



Robert Ian Martin Campbell: Oral History Transcription

Name of interviewee(s):

Robert (Bob) Ian Martin Campbell

Reasons why chosen for an oral history:

A very experienced cameraman. Has made many wildlife films in and around east and central Africa, but is especially known for his work with Dian Fossey.

Name of Interviewer:

Jean Hartley

Reasons why interviewer chosen:

Personal colleague and long-term friend of Bob

Name of Camera operator:

Mia Collis

Date of interview:

24th October 2007

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Nairobi, Kenya

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1. Growing up and first career

JH: Hello Bob. It's 24th October 2007. Can you give us your full name and nationality?

BC: My full name is Robert Ian Martin Campbell, Bob Campbell for short. I'm a British citizen and was actually born in England at Harrow because my mother left Kenya, at the height of the depression I might say, in 1930 and went back to England where I was born. Then she brought me back to Kenya.



JH: So you've spent your entire life living in Kenya apart from those first two years?

BC: Yes, I have basically, one or two years outside. I grew up in Kitale which is a way north, 280 miles north of Nairobi. Originally on a farm where my father was starting up farming and eventually moved into Kitale when the great depression. Locusts and drought cut down his farming activities. So I grew up quite close to the town of Kitale and went to school there, to a co-educational school. I finished my primary education there and went on to the Prince of Wales School in Nairobi, and then, for some reason my mother and father decided I should have a better education. So in 1945 just as the war ended I was carried off to England, again by sea and I started an education there in a public school, Cranleigh Public School in Surrey.

JH: When did you become interested in wildlife? Was it when you were living in the Kitale area? Did you become interested in wildlife like most Kenyan kids do?

BC: Well, as a child of course out on our farm times were very different back then. The population of Kenya was very small and there was wildlife all around. But we shifted into Kitale I should think about 1932 and the wildlife around our house there was minimal. There were a few antelopes. I didn't see much of wildlife in my growing up years. I moved out, of course, to come down to Nairobi and there was no chance of seeing wildlife down here while at school. So the only wildlife that I encountered was in my early years.

JH: So your real interest didn't come until much later?

BC: Yes, that's right.

JH: You didn't at that stage envisage a career in wildlife filming, for instance. You started off selling motor cars.

BC: No. After I got back from my education in England I started off in Kitale as a town foreman of my own home town. I had a workforce that helped look after everything - the roads mainly. One mile of tarmac was all we had then. But quickly my father found me a job in the agriculture department, so that was going to be my prime career with the Kenya Agriculture Department. I was transferred to the Njoro plant feeding station in 1949 and I was really going to go ahead there. The government said 'We're going to send you to Trinidad to be educated in everything to do with agriculture'. But that plan was scotched because I found a girlfriend in Nairobi and after many visits I decided to give up my career in agriculture and came down to Nairobi, and joined the East African Oxygen Acetylene Company. So that I was nowhere near wildlife at all back then.

Those years were, of course, interrupted by the Mau Mau emergency. In 1952. I went into the army, flew down to Salisbury, in Rhodesia, as it was then, for training. I came back to the Kenya Regiment (Kenya Regiment). I was then transferred to the Kings African Rifles and spent three years in the KAR. When I got out of that in 1955 I went back to my job with the Oxygen Acetylene Company. I decided that an office job was not what I wanted and having bought and got interested in sports cars I now took up mechanics and switched my job to a firm called Lowis & Hodgkiss who ran the Jaguar agency. I had bought a Jaguar by then. So I became a Jaguar mechanic.

To go on quite quickly, the firm that I was working with went broke, so with two partners we took over the Jaguar franchise for East Africa and started on a private garage, basically a workshop.

2. Getting involved with wildlife film-makers.

JH: That's when the fun began and you met Des Bartlett.

BC: Meeting Des Bartlett was much more complicated. In 1958/59 I met Heather Martin who would later become my wife. Now Heather's a veterinary surgeon. She got called upon by not only Des Bartlett but also the Leakeys, Mary Leakey in particular who had lots of Dalmatian dogs. But Des had all these animals in a sort of menagerie and he was filming them, Heather was called in to help keep them all going and healthy. So I used to go along with Heather. In those days Des was filming on Crescent Island, Lake Naivasha, making films for kids using various animals as characters. He knew I was interested in photography so being Des and generous, he kept offering me all sorts of cameras to try out. By then he'd gone through a whole range of them so he offered me this huge **Linhof** camera and a nice **Rittreck** and all sorts of things.

That really got me interested in photography because I started to take a lot of pictures, not only of his little animals but everything else all around.

JH: He was teaching you how to process the film and the stills?

BC: Well, that was the key. He said now if you're interested why not learn how to process the film and print. He had a nice little dark room here in Nairobi at Karen, Langata actually. So he taught me how to process film and this I did quite well, and got used to it, and took more pictures, and he persuaded me to buy a **Hasselblad**. So then I was really going forward but had no idea that I would ever enter a career in photography. But then Des went off to Rhodesia, where the new Kariba Dam was filling up. He went to film the animal rescue operations there and he took hundreds of rolls of film.

JH: Operation Noah (1)?

BC: Yes, that's right. Now he sent these back to me. He'd decided that I was now competent enough to handle these films. They were valuable films so he really thought, okay, this fellow knows all about it and I trust him to do it. I processed hundreds of his films and made prints and contact sheets, and that must have kicked into Des's mind. He said I need an assistant and in 1962 he offered me a job with Armand Denis Productions, to look after his stills library and also to take pictures of my own to add to this library. So that's how it started.

JH: Also you got involved with the Leakeys before that? Before you joined Armand Denis didn't you go to Olduvai with Richard Leakey and Denis?

BC: No, that came later. I got involved with the Leakeys through Heather attending to Mary Leakey's dogs and the occasional animals that she had brought up here from Olduvai, like the odd wildebeest that she was bringing up and things like that. So that was my first connection with the Leakey family, and also Richard Leakey. He was only 15 then.

JH: But he was learning to process film at the same time that you were I believe. Des also taught him how to process film.

BC: I don't remember that actually. It must have been much earlier because Des met up with Richard and the Leakeys very strongly in 1959 when Mary Leakey found her famous fossil skull, **Zinjanthropus** as Louis [Leakey] called it. So that was earlier. In fact, I met Richard, whom I was to come to know very well, later in 1959. I think he brought a dog along for Heather to look at, one of his mother's dogs. So he was only 15 then.

Anyway, in 1962 Des said 'come on, give up your mechanics' and in fact I was quite pleased to think about that, and eventually I agreed to join Armand Denis Productions. So in January 1963 I joined Des as an assistant and slowly started off, first of all sorting his stills collection, taking pictures and we went on some long safaris with him, Heather and I, to Uganda, up to Lake Rudolph, down into Amboseli. It was all part of a process of taking still pictures for a new magazine called *Animals*.

JH: Was this the magazine that the Dennis's started which became BBC Wildlife magazine?

BC: Yes, that's right. I'm not quite sure. It faded out eventually and I didn't really follow that up because 63, 64 was a critical period when Richard Attenborough took over the BBC. He cut off the *On Safari* (2) programme.

JH: David Attenborough.

BC: I thought it was his older brother. I had a feeling that it was him but maybe it was David.

JH: I think it was David. I don't think Dickie was ever in the BBC.

3. Working with wildlife films

BC: It was a critical period because whoever it was took over, either David (Attenborough) or Richard, they shut off *Z Cars* (3) and the *On Safari* (2) programme. After eleven successful years that was the end. So all of a sudden Armand Denis Productions was in trouble. Des actually went off in '64 to South America, still filming for Armand Denis but this was a very dicey period, not knowing where his films were going to go anymore.

