



## RE-RELEASES

# Picnic at Hanging Rock

### **Picnic at Hanging Rock**

*Director:* Peter Weir

*Production Companies:* Picnic Productions,

BEF Film Distributors, South Australian Film

Commission, Australian Film Commission

*Executive Producer:* Patricia Lovell

*Executive Producer for AFC:* John Graves

*Producers:* Hal McElroy, Jim McElroy

*Assistant Directors:* Mark Egerton, Kim Dalton,

Ian Jamieson

*Screenplay:* Cliff Green

*Original Novel:* Joan Lindsay

*Director of Photography:* Russell Boyd

*Nature Photography:* David Sanderson

*Camera Operator:* John Seale

*Editor:* Max Lemon

*Art Director:* David Copping

*Set Decorator:* Graham Walker

*Costumes:* Judy Dorsman

*Costume Consultant:* Wendy Weir

*Make-up:* José Perez, Elizabeth Mitchell

*Titles and Opticals:* Optical & Graphic

*Additional Music:* Bruce Smeaton

*Sound Recording:* Don Connelly

*Sound Editor:* Greg Bell

*Artistic Adviser:* Martin Sharp

*Wrangler:* Tom Downer

*Cast:*

Rachel Roberts (*Mrs Appleyard*)

Dominic Guard (*Michael Fitzhubert*)

Helen Morse (*Dianne de Portiers*)

Jacki Weaver (*Minnie*)

Vivean Gray (*Miss McCraw*)

Kirsty Child (*Dora Lumley*)

Anne Lambert (*Miranda*)

Karen Robson (*Irma*)

Jane Vallis (*Marion*)

Christine Schuler (*Edith*)

Margaret Nelson (*Sara*)

John Jarratt (*Albert Crundall*)

Ingrid Mason (*Rosamund*)

Martin Vaughan (*Ben Hussey*)

Jack Fegan (*Doc McKenzie*)

Wyn Roberts (*Sgt Bumph*)

Garry McDonald (*Jim Jones*)

Frank Gunnell (*Edward Whitehead*)

Peter Collingwood (*Colonel Fitzhubert*)

Olga Dickie (*Mrs Fitzhubert*)

Kay Taylor (*Mrs Bumph*)

Anthony Llewellyn Jones (*Tom*)

Faith Kleinig (*Cook*)

Jenny Lovell (*Blanche*)

Janet Murray (*Juliana*)

Vivienne Graves, Angela Bencini, Melinda Cardwell,

Annabel Powrie, Amanda White, Lindy O'Connell,

Verity Smith, Deborah Mullins, Sue Jamieson,

Bernadette Bencini, Barbara Lloyd

Australia 1975

107 mins (Director's Cut)

Digital 4K

Restored in 4K in 2022 by Acid Pictures in collaboration with Second Sight Films at The Grainery laboratory, from the original camera negative preserved by Australian National Film and Sound Archive

A BFI release

*Haunting ...* it seems that in writing on Peter Weir's *Picnic at Hanging Rock*, one cannot help but invoke this at once nebulous, yet appropriate description of the film's aesthetic and affective force. For those viewers whom the film touches, this visually stunning cinematic experience that depicts a terrifying chasm or void of meaning leaves a trace of feeling within that is, in fact, commensurate with being haunted. This exquisite film, which in and of itself centres on themes of absence, longing and lack, also intimates a far more sinister reality: a violence done to young girls on the cusp of womanhood, the denial and disenfranchisement of Aboriginal people and their land, and the folly and arrogance of white, colonial, European settler culture held in place by pomp, ceremony and arcane ritual, all of which is only ever partially concealed by a beguiling, captivating carapace.

This formal device that serves both to hold us at a studied distance – to keep us from *really* seeing – and to gesture towards that which we are not really seeing *is*, I contend, the very essence of *Picnic at Hanging Rock*. This double manoeuvre of acknowledgment and denial creates an ambivalence which is, in turn, crucial to the film's emotional range and register; it is, in fact, its objective correlative. That is, *Picnic* is a film of psychological terror that unfolds in the daylight; if one chooses to give in to it – a position into which the viewer is coaxed by the film itself – it subsists within the perceptive viewer for years afterwards. For if *Picnic* is a strikingly beautiful film, one must question what that beauty is being put in service of: what is it actually concealing from us? And, by extension, if *Picnic* haunts us, it is precisely *because* of that powerful undertow, *because* of the spectral absence we do not want to acknowledge, and yet which insistently returns to perturb us and to force us into a reckoning with our own understanding of a reality that is philosophical, psychological and necessarily political in nature. This is why we keep returning to the Rock.

