

Hidden Outback Transcript

17.10.2009

● Wildlife Photography

World renowned wildlife photographer Andy Rouse has long since had a passion for wild things. He has built his reputation on getting close, in fact very close to some of the world's largest and most dangerous animals; in doing so, capturing some of the most exciting and evocative photographic images of wildlife found today.

Andy Rouse: Apologies for my voice I'm suffering... being a bloke I've got quite a bad head cold and sore throat and you know it must be far worse for me because I'm a guy, so a little bit of sympathy from the guys please.

Thank you very much Rebecca, that was a great presentation. It saves me explaining dreaming, which is absolutely fabulous because I've been trying to think of a way of doing that all week, so thank you very much for that! I'm going to talk just a little bit about travelling around Arnhem Land. Tourism Australia came to me and said 'we need you to promote tourism in Australia. Can you help?' I was like, 'yep, ok, I'll give it a go.' I didn't have much time in the Northern Territory but what I found was quite interesting and I want to show you some really exciting pictures and hopefully give you some tips for travelling around there, including some interesting places to go and some interesting times to go as well.

I'm going to start in Arnhem Land because it's the first place I went. I can say that the aboriginal homeland and the art there was fantastic. It was incredible to see pictures like this being painted. The amount of detail in it... it was just an amazing, amazing experience. This guy took me there, Sab Lord, he's a very famous guide in the area. He's a typical bush-tucker guy. So here he is, trying to convince me that eating lilies is quite a good thing. I've never eaten lilies before, and to be honest, when people ask me what they tasted of, they tasted of lily, which wasn't exactly the greatest thing I've ever had. He's an amazing guy. He knows the aboriginal people very, very well. To go into Arnhem Land you have to be a licensed operator, so you can't just tool along in your car and go in, you have to have one of these guys take you in. it's really great because not only does he look after you, but he's a mine of information. He's also respected by everybody locally, so you get a much better experience. I do urge you that if you do go to the Northern Territory you really must go in to Arnhem Land to see the aboriginal culture because it is absolutely incredible. I heard some things earlier on about swimming in waterholes. That's up to you. My personal opinion is, if you're told to get in and the guide gets in before you, then feel free to get into the waterhole. If the guide refuses to get into the waterhole, then don't swim. It's as simple as that because there are an awful lot of crocs. Crocs are everywhere in coastal Northern Territory, and you get very used to it, especially at some of the dams that we mentioned earlier on.

This is Sab in his amazing vehicle that just expands into this... you can see beer there, hardly a great advert...but it just expands into this great camping extravaganza. This is our first night in Kakadu. We'd just got off the plane, driven to Kakadu overnight. It was a really magic experience. A free camp in the National Park on one of these legal campsites, and have Sab prepare this incredible meal under the stars, with the sound of Australian wildlife in the background. I urge any of you, if you do go with any of these guys, to camp. Don't stay in a hotel or a lodge; please camp because you get to hear Australia. Australia is amazing at night. The sound of everything is just incredible. It's just as good as Africa in any way. So I do urge you to camp. We left our flies open - sorry, I shouldn't say that - flies on our tents open, so we had rain coming in overnight when we were inside our tents, and considering we needed a shower it was quite a good thing actually. The art that we saw - this is on Injalak Hill - and it was amazing to go up there with one of these guides, they're really, really so passionate about the stories and the stories that they tell are incredible. He would tell a story twenty minutes long. There wouldn't be anyone that would

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interrupt him. Everyone would just sit and listen to his story. It was magical to sit in this really special place and to actually listen to his story of creation or what all this art meant. The art on the rock uses the shape of the rock when it's painted. So you can see all kinds of shapes and sculptures. Some of it is several thousand years old. Obviously you can't go anywhere near and touch it, but it's still nice to stand back and look. It uses all the contours of the rock and it's built to the edge of the rock here. To have this guy explaining what it means, to me it was just a really, really vital part of the trip. I just liked the way that this art, wherever you went, it followed the contours of the rock. If there was a lizard or a scorpion, it would use a raised piece of the rock to signify the backbone, so it would have some texture and feeling. It was just amazing. They say that each of these paintings has some ownership, in other words the others can't copy it or paint it without permission. So they all have different styles.

