

Written, Photographed and Directed by BEN KEMPAS - Consulting Producer and Additional Camera MAGDALENA HUTTER - Edited by BEN KEMPAS and RAIMUND BARTHELMES - Sound Recordists MAGDALENA HUTTER and WARD HUNT - Narrated by STAN BLACKLEY and JAKOB RIEDL - Sound Mixed by JÜRGEN ROTH Music by SEBASTIAN R. FISCHER - Music Mixed by KARSTEN LASER - Produced by JOACHIM SCHROEDER for PREVIEW PRODUCTION - Co-Produced by JOCHEN KÖLSCH and MONIKA LOBKOWICZ for BR/ARTE, HUBERT VON SPRETI and CLAUDIA GLADZIEJEWSKI for BR - Financially Supported by FILMFERNSCHONFONDS BAYERN - Additional Support by HOCHSCHULE FÜR FERNSEHEN UND FILM MÜNCHEN and EXPRESSIVE.TV - © 2008 PREVIEW PRODUCTION GbR
 Photograph by MAGDALENA HUTTER - Design by TOM JÄGER
 WWW.UPSTREAMBATTLE.COM

UPSTREAM BATTLE

Press Kit v3.0

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Preview Production GbR
 Herzog-Rudolf-Str. 1
 80539 Munich
 Germany

+49-89-52036767

www.previewproduction.com

Filmmaker: Ben Kempas, ben@expressive.tv

Producer: Joachim Schroeder, j.schroeder@previewproduction.com

Sales Agent: Todd Gamble, todd@601production.com

Festival Materials: Til Schönecker, t.schoenecker@previewproduction.com

www.upstreambattle.com



UPSTREAM BATTLE: The Story

Native Americans fight for their fish – against an energy corporation. Their struggle may trigger the largest dam removal project in history.

“Since the beginning of time,” they’ve been living along the Klamath River, in the far north of what’s today called California. The Karuk, Yurok and Hoopa are among the few tribes in the United States who have managed to keep their traditions alive. Their culture is centered around a majestic fish: the Pacific salmon.

A hundred years ago, up to a million salmon would swim upstream to their spawning grounds each year. Today, only a few thousand return to the river. Four large hydroelectric dams cut off their path and turn the water into a toxic soup. In 2002, in one of the worst fish kills ever recorded in the U.S., almost 70,000 adult salmon died in front of the eyes of the Native Americans.

“If they’re sick, we’re sick,” says Merv George, paddling in his dugout redwood canoe. Once again, the tribes’ existence is in jeopardy. Their position is clear: for the fish to survive, the dams have to go. While the rest of the world considers the construction of ever larger hydroelectric plants, this could become the story of the biggest dam removal project in history.

Managers at PacifiCorp, the dams’ operators, praise hydropower as a low-cost, climate-friendly source of energy, a valuable resource they say they couldn’t afford to lose. “We’re just borrowing water and returning it to a river,” Toby Freeman claims. But now they are in trouble, too – the long-term license for the hydro project needs to be renewed. Conditions of such a license will be very expensive for the company – maybe too expensive.

For tribal members like Merv, this is a once-in-a-lifetime opportunity. Their quest to confront the owners of the dams leads them to a global energy giant in far-away Scotland. The anonymous corporation finally shows a human face, but soon after, it is sold again. PacifiCorp and the Klamath River dams are now part of the empire of Warren Buffett. Will tribal members manage to persuade the second-richest man in the U.S. to save their salmon and their culture?

The story is told in a very character-driven way. Over the course of two years, the filmmaker followed tribal members, utility managers, irrigators, and commercial fisherman all in battle for a river. “I’ve found it fascinating how determined they all are to find a solution to a seemingly hopeless conflict,” Ben Kempas says. “We’ve been witnessing how stereotypes don’t stand the test of time. Indigenous people turn out to be smart strategists. Managers in the energy corporation suddenly fear for their own existence. And we’ve seen some astonishing alliances between old enemies.”

Feature-length version: 97’

TV versions: 52’ to 59’

Produced by Preview Production. Co-produced by ARTE and Bayerischer Rundfunk.

Financially supported by FilmFernsehFonds Bayern.

World premiere of the feature-length version at the International Documentary Film Festival in Munich in May 2008. Winner of the OSCE-sponsored Human Rights Award at the Dokufest in Kosovo. North American Premiere at the Toronto International Film Festival. Winner of Best Environmental Film at the IFF “Water, Sea & the Oceans” in the Czech Republic.

Updates at www.upstreambattle.com.



UPSTREAM BATTLE: Quotes

One of three documentaries mentioned as "Toronto Film Festival's must see films."

Marc Olsen, Los Angeles Times, 03 Sep 2008

"This is one of those films that you can only appreciate: It takes you to a place in the world that you (I) don't know anything about. It has some charismatic characters who fight for a cause. You get to know and love them. It has a strong and relevant, universal story that is straight forwardly well told."

Tue Steen Müller, Filmkommentaren, Denmark, 23 Aug 2008

Ben Kempas "succeeds in providing a sophisticated and dedicated portrayal of opposed ways of life: indigenous people struggling to maintain their identity, and profit-oriented businesses."

Abendzeitung München, Germany, 06 May 2008

"Michael Moore dreams of getting this kind of access. It's a testament to Ben's own belief in this struggle and a reward to those of us lucky enough to see the incredible film."

John Mounier, Filmmaker, Facebook Review, 18 June 2008

"This quarrel could easily have been framed as a classic David and Goliath confrontation, but *Upstream Battle* is wonderfully nuanced, acknowledging the complexity of the situation."

Thom Powers, TIFF Catalogue, Aug 2008

"The film does an excellent job of putting a human face on a complicated issue. [...] Where director Ben Kempas really scores is with the candid interviews with the PacifiCorp staff. [...] At a time when the effects of globalization, the energy crisis and environmental crisis are finally starting to hit home, intelligent, even-handed documentaries like 'Upstream Battle' are an essential part of the dialogue."

Mariko McDonald, FilmThreat, 09 Oct 2008

"Both Ben Kempas and Malcolm Rogge have made works in the grand tradition of socially and politically oriented documentaries: they've let the issues dictate the direction of their films. Like great journalism, these films impart knowledge to the viewer in a clean, linear manner, without losing sight of the complexity of the stories being told. Both deserve to be seen by wide audiences."

Marc Glassman, Classical 96.3 FM Toronto, Sep 2008

"Clarion cinematography and a refreshingly even tone elevate this German documentary. [...] Kempas' reluctance to idealize (or vilify) his subjects or simplify the issues at hand propels the film past simple advocacy-doc territory."

Adam Nayman, EYE Weekly Toronto, 01 Sep 2008

"This documentary fits well into the 'environmental' category. but it's about so much more. It's about what's lost when you devalue culture."

Donna G, "The More The Merrier", CIUT 98.5 FM Toronto, 10 Sep 2008

"A rare story of environmental triumph. [...] What truly makes UPSTREAM BATTLE stand out is the way all these people begin to come together and find constructive solutions that benefit both their communities and the health of the river that connects them all."

Sean Flynn, Filmmaker, Facebook Review, 19 Aug 2008

UPSTREAM BATTLE: The Filmmaker

Ben Kempas is a cinematographer and documentary filmmaker. He lives in Munich where he studied at the University for Film and Television. His previous films focused on the Scottish independence movement, on tabloid television in Germany, on courageous anti-nuclear campaigners, and on an intra-German "border violator". Ben writes for DOX magazine and is a co-host of The D-Word, a worldwide community of documentary professionals.

Documentary films by Ben Kempas:

IM AUFTRAG DES SCHICKSALS (1998, 60')

TO BE A NATION AGAIN (1999, 88')

THE LOCH LONG MONSTER (2001, 59')

GEGEN DIE GRENZE (co-directed with Alexander Dittner, 2004, 44')

ben@expressive.tv, phone +49-89-49003513, cell +49-171-2764778



The Producer

Joachim Schroeder, who grew up in England, is the founder and guiding force behind Preview Production. After receiving a scholarship in production to UCLA's School of Motion Pictures and Television in Los Angeles, and after freelance work for several German television stations, Joachim founded Preview Production in Munich in 1993 and since then has produced several hundred television and feature-length documentaries.

j.schroeder@previewproduction.com, phone +49-89-52036768, cell +49-171-3674305

Preview Production GbR

Herzog-Rudolf-Str. 1

80539 Munich

Germany

www.previewproduction.com

www.upstreambattle.com



The Consulting Producer

Magdalena Hutter came to filmmaking through documentary photography. She has been a student at the University of Television and Film in Munich since 2002. As a cinematographer she has been involved in both documentary and fiction projects, as a director her focus is on documentaries dealing with social justice issues.

The Co-Editor

Raimund Barthelmes has edited more than 50 high-profile feature-length films (fiction and documentary) and worked as a consultant on countless projects. He first met Ben in 1998, helping him and Johannes Kaltenhauser with their film IM AUFTRAG DES SCHICKSALS.

