



The  
Moment

## 6:04 pm • Los Glaciares National Park • El Calafate, Argentina

Photographs by John Huba / Text by Hillary Richard / November 1, 2024 

"I've seen some glaciers before, but this was really quintessential. Being on the actual glacier for five or six hours was amazing," recalls photographer John Huba of his visit to [Los Glaciares National Park](#) in Argentina's Patagonia, which he was shooting for a magazine assignment. But the spectacular landscape wasn't the primary reason the sought-after [feature photographer and filmmaker](#) will never forget this trip — or this shot.

Huba and his assistant had been on a guided trek on the Perito Moreno Glacier — famous for its massive size and for the cracks, crevasses, and icebergs formed by its steady advance. They crunched across the icy blue glacier, marveling at its natural ice formations and avoiding its deep fissures. Toward the end of the trek, his assistant (whose name we're tactfully withholding, for reasons that are about to become clear) had a sudden, horrible realization: Somewhere along the way, in a vast field of homogeneously craggy ice, he had dropped the Epson P-3000, a portable hard drive they were using to back up images. (This was 2008, remember, and Huba was traveling without a computer.)

"I'm thinking, You know, it's a piece of equipment, it's cool, we'll get by. So we kept walking," recalls Huba. "Then later he realized that it wasn't just that the hard drive was gone, but the memory card was still inside it. The whole day's images were on that card! My heart sank. My stomach sank. It's every photographer's worst nightmare, and why digital was such a tricky thing for us film guys."

After confirming several times that the entire day's work was truly, irretrievably gone — and concluding that the failing daylight and their tight schedule meant a redo wasn't an option — Huba had no choice but to shake it off, make the best of it, and continue shooting on a fresh memory card. ("But I obviously wanted to

throw him in the crevasse at that point.”)

Which brings us to the moment pictured above: Throughout the trek, Huba had kept an eye on a tour group an hour or two behind them, occasionally snapping a photo of them to give the epic glacial scenery a sense of scale. Later, in the parking lot, as Huba and his assistant were removing their crampons, one of the men from the group walked up to them.

“He goes, ‘Hey, did you guys drop this?’ My assistant and I looked at each other like, Oh. My. God.” In the stranger’s hand: Huba’s palm-size black-and-silver hard drive, none the worse for wear, with the memory card — and a day’s worth of work — still inserted.

It was, Huba insists, a one-in-a-million miracle. “There are no trails on the glacier and we were all going random directions for hours. I’m not a religious person, but I think I may have broken out a St. Anthony’s prayer on that one,” he says.

Later, when Huba looked over the photos from the day, one in particular stood out: a line of trekkers in their insulated gear, one man bent over as if to pick something up off the ground. Unknowingly, Huba had captured the very instant the stranger saved the day.

“It’s fun to see what would’ve been lost to the world if I’d never gotten these back,” he says today, while flipping through his photo archives on his computer ([here’s a sampling](#)). “It’s a good inside joke — though it almost wasn’t funny at all.”

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