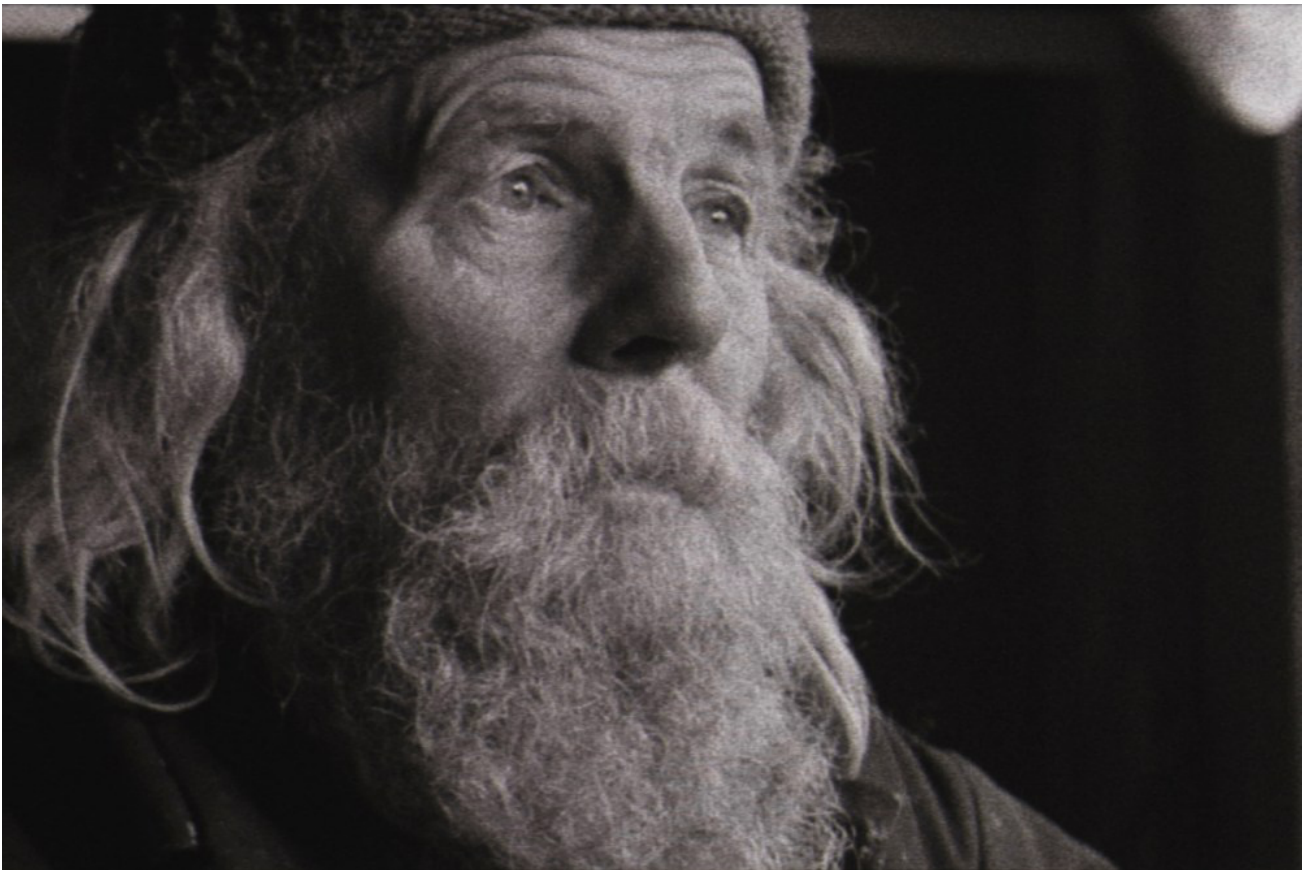


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## **‘Bogancloch’ Director Ben Rivers on Reuniting With ‘Two Years at Sea’ Protagonist Jake Williams: ‘I Will No Doubt Continue Making Films With Him Until One of Us Dies’**

By Jamie Lang



Credit: Ben Rivers

Thirteen years ago, Ben Rivers’ Venice FIPRESCI prize-winner “Two Years at Sea” introduced the world to Jake Williams, a former sailor living in the middle of the forest, mainly off the grid. This year, Rivers is heading to Locarno with “Bogancloch,” a sequel that returns to Williams’ unique homestead to see how much, or how little, he has changed in the decade-plus since.

