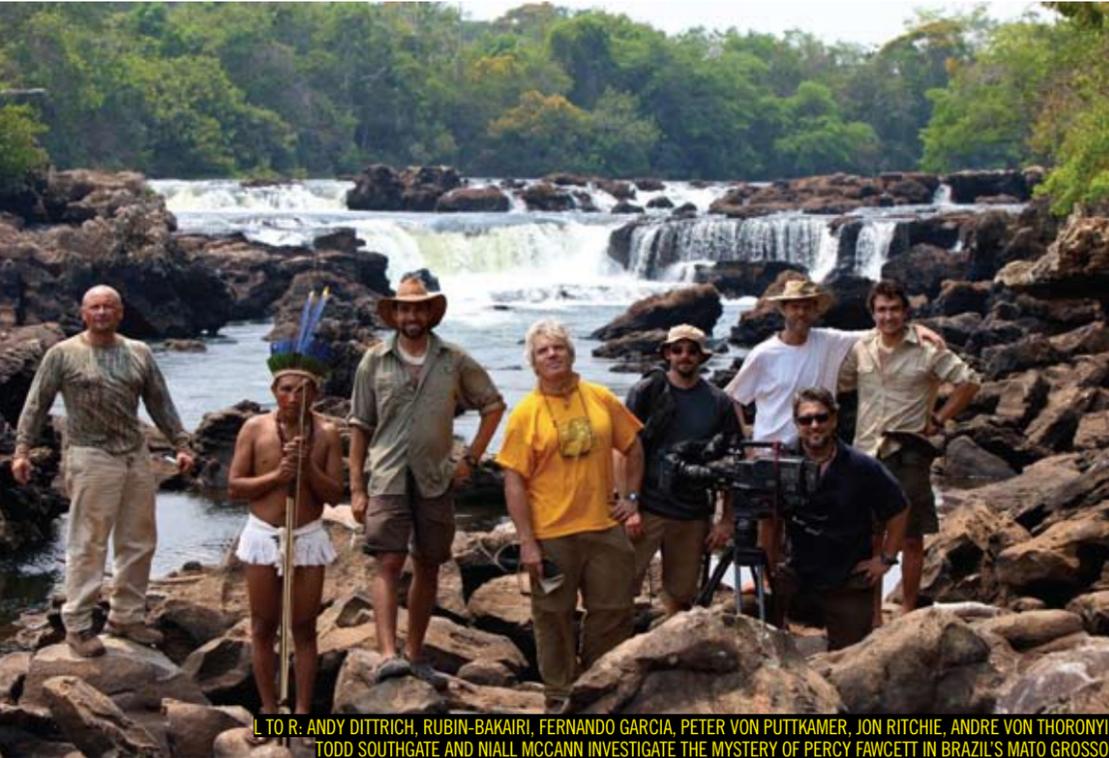


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PETER VON PUTTKAMER GETS *LOST IN THE AMAZON*



L TO R: ANDY DITTRICH, RUBIN-BAKAIRI, FERNANDO GARCIA, PETER VON PUTTKAMER, JON RITCHIE, ANDRE VON THORONYI, TODD SOUTHGATE AND NIAL McCANN INVESTIGATE THE MYSTERY OF PERCY FAWCETT IN BRAZIL'S MATO GROSSO.

MOVIEMAKER GOES IN SEARCH OF THE REAL INDIANA JONES

Documentarian-adventurer Peter von Puttkamer is making a habit of following legendary explorers into far-flung corners of the world. The award-winning filmmaker's latest project is the PBS documentary *Lost in the Amazon—The Enigma of Col. Percy Fawcett*, about the mysterious disappearance of an Amazon explorer.

Von Puttkamer is no stranger to making movies about exploration, having previously gone in search of Sir Arthur

Conan Doyle's "Lost World" in Venezuela and filming in the Amazon jungle for *Peyote to LSD: A Psychedelic Odyssey*, a History Channel project on the discovery of hallucinogenic plants.

Now von Puttkamer is in search of Percy Fawcett, the real-life Indiana Jones whose legendary exploits mapping borders, shooting giant snakes, fending off disease and befriending hostile natives made him a legend around the world. In 1925, Fawcett disappeared while looking for the lost city known as "Z." His fate went unknown, until now.

The mystery surrounding Fawcett's disappearance has recently made

its way back into the headlines. David Grann's critically-acclaimed 2009 book, *The Lost City of Z*, hit number one on *The New York Times'* bestseller list, with a planned feature directed by James Gray set to hit theaters next year. Von Puttkamer has known the story all his life, since his mother helped to raise Fawcett's granddaughter in Switzerland just after World War II.