UPSTREAM BATTLE: The Protagonists

THE HOOPA, YUOK, AND KARUK TRIBES IN CALIFORNIA

The family of **Merv and Wendy George** are members of the Hoopa Valley Tribe. Wendy, a mother of four, spends her days working for the Tribal Council and her nights fishing on the Trinity River, the largest tributary to the Klamath. Her husband runs the Inter-Tribal Fish & Water Commission. They manage to combine traditional Hoopa values and rituals with a very modern “American” lifestyle. He makes regalia from Woodpeckers and plays the drums in a rock’n’roll band.



Richard Myers, a Yurok tribal member, lives a simple life somewhere in the woods along the Lower Klamath, fishing in his old redwood dugout canoe and smoking his own salmon. There’s no public water supply and no electricity grid, so Richard has to generate his own. His 89-year-old mother is still a fluent speaker of Yurok and teaches it to her grandchildren.



Ron Reed is the son of one of the last full-blooded Karuk. But his mother recently died of diabetes, a common cause of death linked to the radical change in tribal diet. His tribe doesn’t have federally recognised fishing rights, so they can only catch fish for ceremonial purposes and for research. Ron works as a cultural biologist for his tribe. **Craig Tucker**, a white environmentalist, is a spin-doctor behind the scenes: He coordinates the Klamath campaign for the Karuk tribe.



TRIBES AND FARMERS IN THE UPPER BASIN IN OREGON

As a member of the Klamath Tribes of Oregon, **Jeff Mitchell** lives upstream from the dams and is totally cut off from the salmon. His neighbours are white farmers like **Lynn Long** who heavily rely on water for irrigation and on cheap electricity to run their pumps. **Greg Addington** runs the Klamath Water Users Association and finally helps to turn former enemies -- tribes and irrigators -- into new allies.



PACIFICORP ENERGY

Toby Freeman first works as a relicensing manager for PacifiCorp, being in charge of obtaining a new long-term licence for the dams on the Klamath River. After the departure of vice president **Robin Furness** and the sale of PacifiCorp to Warren Buffett, he changes positions and now is the Regional Community Manager for the Upper Klamath Basin. Toby is supported by PacifiCorp spokesman **Dave Kvamme**.

UPSTREAM BATTLE: Filmmaker's Statement

by Ben Kempas

A very good friend in Scotland actually deserves all the credit for the existence of this film. Stan Blackley specialises in environmental PR work, and he told me about a couple of tribal delegates who were coming to the UK to take on an energy giant, ScottishPower. In 2005, this Glasgow-based utility was one of the 25 largest in the world. Native Americans travelling half-way around the globe to fight for their river -- it truly is a David-against-Goliath story of today's world.

So I grabbed a camera and flew to Scotland to see what was going on. For some reason, I instantly connected to Merv and Wendy, Ron and Craig, Richard, and Jeff. It soon became clear that all of them would have to be part of a documentary, but I had no idea that this would keep me busy for the next three years.

What did I know about the "American Indian"? Only what the European media had told me: that they still existed, stuck in reservations away from their old homelands; that they had huge problems with unemployment, poverty, and drugs; but some tribes had started very successful casinos. So I guess I knew a little more than those people in Glasgow who asked the visitors if they still lived in teepees.

Yet, our first research trip to the Klamath surprised my partner Magdalena and me in many ways. These tribes still inhabit a good part of their ancestral territory. It's a very remote area, so the first white settlers didn't show up there before the 1850s. Many tribal members withstood the Christian missionaries and have managed to keep their traditional ceremonies going without interruption. Although their grandparents were sent to far-away boarding schools and punished for speaking their own language, people can still speak Yurok, Karuk, or Hupa today. Yet, Merv races jet boats and plays the drums in a rock'n'roll band. "It's all about balance," he says.

We had been invited to attend the annual World Renewal Ceremonies, and all of a sudden, we became aware that access to the tribes wasn't as easy as it first had seemed. Tribal members are very careful not to have their culture "exploited", and any recording of the ceremonies is strictly prohibited. Apparently, National Geographic always gets turned down when they enquire about filming the dances. A Karuk ceremonial leader pointed to our camera: "Last time a camera this big showed up here, it ended up in the river."

We soon realised that we had to find a rather difficult balance between making a film and protecting what's so precious to the tribes. Attending the sacred dances without a camera helped us gain trust from the tribal communities, but more importantly, it gave us an idea of the spiritual power that makes these ceremonies so unique. We learned to understand the need for the ceremonies to be protected. In order to still give the audience an idea of the unique atmosphere, Ron's brother Mike invited us to their War Dance, a rather informal family event, fragments of which can be seen in UPSTREAM BATTLE.

What totally surprised us was the willingness of energy corporations to be part of this film. ScottishPower already gave us some access in Glasgow, and after a meeting with managers of their subsidiary company in the U.S., PacifiCorp, we got permission for shoots at their Portland headquarters as well as all the dams and powerhouses. There is a strange similarity between utility managers and tribal members: they both knew exactly what they would say or do in front of a camera -- and what they wouldn't.

There was a period of silence following the sale of PacifiCorp from ScottishPower to Warren Buffett, but eventually, the corporation opened up again. Finally, following Merv's journey across America to confront the second-richest man, even the new parent company, Berkshire Hathaway, had to offer us limited access to their annual "Woodstock for Capitalists". One shareholder had given us a spare pass to the meeting.

UPSTREAM BATTLE: Credits

Written, Photographed and Directed by
Ben Kempas

Consulting Producer and Additional Camera
Magdalena Hutter

Edited by
Ben Kempas
Raimund Barthelmes

Editing Consultant
Marijan David Vajda

Assistant Editors
Niklas Goslar
Miriam Märk

Sound recordists
Magdalena Hutter
Ward Hunt

Narrated by
Stan Blackley
Jakob Riedl

Sound Mixed by
Jürgen Roth

Music by
Sebastian R. Fischer

Bass and Banjo by
Azhar Karnal

Music Mixed by
Karsten Laser

Producer
Joachim Schroeder

Production Assistants
Dominik Beisser
Bianca Havel

Festival Coordinator
Til Schönecker

Legal Services
Michael Koenig

Commissioning Editors
Jochen Kölsch
Monika Lobkowicz
Hubert von Spreti
Claudia Gladziejewski



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Hoopa Valley Tribe - Karuk Tribe of California
Klamath Tribes of Oregon - Yurok Tribe
Klamath Water Users Association
Pacific Coast Federation of Fishermen's Associations
Berkshire Hathaway - PacifiCorp Energy - ScottishPower
Cowlitz Salmon Hatchery - Trinity River Hatchery
Wendy and Merv George and family
Jeff Mitchell and family
Richard Myers and family
Ron Reed, Mike Polmateer, Dave Arwood and families
Craig Tucker and family
Toby Freeman, Dave Kvamme, and Robin Furness
Greg Addington, Lynn Long
Stan Blackley, Lara Celini

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of the Interior**

www.doi.gov

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Contact: Chris Paolino (DOI) 202-208-6416

Jillian Schoene (OR) 503-378-5040

Lisa Page (CA) 916-445-4571

Art Sasse (PacifiCorp) 503-813-6801

Agreement in Principle Marks First Critical Step on Presumptive Path to Remove Four Klamath River Dams

AIP sets in motion potential for the largest project of its kind in U.S. history.

LOS ANGELES, Calif. – The federal government, the state of California, the state of Oregon and PacifiCorp today announced an Agreement in Principle (AIP) that takes the first critical step down a presumptive path toward a historic resolution of Klamath River resource issues and the Klamath River dams.

The AIP provides a flexible framework for the presumed transfer of four dams from PacifiCorp to a government designated dam removal entity (DRE), which would then undertake the removal of those dams, and sets a timeline for the signing of a final agreement. Under the AIP final authority for dam removal must be granted by the Secretary of the Interior following an assessment to confirm the current view of the United States and governments of California and Oregon that dam removal is in the public interest.

"This is a historic announcement and the culmination of years of hard work from the numerous negotiators from the federal government and the states of California and Oregon, and PacifiCorp representatives who have worked toward a common goal of how best to protect the uniqueness of this region," said Secretary of the Interior Dirk Kempthorne. "We have agreed to a path forward that will protect fish, PacifiCorp customers and the local cultures and communities in the two-state Klamath River basin."

There is a complex framework for dam removal that balances the timing of removal of each of the four dams with operating conditions and the costs of replacement power for PacifiCorp customers. The AIP provides a target removal date of 2020.

"Today's announcement is the first step in what would be the largest dam removal project ever in history that California, Oregon and our federal and private partners are undertaking to improve water quality, water supply and fish populations in the Klamath region," California Governor Arnold Schwarzenegger said. "The health of the Klamath River is critical to the livelihood of numerous Northern California communities, and with this groundbreaking agreement we have established a framework for restoring an important natural resource for future generations."



PacifiCorp's Copco 1 dam on the Klamath River could be removed under an Agreement in Principle announced by Secretary of the Interior Dirk Kempthorne. [Hi-Res](#)

The AIP compels the federal government to scientifically assess the costs and benefits of dam removal. The United States will make a final determination by March 31, 2012, whether the benefits of dam removal will justify the costs--informed by scientific and engineering studies conducted in the interim, and in consultation with state, local, and tribal governments and other stakeholders, as appropriate. At that point, the United States shall designate a non-federal dam removal entity (DRE) to remove the dams or decline to remove the dams at which point PacifiCorp will return to the Federal Energy Regulatory Commission for relicensing.