At this particular moment, 1964, National Geographic called up Armand Denis because he had very strong relations with the National Geographic Society, particularly Melville Grosvenor, and through the Olduvai connection with the Leakeys. They were really strongly involved and of course Armand Denis knew the Grosvenors very, very well. They came up and said we have a young man, Richard Leakey, who's going to take on a sponsored expedition for National Geographic, we need someone to film. By now Alan Root, who had been with Armand Denis earlier on and also Hugo van Lawick, had split away. Simon Trevor was still there with Armand Denis. But he was busy doing something else, so of the four of us who'd been involved with Armand Denis Productions I was the only one available. So, as a highly inexperienced cameraman having very little knowledge of proper cinematography but quite okay with the stills I was taken on to cover this expedition.

JH: Was this the expedition to the Omo River?

BC: No, this was to Peninj, the other side of Lake Natron, in Tanzania.

JH: Right, this was the Zinj one?

BC: No. It's slightly connected with Zinj. What happened was this, Richard flying over Lake Natron had noticed some highly interesting deposits and exposures just below the rift wall there. He'd gone in to this area and had a look and then, also with Hugo van Lawick who took some film of the expedition, and they found a beautiful **Australopithecus** skull. Sorry, not skull, a fossil Australopithecus jawbone or mandible.

JH: There were some funny little salt pits or something, weren't there, as well Richard mentioned in that area?

BC: Yes. They were intrigued by how the stone material, I forget what you call it now. [Chert] It's a white hard stone that the ancient human creatures were making stone tools out of. They [the geologists] were also searching for places to see how this stuff was formed because it's really hard, it's almost like that volcanic glass that they made stone tools out of, obsidian. Yes, just as sharp as obsidian.

Anyway I took on this job and it was an overload situation, because not only was I taking stills but also cine and my cine work, of course, was trial and error, mainly error. But this was my first filming expedition and because the team found nothing, of course nothing came of it. A nice lecture programme came out of it though, which Louis Leakey used to give to the National Geographic Society members in Washington in the Constitution Hall.

So that was my first strong, professional connection with Richard.

JH: This is 1964?

BC: 1964. Then with Armand Denis collapsing and me looking around wondering what was going to happen next, the National Geographic kept sending little requests: 'Would you take stills of stuff that Mary Leakey has?' or 'Louis wants some shots taken'. So they sort of half took me over, and what they paid actually went to Armand Denis, not to me because I was still employed by Armand Denis. I had this new connection going but not a very strong one.

Now I'm not quite sure where this works out, but anyway, after the Peninj expedition, the ABC television unit in New York --

JH: This is your four hour special ?

BC: Yes. They, ABC, decided that they wanted to make a story about the whole of Africa (4), because the politics were all sort of churned up then. Independence was coming to all sorts of places. They wanted this big film, a four hour special, unheard of. Everybody said you're going to fail. Four hours all at once, who's going to watch that?

Anyway, someone came out here, the lead man - I think his name was Blaine Littell - to organise a safari outfit for Kenya. He went to Ker & Downey and others and he received all sorts of quotations and then he came after Richard and said, Richard, you've worked down at Olduvai, you know about the Maasai down there, we would like shots of the local Maasai tribesmen. Then Richard brought me into this. He said, look, we've got an opportunity here to do something for the ABC and he undercut all the other safari firms that they'd been looking at. He said, [to Littell] we'll take it on, we'll take you down to do wildlife filming. We'll take your crew around, we'll set you up. It was an extraordinary situation, because he was now quite a young entrepreneur with a very good, successful safari outfit.

JH: Was this Root and Leakey Safaris?

BC: No, that's before this. This was pure Leakey Safaris which had basically come about because of his connection with National Geographic through Louis, his father, and he was actually taking out some very important people from National Geographic and others. So he set up this nice little safari outfit and he was very skilled at it because he was a very good organiser. So he went ahead.

Anyway he landed me with this job with nothing - no trucks, no Land Rovers, no tents, no cutlery, no cooks, no staff and 11 days to fix it. It was an extraordinary situation. So Heather and I put together this whole safari. We brought a truck. We picked up a couple of Land Rovers, an extra one from Richard and another, and we bought tents, we bought spoons, forks, knives, pots, pans, everything, all in 11 days and got it all sorted out. It was a big outfit. There were three directors and we had a whole stack of people to cope with, and the first shoot was down in Manyara.

JH: So you were a roving cameraman for this series?

BC: Well, they hadn't taken me on as a cameraman then, no. I was just a safari organiser and this was sort of a lead into a possible new career because here was Armand Denis going to the wall. So we set off on this safari and actually I set the truck off on time. I had to hire the driver who was one of the White hunter's drivers, Edgar de Bono - I don't know if you remember him.

JH: I remember him, yes.

BC: He'd been fired by Edgar for drinking. Anyway he was a good driver and I got him to drive this truck. He went to Arusha. He set out from Arusha and he crashed the truck in a most extraordinary accident, you wouldn't believe it. It took off the road and actually he froze up, I should imagine, failing to take a corner. He came to a huge little ditch that normally if he'd gone into it he would have crashed the whole thing, killed everybody. As it was it went right over this huge ditch, it was about the width of your room here. He was going so fast that it took the axles out of the truck and it slid along the other side. Nothing broken, nobody killed, but no truck, no wheels.

I'd hired one of my young chaps, his name was Yank Evans who was actually working for (Campbell Schwartzel & Walker), our Jaguar firm. I'd put him in charge. Anyway he rushed back to Arusha, hired another truck. Because nothing except one table had broken, he got it all out and down into Manyara and began setting up, but he was late of course. So I had to persuade this whole crew that to ease their transition from the highlights of Nairobi we would put them into the Manyara Hotel for the night. This gave us time to set up camp and from there it went onwards.

Now the ABC crew were totally unused to wild animal filming. In those days they had the tape recorder connected to the camera with a cable. Now we had three directors and we had three Land Rovers. We put the cameraman in one Land Rover, we put the tape recorder in another with a cable in between. Now how do you film wildlife moving around like this because it was a mess. Because they were having such a hard time getting decent footage with sync sound, they got quite good footage but not much with sound. A telegram went out to New York saying it's not working very well. So these guys, the three directors, said to me 'would you mind taking some camera shots for us without sound but while they're filming. They set me up with one of the directors, Dick Swicker was his name, and we went off and did some filming on our own and that film went back to New York. Along came a telegram saying Campbell is the one for filming this wildlife.

Now we didn't dare tell the camera crew anything about this. I still have the telegram. Then we sorted the crew out and got the sound crew together in one car and kept everybody quiet, and they actually managed to sort out their wildlife filming which was by then going quite well. But I was set up with one director as a roving cameraman just to shoot wildlife; anything, anything you find. So that was the first major start.

JH: It was really the beginning of the wildlife, wasn't it?

BC: Yes. I had my own camera by then. Actually I'd borrowed it off Des, one of his early Arriflexes.

JH: He left you one when he went to America, didn't he? I think he left you a camera.

BC: Yes, that was it. Plus a lot of mismatched lenses, which really gave me trouble, not the best way to learn. I was learning by trial and error and, as I say, mainly error because cutaways and all these sort of things. I wasn't quite familiar with the whole set-up. Although I knew what had to be done but I didn't always follow through. It was always the excitement of getting the shot and forgetting about the cutaways and so on.

JH: So the four hour special was eventually finished and it was very successful?

