

United
States
Pavilion



News

EVERYTHING YOU WANTED TO KNOW ABOUT THE IMAX MOVIE BUT COULDN'T FIND
ANYONE TO ASK...

By Chris Lingard

On a peak day, 1654 people an hour see the IMAX film, "Man Belongs to the Earth," in the United States Pavilion at Expo '74.

Obviously, not all can corner one of the half-dozen Pavilion guides stationed in the theater area to ask the questions that have been occurring to viewers of the popular Expo '74 attraction since it was first shown back in May; questions such as:

"How did they film that Grand Canyon sequence?"

"How many motorcycles are there in the race scene?"

"Did Chief Dan George's father really talk to the sun, or did someone just hand the Chief a script to read?"

To get the answers to a few of the questions most often heard from visitors, we spoke to Graeme Ferguson, producer, director and cameraman for the movie, and President of the Multiscreen Corporation, who was in Spokane recently.

First of all, those spectacular aerial shots:

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The opening Grand Canyon sequence, Ferguson told us, was filmed from a twin-engine Piper Aztec. The camera was mounted on the front of the plane, with only an on-off switch inside. As Ferguson puts it: "There wasn't even a viewfinder because you just shoot everything that's ahead of you."

The strip-mine flight, also filmed from an Aztec, was designed for a very specific purpose, which, according to Ferguson, was "not just to thrill the audience, although of course it's interesting to do a piece of flying that people don't ordinarily do; but, more importantly, to make the point that, seen from above, there's this beautiful, wide open ranchland, and yet underneath is a tremendous wealth of coal. We thought the dilemma presented by the situation could be pointed up if we could see all this in a single shot."

The raft on the Colorado River was filmed, not from a helicopter, as some viewers believe, but from another boat. What keeps great drops of water from obscuring the lens?

"A very tricky little windshield wiper," says Ferguson. "It's a piece of glass that spins at a very high speed and instantly throws off any water that gets on it. We just put this in front of the lens and shoot through it."

One scene that was filmed from a helicopter was the motorcycle race, which, ironically enough, was organized by the Bureau of Land Management.

"They were plagued by every motorcycle club in the Southwest going out in the desert and running its own race and really doing a tremendous amount of damage," Ferguson explains. "So they run this one race, and they can police it much better, and keep control of what takes place, and clean the area up afterwards."

A total of about 2500 cycles participated in the two-heat race, including 1500 in the heat shown in "Man Belongs to the Earth."

Chief Dan George's role in the film is crucial, in Ferguson's opinion. The Chief was asked to appear because of his known concern for the environment, and the stories he tells are spontaneous. No formal script was ever written for the Chief. Rather he was asked to re-tell some of his thoughts in front of the camera at selected locations.

An Indian member of the film crew spent three days with him and a tape recorder, discussing everything he could think of about the environment. "Then," says Ferguson, "we selected the portions that seemed relevant to our story line, and it was quite clear that what he said was really very helpful. Because of his age and the fact that he's an Indian, it took it out of the context of almost all other environmental films and made it general rather than specific.

"His talk about not wasting fish in a sense is what the film is about and what the whole Fair is about. Even more important, his comment about what he wants his children to inherit was, in my opinion, the precise point the film should make."

Other environmental films had an important influence on the story line of "Man Belongs to the Earth." Before he started shooting, Ferguson spent several days viewing more than 100 environmental films, which, in the end, he says "got very boring."

"So," he continues, "everything that was repeated from film to film, like smokestacks and garbage heaps and polluted rivers and dying fish, we just took out."

Before beginning filming, the producers developed an outline of points they wanted to cover and took it to the Department of Commerce, which had formed an

advisory committee composed of representatives from every Federal department and agency having anything to do with the environment. Suggestions, changes and criticism were made, and filming was started, but the story line was continually altered as new possibilities presented themselves or old ideas proved unworkable.

The crew had to be ready to pick up and go at any moment, which at times proved to be a problem.

"In the case of the oil well," Ferguson recalls, "we'd dispersed the whole group for Christmas and had to put together a lash-up crew. We couldn't wait, because we thought they might put the fire out any minute, and in fact they put it out about five or six days after we arrived."

According to Ferguson, the 500-pound blast finally used to put the fire out was "the biggest blast ever used in an American oil well," and the fire itself was "the biggest oil-well fire, as far as we could gather, ever in the United States."

The United States Pavilion is not the sole possessor of an IMAX film, although its screen is the largest presently in existence. Other IMAX theaters are now operating at Circus World in Florida, Ontario Place in Toronto, a planetarium in San Diego, and prospects look good for two more to be open in 1976 for the Bicentennial celebration. A number of IMAX films now exist and can all be interchanged, except in the case of the planetarium.

What about long range prospects?

"Hopefully a chain of IMAX feature theaters, showing full-length movies," Ferguson answers.

And when might this happen? "Well, it won't be within the next year," he admits. "I'd say it might be as early as two years from now."