

Bernard Gosselin's

## L'Anticoste

Rising out of the Gulf of St. Lawrence, surrounded by treacherous shoals and dangerous currents, Anticoste is an island of jagged rocks, wind-swept cliffs, deep green forests, pebble-bottomed salmon rivers and a hardy breed of people preoccupied with the simpler things in life. Named "Anticoste" ("Old Ship Wrecker") by the first French mariners, it is a land so immense that you could easily fit the island of Montreal within it 17 times. Yet, it is populated by only 347 permanent inhabitants, most of them in the island's only village, Port Meunier.

It is this island, this green band of forest over an outcropping of rock, that documentary filmmaker Bernard Gosselin chose as the subject of his latest film. Shot during a three-year period, *L'Anticoste* is a rambling look at the island from every conceivable angle available to a filmmaker — short of fictionalization.

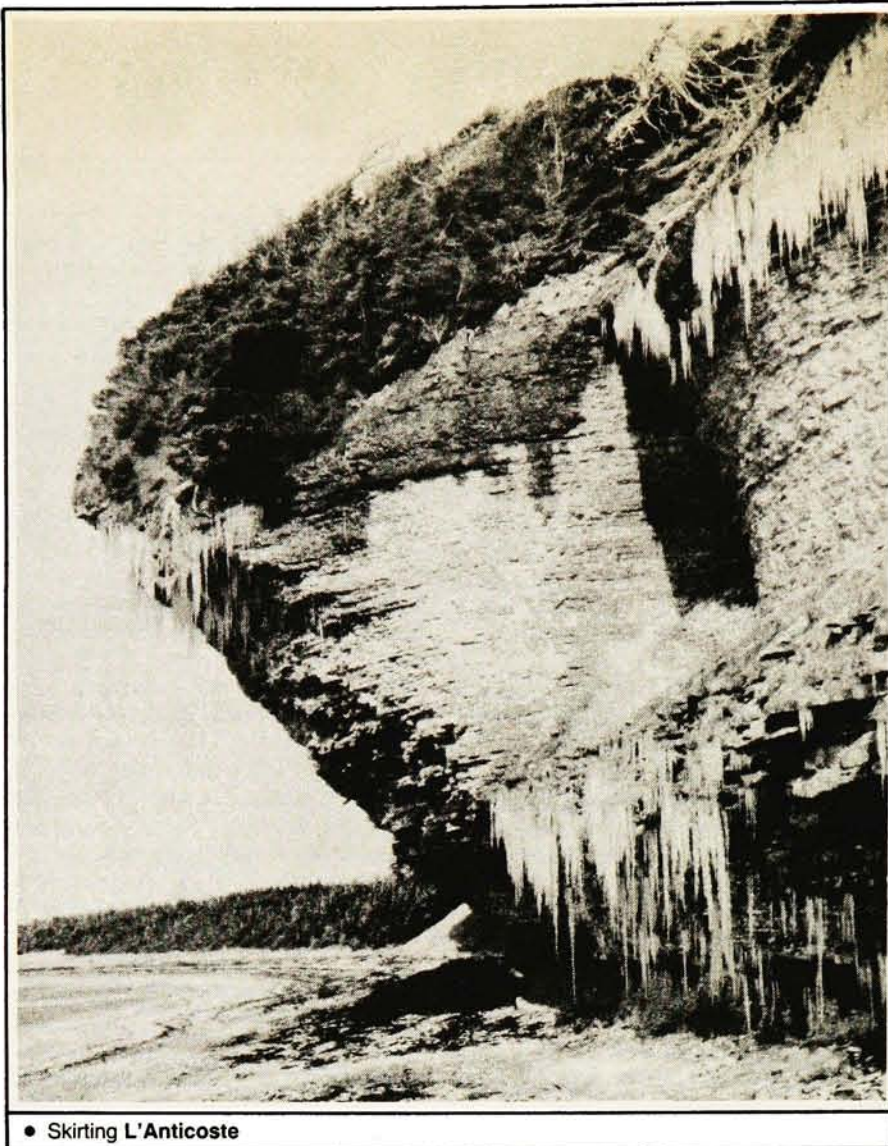
First named "Nasticotec" by the original Montagnais Indians, literally "place to hunt bear", the island has long been the bane of sailors who steer well clear of its treacherous shores. The numerous hulks of grounded ships that today surround the island are a testament to its reputation.

Bought outright by Henri Meunier, a French millionaire chocolate-manufacturer, around the turn of the century, the island was transformed into his private hunting domain, where he reigned as lord and master. Its residents became his employees, forbidden to own land or to hunt without his permission; unwanted residents were simply expropriated. Bears were considered a nuisance, so they were exterminated. Every spring, when he arrived from Europe for the summer season, the entire village would meet him at the dock, in their best Sunday clothes, and they would play *La Marseillaise*. They built him his Chateau, where he entertained his rich friends, and when he died, they mourned him.

The new owner, Consolidated-Bathurst, again made it a private domain. The residents, still forbidden to own the land on which they were born, were confined to cutting timber and manning the fish-canneries. When head office ordered the burning of Meunier's Chateau — to rid itself of the maintenance costs — the islanders obeyed, with the regret of those who are powerless.

Yet, despite all the 'invasions' of their land, the residents still feel a sense of belonging. This harmony between the island and its people is a strong undercurrent of the film. As Gosselin admits, his first intention was to show their liberation from the external manipulation of their island. But the islanders proved more preoccupied with the beauty of a sunset, the freshness of the breeze and the majesty of a passing eagle.