Variety has been given exclusive access to the sequel's first trailer ahead of the film's Locarno world premiere.

Produced by Rivers, John Archer and Sarah Neely with financial support from Screen Scotland, Medienboard Berlin-Brandenburg in Germany and the Icelandic Film Center, "Bogancloch" screens in this year's International Competition at Locarno. Rediance is handling international sales for the film, which will get its U.K. premiere at the Edinburgh International Film Festival on August 18.

An official synopsis for the film reads: "Bogancloch is where modern-day hermit Jake Williams lives, nestled in a vast highland forest of Scotland. The film portrays his life throughout the seasons, with other people occasionally crossing into his otherwise solitary life. At the heart, a song, an argument between life and death, each stating their case to rule over the world. The film is without exposition; it aims at something less recognizable, a different existence of reality observed in discrete moments. A sequel to 'Two Years at Sea,' charting a subtly changing life in a radically changing world."

For today's trailer release, Variety caught up with Rivers to discuss his filmmaking style, his nearly 15-year relationship with Williams and the duo's plans to continue making these films "until one of us dies."

**Variety: How did you first meet Jake, and what sparked your interest in his lifestyle?**

**Rivers:** I first met Jake in 2005. I was living in London and intrigued by the idea of living in the wilderness, completely detached from urban society. This curiosity led me to Jake through a mutual friend. I met Jake and went to Bogancloch and helped him out, moving wood around and that sort of thing, and together, we ended up making a short film titled "This is My Land." The short film began a friendship that led me to visit him repeatedly. Over the years, I made several short films about people living off-grid. When I secured more funding, I decided to revisit Jake for a longer project. Because of our established relationship, I could direct more and collaborate with him to create scenes, making it less of a straightforward observational documentary.

**Was the initial plan to learn about an off-the-grid lifestyle, or did you think there was potential for storytelling there, too?**

It was a bit of both. Personally, I was questioning how I wanted to live in general. I love nature, and the topic intrigued me. Being a filmmaker, I also thought it would be interesting to document this kind of subject. When I met Jake and saw his evolving, eclectic place, it seemed like a perfect subject for a film. Also, despite living alone and largely off-grid, he's extremely friendly and welcoming, which made it an even more interesting prospect.

**How do you communicate with Jake, given his off-grid lifestyle?**

Initially, it was just through a landline as a line ran through the forest. Now, he has email access through a dongle, although his emails are brief. Sometimes, he has to walk a mile up a hill to get a better internet signal. He calls the top of the hill his "Internet cafe."

**You mentioned that this film is similar in form to "Two Years at Sea." Can you elaborate on that?**

Both films are in black and white and shot on 16mm film, maintaining a visual consistency. However, this time, I included a few shots in color and introduced other people into Jake's world because he actually really likes people. I think that is the interesting thing about him, that he's not misanthropic. The color shots provide a glimpse into his environment, hinting at a potential future film that might explore his world more in color.

**How does your approach differ from traditional fly-on-the-wall documentaries?**

When I shoot these films, I give a lot of direction and do multiple takes. From the very beginning, I have some things in mind. I have some clear images and things that I want to achieve with certain scenes. The last shot in the film was always kind of in my head, even before we started shooting.

**Have you thought about examining Jake's past in your films? Or will the focus remain explicitly on his present life?**

I've never felt the need to explain Jake's backstory comprehensively. Instead, I prefer to give subtle clues through photographs, music and small details. My focus is more on the present and imagining the future rather than delving into the past. For instance, Jake's history is hinted at through his collection of photos and tapes, but it's not explicitly explained.

**How do you balance aesthetic choices with the documentary's content?**

Aesthetically, I aim for a dreamlike, atmospheric feel rather than an explanatory approach. For instance, the black-and-white aesthetic helps simplify the busy visuals of Jake's world. The few color shots serve as a teaser for a potential future film, showing his place in a different light. Overall, my goal is to create a feeling and mood that complements the content.

**What future plans do you have for this ongoing project with Jake?**

I envision making another film about Jake in 10 years. This long-term project will allow me to explore how his life and the world around him continue to evolve. I made one of my first short films with Jake, and I will no doubt continue making films with him until one of us dies.