"While many months of work lay ahead, this historic agreement provides a path forward to achieve the largest river and salmon restoration effort ever undertaken in a way that's good for fish, PacifiCorp customers, and local communities and our sovereign tribes," Oregon Governor Ted Kulongoski said. "With Oregon's best interests in mind, it is with great pride that I will be taking the first step in implementing this agreement by offering legislation to support the dam decommissioning and removal process."

Assuming a final agreement is reached next year and pending congressional approval, PacifiCorp will also set aside millions of dollars for immediate environmental improvements. The funds would be used to implement numerous measures that will enhance habitat, improve water quality, increase fish populations, and benefit fisheries management in the basin.

"This careful effort to balance the complex needs of numerous interests within the community is exactly the type of approach PacifiCorp takes every time we sit down to the settlement table," said Greg Abel, PacifiCorp Chairman & CEO. "This flexible framework ensures that our customers will be protected at every step along the way, while remaining consistent with our strong commitment to respecting the environment. We will continue to work diligently with everyone at the table, including the irrigators, environmentalists, the tribes and all local elected officials with the goal of reaching a final dam removal agreement that is in the economic interests of PacifiCorp customers."

The AIP also establishes protections for PacifiCorp customers from liability associated with any removal of the dams and limits the amount customers would pay toward environmental improvements and dam removal.

As part of the AIP, negotiators have committed to another immediate schedule of talks, working toward a final dam resolution agreement and hoping to conclude by June 2009.

Copies of the AIP and accompanying letters from the Department of the Interior to the states and PacifiCorp can be found at www.DOI.gov.

P R E S S R E L E A S E

Karuk Tribe • Klamath Tribes of Oregon • Yurok Tribe • Klamath Water Users' Association • Upper Klamath Water Users' Association • American Rivers • Trout Unlimited • California Trout • Salmon River Restoration Council • Pacific Coast Federation of Fishermen's Associations • Northern California Council of the Federation of Fly Fishers

November 13, 2008

ONE STEP CLOSER TO KLAMATH DAM REMOVAL

PacifiCorp, Feds, States sign Agreement in Principle to Remove Klamath Dams

Sacramento, CA – Today Secretary of the Interior Dirk Kempthorne, Oregon Governor Ted Kulongoski, California Oregon Governor Arnold Schwarzenegger, and PacifiCorp Chairman & CEO Greg Abel,, signed an Agreement in Principal (AIP) that defines the path to what would be the largest dam removal in US history.

PacifiCorp, federal officials, and state agencies plan to work with local stakeholders including Tribes, irrigators, conservation groups, commercial fishermen, and local governments to reach a final agreement within months.

The Agreement presumes that the removal of the lower four Klamath dams will begin in 2020.

The signing of the AIP is welcome news to the Tribes, conservationists, commercial fishermen, farmers and ranchers who see dam removal as the missing element of the more comprehensive Klamath Basin Restoration Agreement (KBRA) released earlier this year.

The KBRA includes a plan to reintroduce salmon to the Upper Basin, provide dependable irrigation deliveries to Project Farmers, a means to reconcile water rights disputes, and ensure affordable renewable power for farm and ranching communities.

“We can remove dams, restore the fishery, and have prosperous farm communities all in the same basin,” asserted Yurok Chair person Maria Tripp. “We are proud to see PacifiCorp joining our effort to provide long term stability to all of the Klamath Basin’s diverse communities.”

“PacifiCorp is making a private property rights decision,” explained Luther Horsley of the Klamath Water Users’ Association, “we support this agreement as part of a larger plan to provide water and power security to local irrigators.”

“This careful effort to balance the complex needs of numerous interests within the community is exactly the type of approach PacifiCorp takes every time we sit down to the settlement table, said Greg Abel, PacifiCorp Chairman & CEO. “This flexible framework ensures that our customers will be protected at every step along the way, while remaining consistent with our strong commitment to respecting the environment. We will continue to work diligently with everyone at the table, including the irrigators, environmentalists, the Tribes and local elected officials with the goal of reaching a final dam removal agreement that is in the economic interests of PacifiCorp customers.”

For more information:

Craig Tucker, *Spokesman Karuk Tribe*
(916) 207-8294

Troy Fletcher, *Policy Analyst, Yurok Tribe*
(707) 498-8486

Jeff Mitchell, *Council member, Klamath Tribes,*
(541) 891-5971

Craig Addington, *Executive Director, Klamath*

Glen Spain, *Regional Director, Pacific Coast Federation of Fishermen's Associations,*
(541) 689-2000

Steve Rotherth, *Spokesman, American Rivers,*
(530) 277-0448

Chuck Bonham, *Spokesman, Trout Unlimited,*
(510) 917-8572

We congratulate Mr. Kempas and his crew for their film's acceptance into the prestigious Toronto International Film Festival.

In addition to some of the varied interests captured in the film, there are many other groups with complex interests, living and working in the Klamath River region. Our customers form a rainbow of unique and distinct energy users, and many of them keep telling us they desire low-cost, carbon-free hydroelectric power, a belief that is broadly held throughout the region.

This film clearly advocates on behalf of one unique perspective. However, our continued goal is to balance all interests with a reasonable and common-sense approach to providing reliable power at reasonable rates for our customers in the Klamath Basin and throughout our entire service territory.

The Klamath issue is incredibly complex and ever-changing. Shooting for this film stopped more than a year ago. In that time, significant conversations and negotiations have occurred. We feel that is important context for people to know, as they view this film.

Today, we are closer than we've ever been to a positive resolution for the Klamath; however, to maintain integrity and candor at the negotiating table, all parties involved have agreed to keep details confidential until we've reached a formal agreement. We remain at the settlement table with Oregon, California and federal officials, working toward a possible resolution. Those talks have been productive and we continue to meet.

Throughout the past number of years that we've been involved in relicensing of the Klamath project, we have been clearly consistent in stating our position: If elected officials feel that, as a matter of public policy and after careful consideration of independent scientific evidence, PacifiCorp should no longer operate the Klamath Hydroelectric Project, then as long as our customers are protected in terms of costs and liability, PacifiCorp would work with those elected officials, along with state and federal regulatory officials to facilitate their desired outcome for the Klamath basin community.

While we prefer the settlement route, we are also legally obligated on behalf of our customers to continue to pursue relicensing for these facilities, until we have a viable alternative. Given the complexity and competing interests associated with relicensing the Klamath hydroelectric project, it is likely that no single resolution will satisfy all stakeholders. However, we continue to strive to find a balanced and reasonable outcome that will best protect our customers from liability and provide them with reliable power at reasonable rates.

Again, we congratulate Mr. Kempas on the recognition of his work. We wish him well in the same spirit we're confident he wishes us only the best in achieving a balanced and beneficial resolution for the myriad of interests in the Klamath River region.

CURATOR

The Fight For Salmon in “Upstream Battle”

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By Sarah Hanssen · November 28, 2008 · [Email This Post](#) · [Print This Post](#)

In a country overrun with Wal*Marts and convenience stores, the idea of living dependent only on the land seems abstract. But director Ben Kempas's new documentary turns that distant truth into a concrete reality as he follows the efforts of Native Americans fighting a massive global energy company who have all but destroyed their way of life.

The Klamath Tribes of Oregon once inhabited a flourishing landscape where fat salmon teemed in the pristine Klamath River of Northern California and Oregon. But the damming of those waters by the PacifiCorp energy company has resulted in the decimation of the local salmon population. For the Native Americans, it wasn't only a question of food, it was a question of faith. They believe that the Creator would provide for their needs through that water and those fish.



"This river is our temple and it is our sacred grounds. So we, the Hoopa people, the Yurok people and the Karuk people, we fight very hard for these waters because it is our church, it is our religion."
- Merv George, Hoopa Valley Tribe

Whether or not you agree that a river has a spirit, you cannot deny its value to the human beings residing on its shores. Two in three Native Americans in these communities are out of work, and poor health is on the rise as they rely upon government subsidies for the majority of their diet. The idea that the need for electricity by distant urban populations should override the needs of the local inhabitants seems questionable to any onlooker and the justifications put forth by PacifiCorp for the dams are simplistic.

"People see hydro as a very green resource, this is a non-polluting resource, there are no emissions, no smokestacks. We are not burning fossil fuels to generate electricity here. We are simply borrowing water and returning it to a river."
- Toby Freeman, PacifiCorp Energy

The filmmaker attempts to portray both sides of the issue fairly, but the Native Americans appear far more genuine and inviting than the energy company and its employees. Nowhere is this more evident than the scene in which the corporate employees are pictured eating lunch from plastic containers in their sterile workplace while the native people gather together and eat what they have fished for themselves. Not only is the fresh fish more appetizing, but the direct relationship they have towards their food is impressive.

Kempas does not mask his admiration for the Native Americans and their way of life. He presents them as both optimistic and brave as they fight for the largest dam removal project in history. There is a touching moment when a uniformed sheriff is seen eating a ceremonial meal with the people who have gathered to protest the dams. The Native Americans and their supporters are so inviting and open that anyone present, even those sent to monitor their demonstration, would want to participate. Similarly, the viewer is carried away with their cause and the hope that their fight for the river will not fail.



