

Chatwill's Verdict

It is 6:00 AM in Dillard, Georgia, and the brightest thing in the sky is Venus, surrounded by millions of slowly fading stars and the quickly approaching sun. This is Rabun County (north east Georgia), high in the Great Smokey Mountains; UFO country according to the locals — and the site this morning of much illuminated activity: vans, generators, winnebagos, production vehicles...all headed for the Chattahoochee Forest for Day One of **Chatwill's Verdict**, an Argosy Film Production directed by William Fruet.

Three hours later, the unit is balanced on the edge of the Tallulah River, the grip and lighting departments (led by Lew Graydon and Scotty Allen respectively) clinging by their toenails to rocks in the middle of the river, reflecting light onto the scene. Charles Braive, the first assistant director has accidentally slipped, dislocated his ankle, and — sin of sins!!! — dumped his walkie-talkie into the drink. Despite all this the first scene, with the star Henry Silva and Leslie Graves, is soon fully covered. By noon the sun is high, the temperature is 80°F and shooting in November suddenly seems a whole lot easier to swallow.

Rabun County, surrounding the city of Clayton, has hosted a number of film productions: **Deliverance**, **Grizzly** and **The Long Riders** among them. **Chatwill's Verdict** is an action film that brings four hiking college kids into confrontation with a brutal murder deep in the backwoods. The plot thickens when they try to report the incident and the mountain society that turned its back on the killing endeavours to stop them.

Chatwill's Verdict

p.c. Argosy Films Ltd. (1980) **exec.p.** Herb Abramson **d.** William Fruet **assoc.p./p.man.** Patrick Doyle **p.sec.** Mary Young **acc't.** Jamie Crammond **a.d.(1st)** Charles Brave **cont.** Gillian Richardson **d.o.p.** Mark Irwin **cam.asst.** (1st) Carl Harvey **sd.mix** Ian Hendry **boom** Copy Sidall **gaf.** Douglas (Scotty) Allen **best boy** David Willetts **key grip** Lew Graydon **art d.** Fred Allen, Johnny McFarlane (asst.) **props mas.** Peter Fletcher **set dress.** Richard Allen **construc.man.** Frank Rickman **make-up** Pip Ayotte **ed.** Ralph Brunjes, Michael Fruet (asst.) **i.p.** Henry Silva, Barbara Gordon, Nickolas Campbell, Ralph Benmergui, Gina Dick, Joy Thompson, Jeff Toole, Sam Malkin, Alan Royal, John Rutter, Bill Gribble, Danone Camden, Jere Beery, Wallace Wilkinson, Lloyd Semlar, Stuart Culpepper, Leslie Graves, Kenneth Cannon, Randall Deal, Leonard Flory, Deborah Wind

Day One wraps with the unit racing up the mountain slopes, searching for sun to match the morning's shooting and wondering, five pages of action coverage per day is tough enough on level ground, but here?...

Ten days later, with executive producer Gene Slott and producer Herb Abramson carefully overseeing, we have had no more injuries, we have tarred and feathered a stunt man, rolled him down a mountain, flipped over his car (on the fifth, death-defying run at it), shot in caves, on cliffs, on boulders in raging rivers and finally, on level ground! The town site of Chatwill is our major set, by art director Fred Allen and his incredible crew of local craftsmen led by the invincible Frank Rickman. The location is an outlying section of Clayton, called Needy Creek, painted and propped and dressed into a perfect backwoods community, complete with an old schoolhouse (now General Store) which was bulldozed out of the mountains and delivered on a

flatbed through fifteen miles of switch-back roads in five hours!

When we arrive at Atlanta airport with our down parkas, we all feel a bit foolish; but by Day 10, with heavy frost and high winds, November is feeling like it's always felt. Chatwill Village is a joy to work in — a 360° dressed set — and from now on Henry Silva as Chatwill, and Nicholas Campbell as his young opponent, will match wits and come to terms with life and death in the mountains.

In the meantime, the crew will indulge in a steady diet of country fried steak, fried chicken, salt pork and smoked ham, will party at Sky Valley, avoid the City Limits Tavern, re-energize with the multitude of tape machines that thunder into the night, and generally squeeze as much out of 12 hours of daylight to be back home by Christmas. However, judging by the skill and enthusiasm of all the Georgians on the shoot, the offer to "ya'll come back now" will be taken up sooner than we can imagine.

Mark Irwin, csc

(Mark Irwin is director of photography for **Chatwill's Verdict**.)