Instead of a straight, clear narrative,



• Skirting L'Anticoste

Gosselin uses a collage-like approach throughout his film, often shifting his perspective from place (i.e. physical, geological, geographical images and descriptions, etc.) to people (day-to-day living, observations about themselves, their hopes about the future, their children...), and time (the island's quaint history revealed in bits, intercut by bits of the other two categories).

At the hands of someone else, all this might be an unsightly hodge-podge of questionable value, but Gosselin knows his craft. Seamless editing and insightful arrangements make this film flow with an illusion of orderly progression.

Photographically, the island is rendered glorious, with its winding coast line, cliffs, cascading streams, deer and fox, salmon skimming winding rivers, village kids noisily pushing a homemade box-cart over a freshly-paved, steaming, black road... The camera shifts from wide-angle, island panoramas, to the intimacy of a river bed, to stunning aerial shots from roving helicopters.

Gosselin has a particular knack for capturing the essence of a person on celluloid. As in his *Le Canot à Renaud à Thomas*, he allows his subjects to speak freely and easily, as naturally as if they were in their own living rooms talking to a friend. Yet, in both these films, the subjects are, for the most part, the very antithesis of 'communicators'. Self-described as plain, ordinary people, they speak the local idiom with thick accents, some are poorly educated, and they are unfamiliar with microphones.

In *L'Anticoste*, one man speaks of fishing for the elusive salmon. He does so with tenderness, passion, respect for the fish. He describes his endless hours in roiling ice-cold rivers trying to tease the fish onto his hook, while it waits, watching and wary. To such a man fishing is not a pastime but a calling.

Gosselin's method allows the subjects to be their own directors, control-

ling how they are perceived by others. At one dinner party where only women are invited (the husband of the hostess is sent to the basement with a six-inch TV), the ladies have a 'girl-talk' session over fine food and wine. At one point, when one of them says something particularly funny but slightly off-colour, another laughs with the rest and tells the cameraman "Oh, don't cut that one out. It's just too good!"

Both the island and its people are rendered in their most favorable light. There are no garbage heaps on this island (what, no sewers?), no cemeteries (what, no dying?); there seem to be no crimes or psychological problems (what, no human weaknesses?). This perception is sorely incomplete and subjective, but understandable given the director's 'safe' approach. But just as bears can no longer be found on the island, it's hard to believe that paradise can be — though we can still be content with the film.

One individual in the film, a young stranger who has taken a month to circle the island in a one-man canoe, is symbolic of this approach. Paddling around the island in a personal journey of discovery, he hugs the coast as close as he can and sees incredible vistas of coastline and wildlife. Around each new corner is a scene as beautiful and as unique as the last. He is content with the island's edge, with what is at his grasp. Yet, he knows nothing of the deep and varied forest that is just beyond his line of sight. That, too, would have been an incredible journey.

André Guy Arseneault •

**L'ANTICOSTE** d. Bernard Gosselin d.o.p. Bernard Gosselin, Martin Leclerc sd. Esther Auger, Claude Beaugrand, Serge Beauchemin m. Kevin Brakeny ed. Bernard Gosselin, Michelle Guerin colour 16mm running time 120 min. 10 secs.

Michel Régnier's

## La Casa

Documentaries on Third World cities and shelter have become the specialty of Canadian filmmaker Michel Régnier. His latest film, *La Casa*, is a 90-minute production sponsored by the National Film Board of Canada which focuses on a 22-member family living in one of Ecuador's mushrooming slum settlements. Overcrowded in their two-room, dirt-floor shack, five members choose to move out and build their own house on the slum's periphery. As we learn in the film, it is a common situation throughout Asia, Africa and Latin America. Today, over 400 million people are homeless in the Third World — most of them crowded into sprawling slums and squatter settlements.

Exposing such issues has been Régnier's *forté*. During the early '70s, he directed a series of films called *Urba 2000*, and in 1976 launched numerous others for Habitat and the United Nations. Many of these films were concerned with the closely related problems of shelter and population growth in the Third World. *La Casa* repeats these themes, but unlike some of his previous work, it exposes the symptoms of the housing problem while neglecting the causes. *La Casa* thus becomes just another film about poverty.

Régnier, however, departs from the technical and distant, journalistic style common to such films. In *La Casa*, there's a genuine feeling of concern for the wide range of issues affecting the people. The family lives on the outskirts of Guayaquil, Ecuador's second largest city. They have occupied their land illegally and built a home on it. Like most people in the area, their rundown shack has no running water, electricity or sanitation services. They have often been threatened with eviction or the demolition of their home. In one sequence, the community confronts privately-hired bulldozers preparing to overrun a whole row of houses. Although Régnier touches on each of these issues, he fails to show how they are related.

The film is made up of a series of testimonials from family members, each delving into different situations. In one interview, the mother talks about her children and their immediate problems — food, health and education. Her testimony reminds us that families of 10 children or more are common in Latin America today. In another interview, an older man in the family, a mechanic, tells us of his fear for his job and of the poor income he earns.

Maria, one of the daughters, explains how she tends to her senile father, cares for the younger kids but nonetheless dreams about a different future. "I'm young", she says, "and have to help out the family while I'm here." These statements do confirm the family bonds but, since they fail to focus on any common issue or person, they seem discon-