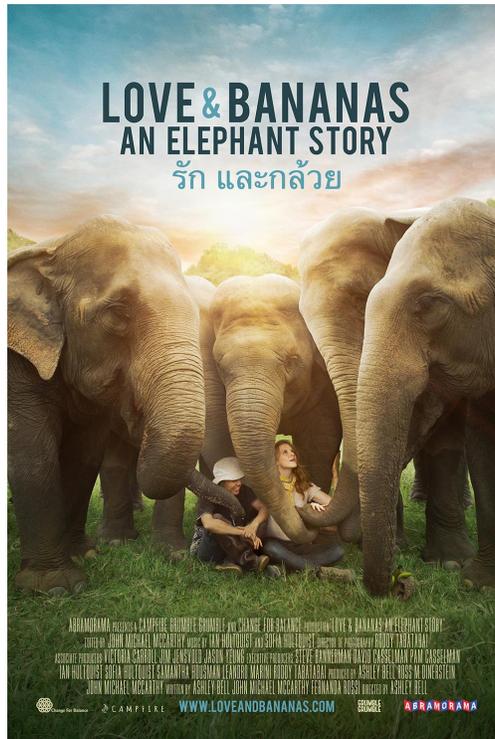




Presents

## Love & Bananas: An Elephant Story



**In Theaters in NY on April 27, 2018 and in LA May 4, 2018**

Directed by: **Ashley Bell** (*The Last Exorcism I & II, Carnage Park, Novitiate*)

Written by: **Ashley Bell, John Michael McCarthy** and **Fernanda Rossi**

Executive produced by: **Steve Bannerman, David Casselman, Pam Casselman, Ian Hultquist, Sofia Hultquist, Samantha Housman, Leandro Marini, and Roddy Tabatabai**

Produced by: **Ashley Bell, John Michael McCarthy** and **Ross M. Dinerstein**

RT: 75 Minutes

[Press Materials](#) | [Facebook](#) | [Twitter](#) | [Instagram](#) | [Love & Bananas: An Elephant Story](#)

#loveandbananas

**PRESS CONTACT:**

Victoria Vargas / [VictoriaVargas@Falcoink.com](mailto:VictoriaVargas@Falcoink.com)

Erica Abrams / [EricaAbrams@Falcoink.com](mailto:EricaAbrams@Falcoink.com)

212.445.7100

## **LOGLINE**

Ashley Bell and a team of elephant rescuers, led by world renowned Asian elephant conservationist Sangdean Lek Chailert, embark on a daring 48-hour mission 500 miles across Thailand to rescue a 70-year old captive blind Asian elephant and bring her to freedom. *Love & Bananas: An Elephant Story* is a heartwarming and hopeful film that exposes the plight of Asian elephants and the people who work tirelessly to save them.

## **SYNOPSIS**

Elephant rescues in Thailand are rare, unpredictable and often life threatening. After waiting over 2 years, actor/director Ashley Bell and a team of elephant rescuers led by world renowned Asian elephant conservationist and TIME Magazine's Hero of Asia, Sangdean Lek Chailert, embark on a daring mission to rescue Noi Na, a 70-year old captive, partially blind trekking elephant and bring her 500 miles across Thailand to freedom.

African elephants are slaughtered for their ivory, but sadly the plight of the Asian Elephant has been completely overlooked even though they are the elephant we are most familiar with in zoos, circuses and elephant rides. *Love & Bananas: An Elephant Story* exposes the cruel secret that every Asian elephant has had to endure to become a service animal; a process known as Pajan, aka The Crush Box. The heartwarming film aims to ignite a sense of hope, and a new way of thinking about this species, while exposing the plight of Asian elephants and the people who work tirelessly to save them.

## **DIRECTOR'S STATEMENT**

There is a cause and effect to everything we do. The capture of wild Asian elephants to bend them to the will of humans for the purpose of trekking, logging and entertainment, has resulted in a dramatic dwindling of their numbers along with desensitizing humans to their plight.

I was given the rare opportunity to join world-renowned Asian Elephant conservationist Lek Chailert as she set out to rescue an elephant from a trekking camp. With a week's notice, I assembled a crew of four, and we soon found ourselves on the back of a truck, barreling down the superhighway in Thailand with Noi Na, a 70 year old partially blind elephant battling heatstroke. It was my job to chronicle this heart stopping and dangerous rescue without becoming part of its success or failure.