The view from the top of Injalak Hill is really, really cool. It's a really, really beautiful place. You can't take pictures of any of the burial sites they have there, obviously, they'll tell you that, so please nobody try. You have to be very respectful, obviously, because this is a sacred site. It's very nice to have lunch up at the top there. It's amazing to look at this incredible landscape all around, really amazing. As I say, the art was something else, and I sat down and watched it being painted. You can see all of these lines, I know Rebecca spoke about this, I'll just show you a video of this guy painting these little lines. Just amazing.

Now, I don't know about you, but I can't paint like that. Look at the straightness of that. Every single line he will create and he won't lift it off until it's exactly ready. He sat there and I watched him for an hour, mesmerised. It's like watching pottery. It's fantastic to watch the skill.

Isn't that amazing? Just to put that into context of what it's actually like.

Now, I wasn't there to do landscapes, so I didn't spend a lot of time in Kakadu National Park. I wish I had have done. What we did see was quite a lot of wildlife along the sides of the road. And of course, those of you who know this is a dingo. I'd never seen a dingo before, and it's quite a weird looking chap, isn't it. Really, really nice colour on him, and you can see he's a male. He was just sitting on the side, watching us. Really, really liked him actually. I know there's easier places to go like Fraser Island and places to see dingoes habituated, but it's quite nice in Kakadu because you see animals that are really, really wild, and come to the car because they want to rather than because they think there's food.

Now, in this area there's an awful lot of saltwater crocodiles and they are really the silent hunters of the Northern Territory. It's a thing I know a lot of tourists like to photograph, so I'm going to spend a bit of time telling you about them and some of the things that you can do. They are fascinating creatures, so please don't be anti-crocodile. I should point out that a lot of people didn't like Steve Irwin, rubber crocodile wrestler, when he was alive. He actually donated millions of pounds to crocodile conservation in Australia and he single-handedly put the issue of crocodile conservation on the map. He deserves an awful lot of respect from everyone for making a huge difference.

Saltwater crocodiles can grow up to six metres in length. So they're big old units. When they kill they kill with jaw pressure, it can be by drowning but normally it's by jaw pressure. Males are much bigger than females. I forget how many kilos they can weigh but it's a lot. You can go on these cruises on the rivers just on the side of Kakadu National Park that are just specifically for crocodiles. There are two kinds of cruises: there's one where you can go up and down and see them, and there's the other one, where they have crocodile feeding, which I'll show you in a minute, and I won't tell you my personal views on that. It's amazing to be right next to these guys. And you can see that this is the closest living thing to a dinosaur, apart from perhaps a land iguana, that we actually have. It's something that hasn't changed over a period of time. It probably hasn't changed over hundreds of thousands of years. It's exactly the same as it always was. And it's designed for one purpose, and one purpose only, and that's as a killing machine. But it doesn't kill every day or every week, it can go months without feeding. It is possibly the laziest animal in the world as well. I used to think lions were the laziest animals in the world because they sleep for

