

SCIENCE AS ADVENTURE

Last Paradise: inspiring kids to study science through the story of Kiwi adventure.

Cinematographer Clive Neeson filming in Canada. He grew up on safari in East Africa as his parents filmed wild animals during the 1950s. In New Zealand and Australia, he joined a group of young mavericks who pioneered extreme sports. Clive earned a masters in atomic physics and electronics under physicist Professor Bruce Liley. He worked internationally in energy development and technology innovation, including the first climate monitoring systems. Living a double life between extreme sports madmen and the conservative scientific community, Clive built his own camera accessories to get a unique perspective on the rise of adventure sports. In 2007, he digitally mastered 45 years of footage at Peter Jackson's Park Road Post Production in Wellington, which provided the impetus to create the film *Last Paradise*.

EDUCATIONISTS AROUND THE WORLD are asking how to get kids to study science, and it was this question which set physicist Clive Neeson on a mission to start making an adventure film five years ago.

Commentary at the recent Santa Barbara Film Festival noted that Clive's film *Last Paradise*, which uses the story of Kiwi ingenuity from Ernest Rutherford to AJ Hackett, and adventure, as hooks to subliminally educate and inspire young people to study the sciences, has spurred a new genre of film.

Amongst all the fun and adrenaline, it addresses the world's most important issues, such as energy development, deforestation, species loss and urbanisation, in 45 years of stunning original footage, restored at Peter Jackson's Park Road Post Production.

"Traditional documentaries tend to attract and preach to a converted audience, whereas this film aimed to reach all audiences, including the ones who matter most – the younger generation. The objective is to inspire them to study the physical sciences," Clive said.

Last Paradise has won a hatful of awards, including Most Popular New Zealand Film at last year's New Zealand International Film Festival, Best of Banff in Canada, and The Ambassador of Green Award at XDance USA. The cast includes AJ Hackett, Jeff Campbell, Ton Deken, Allan Byrne and Biggi Smithers.

It was invited back to Santa Barbara's prestigious Arlington Theatre by Professor Adam Green, who recognised the quintessential New Zealand story as a powerful inspiration to America's youth.

The common theme follows adrenaline-seeking pioneers like AJ Hackett on a journey of both discovery and innovation. The innovation begins on the 1960s sheep farm, as the characters invent their own toys to have fun in the wilderness. In teenage years, they take their ideas to universities and DSIR, the result being the birth of our adventure sports industry.

But the real science kicks in when our characters are presented with puzzling environmental problems and the energy crisis of the 1970s, when they meet Kiwi physicists who were pioneering a solution following the legacy of Ernest Rutherford. This solution has led to the biggest scientific project in history, and its fate desperately depends on an increasingly diminishing resource – young scientists.

Clive was recently invited to Canberra by Australian National University physics professors, excited about using *Last Paradise* to inspire students and the Australian public around the issues of science research and new energy development.

In the wake of the film *Waiting for Superman*, which revealed the dire state of the American education system, *Last Paradise* was described by Californian educators as "the antidote". They aim to tour the film around US universities and community colleges later this year.

"We've had several young individuals come up during our Q&A sessions and proudly proclaim that they are fired up about studying science and have been inspired by the film to pursue renewable energy as their career. That was really gratifying, and the amazing thing is that these academically-oriented kids were being cheered by

a mainstream audience who usually would give them little recognition," Clive said.

Last Paradise is also a celebration of the beauty of New Zealand and the Kiwi pioneering spirit. National Geographic TV International will take the hour-long version of the film to the Cannes TV market in October.

Clive has received many requests to take *Last Paradise* into New Zealand schools, and said this will begin with educators having the chance to see it at local cinema screenings. It is being released at selected cinemas in all New Zealand towns this week. ■



LINKS

Last Paradise details and screening venues/dates:
www.lastparadisefilm.com

Hear Professor Adam Green:
www.lastparadisefilm.com/media/green.mp3

Watch *Last Paradise* trailer:
www.youtube.com/watch?v=t6bRQAddI08