



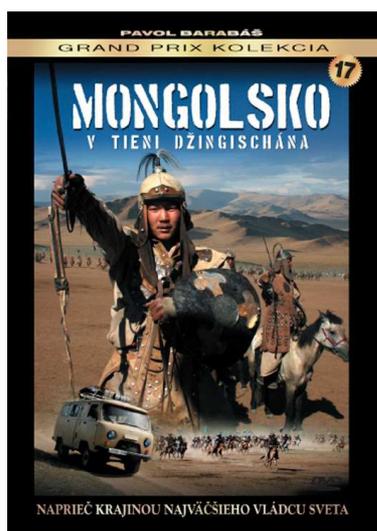
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Presents the documentary film

MONGOLIA

In the Shadow of Genghis Khan

Premiere: 16 September 2010



Director and camera: **Pavol Barabáš**
Script: **Pavol Barabáš, Diana Kacarová**
Editor: **Pavol Barabáš, Maroš Petro**
Music: **Michal Novinski**
Production: **K2 studio**
Length: **61 minutes**
Format: **16:9**
Suitability: **all ages**
Info: **www.k2studio.sk**

Feared, cursed and also admired, the same as its founder, in his life never defeated, the chieftain Genghis Khan. A magic country, searching for its present-day face in the heritage of the 13th century, once became the largest empire that the world has ever seen, known as Pax Mongolica. On our adventurous quest through inhospitable nature, away from the usual routes, we discovered the other, unknown and surprisingly open-minded side of the aggressive conqueror, whose innovative efforts left a much deeper footprint in the thinking and development of the whole of human society than we are willing to admit.

This documentary by Pavol Barabáš is a wandering across the country which permanently changed the face of the world.

FROM YURT TO YURT

“True Mongolia begins where the car tracks end”

Crystal-pure air above our heads and out of sight, just an endless green steppe. At night, millions of stars light up the darkness. Distances are relative for the natives, because the nearest town will tomorrow be as far away as it is today. The country forces you to wander around, offering some kind of freedom that I've never experienced elsewhere in the world. From yurt to yurt, one eagerly follows the call of one's soul, trying to understand the life of this nomadic nation that once used to rule the world's largest empire.

With a clean head

When wandering across Mongolia, the only guide is one's intuition. Maps are old and inaccurate and distances are rather measured in hours spent on horseback. The four lanes of perfectly straight asphalt road leading from the east to the west of the country were only a pre-election slogan of new and old communists in 2000. They promised to build the road of the millennium, two thousand five hundred kilometres long. The first one hundred kilometre stretch of the road ends just after Ulan Bator, heading westwards. There, the asphalt turns into dusty, beaten tracks running beyond the endless horizon. In this vast country, experiences need to be earned. The real Mongolia really begins where the roads disappear. Thank God we've got Ench. Even though he's never been as far away as to the westernmost tip of Mongolia, in the key moments he is always able to point us in the right direction. Seeing our puzzled faces, he smiles and explains: “We Mongolians carry a compass in our heads”.

I carried Mongolia in my head, as a special place on my map of the world. That's why my elder son Juraj, my four friends and I decided to pack everything necessary for life at the mercy of nature, a rubber raft to conquer the Mongolian rivers, glacial gear to combat the Mongolian mountains and rods for fishing, and set out to explore the “Wild East”. To the history-emblazoned country between Russia and China, the empire of which, in the 13th century, reached as far as Slovak territory. Once, an offensive nation came to terms with the philosophy that a man should stay where he was born. So we wanted to experience Mongolia firsthand.

Lakes full of fish

Ench's perfect sense of orientation guides us along mountain paths, which ordinary Europeans cannot see. The highest hills of Mongolia form the border area with lots of mountain lakes. Our guide leads us along rocky paths where we simply try to trust our horses to pass over the steep cliffs without slipping. After that distressful journey, we could barely walk. Thank God we carried the raft with us from home.

Look out, a raft on the horizon!

According to the Kazakhs living with their herds by the river, we are the first geeks who have used a raft to go down their White River, which flows from Mongolia's longest glacier. They could not understand our behaviour, because horse-riding is much faster. On both sides of the river, we were being watched curiously by five different kinds of cattle, as the Mongols call their horses, yaks, sheep, goats and double-humped camels. There is an approximate formula which expresses the relative value of each of these five animals: A horse is worth 5 to 7 sheep or 7 to 10 goats. A camel is worth 1.5 horses. The Mor, meaning a horse, is the pride of every nomad. It can survive the tough winters, which last for eight months in these regions, and it produces their beloved drink – fermented mare's milk. They start to learn to ride horses as soon as they start to walk.

