

Vanishing Tattoo Media Kit Press Information

The Vanishing Tattoo

Billing

Journey deep into the jungles of Borneo in search of the last few remaining traditional Iban tattoo artists, in a daring attempt to help the Iban keep their ancient practises alive.

Summary

Not long ago, most Iban people in Borneo were elaborately decorated with boldly designed tattoos depicting the story of their life experiences. Today, among younger generations, there is little evidence of the traditional art.

In what little tattooing remains, the ancient tattooing method of hand-tapping has been replaced with electric machines and the spiritual and personal images have been replaced by western designs.

Join renowned Canadian tattoo artist Tom Lockhart, and writer and historian of tattoo lore Vince Hemingson, on a gruelling journey deep into the jungle to meet the remaining Iban tattoo artists living in remote parts of Borneo.

The Vanishing Tattoo follows the tattoo hunters on their arduous 400 kilometre quest along the Skrang River, once known as the River of Death and home to Borneo's fiercest headhunters, in an attempt to document the ancient practises and keep the traditional methods alive for future generations, before they vanish forever.

The Vanishing Tattoo

Synopsis

Not long ago, most Iban people in Borneo were elaborately decorated with boldly designed tattoos depicting the story of their life experiences. Today, little evidence of the traditional art remains among younger Iban.

The ancient tattooing method of hand-tapping has been replaced with electric machines and the spiritual and personal images have been replaced by western designs.

The tattoos were once carried out to depict life stories and to represent spiritual beliefs. The images were thought to protect the tribe against intruding evil spirits and unwanted predators, and made the Iban visible to their Gods.

Renowned Canadian tattoo artist, Tom Lockhart, and writer and historian of tattoo lore, Vince Hemingson, are on a mission to meet the last remaining Iban tattoo artists living in remote parts of Borneo. They hope to document the ancient practises so that the tradition may be continued by future generations, before it vanishes forever.

But to find the tattooed tribesmen, they must spend 16 days travelling up the fearsome Skrang River deep into the heart of Borneo's jungle.

Guided by two Iban city-dwelling tattoo artists who have adopted the western methods, Tom and Vince set off on an adventurous cultural journey along the treacherous Skrang River, once known as the River of Death and home to Borneo's fiercest headhunters. There, in the small settlements of tribespeople along the river, our tattoo hunters hope to find the last of the elderly tattoo artists believed to hold the secrets of Iban tattooing.

Along the way Tom and Vince experience what it's like to sleep in Iban longhouses, with up to 120 other people in hot and humid conditions, and with bundles of human skulls staring down from the rafters.

At their furthest point up the river, Vince and Tom meet the legendary Iban leader Aki Basai. Eighty-six-year-old Aki is one of the last Iban to sport the elaborate 'bodysuit' and is one of only a handful remaining who know the art of Iban tattooing.

To pass on the secrets of this ancient art, the tribesmen invite Vince to have two traditional tattoos on his upper body. Unlike the western methods Vince is accustomed to, they use ancient dye-recipes and a "pricker" $\frac{3}{4}$ a wooden rod with up to fourteen needles protruding at right angles. Using a wooden striker to hammer against the end of the pricker, the men begin to make their mark.

After enduring more than six hours of excruciating pain, Vince is welcomed into the Iban tribe with ceremonial dances and rituals, and becomes Aki's adopted son.

The Vanishing Tattoo is a compelling journey into the world of traditional Iban tattoo artists to investigate the critical importance of tattooing in Iban culture and to discover why the art is rapidly diminishing.

The Vanishing Tattoo

Sample Media release

IN SEARCH OF THE LAST IBAN TATTOO ARTISTS

Borneo's Iban tribesmen were once decorated in elaborate and spiritually significant tattoos, but today many of the symbolic images have been replaced with ones from the western world.

Could this ancient art of tattooing be lost forever, or is there still time to learn the secrets of the traditional art? A new programme, The Vanishing Tattoo, goes in search of the few remaining Iban tattooists and aims to rekindle the interest of Iban tattoos among the tribe.