"It's not something that is easy to explain to an outside person. Why I sit here on the river bar, and fish, why my kids are here, why we hunt, why we make baskets, why we sing, why we pray. Why do we do all these things when we can just go work in a big corporate building and forget about it all."
- Wendy George, Hoopa Valley Tribe

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"I want you to stay away from them. Those mondo-weirdo video guys." - Videodrome (1983)

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UPSTREAM BATTLE

by Mariko McDonald
(2008-10-09)
2008, Un-rated, 97 minutes
[CREDITS](#)

★★★★★

So we all know the environment is in trouble, but what does the changing temperature of the ocean and the disappearance of a few thousand species have to do with us? A lot, as is illustrated by the humane and gripping documentary, "Upstream Battle."

Opening with a protest during a shareholders meeting of Scottish Power in Scotland, the film follows the fight of four Native American tribes from Northern California: the Hoopa, Yurok, Karuk and Klamuth, as they try to save their ancestral fishing grounds. What happened to the fish, you may ask? Well, a lot, and none of it good. Basically there are four hydro-electrical dams set-up along the Klamuth river where the tribes are located, and these dams prevent the salmon from returning to their spawning grounds, create toxins in the reservoirs and starve the few fish that do manage to spawn of oxygen.

The impact these dams have had on the Native way of life is best illustrated by the fact that the Klamuth tribe, furthest upstream and now without any salmon whatsoever, had their reservation status revoked by the government. The film does an excellent job of putting a human face on a complicated issue, with each tribe represented by one or two key figures. Interview segments focus as much on the complicated issue at hand as one their personalities and personal attachment to the fight.

Where director Ben Kempas really scores is with the candid interviews with the PacifiCorp staff, notably re-licensing manager Toby Freeman, and Vice President Robin Furness who passed away during the filming of the documentary. Mr. Freeman at times seems to be toying with the filmmakers, aware that he is being cast as "the bad-guy", but unflinching pleasant and non-confrontational. While he might be working for "the wrong side", he is never nasty or rude, but comes across more as a man caught in the middle, just trying to do his job.

The documentary is excellently structured and is able to break down a very complicated issue with some very big players, including Warren Buffet, without over simplifying things or condescending to the audience. At a time when the effects of globalization, the energy crisis and environmental crisis are finally starting to hit home, intelligent, even-handed documentaries like "Upstream Battle" are an essential part of the dialogue.

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Hot Docs at TIFF

This evening at TIFF two excellent documentaries will be screening—and luckily, it's possible to see both tonight. *Under Rich Earth*, the first feature doc by Torontonians Malcolm Rogge and *Upstream Battle* by Scottish filmmaker Ben Kempas are tough, lucid films about

human rights and the environment. A better—or more relevant—double-bill would be hard to find. Rogge's film has its premiere screening at the AMC 2 at 8:45 pm while Kempas' first repeat showing is at AMC 9 at 6 pm, so festival goers impressed by these two docs selected by TIFF's Thom Powers will experience no difficulty "traveling" between cinemas.

Under Rich Earth is a startling exposé of a Canadian company's suspect dealings in Ecuador. *Accident Canyon*, which premiered in Toronto

Upstream Battle also chronicles a fight between Natives and corporations. A series of dams has affected the eco-system in northern California, where the Karuk, Yurok and Hoopa tribes have fished salmon for centuries. After toxic waste caused the death of 70,000 salmon in 2002, the situation went from bad to disastrously worse. The tribes joined forces to fight the hydro producing company that was profiting from this exploitation of natural resources.

Enter filmmaker Ben Kempas, a veteran doc-maker from Scotland, who became interested in the story when Native tribal leaders went to Scottish Power, then the owner of the dams, to ask them to cease and desist. Years of negotiation followed, all expertly chronicled by Kempas.

One gets to know First Nations leaders like Merv and Wendy George, who upset stereotypes by being smart and contemporary in their analysis of the problem. But just when it looks that a solution might occur, Scottish Power sells its interests to Berkshire Hathaway, the corporation owned by Warren Buffet. And everything stalls again...

Filmmakers who don't impose a flashy style on their stories have directed *Upstream Battle* and *Under Rich Earth*. Both Ben Kempas and Malcolm Rogge have made works in the grand tradition of socially and politically oriented documentaries: they've let the issues dictate the direction of their films. Like great journalism, these films impart knowledge to the viewer in a clean, linear manner, without losing sight of the complexity of the stories being told.

Both deserve to be seen by wide audiences.

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BY TOM O'NEIL

GALLERIES



Toronto Film Festival's must see films

With the indie scene shaky, Toronto's festival is especially important as the place to be seen.

By Mark Olsen, Special to The Times
September 3, 2008

Set to begin this Thursday, the Toronto International Film Festival will show 249 feature films and 63 shorts from 64 countries over 10 days. Now in its 33rd year, the annual festival comes at an especially trying time for the independent film business. With specialty films performing poorly at the box office and a number of key distributors recently closing their doors, the picture for filmmakers, producers and sales agents is looking particularly troubling this year.

In addition to its film market, Toronto is, of course, known as an important launching pad/whistle stop for movies on the long trail of the Hollywood awards season. Last year, for example, four of the five eventual best picture nominees for the Academy Award had their North American premiere at the festival. And for the last 10 years, the winner of the best foreign-language



AGAINST TYPE: Brad Pitt is one of the big names throwing curveballs with the Coen brothers in "Burn After Reading." (Focus Features)

Related



Top 10 must-see movies: 2008
Toronto Film Festival

From the documentary selections, festival Co-Director Cameron Bailey highlights the films "Food, Inc.," "Upstream Battle" and "At the Edge of the World" for their interest in environmental issues. Among the fiction films, Bailey sees an increased interest in domestic issues rather than larger sociopolitical narratives, as borne out by films such as "Lyme- life" and the German-language "A Year Ago in Winter."

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Blogstock: Live from the Woodstock Film Festival

Live coverage & commentary from the festival



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From Munich to Woodstock

Posted by Deb_Medenbach on 4 Oct 2008 1:30 pm. Filed under [social](#).



Photo of German documentary filmmaker Ben Kempas at the filmmaker's party Friday night at the Skytop Restaurant. Kempas' film "Upstream Battle" is a competition finalist.

German filmmaker Ben Kempas was fresh off an airplane from Reyjavik, Iceland and hadn't even entered the party at the Skytop Restaurant Friday night when he took a breather on the front steps of the restaurant and talked to me a bit about his new film.



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"Upstream Battle" is about American Indian disputes involving hydroelectric dams along the Klamath River in California and the impact on traditional salmon fishing. The fish, unable to migrate up to spawning grounds, were dying off by tens of thousands. As a dietary staple of the Karuk, Hoopa and Yurok Indians, a change had to be made.


"I first met the tribes in Scotland when they were confronting the owners of the power plants," Kempas said. "Then I went to Oregon for two years to get the story."


The documentary feature film took three years total to make and is a competition finalist.

Kempas has done films about the Scottish Independence Movement, anti-nuclear campaigns and pieces about controversial public issues in Germany.


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THE HOTTEST DOCS AT TORONTO

Author: Sasha Stone

25 AUG

[Doc it Out's](#) Agnes Varnum took a look at the Toronto doc lineup and came up with three must-see docs. Her list is showcased on TIFF's own [doc blog](#):

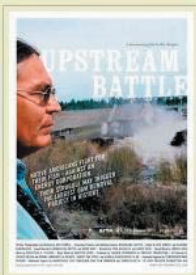
Les Plages d'Agnès by Agnès Varda - I know, I know, Agnes Varnum likes Agnes Varda. Film folks love that one. But Ms. Varda is no joke. The Gleaners and I is one of my

Upstream Battle by Ben Kempas - Sometimes selecting which films to see at a festival is as much about the filmmaker as it is about the film. Ben Kempas is one of the co-founders of the international documentary community The D-Word and a wonderful presence online and in person, but I have yet to see one of his films. The topic of Native American land and water rights is one that I would be interested in no matter who made the movie, but knowing the filmmaker makes this one of my must-sees.

Tiara Festival Blog

THURSDAY, SEPTEMBER 11, 2008

Day 7



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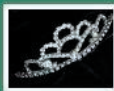
Back at work

Then headed off to see "Upstream Battle" at the AMC. A documentary about a battle over the salmon spawning grounds in the Klamath River of California. Three huge native tribes have been fishing for salmon in these waters for thousands of years but the salmon have been dying off since four hydroelectric dams were built (the highest dam has also turned the reservoir water above it into a highly-toxic soup). The film follows several very dedicated people in their fight to try to get the hydro company to demolish the dams - including some salmon fisherman (usually the natural enemy of the tribes) whose livelihoods have also been affected by the depleted salmon stocks. The company has now been purchased by Warren Buffet's Berkshire Hathaway, so the tribes are now trying to speak to him directly (one of the only funny scenes was when they tried to call him).

Really good movie, quite a complicated story since there are many angles to the issue and the director tried to show all sides. Corporations suck: I'm soooooo glad I often represent the Evil Corporation!

