

# GREAT WHITE SHARK

## DIRECTORS NOTES

### Prologue:



Guadalupe Shark 2004 - Photo Luke Cresswell

In 2004 Luke took his first trip to Isla Guadalupe, a 24 hour voyage by boat from the port of San Diego: it was there he saw his first great white sharks, in crystal clear water, bathed in sunlight. He returned to the UK determined to interest me in two things: a 3D movie about the sardine run in South Africa, and a 3D movie about great white sharks. At the following Giant Screen Conference, we soon discovered

that Phil Streater and Jonathan Barker had a Great White movie in development, so we decided to pursue sardines, whilst lending support to Phil and Jonathan.

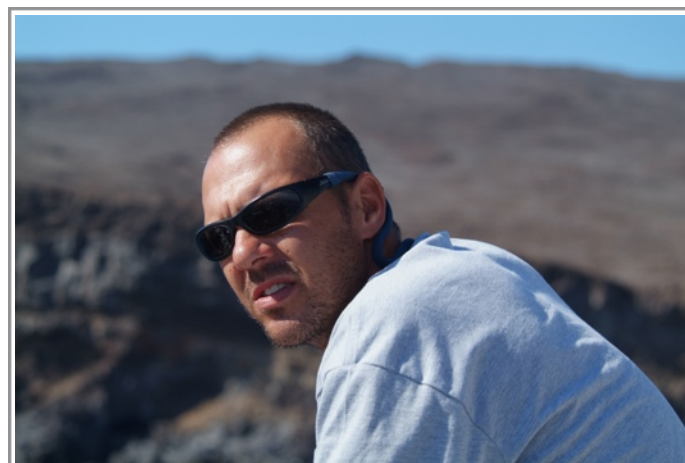


Stan Waterman, Guadalupe 2005



Ramon Bonfil, Guadalupe 2005

In October 2005 Luke and I embarked once more for Guadalupe, aboard the Horizon. This time with a distinguished group of shipmates that included Phil, Jonathan, Sean Phillips and director/photographer Bob Talbot from the large format industry, plus a remarkable group of shark experts: Stan Waterman, who was cameraman on the groundbreaking 70's Great White documentary "Blue Water, White Death", Ramon Bonfil, who had just tagged the infamous shark called "Nicole", Mike Rutzen (South African shark specialist who was determining whether he could swim with the sharks of Guadalupe) and UK shark expert, Suzy Q.



Mike Rutzen, Guadalupe 2005

There was one empty cabin on that trip: author Peter Benchley was also due to be on board with us, but fell ill shortly before we departed. The man who wrote JAWS and subsequently became a passionate shark conservation advocate never recovered from that illness. Stan and Peter were neighbours on the East Coast, and



Suzy Q, Guadalupe 2005

it was Stan's experience shooting "Blue Water, White Death" that had inspired Peter to make a Great White the central figure in JAWS.

The following year, we began production on our first 3d documentary, Wild Ocean, with D.J. Roller ( a protege of Stan Waterman) as underwater Director of Photography, and followed that soon after with The Last Reef. Sharks made guest appearances in both movies, but there was still no sign of the Great White documentary. For The Last Reef, D.J. had designed the world's first underwater 3d beamsplitter rig, and since we now had the means of production, we felt it was

time to resurrect the Great White project. In 2009, Luke and D.J once more made the trip to Guadalupe, aboard the Nautilus Explorer, and captured the deep cage diving sequence. Great White Shark was finally in production, and would be a fitting conclusion to our trilogy of underwater movies.



Left to Right: Sean Philips, Phil Streater, Jonathan Barker, Bob Talbot interviewing Ramon Bonfil (off camera) aboard the Horizon Oct 2005 Photo Steve McNicholas

## In Production 2009-2012



Shooting Cage Diving, Gansbaai, South Africa, with the Imax/Phantom 65 3D camera with the Libra stabilisation rig on a crane, from another boat...

We re-kindled our contact with Mike Rutzen, and whilst still in production on *The Last Reef*, headed for South Africa, hoping to capture Mike swimming outside of the cage, with a great white shark. We also wanted to cover the activity of cage diving, which had grown to be a big business in Gansbaai, South Africa. The other activity South African white sharks are famous for is breaching: leaping completely clear of the water, taking an unsuspecting fur seal by surprise, and brute force. As luck would have it, the Imax production, *Born to be Wild*, was shooting in Kenya, with the Imax/Phantom 65 3D camera system, and we were able to ship it down to Gansbaai, enabling us to shoot with a long lens, in 3d in full 4k resolution at 140 frames per second. This opened up a realm of possibilities for us: we knew from our experience with *The Last Reef*, that underwater digital footage could work really well on a giant screen. This was the first time

we felt confident enough to use a 3d digital system above water for large format, with the added bonus of being able to shoot slow motion.

