

Volcano Motion Pictures presents

Trout Grass

A film by Ed George and Andy Royer

USA • 2005 • Color • 48 Minutes • Digital Beta • 16:9



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The Credits

Director, Editor, Cinematographer
Writer, Narrator
Executive Producer, Writer
Producers
Music
On-Line Editor

Ed George
David James Duncan
Andy Royer
Andy Royer & Joshua Moro
Woody Simmons
Gail Steiger



The Players

David James Duncan
Thomas McGuane
Hoagy B. Carmichael
Glenn Brackett

The Synopsis

Coursing from the verdant hills of Southern China to the sparkling streams of Montana, Trout Grass is a story of passion, international partnership and the discovery of place in our natural world. This unique documentary captures the 10,000-mile journey of bamboo's transformation from a hardy species of grass to a super-conductive split-cane fly rod.

The film tracks Hoagy Carmichael on his first visit to China where he experiences the country's mystical bamboo forests. As a legendary split-cane fly rod craftsman and author of the art's seminal study, these far-off lands have fueled Hoagy's dreams for 40 years. Next, we meet master-builder Glenn Brackett, who taps into "the power of unseen hands" in his Montana shop while converting this hardy piece of grass into a stunning and responsive river wand.

Out on Rocky Mountain waterways, narrator David James Duncan and fly fishing legend Thomas McGuane reveal the magic of fishing with a fly rod made of grass and connecting with the order of rivers and flowing things.



The History

Trout Grass, the film, started as a vision in China. Executive Producer Andy Royer was with rod maker Glenn Brackett who had come with Andy to experience the capital of the Tonkin bamboo world. They believed that the transformation of a single plant, strong enough to support an entire economy in rural China and delicate enough to build a three-ounce fly rod, was a story worth capturing.

Andy works in China every year selecting Tonkin cane poles specifically for the bamboo rod making trade. This particular bamboo (*Pseudosasa amabilis* aka *Arundinaria amabilis*) is the most popular bamboo for nurseries and agricultural markets around the world. Its smooth, straight surface combined with exceptional strength-to-weight ratio makes it the bamboo of choice for literally thousands of industries around the world. Remarkably, this bamboo only grows well in one location in the world, a small geographic oval in the northwest corner of China's Guangdong province. Lying about 25 degrees north of the equator on steep slopes Tonkin Cane flourishes between 800 to 2,000 feet above sea level. The plant has grown here for as long as anyone remembers sharing the hillsides with medium sized fir and pine trees. Lumber used to be the main industry in the area through the mid 1800's and still provides a large amount of the region's revenue. By 1900 however local farmers discovered a market for the area's other natural resource.



All bamboo grows to full size in 2-3 months and is mature at 3-5 years. As a farmed crop, bamboo provides a turn-around time vastly superior to wood. As a grass, it grows via an underground system of roots or rhizomes. This allows bamboo to sustain itself while allowing for intensive human management and sustainable harvest. Around the small hamlet of Aozai, the center of Guangdong's Tonkin forests, people have depended on this one species of bamboo for raw material and economic independence since the uprooting of the feudal landlords in 1949.

The story goes that in the late 1800's, an importer of Chinese carpets on the East Coast of the U.S. found that the bamboo sticks the Chinese included with their shipments in order to carry the rolled carpets were wonderfully suited for building bamboo fly rods. Previously, anglers had used a wide variety of natural materials, continually seeking a material that could propel a lure or, fly into a pool of water. A hand tied fly, built to mimic whatever insect hatch was feeding the locals at the time, was found to be a perfect lure to trick a fish into biting into the hook at the end of an angler's line. A horsehair, gut or silk line could be used to hold the hook and fly but a tool was needed to propel that line onto the water. Various woods were used and most were successful at casting a fly an appropriate distance into a stream or river. However, a species of wood that could maintain its structural integrity in a small diameter pole sometimes reaching lengths of 16 feet is not a lightweight wood. The rods made of hickory, greenheart, ash or other woods cast a fly well enough but resulted in an angler with a very sore arm. This, coupled with the fact that many anglers were fishing for sport and not keeping their catch lead to multitudes of perturbed wives whose spouses kept returning home well after dark, drunk, complaining of body stiffness and NO fish for dinner. Something had to be done.

Bamboo was that something. In 1845, a gun-maker in Pennsylvania named Samuel Phillippe built a four-strip rod from bamboo, devising a rod much lighter than others available at that time. By the late 1800's, Hiram Leonard had found that bamboo rods built with compound tapers that were calculated mathematically greatly improved upon weight and cast-ability. Leonard's bamboo rods introduced techniques that proved a quantum leap in fly rod construction and others in the industry quickly learned to emulate his process. By the 1920's, the Charles H. Demarest Co. of New Jersey was able to supply Chinese Tonkin cane to fly rod manufactures around the world. The bamboo revolution was under way.



The Sui River in China has carried every piece of bamboo destined for rod makers and fly shops around the world. That is the river to which Andy brought Glenn in their expedition to the center of the Tonkin world. It was here, in the spring of 2001 that Glenn and Andy first discuss producing a film about the process of bamboo- from plant to fly rod.

