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CAST

Debbie Thureson Nancy
Steve Bond Joel
Lori Lethin Bobbie
Robert Wald Skip
Gayle Gannes Gail
Philip Wenckus Greg
Jackson Bostwick Mark O'Brien
Jackie Coogan Lester Tile
Connie Hunter Mary Sylvester
Ted Hayden Frank Sylvester
Gerry Goodrow Sgt. Parsons
Carel Struycken The Monster

CREW

Directed by **Edwin Scott Brown**
Produced by **Summer Brown**
Executive Producer **Joe Steinman**
Screenplay by **Summer** and **Edwin Brown**
Director of Photography **João Fernandes** (as "Teru Hayashi")
Edited by **Michael Barnard**
Music by **Don Peake**
Special Make-up and Effects **John Carl Buechler**





TRACKING THE PREY

by Ewan Cant

YOU ARE CORDIALLY INVITED TO A PARTY IN ANTICIPATION OF THE START OF "PREY." PLEASE BRING YOUR OWN CHOICE OF BEVERAGES, AND FEEL FREE TO BRING A BATHING SUIT AND TOWEL, AS THERE IS A SWIMMING POOL AND JACUZZI.

So begins the call sheets for *The Prey* – or simply *Prey*, as it was then known – as distributed to the cast and crew in the fall of 1979. The party to mark the start of production took place on October 12 of that year at the home of Greg H. Sims (then manager of actress Lori Lethin) in Marina del Rey, a seaside community just west of downtown Los Angeles. The invitation to bring along a bathing suit and towel was a portentous one – within a few short days, the young cast would find themselves frolicking in the cold waters of a mountain creek, all the while under the unseen, menacing gaze of a disfigured wild man intent on making these nubile guys and gals his next prey...

Made by writing/directing/producing duo Edwin and Summer Brown, *The Prey* is arguably one of the quirkiest, most idiosyncratic, overlooked and indeed undervalued entries in the annals of slasher movie history. In fact, up until now the film has barely registered in horror movie history at all – a fact that is no doubt in large part due to its patchy (and rather perplexing) release history, and its complete absence from the market since the days of VHS. Certainly, the numerous scathing reviews which litter the internet have hitherto discouraged all but the hardest of slasher movie fans from making the effort to track it down. But those plucky individuals who did stride out into the analogue wilderness to hunt down a copy of *The Prey* would have found themselves rewarded with a surprisingly accomplished, endearing little slice-and-dicer that hits plenty of the right slasher beats whilst never taking itself too seriously.

The Prey carries with it all the trappings of slasher cinema that I personally love – a beautiful, woodsy backdrop, a disfigured killer stalking the landscape, a handful of great gore effects and some fun, playful dialogue. Add to that a cast of genuinely likeable characters – yes, even, or perhaps *especially* Gail, with her infinite sass ("A lot of good that does me now, you asshole!") – a frantic score from *The Hills Have Eyes* (1977) composer Don Peake and



a blistering, fever pitch finale (and, of course, *that* ending), and you have yourself something really rather special, and wholeheartedly undeserving of the critical mauling it's sustained over the passage of time.

For many years, thanks to its relative obscurity and sheer lack of availability, a good deal of mystery has enshrouded *The Prey*. From the genesis of the utterly bizarre alternate "gypsy flashback" version which appears to have been distributed in the international market (more on that in Joe's Rubin's essay) to the relative anonymity of its makers, *The Prey* has been – and to some extent remains – a mystery wrapped in an enigma. And that's exactly what makes this movie so darn fascinating.

One of the major points of debate that has surrounded *The Prey* over the decades is the year in which it was made, with various internet sources claiming anywhere between 1978 and 1984. Of course, the main reason for this discrepancy is the time it took from wrapping principal photography to when the film was eventually released – 1984 being the year in which *The Prey* reached US theaters for a limited run, before being unceremoniously dumped on home video a few short months later (the video release was reviewed in the September 11, 1984 issue of *Variety*). The poster advertising the US home video release from Thorn EMI bears a 1983 copyright (assigned to New World Pictures), whilst the movie itself carries a 1980 copyright, assigned to the original production company, Essex Distributing. No wonder then that confusion regarding *The Prey's* actual year of production has persisted.

