OKAVANGO: RIVER OF DREAMS

(DIRECTOR’S CUT)

TRT: 92 minutes

WORLD PREMIERE

2020 SUNDANCE FILM FESTIVAL SCREENINGS

Press Contacts
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OKAVANGO: RIVER OF DREAMS

LOGLINE: The Okavango in Southern Africa is one of the greatest rivers on Earth – and it is also a river like no other. But the characters that make it, the lions, leopards, dogs, elephants are living in paradise. But here, someone’s paradise is always someone else’s purgatory!

SHORT SYNOPSIS: Drawing on Dante’s “Divine Comedy”, the story is told as a journey from Purgatory into Paradise, a quest for truth, for the soul of this river, the Okavango in Botswana, seeing those who use her, as well as those who are victim to the changes she brings, used by her. Floods rise up and transport trillions of liters of water, and yet, each droplet makes a difference. There are characters like Feeketsa, a wounded lioness that makes it against all odds and becomes a kind of talisman for the tale, a symbol of hope through hardship. The film is like looking through windows into stories and then moving on, until we reveal that each story binds us to the next, and to the river herself. It is also a symbol of hope against a backdrop of climate change that threatens every pristine landscape in the world.

LONG SYNOPSIS: The Okavango in Southern Africa is one of the greatest rivers on Earth – and it is also a river like no other. It starts in the mountains of Angola, but unlike normal rivers, its waters don’t run towards the ocean. Instead, the Okavango flows inland through Angola and into Botswana - only to vanish completely in the Kalahari desert, after a journey of 1,500 kilometres. Almost all of the water eventually evaporates, and very little actually seeps away, down into the soil.

But it is the way the film is constructed that intrigues, as a journey drawing on Dante’s “Divide Comedy”, from the Inferno to Limbo to Paradise, and through the eyes of characters like male lions who climb trees to find their prides, that hunt massive herds of buffalo on termite castles of clay.
An extensive array of animals are shown in this film, living in harmony with the mighty river as they hunt, forage, and scavenge alongside the constantly shifting water’s edge. But the water itself is a character, a female entity that is both, a nurturing force, and a seductive, even fickle one.

But while these lions and leopards, elephants and hippos, warthogs and crocodiles, painted dogs, bush babies, and many more, thrive and survive here, it is by one rule: that someone’s paradise is someone else’s purgatory. It is a testament to the interconnectedness of life on Earth, but also a chilling reminder that these pristine places can disappear under human-created bush fires, or other climate-related changes we impose. Hanging on to this precious jewel of nature should be a major rallying cry and cause for us all.

Filmmakers Dereck and Beverly Joubert have created an utterly breathtaking example of visual storytelling with rich clarity. Each dazzling close-up of the exotic life here is truly remarkable, as is the narration by Dereck Joubert himself, accompanying the stunning images. Calling itself a love letter to the greatest river in Africa, Okavango observes a unique ecosystem with a skilled and deeply perceptive eye.
DIRECTOR’S STATEMENT

We set out to explore this film really, letting it take us where it needed to at first, and spent nearly a year having it talk to us. We needed to discover it and through ‘her’ discover ourselves, and all those who totally depend on her. It let us into darknesses that we could not have imagined.

We dived with crocodiles to understand her “inner belly”, walked with elephants to get to know these keepers, these architects of the Okavango. We lay on the ground as lions devoured buffalo, and hyenas denned, so we could feel the land as termites shuffled underneath built, building her structure. And only then did we feel qualified to really do our film - but little did we know it would take more than that.

Four years later, with 27 lost or broken cameras, over a quarter of a petabyte of footage, we were still not ready, we had still not found the soul of the Okavango. And then, ironically, as if we needed to be bumped into this knowledge with a smack on the heads as bad students, it happened.

After Year One, there was a terrible accident in which Beverly and I were attacked by a buffalo. She died, but I was able to recover here, bring her back from the dead four times. During her recovery and journey back from darkness, after I recovered, I dived into Dante’s words again, imagining our journey, our quest for salvation, our desire to be whole again - and that became a metaphor for recovery, as well as the endless journey of this river.

I wrote the script, loading meaning into every sentence, and each work to deliver what I hoped was a parallel dialogue that simply resonated. This is not a wildlife documentary, but a journey each of us can take visually, without having to die first.

Having said that, once we were attacked, one year into a three-year project, our apparently extremely well-chosen partners, Terra Mater Factual Studios, called to say: “Take your time, recover, do not stress about getting back into the field any time.” We had exactly the same from all our partners. It took nine months, and the
wait was worth it. Had we finished this film without our incident, it definitely would have been a “smaller” film.
SUBJECT BIOS

How does one write a bio on this beautiful femme fatale? She is a river, one who was born millions of years ago, and yet looks as youthful as if she was born yesterday. 60,000 years ago, she changed direction, character, and matured into a matriarch that nourishes millions of birds, animals, trees and the human spirit. She is the great and mighty Okavango.