We stayed on the sanctuary to capture Noi Na's tenuous assimilation into the herd. We woke when the elephants woke to document the spirit of the herd, free of chains, which allowed them to be who they truly are... elephants. Because Lek opened not only her doors, but her heart, we were granted unparalleled access to these giants, and a look at the secret abuse that happens deep in the Thai jungle which turns wild elephants into service animals.

Lek showed me her world. It was my job and responsibility to show the world hers. The result is *Love & Bananas: An Elephant Story*.

## **BIOS**

### **Ashley Bell: Director, Producer, Writer**

An actress across film, television and theater, Ashley Bell is most recognizable for her critically acclaimed role in *"The Last Exorcism,"* for which she earned an Independent Spirit Award nomination for Best Supporting Actress and an MTV Movie Award nomination. The New York Post praised Bell's acting as "Oscar-worthy" and one of the 10 best performances of 2010 for her extraordinary portrayal of the possessed Nell Sweetzer. She reprised her role in *"The Last Exorcism Part II"* in 2013 and yet again received high praise. Bell has since crossed genres, and in 2014 she made her Broadway debut in the revival of the 1920's expressionistic drama *"Machinal,"* alongside Rebecca Hall and directed by Lyndsey Turner. Since then, Bell's projects have been a staple in the independent film festival circuit, with premieres at Sundance, SXSW, Tribeca and TIFF.

Bell most recently starred in Mickey Keating's feature film *"Psychopaths"* (Tribeca Film Festival 2017,) and the drama *"Novitiate"* (Sundance 2017). Additionally, Bell has completed production on the indie dramas *"Next Door"* and *"The Swerve,"* and the motion capture video game *"Scalebound."* In 2016, Bell starred in Mickey Keating's indie film *"Carnage Park,"* which premiered at Sundance, and for which she received rave reviews.

Bell directed, wrote and produced the feature documentary entitled *"Love & Bananas: An Elephant Story,"* which depicts the rescue of a blind Asian elephant from captivity in Thailand and her journey 500 miles to freedom. It will be released nationwide in theaters this April by Abramorama, with a broadcast release on Starz to follow later in the year. To accompany the project, she is releasing an e-book entitled *"Shoot it, Sell it, Show it: How I made an independent film with Grit and Google."* Additionally, Bell serves as a US Ambassador for Cruelty Free International.

Bell's expansive list of film credits include the romantic comedy *"Love & Air Sex,"* directed by fellow Spirit Award nominee Bryan Poser, which premiered at SXSW; the romantic drama *"From Above,"* co-starring Danny Glover; the post-apocalyptic thriller *"The Day,"* starring opposite Shawn Ashmore and Dominic Monaghan, which premiered at the Toronto International Film Festival; the coming of age indie *"There's a New World Somewhere";* the noir feature film *"Sparks,"* based on the graphic comic; and the WWE's action film *"The Marine: Homefront."* Her television credits include AMC's *"The Walking Dead"* webisode series *"The Oath,"* Lifetime's *"Don't Wake Mommy,"* *"CSI: Crime Scene Investigation"* and *"The United States of Tara."*

In 2012, Bell lent her voice to the animated series *"The LeBrons,"* starring NBA player LeBron James. Her voice has also been featured in several top-selling video games, including the lead role of Erlene in Sony PlayStation's *"Sorcery"* and The White Queen in Disney's *"Alice in Wonderland."*

Born and raised in Los Angeles, Bell is the daughter of actor/voice animator Michael Bell and actress and Groundlings co-founder Victoria Carroll. She studied acting and directing at Cambridge University, where she was awarded *"Best Actress"* for her portrayal of *"Ophelia."* Bell later graduated from NYU's Tisch School of the Arts with honors, and was mentored by Oscar nominee Kathleen Turner.

### **Sangdean Lek Chailert: Herself, Founder Save Elephant Foundation**

Sangdean Chailert, also known as Lek, which means “small” in Thai, was born in Thailand in 1962. In return for saving the life of a young man, her grandfather, a shaman or traditional healer, was given an elephant named Tong Kam, meaning Golden One. The bond that developed between Lek and Tong Kam sparked a love and respect for elephants that have shaped the course of her life.

After graduating from Chiang Mai University with an Arts degree, Lek worked in the tourist industry, where she became aware of the plight of the Asian elephant. She began championing the rights of elephants by raising public awareness of their situation and providing medical aid to elephants in remote villages.

