



The Magic of Possibilities: Crossing Bhutan #SBIFF

Description

[Crossing Bhutan](#), a new documentary by Director Ben Henretig, is the story of four veteran athletes who undertake a human-powered journey of 500 miles, walking and mountain-biking across the tiny Buddhist nation in south Asia known as Bhutan. The trek was sponsored by the Bhutan National Olympic Committee.

Interestingly enough, Bhutan measures its economic development and spiritual growth by Gross National Happiness! Every two years, the Bhutanese government sends out a nine-category happiness survey asking questions about how connected do its citizens feel to their surroundings and to their community, what is their knowledge of indigenous plants and animals, and how often do they feel at ease.

The film opens with a very small archival black and white footage with a narrative voice over by Imogene Heap providing an historical discourse to the diminutive country. Quickly the film opens up with establishing shots of fairly recently shot footage revealing 24,000 foot peaks with snow-capped mountains. Soon we find out the story is about a never-done-before 500 mile trek across Bhutan that includes over 90,000 vertical feet in changing elevation.

The team is composed of four experienced, adventure-seeking athletes. The team leader is a female, Terri Schneider. The other three American members are Tony Lillios, David Kelly and Greg Thomas. A fifth member participated in a portion of the journey – Tshering Tobgay from Bhutan.

Henretig provides an extraordinary glimpse into Bhutan with a splendid mixture of direct cinema – as scenes are captured with the action moving through frame – and cinema verite' that captures intimately emotional moments.

Most Bhutanese believe their traditions and cultural characteristics are vital in the construction of the bonds that have held the Bhutanese together throughout the centuries. Bhutan had been a monarchy until 2006 when the country's fourth king abdicated his throne and ushered in a new era of democracy. Despite fears from the Bhutanese people of losing their identity, Bhutan is shedding light on what many are calling the magic of possibility centered around a sense of community, connectedness and

belonging. Nevertheless, the country is facing challenges with growing their economy and with the recent introduction of media to its social and cultural structure.

In an engaging, responsive and informative Q & A following this morning's screening of [Crossing Bhutan](#) at the Santa Barbara International Film Festival Henretig discussed the experiential factors that he and the team of trekkers faced and discerned during and after their journey and the impact the experience has made in their lives. Mostly, the team members agreed it was a life-affirming, paradigm-shifting experience with positive and potentially powerful implications for the meshing of the Bhutanese way of contentment with the often discontented, disillusioned, high-octaned Western way of life.

Team leader, Terri Schneider has been back to Bhutan six times and was instrumental in starting the Bhutan International Marathon that attracted over 220 participants in 2015- 145 of whom were Bhutanese runners. Henretig has also returned to Bhutan within the last year and is currently working on a seventy minute follow up documentary on [Crossing Bhutan](#). Wholeheartedly recommended.

Category

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