

Wolf Camp

The Dutchers talk about the Project



For centuries, wolves have haunted the human imagination. It has been accepted as conventional wisdom that they are savage predators, creatures of nightmare. Determined to overcome such misconceptions, we spent six years in a

tented camp living with

and filming a pack of wolves. Wolves are so intelligent and elusive that they alter their behavior when closely observed by humans. If a wolf senses that it's being watched it most likely will run away. We knew in advance that seeing wolves at all is a rare enough occurrence; to see them demonstrate their social structure, their methods of communication, and their private family life requires special conditions.

If we were to film an intimate portrait of the wolf, we needed to get close enough to see into their eyes. By socializing with

the pack from the time they were pups, we were able to gain the wolves' trust and observe their behavior in a way that few people ever have.

On the edge of Idaho's Sawtooth Wilderness, we built the largest enclosure of its kind and created an environment where a pack of wolves could open their lives to us and accept us as just another part of their world.

While the wolves could not hunt or roam without boundaries, they were free to build their own society, choose their leader, and sort out their own disputes. We called them The Sawtooth Pack, and set out to capture their intimate lives on film, to dispel myths and show a side of wolves never seen before.

Over the course of the following years, the wolves matured, established a hierarchy, and even mated and produced offspring. We lived in a tented camp within the wolves' territory, a constant but unobtrusive presence, documenting, recording, and photographing life inside the pack.

Our approach, one of social partnership with the animals, has garnered discussion, debate, criticism, and, most often, appreciation and encouragement. As a result, audiences have become acquainted with an animal that, in addition to being a successful predator, is curious, playful, both independent, and resolutely devoted to family. This could

have never been achieved with impassive observation.

During this time, we formed a deep relationship with the wolves that went far beyond simple habituation to humans. It was the kind of

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unshakable trust that wolves usually share only with their own pack, a bond that would last a lifetime. Born between 1991 and 1996, the pack members now exist only in memory.

We now think of The Sawtooth Pack as ambassadors for their wild cousins. They didn't ask for that role, but they accepted it with more grace and beauty than we could ever hope for. Now it is up to us. If we have achieved anything, people will be able to make the connection between the wolves they see in our films and books and the wild wolves they now hear about from politicians and the mainstream media. Even if all they hear are stories of dangerous beasts and threats to livestock, hopefully now they also know the other side.