Then I met up with Alison at Ryerson where we caught "Good" -

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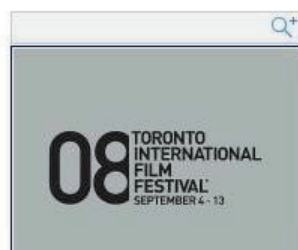
for an operation but decide to stay on to help others. Fascinating and humanizing.



UPSTREAM BATTLE (dir. Ben Kempas)—The persecution of the Native American did not reach resolution with a bonus plot of reservation land and casinos. In Northern California, hydroelectric dams have destroyed the salmon runs that provide food and commerce for the Hoopa and Yurok tribes.

Wielding political savvy while still hewing to ancient rituals, a group of Native Americans takes on the energy companies. Their goal: close down the Klamath Hydroelectric Project. A heartbreaking but engrossing tale of the clash between ancient and modern civilizations. The warriors get their say, but so do the guileless company officials, who are puzzled by the fiery opposition to their role in bringing electricity to rural people.

Q&A with Haskell Wexler



Filmmakers in Toronto focus lens on environmental issues



Filmmakers in Toronto focus lens on environmental issues

Sep 11, 2008

TORONTO (AFP) — A "tsunami" of films premiering this week at the Toronto Film Festival explore mankind's destruction of the environment and efforts around the world to save it, organizers said Thursday.

Led by an inside look at Japanese whaling in Antarctica in the acclaimed "At the Edge of the World," a "tsunami of documentaries on the environment" is being showcased, festival programmer Thom Powers told AFP.

"It reflects our growing preoccupation with nature, which we have long taken for granted, but which now is in serious jeopardy," Powers explained.

The environmental emphasis marks a dramatic shift away from filmmakers' recent focus on war and bloodshed, particularly the US-led "war on terror," he said.

In Dan Stone's "At the Edge of the World," the filmmaker steps aboard former Greenpeace activist Paul Watson's ships "Farley Mowatt" and "Robert Hunter" to document first-hand efforts to shame whalers at work.

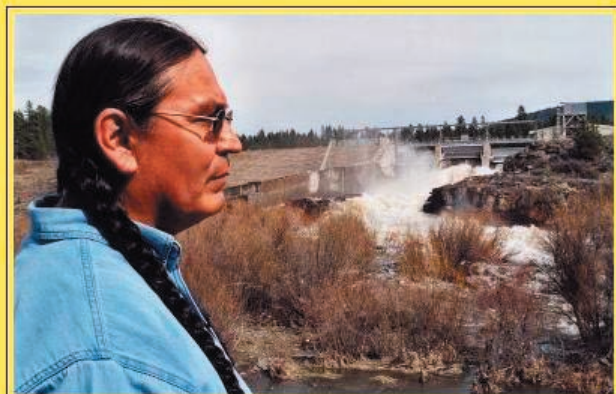
The camera focuses more on the human struggle than the plight of animals, presenting a compelling story with spectacular scenery.

The dozen or so films about the environment at the festival also includes "Upstream Battle" about the impact of hydro-electric dams on US Pacific Coast salmon spawning, and Malcolm Rogge's Ecuador mining story "Under Rich Earth."

Hosted by 

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UPSTREAM BATTLE



This documentary fits well into the "environmental" category, but it's about so much more. It's about what's lost when you devalue culture. Yes, the salmon run has been reduced from millions per year to thousands, but so have the ceremonies of the first nations people who are tied to the land and the river. The Yurok, Karuk and Klamath people continue to battle Warren Buffet's PacifiCorp, and the jury is still out. Also in the fight for dam removal are farmers who need water for irrigation and ocean fishermen. As [Ron Reed](#) said in an interview I did with he and his brother, [Mike Polmateer](#) and director [Ben Kempas](#), he has not hear one word directly from Buffet.

Final Screening:

Friday September 12 11:45AM VARSITY 7

Air date for Upstream Battle interview on The More the Merrier ([CIUT 89.5](#))

[FMJ](#) TBA

"The More The Merrier"
Radio Show, CIUT 89.5 FM

Toronto



Upstream Battle

Dir Ben Kempas. 97 min. Real to Reel.

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BY ADAM NAYMAN September 01, 2008 14:09

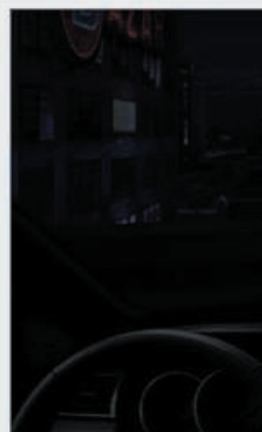
EDITORIAL RATING: ★★★★★

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Clarion cinematography and a refreshingly even tone elevate this German documentary, about the battle over hydroelectric dams in California. Director Ben Kempas clearly lays out a series of cause-and-effect scenarios: the dams prevent the salmon from spawning and expose them to chemicals; the salmon population goes down; the various Native American communities who live off of the salmon suffer in myriad ways; their leaders try to persuade the corporations behind the dams to do something about it. It's a disconcertingly familiar narrative, but Kempas' reluctance to idealize (or vilify) his subjects or simplify the issues at hand propels the film past simple advocacy-doc territory.



Toronto Listings

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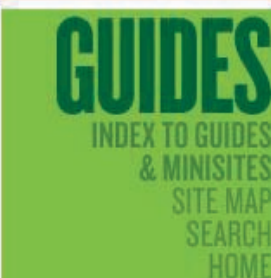
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FILM FESTIVAL INSIDER

Upstream Battle

Director(s): Ben Kempas

Country: Germany

Program: RTR

Rating: NNN

[* ...RETURN TO TIFF REVIEW LISTINGS](#)

Review BY PE

In this involving doc, native Americans from northern California fight the power company over the future of four dams that are seriously upsetting their salmon-based culture.

Merv George, the likeable, articulate Hoopa tribe member at the film's centre, is deeply connected to the earth (and has a fascinating fixation on the pileated woodpecker), and his argument that the decline in the Hoopas' health is directly related to the paucity of salmon in the Klamath River rings true.

With incisive, occasionally poetic camera work, director Kempas conveys the importance of land and lifestyle to these native Americans. He clearly identifies with George, but an inside, human look at the managers of the power company makes the film a richer experience.



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TIFF '08

Tired of war, filmmakers turn to everyday heroes

Jul 30, 2008 04:30 AM

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PETER HOWELL
 MOVIE CRITIC

Eco-warriors have supplanted conventional soldiers in the documentaries division of this year's Toronto International Film Festival (Sept. 4-13).

TIFF selectors have noted the recent box-office battle fatigue for films themed on the Iraq and Afghanistan conflicts for docs in Real to Reel and other fest programs. Just one of the 26 docs announced yesterday has an explicit Iraq angle: *Blood Trail*, a portrait of war photographer Richard Parry.

At the same time, the growing public interest in environmental causes influenced the choice of three films: *Food Inc.*, a look at how big business determines what goes on dinner plates; *At the Edge of the World*, a pirate-style chase of Japanese whalers led by Canadian enviro-activist Paul Watson; and *Upstream Battle*, the quest by Native American activist Nerv George to protect California water reserves. "What Iraq was to us last year, eco-warriors are to us this year," said Thom Powers, TIFF's Documentary and Mavericks programmer.

Toronto audiences aren't alone in their lack of interest in war movies, especially ones dealing with the Iraq conflicts. Several major war films that premiered at last year's TIFF, including *In the Valley of Elah* and *Redacted*, subsequently failed.


"Audiences are tired of this war and they're tired of critiques of this war, even if they agree with them," he said. "I think it's incumbent on filmmakers to find fresh ways of reinvigorating interest around this subject, but it might take a little bit more distance to do that."

There's a broader theme in the selection of docs for TIFF 2008, most of them world premieres: it's the recurrence of stories about ordinary people and their extraordinary actions. Many of the



SUPPLIED PHOTO

Upstream Battle is one of 26 docs that will screen at TIFF.

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Ben Kempas:Upstream Battle:The Story

Skrevet den 23-08-2008 12:31:54 af Tue Steen Müller

This is one of those films that you can only appreciate: It takes you to a place in the world that you (I) don't know anything about. It has some charismatic characters who fight for a cause. You get to know and love them. It has a strong and relevant, universal story that is straight forwardly well told. With a development. Something happens, it is complex but you are well informed about what.



A rich film in other words, because the director-cameraman has taken his time - years - to do a deep research and to get close to the characters to gain their trust. Which goes both for the native Americans, who see their life and culture at the Klamath river north of California threatened by the big hydroelectric dams that they want to be taken down - and for their opponents who work for the energy companies that make a profit but also claim that they have an environmental profile. The consequences of the dams are that the salmon that used to swim upstream the river has almost disappeared. Bring the salmon home, is the message from the tribes.

People from several tribes are in the film, I can't mention them all, so let me highlight the couple, Merv and Wendy, he a big tattooed man, who beautifully explains to us the rituals and religion attached to the Hoopa tribe, she, a mother of four, the spokeswoman for the battle, emotional - a great couple with four children that you are surprised to see at the same time live a modern American life, totally skilled when it comes to modern communication. The fight goes on, as it is said on the site of the film: Their struggle may trigger the largest dam removal project in history.

