

MONUMENTAL

David Brower's Fight for Wild America

A Film By Kelly Duane
77 min, Color & B/W, Video



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"Stylish and substantial enough to prompt even a couch potato to action, Kelly Duane's **Monumental** delivers a stirring and visually dense account of the life and times of Brower . . . " - *Variety*

"If anyone's been searching for the soul of the new West, here it is."- *San Francisco Magazine*

"An inspiring testament to the power of the individual." - *Mother Jones*

"An engrossing study in the power, and the perils, of charismatic single-mindedness." - *LA Weekly*

"See it and just try not to get inspired." - *Outside Magazine*

"This is an absolute must-see." - **Kevin Swift**, *Climbing Magazine*

If you've ever wondered what a single person can do against the relentless onslaught of development, wait until you see the charismatic and enigmatic David Brower push the 1964 Wilderness Act through Congress, and then go on to save the Grand Canyon from damming and help create Redwoods National Park and Point Reyes National Seashore. With a playful visual aesthetic, a cool alt-country soundtrack, and hand-held wilderness footage from as far back as the 1930s, **MONUMENTAL** documents the golden age of American environmentalism, when Brower took the Sierra Club from a regional hiking group into a national political force. Seen through Brower's own eyes--he was an accomplished filmmaker --a 1956 raft trip down Glen Canyon, before its damming, evokes the awful sadness of losing public land we've failed to protect. And in period footage of Brower's early rock-climbs--done in sneakers, with hemp ropes--and of his training of the 10th Mountain Division and participation in their victory against the Nazis in the high Alps, Brower emerges as an unlikely and inspiring national hero.

MONUMENTAL is the story of a true American legend, an artist, a publisher, a filmmaker and a zealous crusader whose fiery dedication and activism inspired the environmental movement.

Synopsis

David Brower is America's most charismatic conservationist. Some say - I among them - that he has accomplished more through the force of one man's will than any of his breed since John Muir." -- The Los Angeles Times

"Mr. Brower was widely regarded as one of the most articulate and powerful conservationist of the 20th Century." -- The New York Times

From the moment David Brower first witnessed the extraordinary beauty of the Yosemite Valley, his life was tied to the fight to preserve the American wilds for future generations. Not since John Muir had an American fought so hard, or been more successful, in protecting our natural heritage. His fiery dedication and activism helped inspire the modern day environmental movement.

Explored in **MONUMENTAL** is the beautiful, dramatic, and lyrical story of Brower and his colleagues' unrelenting campaigns - fought through lobbying, art, and hard hitting advertising - to protect and establish some of our most treasured national parks. At the center of the film are the themes that absorbed Brower throughout his life: the threatened beauty of the American earth, the spiritual connection between humans and the great outdoors, and the moral obligation to preserve what is left of the world's natural wonders.

With contemporary music and stylistic editing **MONUMENTAL** weaves together Brower's very own exquisite 16-mm archival wilderness footage, photographic images from well-recognized artists, and interviews with leading conservationists, photographers, historians, curators, politicians, as well as Brower's family, friends, and colleagues. **MONUMENTAL** tells the story of a true American legend, an artist, a publisher, a filmmaker and an zealous crusader for the cause of environmentalism.

The film combines the 1950s and '60s aesthetic of archival footage with a modern look and recent interviews for a visually compelling experience that anyone can enjoy, whether young or old, activism neophyte or diehard environmentalist.

VARIETY.com

By ROBERT KOEHLER

Stylish and substantial enough to prompt even a couch potato to action, Kelly Duane's "Monumental: David Brower's Fight for Wild America" delivers a stirring and visually dense account of the life and times of Brower, the key post-WWII American environmental activist and a driving force behind the Sierra Club. The ample display here of 16mm film shot by the late Brower in the Western wilderness virtually makes him a co-director alongside Duane, whose feeling for her subject will make this an essential festfest entry and an evergreen public TV programmer.

