



EPISODE 1

YARLUNG ZANGBO – RIVER ON THE ROOF OF THE WORLD

4,000 metres high in the Tibetan desert -- a moonscape in the rain-shadow of the earth's highest mountain range; the world's highest plateau, an ancient seafloor lifted into the sky by tectonic forces. A chiru antelope crosses the rocky, bare moonscape at the foot of a Himalayan glacier, as a trickle of water beneath the ice feeds the rivulet that will become the mighty Brahmaputra (here the Tsangpo, the "great river"). In an all too familiar sight a chiru carcass is hidden by a feeding frenzy of black vultures. The chiru's coat protects against winter temperatures of -40, but the world's finest and most expensive wool is too short to be harvested without killing the animal, so poaching is endangering their survival. The chiru's amazing speed – close to that of a cheetah – and the air-lock that raises the air pressure behind its nose in the thin air, help it escape predator wolves but not the poacher's gun. Satiated, the vultures catch the rising air and glide eastwards, downstream, past nomad camps and herds of free-running wild donkeys - until the waters suddenly shift gear violently and disappear, thundering downward and southward into the world's deepest and longest gorge.

The jagged rapids scrape and tear at towering cliffs, marking the eastern line where two continental plates inch past each other, as the Indian subcontinent continues its thrust into Asia. This elemental force made the Himalayas themselves, as the earth buckled under the pressure. Here it creates the fastest-flowing major river in the world.

For 240 kilometers and a vertical drop of 3,000 meters the river inhabits a secret, shadowy, unexplored world. Dark mountain forests squeezed into ravines are home to red panda, gibbons, and human tribes whose isolation makes them deeply suspicious of outsiders – especially the explorer-spies who first realised that the narrow but rapid river entering the chasm and the sprawling sluggish river of Assam were one and the same. The only outward sign of human presence today are the vertiginous creeper bridges stretching across the gorge high over the river. Down on the river itself the locals have nothing more sophisticated than a simple raft to fish and to get across.

After 240 kilometers of rapids and falls the deafening noise suddenly subsides as the river opens into a gentle, temperate climate where sloth bears roam the rocky forested foothills.



EPISODE 2

BRAHMAPUTRA – THE SON OF CREATION

These Indian hills are the forests of big cats, spotted and snow leopards, as the river curves south-west round the Himalayan foothills, always descending. Rolling west into Assam, we hitch a lift on a giant ferry, we enter the great Kaziranga National Park where tigers roam, sharing its wetlands with one-horned rhino, elephant and buffalo. The Brahmaputra is gigantic, wide and placid, an inland sea that the wind will whip into deadly storms. Like a sea, it divides around an island as big as a small country - land first created by the river and now being taken away: Majuli has lost a third of its surface area during a single human lifetime due to extreme floods. Now the

monsoon catches up with us from the East, pounding the earth and the water with the world's heaviest rainfall. At its peak, the tigers, rhinos and venomous snakes are forced up into the hills to save their skins, into the tea plantations, for uneasy, sometimes fatal, confrontations with humans.

Unsuspecting fish glide over the sandy river-bed. Suddenly, in one of the fastest movement seen in the animal world, a turtle's head and neck flash out of the sand and scoop up prey that literally never knew what hit it. We wouldn't know either, unless we see it again at 3,000 fps -- a black softshell turtle, an ancient hunter like the gharials, the Brahmaputra's fish-eating crocodiles slinking, in their own ungainly slow motion, from the river banks.

STYLE & APPROACH

Klaus Feichtenberger, Heinz Leger and Jeremy Hogarth have hand-picked stories of animals, landscapes and people, as the river continues its descent. We never simply follow the water. This is a classic doc with a powerful modern twist. Sudden transitions emphasize astonishing contrasts along short stretches of river. Some transitions occur via predation, via the movement of animals (as with the vultures above), by weather changes; and sometimes via a human mode of transport, either featured (rafts, boats, buses, 4x4) or unseen (helicopter, cineflex, octocopter).