Alligator Shoes

When **Alligator Shoes** is released sometime in 1981, critics may place it within the nascent genre of raw, loosely scripted features in which non-actors play roles based on their actual personalities and experience. The French film **Simon Barbès ou la vertu**, in which Ingrid Bourguoin portrays herself as an usherette in a Paris porno cinema, was a Critic's Choice at the 1980 Festival of Festivals. **Rude Boy**, starring "Clash" roadie Ray Gange doing his job, has also received critical attention and some popular success. However, Clay Borris, writer, director, and co-producer of **Alligator Shoes**, has been developing this technique with members of his family and friends in his casts and crews for over ten years.

Borris and his long-time friend, partner, and D.O.P., John Phillips, have pioneered what Phillips has described as "organic" filmmaking; that is, constructing a film organically from people's experiences, step-by-step. Their drama, **Rose's House**, is perhaps the best-known example of their method. It's a gritty, unsentimental, and moving portrait of Borris's Acadian mother Rose, re-enact-

ing events of her life running a Cabbagetown rooming house — and it won them the Silver Hugo in Chicago in 1978.

Now, with **Alligator Shoes**, in production in Toronto and the Stirling/Belleville area from November 4 to December 7, Borris and Phillips have broken into features, without compromising either their methods or their continuing commitment to the Borris family saga. The film centres on the struggle of brothers Garry Borris and Clay to keep their working-class family together amidst inner-city pressures and the arrival of their emotionally disturbed aunt, played by Ronald Jones, from New Brunswick. Miss Jones, whose suicide in the film is based on a real tragedy in the Borris family, is the first professional (though non-ACTRA) actress to appear in a Borris/Phillips production. The alligator shoes of the title appear in the story as a simple, resonant symbol. They're genuine 'classy' shoes, which Garry sees in a flashy window at Bloor and Bay. Outside of Cabbagetown — and definitely beyond his means — they are an appropriate focus for his misguided fantasies of social mobility.