The idea was that a material so endowed with human interests must somehow hold some transformative power for those who come in close contact with it. It is that idea of transformation that unfolds in Glenn's own work. Glenn is not simply conforming the bamboo into a mere fishing implement; he is reconfiguring the cane so that humans can now partake in this plant's mystery. A magic wand, a natural antenna, a baton... a fly rod; a thousand tools can be used to catch fish, only one has spawned so many stories.

Glenn introduced Andy to cinematographer Ed George who expressed great interest in making this film. While preparing for the shoot the production team was overjoyed to hear that Hoagy Carmichael whom Andy had only recently met also agreed to partake in the adventure. Hoagy and Ed traveled with Andy and the two-man crew to Aozai, the remote farming community in China's Guangdong Province; Hoagy with his half-century worth of bamboo fly-fishing lore and Ed, with his camera and as much enthusiasm as any one person can carry. [Ed proceeded to get yelled at throughout production by a wide variety of woman working in the field. He would constantly set himself in their path of travel or, with his head attached to the viewfinder, position his camera mere inches from their machetes as they were cutting down 35-foot bamboo spires. "It's okay," he'd yell. "Tell them I've filmed snakes and sharks and stuff, they don't need to worry about me, I'll get out of their way!"]

Ed and crew ended up with rough footage good-looking enough to fool both David Duncan and Tom McGuane into agreeing to work with the production. Both men had the sense to say "no" when Andy first asked them to join in the fun. Most likely, they realized that since Andy and co-producer Joshua Moro had never made a film that they would discuss in public before, Trout Grass would most likely not be up to their high standards. Andy's constant harassment finally helped lower those standards. [Also, Tom and David both think they are getting a rod built by Glenn to be in this film but the truth is, Glenn just mailed them a couple of \$20 pieces of crap he found in his uncle's attic. Don't tell!]

Other than losing Hoagy for a night in China, Tom not catching any fish in Montana, Josh and Andy committing many rookie errors (Photographers? Insurance? Who needs 'em?) and the film taking about two years longer than we told our investors it would, everything worked out just fine. As we learn when watching Glenn in his shop or Tom and David on a river, it's the *journey* that counts!



“We’re trying to get *lost* out there. We’re trying to catch a ride our souls can keep riding forever.” – David James Duncan

Director Bio—Ed George [Flagstaff, Arizona]

Trout Grass is Ed's first run at the director helm. Fittingly, he is a fly-fishing fanatic and has been an independent filmmaker since the 1970's. The first job that lured him into the documentary film field was as a production assistant on the historic documentary "Woodstock." After finishing a graduate fellowship in 1976, Ed has attempted to survive as a free-lance cameraman, shooting for National Geographic, Discovery, BBC and NHK. Along the way, he's been lucky enough to swim with piranhas, anacondas, crocs and electric eels, go to the bottom of the Atlantic on the Alvin, shoot Kazakh eagle hunters in Mongolia and lemurs in Madagascar.

Ed's recent cinematography credits include; "The Grand Canyon", "Lemur Rescue", "The Crocodiles of the Orinoco", "Yellowstone", "The Electric Eel", "The Search for the Big Snake", "Tales of Belize", "Land of the Anaconda", "Lethal and Dangerous".

Ed maintains a mailing address in Flagstaff, Arizona. However, chances are that if you call him right now (let us know if you want his cell phone #) he is not there.

Writer/Narrator Bio—David James Duncan

David James Duncan is a father; fly fisher and practitioner of what he calls "direct, small-scale compassion-activism." Author of the best-selling novels *The River Why* and *The Brothers K*, he also penned the non-fiction narrative and fiction collections *River Teeth* and *My Story as Told by Water*.

The Oregon-born author has traveled extensively throughout the U.S. speaking on wilderness and river issues; fly fishing, the writing life and the non-religious literature of faith. David's many awards and honors include a Lannan Fellowship, two Pacific Northwest Bookseller's awards, the 2001 Western States Book Award and an Honorary Doctorate for Public Service from the University of Portland. With Wendell Berry, he is the co-winner of the American Library Association's 2003 Eli Oboler Award for the Preservation of Intellectual Freedom for their work in *Citizen's Dissent*.

David is currently a contributing editor of *Orion* magazine and an advisor to several local and international river protection and conservation groups. He is currently at work on a novel about reincarnation and human folly tentatively titled *Nijinsky Hosts Saturday Night Live*.

David lives with his family on a river in Montana. We'll tell you which river for a small fee. Double it and we'll tell you how to get to his house. He loves to have strangers pull into his driveway and tell him how much they loved *The River Why*. It is best to try this at about 3:00 AM. Tell him "hello" for me.

Executive Producer/Producer/Co-writer—Andy Royer

Andy has worked with bamboo since 1994 and has been supplying Tonkin cane to rod makers since 1997. He has helped the resurgence of the art of hand-built, split cane flyrods by importing hand-selected, high quality bamboo poles to the worldwide market. He assumed the role of executive producer of the film by default since he was the only one who would do it. The "producer" title came later as Andy discovered that once he got the ball rolling, he would actually have to keep the damn thing moving by force. Both titles were henceforth earned by spilling beer, sweat, tears into the production for four years.

Andy has traveled to China seven times to explore the nature of bamboo in its native soil as he tries to raise the bar of quality cane available for import. He works very closely with the Chinese as they work through the steps of bamboo procurement and processing. Trout Grass is his first real film. Raised in Seattle, Andy now lives with his family surrounded by large trees and a few bamboo odds and ends on Vashon Island, WA.