

# THE ICE (AUDIO) MAN COMETH

BRAVING THE COLD FOR AUTHENTIC ARCTIC AURAL INPUT.



BY TY FORD

**E**my Award-winning soundman Dave Ruddick enjoys the niche he's carved out for himself. His background as a river and mountain guide somehow segued into attending film school for production sound. Seventeen years later, he's ended up in Iceland and Greenland for the PBS/Nova program *Extreme Ice*.

"I'm comfortable working in remote mountain locations and being a production sound mixer, so I work on a lot of expedition-type documentaries," Ruddick says. "This last summer, work took me from Alaska to Uganda, Beirut, Lebanon, Greenland and Iceland. While production sound recording is my number-one role, I end up pitching in on everything from cooking to logistics. This past summer, we were a four-person crew: producer, cameraman, and fine art and nature photographer James Balog and myself, in the middle of nowhere on the Greenland ice sheet."

Ruddick says Greenland is drawing a lot of environmental attention these days: "It's changing so fast right now; it's a hotbed for scientists who are collecting environment and weather data. Balog has been working on his project for two years: shooting time-lapse photography and fine-art photography that shows how quickly the glaciers are receding. He's capturing the changing ice conditions in a form he hopes will demonstrate just how fast the icecaps are changing, literally before our eyes."

Ruddick's job is capturing dialogue and natural sound. His Schoeps CMIT mic, Countryman and Sanken lavs, Lectrosonics wireless microphones and Sound Devices mixers and recorders are the main components of his production audio kit. "For ambi, I've got dual Mid/Side and single Mid/Side arrays, mostly with Sennheiser MKH and Schoeps microphones," he reports. "I also use a lot of hydrophones from various manufacturers to capture sound effects. Burying the hydrophones in the snow is a great way to capture crunchy footfalls, and placing them underwater near calving glaciers is a great way to record the cracking and crashing of the shifting ice."

Balog was particularly interested in *moulins*, the part of a glacier's internal hydraulic system through which water enters from the surface. They can be up to 10 meters wide and can go hundreds of meters deep. "Moulins are rarely explored by anyone because of the

dangers involved in getting close, let alone going inside one."

Ruddick says the crew set up very solid ice anchors and ropes to allow Balog and the cameraman, Michael Brown, to rappel inside these rarely visited glacial features. "Water pours in around them from all directions. I have the wireless transmitters buried under their dry suits, and the Countryman B6 mics are pretty waterproof. Once they are over the side, I rely on wireless to capture the moment and maintain communication. If something untoward happens, it could take days to weeks for help. That definitely keeps you on your toes."

Solid gear is essential. Although Ruddick has backups for mics, cables, transmitters and receivers, he records to a Sound Devices 788T 8-track, timecode-enabled hard disk recorder. "Sound Devices mixers and recorders are rugged and reliable, and the preamps sound phenomenal," he attests. "I first used Sound Devices products on a Mt. Everest documentary, and they have been the foundation of my location sound kit ever since. Peace of mind in the middle of nowhere is important."

And because nature has a way of being unpredictable, having eight tracks of audio for eight different mics allows Ruddick to hedge his bet on which one in what location will capture the moment the best. Another post-handly feature of the 788T is that it records multi-track polyWAV files as well as standard WAV files. This allows an 8-channel, timecode-stamped audio file to be imported directly via FireWire to a nonlinear video editing timeline, with each of the tracks locked together but available for individual editing or processing. "I don't always use eight tracks, but I'll get close to it with my double Mid/Side stereo array," Ruddick explains. "The amazing bit for me was that the 788T gave me everything I needed in one small box, from lots of stereo tracks to lots of wireless tracks."

"I didn't have to reconfigure my bag to from job to job, and the small size made it so easy to travel with. It's also very nice to deliver not only dialogue tracks but lots of atmospheric tracks to postproduction so they can create a mix from the actual location without having to re-create sound effects from sound libraries." **DV**

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