Thankfully, this particular area of the film's history need no longer remain a mystery. Alongside a copy of the shooting script, "final girl" Debbie Thureson was diligent enough to retain the call sheets, which break down in minute detail exactly which scene was to be shot on which date. This information, paired with the 45 minutes of outtakes which miraculously and inexplicably turned up in a storage unit, allow us to paint a highly accurate picture of how the production of *The Prey* unfolded.

Into the Woods

Principal photography on *The Prey* began on Monday, October 15 in Idyllwild, a small mountain town located in the San Bernardino Mountains, approximately 2½ hour's drive outside of Los Angeles. In keeping with the theme of the movie, the advice given to the cast and crew reads like a – rather informal, and oddly specific – hiker's guide:

Your SHOES are crucial to your happiness on this shoot. Hiking boots (broken-in) and sneakers are ideal. Do not wear leather soled shoes, shoes with any type of heel, or any shoes you really love. You will ruin your Frye boots, cowboy boots, Maud Frizon sandals, and anything in suede. You will also want to trade your feet in at the end of the day.

The advice continues:

CLOTHING: Given the temperature changes we will experience each day, dress in layers. Wear long pants, t-shirt, turtleneck, cotton shirt, flannel shirt, and a heavy sweater and/or down vest or ski jacket. Bring shorts and gloves. The first week is all daytime exteriors and it shouldn't be too cold. The second week however, has several night shoots, and you will want to wear everything you own.

There follows a list of other "items to consider" bringing along to the shoot, which include sunglasses, a hat, chapstick, sunscreen, an alarm clock, a tape deck, and, somewhat pointedly, "your own pillow" ("your room has several, but it's not your pillow").

Owing to the long drive up to Idyllwild, cast and crew were encouraged to travel up on the afternoon or evening of Sunday, October 14, with a dinner being offered at 8pm at Michelli's restaurant. Filming would take place over ten days during the course of the next two weeks – October 15-19 and October 22-26 – with the intervening weekend (Oct 20-21) being left free for cast and crew to either return home or remain in Idyllwild as they preferred (it was, however, made abundantly clear by production that the latter option would be at one's personal expense – this is low-budget filmmaking, after all!).

When comparing the filming schedule laid out in the call sheets and the outtakes footage (wherein the clapperboard helpfully indicates on which date certain sequences were *actually* shot), it seems that, for the most part, the production ran on schedule. Among the first few scenes to be lensed, on Monday, October 15, were the arrival of the six kids at their campsite, the following morning when they discover that Greg and Gail have gone, Nancy, Joel, Bobbie and Skip calling out for their missing friends and ultimately making the decision to go on with their trip.

The rest of that first week saw the filming of the early hiking sequences (both the six kids and the character of park ranger Mark O'Brien, who retraces their steps later in the film), Gail getting left behind, Joel and Skip on top of the rappelling rock (a double for the actual

rock), Skip's death, Bobbie's death and the climactic confrontation between Nancy, Mark and The Monster. Friday, October 19 was set aside for a second unit crew to film Joel's stunt double rappelling down the actual rock (the aptly named Suicide Rock, a granite outcrop which sits high above Idyllwild).

The second week of filming kicked off on Monday, October 22, with the first shot scheduled to take place at 9:00am. On this day they shot the final farewell between Nancy, Bobbie, Joel and Skip before the two guys head off to their fateful rappelling session, as well as the various hijinks down at the swimming grotto, including Nancy and Bobbie being spied upon, and their reaction to Joel's death screams. Interestingly, the call sheets for this day indicate that they were also due to shoot a sequence in which Gail's lifeless body is tossed into a shallow grave on top of Greg's body. This fleeting sequence, which was to be inserted just before the shot of Joel putting out their campfire, is mentioned in the script but was apparently never filmed:

CUT TO

106. A SHALLOW GRAVE. SAME TIME.

GREG lies at the bottom. Their gear is dumped on top of him; then GAIL; then some earth.

