

AL CAUDULLO PRODUCTIONS

Tales from the 3D Road at the Mongolian Golden Eagle Festival

**CUSTOMER:**

Al Caudullo Productions
Las Vegas, US

APPLICATION:

EDIUS 3D Preview Version

PROJECT:

Mongolian Golden Eagle Festival

By Al Caudullo

BACKGROUND

In the rugged highlands of western Mongolia, the ancient tradition of hunting with golden eagles has experienced a renaissance. Deep within the Altai Mountains, Kazakh hunters from across the Bayan-Ulgii province gather annually to celebrate this traditional falconry skill, competing in a series of age-old games and hunting competitions. Until recently, this custom was on the verge of disappearing. But in 2000, the Golden Eagle Festival was established to revive the tradition and promote it among the Kazakh's younger generations.

Traveling as far as 140 miles on horseback, arriving competitors are welcomed at the *ger* (felt-lined tent) encampment with a special presentation of Kazakh dance, music, and other folkloric performances.

The official opening ceremony begins with the dramatic parade of these rugged hunters on horseback with their eagles. The excitement continues as the hunters competitively exhibit

their traditional Kazakh dress and the hand-crafted falconry equipment and ornamentation of their adorned eagles.

THE SETTING

Above the stark, almost lunar Mongolian landscape, an eagle circled and pivoted in an equally empty but piercingly blue sky. The ease with which the great bird maneuvered and traversed the heavens contrasted with the rugged trail we had to follow in order to arrive at Mongolia's annual eagle festival.

Flying into Ulaanbaatar, Mongolia's capital, one of the first things you notice is how vast and overwhelming the Mongolian landscape is. It is easy to get lost here. Highways cover only a small portion of the country. And the road to the great eagle festival winds between enormous steppes and towering mountains. The eagle festival takes place amidst these barren heights.

And that is the easy route, the one my colleagues had taken earlier, after flying three hours westward to their jumping off point. My route to the festival was more complicated. Coming from the

capital later, I traveled four hours by an aging turboprop to Khovd and then transferred to a beaten up jeep for an eight hour trip across some of the sparest roads and trails imaginable.

My colleagues had brought in much of our production and editing gear earlier, including two Panasonic AG3DA1 cameras with matching NanoFlash 3D external recording units. The production kit also contained a RedRock Micro Matte Box, ND filters, a Vari-Zoom one hand controller, and assortment of SDHC CF cards and six 1 TB 2.5-inch hard drives to capture as much as possible. To keep us powered up and shooting, we used Panasonic batteries and Anton Bauer Dionic 90 batteries.

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We also carried in two laptops, one with Grass Valley™ EDIUS® 3D beta version software (now publicly available as a Preview Version). It may have been risky to take a beta version software package into field conditions like this, but what better way to test it than in a real-world application. And it performed beyond expectations. EDIUS was installed in a Toshiba Qosmio i7 laptop, running a 3 GHz CPU, 8 GB DDR3 RAM, with a lightning fast NVIDIA GTX 560M graphics card, with 1.5 GB DDR5 RAM.

Before I and my filmmakers had flown into the festival, our advance team carried in the heavy gear, which included a portable generator, gasoline, sleeping bags, and other cold weather items. The advance team consisted of Ganz, our guide, and Bimba, our driver. Their cross-country road trip from Ulaanbaatar lasted a week.

MAN. HORSE. AND EAGLE.

But the hardship and trouble in getting there was well worth it. The festival is spectacular. The birds' owners enter in ranks, mounted on horses. Decked out in full traditional regalia, the men themselves resemble the eagles. Thick, burly fur coats and leather boots cover most of them. All wear hard leather gloves to protect themselves from their eagles' steel-like talons. And more than a few sport red furred hats that resemble the crest of some great flying predator.

The culmination of the festival, however, rises to even greater heights. Perched high on the mountains' rocky crags, the eagles sit waiting. Far in the depths below, across an utterly empty

valley floor, devoid of everything but rocks, moves a slight figure. A man on a horse. It is the owner of one of the birds.

As the owner calls out and his eagle recognizes him, the massive bird takes flight. He soars against an azure sky, a wide expanse of heaven that contains not a single cloud. Only the form of the eagle can be seen. Climbing. Circling. Diving. And turning. Until it streaks down and alights on its owner's outstretched arm.

Man. Horse. And eagle. The combination produces a lethal hunting team. And the festival celebrates this millennia old tradition of nomadic culture in Mongolia. The mountains and enormous valley floors present a stage for this exhibit that retains the authenticity of the experience as generation upon generation of Mongol must have experienced it.

At the end of the day, I noticed something else across the valley floor. Walking towards it, I realized it was a two-humped Bactrian camel. Around the ungainly beast stood a young Mongol family, a man, his wife, and two small children. In his fur hat and layered purple coat, the husband's outfit almost sparkled in the setting sun. But even he was overshadowed by the camel, which was bedecked in a multi-colored blanket, saddle, and bridle.

Getting up closer now, I was able to see the young wife sitting astride the camel. As the animal rose off its knees, she extended her arm. Simultaneously, one of her children grabbed hold and was hoisted aboard the camel's back.





AI Caudullo

3D Award Winner, AI Caudullo, utilized his 30-plus years of video production experience as a foundation for stereoscopic image capture. 3D industry icon Sandy Climan, former CEO of 3Ality referred to Caudullo as “a 3D evangelist.”

After mastering 3D production techniques, Caudullo created and taught Asia’s first 3D production class at Mahidol University, Bangkok. In addition to training, Caudullo uses his vast 3D know how to consult major industry players on advancing their 3D hardware and software tools.

As principal of AI Caudullo Productions, AI served as 3D stereographer and 3D editor many on projects including film, TV, and corporate productions. Clients include Panasonic, Hitachi, NVIDIA, Imagimax Studios, 3DeeCentral, Polaroid, Spatial View, Toyota, and many others.

Such a dramatic act. But she achieved it with the grace and fluidity of a practiced routine. And then it occurred to me. All this magnificence. All this gala celebration. For generations it had been a practiced routine. A matter of survival. Nomadic families on camel and horseback, moving across harsh valleys, undulating steppe, and twisting rivers. Men tethered to their hunting eagles. This was the secret life behind the spectacle I had just witnessed.

PUTTING EDIUS TO THE TEST

During our on-site production, we stretched EDIUS’s capabilities to the limit and beyond. It never failed us. We used it in multiple environments, in everything from rugged Mongolian *gers* to dung-roofed housing. Our immediate concern was to be able to download volumes of 3D footage not only from our cameras and recorders, but to be able to check our dailies. This was to make sure our framing and 3D were within spec and keeping within the storyline. Our intern from Mahidol University International College, Parnop “Tommy” Siripornpak, had as his task that of data wrangler. His job was to download footage and use EDIUS’s 3D beta to create project files and sequences.

EDIUS was a marvel to work with, easily creating stereo pairs and stereo adjusting using only the Toshiba laptop and a 24-inch LG 3D CinemaDisplay monitor. It was a hit with our hosts and the eagle trainers who flocked around the screen in 3D glasses and adapted to watching 3D as naturally as they would call to their eagles. One

of the young eagle hunters took a special liking to the 3DeeSlide attached to my iPhone. He made a habit of taking it around to his friends and showing off the 3D footage from 3DeeCentral. 3D was a big hit. And it just goes to show how easy and fun it is to use this medium to build new audiences.

Other team members included, Dorn Ratanathasane and Sompao “Bee” Caudullo. Being a small documentary film team, each member of the team switched off jobs and worked on every facet of the production, including production stills and behind the scene camera work.



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