

ARTS & CULTURE



photo by Pascal Lauson

The best of nature cinematography

The Banff Mountain Film Festival hits the road

BY PATRICK SHAUNESSY

On Feb. 2 the Banff Mountain Film Festival visited Halifax. Presented locally by the Trail Shop and shown in the McInnes Room, hundreds of film enthusiasts, nature lovers and curious spectators

gathered to see this compilation of some of the most incredible and unimaginable photoplay in the world.

For the past 23 years the Banff Mountain Film Festival has honoured the best of natural cinematography — ranging from professional documentaries to extreme-sport footage to amateur video. The films are submitted to the festival from countries all over the world.

This year the festival considered over 120 films by "successful directors, established producers, famous adventurers, unknown heroes and first-time film-makers." Only 35-40 of these films will be passed on to the finals,

and only a select few of these will receive an award. Indeed, the Banff Mountain Film Festival is quite prestigious.

11 years ago the directors of the festival decided to take the very best of the films on the road. Today the festival visits over 150 cities worldwide — concentrating primarily on North America. The tour is meticulously planned to meet a strict schedule on its seven-month run. The festival presents approximately two hours of film footage in each host city, tailor-made to satisfy the audience.

The grand prize winning film, an ABC/KANE documentary entitled *Bhutan: The Last Shangri La*, was the star of the show. The film explored the scenery, wildlife

and nomadic culture of the beautiful Himalayan province. Narrated by Donald Sutherland, *Bhutan* was presented from the perspective of an indigenous legend who told the history and origin of this secluded paradise. The Himalayan valley of Bhutan began harmonious and undisturbed according to legend, with the planting of one seed, which grew into the ecological wonder it is today.

Another favourite was the people's choice film entitled *Polar Bear*, which documented polar bears living and surviving in the Arctic Circle. According to our host the film contained some of the most rare and beautiful pictures of polar bears ever taken. It was interesting to see what a remarkable animal the

polar bear is, given the extreme conditions under which it must survive.

Other notable features centred around such themes as climbing immense rock pillars in Hanoi, Vietnam; kayaking down break-neck rapids over suicidal waterfalls; and crushing avalanches tearing down mountain-sides to the score of Beethoven's 10th symphony.

The festival is sponsored by *National Geographic*, Solomon Footwear, Sector Sport Watches, Sierra Designs outerwear, Canadian Airlines, and Power Bar. The festival was well run and organized; but most importantly the festival was immensely entertaining. If you missed it this year, I would recommend seeing it next year.

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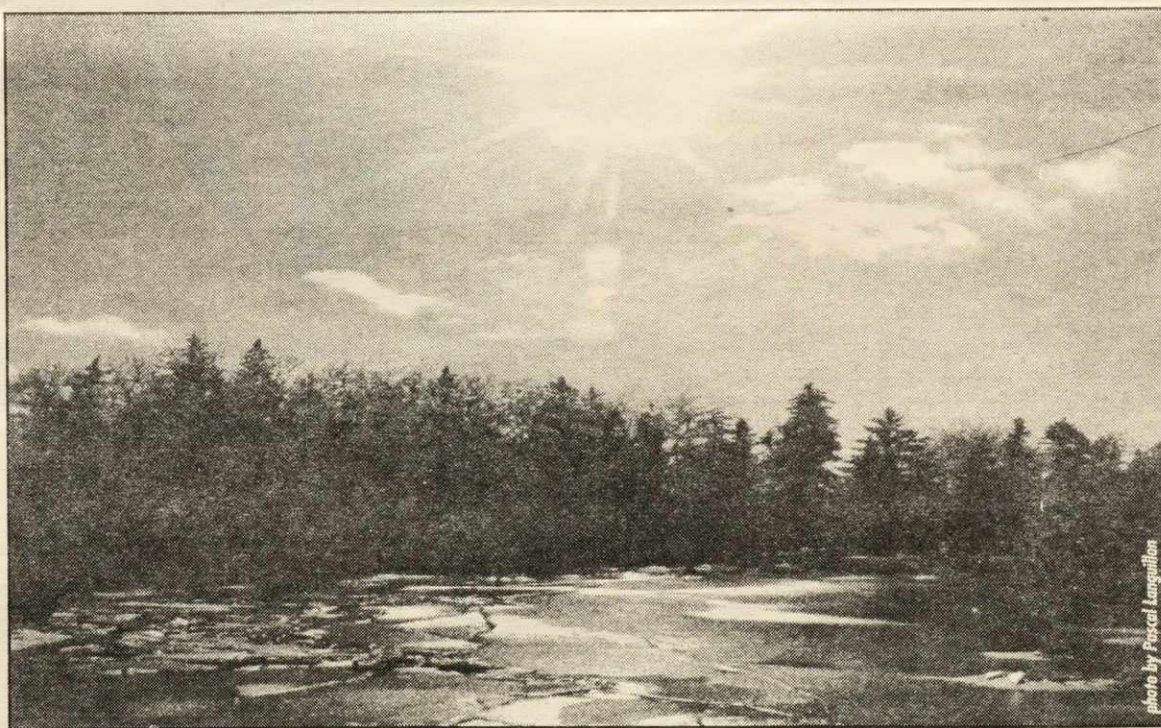
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SUN, ICE AND TREES: Banff in its majestic glory (simulation).

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