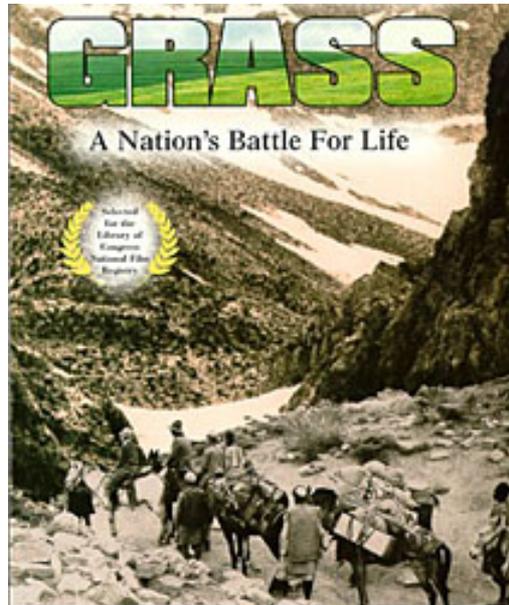


*In the Memory of David H. M. Brooks*

## **Grass: A Nation's Battle for Life (1925)**



**Also Known As:**

Grass

Grass, the Epic of a Lost Tribe

**Running time:** 71 min

**Country:** USA

**Colour:** Black and White

**Sound Mix:** Silent

**Image:** 200px

**Directed & Produced by:**

Merian C. Cooper

Ernest B. Schoedsack

**Released :**

20th March, 1925



## **Merian Caldwell Cooper**

### **Date of birth:**

24th October 1893, Jacksonville, Florida, USA

### **Date of death:**

21st April 1973

Merian Caldwell Cooper entered the U.S. Naval Academy with the class of 1915. He left in his senior year. In 1916 he joined the Georgia National Guard to help track down Pancho Villa in Mexico. After World War I, a new independent Poland was created from territory previously held by Germany, Austria, and Russia. Poland thus regained the independence it had lost in 1795. Almost immediately the new Polish Republic was invaded from the east by the Bolsheviks. In the spring of 1919, as a former U.S. Air Service pilot in France, he was visiting the Polish battle lines as the head of American relief work in southern Poland. When he saw the sacrifices being made by the Poles to defend their new nation, he thought up the possibility of an American volunteer squadron, similar to the Lafayette Escadrille of 1916, to assist them. He immediately went to Paris where he met a friend, Cedric E. Fauntleroy, who had been a combat pilot during the war. Together, they were granted official permission to recruit former U.S. airmen to form a Polish squadron.

Seventeen Americans to Poland and they Squadron, named in Kosciuszko, the Polish well in the American Washington. In 1920, his best friend and B. Schoedsack, in men fought for Poland They flew repeated low-



against the hordes of Cossacks from the east. Their supply of food, clothing and equipment was seldom adequate. On 26th July 1920 Cooper's plane was shot down and he spent nearly nine months in a Soviet prisoner-of-war camp. He escaped just before the end of the war. The Bolshevik invasion ended in May 1921 with victory for the Poles, and those members of the Kosciuszko Squadron still alive were discharged from further duty.

volunteered their services formed the Kosciuszko honour of Tadeusz patriot who had fought so Revolution under George Merian C. Cooper met producing partner, Ernest Poland. These seventeen under great hardship. level bombing missions

During World War II, Cooper served as a Colonel with the U.S. Army Air Corps and was Chief of Staff to General Claire Chennault in China. Cooper retired from the service as a U.S. Air Force Brigadier General.

Merian Caldwell Cooper and Ernest B. Schoedsack embarked on several joint projects and co-directed two successful documentaries in the Near- and Far-East (GRASS, 1925 and

CHANG, 1927). Their collaboration extended into feature films with exotic or mysterious backgrounds, the most famous of which was KING KONG (1933), a classic in the fantasy-horror field.

