



**ON SITE** NBC News' Kerry Sanders took a long journey to the North Pole.

SEJ AWARDS: FINALIST

# SANDERS ON TOP OF THE WORLD

## Sun Never Set on NBC News Reporter's Global Warming Trip

By Jarre Fees

Special to TelevisionWeek

When NBC News correspondent Kerry Sanders set out to do a piece on global warming, he went to the top of the world. Mr. Sanders said the news team wanted to do the story "from the North Pole—ground zero, which is ice on the ocean—rather than from Greenland, which is ice on land."

The result, "Ice Melt From the North Pole," is one of three finalists for the Society of Environmental Journalists Award for Reporting on the Environment in the television category.

To get the story, Mr. Sanders and his cameraman, Dmitri Solvyov, traveled from Miami to New York and then to Helsinki, Finland, and finally to Murmansk, Russia, a city of 700,000 north of the Arctic Circle.

Once they left Russia, it took 15 days to get to the North Pole aboard a nuclear-powered icebreaker.

"This wasn't so much a story to answer questions about whether [the climate change] is man-made," Mr. Sanders said. "It was an opportunity to explore a crisis facing Mother Earth. So as much as it's talked about, we thought it was better to get there and physically stand on the North Pole. We wanted to take the viewers to the location that, frankly, nobody else has taken them."

The news crew traveled from Murmansk to the North Pole with Quark Expeditions. "We got on board the ship (the icebreaker Yamal) and found out the sun never sets—and also that we weren't

allowed to take any pictures.

"Murmansk is the home of a Russian nuclear fleet," Mr. Sanders said, "but after a fair amount of negotiating, we found out how to get our pictures and get the story under way."

Once the Yamal hit the ocean ice, he said, "There was a constant groan of cutting ice. We had an attentive crew—whenever they saw a polar bear or a walrus, they would let us know. Dmitri, a native Russian, would shoot the pictures."

The NBC crew had hoped to contact a Russian research vessel that was already collecting data near the Pole, but "radio communications are limited, and satellite communication is almost impossible," Mr. Sanders said. After days of traveling, "We finally got to where we could see the research vessel, and the Russian crew decided they were willing to get us there. There was a helicopter on board, and they flew us over."

Once the decision was made to fly to the research ship, the adventure took a darkly comic turn.

It was remarkably warm by North Pole standards, Mr. Sanders said, "mid-20s to 32 degrees Fahrenheit, and we piled out of the helicopter onto the ice, and my foot went right through the ice down into sludge. We had 500 to 1,000 yards to go in this melting ice in order to reach the research ship. There was rain and sleet, and it was brutal on the equipment. The Russian security team was standing there with their guns, ready to shoot a polar bear if it came out of the water, which was pouring into my boots."

The icebreaker had been unable to radio the research vessel, so no one knew they were coming. "They hadn't

seen anyone for three months," Mr. Sanders said, "so they were happy to see us. We got on board the vessel and the cameraman backed up one step and fell down a hole in the boat. He was thankfully OK. And they had a dog, an Alaskan husky that was trained to bark to warn them of polar bears, but it was so excited it ran around barking like mad because of all the people."

The research vessel contained a variety of ice experts, geologists and scientists from Russia, Scotland, New Zealand and the U.S., and "it was complete chaos."

After spending just one hour aboard the vessel, with barely any time to speak to the scientists, the helicopter crew announced it was time to go. So the news crew trudged back to the helicopter and returned to the icebreaker, which took them on to the North Pole.

The ice itself turned out to be the story Mr. Sanders was not expecting. "It turned out to be the greatest ice melt on record," he said. Graphics furnished by NASA helped explain satellite photos, and, "You could see the ice disappearing" on the visuals. "It was scientific data people could understand, showing how ice reflects the sun, and how water absorbs the sun's rays when the ice is gone."

