



The Coal Miner's Day

A film by Gaël Mocaër
An Icarus Films Release

2014 / 80 minutes / France / An Icarus Films Release

“Works beautifully; a droll interrogation of how documentary filmmakers interact with their subjects, as well as an opportunity to glimpse working conditions in a remote and rarely-visited corner of Europe.”

—The Hollywood Reporter

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SYNOPSIS

“That’s the fire emergency system. If there’s a fire, it bursts and the water falls down,” one of the mineworkers explains. He is talking about a few bags of water, all the size of a fist, somewhat haphazardly hung from the low ceiling of the mineshaft. “Like a huge waterfall.”

Every day hundreds of men risk life and limb going down into the Buzhanska mine in the Ukraine to mine coal with rusty old tools from the Soviet era. It is heavy, unhealthy, hazardous work, which thanks to the relatively high pay—two to four times what people earn in the city—is nevertheless tempting to many young men. Once a year, they are honored during the Day of the Mineworker—another relic from the Soviet era, when the most deserving workers receive a rose from the director of the mine in a kitschy ceremony.

For the rest of the year the workers are ignored, pestered or intimidated by their bosses, and no one is concerned with their safety. *THE COAL MINER’S DAY* documents their work underground, their comradeship and dissatisfaction in and around the mine over the course of a year. Gradually overcoming the skepticism of the mineworkers, the filmmaker captures a series of oppressive, revealing moments.

SELECTED FILM FESTIVALS

Golden Owl
International Film Festival Cinerama BC 2014

Official Selection
International Documentary Film Festival Amsterdam (IDFA) 2013

Official Selection
Docudays on Human Rights Film Festival, Kiev 2014

Official Selection
Boulder International Film Festival, Bradford 2014

Official Selection
Gdańsk DocFilm Festival 2014

Official Selection
Taiwan International Documentary Festival 2014

ABOUT THE DIRECTOR

Gaël Mocaër, born in 1972 in Bayonne. Mocaër started as a chief editor in 1996 for several production companies and TV channels. "To tell his own stories" has been his chief pursuit ever since.

In 1999, he bought a small camera and went to Madagascar to live for 6 months with "Rickshaw" drivers. His first documentary *A Shadow Between Two Wheels* was selected in and awarded by many festivals and was later acquired by several television channels. In 2001, he shot *Antisocial*, a satirical short film that won first prize at the Beziers Film Festival. In 2002, he directed *Madagascar, Seven Months of Chaos*, which tells the chronicles of a country bordering the civil war following an electoral dispute. The same year, war broke out in Ivory Coast. After a week of shooting in Abidjan, he was arrested by the DST, imprisoned and accused of spying. All the images were destroyed. In 2003, he directed *Saint Marie Island Memories*, a documentary that traces the turbulent history of a small island of Madagascar. In the same year, he worked for the news agency CAPA and joined Iraq where war is raging. In 2005, returning to Madagascar, where he began to gain interest in funeral rituals and filmed *The Land of the Ancestors*, an ethnographic film about the exhumation of those dead in Betsimisaraka. In 2007, he shot *Madagascar, Whales and Men*. Meanwhile, he began to shoot his first feature film, *No Popcorn on the Floor*. After a year of diving into the circle of independent cinema in Bayonne, l'Atalanta, the film was released in April 2009. In November of the same year, he met the photographer Yuri Bilak, who brought him to the depth of a coalmine in Ukraine. He began his two-year-long filming project, *The Coal Miner's Day*, in the coalmine 400 meters underneath the surface of the earth. In March 2011 and again in September, Mocaër returned to the wars in Benghazi and Tripoli, and filmed the fall of the dictatorship of Gaddafi in Libya, where he co-produced two reportages there for the channel ARTE. In 2013, he finished editing his feature documentary film, *The Coal Miner's Day*.

Selective Filmography:

The Coal Miner's Day (2013)

No Popcorn on the Floor (2009)

Kindia (2013)

Madagascar, Whales and Men (2010)

Madagascar, on the Ancestor's Land (2005)

India Day (2003)

Memories of Saint Mary Island (2003)

Madagascar, Seven Months of Chaos (2002)

Ivory Coast, the Bloody War (2002)

A Shadow Between Two Wheels (2002)

DIRECTOR'S STATEMENT

My film is an experience about imprisonment, whether physical or mental. Faces with fences and serial numbers. The prison world of coal spares neither body nor soul. To shoot this documentary, it took me more than two years and few stays of several months in the mine near Bouzhanska Novovolynsk in north-western Ukraine. A place that winter cut from any desire to live in (temperature drops to -30 °C) and probably far from any of our dreams.