Full use will of course be made of macro, slow-motion, time-lapse, low-light & infra-red, aerials and underwater photography. Cranes and tracks will be used where appropriate.



EPISODE 3

YAMUNA – THE BIGGEST DELTA ON EARTH

But the river flows on, turning back south-west, where the Son of Creation – that's what "Brahmaputra" means – merges with India's holiest river, the mother Ganges, to become the "Jamuna". In the biggest delta on earth, land and sea, salt and fresh water shift and blend with the tides. The solid rocks of the world's highest mountains have been ground down to silt by this river to form a land that hardly deserves that term: Bangladesh has more waterscape than landscape. Here, generations of fishermen hunt with trained otters that have, over many generations, become family

members. Mangrove forests are the only natural barrier to Indian Ocean typhoons, but these watery jungles are dangerous themselves: Sundarban man-eating tigers have acquired a taste for human flesh because of the terrible toll of these natural disasters that – with mountain meltwater and monsoon floods - make the world's most densely populated country one of the most perilous for its inhabitants.

The river flows into the Indian Ocean, through channels where sharks roam, depositing the silt that extends the land, before evaporating into clouds that arc back overhead to its source.

It's a journey in space and in time, telescoped and extended: elemental pressures, working over hundreds of millions of years with irresistible force are visualised through state-of-the art computer animation; they vie with the play of day and night, seasons and altitude, split-second predation and timeless peace and mystery. Enhanced satellite and jet-level sequences help to set the Brahmaputra, this river of superlatives, in the big picture of our planet.



The Brahmaputra is unique -- a river that crosses the full range of our planet's climates and landscapes, from arctic to tropical, from frozen desert to broiling rainforest; from the highest peaks to sea-level swamps. To travel the length of the Yarlung-Tsangpo/ Brahmaputra/Jamuna River is to see and understand how the whole world works.

The following three-episode outline merely hints at the astonishing riches of this river and of its climate cycle, more dynamic here than anywhere else on Earth: driven by the world's highest levels of rainfall, the planet's most extreme climate barrier and the jet stream. The Brahmaputra sums up the great, slow dance of the elements -- the earth's crust, the atmosphere, the cryosphere (the Himalayas headwaters come from an icy realm, now called the Third Pole), the oceans and the biosphere: It sums up our planet.

CREDITS

DIRECTORS KLAUS FEICHTENBERGER, HEINZ LEGER, JEREMY HOGARTH
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TECHNICAL INFORMATION

3X 52 MIN / 3 X 45 MIN
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STEREO / DOLBY SURROUND 5.1

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FOR





DIRECTORS SHORT BIOGRAPHY

Jeremy Hogarth

Jeremy Hogarth has specialized in natural history television programs since 1975. After training at the London Film School, Jeremy worked as assistant film editor for the BBC and as film editor on natural history programs for the Australian Broadcasting Corporation before pursuing an independent career as a producer/director and writer of natural history documentaries.

Awards (Selection)

Winner of Wildlife Film Festival USA, Japan Wildlife Festival (Asia/Oceania Award) and Banff TV Festival, Canada, Competition Finalist

Heinz Leger

Born 1961 in the province of Styria, Austria, studied Communications, Journalism and Political Sciences at the University of Salzburg. In the early 1990ies he worked as freelance producer and assistant commissioning editor for UNIVERSUM, ORF (Natural History Unit). Since 2000, freelance author, producer and director of many prime time TV documentaries.

Awards (Selection)

Multiple Winner of CINE Golden Eagle Competition, Washington DC., USA, Winner of Green Screen International Wildlife Film Festival, and Silver Screen Award.

Klaus Feichtenberger

Austrian, born 1953, studied German and English Literature, Translation Studies and General Linguistics in Graz and Southampton. Worked as university lecturer, staff and freelance translator, interpreter, writer, journalist, photographer, cameraman, staff editor (ORF Natural History Unit), staff (ORF/BBC NHUs) and independent film producer.

Awards (Selection)

Multiple Winner of Jackson Hole Award, Winner of Golden Camera Munich and BANFF World Media Award