

MARCH 10, 1988

We are 10 days into the trip on this day and are docked in the Golfo Nuevo at Puerto Madryn in Patagonia. We have spent the big part of the docking time on a tour inland, across a desert and back to the Atlantic shore to see a big colony of penguins at a place called Punto Tombo.

For three hours we hung onto the bus seats over akalai washes and along greasewood lands fenced into indifferent boundaries that make up a vast, desolate sheep range. Far, far off on the rolling hills, windmills were silhouetted on a horizon that reflects the starkness and dryness of the terrain. Big rheas, South American ostriches, bounded up, leading their young in fast getaways; gentle guanacos watched undisturbed as we passed along.

At the penguin colony, the scrubby brush and caliche colored soil continued right up to a shore of jagged, red igneous rocks. Some 4000 or so penguins come to Punto Tombo to make burrows like badgers' dens to hatch their young. Looking like mechanical toys, they waddle as far as half a mile or more inland and make the area resemble a prairie dog town back home.

Nature photographers can't find a better subject. Though this variety, the Magellanic penguin, is sharp beaked and short tempered, he ambles by us as casually as if we were; another bird. His vision is peripheral. When he is blocked by man, he tilts his head and gives off a charming quizzical impression.

In this short episode, I am showing exceptional talent at mug-shooting penguins. After the passengers on my bus had settled down for the return trip, I offered them the two rolls I'd just shot for \$1250 U.S. currency for immediate delivery. At 36 exposures to the roll that was only a tad over 17 bucks a frame. One award winning shot was all it would have taken to clear the deal, but I guess they must have been too tired to recognize a chance to make so much easy money.

On the way back to the ship, the bus stopped by a car rental outfit in a small town called Trelew. There, leaning over against a chrome chair, was my old suitcase. It'd been 10 days since we'd parted in the San Angelo terminal. Nothing had been taken by the custom officials or the various baggage handlers of three different countries and three airlines. I imagine that when the inspectors started searching my stuff they probably figured from the colors and styles that I was a missionary sent down here to convert the Indians and were ashamed to pilfer from a man of the cloth.

Tonight I'm going to launch a social comeback. I sure am getting tired of spending my evenings down below, talking to the sailors, and using the rest of the time throwing potato chips to the gulls.