There, the pride to be a black maw is stronger than time, history and fear that hold those men. To come back alive from a dive of 375 meters in the bowels of earth is a daily fight. To be accepted, and once being one of them, let the ogre eat oneself early in the morning in an uproar scrap of metal that wrinkle and collide. To be flattened to the ground in the black dust and then to be digested with hoses and carpets. Finally being spat with the feeling of having filmed the bowels of the earth and its workers. I wanted to shoot an invisible world that nobody cares today.

On the black foam on their lips, they stuck a cigarette and cough until their lungs will explode. As strong as a detergent, vodka pickle their throat. They spit the little saliva still left. Meanwhile, a sickle and a hammer dance above their heads. Meanwhile, I shoot.

These miners are neither heroes nor the damned of earth. I filmed them as they are, with their faults, their stares and their humour.

I've always been attracted by the disappearance worlds, universes in ruins. In all my documentaries, I hung my camera as a slender hope, that is to say, often alone, without insurance and through uncertain contexts.

What one calls all the time "cinema of reality" here is, as for me, "really", at work. From my initial journey in rickety elevator to the depths galleries, those uncertain, seep, sticky, until at times when coal miners challenge me, "Shoot! Shoot! "While my camera can record only a wooden ceiling collapsing. And the possible death of these men. And the terrible insignificance of these images that could never have reach you.

—Gaël Mocaër

ABOUT THE BOUZHANSKA MINE

Opened in 1992 in the countryside, the Bouzhanska mine is 10 kilometers from Novovolynsk, a major mining town in north-western Ukraine. The mine is six miles away from the Polish border and thus Europe. In the region, there are six operating mines: Bouzhanska is the smallest of them. The state firm hires 1,000 people and runs 24 hours a day and 365 days a year.

Everyday more than 600 miners descend into the bowels of the earth. The teams take turns every 6 hours. Other employees work on the "surface"—offices, workshops and logistics mainly. On the site, there is also a cafeteria, an infirmary and a sauna.

The average salary is 300 Euros per month. Miners working in the bowels earn 500 Euros while those on the surface areas receive only half. Despite the risks, many young people are trying their luck as if such income may seem trivial. The coal mines are considered the best employers in the region because wages for those jobs in the town are much lower, between 70 and 130 Euros.

Although Ukraine has claimed its independence since 1991, the imprint of the Russian big brother is still very strong in Bouzhanska. The extraction equipment is from Russia, the Russian crane, the locker rooms are identical to those used by Russian soldiers, the belt buckles are stamped with the hammer and sickle, and the technical vocabulary is Russian, not to mention the red star is still present.

With its 1,000 tons of coal mined each day Bouzhanska feeds Bourchtyn power plant some 30 miles away. Coal is conveyed by rail or truck.

Two weeks before Mocaër's arrival, a new vein of coal was updated. It will take several months for men to dig galleries, reach and power to exploit it. Experts estimate that the coal in the mine can run for at least 50 years.

IN THE PRESS

"The film works beautifully as a droll interrogation of how documentary filmmakers interact with their subjects, as well as an opportunity to glimpse working conditions in a remote and rarely-visited corner of Europe." —*The Hollywood Reporter*

"Top 10 movies to watch during DocuDays Film Festival in Kyiv. Mocaer aims to show 'airless, lightless, spaceless world of crawling and bowed men,' who work for Bouzhanska coalmine in northwestern Ukraine." —*KyivPost*

"*The Coal Miner's Day* allowed a more human-centric insight into the life of coal miners in the Ukraine." —*Champion Up North*

FILM CREDITS

Film Title:	<i>The Coal Miner's Day</i>
Original Title:	<i>Le jour du mineur</i>
Country of Production:	France
Year:	2013
Running time:	80 minutes
Format:	HD Digital Video

Director:	Gaël Mocaër
Cinematography/Sound/Editing:	Gaël Mocaër
Production:	Xenia Maingot and Gaël Mocaër
Co-Production:	Le Fresnoy

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