BC: Yes, it was a huge success, it won an Emmy award. But while they were working on it and editing it, and other crews were going all around West Africa, South Africa, Egypt, everywhere, they let me go off wildlife filming. They gave me a contract and said just go off and film more wildlife for us. Now that was a wonderful opportunity; totally on my own, no directors around. So I just went off. I went up to Samburu, I went down to the Serengeti and I filmed the migration, all sorts of things.

JH: So it was all in East Africa, you didn't go to other African countries?

BC: No, nothing outside of East Africa. But that was a huge introduction to the ABC, and other television outlets. Actually it was a name around now you see, and if you want somebody to film over there was 'try this fellow' and that was the start.

JH: Good news spreads fast.

BC: Well, this was when I started to break away from ADP but National Geographic was still saying 'now, please, we want you to follow Richard Leakey'. So I was hired on a short-term assignment basis to follow him around. Now this sort of cut away from wildlife filming altogether. Filming bones and stones is something else.

JH: Completely different, yes.

BC: But I'd already got interested in the subject and I'd taken lots of pictures for Louis and he'd explained why he needed all these pictures and what these fossils were and what they meant to him. I became very interested in the subject, and then in following Richard around. We went for a huge excavation up near Lake Baringo where he excavated a complete fossil elephant and actually transported the whole thing here to Nairobi, and set it up in the museum. That was the period when he was becoming competition for his father and he later became the director.

JH: So this was the late 60s then, 68, 69 sort of time?

BC: 66, 67. He was already into the museum operations and the setting up of this huge fossil elephant gave him a very strong introduction to the museum as a competent person to handle all sorts of things for them. Very shortly after that, of course, he took over as director of the museum and that was quite a controversial period and you need to ask him about that.

JH: Well, I spoke to him about it. Yes, it was.

BC: It was quite an exciting time. It was difficult for him because his father was a very strong character and rather objected to Richard taking over so much, but it worked.

JH: It worked but meanwhile were you still doing any wildlife filming at all?

BC: No, the wildlife filming that I was doing was connected to Richard's operation. So in 1967 he was taken on with this international expedition to the Omo River north of Kalam in Ethiopia.

JH: This is where you found this skull which was the oldest homo sapiens specimen to date, 195,000 years or something.

BC: Yes. It was a big expedition and Richard was very heavily involved in organising it and he was a superb organiser. He always has been able to get things together and get people to do things, and they relied on

him. The American section, French and Kenyan section all relied on him to organise. We went up to the Omo, and then National Geographic said, okay, you film this whole expedition. So here I was on another palaeontological expedition, not wildlife, except what I could find that matched the situation we were in. In other words if there were animals around, and there were a lot of animals especially crocodiles, for instance, on the Omo River.

That was a very successful operation in that it went smoothly although there were no spectacular finds except this one that eventually became quite famous for what it is.

JH: It's becoming famous now. It wasn't studied for a long time but it's now on top of the table, as it were, being studied quite actively.

BC: That's right. My main regret was that it was found while I was filming, some probably colobus in the gallery forest of the Omo River when it was found. It was found by one of Richard's friends, Paul Abel, and nobody photographed it as it came out. So this little record was lost and the actual position where it was found is quite difficult to locate nowadays. There was a bit of controversy there.

But I was due now to join Richard again because he was going to go to the east side of Lake Rudolph where he had found some fossil evidence, purely by borrowing the American's lovely little helicopter, flying across towards Ileret somewhere, where they landed, north of Koobi Fora. They're not quite sure now where it was. Anyway wherever they landed he saw fossils and plenty of them so he persuaded National Geographic, 1968, 'let me take on an expedition of my own. Now they believed that, because he'd found some fossil evidence they could truly actually fund him and they did.

*JH: This resulted in a lecture tour called *The Birth of Man* (5), is that correct?*

BC: *The Birth of Man* was one of his promotional films where he wanted evidence to show National Geographic that he was well into the subject and this came after, quite well after his 1968 expedition. So I was taken on again by National Geographic. So now I was becoming the sort of person they asked to follow the Leakeys, taking over from what Hugo van Lawick used to do, in fact way before he went to join Jane Goodall. So there's that connection there. I had taken over, sort of taken over what Hugo was doing.

4. Filming Gorillas with Dian Fossey

JH: Then things went wrong. Alan Root was bitten by a snake and lost his finger and you ended up going to Rwanda.

BC: The 68 expedition was very successful. Richard found part of a hominid jaw that proved that there were hominids there in this huge, vast area, and he'd done a huge survey of about 500 square miles up there. So I was all set to come for the 1969 expedition because he had found something and obviously was going to find more, so National Geographic backed him again. Now I was due to follow through, so I saw this as a new career starting up again.

When I got back to Nairobi in 68 and was building a house at home and getting all sorts of things organised, Alan Root got bitten by a snake. Now he had been hired by National Geographic to take film of Dian Fossey and the gorillas. In fact, he was to be the person who would follow through her research work and he'd already started on it. He'd been up there.

JH: He first showed her the gorillas in 1963 so six years have past.

BC: Yes, that's a whole another story. But that was mainly the reason why he took it on because he knew there were lovely shots to be filmed of gorillas, so he took it on. But then he was bitten by this snake.

JH: Which took a long, long time to heal.

BC: Yes, well, he nearly lost his life. When he came down here he was given an extra dose of anti-venom and he went into anaphylactic shock, and nearly lost his life. Anyway he was no longer able to follow through his commitments. He'd told Dian that he was going to come up there quite soon and continue the filming he'd started. Now he couldn't do it, so there was a bit of problem because Dian wanted to leave to go to America for the first time in two rather long, hard years. First Louis came and then Alan came to see me: 'would I please go and look after her camp while Dian went off on her necessary leave to get back to America'.

I was not very keen on that, in actual fact, because I was halfway through building a house, my vehicle was in pieces having been damaged up in East Turkana. But the excitement of being able to go and see gorillas sort of overwhelmed all this and I thought I would like to take it on, yes; It's only a short period, I can go up there as a caretaker but actually to film at the same time. So I put my car together and took off. Met Dian in September 1968 and I spent two days with her in the field. She showed me her then very wild gorillas, they were not very approachable back then, and left me, and went off to America

So I had this lovely almost two month period getting to know the gorillas entirely on my own, taking film, and thought that was it. I had quite a fine time with the gorillas actually. I took quite a lot of film but came to the realisation that it was going to be an extremely difficult job because then they were not well habituated.

JH: They were black animals in shade and you didn't have the right camera to start with, did you?

BC: Well, I still had Des's Arriflex with it's mismatched lenses. It's quite a heavy thing to carry around all by yourself up there and I'm not a strong mountaineer, so I had a real hard time with it.

JH: Well, they're steep those mountains.

BC: Commercial **Ektachrome** at 16 **ASA** I forced up to 64 to get a decent image. It worked ,but not very well. Anyhow I thought that was the end of it. So, end of 1968 I came back home in November and went straight down to Manyara to film elephants with Iain Douglas-Hamilton.

JH: The Family that Lives with Elephants (6) and you filmed that with Dieter Plage?.

BC: No.

JH: Was he there at that time or before then?

BC: This was before then. This was a project by somebody called Howard A. Baldwin, a specialist in radio collars. I was asked by MGM to go and film (Bob doesn't think it ever made it into a film. Boadicea trashed the transmitter, as well as putting her tusks through Bob's vehicle, so it wasn't a very successful mission!) one being fitted. So this was a quick little side trip down to Manyara filming Iain with his elephants. Not a very successful darting I might say because the elephant was darted and the herd came back and didn't want to leave this creature. But eventually they put on the collar, but then the elephant broke it. So the whole process of actually following the elephant didn't come through because the transmitter had broken. But I did try and show it being collared and later of it moving around and I got spiked for my troubles by Iain's favourite elephant, Boadicea.

