

# DOWN TO EARTH



A film that will change hearts and minds by holding up a mirror to the way we live our lives



## Film Review

I need to start off by saying that this isn't a vegan film. There are scenes which show people wearing — or using objects made from — animal skins, bird feathers animal bones and leather. Down to Earth is not a film that condemns the use of all animal products and there will, undoubtedly, be parts of the film that you disagree with. However, as I sat in the Soho Screening Rooms in February this year, I was genuinely moved by Down to Earth.

Back in 2004, Rolf Winters, Renata Heinen, and their three children were living in central London. Rolf was spending all of his time in corporate boardrooms when Rolf and Renata began to question the value of their lives, and the future of their children in the big city.

Instead of playing the game, Rolf and Renata bought woodland in Upper Michigan to live a more connected life with nature. Three years into their life in Michigan and after meeting an Earth Keeper (also known as shamans, healers, wisdom keepers or medical

people) named Nowaten (He who listens), they knew that they needed to start filming their experiences there, so (having never held a video camera before) they set off on a journey around the world in search of the people who live closest to nature.

Through this film, Rolf and his family provoke thought about the way that society lives, the connections we've lost with nature and the irrelevance we place on the value of purpose in our lives. Showing people what we've lost with our continual progress and mindless consumption can, surely, only be good for veganism as a social movement.

Down to Earth is, as the screening poster proclaims, "one family's journey in search of the Keepers of the Earth", and I should admit at this point that I was suspicious that Down to Earth would be little more than a poorly-filmed, haphazardly-edited jumble of family holiday videos. Almost immediately I saw that my preconceptions were woefully inaccurate.



Down to Earth is a thing of beauty. A beautiful, cinematic, atmospheric success. A thought-provoking film that discards modern wants and shows us what we are missing in a world filled with things.

There was no production team, no script, no list of questions, just a search for enlightenment and a willingness to listen to people.

What struck me, as I watched the film enraptured, was that these 'Earth Keepers' — as they were called in the film — all had astonishingly similar sentiments. In Africa, Asia, North America, India and Australia their

message was one of compassion, of respect for nature and for all of its beings.

Although there were several times where Earth Keepers explained that human lives were equal to non-human animal lives, Down to Earth is not a vegan film. But, it is certainly a film that overlaps with the fundamental principles of veganism.

The family filmed over 200 hours of footage that Rolf and Renata, edited with the help of a couple of professionals, over a five year period. The outcome is a film that is not simply consumed and forgotten about. This is a film that you'll dream about, that you will think about on your way to work, when you're writing your shopping list and, most importantly, this is a film that you will think of in times of personal hardship.

You don't have to simply take my word for it either. A test screening in Holland has proven to be a record-breaker. Down to Earth is now the longest running documentary in Holland and the third largest documentary ever screened in Holland.

However, Rolf understands that simply making a film won't change the world. In a Q&A after the screening, Rolf said: "We've lost things with our continual progress and the problems [on Earth] are so big that we feel dwarfed by them.

"But, they are our problems and we can make them small."

That's why Rolf has plans to roll the film out around the world, but also to show it in schools as part of a wider education programme, to use it in corporate environments and to use it as a starting point for frank conversations about the direction in which we are propelling the planet. ■

Down to Earth will be released in UK cinemas in September. If you are interested in contributing to making a change, you can contact Down to Earth on their website [downtoearthfilm.com](http://downtoearthfilm.com).