

TALKING TO THE AIR: THE HORSES OF THE LAST FORBIDDEN KINGDOM  
DOCUMENTARY FILM – PRESS KIT



A rider from Khingar Village, Mustang, Nepal Photo: Miranda Morton Yap

The horse has been central to existence, culture and spirituality in Mustang, Nepal. “Talking to the Air” tells the story of the ascent of civilization in the high Himalaya and turns a lens on issues of globalization, fragile border politics and the precarious future for the horse in this remarkable region.

The film is available for purchase as a DVD at [rareequinetrust.com](http://rareequinetrust.com) and is streaming on Amazon US/UK – free with Prime, and also on Vimeo on Demand.

#### AWARDS AND SCREENINGS

“Talking to the Air” premiered at the Kathmandu International Mountain Film Festival in December 2014 and is since shown in over 14 festivals worldwide. The film had a U.S. premiere at the Silver Springs International Film Festival in Florida and won **Best Documentary** film at its first competitive festival. The film has also garnered a Jury Award for **Best Visual Presentation of Intangible Cultural Heritage** at the International Festival for Ethnological Film in Belgrade. At the Equus Film Festival in New York City, the film won **Festival Directors Choice Award** and several awards at the Equus International Film Festival in Montana including **Best of Festival**.

World Premiere, Official Selection  
Kathmandu International Mountain Film Festival, Kathmandu - Nepal  
December 14<sup>th</sup> 2014  
World Premiere (Not in Competition)

#### **Best Documentary Feature**

Silver Springs International Film Festival/Equus Film Festival, Florida - USA  
April 10<sup>th</sup>, 2015

Official Selection  
Cine Pobre Film Festival - Mexico  
May 5-7<sup>th</sup>, 2015

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Official Selection

Traveling KIMFF Best of Festival, Lazimpat – Nepal

May 6<sup>th</sup>, 2015

Official Selection

Pakistan International Mountain Film Festival, Lahore – Pakistan

May 20<sup>th</sup>, 2015

Official Selection

Himalayan International Film Festival, Seattle - U.S.A

August 22-23<sup>rd</sup>, 2015

Official Selection

Zakopane Mountain Film Festival - Poland

September 2-6, 2015

(Not in competition)

Official Selection

Matsalu Nature Film Festival - Estonia

September 16-20, 2015

**Jury Award - Visual Presentation of Intangible Cultural Heritage**

International Festival of Ethnological Film, Belgrade - Serbia

October 6-11, 2015

Official Selection

International Mountain Film Festival Tergensee, Bavaria - Germany

Saturday 24<sup>th</sup> October 2015

Official Selection

Vancouver International Mountain Film Festival, Vancouver - Canada

November 14, 2015

Winning Finalist

Yosemite International Film Festival, Yosemite - USA

November 2015

**Festival Directors Choice Award**

Equus Film Festival, New York - USA

November 20-22, 2015

Official Selection

Bankso Mountain Film Festival, Bansko - Bulgaria

November 25-29<sup>th</sup>, 2015

Official Selection

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Al Jazeera International Documentary Film Festival, Doha - Qatar  
November 26-19, 2015

Official Selection  
Dhaka International Film Festival, Dhaka - Bangladesh  
January 14-22, 2016

Official Selection  
Festival Gorniškega Filma Domžale - Slovenia  
February 16-18, 2016

Equus Film Festival Winners Tour, Camden, South Carolina - USA  
February, 2016

Official Selection  
Llanberis Mountain Film Festival, Wales - UK  
4-6 March, 2016

Official Selection  
Himalayan Film Festival, San Francisco, USA  
May 14th, 2016

Official Selection  
Equinale Film Festival, Germany  
June 25<sup>th</sup>, 2016

Equus Film Festival - Best of Fest Tour Stop  
The Screen at Santa Fe University of Art and Design  
August 20<sup>th</sup>, 2016

Official Selection  
Torello Mountain Film Festival, Spain  
November, 2016

**Best of Festival**  
**Best Documentary (tie)**  
**Best Script**  
Equus International Film Festival, Missoula, MT, USA  
September 15<sup>th</sup> & 17<sup>th</sup>, 2017

Official Selection  
Tryon International Film Festival, NC, USA  
October 29<sup>th</sup>, 2017

Equus International Film Festival "On the Trail"  
Emerson Center for the Arts and Culture, Bozeman, MT, USA  
October 29<sup>th</sup>, 2017