### **Ernest B. Schoedsack**

**Date of birth:**

8th June 1893, Council Bluffs, Iowa, USA

**Date of death:**

23rd December 1979, Los Angeles County, California, USA

Ernest B. Schoedsack was fascinated by the mechanics of film photography long before taking his first movie job with the Keystone Studios in 1914. During World War I, he worked as a Signal Corps cameraman, and after the Armistice he worked hard for the Polish war relief, helping thousand of Poles to escape the Russian occupied territories. While in Ukraine in 1920 he met Captain Merian C. Cooper, who, like Schoedsack, was a fervent anti-Bolshevik, and also an aspiring film director. The men renewed their friendship after the hostilities, collaborating on a brace of documentary films, Grass (1925) and Chang (1927). Still in partnership with Cooper, Schoedsack co-directed the adventure film, The Four Feathers (1929), then, after another documentary, the Cooper-Schoedsack team produced RKO's The Most Dangerous Game (1932), which featured the leading lady from The Four Feathers, Fay Wray. Concurrent to The Most Dangerous Game, Schoedsack and O'Brien launched their most ambitious project to date: the fantasy classic without parallel, King Kong (1933). Ruth Rose, Schoedsack's wife and an adventure lover in her own right, collaborated on the King Kong screenplay. When Merian C. Cooper assumed leadership of RKO Radio, he took Schoedsack with him as contract director. Some of Schoedsack's projects were sedate domestic comedies, such as Long Lost Father (1934), while others were along the spectacular lines of The Last Days of Pompeii (1936). At Paramount, Schoedsack returned to the live action/miniature combination that had served him well on King Kong for his first Technicolor production, Dr. Cyclops (1940).

### **Marguerite Harrison**

**Date of birth:**

October 1879, Baltimore, Maryland, USA

**Date of death:**

16th July 1967

Marguerite Harrison was a child of the Gilded Age, a time of transition in American life. Her father made his fortune in transatlantic shipping, and her family lived in luxury in Baltimore and Europe. Her mother came from an old-line Quaker family, but embraced the ideals of the upper-class lady. Her goal was to achieve the pinnacle of social status for herself and her children. Marguerite Harrison wrote about the concealed pressures of an upper-class female's life during this vibrant period in American history. She desired the fulfilment of an intellectual life, outside the conventions of upper-class tradition.

After the death of her husband, she took a job as Assistant Society Editor for the Baltimore Sun. When the U.S. entered World War I, she took the opportunity to become a Staff Reporter, assigned to the Sun's patriotic propaganda efforts. Her heightened patriotism led her to offer her services as an agent for the Military Intelligence Division of the U.S. Army, when she was denied access to post-war Europe as a war correspondent!

After initial success as an agent in Germany, she was a spy for the United States from 1917 to 1923 in Russia and Japan, relaying information on Bolshevik economic strengths and supplying American political prisoners in Russia with food. She was arrested by Russian authorities and spent time in prison in from 1919 to 1922, but was set free in exchange for food and aid after the Russian economy collapsed. She was secretly arrested again in 1923 but was set free days before her trial, which likely would have resulted in her death, after an American aid worker recognised her. Although Marguerite Harrison rejected the ideology of the women's movement of her time, over the course of her adventurous career as a reporter, foreign correspondent, intelligence agent, travel writer, and pioneering documentary filmmaker, she developed a feminist consciousness that was rooted in the key mythic scenarios of American culture.

### ***Grass: A Nation's Battle for Life***

This film is a 1925 silent documentary film which follows a clan of the Bakhtiari nomads of Iran as they and their herds make their seasonal journey to better pastures. The film is Merian C. Cooper, Ernest Schoedsack and Marguerite Harrison's documentation of their journey from Angora (modern-day Ankara, Turkey) to Iraq and to the Bakhtiari country of south-western Iran, in what is now the Khuzestan province.



**From Left : M.C.Cooper, M.Harrison and E.B. Schoedsack, smoking water pipe.**

They follow one of the local chiefs of the Bakhtiari, Heydar Khan. The tribe subsists on their herd animals, which live on pasture. But grassland is not available in the same place all year round, so the tribe migrates twice a year hundreds of miles across treacherous rivers and snowy mountains, just to survive.

In this film, Heydar Khan leads his clan and countless animals on a harrowing trek across the Bazoft and Karun rivers and over Zard Kuh (Kuh-rang), one of the highest peaks in the Zagros Mountains. The film highlights the extreme hardships faced by nomadic peoples, as well as the techniques of nomadisation and the transhumance of the Bakhtiari.



**From left: Cooper, Lufta (Lottf-Ali) Haidar’s son, Haidar (Heydar) Khan, and Schoedsack**

*Grass* is a truly great documentary — not just “for a silent film” or “for an 80-year-old film,” or for the first documentary film in Iran, but on its own merits. The story is timeless, the drama is gripping, the photography is striking and the settings are exotic. With the modern, expressive, yet unobtrusive soundtrack (recorded in 1991 by Gholam Hoseyn Janati-Atai, Kavous Shirzadian and Amir-Ali Vahabzadegan), it is easy to be drawn in and forget that *Grass* is a silent, black-and-white film.