Fabulously styled graphics (care of Los Angeles-based design firm Syrup) provide basic details, including that Brower became the Sierra Club's first executive director 60 years after John Muir founded the group in 1892, and that his footage used in pic was shot between 1930 and 1970, while his vocal commentary was recorded between 1970 and 1978.

Far from its current position as a leading environmentalist lobbying force, the club began as a loose group of hikers especially attracted to the rock-climbing challenges in Yosemite Valley. A trek up the awesomely craggy Shiprock in New Mexico is recalled by Brower pal John Dyer as one of those things young guys do for a thrill.

On his pleasant hikes, Brower found a fine photographic teacher in Ansel Adams, who encouraged him to fiddle with a small movie camera and record his Sierra idylls. During WWII, Brower's mountaineering skills became useful to the Army in Italy, where he participated in some daring raids. But after the war, the activist in Brower was awakened by a relentless march west by developers and the Army Corps of Engineers, whose government-sponsored projects first made a personal impact on Brower when a road was built through Yosemite's unspoiled eastern side.

"Monumental" is attuned to the details that reveal the man. For example, Brower wasn't opposed to all roads, just paved ones; by entering Yosemite via dirt roads, he thought, you earned your way into paradise. Busy with a family of four but alarmed by a nation paving itself over, Brower became the Sierra Club's toppertopper in 1952. Shrewdly, he produced informative films and guided river trips to show the beauty of a remote Utah wilderness area threatened by a proposed dam. Today, that area is the Dinosaur National Monument.

The radicalization of Yank ecologists, and certainly Brower, may be traced to the 1956 building of the Glen Canyon Dam along the Colorado River, which the Army Corps determined would serve as a giant water source for growth in the West. Brower's footage of the canyon lensed just months before dam was erected is pic's most haunting section -- a view of natural beauty now totally submerged underneath a man-made lake.

Wilderness footage makes pic richly cinematic, but it's not merely inserted. A crack team of gifted editors (experimental cineaste Nathaniel Dorsky, Anne Flatte and Tony Saxe) and a wondrous soundtrack of various bands playing dreamy rock give Brower's and friend Martin Litton's lensing a blissful lift. The '60s are shown to have been Brower's crowning time -- he effectively saved much of the Grand Canyon, no less, from dams, and personally steered Lady Bird Johnson into a populist brand of environmentalism that made his cause downright patriotic. Pic provides only a short look at Brower's post-Sierra Club years, when he founded the Earth Island Institute and kept to a much tougher line of ecology activism.

While "Monumental" makes an irrefutable case that Brower was one of the '60s giant figures, Duane recognizes that his strong personality rubbed many folks the wrong way, including his closest Sierra Club allies.

In the end, the memories of Litton, former Interior secretary Stewart Udall, children Ken and Barbara and old enemies like Floyd Dominy give this portrait a human dimension.

More Reviews:

"Monumental is an inspiring testament to the power of the individual." -- **Greg Crouch, *Mother Jones***

"This is an absolute must-see." -- **Kevin Swift, *Climbing Magazine***

"See it and just try not to get inspired." -- ***Outside Magazine***

"Monumental" is a visually ravishing look at the life, work, and world of David Brower. For shut-in film nerds and naturalist who must live in the city to put bread on their table, it is a feast of nourishing images -- as well as a persuasive reminder of what exactly environmentalists are fighting for." -- ***The Oregonian***

"No individual contributed more to the effort to protect wilderness in America than David Brower, and no film captures the contours and passion of that transforming effort better than Monumental. Duane's film has a freshness and originality that sets it apart from the historical documentaries that have come to dominate the genre." -- **J. Stine, *Smithsonian Institution***

"Calling David Brower an important environmental activist is like calling Hamlet an important member of the Danish royal court. Brower invented modern American environmental activism. This film tells you how and why." -- **John Nielsen, *NPR***