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REVIEW

“The latest contribution by Horsefly Films to equestrian film culture, TALKING TO THE AIR: The Horses of the Last Forbidden Kingdom, takes us not only to the top of the world but blows the tops of our heads off once we get there, drawing us into a land beyond time and the medieval culture of Mustang in Nepal along the border of China. This is the Shangri-La of horsemanship, where wealth is measured in hooved gold and the quality of a man and his history is reflected in the honor he shows to his herd. As deftly as its horses negotiate Mustang’s mountainous terrain, this film carries you through an ancient landscape still raw in unpolluted beauty and home to a culture simple in materials but rich in spirit, reminding us once again that the history of the horse is forever parallel to our own. The stable doors of this forbidden kingdom have been flung open. Enter and let TALKING TO THE AIR lift you up and carry you away.” — L.A. Pomeroy, Equinista. Contributing Editor: Elite Equestrian

SYNOPSIS - SHORT

In Mustang, Nepal, wealth can be measured in horses and riding is as elemental as breathing. Using lush cinematography, and insightful interviews, “Talking to the Air” explores the local festivals and shares remarkable stories from Mustang’s royal families and other maverick horsemen. The film also recounts the little known story of the CIA’s covert operations with the Tibetan resistance fighters, and features rare archival footage of the Dalai Lama’s flight on horseback over the Himalaya. The scholarly and perceptive voices of Sienna Craig - author of "Horses Like Lightning" and Mikel Dunham, author of "Buddha's Warriors" are also included.

The horse has been central to existence, culture and spiritual practice and this beautiful film recounts this story of the ascent of a remarkable civilization while also turning a lens on issues of globalization, fragile border politics and the precarious future for the Mustang’s distinctive equine culture.

CONCEPT

From the sword to the plowshare, the noble horse has been integral to our survival and civilization. The very history and domestication of the horse casts a unique reflection back onto humankind and the development of our societies. Not only is the equine an unparalleled mirror into our own human saga, it is also a creature of singular beauty, strength and mythological magnificence unlike any other animal.

DIRECTOR’S STATEMENT

We carefully negotiated access to film in the region with the government of Nepal. The area is politically sensitive, remote and difficult to get to. I agreed to simultaneously produce a film for the Nepal Tourism board as cultural exchange that will be released when the film is released.

We were invited by the Royal Families of Mustang and Jharkot into their homes and were

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provided incredible access and interviews in a region that is relatively un-documented. The combination of my horse knowledge and my filmmaking ability were unique tools and necessary to gain trust and understanding in a very short time frame. Aside from a few anthropological films, and a film that focuses on the restoration of the temples, there is little cinematic record of people and culture at this key point in time.

Mustang is unique and represents one of the last equine cultures in the world. This cannot simply be preserved in a museum – capturing that heritage and sharing it for all time is a vital part of this work to me.

Their vision and relationship to the horse is unlike any other. For me, the subject of “Talking to the Air” was too colorful, too ancient, too fragile and too rare not to be shared with a world that is careening along all too fast into the future.

ABOUT THE HORSEFLY FILMS RARE EQUINE TRUST

The *Horsefly Films Rare Equine Trust* is a documentary production company creating a cinematic library dedicated to exploring diverse cultures, rare equine breeds and unique stories centered around the horse. Using film as a tool to engage new audiences, the film series captures the beauty, history and fragile position of equines and vanishing equestrian cultures and establishes a necessary and compelling film folio for equine enthusiasts, cultural historians and general audiences. The Trust's films are being used to rally awareness, build cultural bridges and connect societies with their unique and often endangered equine and ritual heritage.

SYNOPSIS - LONG

*“The quality of a man’s life depends on the quality of his horse”  
Amchi Gyatso Bista - Priest to the King of Mustang*

In a little-known region in the heart of the Himalaya, the Lo people of Mustang (no relation to the American Mustang horse) have depended on the horse for their very survival and have developed a deep spiritual connection with the equine. Mustang is one of the last Kingdoms in the world that was closed to outsiders and though no longer shuttered to foreigners, it is still geographically remote, majestic and difficult to get to. The people of upper Mustang have lived virtually the same way since the middle ages.

Here, the history of man is the history of the horse. Partners for centuries, no other animal has served man in such diverse ways, nor suffered so dearly for it. “Talking to the Air” illustrates a slice of humankind’s history through the lens of the horse, a creature that is surely one of the most cinematically impressive.

In this harsh and inaccessible environment, Buddhism is central to Upper Mustang. The karmic lives of the Lo people are very much tied into the lives of their horses, and this film explores the ancient practices and belief systems that still exist in this remarkable region.

Central to the film is the three-day Yartung Horse Festival celebrating the end of the monsoon.