In the 1990’s, Lek started rescuing injured, neglected, and elderly elephants and in 2003 was able to establish a permanent homeland for them in the picturesque Mae Taeng valley, near Chiang Mai, in Northern Thailand. She named this land Elephant Nature Park. Today, Elephant Nature Park is home to over 70 elephants that are able to roam freely during the day, live within family herds and develop close friendships with each other. Elephants at the park are not required to work, do not perform tricks, and are not ridden, but instead, are allowed to live a natural life.

Lek is an award-winning conservationist, who has been working for over two decades to improve the conditions of elephants in Asia and promote their welfare. Her work has received international acclaim and has been documented by National Geographic, Discovery Channel, Animal Planet, CNN, and the BBC, as well as print media around the world. In 2005, Lek was honored by Time Magazine as the "Hero of Asia" for her work to protect Asian elephants. In 2010, she was honored by Secretary of State, Hillary Rodham Clinton as one of six Woman Heroes of Global Conservation and recently, in 2017, Lek was invited to attend and speak at the "Global Pact for the Environment" Summit at the United Nations, New York, by President Macron of France.

Today, Lek continues to be at the forefront of elephant (and other animal rights causes), raising international awareness and encouraging other countries in the region to follow her lead, as well as helping provide sustainable alternatives to local villages. She has initiated projects in Thailand, Cambodia, and Myanmar and maintains special relationships with the animals she rescues. Most days, she can be found at Elephant Nature Park spending time with the rescued herd.

### **John Michael McCarthy: Producer, Writer, Cinematographer, Editor**

John Michael McCarthy is a writer, director, producer, cinematographer and editor. He is co-founder of Change For Balance Productions (CFBP), a production company and creative agency that creates insightful, entertaining media that is dedicated to making a positive impact in our world. John/CFB’s first documentary, EQUINE DESTINY, garnered over 20 awards at festivals across North America. John has spent the past 8 years traveling the globe, crafting original documentaries and stories, and creating commercial campaigns for some of the largest companies and organizations in the world. His work has received over 350 million views online and has been featured on MSNBC, Fox, CBS News, NBC Today Show, E!, MTV, BuzzFeed, and Upworthy just to name a few.

McCarthy is a producer, writer, editor and cinematographer on *Love & Bananas: An Elephant Story*, which was directed by Ashley Bell. John/CFB are the filmmakers behind Charlize Theron's international HIV and AIDS work and recently completed a short documentary film featuring Charlize Theron, Chelsea Handler, and Trevor Noah which was released online on World AIDS Day (Dec. 1), 2017 and featured on Good Morning America. John/CFB recently completed *ALOHA AINA WARRIOR* which is a documentary film exposing the dark world of chemical testing for the genetically modified food industry on the Hawaiian island of Kaua'i. *ALOHA AINA WARRIOR* centers around World Champion Tour Surfer and undefeated professional MMA fighter Dustin Barca as he leaves behind his career as a professional athlete to embark on an epic David vs. Goliath battle to protect his home from the largest chemical companies in the world. *ALOHA AINA WARRIOR* will be released in 2018.

John/CFB hit viral success with Prince EA's "Dear Future Generations, Sorry" which to date has over 300 million views on facebook and youtube and won Participant's Environmental Media Award for Best Digital Short of 2015. Their follow up to "Dear Future Generations, Sorry" a spoken word piece with Prince EA called "Man Vs. Earth" has been viewed over 17 million times and was invited to screen at the UN Climate Conference. CFB partnered with the Center for Reproductive Rights and HBO's *GIRLS* star Jemima Kirke to share her abortion story with the world for the first time. The video again went viral, and was featured nationally from Huffington Post to Just Jared.

In 2011, Change for Balance was nominated for Most Philanthropic Small Business of the Year at The Stay Classy Awards – the largest social impact awards ceremony in the United States. John/CFB has directed, produced, filmed, and/or managed productions in Paris, Amsterdam, Dubai, Qatar, Milan, India, Cannes, Monaco, Moscow, Dubai, Kenya, Democratic Republic of Congo, South Africa, China, Taiwan, Sumatra and all around the U.S. John is sponsored by action sports and lifestyle brand RVCA and is a member of the prestigious "Advocate" team.

Mr. McCarthy graduated from University of California, San Diego in 2008 with a B.A. in Political Science with a focus in American Politics.