Photo: To the left the couple Merv and Wendy George, to the right the director.

<http://www.upstreambattle.com/>

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filmkommentaren, Denmark

23 August 2008

Review by Tue Steen Müller, the former director of the European Documentary Network.



Reviews of Upstream Battle

[Back to Upstream Battle](#)

Displaying 4 reviews.



★★★★★ Ben, Hoopa, Munich

by Laura Collado Bossi at 10:58pm on September 22nd, 2008

I had the pleasure of watching Upstream Battle at its world premiere during the Munich Film Festival last May. As the lights went on I thought it was a very beautiful and well-crafted film with an extraordinary story. I was mostly impressed by what I considered an incredible exercise of pursuing objectivity. In a story with enough angles in just one side of the conflict to get lost in, Ben worked hard at giving us a round picture and allowing us to meet all the parts to judge for ourselves. I am aware of the impossibility of a totally objective discourse, however I very much appreciate filmmakers that trust their audience's capacity to understand without being preached at. After the screening, Ben introduced us to two of the main characters of the film, Merv and Popy from the Hoopa Tribe. Their presence and emotion made the experience even more special. Not only they shared with us their personal struggle, explaining in more detail about the situation of their culture, but also they let through their gratitude towards the filmmaker's work, for considering it an important tool to expand awareness of the situation and help their cause. At that moment and during the other two days I spent with Ben and his Hoopa friends I understood the profound respect and appreciation they have developed towards each other in the process of his making of the film and I admired even more strongly Ben's capacity to create such a well-balanced chronicle of a complex David & Goliath reality.

[Write on Laura's Wall - Report](#)

★★★★★ A rare story of environmental triumph.

by Sean Flynn at 3:52am on August 19th, 2008

I got a chance to see Ben Kempas' UPSTREAM BATTLE at Dokufest in Kosovo. It was a joy to watch, not only for its filmmaking craft, but for its incredible protagonists, the embattled Native Americans of the Klamath River who are fighting for their sovereignty, their livelihood and their culture. What impressed me most about Kempas' storytelling was the even-handed humanistic way he treated all those who passed in front of his camera, from Native American activists and fisherman to rural farmers and white collar employees of the "evil" energy company (whose dams are blocking the migration of salmon upstream). Rather than pass moral judgements on these subjects, the film paints an honest picture of simple people struggling to hold onto their way of life in the face of scarcity, overcrowding and environmental damage. What truly makes UPSTREAM BATTLE stand out is the way all these people begin to come together and find constructive solutions that benefit both their communities and the health of the river that connects them all.

[Write on Sean's Wall - Report](#)

★★★★★ Watch this engaging and beautiful film.

by John Mounier at 5:30pm on June 18th, 2008

I had the pleasure of watching Ben Kempas' UPSTREAM BATTLE last night and was left with a feeling of total awe. Shocked by the fight and passion the tribes feel for their lifelong tradition of fishing the Klamath for Salmon; amazed by their spirit and belief that they can take on big energy; and just overall impressed with the beauty of the film, from both a cinematography and access point of view. Michael Moore dreams of getting this kind of access. It's a testament to Ben's own belief in this struggle and a reward to those of us lucky enough to see the incredible film.

[Write on John's Wall - Report](#)

★★★★★ Premiere

by Tom Jaeger at 9:56am on May 10th, 2008

Dear Ben,

thank you for a fantastic evening at the premiere.

To me the film was very moving. And it was a strange feeling when we realised, that we can't really do anything here in Europe to help the tribes in their fight for the dams to be removed. I hope you'll be able to make the film available to a large number of people in the US. And I believe that it will have a positive influence on the outcome of the dam removal procedure.

Also worth mentioning: The film gave me some valuable insights on the culture of the tribes - A world I previously didn't know anything about. And the film actually manages to point out the entire problem in a way that it becomes understandable to the viewer. Not an easy task, when you look at the complexity of the subject.

[Write on Tom's Wall - Report](#)

FILMMUSEUM

HAIDHAUSEN

ELSERHALLEN

...DEN KAMPF DER INDIANER

„Upstream Battle“ am Dok.Fest

Lachs galt einmal als Delikatesse, heute bekommt man ihn abgepackt im Supermarkt. Der Münchner Regisseur Ben Kempas erzählt vom Kampf der im Norden Kaliforniens lebenden Indianerstämme gegen den Energiekonzern PacifiCorp. Der ist verantwortlich für die Wasserkraftwerke am Klamath River. Die riesigen Dämme führen zum Lachssterven und machen aus dem Fluss eine veralgte Giftbrühe. Hauptbetroffene sind die Indianer. Ihre Kultur definiert sich über den Fischfang. Zwei Jahre begleitete Kempas Indianer, Landwirte, Fischer und Manager bei ihrem Einsatz um den Klamath. Ihm gelang ein differenziertes, engagiertes Porträt der unterschiedlichen Lebenswelten: die um ihre Identität ringenden, verarmten Ureinwohner und profitorientierte Unternehmen.

Filmmuseum, St.-Jakobs-Platz 1, 15 Uhr, 7 Euro

sondern auch die gut gepflegten Spleens der Band, wie der, jeden Mittwoch die Bandmitglieder mit einer Verkleidung zu überraschen, oder der unsichtbare Bandfreund Ray. Zwei Engländer aus Reading und ein Schwede haben sich zusammengeschlossen, um neben den Indie-Helden von Tom Waits bis Thom Yorke ihren eigenen Weg zu finden.

Elserhalle, Rosenheimer Straße 143, 20.30 Uhr, Eintritt: 13 Euro, zzgl. Geb.

Gegen Staudämme: Ein Indianer gibt nicht auf. Foto: Dok.Fest

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17. J. Ein erw 20 U alle
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Abendzeitung München

6 May 2008

Abendzeitung is the largest tabloid newspaper in Munich. The second screening of UPSTREAM BATTLE was featured as one of five must-attend events in the city on 6 May. The article summarises the film and concludes: "[Kempas] succeeds in providing a sophisticated and dedicated portrayal of opposed ways of life: indigenous people struggling to maintain their identity, and profit-oriented businesses."



Regisseure unter sich: Der chinesische Filmemacher Yung Chang im Fachgespräch mit seinem Münchner Kollegen Ben Kempas. Foto: Haas

China und Kino

Der Auftakt zum Dokumentarfilm-Festival im Gasteig

Mit der Berichterstattung über das heutige China ist das so eine Sache: Ist sie zu positiv (was eher selten vorkommt), wird man von westlichen Dalai-Lama-Anhängern angefeindet. Äußert man sich negativ, ist einem der Zorn der Chinesen sicher - diese sind ja kurz vor Olympia besonders empfindlich, was Kritik an ihrem Volk betrifft.

Und so verspricht der Auftaktabend des 23. Internationalen Dokumentarfilmfestivals im Gasteig für die Berichterstatteer kontrovers zu werden, geht es doch im Eröffnungsfilm „Up the Yangtze“ um eines der umstrittensten chinesischen Projekte der letzten Jahre: den Bau des gigantischen Drei-Schluchten-Damms, der knapp zwei Millionen Chinesen zum Verlassen ihrer Heimat zwingt. Der Film zeigt, wie sich die Talssperre auf das Leben entlang des Jangtsekiang auswirkt. Doch die Kontrover-