Created for the PBS/WNET "Secrets of the Dead" series, the TV documentary features real-life adventurer Niall McCann as he searches for clues to solve the Fawcett mystery. Von Puttkamer, McCann and their crew traveled from the hallowed halls of Britain's Royal Geographical Society to the Torquay Museum in Devon before going in search of secret Fawcett

family documents in Wales. From there, they flew to Brazil to find a 250-year-old lost city treasure map in the Rio De Janeiro archives, then moved on to the scorching plains of Brazil's Mato Grosso and, finally, explored newly found lost cities in the Northwest Amazon.

Working with cinematographer Todd Southgate, the team traveled across five of Brazil's states. Southgate (who helped film James Cameron's latest, a documentary on preventing Amazon destruction) proved indispensable to the production. Beyond his camera skills, Southgate's expertise with local language and culture made filming in Brazil's often dangerous backwater

towns much easier.

Von Puttkamer used the Panasonic AJ-HDX900 to document McCann's journey. "In general, tape is the way to go on these expedition films," says von Puttkamer. "There's usually not enough time or the weather conditions are terrible or there's no access to power to make file downloading possible." Still, a small, file-based Sony PMW-EX1 was used as a B camera and was handy to use whenever events took an unexpected turn and fast shooting was required.

The crew also found some unique uses for the Canon EOS 5D, with both a Canon 17mm or older 35mm Leica lenses. Following McCann and an expert jungle survival guide across hundreds of miles of former jungle—now dusty soybean fields—the 5D came in handy for capturing conversations in the car by mounting it onto the dash with the 17mm lens, on a flexible manfrotto arm, suction-cupped to the windshield. Later, the Canon helped lend a cinematic look to dramatic re-creations shot in the swamps and forests of Brazil's protected Pantanal reserve.

The filming challenges were significant—from lighting a colonial-era library in Rio to documenting McCann in planes, automobiles and boats across



THE CREW CONTENDS WITH FEROCIOUS JUNGLE BEES WHILE TRYING TO MAKE A WASHED-OUT ROAD DRIVABLE.

Brazil. Along the way, the crew filmed in native villages that Fawcett had visited, were forced to rebuild a bridge in order to cross a giant river and drove across scorching, dusty deserts.

One of the key goals of this movie-making adventure was to find Fawcett's last camp as well as a mythical waterfall mentioned in the explorer's written logs and in a 1753 manuscript. To locate Fawcett's final Dead Horse Camp, the team was equipped with a modern GPS, Fawcett's own secret coded directions and the assistance of locals.

It was with great emotion and excitement that the team eventually tracked down Fawcett's last camp—after cracking the secret code for directions that Fawcett had left with his wife and son. His Dead Horse Camp—where he had written a final letter to his wife telling her "You need not have any fear of failure"—had been found.

"The crew was really pretty emotional when we finally got to the camp," says von Puttkamer. "It was eight grown men feeling like kids on a treasure hunt, and we found the treasure... It was important to capture that enthusiasm on camera."

Covered with dozens of bites from stinging bees, mosquitoes and disease-ridden sand flies, the *Lost in the Amazon*

crew drove several hundred miles south from Dead Horse Camp to film amidst the wild life of Brazil's Pantanal—one of the world's richest exotic animal habitats.

Here in the diverse Pantanal, von Puttkamer could film in the places that Fawcett actually crossed—through massive savannahs, rivers, thick jungle, marshes, gallery forests and more. Shooting from small canoes with the EX1, McCann was filmed catching ferocious piranha—a creature Fawcett himself encountered often and whose own boatman lost a finger to the deadly fish.

From there, the last leg of the journey was to document the newly discovered "lost city" sites in Acre, Brazil. Using a giant crane, the crew was able to capture high angle aerials of "geometric earthworks"—huge mounds and shapes that were part of ancient religious sites and a 2,000-year old city covering a vast expanse of land.

The filming of *Lost in the Amazon* turned out to be a thrilling, life-changing expedition for all those involved. Not only did they capture amazing sequences in high-definition for the PBS special, but they also experienced for themselves the "thrill of the hunt" that Fawcett himself must have felt every time he went out to map another border or locate yet another lost civilization. **MM**

Lost in the Amazon will air on PBS' "Secrets of the Dead" series on April 20, 2011.



VON PUTTKAMER FILMS THE RARE BAKAIRI INDIAN KAPA DANCE IN BRAZIL'S MATO GROSSO.