



TWO YEARS AT SEA

Autumn
Season
2012

Release: 2011

Cert (UK): U

Runtime: 91 mins

Director: Ben Rivers

Cast: Jake Williams as himself



We are showing this film as part of our 'Celebrating New British Directors' Gala. Ben Rivers is building a reputation as a good experimental filmmaker. We were hoping to have him along to tell us about this film, but he had to go to France for his next film. He was loath to tell me much about the film, preferring the audience to make up their own minds. Instead, this is what Dave Calhoun of Time Out had to say:-

'Information is at a premium and atmosphere in abundance in this documentary portrait by British experimental filmmaker Ben Rivers of... well, of what exactly? Purely going by what we see, we can say that Rivers shoots, in gorgeous, grainy monochrome, an ageing bearded man as he goes about his life – sleeping, eating, cooking, chopping, fishing – in an isolated, cluttered house in a forest. Photos of family suggest a life left behind – or that left him behind. It's down to others to tell us that this is Jake Williams, variously described as a 'hermit' and the subject of an earlier film by Rivers, and that Rivers filmed him in the Scottish Highlands on 16mm, using an old Bolex and developing his film by hand, so giving us the streaks that occasionally run across the image.

In the moment, 'Two Years at Sea' can be a tease as Rivers plays with partial views of his subject. A hand reaches out from a void to grab some toilet paper (never has wiping one's arse been so arty), while two other sequences show a caravan up a tree and Williams carrying a load of junk that becomes a raft. Other stretches could be said to be tedious, yet it depends what you bring to the film. You can view it as a semi-blank canvas on which to draw your own ideas about living. Or you can view it as a strikingly pretty but frustratingly one-note doc that conceals more than it reveals. It begs one question: can a man being filmed day and night really be tagged a hermit? But, then, that's our tag, not the film's. Tricky, this film, tricky.'