"In addition to its unique documentary resources, the movie should be an invaluable historical primer for anyone who aspires to influence government policy, not to mention the government officials obliged to evaluate that influence." -- **Gary Arnold, *Washington Times***

"It's great to see those 16-millimeter views of Sierrans at play among Western wonders and striking to see those sights in a grainy format instead of lurid Imax detail. There's Yosemite, the rugged Marin coast, the Nipomo Dunes. There's the young Brower and friends, basketball shoes on their feet, making the first ascent of New Mexico's Shiprock in 1939. The filmmaker's enthusiasm for that insider footage is understandable -- imagine the Rev. Martin Luther King Jr.'s home movies of the civil rights movement. . ." -- **Chris Reynolds, *Los Angeles Times***

If Kelly Duane dabbles in hyperbole for this portrait of the Sierra Club's influential former president, the producer-director also constructs an engrossing study in the power, and the perils, of charismatic single-mindedness. A zealous outdoorsman, David Brower transformed the Sierra Club from a friendly gang of mountaineers into a formidable force for the preservation of America's wild spaces. Duane's research is exhaustive and informative, but the film's real pleasures are Brower's own Sierra Club movies of majestic mountains, canyons and forests. As seen through his lens, these spaces are even more commanding than the activist himself. -- ***LA Weekly***

"If anyone's been searching for the soul of the new West, here it is. Monumental, Kelly Duane's inspiring new-feature documentary, seizes on the renegade spirit Berkeley native David Brower. . ." -- **Michael Fox, *San Francisco Magazine***

"Though framed by the incendiary personality of environmental activist Brower, Monumental is as unconventional a portrait film as its subject. Filmmaker Kelly Duane touches on some personal highlights including his brief tenure at the Sierra Club but what resonates most is the footage he shot of America's most spectacular natural wonders. Brower's passion infuses every frame and proves the old adage about a picture being worth a thousand words, no matter how fiery." -- ***Movie City News***

A TREE FELL in the forest. No one was there to hear it. But I think by now we can all agree it definitely made a sound. Maybe there was a tape recorder on hand. And maybe there was also a finger to press Record because somehow, the 20th century's most crucial environmental activist, David Brower, pumped that sound directly into politicians' eardrums till they screamed uncle. After a towering career that can be credited with saving the Grand Canyon, preserving Point Reyes, and rescuing too many other landscape hot spots to be named while putting the n back in dam, the cantankerous hero of trees, rivers, salmon, and humans fell to earth himself, dying in 2000 in Berkeley at age 88.

*Among the many who heard that sound was San Francisco filmmaker Kelly Duane. Scoring her documentary *Monumental: David Brower's Fight for Wild America* with plaintive indie rock nouveau Americana that feels so Pacific Coast you expect it to swim upstream to spawn Duane has made a movie that is both elegiac and feral, a tribute to Brower the environmental activist working the system like it's an extreme sport. Brower bitterly complained that so many of America's environmental lobbyists are suits who never set foot on a mountain. Brower set foot (actually, initiated ascents) on many mountains one so unexpected it helped the Allies in WWII (Brower's 10th Mountain Division forged its way to key spots in 1942 Italy). His uncompromising footprints are all over the "Geography of Hope," Wallace Stegner's poetic designation of untamed wilderness, named in an essay about how the wild inspires, even if it's only visited by the mind. Brower delivered that romantic mindscape to the people who could save it, bringing art Ansel Adams's and Eliot Porter's photography, Stegner's prose, and his own films to bear on the issue. In fact, Stegner credits Brower's agitation with the genesis of the much-quoted "Wilderness Letter."*

Brower's artistic legacy is what's left of the unspoiled West itself, and he had the foresight to capture that West on film in case it wasn't quite won his way. Filmmaker, surfer, and rock-climber Duane got access to a massive collection of Brower's 16mm forays by promising the UC Berkeley library where it was stored that she would catalog it. She's more than made good on the promise with her re-presentation of those reels a concentrated dose of Brower's perspective on the woods, not so much diluted as augmented by talking heads who genuflect or haggle over Brower's legacy. Duane uses the footage in a way Brower might have approved, as recruiting material an introductory lesson in wilderness appreciation, set to a soundtrack (the Beachwood Sparks, Fruit Bats, the American Analogue Set, Hayden, American Music Club, Kingsbury Manx) whose variations on folkie free spirit and wistful "indie" notes pay tribute to roots without feeling dated by association.