Renowned Canadian tattoo artist, Tom Lockhart, and writer and historian of tattoo lore, Vince Hemingson, endure a gruelling 21-day quest along Borneo's Skrang River, once known as the River of Death and home to Borneo's fiercest headhunters. They travel deep into the heart of the jungle, on a mission to document the ancient tattoo practises before they vanish forever.

The Vanishing Tattoo, which screens on [insert on air details here], takes viewers on a cultural and spiritual journey to explore the meaning and significance of Iban tattooing with the aim passing of the art on to future generations of Iban people.

Director Jack Silberman says the journey along the Skrang River was not only a huge adventure for the crew, it was a fascinating opportunity to learn about Iban traditions along the way and experience their everyday life.

"This 21 day mission was no holiday," he says. "The whole crew had to get right back to basics and fit in with the extremely kind Iban people who allowed us to share their longhouses with them.

"Some longhouses had up to 120 people living in them, as well as numerous dogs, chickens and pigs scuffling around outside. The conditions were unbelievable; it was 40 degrees hot, with nearly 100 per cent humidity, and it certainly wasn't easy sleeping on the wooden floor with human skulls staring down on us!

"But this was not just an adventure, it was also an amazing cultural journey to explore the symbolic meanings of Iban tattoos and the tribe's religious beliefs."

This program was produced by The Vanishing Tattoo Inc in association with NHNZ and National Geographic Channels International.

www.vanishingtattoo.com is the largest and most popular web site on the Internet dedicated to the traditional tribal tattooing of indigenous cultures around the world.
Ends

For further information, please contact:

Vince Hemingson
The Vanishing Tattoo
101 - 3131 West 4th Avenue
Vancouver, BC,
Canada V6K 1R6
(604) 331-0333
www.vanishingtattoo.com
E-mail_ vince@vanishingtattoo.com

or

For further information, please contact:
Rebecca Tansley or Naomi Murfitt
Marketing and Communications, NHNZ
Ph: +64 3 479 9799 Fax: +64 3 479 9916
Email: rtansley@nhnz.tv or nmurfitt@nhnz.tv

The Vanishing Tattoo

Anecdotes

Bedtime, Borneo style

Imagine trying to sleep in a Borneo longhouse when dozens of roosters are squawking, dogs are howling and a generator is groaning throughout the night.

Well, this is what The Vanishing Tattoo crew had to endure for two weeks. After a tiring day of filming life along the Skrang River from sunrise to sunset, each crew member was desperate for a good night's sleep. But instead they just lay there, sweating in the humid conditions and trying to block out the noise coming from outside.

According to sound operator Errol Samuelson the worst thing about the seemingly never-ending nights in the longhouses was the décor.

"As we lay there on the hard floor trying to block out everything around us, and trying to keep cool under our mosquito nets, we had hundreds of human skulls looking down on us - reminders of the ancient Iban tradition of head hunting," he said.

"They were bad enough conditions without the skulls, let alone with them! Luckily they didn't give any of us nightmares, but if we'd managed to get more sleep perhaps they would have!"

When it rains it pours

The torrential rains in Borneo can play havoc with water levels in the island's many rivers, causing them to rise by as much as 6 meters over night and surge over their banks within an astonishingly short period of time.

One day after horrendous rain, as Vince and Tom from The Vanishing Tattoo struggled their way through one rapid, the stern of the long boat tipped out of the water and the propeller was thrown up in the air.

They lost all forward thrust in the swift current and were spun sideways through the rapids. The boat began to tip over and the force of the water hitting the side drove it under, allowing water to pour in.

The boat driver screamed orders in Iban, but of course neither Vince nor Tom understood a word. But luckily they understood that with water pouring over the side, they needed to scramble across to the other side.

