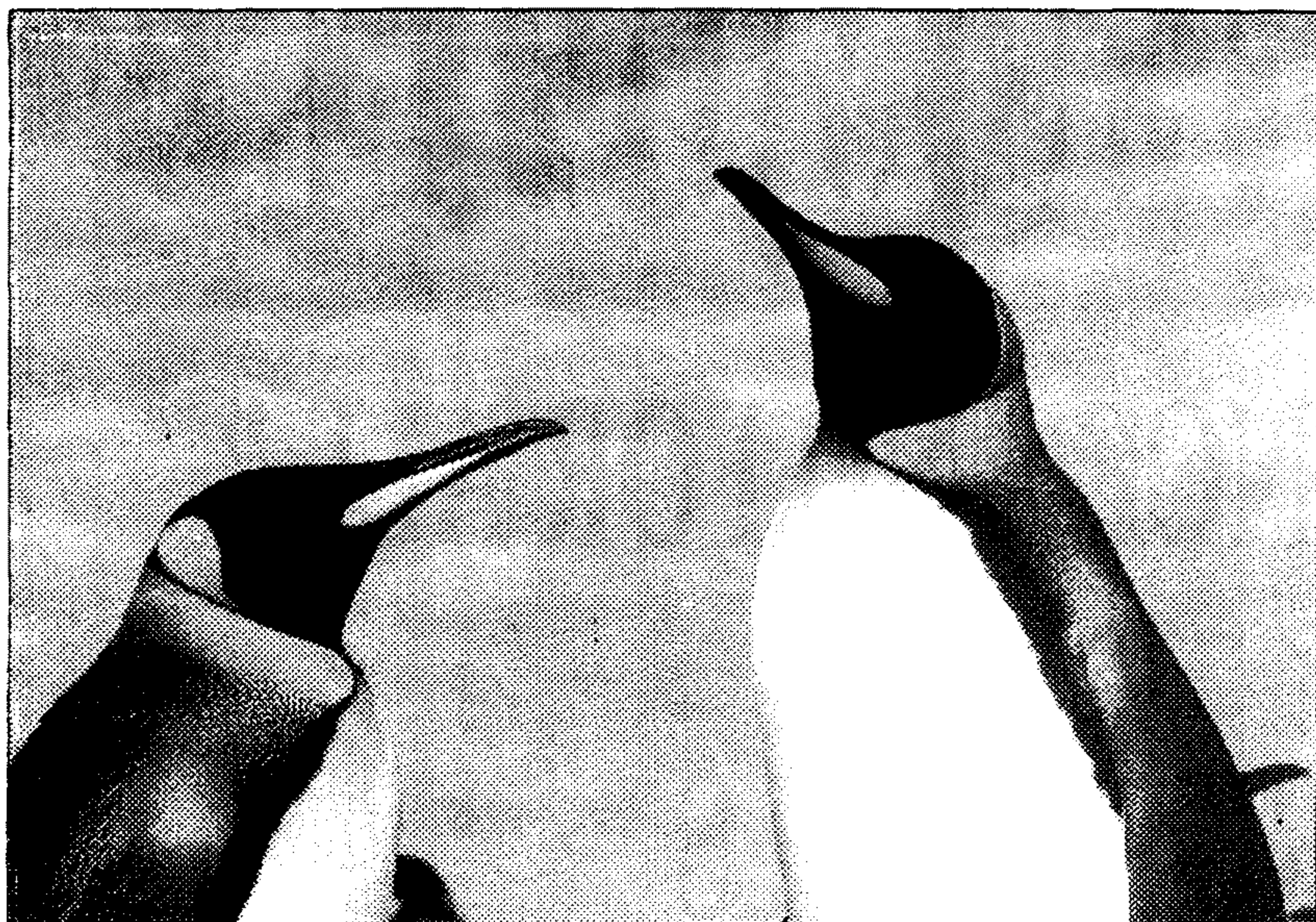


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California Museum of Science and Industry

"Antarctica's" penguins: Not the cartoon figures one imagines.