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The racing events pit the most daring village riders against each other and are a dramatic and compelling visual backdrop to the colorful ceremonies of the windswept, walled medieval town of Lo Manthang. Daring riders are said to be “talking to the air” as they careen along on their small, strong horses.

Told by the very people that live there, the film also recounts the story of the CIA’s covert operations with the Tibetan resistance fighters, and features archival footage of the Dalai Lama’s flight on horseback over the Himalaya.

The horse has been integral to survival and central to spiritual life. The forces of globalization have put these longstanding bonds and ritual heritage in a precarious position and the film is an intimate portrait of a region facing the unpredictable pressures of the future.

Along with the Royal Families of Mustang, renowned riders and villagers, the film also features the scholarly voices of Sienna Craig - author of "Horses Like Lightning" and Mikel Dunham, author of "Buddha's Warriors".

Life here is on the verge of massive change. A new modern road is being built from Tibet through Mustang. The road is funded by the Chinese, who have also gained an almost complete foothold on all goods going in and out of Upper Mustang. With this fragile border it is feared that religious freedom will be suppressed and life in Mustang will be altered forever. Though positive in spirit, many fear that the de facto control that China is gaining inch by inch will deeply affect the lives of people whose families have lived and thrived in this region for centuries.

The strange juxtaposition of subsistence living, ancient sects of Buddhism and the juggernaut of globalization are apparent. This horse culture owes its victories, survival and enriched culture to the noble horse. Where just years ago the relationship with the horse was vital to survival, now young men compare how well their motorbikes tackle the extreme environment. There are stories of cultural practices that have simply vanished in the last decade. Here, change is acute - a shock of the ancient and the new slammed up against each other - a microcosm of globalization before our eyes.

TRAILER

Trailers can be viewed at the following link:

<http://www.rareequinetrust.com/talkingtotheair>



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THIS IS THEIR STORY

“Talking to the Air” is not a sentimental and nostalgic look at the heritage and practices of Mustang, but is intended as a record of one of the world’s last few horse cultures, told by the very people that live there. These annals of life in the highest river valley in the world are precious.



PHOTO: SOPHIE DIA PEGRUM

THEMES

Rarity: Mustang represents a vanishing horse culture unlike any other.

Religion under threat: The tenuous border with Tibet/China threatening suppression of religious expression and Tibetan Buddhism.

Globalization: This geographically isolated and fragile Himalayan region has remained remarkably unchanged and untouched for centuries. With cheap goods, new roads and increased tourism, the cultural management of this once neglected region hangs in a delicate balance.

Ecology and Tourism: Mustang’s grazing lands are being affected by climate change. The impact of tourism in fragile areas like Upper Mustang is a double-edged sword.

GOALS

Horsefly Films Rare Equine Trust completed a successful crowd funding campaign in November 2014 with seedandspark.com to raise money for finishing funds and post-production costs.

The film will contribute to an epic cinematic record that can transmute these fragile and threatened horse cultures into national treasures to be cherished by Nepalis and venerated by



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those of us further afield. It will engender strategic engagement to nurture cultural protection and responsible tourism in a fragile political and economic region.

## SOCIAL CHANGE

As a synthesis of visual beauty and academic scope, the film as a chronicle is imperative to the responsible stewardship of our collective historical and cultural memory.

Through strategic collaborations, screenings, engagement and website, the film has the strength to influence social movements that would be pivotal in helping preserve the important cultural practices of this region.

Mustang has strong historic and religious ties to Tibet. Tibetan culture is being suppressed in Nepal due to pressure from China. Contemporary cultural and geographic dislocation also means many Nepalis are unaware of their unique ritual heritage. This cinematic celebration and investigation will highlight a neglected region and promote local pride. The film provides the chance to connect similar cultures facing rapid globalization/isolation and fragile borders with organizations that work in the world of cultural preservation and promote responsible tourism.

## BIOGRAPHIES

### SOPHIE DIA PEGRUM – DIRECTOR-WRITER-DP

Sophie is a director and filmmaker who has produced and shot films in the Antarctic, the North Pole and in the Himalayas. Her films include "77 Below" a documentary she shot in Antarctica featuring artist Lita Albuquerque and "Daughters of the Curved Moon" a film about the women of Jumla, Nepal. She shot and produced the award winning documentary "Path to Glory" about the history of Polish Arabian Horses and their enduring influence in the United States and around the world and "Tarpan" about the re-wilding of a once extinct horse. Along with Jen Miller, Sophie co-owns a film production company based in Los Angeles - Horsefly Films and recently established the "Rare Equine Trust" and is shooting a series of films about critically endangered breeds of horses around the world and vanishing equine cultures. Sophie works as a Director of Photography on documentary films and is also a painter who has work in collections worldwide.

