

Mountain Patrol (Kekexili)

China/Hong Kong 2004 88 mins

Crew and Cast

Director Lu Chuan
Written by Lu Chuan
Cinematography Cao Yu

Ri Tai **Duo Bujie**
Ga Yu **Zhang Lei**
Liu Dong **Qi Liang**
Ma Zhanlin **Ma Zhanlin**

Synopsis

Tibet 1996. Beijing journalist Ga Yu arrives in Tibet to report on the recent death of a mountain patrolman at the hands of a gang hunting the local chinu (wild antelope) for their pelts. Ra Tai, the ex-army officer who founded and leads the mountain patrol, is persuaded that Ga Yu could publicise their cause and agrees to let him join an expedition into the vast Kekexili wilderness in search of the poachers.

Setting off at midnight, the patrol finds the remains of hundreds of chinu carcasses at Zhuonai Lake. On day five, the driver, Ping Cuo, is wounded by a sniper. On day seven, the patrol encounters a gang of pelt skimmers at the Kumar River and arrests them after a struggle. Under duress, the leader, Ma Zhanlin, shows the patrol where more than 500 pelts are buried....

adapted from Sight & Sound Oct'06

BFFS BLOCK BOOKING

This title is one of a dozen or so releases that form the initial stage of a national block-booking scheme launched earlier this year. This enables BFFS member societies to book films at an economical flat rate without advertising restrictions on a 'show-and-send-on' basis. Further details from the BFFS website www.bffs.org.uk or contact Ros Hill in the BFFS's Sheffield office on 0114 221 0314.

Note: merchandise is available as competition/raffle prizes for film societies booking this title. For details please contact Lisa Cullen at Axiom Films:
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Reviews

Set against the spectacular, freezing plains of the titular high-altitude plateau, this sober, gripping action drama uses the vulnerability of the endangered Tibetan antelope as the basis of a powerfully paced story about conscience and survival. Following the deaths in 1996 of members of the self-appointed local volunteer force established to protect the animals against poachers, reporter Ga Yu (Zhang Lei) arrives from Beijing to investigate. Winning over the group's charismatic veteran leader Ritai (Duo Bujie), he joins an excursion that offers both a chance of nabbing the ringleader and the risk of disaster.

Writer-director Lu has crafted a script gratifyingly free of contrived character conflict, generating its considerable sense of jeopardy and emotional impact through a feel for formidable nature, affecting individual performances and vividly applied ethical dilemmas. The patrol's obvious sincerity and cameraderie is tempered by hints of vigilantism and compromise on which Lu refuses to pass judgement: during the first encounter with suspected poachers, for instance, we share Ga's misgivings about their rough treatment; later, pragmatism grates against principle.

This sophistication is matched by superb use of the film's locations; it's almost entirely exterior. From its stark light and serrated mountains to ice sheets and duststorms, *Kekexili* is a photographer's dream, but Lu also offers an ethnographic aspect ranging from drinking games to seemingly macabre air burials. It wouldn't be too hard to read a political edge into this story of rapacious outsiders exploiting Tibet and its resources. Lu never offers anything so explicit, but he does ask a strong stomach of his audience; animal lovers might applaud the film's sentiment but balk at beasts flayed or fields of vulture-picked carcasses.

Ben Walters, Time Out, Sep'06

Even if you couldn't deduce it from the extraordinary images, it's known that *Mountain Patrol* (rough pronunciation *Cur-cur-shee-lee*) had one of the most arduous shoots since Werner Herzog first trekked into the Amazon rain forest. Working for four months in sub-zero temperatures at some 4,700 metres above sea level, Lu Chuan started with a crew of 108 and ended with about 60. Lu himself was at one point hospitalised for exhaustion and oxygen-deprivation. There was only one fatality - Columbia Asia staffer Alex Graf, who died in a car crash and to whom the film is dedicated - but even the Tibetans in the cast had trouble. Their tribulations pay off in a film that has more visceral intensity than most docu-drama.

Extract from *Sight & Sound* review, Oct'06