#### **Ross M. Dinerstein: Producer**

Ross Dinerstein is the founder and CEO of Campfire, a film and television production company known for its work with Netflix, success at film festivals, and ability to span genres and mediums. Dinerstein is a prolific independent filmmaker who has produced or executive produced forty films, both narrative films and documentaries, over the last thirteen years.

Dinerstein's films have premiered at the most prestigious film festivals in the world including Sundance, South by Southwest, Tribeca, and Toronto. Over the last few years, Dinerstein has focused his producing efforts on creating elevated "midnight movies" including *THE KILLING ROOM*, *THE DIVIDE*, and *THE PACT* and theatrical documentaries including *JIRO DREAMS OF SUSHI*, *THE NIGHTMARE*, and *SILICON COWBOYS*.

Dinerstein/Campfire have recently collaborated with Netflix on five feature films. REBIRTH, the first film from the Netflix collaboration, premiered globally on Netflix in July 2016. Dinerstein's second collaboration with Netflix, CLINICAL, premiered in January 2017. Most recently, 1922 based on the novella of the same name written by Stephen King, which stars Thomas Jane and Molly Parker, launched worldwide on October 20, 2017. Campfire/Netflix has another two films currently in postproduction: 6 BALLOONS, which stars Dave Franco and Abbi Jacobson, and THE EGGPLANT EMOJI MOVIE.

Dinerstein began his career in 2001 working in the acquisitions department at Miramax Films. He has a Master's Degree in Motion Picture Producing from the USC School of Cinema and Television's Peter Stark Producing Program and an undergraduate degree in Economics and Film Studies from Vanderbilt University. He was born and raised in Houston, TX and currently resides in Venice, CA with his wife Liz, daughter Lucy, and son Abbot.

#### **Ian Hultquist: Composer, Executive Producer**

Ian Hultquist is a California-born, Chicago-raised composer and musician living in Los Angeles. Hultquist studied film scoring at Berklee College of Music, where he married his love of electronic and rock music with his love of film, and began to develop his unique composing style. It was in Boston that he also became a founding member of the band Passion Pit.

He began with scoring numerous commercials and short films, which led to work on both his first feature length documentary, *Ivory Tower*, and the award-winning drama *Animals*.

Ian's film work also includes *Clinical*(Netflix), *Mommy Dead & Dearest*(HBO), and the upcoming *Assassination Nation* (NEON/AGBO) & *AXL* (Lakeshore Entertainment).

#### **Sofia Hultquist (AKA Drum & Lace): Composer, Executive Producer**

Drum & Lace, aka Sofia Hultquist, is an Italian composer and performer that writes and creates music for film, fashion and media.

Drum & Lace's composition work includes writing music for fashion shows & films, commercials, and writing for feature-length films such as co-scoring the fashion documentary "The First Monday in May" (dir by Andrew Rossi) that opened the Tribeca Film Festival 2016, and "The Gospel According to André" (dir by Kate Novack) that premiered at TIFF 2017. Her work on fashion film series "Ethetics" by Noir Tribe has been an official selection at the Berlin Fashion Film Festival and Fashion Film Festival Milano to name a few.

Her recent performances include The Echo Society VI: Family concert weekend (Los Angeles, CA) and The Satellite Art Show (Miami Beach, FL) with the NY Fem Factory during Art Basel. She's currently based in Los Angeles.

### **Roddy Tabatabai: Director of Photography, Executive Producer**

Roddy Tabatabai is a, director, producer, cinematographer and editor. He is co-founder of Change For Balance Productions (CFBP). Roddy's/CFB's first documentary, "Equine Destiny," garnered over 20 awards at festivals across North America. Roddy has spent the past 8 years traveling the globe, crafting original documentaries and stories, and creating commercial campaigns for some of the largest companies and organizations in the world. His work has received over 300 million views online and has been featured on MSNBC, Fox, CBS News, NBC Today Show, E!, MTV, BuzzFeed, and Upworthy just to name a few.

Roddy is executive producer and director of photography on Love & Bananas: An Elephant Story, which was directed by Ashley Bell. Roddy/CFB are the filmmakers behind Charlize Theron's international HIV and AIDS work and recently completed a short documentary film featuring Charlize Theron, Chelsea Handler, and Trevor Noah which was released online on World AIDS Day (Dec. 1), 2017 and featured on Good Morning America. Roddy/CFB recently completed ALOHA AINA WARRIOR which is a documentary film exposing the dark world of chemical testing for the genetically modified food industry on the Hawaiian island of Kaua'i. ALOHA AINA WARRIOR centers around World Champion Tour Surfer and undefeated professional MMA fighter Dustin Barca as he leaves behind his career as a professional athlete to embark on an epic David vs. Goliath battle to protect his home and way of life against the largest chemical companies in the world. ALOHA AINA WARRIOR will be released in 2018.