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twenty-three and a half hours a day. The crocodile sleeps for twenty-three hours and fifty-nine minutes a day and fifty-nine seconds, and the other one second it blinks. So, they're quite amazing animals to be close to. It's really nice to see. This is a five metre guy. When you see a five metre crocodile, it's about this wide. Do you want me to hold the pose for the camera there? There you go. So it's kind of about this wide, you know. So you're talking about a really big lump of crocodile sitting there. It's just amazingly beautiful. A lot of people I know are really scared of them, and you're right to be scared of them because they are incredibly dangerous animals. But if you don't go swimming in the water and you don't go leaning over the edge of the billabong with your camera trying to photograph a lily, you're probably going to be quite safe. If you kind of just think of yourself as a wildebeest, as you get in Africa, you think how a wildebeest behaves near a waterhole, well that's how you behave. You're going to be perfectly, perfectly safe, there's nothing to be scared of. But they're really, really interesting animals to get close to and interact with. When I'm photographing them I'm trying to take lots of different abstracts because they've got this lovely skin here. Look at that lovely light on the side of the skin with the eye at the bottom here. These amazing boney ridges that go back here are to protect them, often in a fight situation. Two big males will fight against each other, under water and above the surface, and will try, basically, to take one another's prime territory. So, these are kind of to protect their back. It really does look a bit like a stegosaurus I think, a triceratops and those kind of things. They all have a personality as well. This one's got quite an aggressive face, don't you think? It's quite weird looking. It's got these eyes in there, really nice green colouration. But it's really giving me a look that's going to convince me that I don't want to go a lot closer. When you go along the river there's a lot of them in the side pockets, and that's when you see these guys in the channels like this, they're just in the side pockets of the river, under the shade, and they're just sitting there waiting for something to happen, and just chilling out. This is a female, you can tell by the slightly different colouration of the female. She's got a much more pointed snout, and you can see there she's got this lovely brown colouration. I'm just trying to be a crocodile fan for you because crocodiles are absolutely amazing. They are absolutely incredible things. They also like butterflies, believe it or not. When I'm photographing, I always try to show the animal of any kind in the context of what I believe it is, and the crocodile, you know, everybody wants to see the jaws. Well, I also like to see the softer side of the crocodile, and here the butterfly was landing on its eye and taking off again, and the eye was closing every time it did it and taking off, it was really nice, made no attempt to snap at it, or nothing else, it was just landing on the top of its eye. You know how you let a fly or a moth or something land on your arm, it feels really nice, especially if you've got gorilla arms like I have, it feels quite cool. It was just landing on top of his eye for five minutes, just a really nice, gentle picture I think. I'm sure that eye is looking at it, convinced that eye is actually looking at it. Now, crocodile feeding is controversial to say the least, but most tourists go and do it and that's why I wanted to include it because it's certainly worth a look if you've never seen anything like it before. They're feeding dead animals to the crocodiles, I hasten to add, it's not live crocodile feeding, it's bits of chicken. And they know the crocodiles inside out; they know roughly where they're going to be. The biggest one we saw was just over five metres, jumping. You're in a boat, basically, with Perspex sides. So they'll feed it from the top. You need Perspex sides, because when you lean over you see nothing in the water. The next thing you see is a whole load of teeth, because it's in front of your head. So you need these Perspex sides to stop the crocs coming anywhere near you. You see them leap out of the water. This is a very small one, maybe two and a half metres, a female, you can see the lovely colouration on them. They do absolutely clear the water trying to get out. This is a much bigger one. Photography is very difficult. Some of these ships have two levels so you can go on the upper level and you can obviously get much better pictures because you can be assured of the fact that the croc can't get that high. It's also nice to show the croc in the context of the habitat where it lives. A lot of people just focus on the head, but I think it's nice to show it in the river where it lives. The amazing thing is, one second later that crocodile is under the surface,

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there's not a single ripple, it's six inches under and you've got no idea it's there. I think everybody on their first day in Kakadu or the Northern Territory should go on a crocodile cruise, because it'll teach you what crocodiles are all about and it will teach you that you can't see them in the water. There is no ripple in the water. There is no eye sticking out of the water. There is nothing there, and yet underneath is a five metre crocodile waiting, and it's a very interesting lesson to learn. That's what the throat would be like the second before it bit your head off, basically, so I kind of like that picture, and you can see the other two darlings sitting there underneath it. Not something I would recommend you do, I have to say the crocodile was quite close to snapping my arm off, even though I was holding the camera out at an angle on the stick. It was amazing to watch it come up as well because they come up quite slowly and at the last moment they kick their tail and they're really propelling themselves out of the water. They have an awful lot of power in that tail. And a lot of attitude. When they're snapping at the food it's quite good to get pictures, if you want to get pictures of this, and lots of people do because you're going to Australia for memories, and to be honest, the crocodile is a vital part of this whole belief and culture there, and the whole wildlife scene. Lots of pictures of snapping. If we have budding photographers in the audience, when you're getting these snapping pictures you need to get nice high shutter speed, keep the shutter speed up, keep it quite high, and you'll actually be able to stop the motion of the crocodile as it's snapping at the food. They don't taunt it, they're not going 'come on boy, jump!' they're not doing that. They're very respectful to it, they're just giving it the food, and it's not enough food to keep it alive by itself so they're not dependent on it. But, as I say, you can get some very interesting pictures there. It's quite hellish when you think about it. You can be in the middle of that... But anyway, quite an interesting thing to do. This is a little bit artistic. I created this with a bit of blur. The sun had gone, there was no light, so I used the flash and a slow speed, just to create this feeling of motion of the crocodile erupting out of the water. I was kind of level with it at the back. Just something to do, something different, a little bit more arty, and just to try to create a message that crocodiles are cool as well.