In this film for the first time in the Bakhtiari nomads and their Chahar Mahal va Bakhtiari. This and many men, women, children season. This is why today we find and dangerous passages in the these dangers, names such as Rah-e can also see talismans and sacred women have asked for help from



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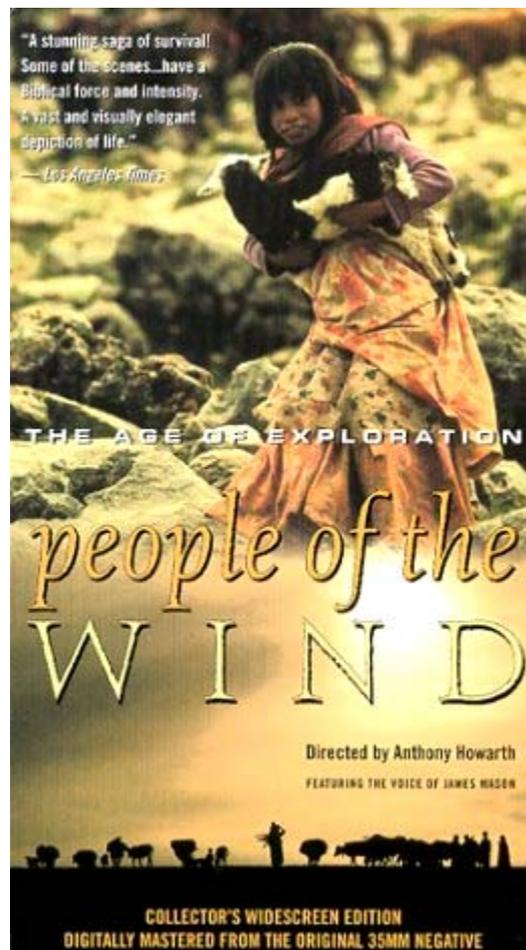
history of Iran, we see the real transhumance from Khuzestan to migration road was very dangerous and animals lost their lives each different local names for the narrow migration roads, reminding us of Zan (the pass way of women). We stones and trees where Bakhtiari nature and from God to keep their

family safe on their journey along the migration roads. Besides images of transhumance, this film is one of the best ethnographical films about the nomads of Iran. We can see the nomads’ daily life, their material culture and their husbandry. We also see how the Bakhtiari prepare their camp to move and how everybody should participate in this huge migration. We also learn about their folklore customs like Chub-Bazi (wood playing) that reminds us of the place of the hero and heroism in their nomadic life.



Bazoft, Khuzestan. ©P.khosronejad

In 1975, precisely fifty years after Merian C. Cooper and Ernest B. Schoedsack's 1925 Odyssey 'Grass: A Nation's Battle for Life', Anthony Howarth and David Koff decided to pay tribute to their eminent predecessors in another documentary illustrating the same journey, only the reverse trip.



**People of the Wind, Oscar nominated in 1976**

This time in colour, this documentary was entitled 'People of the Wind' and was shot in 1975 and released in 1976. It allowed the film crew to focus on one particular tribal leader of the Babadi tribe (Jafar-Qoli Ristami) whose words were translated into English and read by the actor James Mason.

Credit should be given to the film's astonishing wide-screen photography which offers sweeping mountain panoramas that take the viewer out into the dangerous precipices of the Zard Kuh (Kuh- rang) mountain and into the icy waters of the Shinbar ( Shirin-Bahar) River.

Fifty years after Cooper & documentary, the producers of that the Bakhtiari are still a us a stunning epic of survival have something of a Biblical was never acknowledged as the by the British anthropologist,



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Schoedsack's challenging 'People of the Wind' proved fascinating people by offering with scenes that to this day force and intensity, but this film result of years of fielded research David H. M. Brooks.

### *The Nomads Bakhtiari*

The Bakhtiari are one of the important nomadic tribal groups in Iran who have had a long connection with and influence on the political life of Iran during the last three centuries. Nevertheless, in the history of Iran, there has always been interest in a number of leading personalities among the Bakhtiari, like Sardar Asad or Sardar Mozafar, but not in the Bakhtiari nomads themselves.

The Bakhtiari are a partly south-west of the Zagros a year between their winter and spring and returning in autumn Imamate (Twelver) branch of Zagros has historically been Lor-e Kuchek (the small Lor), Lor). The Bakhtiāri Mountains,



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nomadic people living in the Mountains who migrate twice summer pastures, leaving in and they are Muslims of the Shiism. A large part of the divided into two sections: and Lor-e Bozorg (the great forming the north and north-

eastern border of Khuzestan are critical in the understanding of Iranian agricultural developments. The region is ideal for mixed economies, with an emphasis on herding. Its fertile intermountain valleys, frequently well-watered, provide excellent opportunities for the combination of extensive agriculture and pastoral nomadism.

