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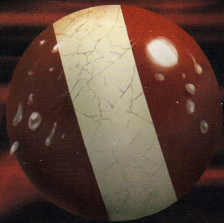
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DOCUMENTARY GOES BEHIND THE SCENES OF *THE BLAIR WITCH PROJECT*

Given that it basically birthed the found footage genre, it makes sense that *The Blair Witch Project* would beget its own found footage documentary. Named after *Blair Witch*'s working title, *The Woods Movie* is an 83-minute making-of film composed entirely of footage shot by the cast and crew of the 1999 release. Premiering at the Film4 FrightFest in Glasgow, Scotland this past February, the doc is the brainchild of Russ Gomm, 34, a British filmmaker who went from *Blair Witch* super fan to one of the privileged few to ever see the approximately 25 hours of raw footage shot over the course of eight days in 1997.

"As a personal thing, I think I'm a great person to be putting this documentary together because not only am I a filmmaker but I am a huge *Blair Witch* fan as well," Gomm says. "So I feel I can give other fans exactly what they want without them sitting through these twenty-plus hours, although I'm sure most of them would relish the chance to do so."

Around 2005, Gomm started corresponding with *Blair Witch* co-director Eduardo Sánchez on MySpace. That led to a friendship and, later, a working relationship that saw him contribute to Sánchez's 2011 movie *Lovely Molly* and shoot an episode of his online series *Para Abnormal*.

While Gomm was staying at Sánchez's house in Maryland for the latter project, his host shared something special with him: twenty discs containing the raw *Blair Witch* behind-the-scenes footage.

"I couldn't believe it," Gomm says. "I sat and watched the whole thing. And he couldn't believe I'd sat and watched it, because to him it was, like, 'Why would you do that?' But as a fan it was like a dream come true."

Gomm pitched Sánchez on a *Blair Witch* documentary in October 2013. Sánchez and *Blair Witch* producer Gregg Hale got the footage over to Gomm, now back in England, in early 2014. It would take him about a year, in between other projects, to edit those 25 hours into *The Woods Movie*.

"Obviously you find out the story of how it happened, the casting and finding locations," Gomm explains. "There's footage of production meetings where they're deciding whether they're going to shoot on 16mm or on video. Everything that you ever imagined wanting to know about it is told."



The documentary, which ends with the film's January 1999 premiere at the Sundance Film Festival (where Artisan Entertainment would acquire it for US \$1-million), also features plenty of footage shot by *Blair Witch* stars Joshua Leonard, Heather Donahue and Michael C. Williams.

"People I have shown it to really felt like watching the middle section of the film is like watching an alternate *Blair Witch*," says Gomm. "Obviously Mike, Josh and Heather have the camera and are going off experimenting and stuff, and a lot of that footage has made it into the [documentary]."

Gomm adds that working on *The Woods Movie* made him appreciate the film's originality even more, both as a found footage film and as a scary movie.

"It's such a hard hitting thing, and I don't think people understood why it scared them so much when they watched it," he says "It's heavily imitated. There are a lot of good found footage movies, but there are a lot of bad ones. People don't seem to do it in the way that is convincing, but *Blair Witch* had that spark. You knew, because of the characters, that Heather



Behind the scenes of *The Blair Witch Project*, including making the iconic stickman props.

was never going to put that camera down, no matter what. And it's basically a character study, whereas a lot of the other [feature characters who] just try to find a way that they can shoot continuously with one camera and make an easy found footage flick."

Gomm, who as of this writing has no definite release plans for *The Woods Movie*, adds, "The terror of it is really in watching these characters go to pieces."

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