We were armed with enough footage to pique interest in the film, but we were always on the lookout for further great white action, something to make this movie unlike any other. Negotiations to shoot in the Farallon Islands were getting nowhere fast, when we came across an odd YouTube video about a "newly discovered aggregation" of white sharks in a "secret" location. Somewhere no one had filmed before; somewhere the sharks weren't used to cages, or more accurately, people inside cages, in the water. It would be an opportunity to capture raw images of great whites reminiscent of the very first images shot by



Peter Scott, Stewart Island, New Zealand Photo Luke Cresswell

Stan Waterman for Blue Water/White Death.

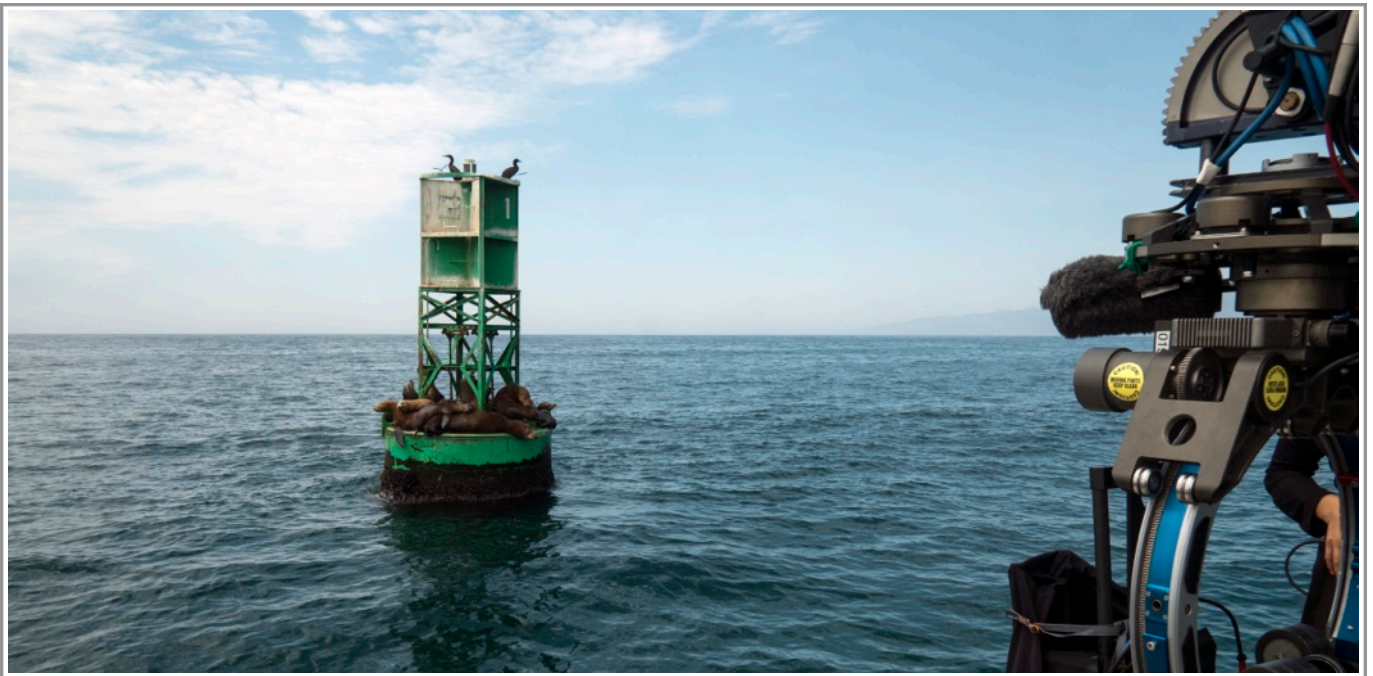
The location transpired to be Stewart Island, at the Southern tip of New Zealand. Just before we arrived, there had been reports of a whale carcass on a Stewart Island beach, beset with white sharks in shallow water, we had just missed it... In the deep south, it was cold, wet and windy; Stewart Island felt like the edge of the world. In over two weeks there were only three days with weather that allowed access to the sharks.



