

LA COMPAGNIE DES TAXI-BROUSSE & INFORMATION
PRESENT

LAST OF THE ELEPHANT MEN

Some of the last elephant owners in Cambodia attempt to save the animal at the center of their society.

HD - 52 AND 90 MINUTES - DIRECTED BY DANIEL FERGUSON AND ARNAUD BOUQUET
BROADCASTERS: TV5 CANADA - FRANCE 2 - FRANCE 5

For centuries, the Bunong indigenous people of Eastern Cambodia lived with elephants, depending on them for every aspect of life.

Now with the forest around them threatened by logging and mining companies, both the Bunong and the elephant face a desperate struggle to survive.

Last of the Elephant Men follows three generations of elephant owners as they attempt to save the animal at the heart of their identity.

Filmed over several years, Last of the Elephant Men is an elegy for the domestic elephant in Asia and a plea to protect the remaining wild population.

From pristine wilderness and isolated villages to the iconic temples of Angkor and the bustling streets of Phnom Penh, the film reveals an intimate portrait of Cambodia's disintegrating heritage, remarkable human-animal interaction, and an indigenous people trying to find solutions to universal problems.

CURRENT PRODUCTION





CONTEXT

Conservationists have long referred to the province of Monduliri in Eastern Cambodia as the Serengeti of Asia. Uniquely isolated by monsoons and with little road access, the region is home to vast pristine forests and rare wildlife. It is also home to several indigenous communities, including the Bunong – a tribe famous for their unique bond with elephants.

The Bunong believe elephants and humans are derived from the same soul. For centuries, they considered it their sacred duty to reunite the two by catching and taming elephants from the wild. Once tamed, a single elephant was often shared by many families and was central to every aspect of Bunong life – their economy, religion and identity.

The last 40 years have seen violent upheaval in Eastern Cambodia: the Vietnam-American war, the brutal Khmer Rouge period and more recently the arrival of multi-national logging and mining companies who are cutting down pristine forest and seizing Bunong ancestral land at an alarming rate. The elephant population has been decimated. Today it is estimated there may be 300 elephants left in the wild and fewer than 50 in captivity.

Some Bunong have accepted the disappearance of the elephant from their culture. Others are fighting to prevent it. Ultimately the debate surrounding the future of the elephant has become a debate about the fate of the tribe itself: Who should control the terms of change? Is it possible to retain their identity once the animal that defined them is gone?

TREATMENT

Like a pre-historic beast, an elephant rises from the water and wanders onto the riverbank before disappearing into the dark, endless forest. An old man lies innate on the floor of an empty room, a catheter drip attached to his arm. He stares at the ceiling, his thoughts of the past. At a rural village clinic, a doctor notes the old man's vital signs, asking his wife a series of questions. His name is Mrey. He does not know his own age. Perhaps 70 or 80. He has been sick for months. He believes he is dying. He believes the spirits have made him sick because he was an elephant hunter. The doctor tells Mrey he is severely dehydrated with fever. He recommends a trip to hospital in the capital city, Phnom Penh. Mrey has never left his village. He refuses to go. His destiny lies with the spirits. They will decide his fate.



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