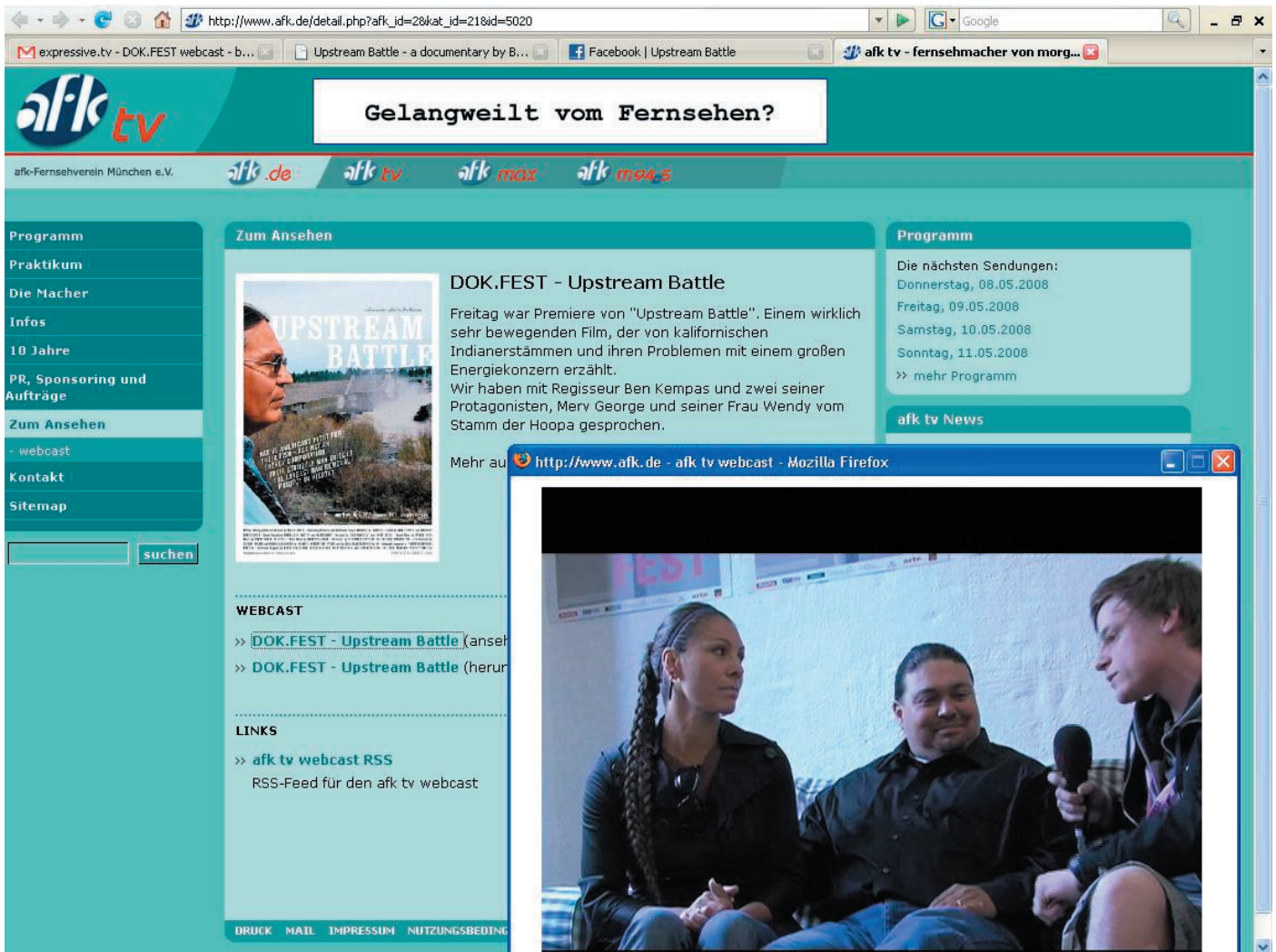
se bleibt aus, schließlich konzentriert sich der Film auf die Schicksale zweier Teenager, die von ihren Eltern zum Geldverdienen auf ein Flusskreuzfahrtschiff geschickt werden. Der Film wurde vom Dokfest-Publikum eifrig beklatscht. Festivalchef Hermann Barth ist zufrieden. Sein Etat wurde erhöht, das (leicht gestraffte) Programm verspreche noch viele Highlights.

Das Foyer füllt sich mit Premierengästen. Regisseur Yung Chang hat schon bald einen geeigneten Gesprächspartner gefunden. Sein Münchner Filmemacher-Kollege Ben Kempas hat auch einen Dokumentarfilm über die Folgen eines Staudamm-Baus gedreht. Als Weltpremiere läuft „Upstream Battle“. Die deutsch-chinesische Völkerverständigung klappt bestens. Wäre da nicht ein kleiner Schönheitsfehler: Yung Chang ist gebürtiger Kanadier. *Josef Gröbl*

Süddeutsche Zeitung

2. Mai 2008

The largest subscription newspaper in Germany (Süddeutsche Zeitung) linked Ben Kempas to the director of UP THE YANGTZE, Dok.Fest's opening night film about the Three-Gorges-Dam in China.



afk tv

2. Mai 2008

afk tv, a TV channel for young talent, reported from the Munich DOK.FEST in daily webcasts. One of their shows was dedicated to UPSTREAM BATTLE, with Merv and Wendy George from the Hoopa Tribe as featured guests. afk tv called the film "truly moving".



»Upstream Battle« von Ben Kempas

Eine kleine Gruppe amerikanischer Indianer gegen einen internationalen Energiekonzern, aber auch Mensch gegen Natur: Unterschiedliche Antagonismen bestimmen den Rhythmus in Ben Kempas' Film *Upstream Battle* (Produktion: **Preview Production**) über das Sterben der Lachse im kalifornischen Klamath River und dessen Auswirkungen auf die traditionelle Indianerkultur (siehe auch S. 19).

Gemeinsam mit der deutsch-französisch-schweizerischen Koproduktion *Lucie et Maintenant* von **Simone Fürbringer, Nico-**

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usibler Figurenzeichnung -
diese lehrt Martin Farkas, der
keit als Oberbeleuchter unter
Michael Ballhaus, Paolo Car-
dict Neuenfels und der Kar-
amann Sozialpädagogik stu-
Dozent an der HFF München,
Mitte der 90er Jahre bei Fil-
ten, *Geheimnisse einer Stadt*
Graf und **Michael Althen**,
Georgisches Liebeslied und
torten die Kamera führte,
seit erstmals auch als Regis-
m mit **Matthias Zuber** ent-
DF der Dokumentarfilm *Villa*
ber das Leben in und um die
ia Dignidad nach der Verhaf-
hen Sektenführers Paul Schä-

work (EDN) herausgibt, und moderiert mit der
D-Word Community (www.d-word.com) ein
weltweites Forum für über 2.000 registrierte
Dokumentarfilmprofis aus 80 Ländern, die
sich in Spezialforen laufend über aktuelle
Trends in ihrem Fachgebiet austauschen.

Beim diesjährigen Dok.Fest München ist Kempas mit seinem neuen Film *Upstream Battle* vertreten, einer FFF-geförderten Produktion von Preview Production (Produzent: **Joa-**
chim Schroeder), BR (Redaktion: **Hubert**
von Spreti, Claudia Gladziejewski) und
arte (Redaktion: **Jochen Kölsch, Monika**
Lobkowicz). Thema ist ein fast schon klassi-
sches David gegen Goliath-Szenario: Am kali-
fornischen Klamath River kämpfen einige
Indianerstämme gegen das durch miserable
Wasserqualität verursachte Lachssterben
und damit um den Erhalt eines wesentlichen
Bestandteils ihrer Kultur. Ihr Hauptgegner ist
ein multinationaler Energiekonzern, dessen
Wasserkraftwerke am Klamath Grund des
Umweltskandals sind. Fast zwei Jahre beglei-
tete Ben Kempas den Konflikt. Im Laufe der
Dreharbeiten entwickelte sich eine Eigendy-
namik der Kommunikation: Nicht nur erhielt
der Filmemacher ein immer präziseres Bild
von den Interessen und Strategien der invol-
vierten Parteien - auch innerhalb der Betrof-
fenen bildeten sich aufgrund individueller
Existenzängste erstaunliche Allianzen. Wicht-
tig war Kempas vor allem, das Vertrauen aller
Beteiligten zu gewinnen: »Dokumentarfilm ist
durchaus Diplomatie.«

Sein Film (www.upstreambattle.com), der
explizit nicht als »Aktivistenfilm« angelegt ist,
baut ganz auf den Charakteren und ihren
Konflikten auf. Zwei zentrale Protagonisten
werden anlässlich der Premiere beim
Dok.Fest in München sein: Ein Jahr, nachdem
die Hoopa-Indianerin Wendy George bei der
Jahreshauptversammlung von Warren Buffets
Investment-Imperium den zweitreichsten
Mann der Welt persönlich zur Rechenschaft
für das Drama in ihrer Heimat zog, reist sie
mit ihrem Mann Merv nach Deutschland, um
das Münchner Publikum für den Konflikt am
Klamath River zu sensibilisieren. Und um
über eine sehr hoffnungsvolle Perspektive zu
informieren: Der Kampf der Indianer führt
möglicherweise zum umfangreichsten Stau-
damm-Abriß der Geschichte.

Film News Bayern

2 May 2008

Two articles in Film News Bayern: One presents UPSTREAM BATTLE as one of the films nominated for the Documentary Talent Award, another one focuses on the filmmaker and his documentary.

Film als Diplomatie:

Ben Kempas, Dokumentarfilmer



Der Kameramann und Dokumentarfilmautor

Ben Kempas nähert sich seinem Genre auf vielfältige Weise. Seit seinem Studium an der HFF München realisiert er nicht nur

Filmprojekte, sondern setzt sich auch auf Festivals, über Online-Plattformen und innerhalb anderer Netzwerke mit der dokumentarischen Form und ihren Rahmenbedingungen auseinander. In München betreibt Ben Kempas die Firma **Expressive.tv** (www.expressive.tv), die sich auf TV-Dokumentationen und Produktionsservices für internationale Filmemacher spezialisiert hat. Seine bisherigen Arbeiten beschäftigten sich unter anderem mit der schottischen Unabhängigkeitsbewegung (*To Be A Nation Again*, 1998), unkonventionellen Atomwaffengegnern (*Das Monster von Loch Long*, 2001) und einem innerdeutschen »Grenzverletzer« (*Gegen die Grenze*, 2004). Als Autor schreibt er regelmäßig Beiträge für die Fachzeitschrift DOX, die das European Documentary Net-

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 Zur Verleihung des
 "Blauen Panthers" - live
 am 9. Mai!
Junger Film

Stromaufwärts

Der Gestank ist bestialisch. 68.000 tote Lachse treiben im Klamath River in Kalifornien. Die betroffenen Indianer treten zum Kampf gegen einen globalen Stromkonzern an. BR-Koproduktion.