Suddenly the prop was back in the water, but now the boat was rocketing at full throttle towards the riverbank - their nightmare was not yet over. Fortunately Tom and Vince then moved to the back of the boat, which thrust the bow of the long boat up and buried the prop deep into the river. In a split second, the boat driver carved a turn back up river and, having ducked to avoid overhanging branches, they were at last, safe.

Creepy crawlies 2, Vince 0

Poisonous scorpions and centipedes are a part of everyday life in Borneo and are one of the reasons, other than the ever-present risk of flooding during the rainy season, that the Iban longhouses are built on stilts above the ground.

One afternoon during The Vanishing Tattoo shoot, as the crew was lounging about the longhouse after lunch, a black scorpion the size of a small lobster tumbled out of the rafters and fell just a few feet from them. Danah, one of the Iban guides, killed it, but it took several whacks of an inch thick pole to finish it off. According to Danah all the scorpions around the longhouses are killed, as their stings are dangerous to children and old people.

One day while out hiking to reach a series of waterfalls, Vince brushed up against a log and was instantly covered in hundreds of red fire ants. He immediately stripped off and leapt up and down like a cat on a hot tin roof. Fortunately there was a nearby stream to jump into.

He then discovered hundreds of bites that quickly turned into a rash of hives covering his right arm, upper body and back. The Iban guides quickly escorted him 10 kilometres back to the longhouse at Emperan as his right arm went completely numb and he began to feel the effect of the ants' venom, becoming progressively more woozy. The women at Emperan knew exactly what to do. They stripped off his shirt and washed him down with tuak, the potent local rice wine, and then rubbed some kind of oil on him. Within minutes he began to feel better, and after a few hours the hives and rash were gone!

No nine-to-five day jobs in Borneo

According to The Vanishing Tattoo sound operator Errol Samuelson, the work ethic among villagers in remote Borneo is incredible.

"The longhouses along the Skrang River were bustling with villagers at sunrise but soon after there would only be the very old and very young left, everyone else would disappear into the rice paddies and the pepper fields," he said.

"The workers would work outside all day in the blistering heat and wouldn't return until just before sunset. There were certainly no nine-to-five jobs over there in the villages!"

Mistaken identity

At every longhouse that Tom and Vince from The Vanishing Tattoo visited along the Skrang, the local people were convinced that they were WWF wrestlers.

Watching wrestling on satellite TV is one of the favourite pastimes of the Iban and the whole longhouse community crowds around the communal television, which is powered by a generator, cheering wildly for their favourites and hissing at the villains!

No matter how vociferously Tom and Vince denied it, the Iban were convinced, because of the westerners' immense size in comparison to the average Iban, long hair and tattoos, that they must be wrestlers. They were extremely disappointed when they finally accepted that their visitors were not their heroes, but were even more disappointed to learn that wrestling was more about entertainment than any real sporting contest!

Tracking the jungle

Occasionally, shooting The Vanishing Tattoo took the crew beyond sight of the longhouse and into the surrounding jungle. On these occasions, the Iban always insisted on sending someone along to accompany them, usually a young man named Tawan.

Director Jack Silberman says: "I had read that the Iban were famed for their bush skills, and Tawan was living proof. I never felt like such a stumble-bum as when trying to duplicate the grace and ease with which he manoeuvred jungle trails or traversed mountain streams.

"Tawan could immediately identify every bird by its call, and once stopped to point out a small python, coloured like the surrounding leaves, curled up and fast asleep some 75 feet up a tree. It took Earl Kingi, the cameraman, and me some five minutes just to see the snake, even with Tawan pointing it out. How he spotted the sleeping serpent while walking by far below, I'll never know. It was after that experience that we gave him the nickname 'Tracker'."

Silberman goes on: "Come lunchtime, we'd pull out our fancy protein bars. Tawan, on the other hand, would start a small fire, take out his parang (bush knife), cut a piece of bamboo, put a little rice inside it, add water from the stream, catch a few small fish and add them along with a few green leaves. In a little while he'd have a beautiful lunch of bamboo-steamed rice and fish, ready to be eaten with bamboo chopsticks.

