



a documentary film by Ben Kempas

UPSTREAM BATTLE

NATIVE AMERICANS FIGHT FOR
THEIR FISH – AGAINST AN
ENERGY CORPORATION.
THEIR STRUGGLE MAY TRIGGER
THE LARGEST DAM REMOVAL
PROJECT IN HISTORY.

PREVIEW PRODUCTION



arte

BR

FFF Bayern



expressive

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 FILMFERNSEHFONDS 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

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UPSTREAM BATTLE

*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 investment empire of Warren Buffett. Will tribal members manage to persuade the richest man in the world to save their salmon and their culture?



Feature-length version: 97'

TV versions: 52' to 59'

Produced by Preview Production.

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THE FILMMAKER: Ben Kempas is a cinematographer and documentary filmmaker. He lives in Munich where he studied at the University of 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.

THE PRODUCER: Joachim Schroeder, who grew up in England, is the founder and guiding force behind Munich-based 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 1993 and since then has produced several hundred television and feature-length documentaries.

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