

LIGHTS, CAMERA, ERUPTION

This St. Helens won't rouse residents



The snap of the clapboard signals a weary crew to action on the next scene.

Hollywood has come to Bend once again. The small central Oregon town is the location for the movie "St. Helens" — tinsel town's version of the May 18 eruption of the now-infamous volcano.

In any other community the size of Bend (pop. 17,420) moviemaking would spark enthusiasm and intense curiosity on the part of locals. But Bend residents, veterans of several movies including "Rooster Cogburn," and "How the West Was Won," don't even slow down when driving past the Woolen Mill Pub where Panzer Davis Productions is filming the volcano movie.

"It's not a disaster film," says assistant director Duncan Henderson, describing the movie as a "personal thing."

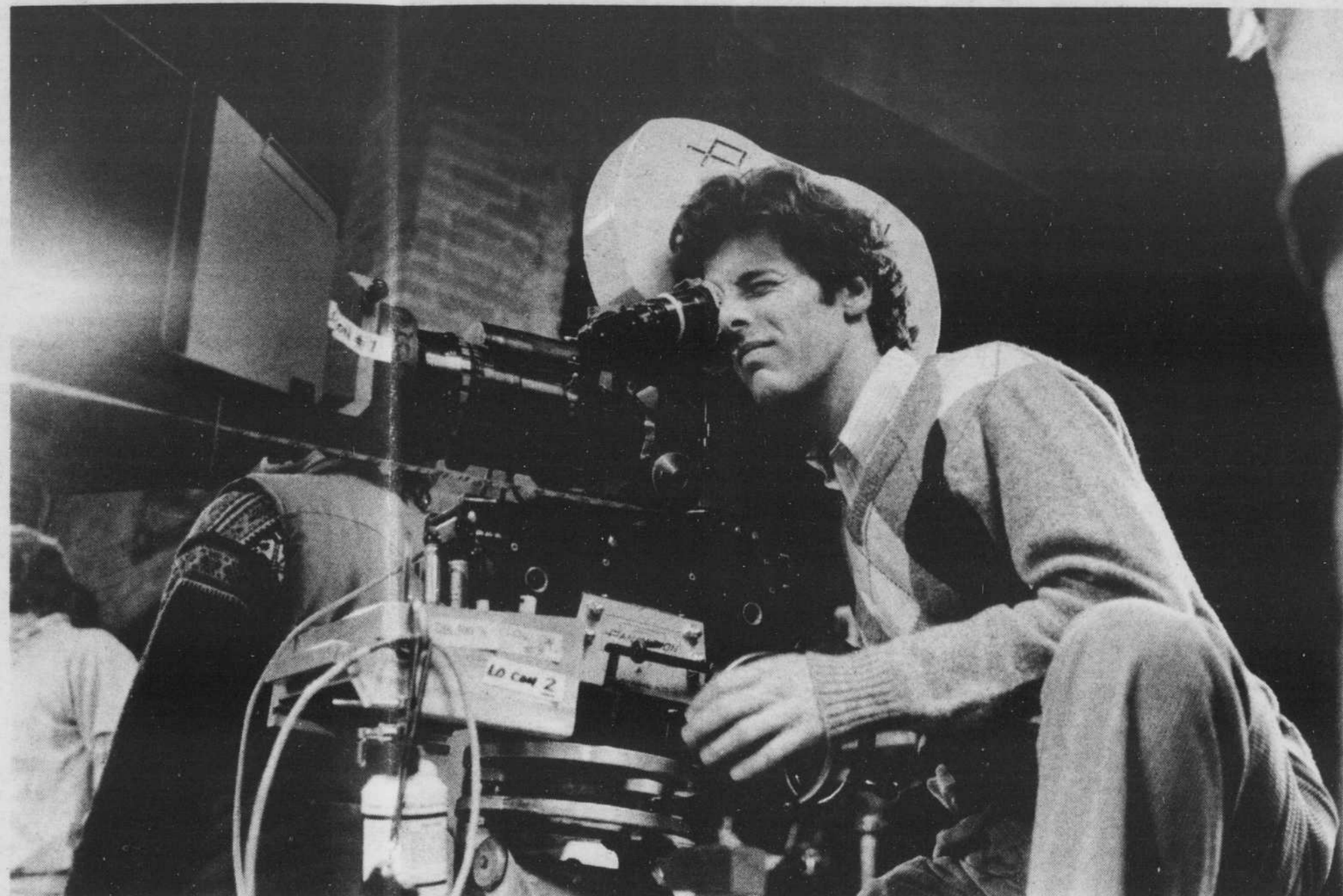
The movie focuses on the lives of Cougar, Wash., residents and oldtimer Harry Truman just prior to the mountain's eruption. The plot has a bad guy, a good guy and, of course, a romantic distraction.

The bad guy, a dirty dealin' timber man named Whittaker, is pitted against David Johnston, a U.S. Geological Survey scientist who becomes involved with a pretty little thing from Chicago.