### JEN MILLER – PRODUCER

Jen is a filmmaker whose career has taken her from Hollywood blockbusters to independent cinema. Cutting her teeth on "Forrest Gump", Jen's subsequent inauguration in the film business was producing a feature film for MGM, on which she also served as Music Supervisor and Creative Director for the publicity campaign, overseeing key art one-sheet and trailer production. She was nominated for a Key Art Award as Copywriter and Creative Director for her efforts. Over the next several years, Jen directed and produced music videos for MTV through her own production company. As a music supervisor she put together the soundtracks for several feature films for Miramax and MGM films and also free-lanced as a music supervisor, producing music for films, commercials, trailers and TV series. As a screenwriter, her screenplays have won honors in the Sundance writing program and have been optioned and produced by companies such as Columbia Tristar and Stormworks entertainment.

Jen's first novel "Billy Bones" was a semifinalist in the 2011 Amazon Next Great Novel contest in which publishers proclaimed " This is great stuff! ... Whatever the nature of the story

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unfolding, I am willing to follow". Jen co-founded Horsefly Films with filmmaker Sophie Pegrum. Together they produced the critically- acclaimed documentary “Path to Glory” and now the ongoing series of RARE films under their Rare Equine Trust banner.

MIRANDA MORTON YAP - FIELD PRODUCER

Miranda has worked as a facilitator, coordinator, producer and organizer in the creative arts for over a decade. Many hats have been worn for multiple projects ranging from commercials and short films, stage productions, as well as booking bands on tours and producing fundraising charity events. In recent years, she has spent time exploring the globe. The inspiration she found on those journeys sparked a desire to share the stories of the vibrant people and colorful places she encountered. Combining her professional experience with her interest in people and culture has culminated in her venture into documentary filmmaking and the establishment of Shakti Pictures.

DIPENDRA BHANDARI - DP

Dipendra Bhandari is Executive Producer at *Adventure Nepal Productions* in Kathmandu, a film production company with a focus on documentary material. Previously a producer at Kantipur Television, Dipendra Bhandari wrote and directed the 2011 award-winning documentary “Journey to Yarsa”. An audience favorite at Kathmandu International Film Festival, “Journey to Yarsa” is about the caravan of hunters who trek into the treacherous high Himal in search of the elusive yarsagumba, a fungus-larvae prized in East Asia for its medicinal properties. Dipendra followed the family of Punimaya of Rolpa up into the flanks of the Himalaya to capture the struggle, hope, laughter, romance and resilience in the lives of the hill people who go to dig for survival.



Riders are said to be “Talking to the Air” when careening along on their horses.

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**US Premiere of *TALKING TO THE AIR*  
gallops into the Horse Capital of the World**

*“TALKING TO THE AIR: The Horses of the Last Forbidden Kingdom” premiered  
in Ocala as part of the Silver Springs International Film Festival & Equus Film Festival*

Los Angeles, CA March 16 2015—

**Acclaimed equine filmmakers Horsefly Films will premiere their new documentary *TALKING TO THE AIR: The Horses of the Last Forbidden Kingdom* in Ocala, Florida on April 10th, 2015 as part of the Silver Springs International Film Festival and the Equus Film Festival.**

Documentary film is the ultimate cultural conversation and this breathtaking film, shot on a tenuous border with China in the remote and fragile Tibetan Buddhist region of Mustang, illustrates one of humankind’s most ancient and enduring relationships – that between man and horse. *TALKING TO THE AIR* illuminates this virtually unseen world where a man’s wealth—indeed the very nature of his life—is measured in horses. Here in the heart of the Himalaya, riding is as elemental as breathing. Culminating with the death-defying races of their annual Yartung Festival, riders are said to be “talking to the air” as they careen along on their small, strong horses.

In Mustang, an ancient Kingdom shuttered to foreigners until recently, the filmmakers were given unprecedented access to daily life where the horse has been central to survival, culture and spirituality. The Dalai Lama can only celebrate 80 years this year due to the horses that carried him to safety in India 60 years ago. Rare archival footage of his horseback escape are featured in the film, along with archival footage detailing the CIA’s virtually unknown covert operations in Mustang. With a new road and the march of globalization, life here is on the verge of massive change. With this dramatic visual backdrop, interviews with Mustang royalty, priests, riders and young Mustangis make “Talking to the Air” an important portrait of a vanishing equine culture.

*“It is key that we use the film as a tool to raise awareness for this fragile place to promote careful conservation, and importantly, pride for this often overlooked cultural treasure. Humankind owes the equine an immeasurable debt, and this film is made in part, to honor their immense contribution to our lives and culture”,* says director Sophie Dia Pegrum.