"It was at that moment I knew that if I was ever going to be lost in the jungle and I could have just one person with me, who that person would be!"

The Vanishing Tattoo web site, www.vanishingtattoo.com is the Internet's largest and most comprehensive site pertaining to all things tattoo.

Ranked the number one tattoo web site on the Internet by Google! and most other Search Engines, the site contains the world's largest photo archive of tattooed celebrities and historical figures. The site currently enjoys traffic of well over 40 million hits per month and has been extensively featured in newspaper, radio and television stories all over the world.

The Vanishing Tattoo

Crew Biographies

PRODUCER/DIRECTOR - Jack Silberman

Jack Silberman was educated at Middlebury College (Vermont), studied documentary film production at the Massachusetts Institute of Technology, and earned a Masters degree from the Harvard University Graduate School of Education, where his studies focused on educational television.

He has been producing, directing, and writing documentaries for 23 years and has extensive international experience, having worked on location in many different countries. His films have played on television networks around the world and have won more than 50 international awards.

PRODUCER/WRITER - Vince Hemingson

Vince Hemingson earned his B.A. in History and Political Science at the University of Victoria (British Columbia). He also studied screenwriting with Richard Walters, Dean of the School of Film and Television at the University of California at Los Angeles (UCLA).

He has travelled extensively all over the world and his journeys figure prominently in his writing. He has been working as a screenwriter for over a decade and recently began producing.

WRITER - PJ Reece

Raised and schooled on Canada's northern prairie, Reece graduated from the University of Alberta in 1967 with a Geography degree, then signed on with CUSO (Canadian University Service Overseas) and for two years conducted a hydrological survey of the rivers in Central Africa.

For 15 years, Reece worked as a cameraman/director, helping to pioneer the film industry in Alberta. Known as a cameraman who could travel, Reece's overseas shooting climaxed with four years documenting the Aga Khan's development projects in Asia and Africa.

After trading camera for keyboard in the late 1980s, Reece studied dramatic writing but emerged once again into the documentary field where he has written, story edited, and directed scores of episodes for American and Canadian network series. He has a newly released novel, *Smoke That Thunders*, currently under feature film option.

CAMERA OPERATOR - Earl Kingi

Earl's television career began in Dunedin, New Zealand in 1988, when he trained in editing, sound, film editing and assisting, and as a film camera operator with TVNZ Natural History. During this time he was involved in programs such as Wildtrack, a weekly children's program; Moa's Ark, a series about New Zealand presented by renowned botanist David Bellamy; and one-hour natural history specials.

Earl also worked as a camera operator, editor and field director with Dunedin-based television and animation company Taylormade Productions.

Since forming an independent production company in 1996, Earl has worked as a camera operator, director and editor on numerous fast turnaround programs for both adults and children, including current affairs, magazine-style and sports programs. Before working with NHNZ on the Animal Planet series, Twisted Tales, he filmed the world's rarest parrot for the film To Save the Kakapo. Earl then went on to work on NHNZ's 26-part series The Most Extreme, a co-production with Animal Planet.

CAMERA OPERATOR - Rick Fadayadan

EDITOR - Marilyn Copland

Marilyn is one of New Zealand's most experienced television editors. In 1997 she was awarded the Best Editing Award at the NZ Film & TV awards for the Discovery-commissioned documentary Dragons of Komodo. Other films on which she has worked include Nature's Death Traps, the award-winning series Twisted Tales, and more recently on the one-hour programme Ghosts of Gondwana.

MUSIC- Neville Copland

Neville Copland has enjoyed playing and composing music since childhood. After starting piano tuition at age six, he began performing in cabaret bands at 13, and was runner-up in a national competition for song composition two years later. Neville joined television shortly after completing a Bachelor of Music Honours degree, taking up the role of musical director for a New Zealand children's programme, to which he contributed about 50 original songs.

