

Land of the Bears



Reviewed by Garry Victor Hill

Directed by Guillaume Vincent. Produced by Thierry Commissonat, Benoit Tschieret, Guillaume Vincent and François de Carsalade du Pont. Written by Guillaume Vincent and Yves Paccalet. Narrated by David Fassman. Cinematography by Lionel Jan Kerguistel. Original Music by Fabien Call & Simone Gaby. Songs composed by Cécile Corbel & Simone Gaby and sung by Cécile Corbel. Editorial department post production assistant: Simon Alexandre. Edited by Vincent Schmidt. Cinematic length: 87 minutes. Distributed by assorted national companies. Major Production Company: Les films en Vrac. Cinematic release February 2014: DVD release 2014. Available in 3D and normal cinematic showings, Blue Ray and DVD. Rating 90%.

All images are taken from the Public Domain following permission steps. In this review no images are actually taken from the film as posters and stills were not in the Public Domain. The images are of Kamchatka bears and landscapes.

Written Without Prejudice

Review

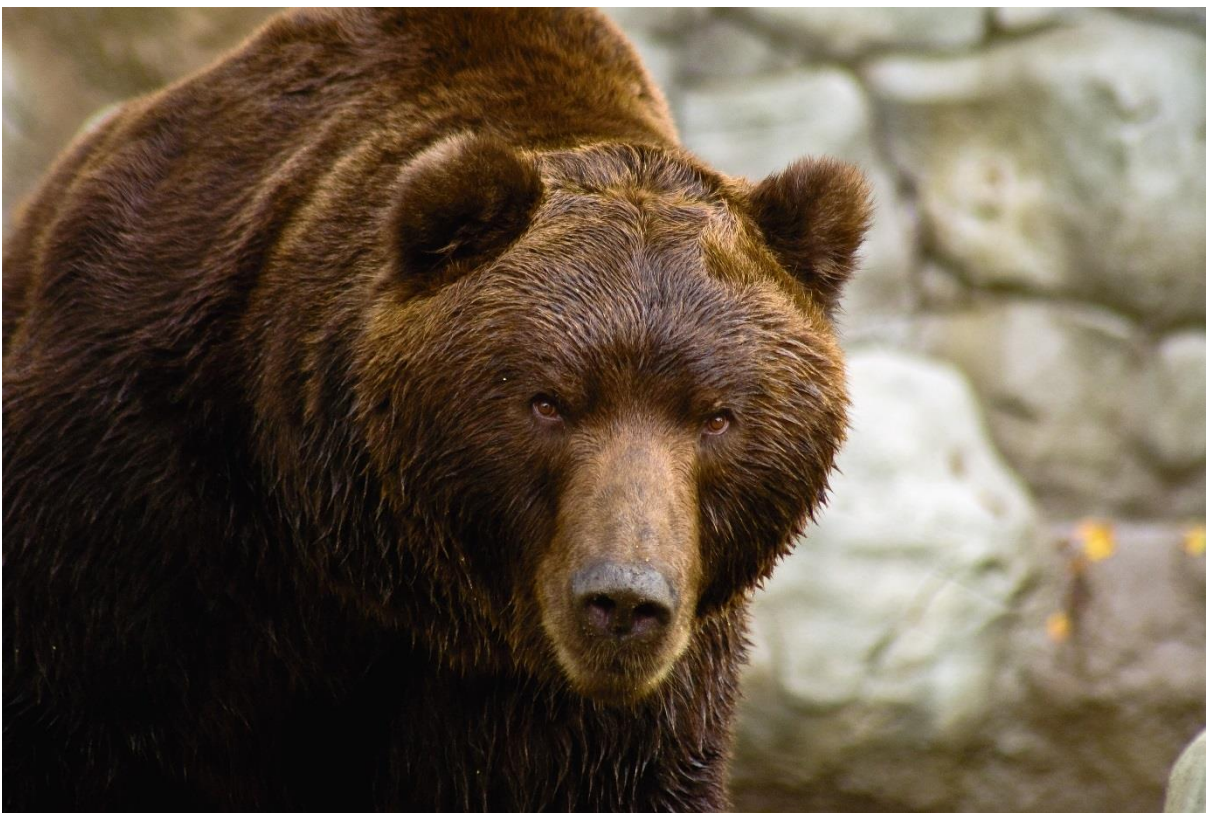
The land of the bears is the Kamchatka Peninsula. On maps it looks like a tail of Siberia or a dagger pointed at Japan. The popular conception of Siberia is of flat frozen windswept tundra, ice flows and looming glaciers. Fortunately by following the four seasons in the life of some young bears as they wander across the landscape that stereotype vanishes, at least in their four to six month long summer. We see green flowing rivers with abundant willow forests on their banks, while pine, birch and alder forests stretch off into infinity. Massive lakes, ubiquitous geysers and flowing lava from Kamchatka's thirty still active volcanoes are shown. Around three hundred volcanoes dot the landscape, their building up of past flows giving the impression of mountain ranges. Like the forests and the lichen covered mountain ranges, grassy plains also stretch across the landscape, all supplying food for the moose, mice, deer and caribou who only occasionally appear in this film. These herbivores also supply food for the predators who are not shown; foxes, lynxes, wolves and wolverines. Although bears are omnivores and will eat caribou, the film does not show this. Kamchatka has the world's largest concentration of salmon, perhaps half a billion arrive in the summer, this makes them the staple summer diet for the peninsula's fifteen to twenty thousand bears, probably the world's largest brown bear concentration. With just over three hundred thousand humans in the Kamchatka Peninsula and over two thirds of those residents focused in two cities, the bears control most of the rest: Kamchatka is indeed the land of the bears.



The Kamchatka Peninsula is marked in red



Cute and not so cute





Two views of Kamchatka in summer



Not one human or any indication that humans exist appears in the filmed landscapes and sea scenes of *Land of the Bears*.

Watching this film also ensures that stereotypes vanish about bears. Most of the images we have go to extremes; playful cute cubs with muma bear or ferocious giants growling before they launch their truly terrifying attack. Actually Vincent's film captures their many moments of adult playfulness. He also reveals that after the cub years end at around the age of three, they leave the mother's den and wander off. Unlike most mammals, bears do not form herds, packs or family groups. Adult bears dislike close contact. Considering their massive size and therefore their devouring need for large amounts of sustenance, this must be a survival tactic. Unfortunately, although the film implies this, the point should have been made clearer, especially as the filmmakers spent a considerable amount of the film's short time showing siblings bonding, then fighting and subsequently separating without explaining why.

Although they are the Kings of Kamchatka they are not invincibility incarnate. The bears spend their lives preparing for winter, enduring it and then recovering: but they do not always win. Half the cubs die before their second birthday. Causes include disease, starvation, accidents and sibling rivalry fights. There is no sharing in the brown bear breed: the weaker bears get no fish and cubs steal from the mother. Wisely as the previously mentioned facts show, the narration dispels sentimentality about the species.

Without that narration and scenes showing bears fighting and competing, a rosy picture that could feed sentimental fallacies could easily emerge. This is because of the extraordinary beauty of the filmed skylscapes and landscapes, their lyricism well-matched by the film's extraordinarily evocative music, which frequently sounds Celtic.

The message here is that even in the most serene and beautiful landscapes, life is a bitter struggle for even the strongest species.

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