



JOURNEY INTO THE UNKNOWN: THE FILMS OF WERNER HERZOG

Grizzly Man

Grizzly Man

Directed by: Werner Herzog

©/Presented by: Lions Gate Films

Produced by: Real Big Production Inc.

Presented by: Discovery Docs

Executive Producers: Erik Nelson, Billy Campbell, Tom Ortenberg, Kevin Beggs, Phil Fairclough, Andrea Meditch

Co-executive Producer: Jewel Palovak

Produced by: Erik Nelson

Associate Producer: Alana Berry

Executive in Charge of Production: Dave Harding

Executives in Charge of Production for Discovery

Channel, Inc.: Jane Root, Don Baer

Production Managers: Tom Koykka,

Jessica DeJong

Post-production Supervisor: Randall Boyd

Director of Photography: Peter Zeitlinger

Assistant Camera Operator: Erik Söllner

Edited by: Joe Bini

Assistant Editor: Maya Hawke

Editorial Assistants: David W. Ryan, Brian Patterson

Music Composed by: Richard Thompson

Guitar/Bass: Richard Thompson

Cello: Danielle DeGruttola

Percussion/Drums: John Hanes

Piano/Guitar: James O'Rourke

Acoustic Bass: Damon Smith

Music Produced by: Henry Kaiser

Recording Engineer: Stephen Hart

Audio: Spence Palermo, Ken King

Post-production Audio: Michael Klinger,

D.D. Stenehjem, Tree Falls

With:

Timothy Treadwell (1957-2003)

Amie Huguenard (Timothy's girlfriend)

Warren Queeney (actor, close friend)

Willy Fulton (pilot, former rodeo rider)

Sam Egli (Egli Air Haul)

Marnie Gaede, Marc Gaede (ecologists)

Larry Van Daele (bear biologist)

Sven Haakanson (Alutiiq)

Dr Franc Fallico (coroner)

Jewel Palovak (Grizzly People)

Val Dexter, Carol Dexter (Timothy's parents)

Kathleen Parker (close friend)

Werner Herzog (narrator)

USA 2005©

104 mins

Digital

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SIGHT AND SOUND

Timothy Treadwell is an unusual protagonist for a Herzog film: he has a high, squeaky voice, a mildly effeminate manner and a stridently sentimental impulse towards animals. This seems unlikely in someone who spent the last 13 summers of his life living cheek-by-maw with ten-foot, powerful, aggressive grizzly bears in a remote part of the Alaskan peninsula.

There Treadwell made wildlife video films of wonderfully intimate daring and of a passionate campaigning nature, casting himself as the close protector of the bears, as much from the National Park authorities as from supposed poachers. He used these videos to educate American schoolchildren in storytelling shows for which he never charged a fee. Werner Herzog was given the use of the footage Treadwell shot and he creates an astounding memoir.

Clad in black and wearing 'cool' shades, with a bandana or a baseball cap atop his head and a tuft of blonde hair disguising a receding hairline, Treadwell looks and sounds more like the excited LA actor-wannabe he once was than a naturalist. Apparently he tried out for the naïve barman role in *Cheers* and – according to his own mythology – only just lost out to Woody Harrelson.

Treadwell's daily self-imposed dilemma is best described in the first to-camera piece Herzog uses. Crouching in the foreground while huge bears graze in magic-hour light behind him, Treadwell talks about a 'sub-adult gang' of bears: 'They're challenging everything, including me. It goes with the territory. If I show weakness, if I retreat, I may be hurt, I may be killed. I must hold my own if I'm going to remain within this land. For once there is weakness, they will exploit it, they will take me out, they will decapitate me, they will chop me into little pieces. I'm dead.' It spoils nothing of the experience of watching *Grizzly Man* to reveal that there is a macabre end to Treadwell's story. Timothy and his girlfriend Amie Huguenard were eventually eaten by a starving grizzly, a bear from the Alaskan interior unknown to him before the autumn of 2003, when he and his companion met their fate.

In Treadwell's footage the long-familiar bears are given names such as 'Mr Chocolate', 'Rowdy' and 'Tabitha'. In self-help mode, he unloads his neurosis and paranoia to the camera, ranting as much about his problems with women as about poachers or park rangers, only breaking off to coo 'I love you' to the beasts. He is clearly a disturbed individual, but the film delivers on the promise of Herzog's introductory justification. 'Having myself filmed in the wilderness of the jungle,' says Herzog, 'I found that beyond a wildlife film, in his material lay dormant a story of astonishing beauty and depth. I discovered a film of human ecstasies and darkest inner turmoil. As if there was a desire in him to leave the confines of his humanness and bond with the bears, Treadwell reached out, feeling a primordial encounter, but in doing so he crossed an invisible borderline.'

