



8 Facts About Discovery Channel's Miniseries 'Klondike'



Discovery Channel is jumping into the scripted series landscape and achieving quite a compelling miniseries with their three night event **Klondike**, which focuses on the Klondike gold rush in the 1890s and is based on Charlotte Gray's book *Gold Diggers: Striking It Rich in the Klondike*.

To present the series, the cast including Richard Madden ('Bill Haskell'), Abbie Cornish ('Belinda'), Sam Shepard ('Father Judge'), Tim Roth ('The Count'), Conor Leslie ('Sabine'), Augustus Prew ('Byron Epstein'), Johnny Simmons ('Jack London'), and writer/executive producer Paul Scheuring, executive producer David Zucker, executive producer/executive vice president of production and development at Discovery Channel Dolores Gavin and director Simon Cellan Jones made an appearance at the Television Critics Association (TCA) Winter press tour.

Here are a few things they shared about *Klondike*.

Discovery Channel First Scripted Series

Klondike is Discovery Channel's first scripted series. Gavin expressed that Discovery is about "man's relationship to nature, and sometimes that's a beautiful relationship, and sometimes, that's an agonizing relationship. And in the end, it's always a meaningful one."

And so with that in mind they decided that they wanted to tell stories that were relatable to their audience. David Zucker eventually brought them Charlotte Gray's book and the series grew from there.

Preparation & Shooting Conditions

When asked about their preparation for the series, Cornish shared that the environment in which they were shooting, were very similar to the environment their characters would have been in.

She shared, "We shot in Calgary, Canada, and we started off in the winter. And for both Richard and I, I think the very first couple of days on set, we were on a massive lake, it was cold. There was snow being thrown into snow machines. Richard spent the whole day with real snow being blown into his face. And the hands were cold, the face was cold. It was hard to talk, and there was something very elemental, very challenging, very dramatic about the landscape and about the weather that told us very quickly what these characters would have felt like and gave us a little sense and a little taste of it." She added, "So we were really lucky, and we're both nerdy, in that, we enjoy the process of gathering information. Johnny was very much like that about Jack London, and so it was kind of nice to have something physical come in and really take over as well."

Madden added, "There's so many photographs from the time that informed us so much in terms of the costume and what they were actually wearing that we could do it quite realistically and dress exactly how they would have done, which was really miserable a lot of the time actually because it was freezing."

Creating Characters

When asked about why he added fictional characters to the story, instead of using real-life figures, Scheuring explained that he created some of the supplementary characters, like Epstein or Sabine, in order for them to "serve the larger narrative" and keep Bill Haskell in the *Klondike*. The mystery surrounding the murder of his friend gives him some unfinished business that Scheuring felt would give the audience something to embrace and empathize with, rather than just following a man solely trying to get rich.

In addition, Scheuring shared that there weren't a lot of women in the book and so he decided to create the Sabine character to as a "counterpoint to Belinda."

Scheuring also equated Belinda to the godfather of Dawson City. She really became the most powerful person in the town. And he wanted to show the other side of that, the women that had to become courtesans. He explained, "I wanted to explore that as well. It allows a feminine arc in a character to go from this place of self-loathing, of prostitution, to maybe there's some hope of deliverance for me, which is to forego my old ways because, in a lot of ways, what I wanted in a lot of the characters was, ultimately, this isn't about gold. It's about the arc of their souls and can they find deliverance in this horrid place."



Becoming Jack London

When asked how he approached the role of Jack London, Simmons said:

“Well, I read a lot of his books, and my favorite was “Martin Eden.” “Martin Eden” tells the story of what happened to Jack London after he came back from the Klondike. He dropped out of Berkeley. He packed up and left. He was on a search for his father. His father abandoned him, said “You’re not my son.” He took off for the Klondike and ended up writing a bunch of his material off of his experience there. But the thing that I found the most interesting about him was “Martin Eden.” He came back and pursued literary success — and just reading a lot. There’s so much information, his own biography is “John Barleycorn,” and “Martin Eden” really let you in on his thoughts, plus there’s a bunch of biographies.”

Tim Roth’s Approach

When asked how he prepared for his role, Tim Roth shared, “I think originally he was German. So I scrapped that just purely because of the time that we had and the workload and all of that. And then, you just play. I mean, for me, I like the idea of playing a sort of crooked real estate guy. I thought that was kind of an interesting concept. But, for me, nothing really dark and deep. You just muck about and then hone in on things that seem to be working and you flush them out and push them through other scenes. I found him to be incredibly offensive but also quite funny. And the humor aspect, even if it’s only for my own entertainment, I find that’s what keeps me going with stuff like that.”

Action Sequences

A lot of what you see on screen in *Klondike* is real. They used very little CGI.

Madden talked about shooting the river rapids sequence:

“We did some tank stuff for the underwater stuff, but we actually had a camera in the water on the day we were doing that as well, and I did throw myself into the rapids. They were real rapids, and we were all on speed boats trying to achieve something really difficult and mad. But it was brilliant. I think that’s what is so good about this show is that we don’t rely heavily on CGI or VFX for a lot of it. Most of it we were actually there doing it. When we were up the mountains, we were at 9,000 feet. You drive into a base in the morning and get into period costume, and then take a snowmobile as far up the mountain as you could. And then you’d hike kind of 45 minutes to get to the top, which is like there’s no air and you can’t really breathe, and then we’d start shooting. It was the same with the river rapids, and I kind of got there and I was like, “oh, we’re not actually using this are we? That’s really dangerous.” And then I just convinced myself that it was a studio and we could just turn the rapids off if it got dangerous. [Laughs] It was the only way I was going to get in them, and I remember being in the boat with Auggie [Prew], and we’d had a couple of scary moments actually where — we’ve got lots of safety people there, but you can’t control nature. I think the show talks about that, and we kind of experienced that firsthand. We smashed this boat into the rocks quite dangerously at some points. There’s actually some very funny sound recordings of Auggie’s panic during that.”



Difficult Shoot

When asked which scene was the most difficult to shoot, Simon Cellan Jones shared that the one with the wolves chasing Bill was the hardest because “the wolves were sort of like big fluffy pets who’d go and fetch your slippers for you. [Laughs] So it was very hard to make them aggressive.”

He added that probably the most difficult and exciting to shoot was the big avalanche in the beginning of the first episode. He explained:

“...that involved blowing up huge amounts of snow and making it fall down the mountain. So that was the most complex because we only had one chance at that, and we had to shoot people running away from

it and then use the same shots and actually have the snow coming down, and if we got that wrong, we blew the whole movie.”

Scheuring also added that they had 12 cameras out there to shoot the scene simultaneously and that two or three of their Go Pros are lost somewhere there.

Sequel?

There are no plans for a sequel. When asked about it, Gavin stated that they had told the story they wanted to tell and that they didn't leave anything on the table.

Klondike will have a three night television event premiering on Discovery Channel Monday, January 20 at 9 PM ET/PT, followed by part two Tuesday, January 21 at 9 PM ET/PT and part three Wednesday, January 22 at 9PM ET/PT.



By [Sandrine Sahakians](#) | January 20, 2014 | [0 Comments](#)