Perhaps the filmmakers ran out of time to shoot this sequence, or else encountered some sort of logistical difficulty – it's possible that the prospect of digging a grave deep enough to house two bodies was ultimately considered an unnecessary extravagance, or the crew simply didn't have time to do it. Either way, this planned sequence would end up being replaced with the scene later on in the movie in which ranger Mark discovers Gail's decomposing body in the undergrowth.

The rest of the week of October 22 to October 26 saw more hiking ("Man, am I ready for tonight!"), the arrival of the gang at the ranger station parking lot and finally, the nighttime sequences: the kids around the campfire, Greg's throat being ripped out and poor Frank and Mary Sylvester meeting their maker. Curiously, the outtakes for the Mary's death scene show the actress being throttled by The Monster, as opposed to being bludgeoned by his axe, as happens in the finished movie. This tallies with Mary's death as it's described in the original script:

MARY

Dear God!

She is about to scream when a branch CRACKS behind her. Mary whirls around and A pair of huge, deformed hands reach into frame and grab her around the neck.

Watching the outtakes of this sequence, it's tempting to suspect that, when they were reviewing the dailies, the filmmakers weren't entirely convinced by the actress' feigned death throes (eyes agog and tongue lolling!), and so made the decision to trim this in favor of a shot of a bloodied axe descending on her. Purely conjecture, of course...

Thursday October 25 was due to round off with a shoot at the nearby Lake Hemet, beginning at 4:00pm, where they planned to capture shots of both Joel and Frank Sylvester fishing (in separate sequences), and of Mary Sylvester washing their dishes at the lake. Given the absence of any fishing scenes in the finished movie, it seems likely that the filmmakers ran out of time on this day and were unable to relocate to Lake Hemet (something which goes a long way in explaining the moment in which Joel strolls out of the bushes, seemingly out of thin air, with a string of freshly-caught fish in hand – as the saying goes, "here's one I prepared earlier!"). The footage of Mary Sylvester was ultimately shot, but apparently at a later date, and not at Lake Hemet as planned.

Although not listed in the call sheets available to us, the outtakes indicate that the memorable scenes with *The Addams Family* (1964-1966) alumnus Jackie Coogan were filmed the following Monday, October 29. According to producer Summer Brown, this footage was shot at a location in Los Angeles.

A brief glimpse in the outtakes of a close-up on actor Jackson Bostwick (as ranger Mark O'Brien) outside his cabin, again accompanied by a slate dated October 29, suggests that the famous wide-mouthed frog gag was also filmed on this date – and thus *The Prey's* position in the annals of quirky slasher moviedom was secured.

The Plot Thickens

When reviewing the outtakes of *The Prey*, an interesting anomaly (or rather, anomalies) surfaces. Whilst the clapperboard on most of the footage indicates it was shot between October 15 and October 29, 1979, there are two passages where a 1980 date is listed on the slate. The lengthiest of these sections consists of bloopers of actor Jackson Bostwick



attempting to shoo away the gathering of vultures (for the most part unsuccessfully!) and is accompanied by a clapperboard with the date March 10, 1980. An examination of both the script and call sheets reveals that this entire sequence – wherein ranger Mark discovers Gail's body being preyed upon by vultures – is mentioned in neither document.

It would seem a reasonable assumption then that this particular sequence was conceived after the fact. Given that, for whatever reason, the scripted sequence of Gail's body being thrown into a shallow grave was apparently never filmed, perhaps the filmmakers decided that we still needed to see what had become of her. Perhaps they felt that the movie required another “shock” sequence. Or perhaps, quite simply, they wanted to fill out the running time.

The revelation that the vulture scene was shot in early 1980 tallies with an anecdote that actor Jackson Bostwick recounted during the Q&A panel at Texas Frightmare Weekend 2019, where he stated that this sequence was shot as a pick-up at a location “right in the middle of Bel Air” (a neighborhood on the Westside of Los Angeles). Jackson names the location as Lake Sherwood, but there doesn't appear to be a lake by that name in Bel Air – Lake Sherwood is in fact the name of an area (and reservoir) located in the northwestern part of Greater Los Angeles, some 40 miles from Downtown LA. Assuming that Jackson is specifically recalling that they shot near a lake (and not just an area with the name “Lake” in it), it's worth noting that there is indeed a body of water in the center of Bel Air: the Stone Canyon Reservoir. Based on online photographs, the area around the Stone Canyon Reservoir looks like it could, when photographed from the right angle, provide a reasonable facsimile of wilderness. What's more, the area has a history of being used as a movie location – Roman Polanski's *Chinatown* (1974), for example – although this is perhaps unexceptional given its close proximity to Hollywood. Nevertheless, the Stone Canyon Reservoir looks like a likely spot for LA-based filmmakers looking for a spot of nature a little closer to home.

