And I really love the new one click zoom feature Nikon has built into the D300. With this custom function turned on I can





My initial tests regarding noise levels on the D300 show significant improvement over the Nikon D2x. The above samples are images taken at the respective ISO ratings - all with no noise reduction applied in camera or afterwards in the postprocessing. It might be difficult to see in the images above but I find that the D300 is 2-stops ahead of the D2x, meaning that noise levels on the D300 at ISO 3200 are roughly similar to noise levels at ISO 800 on the D2x. And the quality of the noise on the D300 is quite a bit nicer than it is on the Nikon D2x - much more film like and not objectionable at all. In fact, even up to ISO 3200 on the D300 I find the noise levels very low & the image quality is excellent. When printed, images at ISO 3200 will show almost no noise. ISO 800 on the D300 looks like ISO 200 in the D2x and ISO 1600 on the D300 looks like ISO 400 on the D2x. What does all this mean? If the D300 is this good I can hardly wait to see what the D3 can do. We now have a camera that will allow us to use more depth of field and eliminate camera shake in low lighting conditions. I am amazed at the low noise levels in the D300. For this reason alone, my D2x is looking like the poor 2nd cousin to my new D300.

just push on the focus selector (in the middle) once and the image on the LCD zooms to 100% and to the spot where I had the focus point selected.

In fact, in general I find myself reaching for the D300 instead of my D2x these days. It looks like the D2x's days are numbered - at least in my camera bag. And I must say that I really like having a smaller lighter camera body with a removable vertical grip. As an outdoor shooter, this allows me the option to go with a smaller, more compact and portable set up which is always a

bonus. The MBD10 battery grip mounts on the D300 very securely and pretty much feels a lot like my D2x once mounted. And luckily, the Nikon engineers were savvy enough to allow the use of the same EN-EL4 batteries that my D2x uses (and the D3). This is a great feature that allows one to take just one set of batteries for all of our pro caliber cameras.

Ergonomics on the D300 are improved, ever so slightly from the already excellent D2x. I feel that Nikon continues to lead the pack in this category. The focus

selector has come into it's own with the new 51 point autofocus system of the D300 and D3. With that many points to work with it is still quite easy to navigate just where you want the camera to focus. And speaking of the autofocus - it is quite a bit faster and more accurate than my trusty D2x - which was no slouch to begin with. The array of options for autofocus with the D300 is dizzying. We have 9-point, 21-point, 51-point, 51-point 3D and many more options to choose from - of which the 51-Point 3D uses the fantastic Nikon color metering system to track objects based on color! I haven't fully tested the 3D focusing just yet but I will soon here in Patagonia on this next assignment. It sounds fantastical and like some science fiction technology of the future - and from what I have read online by Dave Black and others works extremely well.

At the moment I have the D300 primed to use the 21-point set up in dynamic mode. With this set up you choose the focus point and the camera uses the 21 points around that focus point to achieve the optimum focus. On the few shoots I have done since purchasing the camera this mode has been super reliable. I still find the AF-S lenses to provide the most accurate and fastest autofocus as compared to the non AF-S gear driven lenses but in every respect the D300 (and D3) has a superior autofocus system to the D2x. In fact, it may even rival or beat the long heralded Canon autofocus - which of late has had some severe issues, especially in the Canon 1D Mark III. Again, I'll report back on my findings once I have had a chance to thoroughly put the D300's autofocus to the test.

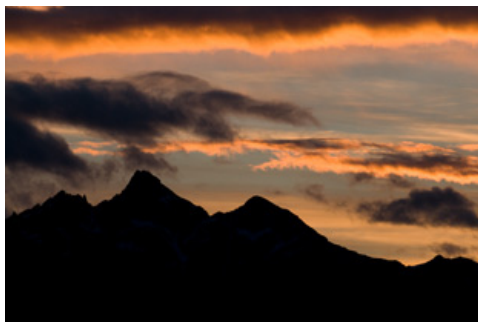
And of course the Nikon speedlights work seamlessly with the D300 just as they did with the D2x. Just like the D200, the D300 has a pop-up flash that can be used on it's own or act as a commander for any number of SB-800 or SB-600 speedlights. I have found the D300 to perform even better than the D200 in commander mode. I have tested the commander mode with an SB-800 at up to 10 meters and even with the flash out of line-of-sight behind a metal grate and it still triggered the flash just fine. The Nikon lighting system truly is amazing and I need to take advantage of it more often with my outdoor and adventure work. I normally just leave the D300 set to rear curtain synch, which works perfect at 1/250th of a second and allows me to automatically go into motion blurs with the rear synch set up. I tend to do a lot of motion blurs with athletes at around 1/10th to 1/25th of a second with the SB-800s.

I have to say again the LCD on the D300, which is the same as that on the D3, is nothing short of astounding. It rivals the amazing LCD on my Epson P2000 for sharpness and as I already said, it is the first LCD on the back of a camera that actually allows one to definitively see if an image is sharp or not. I'm not one to "chimp" a lot but with the new larger LCD it is hard not to. Besides the gorgeous image previews, the menus are also much improved and easier to read with the higher resolution LCD. I really like the new "My Settings" panel that allows you to sequester those features you change often so you don't have to go hunting all over the place to find them. This replaces the "Recent Settings" menus on the D200 and D2x. The menus are otherwise pretty similar to the D2x.

