

Ernesto (Gael Garcia Bernal, pointing) and Alberto (Rodrigo de la Serna), dazzled by the wonder of the natural world.



PAULA PRANDINI/FOCUS FEATURES, 2004.

Biking, Hiking, Waking Up

Ernesto's road trip with Alberto

MOTORCYCLE DIARIES: Directed by Walter Salles Jr. Screenwriter, Jose Rivera, based on the published diaries of Alberto Granado and Ernesto Che Guevara. Produced by Edgar Tenenbaum, Karen Tenkhoff and Michael Nozik. Executive producers, Robert Redford, Rebecca Yeldham, Paul Webster. Cinematographer, Eric Gautier. Editor, Daniel Rezende. Production design, Carlos Conti. Costumes, Beatriz du Benedetto, Marisa Urruti. Musical score, Gustavo Santolalla. Starring Gael Garcia Bernal and Rodrigo de la Serna. With Mia Maestro, Gustav Bueno, Jorge Chiarella and Igo Calvo. Focus Features, 2004. R. 128 minutes.

Set in 1952 in a continent of mostly poor people living in dirty, overcrowded cities surrounded by stunning, empty landscapes of breathtaking natural beauty and generous-hearted Metizo people, *Motorcycle Diaries* is a buddy movie, a road trip and a coming of age story.

To enjoy what the film has to offer, which is considerable, I had to give up the need for an overarching focus or for contextual continuity. None of that exists. Instead, Walter Salles Jr. has pieced together a number of anecdotal episodes and travel notes from a life-altering trip 23-year old Ernesto Che Guevara (Gael Garcia Bernal) took with his 29-year old friend, Alberto Granado (Rodrigo de la Serna), through the interior heart of South America: Argentina, Chile, Peru, Colombia and the Andes, the Amazon, Machu Pichu.

Alberto and Ernesto spend important time at a remote leprosarium run by Catholic sisters. By the 1950s, the treatment for leprosy had advanced from the Dark Ages, but affected people were still shunned and quarantined for their own protection, although the disease is not contagious. Ernesto insists on breaking down barriers and dismantling the fascinating customs around the treatment of the patients.

The two men, despite being good friends, are dissimilar personalities. They fight and call each other names, storm off and pout for the next 100 miles. I like this, because I cannot imagine sharing a grueling travel experience without some times when everyone blows off steam. Both come from comfort-

able backgrounds, are well-educated — Alberto is a chemist, Ernesto a medical student. Until this trip, they have had no idea how the poor live.

Ernesto is reserved, brutally honest, soft-spoken. Alberto is bombastic, pragmatic — not rigid — about truth-telling, and worried about whether they have enough food and money. The image of Ernesto is a young man who becomes more serious and quietly observant as their journey reveals more about the suffering of impoverished, unemployed indigenous people. I don't detect Ernesto with a martyr complex, as some in the West have portrayed him, but he does recognize the disparity between his privileged life and that of others. Alberto takes people as they are and likes most of them, especially the women.

You, too, may be captivated by the faces of the people who call this southern continent "America." You will be enchanted by its beauty and humbled by its vastness.

You, too, may be captivated by the faces of the people who call this southern continent "America." You will be enchanted by its beauty and humbled by its vastness. And maybe some of the negative hype surrounding the historical figure of Che Guevara may be toned down, at least in your heart. He died an undeserved, brutal death at the hand of thugs hired by our CIA, when he was only 33. But when he was younger, Che took a trip into the landscape of his people and saw hope.

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