A key character is Feeketsa, a lioness who is an extension of the river, a survivor, a meanderer. Another, Moporoto, is a leopardess, with two stunning cubs she will defend to her death. Watchwe is a hybrid, half waterbuck, half lechwe - the only one of its kind, anywhere and in any time. A once-off. He deserves a mention.

OKAVANGO FACTS and CONSERVATION

- This is a 15,000 sq km delta that has as its backbone the river, that starts in Angola and ends in a desert, never touching an ocean
- It delivers 11 trillion liters of water each year, and 98% of that simply evaporates and doesn't seep in
- As a result, more than 130,000 elephants, more than 1/3 of the world's remaining population, live off these waters
- It is home to a unique breed of lions, swamp cats that weigh nearly 15% more than savanna lions; these Okavango lions swim and wade in water for hours, and then even climb trees to cool, look out or get away from flies
- 60 years ago, there were well over 2 million elephants, today there are under 500,000
- At the same time, lions have dropped from 450,000 (when I was born) to 20,000 today.
- Leopards have dropped from 700,000 in that time to 45,000 and falling, as Botswana opens up leopard and elephant hunting again.
- A rhino gets shot by poachers every 7 hours.
Dereck and Beverly Joubert are preeminent natural history filmmakers with 9 Emmy awards and a Peabody under their belts (amongst other awards) and are National Geographic Explorers at Large, a title given to just 14 people around the world. They have lived (and died) in Africa all their lives, and have over 40 films to their production and directing credits. But it is the plight of the big cats and disappearing African wild landscapes that drives them to expose and talk about Africa.

The former president of Botswana referred to them as ‘True Children of Africa’ and that is right: their mission is to preserve the integrity of that wild places there.

As filmmakers, they find a “Sympatico” with Walter Koehler, Sabine Holzer and Ivo Filatsch at Terra Mater Factual Studios in making films that matter.
This is a love letter, from us,
to the greatest river in Africa.

We hope she knows...

a TERRA MATER FACTUAL STUDIOS
and WILDLIFE FILMS production

in co-production with
THIRTEEN PRODUCTIONS LLC  DOCLIGHTS / NDR NATURFILM

in association with
PBS  CPB  ARTE FRANCE  NATIONAL GEOGRAPHIC CHANNELS

OKAVANGO

a film by
DERECK & BEVERLY JOUBERT

END CREDITS
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<td>UNDERWATER EXPERT</td>
<td>SVEN BOURQUIN</td>
<td>ADDITIONAL EDITOR</td>
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<td>ASSISTANT EDITORS</td>
<td>WARREN FREIMOND</td>
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<td>GRAPHIC DESIGNER</td>
<td>CLINT CORDEN</td>
<td>POST-PRODUCTION SUPERVISOR</td>
<td>MICHAEL FRÖCH</td>
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<td>LEE NIEDERKOFLER</td>
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<td>CHRISTOPH STEINER</td>
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<td>OLIVER RAUTNER</td>
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<td>SOUND EFFECTS DESIGN</td>
<td>JULI VANDENBERG</td>
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<td>S.A.G.E.</td>
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<td>RON NELL</td>
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VAL NELL

SOUND POST-PRODUCTION VIENNA
BLAUTÖNE

RE-RECORDING MIXER
BERNHARD ZORZI

SOUND POST-PRODUCTION CO-ORDINATOR
EVA REITHOFER

SOUND POST-PRODUCTION SUPERVISOR
THOMAS KATHRINER

SOUND POST-PRODUCTION SOUTH AFRICA
BEYOND SOUND
CHARLOTTE BUYS

ORCHESTRATION
TILO HEINRICH

MUSIC RECORDING ENGINEER
RICHARD MITCHELL

ORCHESTRA
THE JOHANNESBURG FILM

TITLE MUSIC
“SWEET DREAMS”
WRITTEN BY ANNIE LENNOX / DAVE STEWART
PERFORMED BY MARILYN MANSON
UNIVERSAL MUSIC GROUP

PRODUCTION EXECUTIVE
VANESSA YELSETH

PRODUCTION MANAGERS
TRAUDE BOTHA
LORNA GIBSON

LINE PRODUCER
ALDO METZELAAR
SPECIAL THANKS

THE PRESIDENT AND THE PEOPLE OF BOTSWANA

THE MINISTRY OF ENVIRONMENT, WILDLIFE AND TOURISM OF BOTSWANA

GREAT PLAINS CONSERVATION

SELINDA RESERVE AND DUBA PLAINS GUIDES

CANDICE ODGERS
MARK STOOP
JOHAN THERON
BRIDGET ZIETSMAN
JANET HESS
BILL MURPHY
TOM SYNNATZSCHKE
HÉLÈNE GANICHAUD

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