The icebreaker spent two days at the North Pole, Mr. Sanders said, adding that he had no intention of doing a political story on global warming. He praised NBC's commitment to environmental reporting, but said he is "not doing advocacy journalism. I want to give the facts as we know them. But so many times conclusions are drawn before people have the facts." ■

SEJ AWARDS: FINALIST

# CRISIS IN INDIA

## Report by New Delhi Station Exposes Illegal Mining Activities

By Jarre Fees

Special to TelevisionWeek

"Mined to Death," Sidharth Pandey's investigation into three sites being illegally mined in India, is one of three television finalists for the SEJ's Award for Reporting on the Environment.

Mr. Pandey, an investigative reporter for New Delhi's NDTV 24x7, a live English-language station covering national and global news, was on his way to another assignment when his driver mentioned that local contractors were mining in New Delhi at night.

Mining of raw material such as sand and stone is illegal in the Indian state of Delhi, Mr. Pandey said, but with new construction flourishing, the state is "racing to modernize at the cost of our own environment."

There's a 5-kilometer forest buffer zone around Delhi, Mr. Pandey said, which is part of the Aravalli mountain range. "The Aravallis are one of the oldest mountain ranges in the world," he said, "and the trees take double time to grow because it's a hard, rocky area."

When the summer winds blow into Delhi from the desert, that buffer zone of forest blocks the wind and protects the area. The trees also help to control pollution, he said.

When contractors mine for sand to make concrete, they cut down trees to get to it. Even if trees are not cut down first, Mr. Pandey said, when contractors mine within the forest, "they go so deep the trees are killed [anyway]."

The Indian government has declared the area off-limits to mining, Mr. Pandey said, "but there's a big building boom. And the 2010 Commonwealth Games are coming to Delhi, and that means construction for that as well."

Contracts go to the lowest bidder, Mr. Pandey said, but "no one asks you where you're getting your sand" for building. "To keep your profits high," he said, "you might do your sourcing from the gray market."

When Mr. Pandey mentioned to friends in the neighboring state of Haryana that he had found out illegal mining was going on in Delhi, "They said, 'It's happening here as well. We told the government, but they're not taking any action. Some local people complained, and they've been attacked by contractors.'"

Mr. Pandey and his cameraman, Deepak Verma, decided to travel to the Kalesar National Forest in Haryana to film the illegal mining operation.

The area, part of the outer Himalayas, is composed primarily



**WHISTLE BLOWER** Sidharth Pandey's investigation for NDTV 24x7 led to arrests.

of low sandstone and rocky hills. "They go in, and their bulldozers scoop out tons of material. You can see huge pits dug out of the river bed—all of this is protected land—and there aren't any real roads through the forest to get there."

After two nights of secretly filming the clandestine mining operation, Mr. Pandey said he went to the nearby office of the Forest Department and told them he had discovered there was illegal mining going on in the area.

"The [Forest Department official] said there used to be illegal mining in the area, but that it had 'completely been stopped, it was absolutely illegal, people could go to jail for it.'"

When they aired that clip, Mr. Pandey said, "On the left side of the screen, the guy is speaking, saying, 'It hasn't happened for years,' and on the right side we're showing what we just shot the night before, with the sand being taken out."

But the third site, in the Indian state of Rajasthan, revealed "the most brazen" of all the illegal mining operations, Mr. Pandey said. "[The contractors] had a couple of hundred trucks there in broad daylight, and we had to [figure out] how these guys got away with it."

In the end, Mr. Pandey said, he pretended to be a contractor himself. "I went to these guys and said, 'I need to get [my materials delivered] cheap and on time. How do you do it?'"

The contractor subsequently "showed us the entire mining site," Mr. Pandey said, allowing Mr. Verma to film the whole operation.