Seit Jahrtausenden leben sie rund um den Klamath River, im äußersten Norden des heutigen Kalifornien. Die Karuk, Yurok und Hoopa gehören zu den wenigen Indianerstämmen in den USA, die es geschafft haben, ihre Traditionen zu bewahren. Grundpfeiler ihrer Kultur ist ein majestätischer Fisch: der pazifische Lachs.

Einst zog jedes Jahr eine Million Lachse den Fluss hinauf, doch heute sind es nur noch wenige Tausend. Vier große Wasserkraftwerke schneiden den Fischen den Weg zu den Laichgründen ab und verwandeln das Wasser in eine giftige Brühe. 2002 kam es zu einem der schlimmsten Fischsterben in den USA: Fast 70.000 ausgewachsene Lachse verendeten vor den Augen der Indianer.

"Wenn sie krank sind, sind wir krank", sagt Merv George in seinem Mammutbaumkanu. Die Existenz seines Stammes ist in Gefahr – wieder einmal. Für die Indianer steht fest: Damit der Lachs überlebt, müssen die Talsperren weg. Es wäre der größte Staudamm-Abriss der Welt.

Der Stromkonzern PacifiCorp preist seine Anlagen als umweltfreundliche, kostengünstige Energiequelle. Heutzutage könne man sich es nicht leisten, so etwas aufzugeben. "Wir borgen uns doch nur Wasser aus und geben es dem Fluss zurück", sagt Toby Freeman. Doch auch der Manager hat ein Problem: Er braucht eine neue, langfristige Betriebsgenehmigung für die

Info**Datum:**
 02.05., 19,30 Uhr (Atelier) und
 06.05., 15.00 (Filmmuseum), OmU
Ort:

München

BR-online
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River's issues told on film

Published: May 26, 2007

By Hilary Corrigan

Triplicate staff writer

The struggle over the Klamath River's dams may soon hit the big screen.

Independent filmmakers from Munich, Germany, have been documenting the process as Portland, Ore.-based PacifiCorp seeks to renew a 50-year federal license to operate its dams on the waterway. Area tribes, fishermen and farmers have sought to block the federal permit, pointing to water quality problems, a 2002 fish kill when more than 60,000 salmon washed up on the river banks and last year's commercial salmon fishing closure along 700 miles of the West Coast.

For Ben Kempas, the story started in Scotland in 2005, when a group of northwest California tribal representatives showed up to protest outside the annual shareholders meeting of Scottish Power, the owner of the dams at the time. A friend doing environmental public relations work in Scotland asked Kempas to help detail the issue.

In Glasgow, Kempas watched tribal members attempt to show shareholders the cost of removing the dams by handing out two-pence pieces to represent the two pence per share expense of such an effort.

He observed a traditional Klamath River salmon bake at a Glasgow home's backyard.

"It just sounded like a great story instantly," the 33-year-old filmmaker said. "So I just grabbed a camera."

Kempas and filmmaker Magdalena Hutter, 27, have since traveled along the river, meeting with those involved in the process, trekking from the river's mouth one day to the upper basin the next, hauling camera equipment to interviews, heading to Omaha, Neb., earlier this month for another tribal protest at another company shareholder's meeting.

But the story applies beyond the local region.



Click this picture to view a larger image.

The Daily Triplicate/ Hilary Corrigan

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• 150 Years

"It works on many levels. The importance of food, the importance of water," Kempas said, noting indigenous people throughout the world who rely on salmon and other natural resources. "In this basin, you have this kind of microcosm that reflects many things of global importance."

PacifiCorp's relicensing process for its dams, though, remains unique in one way.

"If the dams are to come down, this will be the biggest dam removal in history," Kempas said.

Real characters

The film aims to show all of the story's angles, including farmers' struggles and PacifiCorp employees' concern about their jobs during corporate takeovers, for instance.

"This is a hugely complex issue," Kempas said. "So we're trying to tell it through characters that people identify with."

Those include a tribal member who lives in the woods without power and fishes with a traditional redwood canoe. Another balances modern and traditional lifestyles, racing jet boats and using a traditional canoe, singing the tribe's old songs and playing in a rock band.

The film also aims to showcase tribal cultures.

"What really amazed me is how much of the Native American culture is still intact here," Kempas said. "There's very little known about it in Europe."

Kempas wants viewers to learn not only about the river and the dams, but also about that culture.

"They should no longer think, 'teepee' or 'casino,'" he said. "This is not just an environmental issue. It's also an issue of tribal sovereignty."

With their work to remove the dams, Kempas said, tribal members seek to protect their rights as sovereign nations.

"All of these rights are infringed daily. Trying to secure those rights are a fight for sovereignty. What use is the right to fish if there are no fish for you to catch?" Kempas said.

Karuk Tribe campaign coordinator Craig Tucker agreed, pointing to the impacts of other energy projects in China, India and Chile.

"In a lot of those cases, the people who are bearing the highest costs or carrying the biggest burdens are indigenous people," said Tucker, who wants to see the film put international pressure on the U.S. to remove the dams from the Klamath River. "What's our history on human rights? We enacted one of the biggest genocides on Native Americans here and I'd argue that genocide is ongoing."

Spotlight

The next stage involves editing, when Kempas will hole up in a room for a couple of months to piece the story together. He aims to release the film in Europe this fall. He also plans to show it throughout the Klamath River basin and put it on DVD, with bonus tracks of side stories.

The tale of the struggle over the river's dams, though, remains the focus of the movie that carries the working title of "Upstream Battle."

"It's this David against Goliath story," Kempas said. "Small tribes against the big corporation."

"But one should remember that David won that particular struggle," he added of the Biblical story. "Let's see if that happens here, as well."

GERMAN FILM CREW DOCUMENTS TRIBES' FIGHT FOR SALMON

Interest Sparked During Tribes' Visit To Scotland

By Shelly Baldy, HPN Staff Reporter

"I think it's a classic David vs. Goliath story," explained German independent filmmaker Ben Kempas. "It's the four small Tribes against a big corporation. Worldwide, it's important on four issues...food, water, globalization and the threatened Tribal culture."

This is the reason Kempas and fellow crew member Magdalena Hutter decided to take the issue and run with it.

Kempas said the two obtained a grant to fund the project and since then have been back to California to visit and film with four neighboring Tribes—Klamath, Karuk, Yurok and Hoopa—eight separate times.

Kempas met the key parties involved in the filmmaking process during the Tribes' visit to Scotland last year. From there, he said the idea of the film originated.

"The main focus is the Tribes' fight for the salmon," said Kempas. "But we've also been filming with the owners of the dams, PacifiCorp, and the irrigators in the Upper Klamath Basin. It's not an activist video, but a long-term, observational documentary."

And to tell the full story of the Klamath River Fish Kill that left more than 30,000 salmon dead and the aftermath of it all, including American Indian Tribes and other interested parties, fight against the dams on the Klamath River, Kempas said you must look at all aspects.

"In a way, they all fear for their existence. Farmers go bankrupt, commercial fishermen lose out, and employees of PacificCorp don't know what to expect from a takeover of their company," explained Kempas. "But there's so much more at stake for the Tribes. Their whole culture is centered around the fish...if this is gone, there is no way to bring it back."

ing them if they still lived in teepees," said Kempas. "They simply don't know a lot about Tribes."

Kempas said some European media just like so many others, have made American Indian Tribes from California out to be

"I WAS SURPRISED TO FIND THE HOOPA TRIBE STILL FOLLOWING TRADITIONAL WAYS THAT HAVE ALWAYS BEEN HERE. IT'S FASCINATING"

Ben Kempas
Independent Filmmaker

And throughout the filming process, Kempas said he has learned a lot about the four neighboring Tribes and each of their cultures. And because the initial target audience of the film is mainly European, Kempas focused a lot of his energy on learning the Tribes' culture, countering stereotypes felt by many Europeans.

"When the Tribes were in Scotland, some people were ask-

casinos.

"The people I have met here don't fulfill any of these clichés," explained Kempas. "I was surprised to find the Hoopa Tribe still following traditional ways that have always been here. It's fascinating."

And Kempas said although the Tribes have a lot in common, each of them has a fascination of its own.

With the Hoopa Tribe,



Ben Kempas (left) and Magdalena Hutter (right). Photo by Shelly Baldy, HPN.

(the Karuk's Klamath Campaign Coordinator), we focus on their constant battle with PacifiCorp. In the Upper Basin, we've been filming with Jeff Mitchell (member of the Klamath Tribes) whose people have been cut off from salmon completely."

Besides the everyday environment of the Tribes, Kempas has also been offered a glance at the ceremonial dances. His respect has increased even more for the Tribes after witnessing some of

the dances.

"When it comes to the ceremonies I don't come with a camera," he said. "I understand certain things may not be filmed."

Kempas said there will also be scenes of this year's Klamath-Trinity Unified School District Fish Fair and the Salmon Relay Run in the film.

The documentary is expected to be completed by May of next year. Kempas said although it will be aired on European television, he will attempt to have it shown in the United States and DVDs will be available for the local audience. ■

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September 2006

Regional newspaper of the Hoopa Tribe.