Nick James, *Sight and Sound*, February 2006

Timothy Treadwell fits so neatly into the standard Herzog roll-call of self-destructive, Conradian loners, misanthropes, hermits, monomaniacs, outsiders and crazies (Aguirre, Kaspar Hauser, Fitzcarraldo and company) that *Grizzly Man* sometimes feels a little like a brilliantly executed self-parody. Alas for Treadwell and his lover, it is all brutally real. It's also fascinating twice over: as a

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Signs of Life Lebenszeichen

Mon 1 Jan 12:30; Sat 13 Jan 15:00

Fata Morgana + The Great Ecstasy of

Woodcarver Steiner Die große Ekstase des
Bildschnitzers Steiner

Mon 1 Jan 18:00; Wed 17 Jan 20:30

Even Dwarfs Started Small

Auch Zwerge haben klein angefangen

Tue 2 Jan 18:15; Mon 15 Jan 20:45

La Soufrière Warten auf eine Unausweichliche

Katastrophe + **Lessons of Darkness**

Lektionen in Finsternis

Wed 3 Jan 18:20; Tue 16 Jan 20:40 (+ intro by
writer Ian Haydn Smith)

Heart of Glass Herz aus Glas

Thu 4 Jan 18:30; Fri 19 Jan 20:40

Land of Silence and Darkness

Land des Schweigens und der Dunkelheit

Thu 4 Jan 20:50; Wed 10 Jan 20:45; Wed 17 Jan
18:15 (+ BSL intro by deaf filmmaker Sam Arnold)

Aguirre, Wrath of God Aguirre, der Zorn Gottes

Sat 6 Jan 15:15; Sun 14 Jan 11:40;

Tue 23 Jan 18:30

My Best Fiend Mein liebster Feind – Klaus Kinski

Sat 6 Jan 17:45; Sat 13 Jan 21:00

Little Dieter Needs to Fly Flucht aus Laos

Sun 7 Jan 15:20; Thu 18 Jan 20:45

Fitzcarraldo

Sun 7 Jan 17:45; Sun 14 Jan 14:20;

Thu 18 Jan 17:50

Stroszek

Mon 8 Jan 18:20; Sat 20 Jan 20:40

Werner Herzog's Tales of Life and Death:

An Illustrated Talk

Wed 10 Jan 18:30

Nosferatu the Vampyre

Nosferatu: Phantom der Nacht

Fri 12 Jan 18:10; Wed 24 Jan 20:50;

Sat 27 Jan 15:00

Grizzly Man

Fri 12 Jan 20:45; Sun 14 Jan 18:15;

Mon 29 Jan 18:15

Echoes from a Sombre Empire

Echos aus einem düsteren Reich

Sat 13 Jan 14:10; Tue 30 Jan 20:30

Woyzeck

Sat 13 Jan 18:20; Sun 28 Jan 12:30

The Fire Within: A Requiem for Katia and

Maurice Krafft

Fri 19 Jan 18:30; Wed 31 Jan 20:50

The White Diamond

Sun 21 Jan 18:20; Fri 26 Jan 18:30

Into the Abyss – A Tale of Death, a Tale of Life

Fri 26 Jan 20:45; Sun 28 Jan 15:10

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courageously close-up view of Alaskan wildlife, red in tooth and claw, and as an unwittingly self-condemning portrait of the artist as a would-be Tarzan of the Bears. A failed actor before he caught the wilderness bug, Treadwell carefully honed his soliloquies to camera, shooting them again and again in short versions and long versions, calm versions and hysterical versions: he knew he was gradually piecing together a film in which he would be both star and director. The vanity of the man seems rather childlike and appealing in the earlier sequences: he's a bit of a flake, full of New Age tosh about being a 'kind warrior', but well-intentioned and obviously brave.

As the film proceeds, the vanity starts to seem more like wanton arrogance, and the bravery more like megalomania. We learn from old friends and family about a man with major drink and drug problems; a directionless character, abruptly redeemed (or damned) by his discovery of bear life; in short, a loose cannon. A Native American zoologist condemns his actions as 'disrespectful' and damaging to the wary association of man and bear that has held for hundreds of years; forest rangers dismiss Treadwell's belief that he was 'saving' bears from poachers as largely fanciful, and say that his habit of accustoming bears to human presences exposed them to the very threat he purported to be fending off. None of these testimonies is as dismaying as Treadwell's own performances, though, whether in terms of his twee cooing at the huge creatures in baby-talk or his ranting profanities against those he saw as enemies, or his imploring Jehovah, Allah, Buddha and 'the Hindu floaty thing' to send rain. Which, by the way, duly comes.

Herzog's attitude to his protagonist is, as one might expect, reasonably sympathetic. Not that he goes along with Treadwell's rather infantile view of nature (Treadwell always took his favourite teddy bear along with him on expeditions). 'I believe,' Herzog explains in a voiceover so ludicrously deadpan as to provoke whoops of laughter, 'that the common denominator of the universe is chaos, hostility, murder.' But he takes his hat off to Treadwell as a brother filmmaker, and commends the quality of some of the images he captured as possessing a force and magic unattainable by Hollywood means.

Up to a point, this sympathy is justified. Treadwell undoubtedly did have a flair for wildlife photography, and some of his sequences – notably those in which he plays with the foxes living close to his tent – suggest that his rapport with animals could be genuine, and not entirely in his naïve mind. Herzog's film is strongest when most dispassionate and cool-eyed, weakest when it drifts into taking Treadwell on his own valuation, as part-shaman, part-samurai. In death as in life, the person who gets the worst of all worlds is Treadwell's girlfriend Amie Huguenard. Despite the fact that she and Treadwell had in effect split up, despite the fact that he shouted at her to run for her life, despite her chronic dread of grizzlies, she took a frying pan and bashed at the animal that was mauling him to death. Within six minutes, she was dead, too. If *Grizzly Man* has a true hero, it is this brave grizzly woman.

Kevin Jackson, *Sight and Sound*, February 2006