Now, while I was there, I went to a place called Bamurru Plains. It's a company called Wilderness Australia that have set up an African-style series of lodges around Australia. Really, really good company. And the idea of African-style lodges is that you have fine wine, fine food, fine linen, and fine wildlife. And it's called Wilderness Australia. Very good company, and they... Excuse me, sore throat is getting the better of me now. They helped to sponsor my whole trip, really, because I really wanted to go and see the wetlands. The wetlands are just incredible, and I hope you're going to enjoy seeing this. They're the home of the magpie geese. This is the object sitting on a branch in front of you, it's a magpie goose. Best shown in silhouette, in my opinion, the magpie goose. Not the most beautiful goose in the entire world, it's fair to say, though I'll probably have the Freedom for Free Expression of Goose on the phone to me tomorrow or something. They're probably not the most attractive geese in the world, but in silhouette they're fantastic. To see them on the wetland, I have to say, is an incredible experience, and it does rival the Everglades. In fact, in my opinion, it's far better than the Everglades for seeing this kind of wildlife. So let's have a look at Bamurru. It's a mixture of swamp, savannah and forest. You go around in several different forms of transport, one of which is a four-wheel drive vehicle, just like Africa, so you go on a game drive. You can go on horse-back, you can go riding, so it's a working buffalo station, but you've got to be careful wherever you go because you've got the buffalo and they can be quite mean. But the attraction for me is that you can go on the wetlands in an airboat, you know, like in the Everglades with the great big things at the back, which is a really, really exciting thing to do. You can see in the morning here it's a really, really gorgeous place to be. The water is only ever this deep, but you can't go swimming in it because there are things in there with teeth that are waiting to greet you. It has a beautiful variety of habitats. It has lots of these Paperbark forests around, and Paperbark forests are very important to the aboriginal culture. So this Paperbark is beautiful but very practical too. And there's lots of areas you can go into with the airboat that you could never go into with any

other kind of vehicle or certainly on foot in any way, shape or form. There's the airboat going along at full speed. It takes four or six people. We had a four, there was another six. A lot of the criticism with airboats is that they scare wildlife off, and yeah they do kind of make birds take off, but the guides are very, very respectful. The airboats are not allowed on when the geese are breeding, so when the eggs are down and the geese are on their nests airboats are not on Bamurru at all, okay, so they're only on after that period ends. But it is really, really great fun to be on them in the morning, and it does give you a tremendous sense of the wilderness and it does allow you to get around from one area to the next. So I'll show you what it's like to be on board an airboat.

Excuse my awful video cutting, by the way. So you can see we're just out in the morning going towards one of the Paperbarks. Not going along that fast. Notice all the grasshoppers jumping in, look. You absolutely get covered in grasshoppers. You can see that you're getting covered in grasshoppers all the time, which is a great thing. Bit of a bump there. Now you can hear the engine start to conk out as we're trying to stop it. It will eventually stop. And you glide amongst these amazing forests. And you don't actually use the engine, you use a paddle, and you paddle the airboats around. And this is going through the lily pads on the way out. We said earlier on about the lily pads and the natural lilies, it is astoundingly beautiful and my video, unfortunately, fails to do any justice to it whatsoever.

That's the magpie goose. Now, as I said, please don't write to me for Friends of the Magpie Goose Incorporated Limited. Not the most stunningly beautiful goose in the world, but I'm not the most stunningly beautiful wildlife photographer in the world so I'll give it a bit of credit there. It's a really interesting thing to see, because to see the wetlands and to see the animal at home in its natural habitat is a really special thing. And a lot of people think Australia, all it has is a few dingoes and a few kangaroos. And it doesn't. At Bamurru Plains alone there are 236 bird species, ranging from the great big wedge-tailed eagles to the smallest kind of darter hummingbird. As well as that, lots of mammals, tremendous amount of marine and aquatic life as well.

