

ALONE IN THE WILD

A brush with danger in the African bush

Parachuting celebrities into the wild to survive on their own for a week was considered by many to be too great a risk, says **Dick Colthurst**



Dick Colthurst
Executive producer

When an experienced fixer in Africa says your project is so dangerous they want nothing to do with it, you're obliged to think hard about what you're trying to do.

The idea was simple enough. We wanted to drop well-known personalities in the wilderness to find out what it's like to survive in the wild completely on your own. The experience had to be absolutely authentic – and that was the fixer's problem. They were used to carefully arranging 'jeopardy' and 'danger' for TV programmes, and took fright when someone wanted to do it for real.

In 2009, explorer Ed Wardle filmed himself in the wilderness for a Channel 4 series of the same name, but he was an experienced adventurer. Our fixers thought celebrities with no experience of the African bush would almost certainly get killed by a lion, crocodile, elephant or other wild animal, and they couldn't see a safe way of doing it.

Luckily, one of our favourite fixers, Botswana-based AfriScreen, was at least willing to think about it. After lengthy discussions with safari guides, game wardens and government officials, they came back with a plan. Arming our participants with a rifle was a non-starter as history has shown that inexperienced people are far more likely to shoot themselves accidentally than to get attacked by a wild animal. But if we could accept an

armed warden discreetly shadowing each of our celebrities, it might just be possible to keep them safe.

A few weeks later, cricket legend Freddie Flintoff, Winter Olympics gold medallist Amy Williams and world champion freediver Tanya Streeter arrived by helicopter in a remote part of Botswana's Okavango Delta at the start of filming for *Alone In The Wild*. They'd each had a day's medical training and now they had three days to learn everything they could about surviving in a truly wild place, where even straying a few yards from camp could be fatal. On day four, it started for real as they were dropped deep in the bush to survive a full week completely on their own, watched over by unseen armed guards from a distance.

The second biggest fear in the planning stages was that the celebrities wouldn't film themselves properly or record their emotions honestly and openly. We couldn't afford to wait until they emerged from the bush to know what they'd recorded, so a system of dead-letter boxes was arranged, where production left new batteries and the celebrities left recording cards.

It soon became clear we didn't need to worry – hours of remarkably well-shot and emotionally raw material started coming back to base camp and it was only necessary to send minor directing notes by return.

After that first shoot, there was no disguising the relief that everybody had survived and the content was fantastically strong. Freddie, Amy and Tanya had loved the experience despite the occasional terror, and each had a huge sense of achievement. We were on a roll.



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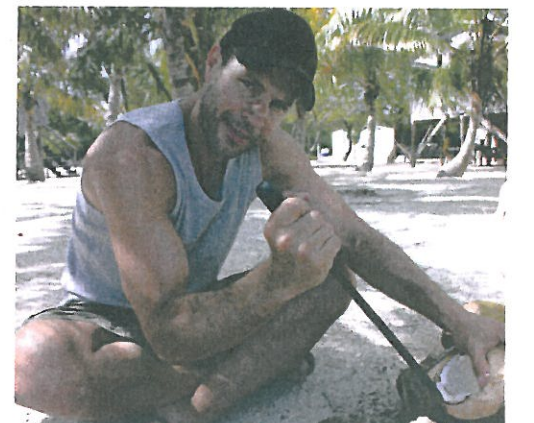
Dick Colthurst

ALONE IN THE WILD

Production Tigress Productions
TX 9pm, from Wednesday 5 October, Discovery
Commissioner Dan Korn
Directors Matt Brandon, Jonny Young, Martin Pailthorpe
Edit producer Sarah Peat
Executive producer Dick Colthurst
Production manager Tina Razdan
Post-house Films@59
Summary Eight celebrities are challenged to survive in some of the planet's most perilous and remote locations.

Dick Colthurst My tricks of the trade

- If you're working in difficult environments, hire directors with experience of the locations. They know how long things will really take and how to keep equipment and crews alive in 90% humidity, freezing conditions or 40°C heat
- Have trusted fixers in every corner of the globe. They're invaluable and often pull off the impossible
- Hold your nerve. You can usually turn adversity to your advantage and crossing your fingers seems a remarkably effective technique



But then we arrived in the jungle of Guyana with comedian Joe Pasquale, investigative reporter Donal MacIntyre and former SAS soldier and best-selling author Chris Ryan. It was supposed to be the end of the rainy season but when the team arrived at the location, it had disappeared overnight under 3ft of water – the first time in living memory the area had flooded.

While the fixer and his team of local Amerindians searched for a suitable area of higher ground, our celebrities enjoyed a longer than anticipated training period at a tourist lodge while the clock ate into our shooting time.

The rain never stopped – it was the heaviest for 35 years – but it turned into a blessing. Joe, Chris and Donal battled through tough conditions where there were no fish in the swollen rivers, no dry wood (or clothes) and nothing to hunt as all the animals had fled the floods. Amazingly, all three loved their time in the jungle and all the cameras survived the conditions.

After that, tropical storms on a desert island off Belize that hit *Dancing On Ice* judge Jason Gardiner and Aron Ralston – the guy who cut off his own arm after he got trapped in a canyon, on whom Oscar nominated *127 Hours* was based – were mere inconveniences.

Clockwise from left: comedian Joe Pasquale; Winter Olympics gold medallist Amy Williams with world champion freediver Tanya Streeter; cricket legend Freddie Flintoff; *Dancing On Ice* judge Jason Gardiner

ALONE IN THE WILD FILMING IN BELIZE



Martin Pailthorpe
Director

Idiot-proof? Hmm, not sure I can get away with that; maybe

tamper-proof would be a better way to describe the set-up of the cameras we gave Aron Ralston (below) and Jason Gardiner. We opted for Canon XF 105s, each gaffer-taped to within an inch of its life to prevent inquisitive fingers from changing any of the settings. We also gave them Sony Go Pros in underwater housings so they could film themselves snorkelling for shellfish.

Although Aron and Jason were utterly marooned, they did have our support from a neighbouring island. Each day at 9am and 4pm, we would exchange shot cards and dead batteries for fresh ones. To avoid being seen or heard, we would anchor at the far end of their island and our survival instructor, Marc Mouret, would snorkel into a drop-bag 100 metres from their camp, with the

fresh supplies double-dry-bagged to avoid getting them wet.

Then we would view their footage and send in notes. Each day's cards were ingested by technical supremo Parker Brown using Shot Put Pro to copy them onto dual hard-drives in a Caldigit chassis.

Even though you know the material has been ingested and backed up, it still takes a particularly steely nerve to format the cards for re-use.

And the only hiccup? When we thought one of the cameras had recorded for a full day with no audio. A potential disaster, averted when we found that the cheap speakers we were using to hear sound over the noise of generators and fans only played one leg of a stereo signal, and all the sound was on the 'mute' leg. Much relief and rums all round.

