

Incredible Personal Tour in ‘Antarctica: A Year on Ice’

Submitted by [NickHC](#) [1] on December 5, 2014 - 6:17pm

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Rating: **4.0/5.0**

CHICAGO – Along with your local library’s DVD section and equality, Antarctica remains one of the general world’s greatest oversights, even though it’s the size of a continent (because it is one). Around this time of year, the North Pole gets a huge shoutout for its mass production of brand items, but it’s the South Pole that forever remains in the shadow of everything else in the world, only mentioned in films like Werner Herzog’s 2007 documentary “Encounters at the End of the World,” or that 2009 Kate Beckinsale snow thriller “Whiteout.”

As it turns out from Herzog’s doc and now first-timer Anthony Powell, there is more to Antarctica than a giant rock of frozen water. And where Herzog’s (highly recommended) documentary comes solely from his viewpoint as definitively curious outsider, this week’s release “Antarctica: A Year On Ice” by Powell presents the continent from an insider’s perspective. Powell is a self-proclaimed resident taking beautiful advantage of the advancements in filmmaking technology, using them to capture a grandeur of untarnished glaciers and unique lifestyle.

Directing his first feature film, the charming New Zealander gets real, real quick with a “Hammer Don’t Hurt ‘Em” bluntness in the first four minutes of his film, essentially a trailer for what’s to come next. I’ll let his direct narration explain: “The most common question I get asked is, ‘what’s it like to live down there?’ It’s so hard to answer that in words, and it’s never really been captured on film before ... it’s taken me more than ten years to make this film ... in an effort to capture the true feeling of this vast and important place ... to understand the place properly, you really need to spend one full year, down here on the ice.” Powell fulfills this with a non-narrative that is seemingly episodic; one that is steered by the land’s alternating two seasons (summer and winter) but with plenty of information he wants to share about the land.



‘Antarctica: A Year on Ice’

Photo credit: Music Box Films

Its documentarian extremely well-versed in the character of this forgotten land, “Antarctica: A Year on Ice” has a warming personality to it,

from both its filmmaker and the subjects. Powell fashions some of the world's prettiest vlogs, positioning himself in many wide shots as a humble speck amongst a giant canvas of wintery nature that remains untarnished, sometimes with penguins at his side. Similar to the first-person narration in his opening pitch, his past in the continent is an open book, as providing the worldwide silver-screen previous recordings of snow shenanigans like when he and his wife were blocked from leaving by a tall wall of ice. In one of the documentary's sweetest scenes, Powell shares footage from his wedding video, an occasion of strictly paper flowers and a new father-in-law who could only be there on the phone. Recounted with Powell's charming voiceover, the moment creates a specialness that makes the title location romantic in its strange isolation - only in Antarctica.

Powell's comfortably casual nature with the going-ons of Antarctica shines with his friendly presentation of the continent's cogs - the working-class folk who arrived to the isolated land of research for whatever reason. Sticking to a few often-smiling temporary citizens with their own experiences to tell, he conducts with personal nature even in listing them on a first-name basis only, next to a simple title of what it is they do. Tom works in administration; Keri works retail. Hearing them talk so offhand about their curious location is often fascinating, even if Powell sticks to a generalized surface about being a human being in a tight-knit land where no children or dogs are allowed. With these shiny title cards of regular people, Powell includes audiences in on the inherent friendliness that takes place between the self-proclaimed "boxed in" residents of this land.



'Antarctica: A Year on Ice'

Photo credit: Music Box Films

As his own cinematographer, Powell uses technology and technique to take advantage of the wide shots waiting for him and his camera arsenal. Time lapse is a significant tool used for grandiose effect in particular, capturing freight loads of work in a condensed time, with cameras in place to frame in giant backdrops. And even with his simple crew, it's worth noting that other aesthetics are in strong place as well, with only the sometimes-meandering editing throwing Powell off an otherwise smooth course. A brief shoutout Powell wants to make to the multitude of penguin corpses covering the land is comically crammed into an otherwise general observation of the animals.

There is a giddy beauty in the craftsmanship of "Antarctica: A Year on Ice" beyond its sumptuous plentiful images of unimpeded ice fields, and star-soaked skies. Powell's passion project marks a new achievement for filmmaking, as the act of capturing Earth's grandiosity becomes less separated from the potential of cinematic storytelling in the age of digital cameras. In 1922, Robert J. Flaherty had to orchestrate his real-life spectacle with an entire film crew for his film "Nanook of the North," partly due to the limits of his technology. Now, the art form can instead further boast limitlessness, as "Antarctica: A Year on Ice" presents an unquestionable humanity within a world to be discovered, while exclaiming the incredible experience between a filmmaker and their continent.

"Antarctica: A Year on Ice" opened today at Chicago's Music Box Theater. A documentary directed and filmed by Anthony Powell. Rated "PG"



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