So these kind of birds taking off, you basically have to go out as much as you can to get one picture like this because you've got no idea which one's going to take off towards you or away from you, or even hit you in the face. But if you get lucky enough you get a group. I took this in colour but converted it to black and white because I thought it was better. It's really nice when you get a group of them just erupting off because they'll erupt off right over the top of your airboat and all the way over onto the horizon and it's a really nice thing. And yes, it does rain green rain, if you know what I mean, at the time, so it's best to always wear a hat. There you are, there's an adult in the foreground here and a youngster in the background. That would be last year's youngster because it's not in full mature plumage yet. And they have this amazing coloured feathers as well, really, really luminescent and interesting. We were lucky enough to have a full moon. I managed to persuade the airboat driver to come out before dawn. Now, you'd never do this in your right mind, because it's a swamp. And what do you have in swamps? More insects than you'd know in your entire life. In the Everglades I wear an insect suit, and it's exactly the same here. You have a lot of mozzies, but you have really good bug spray that keeps them away from you. So we went out first thing in the morning, very quietly, parked ourselves by a couple of the trees where we knew the geese would come to sit and roost, switched the engines off, and just waited. And, of course, it's [claps] every five minutes, and you get used to it after a while and they're only there for about ten or fifteen minutes before they all go away. I was really lucky to get the goose actually sitting right on the branch behind the moon-set. That was a really beautiful thing, to see the moon-set actually there. Just a spectacular day.

Now, my landscapes don't really do any justice to the beauty of the Paperbark forest because it was something that I'd really... it's one thing to see the geese, but when we went into the Paperbarks, it was really silent and quiet and you never knew what you were going to see around every corner. You might see the flash of a kingfisher, or you might see the splash of a croc going in, maybe some frogs, all this really cool stuff. You might come across a dingo. You've got no idea

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what you're going to see. You're gliding very, very gently through it all. Here you can see our hunk of a guide, and yes ladies, the guides at Bamurru are selected for their hunk-ability. Lads don't worry, there are plenty of lasses there too. Very nice young ladies. They're really great people. We would get the paddles out and we would paddle the airboat through these places so that we wouldn't disturb any of the wildlife or the birds or anything else. It's a very nice experience to be there, I have to say, we would spend two or three hours in each one and wouldn't rush at all. I've no idea what it is, I haven't even researched it because I only processed it two days ago. The thing I like about this wetland area, the Paperbarks, is that it's completely full of these really tiny frogs. There were hundreds of them! When we went in they'd all be jumping and when you sit down and just are very careful and watch, you can see they're all sitting on lily pads. It's a really brilliant thing to watch. You can't lean over the side because you don't know who's underneath the water, you have to get used to this, but you can watch them from afar (probably from here to the monitor) and it's quite easy then to get some pretty good pictures. They were really, really, really beautiful frogs as you can see.

We managed to hitchhike a stick insect as well. Here he's cleaning the second of his main sensory glands, if you like, and this actually hitchhiked on my hat! We picked him up as we were going through all the grass and he stayed on with us the whole time for about three hours. We were very protective about him. We put him underneath when we were going along so he wouldn't get chucked off, and he was a really, really cool guy. Let him crawl up all over us. Things like this were really great to me because I wasn't expecting to be so surprised by Bamurru and the kind of wildlife it has.

Then I started taking pictures of seed heads. This is a lily head. I'm Andy Rouse, I don't do pictures in macro! I'll be showing you pictures in a minute of a flower! *laughter* God, I've got to stop doing this. It was just such a beautiful place that even I, who hates flower photography just because I'm awful at it, I just wanted to take these pictures because it was amazing to see these kind of lilies in this beautiful environment with no manmade sounds whatsoever. Absolutely nothing. That's the thing you learn about Arnhem Land and this whole area, is that it's devoid of human sound. It's real, pure nature and that's something that I find very special. And of course, what you do in the morning is have a very nice cup of coffee and a breakfast, so it's a very nice thing to do, you know, it's a nice couple of days to spend at Bamurru. If you're going to go on this northern circuit and see the art, some of the walks you've seen earlier on, a couple of days at Bamurru is a really, really wonderful thing.

Of course, there's not only that, the Paperbark forests are really beautiful and at sunset they take on this wonderful red glow and I took this as a straight picture, which I thought was pretty boring, so I thought I'd be a bit of a Monet. So I did a bit of blur. For the photographers amongst you, I'll tell you the technical way I did it. I moved the camera up and down. Right? That's basically it, to get this kind of effect of the Paperbarks at sunset. I think it's a bit Monet-esque, and it's quite nice. The forests were just amazing and they really would come alive.