JH: She charged you? She charged everybody though, didn't she?

BC: Well, she normally didn't hit people. Ian said 'I don't know why she did that'. I know why she did it; because I got a bit too close trying to find the one with the collar and she got angry. She chased me and because I was in low range and low gear she caught up with me and put her tusks through the back of my Land Rover. But I went out with Ian afterwards, just to prove to me that she would charge and it wasn't serious, and she did in fact charge. I thought, oh boy, is she going to stop because he was in his open Land Rover in those days and she did stop. He said there you are, it's proof, she doesn't normally do what she did to you.

But anyway by now I was wondering what was going to happen next. This was my sort of final shot at working with someone else. MGM this was I think.

JH: You also did some stills at that time with Heinz Sielmann I believe?

BC: Yes.

JH: He came out, the woodpecker man, to do some stills.

BC: Yes, National Geographic. They asked me to come along and give a hand so there was a quick combination there but I still had no projects going forward.

JH: What was it like working with Heinz Sielmann

BC: It was a small episode.

JH: How did you find him?

BC: He was a very interesting man and obviously he'd done a lot of wildlife filming and photography and was interesting to talk to. So my role with him was pretty minor but it was interesting to watch how films were put together and it was just a short experience.

Now came the time when I was contacted by National Geographic, again through Richard Leakey who'd gone off to Washington and was actually fund raising with National Geographic for his new 1969 expedition. While he was there he discovered his father was looking for someone to take Alan's place up with Dian Fossey, and he had some obligation to somebody who'd funded Louis for various projects here in Kenya. Richard didn't think it was a very good idea. The young man that he was proposing was not the right sort of person. So having worked with me for a long time he knew National Geographic were quite interested in keeping me going and he suggested that I should take this up. He did this in Washington, so I got a telegram from Washington saying: 'would you like to take on a long-term project with Dian Fossey?'

Now this was a big problem because I didn't know whether Alan was going to be able to take it on. I had to contact him first and say what are you going to do, because I know this is one project you really want to do. You've worked with gorillas before and you'd like to continue and he said 'no way'. 'I'm now well behind and I have some major projects going on, for instance one with George Schaller, I haven't finished that off yet. I think he was also working on other ones that he was going for.

So it landed with me, not that Dian Fossey was very pleased with this, as we later discovered because she liked Alan and Alan had set her up in 63. She knew him very well and was getting along with him very well, he was the prime person. Now here's a stranger come along. Although she'd met me for a short two days in 1968 she was really upset. Anyway I took it on.

JH: She didn't treat you very well, did she, giving you a wet tent when you arrived?

BC: When I first got there (in 1968) I was put in her original tent because she was in a nice little cabin. It was one of Alan's tents I believe, I'm not quite sure. It's one she brought back from the Congo when she was chased out. So I did have this rather wet tent. That was quite a strong introduction to the conditions up there. So I knew what I was going into but I took it on because of the opportunity to film gorillas, a long-term project, and as a freelance cameraman this is what you want, go for it, so I did.

JH: Absolutely and you had a new camera by now?

BC: No, I didn't.

JH: Were you still using Des's Arriflex?

BC: I decided, because I realised working with the Arriflex was going to give me problems. I'd brought another camera, a **Beaulieu**. It had a fairly sophisticated internal light meter; so you didn't have to move and fiddle with the lenses at the front, which the gorillas actually didn't like back then. They didn't like the Arriflex camera for a start and they didn't like all the movement as you tried to follow, the light fading and coming and going.

So I took on this Beaulieu and a nice zoom lens just to get the light weight and to get a decent image without having to move too much. Although I took the Arriflex up there I abandoned it quite quickly because this Beaulieu was working very well.

JH: It worked better?

BC: Yes, it did.

JH: But you were still having trouble getting close to the gorillas?

BC: Yes.

JH: Dian wouldn't let you, would she?

BC: Well, as a behaviourist she wasn't supposed to get in amongst them like Jane had done. Strong behaviourists object to people purposely trying to make friends with their subjects. You're supposed to be out of the way, an impartial observer with no connection so you can view uninhibited behaviour.

To start off with Dian wasn't so pleased to have me around anyway because I was a total stranger, so she was a bit resistant. Quite apart from that she'd just taken on the task of looking after two orphan gorillas and there was a lot of stress there. So for the first couple of weeks, although I wanted to go out she wouldn't let me go out. Later on she said this guy's sitting around, not going out and getting out of the way, whereas she wanted me there to film these baby gorillas. I nearly walked out actually. By end of May I had written to Geographic and said, look, this is not really what I want, in spite of the opportunities. I'm going to come back to Nairobi and think it over.

JH: So this was 1970?

BC: No, this is 1969, April, May was enough because Dian was really upset about these gorillas. She'd had to give them up. In fact, I took them down to the Ruhengeri airstrip.

JH: You describe this in your book. It must have been heartbreaking.

BC: Yes, it was for her, absolutely, and to take them down because they were really friendly. They'd attached themselves to her strongly. She'd really wanted to release them in the wild but couldn't do it. Anyway I sent them off.

I came back home realising that I'd have to make a big decision and I spent a couple of weeks back here or more (in Nairobi). No, I thought, filming gorillas is just something you can't miss. So I kitted myself out completely to become totally independent of her facilities. I took my own cooking gear and everything else so that I could be totally independent - and that worked.

It took a while but gradually she came round to: I'm stuck with this guy and I might as well get on with it, and then it went on from there. But it was still a difficult period because here I was working under her rules and conditions, not able to try and get in amongst these creatures, and that went on for a long time.

JH: It took you a while to persuade her to be more intrusive in her approach to the gorillas which was also helping you to get closer to them. But you actually changed the way she studied the animals I think. You pushed her a little bit further than she wanted to go maybe.

BC: Well, no one knew how tolerant these creatures can be, had no idea. I think it was after at least a year and a half, I said to Dian, look, I've got to get in amongst them, even if you don't want to disturb them and be accused of influencing your studies and influencing your subject. Let me try a new technique, because I was really having trouble filming these animals. It was all telephoto lenses, long distance, as soon as they moved they were out of sight. So I said, let me do my own thing and try and get closer to them. So she agreed. She said, okay, but if they're stressed or if you harass them then I'm going to stop that.

JH: She didn't want screwed up gorillas, did she?

BC: That's right, she didn't want screwed up gorillas. Yes, that was the way she put it. Anyway I started out on hands and knees and it worked superbly and quite quickly. Actually later on I discovered there's no need to get down on hands and knees. If you're cautious and careful you can get in amongst them and they become totally habituated to your presence quite quickly. But I started on hands and knees and this worked even better than trying to stay upright. So I got in amongst them quite quickly, and they soon realised that this creature coming along on its hands and knees actually was not a threat at all. So the changeover went quite quickly. They didn't trust me and I didn't trust them at this stage but it developed quite quickly. Dian didn't believe it for a while because she kept saying, we're going to run into trouble here, we don't know how they're going to react to these extremely close approaches. 'You might get hammered by one of the Silverbacks at any time'

Of course, I felt the same thing. It was a bit tense when you get in amongst unhabituated creatures and a bit of trust has to develop. Anyway it worked and I started to get really good shots, and Geographic kept writing back saying do this, do that and Dian was a bit resistant. Then she started to come along with me and to see that they relaxed. If they trusted you they started to relax, and they started to get on with their life without reacting with you. Then she realised that they were so tolerant, or could be so tolerant, that it changed her whole outlook. Now she could see things at close range, so could I and that's what I wanted. So this was the big changeover.

