UC SANTA BARBARA
THE Current

October 8, 2020
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Track Star

Originally from Wyoming, “a state with wonderful biodiversity, landscapes and very few people,” Chris Jenkins’s early adoration of nature only intensified when his family moved for a time to Africa.

“Some of the fondest memories from my childhood are of remote places with wild animals,” he said.

Fitting, then, that Jenkins turned his passion into a career as a documentary filmmaker. His favorite subject — nature. Also the head of production in UC Santa Barbara’s film and media studies department, his courses include GreenScreen, a competitive and popular offering in environmental media production.

“The class has an amazing track record of producing festival-worth films,” Jenkins said of GreenScreen, for which he annually selects only 16 students — and greenlights four films for production.

Among the recent crop is “10 Miles Out,” a documentary ode to backpacking in the Los Padres National Forest, conceived and directed by alumnus Preston Maag. The film will screen as part of the NatureTrack Film Festival — running online Friday, Oct. 9 through Sunday, Oct. 18 — after being postponed from March due to the pandemic.

“Being recognized for your work is always an honor, so I’m very grateful that our film was selected for NatureTrack,” Maag said. “When I was part of the GreenScreen class, NatureTrack was one of the festivals I wrote down as a goal for submissions,

so to see it come to fruition is special.”

Based on a belief that a deeper understanding of, and connection to, the natural world enriches our lives, “10 Miles Out” is an immersive journey into the captivating world of backpacking. Maag’s documentary follows the adventures of backpackers of various skill and experience levels — from amateurs to aficionados — as they navigate the Los Padres National Forest from Ventura to Monterey. Bonded by their love of nature, the backpackers reveal the reward of the journey can be over the destination.

Maag was inspired to make the movie after catching the backpacking bug shortly before he was selected for GreenScreen.

“My friend took me on a brief overnight trip into the Los Padres National Forest just above Santa Barbara and I was immediately hooked,” he recalled. “Coming from a camping background where my supplies came from the bed of my car, backpacking kept all the gear on my back. As an avid hiker, this gave me the option of hiking to beautiful places and rather than hiking back, being able to setup camp where nobody else was. After that first trip, I felt inclined to share my experience with people in the form of a film.”

There couldn’t be a much more perfect landing spot for Maag’s first festival than NatureTrack, according to Jenkins, an active partner in the event for several years.

I have a keen interest in nature, wildlife and the outdoors, so it’s been wonderful to collaborate with the NatureTrack Film Festival that is dedicated to these kinds of stories,” he said. “I am really proud of Preston and I believe his crew had a fantastic time as they put their film together. The founders of NatureTrack have been so incredibly supportive of our students, and I really look forward to continuing to build this relationship.

“Film festivals are the ideal place for filmmakers to connect with like-minded individuals,” Jenkins continued. “Many of the films that I’ve worked on came from connections that started at film festivals. I always encourage students to submit to festivals and do their homework regarding the other films in the festival so they can meet other filmmakers, make connections and grow their possibilities.”

About UC Santa Barbara

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