Australians think that marsupials are boring. They think that wallabies are rubbish. They're just rubbish kangaroos. I'm like, 'you're mad!' We would love to have wallabies, red kangaroos running around everywhere, wouldn't we? They're so cool to watch. They're so cute, and at Bamurru there's loads of them. You can see them from the vehicles. There's tonnes of them outside where you actually stay. They're just so cute, they're adorable. I was desperate to get a joey the whole trip. There's lots of parks in Australia where you can go and get captive kangaroos with joeys hanging out. I'm not interested in that, I want to get the wild jobs. I want to get the real ones where it's a privilege to be there. These guys, there were loads of them with joeys, and they hopped right up to the vehicle to have a look. I like the expression on that one's face – I think it's a bit big to be in the pouch! I think the mother's like, 'ok, mate, I'm going to get rid of you in a minute!' But how cute is that? It really, really is. I've always been this kind of guy, I want to see the red kangaroo because it's the biggest and the meanest and the best, but do you know what? I really enjoyed

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in the water. It's perfectly great. If you start to go later and later and later, all the wetlands begin to dry out and they'll start taking a four-by-four drive out to the wetlands. I quite liked the airboats, I think it's something really interesting and really unique. As I say, very, very good dining. One guy was there and he did it in a helicopter. He'd hired a helicopter for thirty days and it flew him each day to a different place. I wanted to be his bag carrier but he wouldn't allow me. She was much more beautiful than I was, unfortunately. There's a really interesting northern circuit when you go to Bamurru and it's only about four hours outside of Darwin. Darwin is a really interesting place to go, a really lively funky place. If you've got to stay overnight don't worry about it, because if you stay in a hotel it's right on the main strip. There's a cinema, there are restaurants, it's a really lively place. Travel tips, well first of all, take swimming trunks. Take bug spray. I'm not underselling it, I would say the same if you went to Africa and I would say the same if you went to the Everglades. Do take bug spray. If you're out first thing in the wetlands you can get a little bit bitten. Obviously long sleeves and not wearing shorts and sandals which means you're not going to get bitten, and you know, the average Britisher abroad... you don't want to see pink legs everywhere. So, wear long trousers when you go out and you'll be alright.

Also, don't rush it. Don't spend one day here, one day here, because I've got to get to Sydney, or I've got to go and see Ayers Rock. Give the Northern Territory some time. It needs you to give it time. You must give it a week, ten days. There's so much to do there, it's such an incredible place. Please give it time before you go somewhere else, don't rush it. Any questions I'll take.

Question: How did you manage with all your camera equipment, your PC and all the rest and the luggage restrictions?

Andy Rouse: PC? Mac!

laughter

Question: Sorry.

Andy Rouse: Well, I have a specially designed rucksack that gets all my big lenses on, but all you have to do is get it within size and you have to make sure... there's no BAA people in here are there? There's no one working for the airport in here, is there? What you do sir, you book valet parking at the airport. You park your car in the short term, put your hand baggage in it, you go and check in with all your big baggage (don't tell them I told you this, it's between us), they say, 'what have you got sir?' 'I've got an iPod.' Haha! They say, 'ok, sir, I'll weigh that. It weighs two ounces.' You go back to your car with your hand baggage in it; you drive it round to valet parking at the front of the terminal, 'thank you sir, here's your keys,' and you can carry your stuff through. It's at check-in where they're going to weigh it, and they're going to hassle you, and I guarantee you it's getting harder on every single airline. Even though I was going with Tourism Australia I had major problems at some airports, but I did have a lot. I had 20kgs of camera gear. But, you know, I want to take it on. You can't take it and put it in the hold. Most normal camera gear, the thing about Bamarru is that you don't need big lenses. The geese are quite close, and the thing about taking all the art is you don't need big lenses for this. The crocs are right here, you don't need big lenses for a hide. The thing about Australia is that you don't need to take massive great lenses with you.

Question: Which cameras are you using?

Andy Rouse: Nikon D3, D3X, and for an underwater housing, because I also went to Ningaloo Reef I used D700, and a little point and shoot camera. These little videos that I got, when you've



taken a picture with a camera, you don't remember what you've just done. When you take a video, you remember. It's important to have video because it's a much better memory of what you've done.

Thank you, anyway. I hope that was alright.