

Looking for dinosaurs in present-day London

Primeval is an ITV/Impossible Pictures production about an investigation into the appearance of dinosaurs in present-day London. Professor Nick Cutter (played by Douglas Henshall) leads a group through time to discover where the dinosaurs are coming from and why.

The series comprises six one hour episodes; the first three were shot by DP Jake Polonsky (*Hustle*, *Sister*, *Spooks*) and the final three by Adam Suschitzky (*The Shadow in the North*, *Middletown*, *Life on Mars*).

Ironically, for a series concerned with time travel, both DPs agree that the main filming challenge was simply not having enough time. Jake says, "We were filming big stunt sequences with effects and CGI on a TV schedule, which was extremely difficult as we wanted to have a very exciting camera style with lots of movement, almost constant use of Steadicam and as many shots as we could get to make the potential for an exciting edit. We filmed the distant past sequences in La Palma, one of the Canary Islands, where we found some incredible untouched volcanic landscapes that looked truly otherworldly."

"Generally, we used a lot of two camera coverage and knowing that we could easily break out another camera helped us complete what we wanted to do."

Adam agrees that *Primeval* was a very interesting and challenging shoot. He says that, "the amount of CGI content for a TV drama has rarely been done before, certainly not in this country. The style of the series was the best of all genres, some moments were horror, some comedy and some thriller and it offered great scope for the camera to reflect that in interesting ways."

Both DPs acknowledge that Kodak film stocks contributed greatly to the overall look and appearance of the series. Jake admits that he was very much pushing the film to the limit of 16mm. "We had many sequences where I

wanted to use a 90° shutter to give the action an extra edge," he says, "and for much of the time I was pushing the 7218 500T one stop to get the exposure I needed. Certainly it would have been better not to have gone that far, but I was satisfied that even at that stretch, I was getting a good image and the film is outstanding in the shadow areas—even places that read virtually nothing on the meter register—which is reassuring to know."

"Generally, we used a lot of two camera coverage and knowing that we could easily break out another camera helped us complete what we wanted to do. At a time when many productions are, I believe, prematurely going over to HD, it was great to find a production company who understood the advantages of sticking with film. In fact, it was the visual effects supervisor from CFC Framestore,

Christian Manz, who sat the producers down and showed them the difference in dynamic range between HD and Super 16 and that was one of the deciding factors in shooting film, that it was actually being advocated by post-production."

Adam was also pleased with his choice of film stocks. He says, "I wanted a very contemporary, sharp and crisp feel to my episodes so I opted for the slowest stocks that I could use. I began, for the first time, to use the 7201 50 daylight stock on all the exteriors and wherever possible on interiors as well because I absolutely loved the look of it. It's so

sharp and yet has a fantastic tonal range. In the UK, we often had very bright days in hugely contrasting areas such as dense forests and the stocks handled the contrasts immaculately. For a slightly different look, I opted to use 7212



The cast (l-r): Stephen (James Murray), Abby (Hannah Spearritt), Connor (Andrew Lee Potts), Ryan (Wakeling), Claudia (Lucy Brown).



Yandy Sahla, camera operator, Jake Polonsky, director of photography, and Cilla Ware, director on location in the Canary Islands.

100 out in the Canary Islands. This was to give a slightly warmer feel to the prehistoric-looking landscape."

Jake concludes, "I hope people will see the difference in image quality between a series like this and something like *Doctor Who*, which, although very well photographed, I think suffers from the decision to go on tape. The depth of image possible with Super 16 is I believe still more appealing than most video formats, which is worth remembering at a time when the decision to film Super 16 or HD for TV drama is becoming more of a regular debate."