JH: Now you shot during your time in Rwanda something like 70,000 feet?

BC: Yes, 70,000 odd feet.

JH: 70,000 feet of film.

BC: Well, a lot of it in the earlier stages was all long distant shots not much action, sequential action difficult to achieve, but this changed to actually intrusive work. It started to work so well. It was still early stages here in 1972 when I started to get right in amongst them. I still hadn't habituated more than two groups to this approach.

JH: In 1971 there was Monkeys, Apes and Man (7), a Dennis B. Kane film. Was that when you were still using the long lenses?

BC: That's right. That really upset us, yes. 1971 was when I was beginning to get in amongst them and getting some really good shots. They were making this film and Dennis said, hey look, we've got this gorilla material, let's put that in too. That had an effect later on because first of all there was an article coming up in the *National Geographic magazine*, about Dian again. But they hastened it through so that they could advertise the *Monkeys, Apes and Man* film in that issue. So we got a quick/shortened magazine article that shouldn't have gone in because it wasn't ready and there were all sorts of things coming up - just to advertise this film. One was going to go for many, many pages but they'd concerted it to get in. So this really upset Dian and myself.

JH: You had nothing to do with the making of this film?

BC: No, because in those days National Geographic was operating with the West Coast for their production facilities, Wolper Productions were producing their films. So they, of course, fired off all the material they wanted and they made this film and sort of pre-empted the new film, perhaps a one hour special, on gorillas by introducing them all of a sudden as part of a small film. So there were two disasters there, pushing it through.

JH: Yes, not very good timing on National Geographic's part. But anyway you progressed and got more friendly with the gorillas.

BC: In 1972 it was becoming fabulous, it really was.

JH: Picking up your gloves and picking up Dian's notebook and pencil and all these kind of things. Some of that was in a more recent film that was brought out by National Geographic. 'The Lost Film of Dian Fossey' (8). All your footage which had been sitting in their basement for all these years.

BC: That's right. They'd actually lost track of it. They had the rushes. This is another story that is actually mixed up with the Leakeys because we should go back a little bit. In 1972 Dian wanted me to stay and she made a firm decision if I was not going to come and stay with her she was going to shut off my opportunity to continue, which she did. But in 1972 Richard Leakey invited Prince Philip to pay a visit to the Turkana region because he was passing through. I forget what was happening,, but he was passing through this country.

5. Starting with Survival Anglia.

JH: You had Aubrey and Cindy Buxton then?

BC: Yes, included.

JH: And the Roots?

BC: Yes, Alan and Joan came up. They actually flew over the top of us while we were birding so they got a real rocket from Prince Philip. You now how Alan loves to zoom. His arrival was announced with the zoom. But this is where I first met Aubrey Buxton. Now I'd gone specifically to help Richard entertain Prince Philip with Heather, and Alan and Joan came later. But the idea was for me to talk to Prince Philip about the gorillas and to get him interested in this wildlife situation there. Of course, Aubrey listened to all this and Aubrey is a great fan of the Lake Turkana region. He'd been up there more than once, in fact they'd bought a boat and sailed around Lake Turkana and gone on a bit up the Omo River. So he was really interested in the region and what Richard was doing with it.

JH: He wanted you to make a film for Survival at Turkana. Did he or did he not at this stage?

BC: No. He and I had a long talk while I was up there because I was still working with National Geographic and I said no. No inkling that I was going to join Survival back then. There was this very interesting party, small, intent. It went all over the countryside. It gave Prince Philip a real whale of a time, did things that he wouldn't normally do because his security men had to stay out of it. They weren't allowed to accompany him and they thought this a really bad idea. Anyhow he had a real whale of time. But I did have this connection with Aubrey.

I had no idea what was going to happen because I knew the shut-off was coming in May 1972 and it did. I left the mountains in 1972.

JH: That's right. But not before you got the footage of Digit?

BC: No, that came before. That was totally unexpected.

JH: Dian and Digit together.

BC: Yes, together which really showed the fantastic relationship that was developing, and it is something you can develop with gorillas, except behaviourists will try and still remain reserved and away from them even though they're allowed to walk in amongst them nowadays. It's so easy, now you can do what you like. You can walk right in amongst the gorillas because they're so tolerant.

But now this connection came up. 1972 was a very successful season with Richard. I joined Richard which was one of the reasons why Dian said if you go and join him you're not coming back with me.

JH: She gave you the ultimatum but then you worked with Richard?

BC: Yes, through 1972, very successful.

*JH: You went with Mary Leakey to film the footprints, the **Laetoli footprints**.*

BC: That's right. Yes, that came in.

JH: That was all in the same year?

BC: Yes. Actually it wasn't the Laetoli footprints it was what she called 'Pits and Channels and (inaudible)'. The footprints came up in 1978, quite a while later. I know that came a bit later because I was asked to go down specifically to take pictures of the prints.

The 1972 expedition with Richard was very successful. We found this **homo habilis** skull, 1470, which became very famous and, of course, now I was expecting to continue with his other expeditions. But also now there was a new aspect because Richard had been talking to Aubrey about Survival and the National Geographic were involved, and how about making a one hour special on Richard and his work around Turkana.

So come '73 I was taken on again by National Geographic specifically to show whether I could take footage that would warrant a film in conjunction with Survival.

JH: They were going to work together?

BC: Yes. So an Anglia crew came out and I worked with them, with Richard, for this film, *The Bones of Contention* (9) as it was called later. So now the connection with Survival became stronger. I was filming for National Geographic for this film not part of *Survival*, never ending. I think actually somewhere along the line here I got taken on by *Survival* to aid the Anglia team to film *The Bones of Contention* film. That's how it happened.

So here I was connected with a proper TV crew from Anglia, not Survival. I was sort of kept second camera on this. Aubrey talked to me again and he said, now look, I'm very interested in the Lake Turkana region. I want you to make a film about Lake Takana and everything that goes on there'. So when we passed through London in 1973, Heather and I, we'd been to America and I'd been talking with ABC and NBC and asking about their projects and so on. When I got back to London Aubrey said I'd like to take you on. Now this is where I met Colin Willcock for the first time.

Colin said 'another cameraman, I don't think so' but Aubrey said, no, he knows all about Lake Turkana, been up there, spent a lot of time there. I would like a film about that region and I'd like to take him on. First of all they set up an expedition with National Geographic to run the Omo River from all the way from the Abalti Bridge right down to the top end of Lake Turkana. So I joined that with Alan Root to make a film about this river run.

JH: The Omo River run.

BC: The Omo River run, yes.

JH: This is like white water rafting?

BC: Yes, it is. So actually it was the height of the rainy season which is the only reason you can get over all the obstacles in that river so it was quite exciting. But for a true boatman not all that exciting.

JH: A film was made about this?

BC: I made the film in the end because we decided it wasn't a special material, there wasn't enough in it. A lot of boats running up and down and having occasional trouble.

JH: So it was never broadcast? It was just for the contestants?

BC: I put it all together and it was actually made into a film for the participants who had joined in. But now having done this Aubrey said, look, we're going to take you on., we want you to make films for Survival. So forget about Turkana, just come up with some ideas. Now another person had joined in, John Heminway. John had joined in this river run expedition and he'd also been talking to Survival and he was taken on as a producer. I'm not quite sure of his role there.

Anyway here was the start, a start to make films for Survival and the first one we thought up was called *African Garden* (10), that's all the title we had. John said, hey, you've got something around your garden, make a film about it.

JH: And the warthogs?

BC: The 'Warthogs at the Bottom of my Garden' which went all the way round and round the world apparently.