## List of Copper's film:

1. [Best of Cinerama](#) (1963) (co-producer)
2. [Seven Wonders of the World](#) (1956) (producer)
3. [The Searchers](#) (1956) (executive producer)
4. [The Sun Shines Bright](#) (1953) (producer)
5. [This Is Cinerama](#) (1952) (producer)
6. [The Quiet Man](#) (1952) (producer)
7. [Rio Grande](#) (1950) (producer)  
... aka John Ford and Merian C. Cooper's Rio Grande (USA: complete title)
8. [Wagon Master](#) (1950) (executive producer) (uncredited)
9. [She Wore a Yellow Ribbon](#) (1949) (executive producer)
10. [Mighty Joe Young](#) (1949) (producer)  
... aka Mr. Joseph Young of Africa
11. [3 Godfathers](#) (1948) (producer)
12. [Fort Apache](#) (1948) (executive producer)  
... aka War Party
13. [The Fugitive](#) (1947) (producer)  
... aka Fugitivo, El (Mexico)
14. [Dr. Cyclops](#) (1940) (producer)  
... aka Doctor Cyclops (USA: poster title)
15. [The Toy Wife](#) (1938) (producer)  
... aka Frou Frou (UK)
16. [Dancing Pirate](#) (1936) (executive producer)
17. [The Last Days of Pompeii](#) (1935) (producer)
18. [She](#) (1935) (producer)
19. [Finishing School](#) (1934) (executive producer)
20. [Success at Any Price](#) (1934) (executive producer)
21. [Kentucky Kernels](#) (1934) (executive producer) (uncredited)  
... aka Triple Trouble (UK)
22. [Spitfire](#) (1934) (executive producer)
23. [This Man Is Mine](#) (1934) (executive producer)
24. [Keep 'Em Rolling](#) (1934) (executive producer)
25. [The Lost Patrol](#) (1934) (executive producer)
26. [Hips, Hips, Hooray!](#) (1934) (executive producer)
27. [Two Alone](#) (1934) (executive producer)
28. [Long Lost Father](#) (1934) (executive producer)
29. [The Meanest Gal in Town](#) (1934) (executive producer)
30. [Flying Down to Rio](#) (1933) (executive producer)
31. [The Son of Kong](#) (1933) (executive producer)
32. [If I Were Free](#) (1933) (executive producer)  
... aka Behold We Live (UK)
33. [The Right to Romance](#) (1933) (executive producer)
34. [Little Women](#) (1933) (executive producer)
35. [Chance at Heaven](#) (1933) (executive producer)
36. [After Tonight](#) (1933) (executive producer)  
... aka Sealed Lips (UK)
37. [Ace of Aces](#) (1933) (executive producer)

38. [Headline Shooter](#) (1933) (executive producer)  
... aka Evidence in Camera (UK)
39. [Aggie Appleby Maker of Men](#) (1933) (executive producer)  
... aka Cupid in the Rough (UK)
40. [Flaming Gold](#) (1933) (executive producer)
41. [Ann Vickers](#) (1933) (executive producer)
42. [One Man's Journey](#) (1933) (executive producer)
43. [Rafter Romance](#) (1933) (executive producer)
44. [Blind Adventure](#) (1933) (executive producer)
45. [Morning Glory](#) (1933) (executive producer)
46. [No Marriage Ties](#) (1933) (executive producer)  
... aka The Public Be Sold
47. [Before Dawn](#) (1933) (executive producer)
48. [Flying Devils](#) (1933) (executive producer)  
... aka The Flying Circus (UK)
49. [Double Harness](#) (1933) (executive producer)
50. [Cross Fire](#) (1933) (executive producer)
51. [Bed of Roses](#) (1933) (executive producer)
52. [Emergency Call](#) (1933) (executive producer)
53. [Melody Cruise](#) (1933) (executive producer)
54. [Professional Sweetheart](#) (1933) (executive producer)  
... aka Imaginary Sweetheart
55. [The Monkey's Paw](#) (1933) (producer)
56. [The Silver Cord](#) (1933) (executive producer)
57. [Diplomaniacs](#) (1933) (executive producer)
58. [King Kong](#) (1933) (producer) (uncredited)  
... aka The Eighth Wonder  
... aka The Eighth Wonder of the World
59. [Lucky Devils](#) (1933) (associate producer)
60. [The Phantom of Crestwood](#) (1932) (associate producer)
61. [The Most Dangerous Game](#) (1932) (associate producer)  
... aka The Hounds of Zaroff (UK)
  
62. [Chang: A Drama of the Wilderness](#) (1927) (producer)  
... aka Chang (USA: short title)
63. [Grass: A Nation's Battle for Life](#) (1925) (producer) (uncredited)  
... aka Grass (USA: short title)  
... aka Grass, the Epic of a Lost Tribe (USA)

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