In 1988 Neville began composing soundtracks for a range of television programmes, including natural history documentaries, earning a gold medal at the Prix Leonardo in Italy, and top honours at three New Zealand Film and Television Awards for the musical scores for Solid Water, Liquid Rock, Sex on the Reef and Hillary - A View from the Top.

EXECUTIVE PRODUCER - Wayne Tourell

Wayne Tourell is an international award-winning veteran of television drama and documentary. With thirty years' experience in television production, Wayne's credits include the pioneering documentary series, Landmarks, the feature film, Bonjour Timothy and the Emmy nominated drama mini-series Hanlon, which was re-released around the world.

He was the first Executive Producer of the Auckland-based production company South Pacific Pictures before joining NHNZ to head the action series Adventure Central, a co-production with Travel Channel. He has produced/directed/written for many NHNZ films and was Executive Producer for Tropic Gothic, Forgotten Rhino, Mountain Rescue and the six-part X force series.

EXECUTIVE PRODUCER - Peter Hayden

Peter Hayden has worked in the television and film industry for more than twenty years, moving from acting into presenting, directing and writing for magazine and rural programmes. He joined the fledgling Natural History Unit of Television New Zealand - NHNZ's predecessor - in 1980.

Peter was involved as writer, narrator, producer and director in many award-winning documentaries over the following 17 years. Appointed Head of Production Development in 1997, he is now responsible for developing new ideas, providing editorial direction for films in production and developing training modules for extending story-telling skills among producers of wildlife films.

PRODUCTION MANAGER - Suzanne Lloyd

Suzanne has worked in the television industry on a broad range of productions in New Zealand and overseas, from children's programmes to multi-camera live sport productions, before specialising in natural history documentaries. Suzanne was associate producer for Animal Cannibals and Wild & Weird, both co-productions with Discovery Channel, and was assistant producer for Croc People, a co-production with Turner.

In 1996 she produced The Forgotten Sunbear, which aired on National Geographic Channel. In 1999 Suzanne was the production manager on the popular series Adventure Central, a NHNZ/Travel Channel co-production. She has also worked as line producer for Year of the Locust and was recently production manager on Mountain Rescue and Manapouri - The Toughest Tunnel.

The Vanishing Tattoo

Credits

Director

JACK SILBERMAN

Writers

PJ REECE

VINCE HEMINGSON

Camera

EARL KINGI

RICK FADAYADAN

Sound
ERROL SAMUELSON
DON HOWELL

Executive Producers (Canada)
WARREN HILL
STACY KIRK

Editor
MARILYN COPLAND

Post Production Sound
ERROL SAMUELSON

Video Production
GERRY BROWNE
TREVOR DEAKER

Production Manager
SUZANNE LLOYD

Location Manager
JUDY CHAN

Narrator
MARK FERGUSON

Music
NEVILLE COPLAND

Graphics
REUBEN DERRICK

Anthropological Consultant
LARS KRUTAK

Archive
SARAWAK MUSEUM
EDDIE DAVID
THOMAS LOCKHART
BARBARA HARRISSON
MARTIN & OSA JOHNSON SAFARI MUSEUM
NZ TELEVISION ARCHIVE
ARCHIVE FILMS
SARAWAK MUSEUM

CORNELL UNIVERSITY

Special Thanks To

THOMAS LOCKHART DOUG COOK
DAVID UMPIE ALICE UMPIE
RICHARD PITT DON RAMSDEN
JANICE TALBOTT DAVID SETON

Executive in Charge of Production

MICHAEL STEDMAN

Executive Producers

WAYNE TOURELL
PETER HAYDEN

Producers

VINCE HEMINGSON
JACK SILBERMAN

Developed with the participation of
BRITISH COLUMBIA FILM

AND

Global Television Network Inc.

A CanWest Company

Produced in Association With

ABORIGINAL PEOPLES TELEVISION NETWORK

A Canada-New Zealand Co-production Between
NHNZ LTD and THE VANISHING TATTOO INC.

www.vanishingtattoo.com www.nhnz.tv

c. NHNZ Ltd and The Vanishing Tattoo Inc.2003