

Grizzly Man

This is a very strange documentary about an obsession, an obsession revealed on video by an amateur naturalist Timothy Treadwell, who spent 14 summers observing and living with grizzly bears in Alaska.

Treadwell was an unfocused individual who first discovered and then came to identify almost totally with “his” bears and came to feel his purpose was to protect them from the outside world. That commitment, which morphed from touching to bizarre, was recorded by him on hours and hours of videotape and ended in 2000 when he and a female companion were brutally killed--and eaten--by those self-same grizzlies.

This eccentric tale is told with both respectful solemnity and genuine humanity in *Grizzly Man* by a master of the bizarre, German director Werner Herzog, who has depicted his own share of obsessives in both feature films (*Aguirre, the Wrath of God*, *Fitzcarraldo*) and documentaries (*The Great Ecstasy of Woodcarver Steiner*).

Herr Herzog, who somehow came upon the Treadwell footage and was fascinated by it, has effectively blended ample excerpts of that footage with a biography of the man, a collection of reminiscences from his friends and colleagues, and Herzog’s own sardonic comments. Clearly, the director is one who can potentially identify with the Grizzly Man yet who also pointedly distances himself from a person he (and we) see literally losing his mind in front of his own camera.

Whether you, as a filmgoer, will want to accompany Herzog on his quest to plumb the psyche of a fixated soul who saw himself as a modern “samurai” and a “guardian of the land” is hard to judge; just be aware that this quest carries its own singular measure of fascination.

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