Roddy/CFB hit viral success with Prince EA's "Dear Future Generations, Sorry" which to date has over 300 million views on facebook and youtube and won Participant's Environmental Media Award for Best Digital Short of 2015. Their follow up to "Dear Future Generations, Sorry" a spoken word piece with Prince EA called "Man Vs. Earth" has been viewed over 17 million times and was invited to screen at the UN Climate Conference. CFB partnered with the Center for Reproductive Rights and HBO's GIRLS star Jemima Kirke to share her abortion story with the world for the first time. The video again went viral, and was featured nationally from Huffington Post to Just Jared.

In 2011, Change for Balance was nominated for Most Philanthropic Small Business of the Year at The Stay Classy Awards – the largest social impact awards ceremony in the United States. Roddy/CFB has directed, produced, filmed, and/or managed productions in Paris, Amsterdam, Dubai, Qatar, Milan, India, Cannes, Monaco, Moscow, Dubai, Kenya, Democratic Republic of Congo, South Africa, China, Taiwan, Sumatra and all around the U.S. Roddy is sponsored by action sports and lifestyle brand RVCA and is a member of the prestigious "Advocate" team.

Mr. Tabatabai graduated from University of California of San Diego in 2008 with a B.A. in Communications.

### **Steve Bannerman: Executive Producer, Owner Local Hero**

Founded, co-owned and operated by colorists, Local Hero has been supporting the feature film community since 2006. With over 120 feature DI credits, Local Hero has been innovating in the field of digital intermediate and feature finishing ever since.

Local Hero has been file-based since opening day, specializing in making digitally shot films look their best. With our deep understanding of all things RAW and digital cinema, Local Hero has been helping to push the digital revolution in Hollywood forward, helping filmmakers create films that don't look plastic or digital.

Local Hero has built a loyal following of directors, DP's, producers, and post supervisors, who rely on us to help them map out their entire production chain, from what cameras to shoot, through onset services, to dailies and finally DI, finishing, and delivery.

We are also developers of technology. Local Hero has been partnered with ASSIMILATE, the makers of the SCRATCH dailies and DI platform, for 5 years, helping develop this cutting edge system and have used SCRATCH exclusively on all our feature projects. Having a very close relationship with the makers of our tools enables us to stay on the very bleeding edge of the ongoing workflow revolution.

#### **David Casselman: Executive Producer, Founder Cambodia Wildlife Sanctuary**

David Casselman is an honors graduate of the University of Michigan and Southwestern University School of Law (selected 1993 Alumnus of the Year). In addition to his other work, Mr. Casselman is recognized trial specialist, successfully representing both plaintiffs and defendants for decades. Mr. Casselman began his trial career primarily defending major corporations. After years of undefeated trial successes, he also began representing plaintiffs and public entities.

As lead trial counsel for the Los Angeles County entities in the massive Big Rock Mesa landslide litigation, Mr. Casselman pioneered new ground in the field of government tort liability and inverse condemnation. He has also successfully defended against numerous claims of paralytic injuries resulting from ocean related activities. In trials and settlements involving landslides, public construction contracting fraud, products liability, ground water pollution and other complex cases, he has secured nearly one half a billion dollars for his clients. In one case alone, he secured \$84 million dollars for a group of homeowners against Caltrans.

Mr. Casselman is a member and Past President (2005) of the Los Angeles Chapter and (2009) President of the California Chapters of the American Board of Trial Advocates (ABOTA), a past member of the Board of Directors of the Southern California Defense Counsel, past chairman of their Amicus Curiae Committee, a member of the International Association of Defense Counsel, the American Trial Lawyer's Association, the Los Angeles County Bar Association, The Inn of Court and the Supreme Court Historical Society. He was also asked to participate as an original co-author and editor of the definitive three volume Rutter California Practice Guide on Insurance Litigation.

Mr. Casselman is also a passionate defender of animals. He is the founder and director of the Cambodia Wildlife Sanctuary ([www.cambodiawildlifesanctuary.com](http://www.cambodiawildlifesanctuary.com)), which was created in partnership with the Kingdom of Cambodia to protect the habitat and animals of Southeast Asia. So far, the Sanctuary has rescued four elephants and many other animals.