There are additional details which suggest that the March 1980 pick-ups were shot near a body of water. For example, the other, much briefer anomalous section of the outtakes which shows a glimpse of a nighttime shoot with a clapperboard giving the date March 11, 1980 – the day after the filming of the vulture scene. Although the shot of the clapperboard is followed swiftly by a cut, the next piece of footage shows the character of Mary Sylvester wandering alone in the woods, on her way to wash their dishes (at a lake, according to the script and call sheets). Whilst a lake is not (clearly, at least) visible during this sequence – neither in the outtakes nor in the finished film – producer Summer Brown recalls that Mary going to wash the dishes was indeed shot as part of the pick-ups, so we can safely infer that this was most likely filmed at the same location and approximate date as the vulture scene.

Finally, we do get a few glimpses of a lake during the movie proper. Firstly, and most unambiguously, the “postcard sunset” shot of a lake (as described in the script) which appears approximately twenty minutes into the film and serves as part of the transition from the kids setting up camp to the campfire scene. Secondly, water can be discerned (just barely) in the background of the brief sequence in which Gail, alone and running through the woods, is scared by a flock of birds. Again, Summer recalls that this moment was most likely to have been filmed as part of the pick-ups. Certainly, it would make sense if both the vulture scene and the scene with Gail being scared by the birds were filmed on the same day, as presumably both required the services of an animal wrangler (Gary Gero is credited as “Wildlife Photographer”, but his IMDb profile reveals a long and prolific career as a wrangler/trainer of various animals).

Throwing a little additional light on the shooting of the 1980 pick-ups, Summer asserts: “We did do a few days in a park on Mulholland [Drive] above one of the canyons. There were sugar pines which grow at a lower elevation so [an] eagle eye may be able to discern the different pine needle formation. I think it was Stone Canyon Reservoir.”

But before we go getting ahead of ourselves, Summer is quick to maintain that the actual shots of Gail's decomposing body lying in the undergrowth had to have been filmed in Idyllwild, because this is where the late John Carl Buechler did all the make-up effects. Indeed, a close analysis of the sequence in which ranger Mark discovers Gail's body reveals that actress Gayle Gannes is never actually onscreen at the same time as the vultures, so it's perfectly feasible (if not a little confusing, given its absence from the call sheets and shooting script) that part of this scene was shot in LA, and part in Idyllwild. Clearly, there are some *Prey* mysteries we will never fully unravel!

The closing shot of the movie – the slow zoom into the opening of The Monster's fog-enshrouded cave – was filmed at Bronson Canyon, also known as Bronson Caves, a popular shooting location situated in Griffith Park close to Hollywood, and perhaps best known as the setting for the Batcave in the 1966-1968 *Batman* TV show.

Finally, Summer confirms that she, Edwin, director of photography João Fernandes (credited under the pseudonym of “Teru Hayashi”) and second assistant camera Phil Sparks returned to Idyllwild in late 1979 to capture the wintry vistas which convey the changing of the seasons, bridging from Nancy's confrontation with The Monster to the haunting reveal that she has borne his offspring.

Out of the Wilderness

In putting together this rather whistle-stop breakdown of the production of *The Prey*, it's my sincere hope that we've gone some way in illuminating the untold history of a curious, charming little slasher movie that has, for far too many years, languished in unwarranted obscurity. Certainly, there are still several facets of the movie that remain confounding (that Gypsy cut again, which I haven't even tried to touch upon and have instead left for Joe to cover in his valuable piece) – and perhaps in digging we have unearthed questions that we didn't have before. But an element of mystery is often what makes these restoration projects so alluring – and surely, it's no fun if we know the answers to absolutely *everything*, is it?