JH: I think that was 1975.

BC: Yes, that's right. I got mixed up with John again because he joined with Mirella Ricciardi on her **dhow** trip from the Gulf, in the Mir-el-lah. When they came to Lamu with the Anglia film team they asked me to join in as second camera. So I did join in there as part of *Survival* so that was the voyage of the Mir-el-lah. But in the meantime all these little bits of filming were continuing.

JH: Between those two you got involved with Safari by Balloon (11). I think you were third camera on that one when Alan and Joan flew over Kilimanjaro.

BC: Yes, after they decided it was worth making a film about all the adventures after Alan's exploit over Kilimanjaro. It was a really good one.

JH: There certainly were some adventures, weren't there?

BC: Yes, well it was extraordinary. Dieter was basically the true, hot rod second camera and I was third camera, filming around, operating from the bank not from the boat. One day Alan said won't you join us. We're having fun on the river, nothing's happening, join us. Heather and I actually joined in so I took along my camera of course, and Dieter was put off on the bank this time, and then it all happened on that one day. A buffalo made a charge right on the edge of the bank, and further down the river an elephant and her calf were in the river and they charged us and hooked the boat and she put her tusks through it. It all happened in one day, much to Dieter's upset because he should have been there.

JH: Yes, Mr Root having a bad day. Then you continued to make many more films for Survival - The Parenthood Game (12). It was about cichlids, wasn't it?

BC: Yes. They wanted to show cichlids holding the young in their mouth. That was basically the only shot that they wanted from me but it meant setting up aquariums, getting the fish, filming and keeping them alive. So it was quite a project just for those few shots.

JH: Well, in those days it was quite a challenge, yes. What about Messengers of the Gods (13) ?

BC: What happened was, over the years, as I gradually got into the filming for *Survival* they kept thinking up ideas or they said what are your ideas? Obviously you're not going to go into one hour filming because I didn't have a crew. All my filming was done alone which is not really the way to make films. So working alone you're sometimes at a strong disadvantage so they said now you suggest what you want to do.

The first opportunity came when, unfortunately, John Pearson was killed in the Ngorongoro crater.

JH: He was shot by his askari (watchman) in the middle of the night.

BC: His game scout, yes. John had nearly finished *Hunters of the Plains* (14). He'd spent a lot of time on it and was doing very well. The cheetah section was missing, so Aubrey or Colin said, look, we must finish this off. Would you take on just that section to finish off John's film? So now I went to the Mara. This was not my first visit to the Mara, of course, because I'd been there several times before and knew the place quite well, so I took it on. So here was another portion of the film but it gave me a good chance to have a good look at Manyara and decide what else was there.

So I said to them, look, there are a lot of animals here, let's go through them one by one as I mentioned to shoot them. I filmed what they wanted for the cheetah part and I'd got myself established in what was then a Root and Leakey safari camp which eventually became the Mara camp. Got myself established there, in my own tent so I had a base. From thereon after I'd finished the *African Garden*, the cheetah section, I said, look, we'll go through the animals one by one. There are other sections where they said, well look, other things are going on just suggest more than other animals. A group was set up, say, the giraffe, the hyena, each one should make a good half hour if we can get around to it. So that's how it was set up.

JH: Right, and you had your buffalo film, The Big Boss (15).

BC: Yes. They were all filming a separate animal and following it through, and the cheetah one. I did another cheetah one, *The Fastest Thing on Four Legs* (16). Partly because although I'd really shot this section for John I'd got a nice bit of footage but I hadn't got enough obviously. So another cheetah film came out of it. But also Aubrey came and said take us on a safari, we want to go up to Lake Baringo and we did so. He looked at Lake Hannington as it was then, it later became Lake Bogoria, the flamingos. Okay, you make a film and I'll fund you.

JH: The Birds of the Burning Soda (17).

BC: But that came up so free and easy. I had a really free time with *Survival*. It wasn't do this and do that. It was just suggest something and then get on with it. It was a really nice relationship.

JH: Yes, they seemed to be like that with all their cameramen.

BC: Yes, and it worked very well. With me as an individual and filming alone it was the best way to go because I spent a lot of time. I wasn't tied to a very tough schedule and they just said, well, take your time, get on with it but, please, try and get two within a year. So that's how it went.

JH: But you didn't always work alone, you did Last Kingdom of the Elephants (18). You did that with Cindy Buxton.

BC: Yes. Well, Cindy had already made a film, she'd done a film in Zambia.

JH: The Shoebill Stork (19) Survival Anglia, Cindy Buxton, filmed in Zambia. I think it was called "Almost a Dodo".

BC: That's right and Aubrey said we'd like Cindy to make another film, a one hour special, and would you like to give her a hand? So I said okay, yes, well let's do it and I did. So I went with Cindy Buxton and we spent a lot of time together making this film, *The Last Kingdom of the Elephants*.

JH: That was mostly in Zambia.

BC: Well, it was all on the Luangwa Valley. That went very well. Again, the filming back in those days was much more static than you see now. Nowadays they get some really extraordinary footage, partly because

they latch onto cameramen who have a really good relationship with the animals that they're working with, and some really extraordinary footage has come out these days.

JH: Yes, the equipment's changed and the people have changed.

BC: And the necessity to get in close and to get intimate footage. It's not quite so static as it used to be. As Colin Willock used to say, let the film tell the story, I don't want to narrate too much, I don't want narrators keep telling you what's going on, you want to see what's going on. That was his style.

JH: That was definitely his style. He wrote most of them, didn't he?

BC: Yes, he did.

JH: Which people are you pleased to have met in your journey through this career, the people in the business? You've met a lot of people.

BC: Yes, there are so many. They're fleeting meetings usually because you're making your films and someone else is making theirs. It's not necessarily competitive but they are doing the same thing as you. For instance, Warren and Jenny [Garst]. Do you remember them, *Wild Kingdom* (20)?

JH: Wild Kingdom. Yes, of course.

BC: I mean they filmed everything around the world for that particular programme, *Wild Kingdom*. I met them several times. This is another kink in the story. I met Harold Hayes, the writer, while I was filming in the Mara and he came with his wife, I think her name's Judith, and this is 1985 when Dian had just been murdered. He was intrigued. I talked to him. I said, yes, I spent time up there and his journalist mind kicked in and he immediately knew there was a story that was far and away from just someone working with gorillas up in the mountains. He actually got me involved very much within the film proposal that came out later but a competitive film.

JH: Yes, and you went back to Rwanda as a second unit, didn't you, for the feature film?

BC: No, not second unit. Simon Trevor took on the second unit. They employed me as they wanted to use my name. So they employed me and they had to find a job, so they took me in as a unit stills photographer.

JH: It must have been rather strange watching Brian Brown playing Bob.

BC: Yes, it was. It was an extraordinary experience that one because I know they mangled historical accuracy quite strongly.

JH: They always do in a feature film.

BC: But the film that came out really affected a lot of people, an emotional film, and it really put out the story that people latched on to. So let it ride, it's helped enormously.

JH: It helped the gorillas.

BC: Yes, it really did.

JH: Certainly Sigourney Weaver has been back and done various other things. I had to send Perrier water from Nairobi because Sigourney Weaver couldn't get it in Rwanda. That was a television appearance.

BC: I got along quite well with her because I think she did a good job, considering the circumstances she had to work in.

JH: Very difficult circumstances, yes.

BC: And to get right in amongst the gorillas and let them come up to you she handled that very well. Mind you she had Simon filming it and advising her what to do and what not to do but she did it very well.

