



The *Totally Wild* team, Marie Davies (left), Wes Denning and Stephen Harrison with CSIRO's *Scientriffic* editor, Tanya Patrick (right).

# TOTALLY WILD IN ANTARCTICA

A team from Network Ten's flagship children's series, *Totally Wild*, travelled to Antarctica in 2006 as Australian Antarctic Division Arts Fellows. They filmed six special half hour episodes for *Totally Wild*, an episode of *SCOPE* (Network Ten's children's science series), and a documentary.

*Totally Wild* has been entertaining and educating children with stories about adventure, wildlife and the environment for more than 15 years. In that time we've only briefly visited Macquarie Island and flown over Antarctica. So we were very excited when told myself (as producer), Wes Denning (reporter) and Stephen Harrison (camera), had been awarded Antarctic Arts Fellowships and would travel to Antarctica in December 2006. In the lead up to the International Polar Year, it was the perfect opportunity to bring Antarctica to *Totally Wild*. We all felt extremely privileged.

It was immediately all systems go. We had a good idea of what stories we wanted to film, but we knew the list would constantly change, adapt and develop. With laptop and ready-made office space, I treated each day of the 12 day voyage on the *Aurora Australis* like a day in the office, with

a couple of big exceptions: there were icebergs floating past the 'window' and you had to hold your paperwork and cuppa down so they didn't slide off the table!

But five metre swells and 120 km icebergs weren't going to stop us – we had committed to shooting over 30 stories and a documentary. We had only 12 days to shoot on the Antarctic continent and had to fit in around science projects, a change over at Davis, and a resupply at Casey. When told it takes four times as long to do anything in Antarctica we were under no illusions – this was going to be the most challenging *Totally Wild* shoot to date.

We began by filming stories about pre-departure training, ship safety, icebreakers and the voyage. We wanted our viewers to experience the journey with us, with Wes Denning as their guide.

With the success of the movie *Happy Feet*, penguins were going to be a big drawcard for our young audience. However, along with the wildlife, we wanted to show what it's like to work in such a hostile environment, the important science being done, and to focus on the bigger picture of climate change.

During our whirlwind tour of Davis and Casey we discovered how an ice runway is built, what a LIDAR is, and how and why you collect microscopic organisms from a frozen lake. We also followed a moss sampling expedition into the Vestfold Hills, and got up close to Antarctica's inquisitive wildlife. One of my favourite moments was flying to a Weddell seal colony at 10.30pm. Filming them wallowing around as the 'midnight' sun drifted over the horizon was an experience none of the team will forget.

Let's not forget the wildlife beneath the ice. Underwater photography is challenging at the best of times, but try filming in temperatures of  $-1.8^{\circ}\text{C}$ . It took a lot of paperwork and organisation from the team at the Antarctic Division, but I was cleared to snorkel and film when leopard seals were absent. For 45 minutes I filmed cheeky little penguins as they played and caught food all around me. Thanks to my dry suit I was quite toasty for most of the time.

Although we're back in the office now, the journey is far from over. We are reliving our adventures as we edit the stories and put together episodes. The great part is we can 'pause', 'rewind' and 'play' as often as we like.

*SCOPE* aired their Antarctic episode on 5th March 2007 and *Totally Wild's* special episodes broadcast for six weeks from 18th May. It was great to see some of our hard work pay off and to share our experiences with our viewers.

It was an honour to represent *Totally Wild* and huge thanks go to the Antarctic Division, our field guide Vonna Keller, the crew of the *Aurora Australis* and all the people who braved the camera to share their lives, work and experiences with us. Without their support we would never have achieved our goals.

Like previous arts fellows I have grown addicted to all things Antarctic and have just finished reading about Tom Avery's record breaking trek to the South Pole. I probably won't be following in his footsteps, but I will make it back down south one day. For now, I'm content with pressing 'play', 'pause' and 'rewind'.

MARIE DAVIES  
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AAD Arts Fellow, 2006