To say that, over these past few years, salvaging *The Prey* from the slasher wilderness and putting it back into the genre movie limelight where it belongs has been a personal crusade of mine is something of an understatement. It's a journey that's taken me many years, transported me halfway across the world to breathtaking landscapes, and, most importantly, afforded me the opportunity to meet some amazing people who I'm honored to now be able to consider my friends. Regardless of your thoughts on the movie itself (which I nevertheless hope are nothing but positive!), let this release stand as a testament to all those hearty souls who have so generously given their time and effort in making one horror fan's mad dream a reality.

Just like its monster, all *The Prey* ever wanted was a little love.

Ewan Cant will shortly be seeking to legally change his name to The Crispy Gypsy.





RESTORING SOMETHING THAT NEVER EXISTED: RECONSTRUCTING THE PREY

by Joe Rubin

As with nearly all low-budget horror films released in the 1980s, *The Prey* found most of its audience through its various home video releases. Although the United States only ever saw a single release – Thorn EMI's clamshell version of director Edwin Brown's original director's cut – the international market experienced *The Prey* in a wholly different edit, the origins of which are still baffling even to those involved in its creation.

A bit of background and context: when New World Pictures was bought from Roger Corman, its new owners were hungry for content to fill their library. They quickly got to work on a handful of fresh in-house productions, but also began searching for completed films they could pick up for distribution. One of their earliest acquisitions came to them via Essex Pictures, a very successful producer and distributor of big budget, 35mm hardcore features such as *Sex World* (1977) and *One Thousand and One Erotic Nights* (1982).

Like many sex film focused companies, Essex dreamed of breaking into the 'straight' market, initially taking on distribution duties for the R-rated sleaze fest, *Human Experiments* (1979), and then funding their own horror opus directed by one of their most successful filmmakers, Edwin Brown.

Despite having all the right ingredients to ride the *Friday the 13th* (1980) or *Just Before Dawn* (1981) coattails (while being shot nearly simultaneously with those two), *The Prey* didn't go anywhere in the US, until New World licensed it and, it appears, dumped it nearly straight to video.

But before *The Prey* landed on video stores across the States, Essex decided to beef it up; adding a nearly 25-minute flashback sequence to explain the killer's origin. This sequence, shot in the summer of 1981, nearly two years after principle photography on Edwin Brown's original cut had begun, was awkwardly shoehorned into the laid-back campfire chat session and resulted in the need to partially dub over some of the original dialogue in order to make the transition less awkward.

Re-cutting and adding footage to films which had failed to find distribution was a common practice in American exploitation films. Unfortunately, the methods by which these edits were often achieved were less than ideal for archival future-proofing and, when *The Prey's* campfire scene was hacked up to accommodate the newly-shot flashback, the edits were done in the original camera negative and the scraps of footage which were removed were likely thrown in the trash.

Luckily, Essex printed and cut a CRI (Color Reversal Internegative; a positive stock used to dupe negative images) of the deleted shots back into the camera negative for the original version. A new, 3 reel-insert kit of the Gypsy flashback was created for making prints of this version of the film, and Essex was quick to start selling it to each and every foreign market they could penetrate. Thus, two formal versions of *The Prey* existed. But not really...

As the video trading boom of the '90s exploded, with many collectors claiming to have longer, stronger and more shocking versions of countless trash classics, the International version of *The Prey* became a minor legend stateside with those who had a copy (falsely) proclaiming it to be "uncut". Yes, it ran nearly 20 minutes longer than the 80-minute US version, but when compared side by side, campfire scene edits notwithstanding, a whole bunch of other small changes would immediately spring out.

For reasons as mysterious as the rationale behind shooting the Gypsy flashback itself, roughly 6 minutes of mostly nature footage had been inexplicably shorn from the International version. And just as baffling, despite this cut running nearly 100 minutes, most of the home video editions of this version reference the 80-minute runtime of the original edit.

