

THE ENDLESS SUMMER

Directed by Bruce Brown
Produced by Robert Bagley and Bruce Brown
Distributed by Bruce Brown Films
Released in 1966

Three things keep this Spartan documentary perpetually entertaining—the skill of profiled surfers Michael Hynson and Robert August, the beautiful locations, and the music.

The surfers are California boys who set out to test their skills against the unknown, uncrowded waters of the world. They travel to Africa, Australia, New Zealand, Fiji, and Hawaii, journeying for a year. Their progress is tracked by documentarian Bruce Brown, author of several earlier less ambitious films bringing attention to the emerging sport of surfing.

In this film his presence is constant, narrating the proceedings, and occasionally showing up on the screen, himself. Brown's apparent skill at, and enthusiasm for, surfing permeates the film, providing a viewer totally ignorant of the activity what he needs to appreciate and enjoy the footage. Brown is the third man in this global odyssey, but he presents the material with a necessary sense of reality, occasionally lapsing into a contrived jokiness made all the more difficult by the acting inabilities of his two stars.

The music theme, an easygoing, wordless lullaby extolling perpetual sand, sun, and surf through electric guitar, is attributed to the Sandals. But the film is loaded with light orchestral ditties that lend to the proceedings an air of freedom and insouciance. They are unattributed. *The Endless Summer* relies a great deal on the appropriateness of the music as, apparently, no live sound can be heard in the film, and the final soundtrack consists of music, lots of narration, and some stock sounds of crashing waves. A few moments of illusionary sound-picture synergy are in evidence, but the lack of good sound is no drawback. In fact, the absence is hardly noticeable. The narration is serviceable, but a little too cheeky. The music does a very good job, despite the awkward transitions that are always to be expected when a film is not scored.

Sound is not a real problem because the visuals are so outstanding. But the story is compelling as well. At some points of the film it becomes less about surfing than discovery—seeing new lands, meeting new friends, accepting the dangers and inconveniences of international travel in order to see something untrammelled, clean, and wondrous. The areas to which Michael Hynson and Robert August traveled had been discovered by white men centuries before, but at almost all the places they visited, surfing was an obscure pastime or was unheard of. What lasts about this film is the sense that these two young men were surfing in some of the best waters in the world before the rest of the world learned about them. Now, with the incredible changes in international travel resulting from jet aircraft, the most inaccessible places in the world can be reached usually within a day's travel.

Though the end of the film comes suddenly and awkwardly, devoid of grand narration, the choice is understandable. What is lost in philosophical luster is gained in the pleasures of simple fun. Bruce Brown doesn't seem to be concerned with issues of purpose and meaning,

and, though the film is strong enough to embrace the age-old symbolism of the ocean as death-metaphor, Brown decides to just have a good time and wind up the film like a casual conversation left unfinished, as if interrupted by an obligation to welcome arriving guests.

Explorers of yore found unspoiled lands sometimes inhabited by unspoiled people, but, perhaps, lamented the crass commercialism that followed in their wake, as greed and violence made a devastating show. Just as exploitation and destruction scoured away these lost beauties, many of the locations we vicariously enjoy in *The Endless Summer* are probably now the domain of resorts and hotels, and trinket marketeers. Thankfully for us, the thrill of discovery is this time preserved, in a cinematic gem.