JH: Are there any moments that you're really grateful for or any moments you wish hadn't happened and something really terrible, apart from nearly losing the bottom of your vehicles? Any high points in your life that you think, gosh, I'm so glad that happened?

BC: Well, of course the high point was when a gorilla, a wild gorilla, decided I would be a good playmate. We'd gotten used to each other.

JH: It picked up your glove and touched you.

BC: No, it was later than that. This was the first time there was a complete reversal. Otherwise it was me trying to get in close and I'd managed to get extremely close - as you and I here. But there was a barrier between us and there was no real communication like a real friend, and suddenly this one creature decided this guy who keeps wandering around on all fours I'm going to have a go. He came up to me, pounded me on the back, tickled the back of my neck and then rolled away saying come on, let's have a bit of play. Now that was the first time anything like that had happened. One of these wild creatures had decided, okay, this guy's good enough to play with.

JH: What was the name of that gorilla?

BC: That was Digit.

JH: That was Digit, rather special.

BC: I actually gave the name to that one. I discovered this young gorilla with a broken finger and said to Dian this is a gorilla with a damaged digit and eventually that name stuck. That's why it's such a strange name.

JH: I understand but Digit is world famous. Everybody knows Digit. The Digit Fund has come after that.

BC: Well, he was the one who introduced me to real friendship with a wild animal on their own terms.

JH: You must have been very, very distraught when he was killed.

BC: Yes. I think I was in London and I heard it on the news when that happened.

6. The Industry in 2008

JH: Bob, in all these years, apart from making films you must have watched a fair number. Can you tell me which films stick in your mind as being memorably good?

BC: Yes, I have watched hundreds of these films, especially all the *Survival* ones of course and at the, what is it the one that takes place in Bath?

JH: The BKSTS, the Symposium. It doesn't happen any more but the Wildscreen Festival in Bristol.

BC: The Wildscreen Festival. I've attended several of those and saw other people's films, seen the B.B.C. films, enjoyed most of David Attenborough's films. I really enjoyed those because there's excellent commentary. Although he's quite active in all of them he really tells the tale and it goes over nicely, so enjoyed those, and Alan Root's films. I enjoyed all of his because he really takes a lot of time setting them up.

JH: Alan is a master. I think as a storyteller he has got the balance just right.

BC: Yes, the commentary and the people he selects and the music he selects and the way it's done, that produces films that people really like. When you work like I did, just trying to make a film of a specific animal it gets much more static and not nearly so interesting for the audience.

JH: If you've only got one animal it's much more difficult. Yes, Alan didn't do much of that. Now you've got people coming in his footsteps, you've got [Mark] Deeble and [Victoria] Stone and other people coming along. Do you think the industry's heading in the right direction?

BC: I think partially because, for instance, what was the name of the one, Mark?

JH: Mark Deeble and Victoria Stone.

BC: Deeble, the name of it because I went to see that.

JH: Queen of Trees (21).

BC: Yes, now that's beautifully done.

JH: And Mzima (22).

BC: That's the way I like to see films done because you can follow the story through nicely. There's no overactive camera work, there's no funny zooms or snap changes of scene with drums playing in between that tends to be the way to do things with some people now. If films come out like that you're intrigued with them when you go in and watch because it's really telling you a story.

JH: But sadly these films take time to make and people don't seem to have the money anymore.

BC: That's right.

JH: They're always in a hurry and it seems to me they're making more films. Make a 50minute film in five days, why not? They do this, of course, by getting very, very little good wildlife stuff and they pad it out with a presenter who doesn't always know what to say and doesn't work for me, does it?



BC: No. There's an enormous amount of stock footage too.

JH: I think they're reusing stock footage a lot.

BC: Yes. There is a huge pile of stock footage around the world and it takes a lot of sewing together to match nicely. If you've been filming yourself a lot you can look at these scenes and you suddenly say, "Well that scene never matched what came before", even though the average viewer didn't notice. There's a tendency nowadays to rush things because there's so much around, there's so much competition, that to make a lovely film that people really like is expensive, long-term work.

JH: It is expensive, but now everybody wants to do things that have been done before, but now it's got to be done in high definition.

BC: That's right.

JH: We're going round and round the same circle again. To me, the quality films are fewer and far between now but I wonder, how do you see things in 10 years' time? What will the industry be churning out? What kind of films will we be watching?

BC: We'll surely be watching the same animals being replayed perhaps closer, perhaps more dangerous situations, as you can see in some of the South African films. Some beautiful ones down there but extraordinary situations. Now people are tending to get intrigued with the extra close shots that show the camera may be right there next to the creature and unfortunately television is going that way. The extra close, extreme close shots are overtaking the balance of the film. You don't get a natural feel. The camera sometimes just can't follow what's going on, so you see an eye and a mouth and to the cameraman that's working now he's got a fine shot, he got in so close, but it's that sort of thing that is attracting the modern editors.

The modern editors are having a huge influence on the way they put films together because of the way they've actually come through the system, with watching a lot of TV, with playing games, with playing with computers that can now do extraordinary things with the images that they're given to put together and some of them really over do it now. Some of them become hard to watch. You get an interesting subject which suddenly is spun round or is upset by a very quick zoom or tilted camera or the person being interviewed spun around and suddenly brought to a stop. All sorts of little kinks that the modern editors obviously like and probably a lot of the modern viewers like because their attention span is so short. They like to see these quick changes but for the modern human eye, or the average human eye, it's quite hard to watch that.

JH: I think it makes you just feel dizzy.

BC: Yes it does.

JH: The problem is they're trying to attract new audiences the whole time and they say we must get the young kids off the--

BC: Yeah, something snappy.

JH: Get them off the sofas and we must change it so they rewrite things.

BC: Let's face it the attention span is very short with certain modern audiences and what they will do is flip channel unless you've caught their interest in some way.

www.wildfilmhistory.org



JH: Absolutely.

BC: One of the ways of doing that with modern kids is to flip things around and make funny noises and crashing sounds between each scene change. It's quite difficult to watch as far as I'm concerned but some people like it.

JH: It's going to get worse then do you think?

BC: Yes. But modern wildlife filming now, the techniques that are being used are extraordinary and you can get right with a bird for instance, flying and it gives you a different feel all together.

JH: Completely different and there's some people who are very, very good at that, hidden cameras here and there and everywhere. Is there one film that you never got the chance to make that you really, really wanted to do?

BC: Now that's a bit hard to decide because I kept going through one animal subject after another. That's actually not like Alan Root, I didn't have the ability to go out on a project that was going to be wide ranging and include more than just a few.

JH: Include lots of species.

BC: Yes, so there's no real film that I missed, I don't think, that I wanted to take. I'd come right through a range of animals and I was actually going to work with hyrax, that was one of the last ones that I was working on.

JH: What happened? Did it get finished?

BC: Well, I went off to help the Warner Brothers and Universal to film *Gorillas in the Mist* (23).

JH: So the hyrax film never got finished?

BC: Never got made. I'd made a start on it.

JH: Is it going to happen?

BC: No, not with me anyway. That really made a kink. That actually was near the end of my filming career. I went across to Rwanda and when I came back the immigration department told me that really I shouldn't be making films anymore. They wanted to slap me with a huge fee because they said you've been making films all these years which was perfectly legal, I was, but they'd suddenly changed the rules. They were drawing in all photographers and photographic shops and film making and putting up the price, or actually introducing a new fee for working in the country as an expatriate, although I'm not an expatriate I am still a British Citizen. That makes a problem. I almost got thrown out because we had an immigration officer who said, no, you can't do that, go and get a visa, a permit to reside here, after I'd been here 60 years. We had quite a long battle and, in the meantime I was thinking of writing this book about my gorilla experiences. Having watched a film being made and having seen another two books come out about the whole of the gorilla subject, I decided I'd write one of my own and that sort of cut me off from filming for a while.