The treasure of the nomads

Cattle are everything the nomads have. Ever since the times of Genghis Khan, they have been constantly on the move. Up to four times a year, they load their means of living on camels or, as if by miracle, on a mobile truck and travel, seeking feed for their sheep, goats and yaks. To be self-sufficient, a herder's family has to keep at least 250 cattle. People live in yurts, under a round wooden structure, the roof of which is covered by a tarpaulin and insulated against the winter by camel's wool. They live in the same way as their ancestors once did. They're not hungry or cold, and that's enough for them. It's hard to believe that they don't crave something else, like driving a car, having a fixed place to live, eating in restaurants. And yet, the children of some herders leave. At a young age, when they are most needed. In Ulan Bator, they suddenly don't need to move as much, worry about food or cattle. At the same time, they recognize stress. For herders, it's an unknown concept. Goats, sheep and yaks are not in a hurry; they graze on the steppes, sleep under the sky and know that twice a day they will be relieved of their milk. But it gets worse, when it's not raining...

Genghis Khan as a God

I'm becoming more and more puzzled about how Ench is able to find his way in different valleys and see the invisible tracks of cars which passed this way a few weeks ago. We head towards more mountains, plains and meetings. But there are some days when we don't meet anyone. We sleep in the open air, in absolute silence, under the stars, the number of which can't be compared with

anywhere else. To the south of us is the Gobi Desert, the world's driest and second largest desert, where three hundred million years ago there was a sea. Mongolia is still a paradise for geologists and researchers. There are places where you can read the history of the Earth as if it were an open book. People, as well as places, breathe history. Except for Buddhism, which was brought to the Mongolian plains by Tibetan monks, the souls of the Mongols are still held by Genghis Khan. Children in Mongolia still bear his name, and portraits of him can be found on bank notes, on the streets and in schools. Eight hundred years ago, he managed to unite the local tribes, and in 1206 become the Khan of all the Mongols. The entire world was literally laid at his feet. Gradually, he took control over northern China, Central Asia, part of Russia, the territory of modern Afghanistan, Iraq, Iran and Tibet and laid the foundations of the greatest empire in human history. His followers came as far as to the territory of the former Kingdom of Hungary, as far as to us. And today, when their grandchildren pack up their yurts and move, there is no trace left; only a clean, almost English lawn, without a single speck. Mongolia is simply a country which lovers of untouched nature can only dream about. It's not for nothing that it's known as the last bastion of unspoiled country in Asia. The nomadic history of the natives did not need any cities, services or infrastructure, and cleanliness was maintained thanks to shamanic prohibitions against the pollution of nature which apply until the present day. If you stretch asphalt into nature, the intuition of the natives will disappear, which plays a major role in their decision-making on their travels, criss-crossing this virgin country.

Pavol Barabáš, prepared by: Juraj Sedlák

ABOUT THE FILM

Today, Mongolia has the lowest population density in the world. A vast and little populated country with ancient history that raises the curiosity of many people. Among them, a bunch of friends who set out on an expedition to seek adventure on the most remote Mongolian steppes. In places where there is nothing; just vast plains under a great, blue sky. Where there is only sun and a feeling of freedom. They travel across the country, from the west to the east, rafting down rivers, crossing valleys on horseback and climbing the largest glaciers. Wandering off the beaten track allows them to get closer to the nomads, who graze their herds around their white yurts. Contact with them, with their culture and hospitality, their ecological way of life and their spontaneous joy, make one think about our lifestyle, which is based on such different values. When wandering through Mongolia, one cannot believe that the locals are the descendants of people who, according to contemporary historians, dispersed fear throughout Europe. A jigsaw of empty spaces in the history of the Middle Ages is being filled, and the message of Genghis Khan's spirit seems much more present than ever before.

Even in the early 13th century, nobody in China knew about Europe and nobody in Europe knew about China. At that time, nobody travelled that far. In 1227, when Genghis Khan died, both parts of the world were connected through diplomatic and trade routes. The beginning of the journey is accompanied by more questions than answers: How was history captured by the Mongolian

chronicles? Where did such a great and warlike nation disappear to? Are the ideas of globalization only a subject of today's sociological theories?

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PHOTOGALLERY



Mongolia – In the Shadow of Genghis Khan



