

Recreating lost world is a mammoth task



BC's *Walking With Dinosaurs* was a hugely successful combination of skilful documentary filmmaking, superb CG effects, animatronics and painstaking palaeontological research. Now *Walking With Beasts* – a new series on the mammals and birds that came after the dinosaurs – is set to follow in its evolutionary footsteps. Director of Photography, John Howarth, a prominent British documentary filmmaker, acknowledges that in the short time since filming the first series, significant software advances have enabled him to incorporate more complex tracking and movement shots in the six-part *Walking With Beasts*.

Equipment for the fourteen-month shoot, including the ARRI 435, was selected for portability and carried in rucksacks, as the locations in the US, Mexico, Indonesia, Brazil, Canada

later," says Howarth. "When the animation is created, you can add camera movement to a shot by going back to the neg and inserting, for example, a tilt, or it's possible to zoom in and add movement to simulate unsteady camerawork – a significant feature of 16mm long lens wildlife work."

Unlike dinosaurs, the CG beasts have 'fur' and 'feathers' – a major challenge tackled by animators at Framestore. "At times on location when it was windy, we had to frame shots carefully so that the grass movement wasn't obvious, otherwise you'd expect the fur and feathers to be ruffling as well," he explains. Crawley Creatures provided the animatronic puppets for close-up sequences, the most highly complex of which was the ape-man animal.

Walking With Beasts has several 'privileged view' lighting sequences

"It amuses me that on a technologically cutting edge series of programmes, I rely on a forty year old camera as the only practical way to get certain shots."

and South Africa were often only accessible on foot. Stock comprised 35mm Eastman EXR 50D (5245) for bright daylight, Kodak Vision 250D (5246) for sunrise, sunset and forest cover and Kodak Vision 500T (5279) for night time. "Shooting in Super 35mm widescreen with an open gate provided extra image area to call up

shot at night, including the birth scene of an elephant sized animal. "I used conventional visible light, but lit 'badly!'" says Howarth. "I put a key lamp next to the camera so it looked like a wildlife set-up with infra red illumination; when it's treated in post and given an infra red monochrome look, the image will be



c DP John Howarth.

credible. There was a difficult sequence of Neanderthal men with firebrands chasing CG mammoths at night; I needed real interaction from the fire but, unlike a normal fire-lit night scene, there had to be a high level of ambient light to give the right image-intensified look. The scene in front of the camera looked extremely unnatural but when it's treated in post, the firelight will flare onto the actors in a believable way, and the background will be bright."

Howarth used time-lapse as a motif and chose to shoot it with an old lightweight 35mm Cameflex fitted with a modified Norris intervalometer. "It amuses me that on a technologically cutting edge series of programmes, I rely on a forty year old camera as the only practical way to get certain shots."

Walking With Beasts will appear on BBC television in late autumn. 