

of the film is that, if you are willing to spend some time with Jake on his own terms, there is an ease that comes with it. Jake is at home in the world. When he sits down in a forest, it's like he's found his favourite chair and the clearing is his living room. He's soon dozing. Some viewers might be too, but that's alright. There's no rush. Where are you in a rush to get to? Just take it easy. Touch some grass. ♦

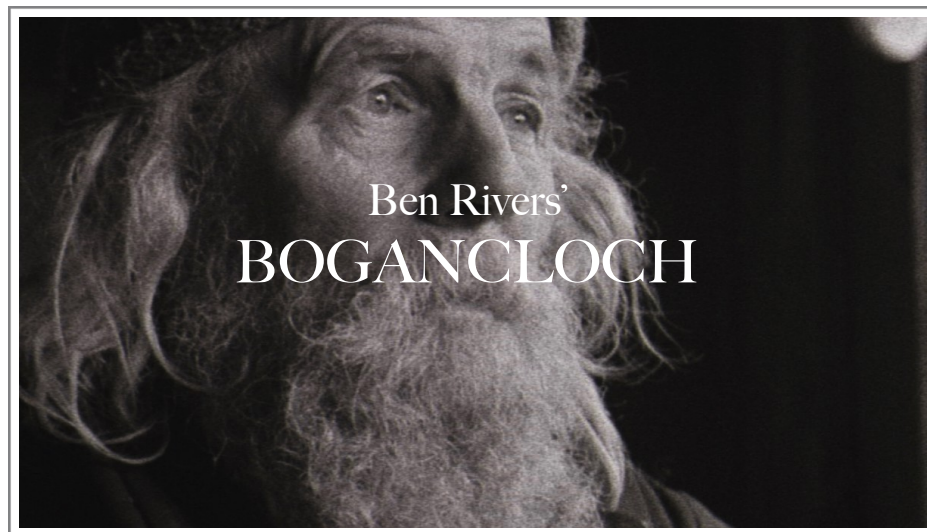
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ABOUT THE FILM

Bogancloch is where modern day hermit Jake Williams lives, nestled in a vast highland forest of Scotland. The film portrays his life throughout the seasons, with other people occasionally crossing into his otherwise solitary life. At the heart a song, an argument between life and death, each stating their case to rule over the world. The film is without exposition, it aims at something less recognisable, to a different existence of reality observed in discrete moments. A sequel to *Two Years At Sea* (2011), charting a subtly changing life in a radically changing world.

TRT: 86 min

In person: Ben Rivers

Special thanks to the Center for Ethnographic Media Arts, USC, Stephanie Spray, Tasnim Boufelfel, Jesse Lerner, Rebecca Baron, Irina Leimbacher, Ilana Coleman

Bogancloch by Timotheus Vermeulen

The following article was originally published by Little White Lies, May 29, 2025

In his 2011 film *Two Years at Sea*, artist/ filmmaker Ben Rivers decamped to Scottish wilds with his hand-cranked 16mm camera and hung out with a bearded loner named Jake Williams. The film did little more than capture the everyday minutiae of a man who had chosen to partition himself from urban society and the company of others, yet the resulting film played more like a pastoral post-apocalyptic riff on something like *The Omega Man*. It's over a decade later and we're back in the woods with Jake, still eking out a happy existence in his tumbledown shack and drinking in the pleasures of the rugged and serene landscape.

The key difference with this new film, *Bogancloch*, is that there is more interaction with other people, with Jake now presented as someone slowly reintegrating with a primitive form of society – but strictly on his own terms. There's a sequence where he's shown with a group of intrigued highschoolers as he demonstrates the working of the cosmos with use of a wilting pub parasol and some old bits of string. Later on, he's seen leading a nighttime sing-along of thematically fecund Scottish folk music. There's something enlivening and hopeful in Jake's world this time, where he sees potential and companionship in other people, even if for very short and sweet bursts.

The material is elevated by Rivers' typically-fastidious formal approach, where high contrast black-and-white film is processed in a way to leave glitches and blemishes in the frame, like the film itself is a relic that's been dug up from underneath a trees tump. Indeed, all of Rivers' films contain some element of this "found" quality to them, and in this instance you're made to feel as if Jake himself would have concocted this thing from old ends of film reels discovered in a ditch. The film and landscape are as one, with the visual degradation echoed in the moss, rust and grime we see on the screen.

With so little context given about Jake's situation and how he came to be out there alone, the film allows you instead to impose your own backstories and psychological justifications. There's one sequence in which he starts rifling through a box of old music tapes and giving a couple of them a listen; the crackling music sounds like it's from Asia somewhere, maybe India. You begin to wonder if Jake had been there and kept these tapes. Or maybe he was once married to an Indian woman way back when and we're suddenly party to his own little trip down memory lane. It's refreshing that Rivers and Williams have an understanding that, just because the camera is pointing at you, it doesn't mean you need to narrate your actions and speak to the audience down the lens.

And yet, there are elements of performance in the film, where scenes have been pre-agreed and set up for show. In the climactic shot of *Two Years at Sea*, Jake is seen floating slowly across a lake. In this film, he warms up the water in an old tin bath and just marinates there, this time the camera itself floating away like a bubble caught on the breeze, leaving us with another vision of blissful contentment.

Bogancloch by John Bleasdale

The following article was originally published by Sight and Sound, August 14, 2024

The silence of seclusion allows for other noises in *Bogancloch*. In the quiet away from the world and conversation, we hear birdsong, the wind through the pineneedles, the breaking of bracken, the crumple of gravel under the vulcanised rubber of a caravan's tires. Ben Rivers's new film is an old film and a new film. It's old in the sense that it returns the subject of one of his earliest shorts *This is My Land* (2006), as well as the feature *Two Years at Sea* (2011): Jake Williams, a man who lives in rich self-sufficiency in the forest in Aberdeenshire. He trundles about in a graffitied caravan before winding back home to a bungalow of dirty windows, cobwebs and smoke, glass jars of various shapes and sizes and a few cats. With his bald pate and long white beard, he looks like a mixture of Tolstoy and Gandalf, or maybe Radagast, given his connection to nature. When he pulls on a woollen hat, he also has an air of Pootle from *The Flumps* (1977-1988).

Rivers keeps his distance visually, allowing Williams to blend and even disappear into the landscape, but the audio is always intimately close. When a cat eats chicken bones, they break like tree trunks cracking. Hair and grain cross the screen, giving the film an archaic feel, though in the Instagram age, this kind of handmade authenticity can easily feel like a fetish. The first articulate sounds we hear in the film are songs on a cassette player, followed by Williams himself singing "Blue Skies." Other people cross Williams's path, fell walkers, folk singers: he even goes into a school to explain the Solar System, with the aid of a repurposed pub broolly, to a class of suitably baffled children.

But the film, and Williams himself, is happiest in solitude. Colour interludes of decaying photographs of foreign climes and exotic locations tell us he is an ex-sailor. Those songs on the cassettes are in a foreign language and hint at exotic romance. At one point, colour breaks into the present, bringing rust and autumn; as well as the surprising yellow of Jake's overalls. It also teases a potential sequel which Rivers has talked about making in colour. The pleasure