Extracted from *Picnic at Hanging Rock* by Anna Backman Rogers (BFI Film Classics, 2022).

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*Picnic at Hanging Rock* is adapted from a 1967 novel by Joan Lindsay. Written in her mid-sixties and her only work of fiction, it has provoked the belief that it's based on a true, but undocumented, incident. The subject has rapidly worked its way into the national folklore, and the mystery surrounding the mystery has lent valuable support to the film's publicity campaign.

I asked Peter Weir if he'd been hesitant about filming a mystery without a solution. 'My only worry was whether an audience would accept such an outrageous idea. Personally, I always found it the most satisfying and fascinating aspect of the film. I usually find endings disappointing: they're totally unnatural. You are creating life on the screen, and life doesn't have endings. It's always moving on to something else and there are always unexplained elements.'

'What I attempted, somewhere towards the middle of the film, was gently to shift emphasis off the mystery element which had been building in the first half and to develop the oppressive atmosphere of something which has no solution: to bring out a tension and claustrophobia in the locations and the relationships. We worked very hard at creating a hallucinatory, mesmeric rhythm, so that you lost awareness of facts, you stopped adding things up,

## NEW RELEASES

### Preview screenings: I'm Still Here

Ainda Estou Aqui  
From Fri 14 Feb

### Memoir of a Snail

From Fri 14 Feb

### On Falling

From Fri 7 Mar (Q&A with director Laura Carreira and producer Jack Thomas-O'Brien on Fri 7 Mar 18:00)

### Sister Midnight

From Fri 14 Mar (Preview + extended intro Mon 10 Mar 20:40)

## RE-RELEASES

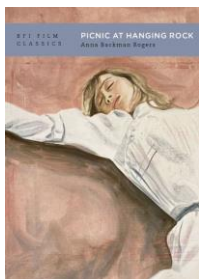
### Jeanne Dielman, 23, quai du Commerce, 1080 Bruxelles

From Fri 7 Feb

### Picnic at Hanging Rock

From Fri 21 Feb

*Picnic at Hanging Rock* by Anna Backman Rogers is available to order from the BFI Shop: <https://shop.bfi.org.uk/picnic-at-hanging-rock-bfi-film-classics-paperback.html>



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and got into this enclosed atmosphere. I did everything in my power to hypnotise the audience away from the possibility of solutions ... There are, after all, things within our own minds about which we know far less than about disappearances at Hanging Rock. And it's within a lot of the silences that I tell my side of the story.'

Weir freely admits that he's always been more interested in atmosphere than character, and insists that he works from instinct rather than 'premeditation'. But his instinct prompted him, and his scriptwriter Cliff Green, to at least one premeditated shift of emphasis. Although Joan Lindsay's novel contains hints of the Rock as another time zone, its style combines the omniscient condescension of an Agatha Christie (characters neatly slotted into defined social stations and good-humoured servants kept above suspicion) with a streak of purple pantheism. She stresses the repressiveness of Victorian morality and 'the smouldering passions banked down under the weight of grey disciplines.' Weir's school contains more lyrical sunlight than lurking shadows – its atmosphere perhaps further lightened when illness prevented Vivien Merchant filling the role of the headmistress, now played by Rachel Roberts – and he emphasises instead the book's timeless theme: 'The tragedy had its beginnings on St. Valentine's Day. Traditionally, it's the day of the pairing of birds. And from the moment the day begins, the story is about the failure of birds to pair and of connections to be made.'

'I could have placed more emphasis on the outpost of Empire in the bush, the invaders in an alien landscape, the repressive nature of this little piece of Empire; but as the atmosphere resulting from the disappearances became my central interest, these themes disappeared from view ... Yes, you could see them as elements in all my films,' (including *Homesdale*, an experimental 50-minutes about a lethal holiday camp for jaded city folk) 'though I'm only conscious of one recurring theme. I find people in isolated situations fascinating. Obvious things – long boat voyages and waiting rooms and lifts – unfailingly intrigue me because people reveal ... all the things that aren't being said. Not so much in their relationships as in their unconscious. And I like situations where I can get these things out quickly. Nature isn't consciously a theme with me either. It's just that, in the most practical way, I prefer to make films away from the city. It's not that the wide-open spaces open me up but that I find them intensely claustrophobic.'

Jan Dawson, *Sight and Sound*, Spring 1976