

Otters 1000 Word Report

Filming Otters proved to be a challenge. The main obstacle was coronavirus, which limited my filming chances. Otters are notoriously shy and evasive, which meant doing my homework.

Our field exercises with Dave allowed us to film in a water environment. With the task of showing how Storm Ciara impacted Pembrokeshire, we set out with a clear objective. The rocks on the road was an interesting subject to film with how it disturbed the everyday livelihood of village communities. In my short poetic documentary, I demonstrated different filming techniques. Panning from left to right smoothly adds movement to a shot and establishes the geography of a location. I had the opportunity to use Dave's Sony HXR NX200, which had inbuilt ND filters. ND Filters allow you to film better in sunny conditions. They effectively work as sunglasses for the camera. We depended on the conditions to get a perfect shot. The Sony allowed me to film slow-motion footage of waves crashing into the rocks on Broadhaven South.

After this, we went to Bosherston Lillyponds. Dave showed us otter excrement and explained how to track them. Such as where they make their holts and mark their territory. From this experience, I learned more about their behavior. Knowing that they roam in this area, I wanted to come back in the early hours of the morning. It's at around this time the COVID-19 Restrictions happened, so I traveled home to Somerset.

Another exercise we did was learning methods to increase the likelihood of seeing one. We used a camouflaged hide, an item that helps keep your presence unknown to the otter. It's useful for wildlife filmmaking because shy animals are intimidated by human activity. A net obscures your face and keeps you hidden from plain sight.

I tried to apply my knowledge about finding otters to my native hometown river.

Unfortunately, the lockdown rules made this location a haven for people to walk their dogs.

Otters are intimidated by dogs and people, so this location is not ideal. I tried to film in this location for a month, only managing to see a heron. It's at this point I decided to pick up a trail camera to help film animals at night. I picked a Toguard 40, which had excellent reviews on Amazon. This camera has a mode that allows you to connect to WiFi on your phone.

Unfortunately, I don't understand how to do this. I looked at different locations to set up the trail camera, meaning I have to go off-trail to make sure humans don't find it. The placement of the trail camera is key to the success of the project. I found that putting things in front of the camera gives it false alarms. I left it for a week in the Somerset Levels, which picked up a heron and moving grass. With my restricted access to some areas during COVID

19, this was the best I could do with my resources. Because of this acquisition, I have equipment for future wildlife filmmaking.

Editing is a struggle. I've had to downgrade from the University iMacs to my Mum's MacBook Air, which struggles to run Adobe Premiere Pro. Long rendering times and laggy playback made editing difficult and strenuous. To overcome this I gave myself a lot of time to edit. I wanted to use AfterEffects to use some infographics but unfortunately, the MacBook wouldn't run the software effectively. Filmmaking during a crisis called for some compromises. I have to go very minimalist with my editing, which made things a bit easier to edit. I used some crossfades to complement the poetic aspect of my film. I only used very simple cuts and examples of exposition and performative mode filmmaking, which helped me convey information about otters and show my progress. I included the Welsh footage which I had filmed before I went to Somerset. I did this because I felt it showed an upwards improvement in using different techniques to find otters. I felt that this was necessary for extenuating circumstances.

I feel that the outcome made the film a bit dated. With no drones at my disposal, I can't add a different perspective to my film. I tried to mix it up with some panning left to right mixed with static shots. I think this technique gave my film an unintentional 90's look. Next time, I will invest in more professional equipment. I will invest in a Mavic Air 2 to have 4k 60fps aerial footage at my disposal. I shot the film in a warm white balance to complement the golden hour times of day I'd film. I did this because I know you get more interesting natural

light at earlier and later times of the day. I used a 24-105mm lens because that's the longest focal length I have, it enabled me to film wild animals better from a long distance. Next time, I will use a telescopic lens with a longer zoom of more than 300mm. I think that this would be better because I'd be able to capture more detailed close-ups to establish a stronger emotional connection with the audience. It'd also allow me to communicate the humanization of animals to make their quirks and charms more relatable. I'd also use a camera body that can shoot above 60fps to add some slow-motion footage. I think this would have complemented the movement of action better. In hindsight, music would've made it more interesting and engaging. I felt, however, that I wanted to let the project breathe and let the audience listen to the beautiful sounds of water running and birds tweeting.

I thoroughly enjoyed this experience. I learned so much about otters and the importance of conservation. It's not as good as it could be, but I did what I could. I would like to make a part two about this documentary. Next time I'd like to apply more of my research into the video.