



Jen and Des Bartlett

HALF way through the one hour documentary film, *Survivors of the Skeleton Coast*, the death of the last known lioness to prowl the area is revealed. It is a poignant example of the difficulties facing conservation efforts where humans and wildlife eke out a living in such an inhospitable area. On screen Des Bartlett, the film's creator, laments: "The men on the ground are doing a terrific job. All they need is more money." And tens of millions of Americans listened.

This is the power of documentary films. At their best, films entertain, educate and enlighten, opening debate on a larger scale than almost any other form of media. Television has the power to reach huge numbers of people from virtually all walks of life. And, if a film's verbal and visual message is compelling, it can singularly move and motivate a very diverse audience.

Survivors of the Skeleton Coast is one of the best. It is destined to become a classic, along with the *Namib*, a detailed look at life in the desert, and *Etosha: Place of Dry Water*, both filmed by David and Carol Hughes, and *Lions of Etosha* also by Jen and Des Bartlett.

These are some of numerous documentaries which have been filmed in Namibia over the last few years. Film companies from as far

NAMIBIA: BEHIND THE SCENES

BY
GINGER MAUNEY

Above: World renowned filmmakers Des & Jen Bartlett steer their microlight over the desolate mountains of the Skeleton Coast. The Bartletts' documentaries have increased environmental awareness at home and abroad.

as Japan to those based in Namibia normally work for periods ranging from two weeks to two years to film Namibia's rich wildlife, geological and cultural heritage.

Some documentary films are made especially for a particular national market. For example, Japanese film companies seem to have a deep fascination with life in the Namib Desert. Obviously their viewers share this, because several crews come to the Desert Ecological Research Unit each year to film fog basking beetles and other aspects of the intricate ecosystem at work in the Namib for documentaries that air on Asian television networks.

Taiwan and Japan are two Asian countries which have poor records of conservation. Films such as those shot in Namibia have the potential to educate the younger people there to be more concerned with environmental issues and to respect and conserve the natural world.

From an educational and tourism standpoint, three films of recent years drew attention to specific areas in Namibia. *Strandwolf*, filmed over a two year period by Kim Wolhuter and Richard Goss, detailed the life of a small clan of brown hyaena prowling the shore around Lüderitz. Produced in association with the

Des Bartlett records close up footage of ghost crabs on the Skeleton Coast.



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BBC in England and National Geographic in the USA, *Strandwolf* aired successfully in both these countries.

Kaokoveld - How can I tell you? dealt with cultural and conservation issues, highlighting the lifestyle of the Himba and the work done by community game guards of the Save the Rhino Trust in northwestern Namibia. Its primary market was South Africa, but proceeds from the video version, which is on sale in Namibia, help to support the work of the Save the Rhino Trust.

Taking a different angle on the rhino story, Franz Camenzind, a filmmaker from America, worked alongside two researchers,

Joel Berger and Carol Cunningham, to include the possible effects and potential consequences that dehorning has on female rhinos and their offspring in northwestern Namibia and the western Etosha National Park. This film, a one hour special, was scheduled to air on network television in the USA in September 1994, thus practically guaranteeing an audience in the tens of millions.

Some of these films have and will be shown on Namibian television and almost all are available in Namibia on video. Their standard and content set a mandate for the national broadcaster, Namibian Broadcasting

A television crew records a rhino de-horning programme west of Khorixas. The national television station should make more use of these opportunities to increase environmental awareness among Namibians.



Johan Jooste

The author, Ginger Mauney and a friend during the filming of the documentary "Life on the Edge", which recorded the survival hardships of a troop of baboons in the Kuiseb river in the Namib-Naukluft Park.



Conrad Brain

Corporation, to become active in documenting environmental issues at home. The need clearly exists. The NBC has the capacity to share with Namibian viewers the issues surrounding wildlife and humans here so that they can be exposed, educated and become part of the decision making process. To this end, the NBC produced a 12 part environmental series during 1995.

Also on the agenda for 1995 are several other documentaries filmed in Namibia and slated for international release. These include a four-part series by Jen and Des Bartlett detailing the coastal plains, dunes and riverine ecosystems of the Skeleton Coast Park and adjacent areas. Richard Goss has a film in production on the wild horses of the southern Namib. And *Life on the Edge* details a four-year research project by Dr Conrad Brain and myself on the extraordinary lives of a small troop of baboons living in the Kuiseb River canyon.

To realise the huge personal commitment it takes to make a wildlife documentary and the tremendous worldwide impact that two people and two cameras can have, one need only trace the saga of *Survivors of the Skeleton Coast*.

In 1984, Australians Jen and Des Bartlett, a husband and wife team of naturalists who have documented wildlife and wild places around the world, moved to Möwe Bay, north of Swakopmund on the Skeleton Coast. From their base at the coast and with the aid of two microlight aircraft, the Bartletts filmed and photographed throughout the Skeleton Coast Park. Tourists, conservation officials, and years of east wind came and went. The

Bartletts continued working, capturing never before seen behaviour such as elephants sliding down sand dunes and aerial images. Nine years later, they took their footage to America.

In April 1993 the National Geographic television special *Survivors of the Skeleton Coast* premiered in the USA. It is estimated that with associated press coverage, this film reached 163 million Americans, more than half the country's population.

Since then, the film has aired with great success in Australia, Asia, Canada, Europe, the Middle East, New Zealand, South America and again the United States of America.

While launching the film in New York City, the Bartletts were guest speakers at a World Wildlife Fund Club dinner. That night, in association with the Namibia Nature Foundation, the Jen and Des Bartlett Fund was formed. *Survivors of the Skeleton Coast* had come full circle.

Proceeds from the sale of the video version of the film in Southern Africa have been donated by the Bartletts to this fund. During their extensive travels, the Bartletts help to raise money for the fund for conservation work in Namibia. Conservation, scientific and community based research projects in the Skeleton Coast Park and surrounding areas will be the ultimate recipients of these funds. The premise of the Bartletts' film and fund is that what has been preserved on film should be protected for future generations to see, enjoy and conserve.

This is what personal commitment and an excellent film can do.