Bliss forms in the confines of a genre that rarely lets air in. Edits take their time, letting whole nature scenes play out over the course of a song, as opposed to leaving those scenes in manicured garden formation. Rushing rivers, half-century-old mountain climbs (in crepe-soled shoes!), quaintly rough roads into what's now a Disneyfied Yosemite, and the cave art of Glen Canyon (now a gas-filled power-boat puddle) don't evaporate the way contemporary, clear-eyed 35mm "nature photography" can they stick.

The Glen Canyon images clearly burned a hole in Brower's retina. He collected them after he'd already allowed for an onerous compromise with the federal government: letting the canyon be flooded and dammed in order to save Dinosaur National Monument from the same fate. From that moment on, Brower would help the environmental movement abandon "compromise" as its primary M.O. Strangely, the film ends where many of us see Brower's true career as visionary beginning: when he was ousted from a Sierra Club then lending its support to the Diablo Canyon nuke plant and founded Friends of the Earth. But what it captures is the way Brower actually saw. He was most definitely a seer: his bold-stroke campaign to save the Grand Canyon a full-page New York Times ad asked, "Should we also flood the Sistine Chapel, so tourists can get nearer to the ceiling?" could still be pondered today with boaters who love dams and the bikini-bursting water-skiers they bring. It's a testament to Brower's monumental status, and evidence of Duane's skill displaying it, that so many of this film's talking heads are still scratching theirs today. --By Susan Gerhard, San Francisco Bay Guardian

"Monumental" is a visually ravishing look at the life, work and world of David Brower...it's a feast of nourishing images - as well as a reminder of what exactly environmentalists are fighting for." - Shawn Levy, The Oregonian "This is the definitive film on David Brower."

-- Jon Else, Filmmaker, Cadillac Desert

A magnificent achievement, Monumental tells the story of David Brower's charismatic leadership of the Sierra Club. Thirty years of priceless wild lands footage from Brower's home movies make this a "must see" for anyone who cares about the earth and the history of the environmental movement.
--Larry Fahn, President of the Sierra Club

"I got a sneak peak of this documentary and it is incredible. This film combines David Brower's own footage with Brower audio clips and interviews with key players in the environmental movement . . . don't miss it!"
-- Chris McNamara, Writer & Professional Climber

CREDITS

Kelly Duane: Director & Producer

Kelly Duane founded Loteria Films after she co-directed and produced her first documentary film, **See How They Run**, chronicling the 1999 Willie Brown Mayoral bid for re-election in the city of San Francisco. **See How They Run** has been broadcast on PBS stations nationally. It has screened in movie theaters throughout the Bay Area and film festivals across the US. For complete information link to: **See How They Run**. Prior to film work Duane was a photojournalist and photo editor for Random House and Chronicle Books. A few book titles to her credit include, *Mavericks: The History of Big Wave Surfing*, *El Capitan*, *Radiance*, *Poker*, and *The Rock and Roll Traveler*.

Edited by Tony Saxe, Anne Flatte, Nathaniel Dorsky

Production Assistant: Sara Pellegrini

Motion Graphics/Graphic Design: Syrup Design

The 'Monumental' Soundtrack includes Music by:

The Beachwood Sparks (*Subpop*)

The Fruit Bats (*Perishable Records*)

FCS North (*Pacifico Recordings*)

The American Analog Set (*Tiger Style Records*)

Hayden (*Hardwood Records*)

Kingsbury Manx (*Overcoat Records*)