The New Zealand crew, resilient and cheerful

Working with Peter Scott and Dave Abbott, we managed to shoot some great footage, at one point we had up to eight sharks around us, too many to see on camera all at once...

There was some resistance from the islanders too, who were worried that baiting sharks would endanger the local abalone divers. Every white shark aggregation seems to be close to kelp forests, close to abalone and, as a result, close to abalone divers. These people spend their lives, working in white shark waters.



Shooting Sea Lions: a buoy just off Santa Monica beach

Constantly monitoring shark news revealed our next location to us, and it was something of a surprise. We knew that Monterey Bay Aquarium had, on numerous occasions, displayed a juvenile white shark in a large tank, for a limited amount of time, before tagging and releasing it back into the wild. It led us to the work of Dr Chris Lowe, based at Cal State University in Long Beach, who was making some interesting discoveries concerning juvenile white sharks. The principle discovery being that the Los Angeles coastline is a nursery ground for white sharks, a hot spot for juveniles, little older than 1 year. Dr Lowe has a tagging programme run in conjunction with Monterey Bay, and they would be working from Marina Del Ray in August. We felt it was a real opportunity to tell a slightly different great white story.

There was one small scheduling problem for us, and especially for Luke: we had been invited to work on the London Olympics closing ceremony, which was an immovable feast, August 12. The LA tagging was also immovable, August 13. After months of preparation for the ceremony, I had to watch Luke and the rest of STOMP in the biggest performance of our career, from the comfort of my hotel room in LA...

Meanwhile, D.J. had been busy adapting our underwater housing and 3d rig to take the new RED Epic cameras, which gave us a leap forward in resolution, tonal quality and available frame rates. It meant that most of the remaining footage would be shot at 48 frames, with the same cameras used by Peter Jackson to shoot The Hobbit in 3D. Of course, he had a few more rigs than we did.



Shooting the capture of juvenile White Sharks off the coast of Los Angeles.

The 3D rig was mounted on a techno crane, sitting atop a flat floating platform, and must have looked pretty peculiar to the people on Venice, Santa Monica and Malibu beaches as we passed by. Day one gave us our first shark capture, and it was held in a pen, hopefully going to be transferred to the aquarium. Luke arrived the following day, and there followed three days of no sightings. Without a tag and release we didn't have a full story... we also learned that the shark from the first day was released after being deemed unsuitable for transfer to Monterrey, so we didn't have a story ending there either.

After accidentally snagging a fisherman's line by Venice Pier, we also came to the attention of the local coastguard. The tagging expedition was officially over, but we managed to persuade a local fishing crew to help us one more time, and as luck would have it, our spotter plane found a shark off Santa Monica pier. Just as Dr Lowe and his team caught the shark, the coastguard ordered us to stop shooting... after a few tense moments with the Baywatch team, we were allowed to resume shooting, and got the shot of the juvenile release...

On board with us was Terri Farley Teruel from Universal Studios, and it was fitting that she would see a "baby" white shark right in her back yard, not so far away from the JAWS theme park experience. A few days earlier, I had been to recce the JAWS

location at Universal. It was early in the morning, before the park was open, and a family of deer were wading through the JAWS lake... JAWS and Bambi, together at last...

Just a few days later, a juvenile white shark would make the headlines, caught and released by a fisherman at Venice Pier: I doubt that a coyote seen strolling through the Hollywood Hills would make the evening news, but really, there is little difference. Los Angeles is a shark hot spot, in more ways than one...



D.J.Roller in San Benitos Photo: Vance Wiese

Armed with D.J's Epic cameras, we knew we wanted to flesh out our story by showing more of the food chain, in particular, the fur seals and sea lions that become such an important part of their diet as adults. So we headed for the kelp forests of San Benitos, with the crew of the Horizon, and captured more footage than we could possibly use of pinnipeds of all shapes and sizes, including the nightly trek of sea lions up the cliff sides, to the barren highlands. With dolphins, humpbacks and blue whales around us, it was a memorable trip, and we felt the movie was almost complete...