The film debuted to sold-out audiences in December 2014 in Kathmandu, Nepal at the illustrious Kathmandu International Mountain Film Festival (KIMFF).

*“We are excited for audiences in the U.S., and particularly in Ocala, the Horse Capital of the World, to see the film and connect with it in ways only horse-lovers can!”*, says Jen Miller, partner at Horsefly Films.

Now in its 2nd year, the Silver Springs International Film Festival (SSIFF) has partnered with the acclaimed Equus Film Festival, also in its second year, to bring a slate of award-winning equine films to the Horse Capitol of the World this April 8-12.

*TALKING TO THE AIR* is the third of a new series created by Horsefly Films for their Horsefly Films’ Rare Equine Trust, a cinematic library dedicated to the filmic preservation of endangered rare equines and equine cultures around the world. The first two award-winning films of the series, *OF GODS AND KINGS* and *TARPAN* will also play at the SSIFF.

**About Horsefly Films Rare Equine Trust:** Horsefly Films is a film production company producing documentaries and commercials specializing in equine subject matter.

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[www.rareequinetrust.com](http://www.rareequinetrust.com)

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**USA-Nepal Collaborative Production debuts Film at KIMFF**

*“TALKING TO THE AIR: The Horses of the Last Forbidden Kingdom” will premiere in Kathmandu as part of the Kathmandu International Mountain Film Festival*

Los Angeles, CA, December 1 2014—

**Horsefly Films in association with Adventure Nepal Productions, will premiere their new documentary *TALKING TO THE AIR: The Horses of the Last Forbidden Kingdom* in Kathmandu, Nepal on December 15th, 2014 as part of the prestigious Kathmandu International Mountain Film Festival (KIMFF).**

TALKING TO THE AIR was produced in collaboration with Horsefly Films (USA) and Adventure Nepal Production (Nepal). Horsefly Films’ Director Sophie Dia Pegrum partnered with Dipendra Bhandari of Adventure Nepal Productions. Previously a producer at Kantipur Television, Dipendra Bhandari wrote and directed the 2011 award-winning documentary “Journey to Yarsa”, an audience favorite at Kathmandu International Mountain Film Festival.

Documentary film is the ultimate cultural conversation and this cross-border collaboration resulted in a breathtaking film about one of humankind’s most ancient relationships – that between man and horse. Filming in the remote mountain regions of Mustang, Nepal required a fusion of careful research with logistical and venturesome daring and the filmmaking team endured a challenging journey to reach Mustang in time for the Yartung Horse Festival. The former kingdom of Lo is linked by religion, culture and history to Tibet, but is politically part of Nepal. *TALKING TO THE AIR* illuminates this virtually unseen world where a man’s wealth—indeed the very nature of his life—is measured in horses. Culminating with the death-defying races of their annual Yartung Festival, riders are said to be “talking to the air” as they careen along on their small strong horses.

In Mustang, one of the last standing truly Tibetan cultures existing today, Pegrum and Bhandari were given unprecedented access to daily life where the horse has been central to survival, culture and spirituality. The film includes interviews with the Royal family of Mustang who still keep horses as well as the scholarly voices of authors Mikel Dunham - “Buddha’s Warriors” and Dr. Sienna Craig - “Horses Like Lightning”.

*“It is key that we use the film as a tool to raise awareness for this fragile place to promote careful conservation, and importantly, pride for this often overlooked cultural treasure. Humankind owes the equine an immeasurable debt, and this film is made in part, to honor their immense contribution to our lives and culture”, says Sophie.*

Now in its 14th year, the Kathmandu International Mountain Film Festival (KIMFF) features films from all over the world. The growing diversity and complexity of mankind’s relationship with mountains—whether through extreme sports, adventure, religion or distinct cultural practices-- is what (KIMFF) seeks to explore. The challenging journey the Talking to the Air team took to make the film-- including treacherous traversing of raging rivers and the unforgiving steeps of the high Himalaya-- perfectly represents the arduous physicality and intimate spirituality of mountain terrain.

*TALKING TO THE AIR* is the third of a new series created for their Horsefly Films’ Rare Equine Trust, a cinematic library dedicated to the filmic preservation of endangered rare equines and equine cultures around the world.

**About Horsefly Films Rare Equine Trust:** Horsefly Films is a film production company producing documentaries and commercials specializing in equine subject matter.

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**About Adventure Nepal Production:** Adventure Nepal Production is a film production company based in Kathmandu and produces documentaries and promotional spots for NGOs throughout Nepal.

Contact: Dipendra Bhandari adnepal02@yahoo.com

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