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Film Festival Review

by Tom Isaacson

The Third Annual Washington Mountain Film Festival, held March 15,1990, was the most successful of the three festivals held so far. Festival Chairman Jeffrey Levy and the many club members who assisted in various aspects of organizing and running the festival deserve much credit for a job well done.

I managed not to get deeply involved in planning the event. As a result, I had seen only one of the films prior. Seeing films for the first time on a movie screen is much more striking than previewing them on the television set in my living room.

Despite some initial concerns regarding attendance, I am told that we sold about 340 tickets. Ticket sales probably would have been somewhat better had we not experienced the seemingly inevitable problems with publicity mailings by some of the retailer-supporters. I am not sure why this has been such a problem over the years, but some aspect of these mailings must be a lot more difficult than would appear to an outside observer. In any event, the festival produced a small profit for the club. Making money is not the primary purpose of the film festival, but it is certainly a welcome source of additional revenue.

The five films shown represented a good balance among the various forms of climbing: one rock jock film, one big wall, one alpine trickster and two Himalayan films. The selection included one each from the United States and Germany and three from France -- representative of the distribution of mountain film efforts these days.

"**The Sprinter of Everest**" (1989), which opened the festival, showcased our special guest Marc Batard. Marc gave a brief introduction in French -- translated by PATC/MS member Anne Baron -- outlining the achievement that is the focus of this film. Marc's solo ascent of Mt. Everest via the South Col route in less than 24 hours is surely one of the more remarkable mountaineering accomplishments in recent years. The film, which was made on a very low budget, does not do complete justice to that accomplishment.

It begins with a close-up of Marc and a brief narration reminiscent of the opening scene of the Superman television show. Whatever it may have lacked in style, the opening sequence at least is honest. This film lives or dies as a testimonial in praise of Marc's achievement. It is unabashedly self-promoting and, on those narrow terms, is a success. As an artistic statement beyond the bare historical documentation it is a disappointment.

After the obligatory scenes in Kathmandu and the stop at a shrine for a spiritual fill-up, Marc heads off to Everest base camp. There are a variety of people at base camp whose connection to Marc's climb is unclear.

Marc heads up the mountain and turns back just below the Hillary Step -- perhaps 15 minutes from the summit. After this return to base camp I assumed he had completed his effort and that the reference to his "ascent" of Everest was just a slight exaggeration. It did not occur to me that he would try again. The tension and surprise created by his second (and successful) attempt is the most dramatic portion of the film.

Because of the speed at which

Marc climbed, there was no opportunity for a cameraman to film his ascent. The only "action" footage consists of his departures from and returns to base camp and some self-portraits filmed on the summit. The extensive coverage of Marc's sponsor -- Paris Match -- did not do much for me. Most people accept the fact that such climbs require some commercial sponsorship, but why highlight it?

The club was certainly honored by Marc's appearance both at the monthly PATC/MS meeting on Wednesday and at the film festival itself. His unassuming manner made him a popular attraction during an intermission question-and-answer session.

"**The Dark Glow of the Mountain**" is an hour-long interview and portrait of Reinhold Messner, one of the best mountaineers of our time and one of the sports' best self-promoters. I thoroughly enjoyed this film and found it much more engaging than the Chris Bonington portrait which was shown at the Second Festival. Whereas the Bonington film portrayed Chris as essentially the same person we've come to know through his many books, the Messner portrait had an emotional depth and range I have not found in Messner's books (not that I've read all of them).

The film includes a hilarious scene of Messner calmly answering the interviewer's questions while a sherpa gives him a vigorous and animated head massage. The film also takes us through a wrenching discussion of Messner's brother's death.

"Dark Glow" centers on Messner and Hans Kammerlander's traverse of Gasherbrum I and II. This was a significant mountaineering achievement, but there was very little action footage of their successful climb. Our version of the film had already been translated, which was probably fortunate given the amount of dialogue -- or was it monologue? -- it contained.

"**Seo**" is another in a line of French films depicting the visit of some hot-shot to a foreign culture for a little climbing and showing off. The success of these films depends on both the artistry of the climbing and the cultural interaction. Of last year's film, "Nomads" failed on both counts and "Piliers" was very strong on the former and largely ignored the latter (though not the ladder). "Seo" was quite good in both respects.

Although most of the climbing in "Seo" didn't look any harder than 5.9, Catherine Destivelle added her own touches to make a more powerful artistic and athletic statement.

The climbing included a nice solo up a long vertical wall of buckets, a lead climb out a huge roof reminiscent of the Gunks and a solo traverse of an overhanging wall/crack which, to my cynical eye, looked all of four feet off the deck. Nevertheless, Catherine climbed with grace and power in her customary scanty attire. Like "E Pericoloso Sporgese", "Seo" went out of its way to show that male climbers, by contrast to the great Ms. Destivelle, are stupid, lazy and dirty, a point some people might find unnecessary.

Catherine's interaction with the locals was quite lighthearted, bordering on the disrespectful. Her crew placed some totally unnecessary bolts on the cliffs, and she appeared to tread on an ancient burial ground. It is obviously difficult for any beautiful, rich French climber to visit Mali without seeming a tad condescending. On that score, Catherine didn't do too badly.