Except, now we had the higher resolution cameras, shouldn't we return to New Zealand or Guadalupe, to get more shark footage





Guadalupe, Mexico, Photo Luke Cresswell

Luke's next discovery would determine how we finish our shoot: he had seen Fred Buyle make a presentation at a dive show in the UK (in the same way, Luke had first met Mike Rutzen many years before). Fred and another champion freediver, William Winram, were freediving in those crystal clear waters in Guadalupe, handpicking and tagging great whites, particularly, the big females. And he was working with Dr Edgar Mauricio Hoyos Padilla (to give him his full name), who we had met ten years earlier (and D.J. had worked with on numerous occasions).

Mauricio, was no longer operating from a local fishing "ponga", now he had sponsorship, underwater beacons, and satellite tags... But he was still tagging sharks at the surface, much like a whaler on a small boat with a harpoon (this method is used in New Zealand and many other parts of the world also). By enlisting the help of Will and Fred (who had been tagging many other shark species worldwide), he was to exponentially increase his success rate, *and* be able to choose which sharks he'd like to tag.



James Neihouse reflects on his next shot, Guadalupe 2012

We also felt we wanted more 65mm footage in the movie: we had shot aerials in South Africa, but we had no topside footage in Guadalupe. We knew from our previous trips what a dramatic island it was, and the only format to do it justice would be 65mm: we persuaded James Neihouse to join us on the high seas and our final voyage back to Guadalupe, to shoot some deep, rich film footage to complement the pristine shots D.J. would capture of the free divers underwater.

Luke's original vision of the end of our movie was to see man and shark, in an underwater ballet: show that these animals aren't aggressive monsters, they're just peak predators doing what they do best, being perfectly adapted, perfectly controlled masters of their environment.



William Winram, Fred Buyle with safety diver François Leduc and their ponga in Guadalupe 2012

But that's not the end of the story...

## Postscript

Once the footage has been captured, the film has to go through a completely different stage... if shooting is the larval stage, post production is the cocoon stage, which can be quite a lengthy, intensive process, before the fully fledged movie can emerge and take wing...



Mike Roberts, Brian Eimer, a shark and Luke Cresswell during the mix at ImagesInSound

We consider all aspects of post to be equally important, and we script, edit and compose the original music ourselves: its hard for us to imagine them as separate elements, they all develop at the same time, or are reworked at the same time, repeatedly, until we are ready to let go of the movie and hand it over to the real post experts. The offline post work takes place in our home town of Brighton, including the recording of the soundtrack in our room at the Old Market Theatre.

Our temp tracks are meticulously replaced by live musicians, including a 20 piece string section, conducted once again by Dominic Nunns; also on the soundtrack are the ubiquitous rhythms of Luke Cresswell with myself and an uncredited Mike Roberts on guitar (Mike added some funky electric wah-wah guitar to our Los Angeles musical sidetrack).



Dominic Nunns conducting the GWS strings at The Old Market, Hove, UK

But this is a large format film, which requires a 65mm print release, with a 6.1 soundtrack...

So this takes us to Los Angeles, to the 65mm den of iniquity that is RPG (Rick Gordon), and the house of transition from digital to 65mm film, Fotokem. Much of the digital footage also needs to be prepared for the ultimate scrutiny that projected 65mm gives it, by going through complex, proprietary processes performed by Reliance. The colour of the film and the 3d correction all takes place in the D.I room at Fotokem in the very capable hands of John Daro, operating the highly impressive Mistika.

Our map and 3d cgi doodles are painstakingly reinvented by the artists at Frima in Canada, and our soundtrack mixed, as ever by Brian Eimer at ImagesInSound,

under the watchful eye of our very own Mike Roberts, who has the unenviable task of translating our complex musical machinations into a manageable track list...

There are several end results: a 65mm 3d print, a digital 3d drive, a cut down version for digital cinema plus a 2d Dome print....

It's a lengthy, intensive process, that doesn't seem to get easier even on our 4th film: with every movie, the technological goalposts change, the bar is set ever higher, and the metaphors ever more mixed...

Hopefully the end result is as inspiring as the subject matter is to us: we hope our audiences will be as moved as we have been, to know more about this somewhat stunning creature we share our oceans with...

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*Our long time collaborator, David Marks (we have worked with David since he produced our Stomp/Target commercials in the mid 90's), was line producing the movie, but mid way through production, his son, Gardner, was diagnosed with Leukaemia. Quite how David managed to keep a grip on Great White Shark whilst he and his family were fighting for his sons life, we will never comprehend. Gardner passed away in April of this year, and we all dedicate this film to his memory.*

Steve McNicholas May 2013

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