As a testament to the delirious fandom of *The Prey's* devotees, Arrow Video was adamant that both the original 80-minute director's cut and the roughly 97-minute International Cut be featured in all their glory. A simple task, one would assume. After all, camera negative for the 80-minute cut survived, and a CRI with original negative for the Gypsy specific footage was also available.

Then came the strangest discovery: the Gypsy version was identical in every way to the original cut, save for the Gypsy (and surrounding campfire) footage itself. None of the additional cuts to the nature footage (or banjo and fawn sequences) had been made in the film itself, implying that these particular cuts were not indicative of how the Gypsy version was originally intended to be seen.

After some deliberation, it was decided that, rather than leaving it 'as is,' the now-determined-to-be-VHS-exclusive Gypsy cut (which had also been dubbed into a number of different languages, including German and French) would be digitally recreated.

While cutting it down, another discovery was made: nearly all of the principle footage cuts, as omitted in the video version, were made at the start or ends of reels (the film is divided into 1000 ft. reels, each of which runs roughly 10 minutes). This cutting strategy implied a couple of possibilities for how and why the footage was omitted: first, if it was done on video, making cuts at reel changes would be something which could have been accomplished while creating a telecine master, and done with minimal after-the-fact editing. If these cuts were made in a yet undiscovered interpositive or CRI of the film, the edits would have been easy to achieve on a synchronizer, without having to splice and rejoin reels midway through. The overall takeaway being that, whatever the method, it was probably done as lazily as possible.

One noteworthy exception to the above theory remains: in the Gypsy cut negative, the campfire sequence leading up to the flashback itself contains substantially more nature and chit chat footage than the version released on tape. While in most cases, entire shots were removed in the video version, other instances of cutting account for as little as half a second. Why such intricate editorial changes were made in this one section of the Gypsy version remains completely unclear.

Joe Rubin is a film archivist and co-founder of Vinegar Syndrome.



ABOUT THE RESTORATION

US Theatrical Cut

The 35mm original camera negative of *The Prey* was scanned in 2K resolution on a 4K pin-registered Arriscan by OCN Labs, USA. Color grading was performed using DaVinci Resolve 16, and all image restoration was performed using Nucoda by Digital Vision. The soundtrack was transferred from the original 35mm optical soundtrack negative and restored using ProTools and Audacity.

Note: Due to severe fading in many of the film's optical effect sequences, there is periodic color flicker and hue inconsistencies.

International Cut

All footage for this version of the film were sourced from its 35mm original camera negative and scanned in 2K resolution on a 4K pin-registered Arriscan by OCN Labs, USA. Because no complete picture element for the International Cut of *The Prey* was apparently ever made, this version of the film was reconstructed using a video master as a reference.

Colorist **Lannie Lorence**

Restoration Supervisor **Joe Rubin**

Scanning Technician **Brandon Upson**

Lead Restoration Artist **Kurtis Spieler**

All film elements provided by Vinegar Syndrome.

PRODUCTION CREDITS

Disc and Booklet Produced by **Ewan Cant**
Executive Producers **Kevin Lambert, Francesco Simeoni**
Technical Producer **James White**
QC **Nora Mehenni, Alan Simmons**
Production Assistant **Samuel Thiery**
Blu-ray Mastering **David Mackenzie**
Subtitling **The Engine House Media Services**
Design **Obviously Creative**
Newly Commissioned Artwork by **Justin Osbourn**

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This release would not have been possible without the support and general cheerleading of the following individuals:

Edwin and Summer Brown – for making this wonderful slasher oddity, and for sharing their stories and friendship
Joe Rubin – for enabling my *Prey* dream every step of the way
Debbie Thureson – for being an incredible sport
Lori Lethin – for the constant words of encouragement
Gayle Gannes Rosenthal – for the life advice and BBQ sauce
Jackson Bostwick – wow, what a HUNK
Carel Struycken – the original Crispy Gypsy
Jim Kunz – for risking life and limb to “get the shot”
Michael Felsher – for his sterling work on the extras
David Gregory – for unearthing the outtakes
Jack Whiting – for withstanding hours of staring at footage of me in swim shorts
Amanda Reyes – my *Prey* bestie and Gail-in-training

To all of these happy campers, my eternal thanks.
Ewan Cant, August 2019.



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