JH: So do you think you've hung up your camera so to speak?

BC: Yes, I will.

JH: You don't think you're going to do any more?

BC: Not only hung it up but they've all become obsolete.

JH: Well they're all a bit old-fashioned now though. You want to go high definition now.

BC: That's right and of course they altered the aspect ratio and everything. All my old 16mm films don't fit very well anymore.

JH: Maybe you just have to watch what other people are making and hope that we still get entertained in that way.

BC: Every now and again one comes out that I really enjoy, that's put together nicely and smoothly and leads you into the story and people have made a real effort, along with the editors, to get it like that. So they're still coming out, there are some really fine ones.

JH: It's quite a rare treat though I think, isn't it?

BC: It is, yes, but obviously a lot of people spend huge amounts of time getting scenes that you've never seen before.

JH: Absolutely, yes. If somebody came to you and said, how do I get I to this business, do you think it's a good idea, would you encourage them? Would you say, no, go and sell motor cars instead?

BC: I would encourage them but I would also try and point out the pitfalls, the huge number of people involved in the subject of making wildlife films. Not just people who are in the business but others who are amateurs and would like to kick in and can do it by using their little camera and capturing a few scenes that somebody latches on to and says, well, please expand on this. Pure chance that is. But actually to go into a career, one has to tell them it's going to be expensive and it's going to be time-consuming and are you really committed? It's lovely to be in amongst the wildlife but working to make a good film of them is hard work.

JH: It's very, very hard work indeed.

BC: A lot of patience required, do you have it? Are you going to take stills? Be aware that everybody's taking stills, it's quite hard to market them. You really have to think if you want that, make that your career. You need to know a lot about how films are made for a start, not jump in like I did, totally inexperienced, everything by trial and error. It's hard to do these days.

JH: You did very well Bob.

BC: Well a lot of chances came my way and fortunately, I was able to follow them through.

JH: You did very well and you're certainly, in my book, you're one of Africa's big five.

BC: East African big five, is it?

JH: The African big five, I think, the whole continent. Well thank you very much for spending the time talking to us Bob.

BC: I'm sorry it's so long but it's intriguing and it's involved.

JH: It's just so interesting it's impossible to turn it off.

BC: One thing led to another and that's how it goes on.

JH: Well that's how it's meant to be.

BC: Now as I've said, I have a cupboard full of obsolete cameras. Do you think eBay would be interested?

JH: We'll try them on eBay. Right, thank you very much indeed Bob for coming along.

BC: My pleasure. I suppose I've got stand and act naturally, stop looking at the camera. Yes, that's quite something else. Modern camera work is very different.

JH: You know Mark and Vicki's next project is 3D.

BC: Yes, 3D's coming but that's also static if you want to show it as static, it doesn't have to be 3D does it? I mean it's not one out that can only be shown on 3D.

JH: I'm not actually quite sure, I don't know.

BC: Like Des's **super8 Kodachrome**.

JH: Des, he's got some amazing memories has Des.

BC: Well it was the way I got into the whole process of filming. It was totally unexpected. Kenya was about to become independent, we were totally unsure where we were going.

JH: Nobody knew really.

BC: I mean this workshop. We took in all sorts of people including Alan Root and his jeep and Des and his old Dodge, American car, that he had and Des's Land Rovers. It was really unexpected, just because he taught me how to use his darkroom and that one kink where, having taken all this film, instead of sending it to Musa Quraishy of Photomural, who'd done all of Des's films; black and white, huge numbers, he said I'll give them to you. He had a nice little set up in his darkroom and it was a long process actually doing it, nothing automatic, it was all hand by hand and counting. A lot of care was taken over that lot and when they came up and said get out this workshop and come along and join us.

JH: I think it was a good move Bob. I think you did the right thing.

People, films and organisations mentioned

Alan Root

Armand Denis

Aubrey Buxton

Blaine Littell



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100 YEARS OF WILDLIFE FILMMAKING

Brian Brown
Cindy Buxton
Colin Willock
David Attenborough
Dennis B. Kane
Des Bartlett
Dian Fossey
Dick Swicker
Dieter Plage
Edgar de Bono
George Schaller
Harold Hayes
Heather Martin
Heinz Sielmann
His Royal Highness Prince Philip
Howard A. Baldwin
Hugo Van Lawick
Iain Douglas-Hamilton
Jane Goodall
Jenny Garst
Joan Root
John Heminway
Judith Hayes
Louis S.B Leakey
Mark Deeble
Mary Leakey
Melville Grosvenor
Mirella Ricciadi
Musa Quraishy
Paul Abel
Richard Attenborough
Richard Leakey
Sigourney Weaver
Simon Trevor
Victoria Stone
Warren Garst

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Yank Evans

ABC

ADP

Anglia

Armand Denis Productions

BBC

BBC Wildlife magazine

Campbell Schwartzel & Walker

Ker & Downey Safaris

MGM

National Geographic

NBC

Survival

Universal Pictures

Warner Brothers

Wildscreen

Glossary

American Standards Association (ASA): Refers to the scale of film speeds devised by Kodak

Arriflex; moving image film camera line from Arri

Australopithecinae: A genus of extinct near-men hominids

Beaulieu; moving image film camera

BKSTS; British Kinematograph, Sound and Television Society, a professional body formed in 1931

Dhow: Traditional Arabian sailing vessel

Ektachrome: Professional film stock line from Kodak

Emmy: Academy of Television Arts and Sciences

Haselblad; a large format stills camera

Homo habilis: Species discovered by the Leakey team meaning 'handy man'

Kodachrome: Kodak film stock line, now discontinued

Laetoli footprints: A line of hominid fossil footprints discovered by Mary Leakey in 1976

Linhof Camera; a large format folding stills camera

Rhodesia, now (2008) Zimbabwe

Rittreck; a large format stills camera

Salisbury, now (2008) Harare

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Super 8: Film format by Eastman Kodak

Zinjanthropus: Bones of an extinct primate found in Tanzania in 1959 by Louis S.B. Leakey

References

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3. *Z Cars*, (1962-1978, BBC)
4. *Africa*, (1967, American Broadcasting Company, ABC News)
5. *The Birth of Man*, lecture title,
6. *The Family That Lived With Elephants*, (1974, Survival Anglia Limited)
7. *Monkeys, Apes and Man*, (1971, National Geographic)
8. *Mountain Gorillas: The Lost Film of Dian Fossey*, (2005, National Geographic)
9. *The Bones of Contention*, (1976, Survival Anglia Limited)
10. *African Garden*, (1974, Survival Anglia Limited)
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13. *Messengers of the Gods*, (1975, Survival Anglia Ltd)
14. *Hunters of the Plains*, (1977, Survival Anglia Limited)
15. *The Big Boss*, (1980, Survival Anglia Limited)
16. *The Fastest Thing on Four Legs*, (1977, Survival Anglia Limited)
17. *The Birds of the Burning Soda*, (1979, Survival Anglia Limited)
18. *Last Kingdom of the Elephants*, (1975, Survival Anglia Limited)
19. *Almost a Dodo*, (1974, Survival Anglia Limited)
20. *Mutual of Omaha's: Wild Kingdom*, (1963 - 1988, NBC, USA)
21. *Queen of Trees*, (2005, BBC)
22. *Mzima: Haunt of the Riverhorse*, (2003, Deeble & Stone Productions)
23. *Gorillas in the Mist: The Story of Dian Fossey*, (1988, Universal Pictures)

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