MOVIE REVIEW

IMAX Captures the Frozen Majesty of 'Antarctica'

By MICHAEL WILMINGTON
SPECIAL TO THE TIMES

Antarctica the continent is, for most of us, the last and most terrifying place on Earth. ["Antarctica" the movie—opening today at the IMAX Theater—is something else again: a breathtaking and unique experience and a real cinematic treasure.

The land we see here—with crystalline clarity on the huge IMAX screen—is a vast, forbidding domain of ice, snow and barren rock, located on the world's southernmost tip. Measuring 5.4 million square miles, wholly uninhabited except for exploratory teams, its temperatures can drop to 100 degrees below zero. It's both the coldest place on Earth, the driest, and paradoxically, the one with the biggest water reserve. If all Antarctica's ice melted, it would comprise 90% of the world's water supply. Its craters can swallow you up, its glaciers crush you, its winds freeze you solid.

Harsh, deadly and desolate the land may be, but the film made there is one of the best in IMAX. Other moviemakers have been to Antarctica—notably, in 1910, Herbert Ponting, the courageous and poetic recorder of Cmdr. Robert Scott's ill-fated expedition in "Thirty Degrees South." But nothing like "Antarctica" has been seen before. The Australian team that made it—director-writer John Weiley and co-cinematographers Tom Cowan and Malcolm Ludgate—had few limitations. The IMAX cameras let them soar above mountain peaks, plunge beneath the ocean's surface into grottoes and caverns of ice, move right into the hearts of glaciers.

What they captured—augmented by maps, computer animation and even a few fragments from "Thirty Degrees South" and Charles Friend's 1948 "Scott of the Antarctic"—is extraordinary and exhilarating. The film makes Antarctica real for us, but also endows it with magical super-realism, otherworldliness. "It is summer, it is midnight and we are traveling south. . . ," says narrator Alex Scott, as a ship's prow crashes through ice floes in the six-month daylight. All expectations take a 180 degree turn.

That's not the only expectation smashed. Antarctica is not really a barren place. Its outer borders teem with life: the penguins, seals, and also, in the ice caverns below, forests of algae, swarms of fish and vast amounts of krill, the shrimp-like species that is the food chain's vital link. Are the penguins really the dopey-looking, shuffling little tuxedo-birds of countless cartoons? Dropping below the waterline we get another shock: Those same

penguins shoot and glide underwater with dazzling speed and athleticism. Even on land, they've perfected a toboggan-like, belly-slide, which zips them beyond the fleetest predator.

"Antarctica" only lasts 43 minutes but its wonders are many: diamond-bright ice sheets; shots of mountain-climbing that, for authentic thrills—beggar anything in "K2," and most of all, those staggering white vistas, stretching off with seemingly infinite range and sweep.

The moviemakers, especially Weiley and Cowan, who collaborated on 1977's "Journey With Women," are storytellers as well as reporters. But they know what the IMAX process excels at: recording and transmitting the visible world. (Because of this, Weiley may have erred in his use of "Scott of the Antarctic." Inattentive viewers may go away convinced that Cmdr. Scott looked just like John Mills, and that a camera, in the blizzard, recorded his dying moments.)

Attendance at the Museum of Science and Industry has suffered since the riots. This premiere of "Antarctica"—accompanied by a large exhibit in the museum—is an attempt to win audiences back. And it deserves to succeed. "Antarctica" (Times-rated: Family) is a rich tribute to adventure and science. At the end, the sobering revelation of the experiments there—that the ozone layer is dangerously depleted—lends greater poignancy to our view of this frozen land: the only place on Earth where men and women of many nations live together peaceably, working for the good of all—out of necessity, since the land is so formidable, it would crush them if they didn't.

'Antarctica'

A Heliograph Film, with the assistance of the Australian Film Commission and the Australian Film Finance Corp., Pty. Ltd., released by the Museum of Science and Industry, Chicago. Director John Weiley. Screenplay by Weiley, Les A. Murray, Michael Parfit. Cinematographers Tom Cowan, Malcolm Ludgate. Additional photography Hans Heldrich. Editor Nicholas Holmes. Computer animation director John C. Donkin. Music Nigel Westlake. Sound Susanne Bartscher. Running time: 43 minutes.

Times-rated: Family.