

FILM: ENVIRONMENT

Three Takes on People and Water

The 17th annual Environmental Film Festival in the Nation's Capital offered Washington, D.C., viewers a very wide range of topics. Many showings examined environmental issues (Ian Connacher's *Addicted to Plastic*) or celebrated nature (Dereck and Beverly Joubert's *Eye of the Leopard*). Others—such as Richard Rifkind and Carole Rifkind's *Naturally Obsessed: The Making of a Scientist* (screened at AAAS headquarters) and David Conover's *Cracking the Ocean Code* (on Craig Venter's global voyage)—highlighted the pursuit of research. The oceans and their (often-threatened) life were the focus of a series of films that also included a 1929 adaptation of Jules Verne's *The Mysterious Island* starring Lionel Barrymore. Several screenings were world or U.S. premieres, and the organizers arranged a retrospective of 12 movies by Werner Herzog. Short descriptions of all 135 films are still available at www.dcenvironmentalfilmfest.org/films.php. Here we consider three that explore aspects of people's relations with water.

Blue Gold: World Water Wars.

Sam Bozzo, Director. Purple Turtle Films, Canada, 2008. 90 minutes. DVD, \$24.95, C\$34.95. www.bluegold-worldwaterwars.com.

Sam Bozzo's award-winning *Blue Gold* addresses an important topic. Many in the developed world (certainly in the United States) take water for granted in the same way that they take the air they breathe for granted. However, as the film makes clear, water is increasingly being treated as a commodity, like oil, and people are losing the rights to it within their own countries and for their own land.

Bozzo begins by presenting basic facts and answering fundamental questions such as why the water cycle we learned about in elementary school isn't enough to keep our water supplies stable. The film paints a grim picture of the politics surrounding the exploitation of water resources. From Grenoble to Atlanta, government representatives have been accused of taking bribes to support the privatization of water supplies. The World Bank has made such privatization a condition for debt relief. Violence has broken out, as in Cochabamba, Bolivia, where even the rainwater was privatized.

The movie is not without flaws. It is fairly one-sided, and, in covering a lot of ground, it makes some sweeping generalizations. Nonetheless, it is packed with verifiable stories and facts.

In a postscreening discussion, Bozzo explained that he had originally planned a sequel to *The Man Who Fell to Earth* (which is about an alien race trying to get Earth's water). For background, he read Maude Barlow and Tony Clarke's *Blue Gold: The Fight to Stop the Corporate Theft of the World's Water*. Horrified about the lack of coverage of the situation, he gave up fiction and turned to documentary. —Barbara R. Jasny



Legacy of the Great Aletsch. Nick Brandestini and Steve Ellington, Directors. Switzerland, 2008. 52 minutes. www.aletschfilm.com.

Nearly 23 km long and reaching a thickness of almost 1000 m, the Great Aletsch is the largest glacier in the Alps. In the past 150 years, it has retreated some 3 km and its surface fallen by more than 100 m. But the effects and threats of climate change form only one of the strands Brandestini and Ellington weave around their descent of the glacier (beginning from the highest railway station in Europe). Martin Nellen (their mountain guide) and Art Furrer (a renowned



freestyle skier turned hotelier) recount personal experiences and describe the glacier and the influences it has had on them and other local residents—such as traditional fears that the purgatorial souls of the dead emerge at night to trod the surface of the ice. Additional perspectives and memories are provided by a geologist (who has reconstructed previous waxing and waning of the glacier), a Pro Natura naturalist, a hydroelectrical engineer, a glacial pilot, a Greenpeace activist, students, and tourists.

The film contains many striking images of the spectacular landscapes of Switzerland's Jungfrau-Aletsch-Bietschhorn region (a UNESCO World Heritage site). Viewers may, however, find themselves more fascinated by the stories of people who live with these mountains. —Sherman J. Suter

Onze Kost [Our Coast]. Ireen van Ditschuyzen, Director. IDTV-DITS, Netherlands, 2005. 78 minutes. DVD, €25. www.idtvdocs.nl.

The Dutch have long toiled to reclaim and protect their lands from the sea. They remember drowned villages, shifting islands, and disasters such as the floods of 1953. Thus, it is no surprise that proposals to cut notches in seashore dunes or adopt other practices of dynamic coastal management lead to heated discussions. *Onze Kust* is the result of a seven-year project that documentary film-maker Ireen van Ditschuyzen embarked on after controversy arose in her own neighborhood. Piotr Kukla's cinematography presents the beauty of beaches, dunes, grasses, and waves. Coastal dwellers and workers recall their experiences and fears. Citizens clash with policy-makers at public hearings. The film mixes these scenes with historical footage to explore how the Dutch live with their coast. It offers multiple perspectives on such questions as how hard should people try to resist the sea and how can the goals of nature conservation and coastal protection be reconciled. (The film, without English subtitles, can be viewed at <http://player.omroep.nl/?afid=2337934>.) —Sherman J. Suter



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