For Jerry Kobalenko, the Arctic inspired a compelling career in photography.
Jerry Kobalenko’s professional photography career began with a 350-mile mid-winter solo expedition across the Eastern Arctic. He was hoping to sell the story of his trip to a magazine and knew he’d need photographs to illustrate it. Along the way, Kobalenko discovered he enjoyed
the photography. The Canadian adventurer found that photography, unlike writing, is an extroverted art form. It got him out and interacting with people and the environment, while encapsulating the experience in frames.

On his return, Kobalenko sold the story to *Outdoor Canada* magazine in Toronto. As luck would have it, his images were published alongside the story in the widely distributed glossy. The magazine's editor loved the article so much, she asked Kobalenko to be a staff writer. He spent the next five years with *Outdoor Canada*, and the next five at *Photo Life* magazine as an editor.

Kobalenko arranged to work around his expeditions to the Arctic, where he practiced photography fervently. He learned the finer points of the craft from the photographers at the magazines. Good technique was essential to capturing unique shots of the farthest reaches of the globe. “I work very hard at getting good images despite the physical demands,” says Kobalenko. “A lot of my images are deceptively simple. It might be for people for whom work is play and play is work.”
be a basic shot of a landscape, but I’d had to walk 500 miles to get there. That’s why there are so few Arctic images—it’s a wonderful place but very difficult to access."

"About 12 years ago, Kobalenko went freelance as a photographer and writer. He and his wife, Alexandra, who sometimes accompanies him on trips and does all their Photoshop work, settled in a town near Canada’s renowned Banff National Park. By now, Kobalenko had good relationships with a few stock agencies that were excited about his rare Arctic images. Magazine editors were eager to use him because he could provide both writing and photography, thereby conserving their travel budgets."

Kobalenko built a business on writing, stock sales, magazine editorial assignments, photography books and speaking engagements, yet he cautions, "Doing something like this is not a business decision. "You are doing it to support a lifestyle."

"That lifestyle revolves around an obsession with the Eastern Arctic, an area as remote and difficult to access as any place on earth. The size of Europe, the territory has no highways, few roads, no major airports, and is locked in ice much of the year. The airfare to Resolute, an isolated Inuit village on Canada’s Northwest Passage, is roughly equivalent to two round-trip tickets from New York to Australia. And that’s just to get to the jumping-off place. A charter plane from Resolute to interesting areas of the Arctic wilderness runs more than $22,000—or else you could wait around for weeks to hitch a ride on a research aircraft. Out in the wilderness, Kobalenko travels hundreds of miles by whatever means he can beg, borrow or barter. "You either have to have a lot of money or a lot of time. I always go north with plenty of time," he says.

Why go to such lengths? For Kobalenko, it’s the connection he feels to the land and“
its inhabitants. “The Arctic is a strange place,” he says. “You either hate it and can’t wait to get out, or you love it and can’t wait to go back. I have a real excitement for shooting what hasn’t been shot before. You can go to parts of the Arctic that humans have rarely walked on, if ever. And then there’s the wildlife. The Arctic is a sort of a cold-weather Galapagos. With so few human travelers, the wildlife is tolerant of people. I was photographing some arctic fox pups, and they kept running up and sniffing the legs of the tripod. It was actually quite irritating!”

As a photographer, Kobalenko enjoys the working conditions in the Arctic’s long summer days. There might be six or seven hours of warm sunlight, with only one f/stop’s difference between noon and midnight. “It promotes a different way of working. I often find myself working around the clock and going to bed when I’m tired, not when it gets dark. It’s a strange and energizing experience,” he says.

The Arctic drives Kobalenko’s creative spirit, but it’s not for everyone. “To do it, you have to be driven by it, and it has to be more important than anything else,” he says.

“There are some of us who follow a master plan. Others of us are at the mercy of our obsessions. We pursue them regardless of the economics, regardless of the times, regardless of anything else in life. If we get a few breaks, we find ways to make it work. There’s no way to predict success when you start out. What I do is for people for whom work is play and play is work, and you never put down the ball.”

To see more from Jerry Kobalenko, visit www.kobalenko.com.