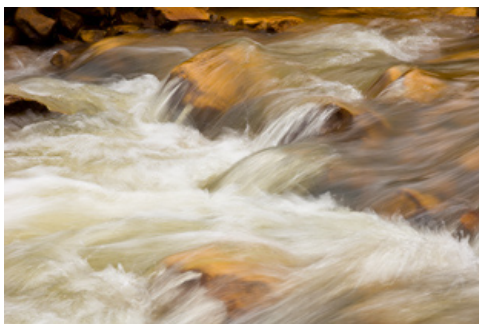
There are a few notable new features like a built in sensor cleaning function, more choices and control of color settings, and a new lossless compression for raw images. The built in sensor cleaning custom function can be set to vibrate the sensor at high frequencies when you turn the camera on and off. When the sensor is being cleaned it makes a faint squeaking noise that had me wondering if I was hearing things when I first heard it. The jury is still out on whether the sensor cleaning mode works or not - so far I am dubious and still use Visible Dust brushes to get the sensor clean. The color choices also seem interesting - I have already seen that the vivid setting, while creating Velvia-like colors, is most of the time a little too saturated for my taste and I shot a ton of Velvia back in the day. No matter what setting you choose for the color, if you shoot raw this can be modified in the post-processing. The new lossless compression mode is excellent - it reduces the file size by about 40% which is slightly less than the lossy raw compression used in the D200 and D2x. Coupled with the fact that the D300 shoots in 14-bit, file sizes are quite a bit larger - close to 16 MB per NEF file. It was a shock to put in my 2 GB CompactFlash card and see that it would only hold approximately 100 images, so I have upgraded to 4 GB cards for the D300. Onward and upward as they say - they have us going and coming in this digital age!

Overall, there are very few things I can find fault with the D300 so far. I'll give a more in-depth review in my next Newsletter after I have put the D300 through it's paces in some harsh conditions. I am very interested to see how well it stands up to some rough handling and bad weather. Until next time, adios!

[PORTFOLIO]



[PORTFOLIO]



A Good Day

by Michael Clark

In any job there are days that are good and some that aren't so good. It is no different as a pro photographer. While in Patagonia last month I had one of those rare days when the stars seem to align and everything comes together. I was in Torres del Paine National Park in southern Chile and we had hiked up to the Chilean camp near the Torres spires. These spires are quite famous in the world of climbing. As a climber I wanted to see them up close and personal.

The plan was to get up at 4 AM and hike two hours up to the lake just below the spires to shoot some sunrise landscape images and if I was lucky I was hoping one of my compadres would hike up with me so I could put a person in the photo and create a more marketable image. I'm not a morning person but I can get motivated when I am in such an incredible location. And I was praying for clear skies so we

"IN THE END WE FIGURED OUT THAT WE HAD HIKE CLOSE TO 36 KILOMETERS OR ROUGHLY 22.4 MILES THAT DAY - ALMOST A MARATHON WITH BIG PACKS ON."

could actually see the spires - that is always an issue in Patagonia. When 4 AM came I was wide awake and ready to roll. I shook a few tents to see if I would have any company and amazingly everyone wanted to go. We hiked at a brisk pace and got there a lot faster than I thought we would. Hence we had some extra time to wait for the sunrise. In fact we had a lot of extra time which was perfect for the image I had in mind.

I asked Lydia McDonald, who was the writer that accompanied me on the trip to cover the Patagonia Expedition Race, if she would step up onto a boulder with a headlamp so we could shoot some images of her in front of the Torres. She was a climber and we had worked together before so she knew the drill. After a few test shots I dialed in the long exposures and her positioning. The images right away were pretty spectacular. It was the start of a very good day and as they say, the early bird gets the worm.

An hour or so later, when the light started to come up it was pretty much a cloudless morning over the Torres. At first the light was subtle and then it popped into full force lighting up the Torres with an amber glow. Thin clouds were streaming over the peaks in long trails which gave them an eerie look. I shot 200+ photos that morning and a series of 35 images that will create a massive panorama.

It was going to be a long day. We had already hiked for four hours or more before 8 AM. And we had a long hike ahead of us around to our next camp on the south side of the Paine range. In the end we figured out that we had hiked close to 36 km or roughly 22.4 miles that day - almost a marathon with big packs on. Towards the end it wasn't much fun but it was still a solid big day in one of the world's most incredible landscapes. I'll be publishing a portfolio of images from the Patagonia Expedition Race and from my other adventures in Patagonia in the next issue of the Newsletter. Stay tuned!



Owen Haggard and Tim Beynart traversing the Ruth Glacier in the Ruth Gorge late at night in Denali National Park, Alaska.
Nikon N90s, Nikkor 24mm f/2.8D, and Fujichrome Velvia Film.