



SUNDANCE  
FILM FESTIVAL

05

2005 Sundance Film Festival

## Tinseltown comes to Timpanagos

This month marks the 21st birthday of the Sundance Film Festival.


It was in 1984 that Robert Redford and his disciples at the Sundance Institute first turned a powerful spotlight on the independent film scene. Julie Egleton reports.

ROBERT REDFORD'S Sundance resort lies surrounded by magnificent forest on the eastern slopes of Mount Timpanagos, which soars to 12,000ft. The area was once a notorious hunting ground for the Ute Indians. Redford began his love affair with Utah back in 1961 when he bought a two-acre piece of land for \$500, and built a house, literally by hand. Naturally, over time, the land and house became bigger, and Redford started to buy up most of the surrounding area to save it from "out-of-control development". Consequently, thanks to his vision, 25,000 acres surrounding Sundance is now protected. He first conceived of building a "community for the arts" in 1969.

What Redford refers to as his "experiment in environmental stewardship and artistic expression" now comprises an institute for independent film and the arts, a resort where you can ski in winter and ride in summer, a cable channel, a catalogue gift shop, deli, bar, restaurants, a 120 seat screening room and of course, an annual film festival.

After checking in to my idyllic cottage, tucked into the woods a five-minute stroll from the ski base, I ventured out for the evening to have a quick look around the resort. I gravitated towards the delights of the Sundance Deli, charmingly set out like an old country store. As I mentally wrestled with the delicious choice of home-made jams on offer, I looked up to see a figure striding purposefully towards me, clad in jeans and cowboy boots. It was only when I saw the shock of honey-coloured hair that I realised this was the man everyone had been talking about. He smiled and I smiled back. A good start. A book that had been causing ripples around town, Peter Biskind's *Down and Dirty Pictures: Miramax, Sundance and the Rise of Independent Cinema* had accused Redford of doing a disappearing act during the festival, and I had heard that sightings are indeed rare. Not bad then, since I'd been at Sundance less than an hour!

However, this year Redford had a film to promote, and in his own words he was going to "put his body where his mouth was by being in the festival rather than being a spokesperson for it". *The Clearing*, co-starring Helen Mirren, is an enjoyable yet sombre thriller about a successful entrepreneur (Redford) who is kidnapped by an embittered man from his past (Willem Defoe).

As I was going to be here for only eight days of the 10-day festival, zipping to Park City and back with an average of two films to see per day, I had to plan my schedule carefully. Dilemmas inevitably occurred when I wanted to see two films that just happened to be showing simultaneously, at Sundance and Park City. Should I go and see *Super Size Me*, a documentary about a guy who ate McDonalds morning, noon and night for 30 days to see how it would affect his health, or should I see *Motorcycle Diaries* about Che Guevara's youthful adventures around South America on the back of an unreliable Norton 500cc bike? (I'm glad I chose the latter, as it turned out to )



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be my favourite film of the entire festival - and not just because it starred the gorgeous Gael Garcia Bernal). Then there was *Maria Full of Grace*, about women who were used for Columbian drug trafficking. Or would it be the big-wave surfing movie *Riding Giants* that opened the 2004 festival to critical acclaim? Not to mention the numerous press conferences, gala evenings, music nights at Sundance's Owl bar (which incidentally houses the original rosewood bar where the real Butch Cassidy used to drink, complete with genuine bullet holes).

Over on Main Street, Park City, the hub of festival activity, there were daily events to attend at the Filmmakers' Lodge, the Music Café and Sundance House. The Lodge seemed to be the unofficial HQ of the festival, where every day, film-makers and the press would get together over coffee and discuss their experiences. Another great way to interact with fellow festival goers and catch up on the latest happenings, was simply to catch the free shuttle bus that ferried passengers to and from screenings.

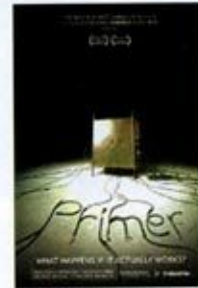
Since the very first festival, when *Sex, Lies & Videotape* was a huge hit, attendance has rocketed to 40,000. As actors, producers, agents, studio executives, media, wannabes and the film-going public hustle for film tickets, invitations to the hottest parties and extremely generous goody bags (Paris Hilton was rumoured to be Queen of the swag haul), Cannes seemed to have temporarily moved from the Croisette. As spottings of Demi Moore and Ashton Kutcher shopping on Main Street and parties with Nelly Hooper blurred into

one, I decided to stop being so hard on myself, and make time for some skiing.

I was really looking forward to exploring the totally unspoilt Sundance area and virtually deserted slopes. After a delicious organic breakfast at the Foundry Grill, I warmed up by cruising the roller-coaster slopes of Maverick and Rays Run before graduating to the steeper blues and blacks off Amy's Ridge. The difficulty gradually increased towards the Bearclaw cabin. It was it worth it for the view from the top. Nothing but unspoilt Rocky panoramas as far as the eye could see. It was an exhilarating day, and a pleasant surprise to find so much good skiing in a small resort.

As the awards night grew nearer, so sadly did my departure date, so I figured I'd better test some more local ski areas. Clutching my Utah passport, which covers The Canyons, Park City, Deer Valley & Sundance (as well as Alta, Snowbird, Brighton and Solitude), I headed to Deer Valley, the most exclusive of the three Park City areas, where I enjoyed a long, sunny day bashing the immaculately groomed pistes. Steep, rolling or gentle in turn, the runs were attractively gladdened with occasional wide-open views over the surrounding broad valleys. Better still, it gave me one last chance to star-spot, particularly when I slid as elegantly as possible along Stein's Way and Roamer, which wind past the grandest of chalets. A little disappointingly, my tally for the morning amounted to just one - Jeff Daniels (*Dumb & Dumber*), who managed to cut me off at the top of the chairlift.

As Park City prepared to party one last time, The Dramatic Grand Jury



Prize was presented to a film called *Primer*, about a group of men in a suburban garage who, partly by accident and partly by design, discover a

mechanism whose power enables them to have anything they want. A reliable source advised that it takes two viewings just to understand it, but once you do, it's brilliant.

It was time to go. I'd seen some great films, met some larger-than-life characters and even improved my skiing technique - and now I was able to put these into practice against the most magical back-drop imaginable. **SB**

Julie Eagleton travelled to Sundance and Park City with Ski All America (08701 676 676 [www.skiallamerica.com](http://www.skiallamerica.com)) A seven-night holiday staying two nights (B&B) at the Sundance Lodge in a studio followed by five nights' B&B at the Radisson Hotel, Park City, costs from £1059 during the film festival, inclusive of one-stop flights from the UK into Salt Lake City and a rental car with gold insurance. A seven-night holiday in a studio in Park City in mid-January costs £716 including flights and transfer. Film Festival passes start at US \$250 for 10 film tickets. The Ski Utah passport costs £203 for 6 days.



PHOTO: PARK CITY