Art Carney, who won an Academy Award for best actor in "Harry and Tonto," portrays whiskey-loving Harry Truman, who refused to leave his Spirit Lake Lodge during the mountain's tantrums last spring. Albert Salmi, ("Brubaker," "Caddy Shack") plays Whittaker, who owns a fictitious timber company and restaurant in Cougar.

Cassie Yates ("Rich Man Poor Man," "FM") plays Linda, who leaves Chicago for the supposed tranquility of Cougar after seeing postcards of the town. David Huffman ("F.I.S.T.") co-stars as the protagonist scientist Johnston, who must convince the obstinate townspeople of an eruption's fatal effects.

But the camera will focus on a slightly differ-



Director of photography Jacque Hartkin critically eyes the "St. Helens" movie set for any visual oddities.

ent Truman than the man who died in the eruption. Director Ernest Pintoff has replaced Truman's 17 cats with dogs. The explanation on the set: Pintoff is allergic to cats.

Elk Lake and the Elk Lake Lodge have been cast as Truman's Spirit Lake home, now only a giant mud puddle. Bachelor Butte substitutes for the once snowcapped St. Helens.

Producer Peter Davis says the Los Angeles-based production company chose Bend for its reliably dry winters — arid compared to rainy Cougar.

According to Peggy Sawyer, Bend Chamber of Commerce manager, production companies have been filming in and around Bend since the late 1940s when Marlene Dietrich and crew came to film parts of the movie "Golden Earring."

Bend citizens aren't intimidated by Hollywood at all, Sawyer says.

"They're delighted. That's the reason why production companies like to come here, because of the fine attitude."

Most Bend citizens enjoy Hollywood's visits. Moviemakers pour money into the town's hotels and restaurants and the pockets of hundreds of Bend residents who act as extras.

"It gives you something better to do than just sittin' around freezing," says Walt Aleshire, an extra who has lived in Bend for eight years.

Normally the Woolen Mill Pub welcomes Bend beer drinkers, except when Hollywood comes to call. The drinkers might not recognize the pub through its stage make-up.

They've transformed the Woolen Mill into "Whittaker Lodge," a fictitious restaurant in Cougar. The foosball machines are crammed into a rear room, and bright, hot lights hang from the rafters. Blue and white checkered table cloths grace the tables.

Extras sit patiently at tables, looking distastefully at rubbery eggs, limp burgers and soggy sandwiches cooked long ago. The waitresses wear bright pink T-shirts with "Whittaker Lodge" emblazoned on the front. They wait patiently for photography director Jacque Hartkin to finish checking the visual details of the upcoming scene.

Haitkin orders an "Oly Gold" mirror above the bar taken down. "It's in my field of view," he explains impatiently.

The actual filming won't begin for another hour.

"I can't get anything over here," the microphone man yells, a long microphone draped across his shoulders like a yoke.

Not all the crew members work in the comfortably warm tavern. Some, like Peter Smith, work outside in the bitter cold.

Smith is putting foam padding in a lightweight beam that will "break" in an upcoming earthquake scene. "Actually special effects should be doing this," says Smith, who works in the art department.

Six days a week, Smith and the other crew members report to the set at 7 a.m. and work 11 to 12 hours. The longer the hours, the sooner the filming will be finished. Assistant director Henderson estimates the production crew will jet back to Los Angeles in early December.

With obvious haste, Pintoff commands "QUIET ON THE SET!" and filming begins.

Outside, Michael Curillovic of Bend sits alone in the cold, charged by the moviemakers with keeping away intruding mobs of onlookers. Curillovic blandly watches the traffic. The bank thermometer across the street reads 28 degrees at 3:23 p.m.

His heavy leather coat and fleece cap protects him from the dry, cold air.

Curillovic has worked on the "St. Helens" set since filming began. He says he's noticed one thing about the sunshine-oriented Californians making the film.

"They can't handle the weather."

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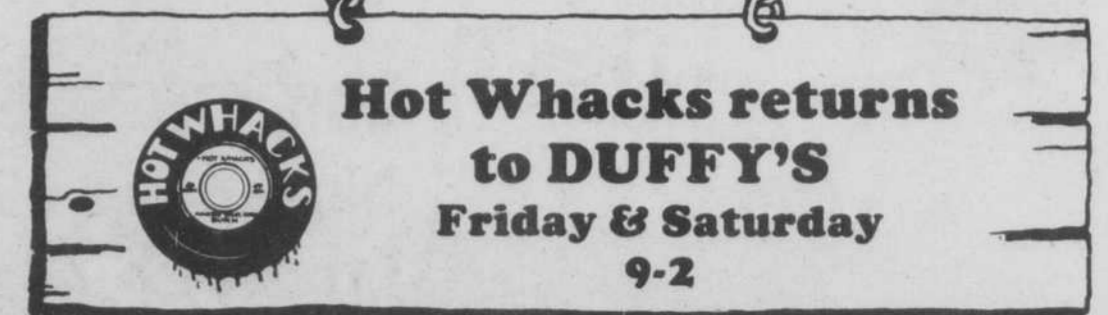
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