"At that particular site," Mr. Pandey said, "people got arrested" after the report aired on NDTV. Sonia Gandhi, leader of India's ruling coalition, demanded to know why and how the illegal mining had been happening under the noses of government officials, and the Supreme Court of India asked for all footage shot for the expose and has taken steps to shut down the mining operations. ■

## SEJ AWARDS: FINALIST

## THE 'HOT' TOPIC

Filmmaker Peter Bull's Hour for 'Frontline'  
Traces the Political History of Climate Change

By Allison J. Waldman  
Special to TelevisionWeek

Among the SEJ Awards for Reporting on the Environment being given out at this week's conference is one in the category of outstanding beat/in-depth reporting in television. Filmmaker Peter Bull is one of three finalists in the category for his "Frontline" piece "Hot Politics," about the political history of climate change.

Mr. Bull came up with the idea for "Hot Politics" during his years at ABC News and PBS' "Now With Bill Moyers." "I was a senior producer and worked with outside journalists who did pieces for the show, but my real love is making films, not managing a broadcast, and I was excited to go back and produce my own films and the first thing I did was go to the Center for Investigative Reporting in 2003," said Mr. Bull.

"Global warming was the topic of our times and it was still not recognized in the media at that time. I approached 'Frontline,' which has a long-term relationship with the Center for Investigative Reporting, and they went for it. The focus of the hour became the politics of global warming. It tries to explain why our nation has taken so long to recognize this as a real problem."

Mr. Bull's program brings historical perspective to perhaps the most important environmental story of the century thus far, global warming. "Hot Politics" goes back in time to look at the presidential administrations of George H.W. Bush, Bill Clinton and George W. Bush. "Why have we not seemed to have the political will to go along with the Kyoto Treaty and keep up with the rest of the world in terms of responsibility when it comes to climate change?" Mr. Bull asked.

Much as the tobacco industry fought the scientist who reported the connection between smoking and cancer, the fossil fuel industry did the same with global warming. "They were protecting their assets. They went all out to raise questions, and the media was the huge culprit in this," said Mr. Bull. "At ABC News I pitched stories about global warming in the mid-'80s and they wouldn't buy it. When they did do a story on it, they would bend over backward to talk to the skeptics. Those skeptics represented only 1% of the scientific community, but received 50% of the airtime."

As an environmental journalist, Mr. Bull appreciates the assistance provided by SEJ and advises others to use the association's resources.

"The first thing is to get educated. You have to understand the science inside out, because you can't confront people who are defending their interests and know if they're

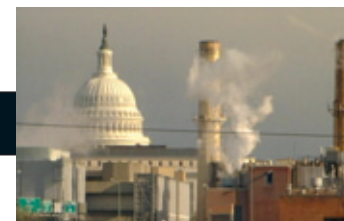
not telling unless you are armed with the best possible information," he said. "I have always found as a journalist that I need to be completely over-prepared. You have to become an expert in the field; that's a given in environmen-

tal journalism. Also, don't take any information on the surface. The trail of influences and interests that are trying to be defended is complex, especially in areas where the science is complicated and the industrial links are very subtle."

Mr. Bull plans to premiere a new film during the SEJ Conference: "Blackout," a 90-minute theatrical documentary on coal.

"It's an extension of the story in 'Hot Politics,'" he said. "Coal is the elephant in the room for climate change and energy issues. Coal is the fossil fuel that emits the most carbon dioxide. It also provides 50% of our nation's electricity. We cannot keep burning coal or global warming will kill us.

"All these ads that are playing for clean coal are centered on getting off foreign oil, and we have this resource here at home—but it's not clean and it has nothing to do with your car. Clean coal is pandering to the sense that America wants to be energy independent. But if you dig under the surface, coal has nothing to do with energy independence. It



## Hot Politics

LOOKING BACK "Hot Politics" puts the issue of global warming into historical perspective.

has everything to do with electricity. The coal industry is continuing to say that if we don't burn more coal and build more coal plants, the lights are going to go out. They won't be able to meet the electrical demand without coal. Environmentalists want to shut down coal immediately." ■



## Society of Environmental Journalists

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