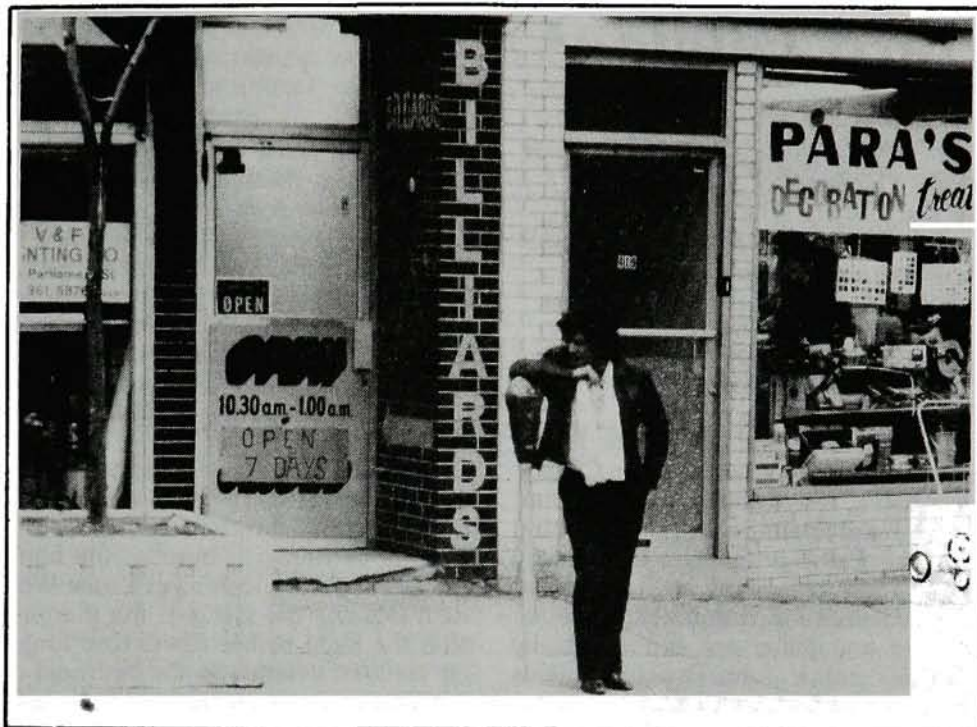
IN PROGRESS

On Wednesday, November 19, they were shooting the major Cabbagetown exteriors, which included a running chase scene down Parliament Street between Winchester and Gerrard. Beforehand, Borris introduced his actors and described the context of the scene. "These guys are the two guys that are gonna be chasing Garry down the street. They are brothers in real life, both boxers...In the film, they're just punks. They're chasing him down the street and then there's a whole pool hall scene we haven't shot yet, there's a big fight that takes place, me and my brother wipe the shit out of them. Because, you know why? The good guys always win (laughter). They get ripped off for a car that he (Garry) sold them, and they get mouthy and dare to call us dumb frogs, and then we beat the shit out of them." One of the boxers added, "They jam us in the muffler." "Damn right," said Borris. "What happens is, he comes out of the hotel, there's two guys chasing him, he runs down the street into the pool hall where his brother's playing pool, and the guys are there, and they're mouthin' off about how they want their money back, and they keep calling them frogs. So finally, the other brother just starts it by beating the shit out of one of them, and they start a big fight, bang bang bang, and then (slapping his hands together) they win. The fight scene in the pool hall's not scheduled for another two weeks. We're keeping it as the last scene, in case we get hurt, because we're doing our own stunts."

Outside the Winchester Hotel they prepared to shoot the chase. "I've always wanted to take over Parliament Street," commented Borris. "What a thrill. Even got two cops." (His first film was called **Parliament St.**) Northbound traffic was cut off by the two cops, and the crucial sequence was shot by tracking the runners from a crane dolly loaded on the back of a half-ton pickup. It took a while, and they were losing light, but, as one member of the crew commented, that's O.K. They have been lucky so far, be-

Alligator Shoes

p.c. Alligator Shoes Production (1980) p. John Phillips, Clay Borris **exec.p.** Don Haig, Barry Shapiro **d.** Clay Borris **asst. d.** Dennis Chapman **p. man.** Nick Gray **sc.** Clay Borris **d.o.p.** John Phillips **asst. cam.** John Gundy **3rd a.d.** Colin Brunton **light.** Robert Holmes **best boy** Dave Roberts **sd.** Brian Richmond **boom** Carol McBride **cont.** Barbara Ratz **stills** Anita Olanick **key grip** Mike Ray **pub.** Jack Cunningham **l.p.** Ronald Jones, Gary Borris, Clay Borris.



Part of the local colour of Parliament Street is Garry Borris, stopping to catch his breath in **Alligator Shoes**.

cause all the exterior stuff in the city has been under grey conditions, and a little darker won't matter. It reinforces the mood.

The only limitation on their use of evening light is the very special lens which they're using to shoot most of the film. It's a new prototype Cook 9-52 m.m. zoom, f. 2.4, which Phillips says is one of about twenty in the world. It is much sharper than a comparable Angenieux, for instance, and that extra sharpness is crucial for them, because they expect to blow the film up to 35 mm for theatrical release.

Alligator Shoes is a very low-budget feature. It will be made for less than \$500,000, and even that was hard to find. Phillips explained, "We've suffered, getting this film off the ground (laughing). It almost started several times, at one point it had a budget of over a million dollars...The money fell through...They didn't trust us because we didn't have a feature profit-making record. People respected the films we did, but they didn't make that much money...So we had to do some real fancy footwork to finally put together the money we did." Eventually, they were able to raise the funds on the basis of an initial grant from the Canada Council, because it beat the catch-22 of film financing and gave them the legitimacy of seed money. Phillips explains how they managed it. "They (the C.C.) do have a policy of putting money into low-

budget features. If it's a good project which couldn't get done any other way...If it's not a crassly commercial film, if you don't have stars and so on, if they respect the script and what you're trying to do, then they'll help out."

On the set, they're squeezing amazing production value out of their money. For some bird's-eye shots of Garry and Clay emerging from the pool hall, they managed to rent a cherry-picker for a mere \$25 an hour. After the sequence was shot, Borris joked with one of his cameramen. "So, you like that shot? Three times, eh, &*oç*!? Better be worth it; if you blew it it'll be the last thing you blow..." Three of the production assistants got five weeks leave of absence from Sheridan College to work on the entirely non-union film. One of them commented, about not getting paid: "I don't care. It's just great to be working on the film, that's all."

Robert Fulford, editor of *Saturday Night* magazine and a former film critic for the *Toronto Star*, called **Rose's House** "rough, but unrelenting and sometimes brilliant." Judging from the dedication and vitality in evidence on the set of **Alligator Shoes**, it may surpass that praise, eliminating the technical roughness and sustaining the particular brilliance of other Borris/Phillips "chunks of life".

Christopher Lowry