"**Over the Edge**" was a very pleasant surprise. It is a slightly disjointed look at an ascent of El Capitan somewhere near the Pacific Ocean Wall. The climbers maintained a spirited interaction throughout most of their climb. Randy Leavitt, an accomplished wall and free climber, played the role of the straight man while his partner (O.K.., so I forget his name; I'm sorry, it was a long day) practiced his French lessons and bird calls. The best climbing scene consists of Leavitt's lead of the roof crack "Separate Reality", which is about three miles from El Capitan (at least it's in the same park) although the film made it seem halfway up El Cap.

Dave Schlutz's stunt fall off the top pitch ranks up there with Rick Sylvester's stunt in the James Bond film "For Your Eyes Only" in the annals of staged falls. I was gripped, and I had already seen the fall on an earlier viewing. The paraseil off the top of El Cap (it's illegal, by the way) added a fine finish to an endearing film.

"**Trilogie Pour Un Homme Seul**" depicts Christophe Profit's winter solo of the North Face of the Eiger, the Matterhorn and the Grand Jorasses in a day and a half. There was some spectacular footage of Profit galloping up two of those difficult faces. He did the Eiger at night, and there we are treated instead to a long

falcon release project at the New has been successful over the past few years. Last summer, a subadult bird was spotted in the gorge. This year falcon watchers are hoping to see the falcon return (with a mate) and nest. If anyone sees what they think is a peregrine falcon (photos at the Visitor's Center), call the hotline: 304-636-1767 or 304-636-6487. If the falcons don't return this year, the falcon project will most likely release more chicks, so the hacking site at the Central Endless will be posted. Keep your eyes open!

We'll be back down again soon. Let us know if you're interested!

TEN COMMANDMENTS FOR CLIMBERS

In response to a growing sense of frustration at inappropriate behavior among climbers, the AAC Access Committee and Mountain Tools have written a new brochure to be distributed around climbing areas. Climbing magazine has footed the bill to print 25,000 copies. The basic idea behind these so-called commandments is to try and minimize the environmental impact of our sport while retaining most of its current values and practices. In other words, they're a compromise.

For UP ROPE readers, here are the big ten:

1. Never disturb historically, archaeologically or environmentally sensitive areas.
2. Don't scar, chisel, glue holds onto, or otherwise deface the rock.
3. Don't place bolts near cracks or other natural protection.
4. Avoid using colored bolt hangers that contrast brightly with the rock.
5. Don't add fixed protection on established routes except to beef up questionable belay or rappel anchors.
6. Don't establish routes in heavy traffic areas such as campgrounds, or directly above public trails or roads
7. If you must leave slings at rappel stations or "back off" gear, use colors which blend in with the surrounding rock.
8. Don't throw anything -- rotten slings, trash, or even human waste --off climbs; it's simple: everything you start up with comes off the climb with you, not before.
9. Accept responsibility even for the impact of other climbers on the mountain environment by removing rotten slings and garbage from climbs, bivvy areas and descent routes.
10. Know and follow local regulations on climbing and restrictions on bolting, motorized bolting and chalk. Then work to change unfair restrictions through the AAC Access Committee or local climber organizations.

Obviously, most of us will never face some of these commandments' edicts, but all of us can start carrying trash bags (yes, even to Great Falls and Carderock to pick up the idiotic touroid trash). Encourage (politely) other climbers to do so as well. Thanks.

Hueco Tanks

by Tom Halicki

In mid-March I allowed myself the luxury of a short trip to Hueco Tanks, in part to revisit the area since my initial trip there in 1982, but equally to meet some Texas climbing friends. I was to meet an old friend and climbing partner, Jim Greene, at the El Paso airport. He was due to land within minutes of me, but the friendly skies being what they are, I arrived three hours late. Fortunately, so did he. Writing off any hope of climbing that day, we rented a car, shared our traditional bottle of scotch, cruised to the Tanks to get our campsite, then made it back to the airport to pick up two more friends.

Hueco tanks can be cold in the winter, as the next morning proved. Everyone was holding out to climb on the "front side", which harbors the two-pitch classic face climbs. But I didn't fly to Texas to climb in the shade on a cold morning, and insisted on sunny routes. So we compromised and headed to a sunny locale but for some reason climbed routes that were still in the shade. We did a few warm-up climbs, and then I led Creatures of the New Left (5.10) which, while somewhat easy for its grade, nonetheless required attention to protection. We also played on the imposing Biko Roof (5.12), which provided more humor than serious climbing. We finished the day with an easy 5.10- crack and headed for the campsite and illegal beer.

The next day brought us to the Pigs in Space buttress, the site of some great overhanging routes. I opted for the more vertical Pig Riders(5.10), which takes an aesthetic line up a corner of the buttress, and let someone else led the strenuous Pigs to Pork (5.10). We also did King's Highway (an aesthetic 5.9) on the same buttress, then located After the Gold Rush in a narrow side canyon.