Mr. Casselman has dedicated in excess of 10 years of legal effort pro bono attempting to prevent Los Angeles City abuse of elephants, representing Robert Culp and Aaron Leider in the highly publicized dispute over the care of elephants at the L.A. Zoo.

This case went through trial, and two favorable appellate decisions before it was ultimately heard by the Supreme Court and reversed on a technical issue involving the right to seek relief for the Zoo elephants. As a result, the case was sent back to trial and is still pending.

Mr. Casselman also provides a substantial amount of his time pro bono representing animal welfare causes, including drafting and speaking regarding proposed legislation; and litigating on behalf of endangered and abused animals. He also provides pro bono mediation services to resolve disputes between public and private entities regarding proper care of animals impounded by City and County government.

#### **Fernanda Rossi: Writer**

Internationally renowned writer and speaker Fernanda Rossi has collaborated in more than 500 fiction scripts, documentaries and fundraising samples, including two documentaries nominated for the Academy Award® and many that received funding from ITVS and National Film Board of Canada. She has given her lectures in more than 12 countries and at world markets, such as Hot Docs and Sheffield Doc/Fest. In addition, she's is a trainer for special programs and grant evaluator for foundations. Her book *Trailer Mechanics: How to Make Your Documentary Fundraising Demo*, 2nd Edition, is according to industry professionals the bible on demo production.

#### **Michael Perricone: Sound Editor CAS**

Michael Perricone started out playing guitar and bass at age ten. At age 19, Michael moved to Hollywood, and became an orchestral recording mixer for film and television music, later switching to sound design and re-recording mixing. He has sound edited, supervised or mixed hundreds of hours of television and over a hundred-fifty features. He's also been co-founder of Interlock Studios, Lotus Post and Airtight Media.

### **Behind the Scenes of *Love & Bananas: An Elephant Story***

#### **Cambodia Military**

In 2013, after we had taken a helicopter to film the effects illegal logging had made on the Cambodia Wildlife Sanctuary forest, it was understood that we had been cleared to land on a Cambodian military base. We were mistaken. At touchdown, we were surrounded by the Cambodian military, dressed in camouflage fatigues, Rolex watches, flip flops and AK 47s. Cash paid to the military cleared up the problem.

### **Elephant Howl**

Composers Ian Hultquist and Sofia Hultquist were open to incorporating actual elephant noises into the score. They sampled the raw elephant sounds from the elephants at the sanctuary in Thailand, and incorporated “elephant howls,” as well as time stretched the sound of elephants exhaling into the score.

### **Bananas over Broadway**

The initial funding for the filming of Love & Bananas was raised on Indiegogo. To raise funds and awareness, actor/director Ashley Bell dressed up in a banana suit, went to Time Square, and gave out fliers in between performances of Machinal on Broadway.

### **Freedom Run**

Lek explained, when an elephant first has the chain removed from its leg, it’s not uncommon for them to charge into the forest. Elephants feel the sensation of freedom and smell the raw jungle. When Lek removed Arun Reah and Kham Lin’s chain, (the first two elephants rescued in 2013), Lek found them half a mile in the jungle.

### **Turd Melon**

While filming at the sanctuary, the crew noticed a baby watermelon had grown out of an elephant dropping. They lovingly called it a turd melon, which stuck as a nickname for everyone during the shoot. The turd melon is discretely woven into the animation and is in the end credit crawl.

### **Airport Security**

The sound mixer / still photographer shot 28 rolls of film stills over the course of production. When he went through security at the airport in Cambodia, the film was seized. The crew fought for an hour to get the film hand checked. Eventually security agreed to have it x-rayed. As a result, there are white orbs in many of the stills.

### **Mud Pit**

In the mud pit scene the mud that was put on Ashley’s face unbeknownst to everyone contained some elephant dung. After many courses of antibiotics the infection cleared. If asked if she would do it again, “Yes. I love that scene. A trekking camp of 30 elephants were liberated.”

### **No Turn Left Unstoned**

The entire documentary was shot in 14 days. For the rescue everyone was up for three days, taking turns napping in follow cars. The Director of Photography Roddy Tabatabai actually got chased by an elephant, and producer/editor John McCarthy got side kicked by an elephant in the shin.