



Changing the Face of Adventure Film

BY JAYME MOYE

Photo: Andrea Wing, Darcy Hennessey, and Sarah Steele, co-founders of Well Travelled Collective.

In the 2010s, professional freeride mountain biker Darcy Hennessey didn't like the way women were being portrayed in adventure film—herself included. “I remember this awful scene in a mountain biking film where I was just on this swing set, just swinging, and it went on and on,” she says. “It had nothing to do with my character, or with being an athlete.”

After studying film through her master's degree program, Hennessey began to understand that the male gaze—the only one she'd ever been portrayed under—wasn't necessarily the best lens to tell a female athlete's story. But it was often the only one available. Part of the problem was that there weren't enough women making outdoor action films. Hennessey felt compelled to do something about it.

She wasn't alone. In 2019, at a prominent film festival, she found herself deep in conversation on the topic with adventure film executive producer Sarah Lee Steele and commercial film director Andrea Wing. “None of us could relate to how women were portrayed in adventure films,” says Steele. “We got to talking about what we wanted to see in the industry to give women more opportunities.”

The three creatives decided to join forces. They formed Well Travelled Collective, a female-owned production company specializing in the adventure and outdoor space. The company aims to elevate women's voices both in front of and behind the camera. In addition to producing films, Well Travelled Collective leads workshops to help women acquire and build technical filmmaking skills, and provides one-on-one mentoring online.

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Well Travelled Collective has since produced multiple films that have appeared in film festivals worldwide. Most notable at the Banff Centre Mountain Film and Book Festival is *This is Beth* (2022), rock climbing superstar Beth Rodden's heartfelt reveal of her history of disordered eating and body image issues. The film went on to win Best Climbing Film at the 2023 Vancouver International Mountain Film Festival.

The company's latest release, *Jamie*, was part of the 2024 Festival in Banff and Mountainfilm in Telluride, Colorado. It follows pioneering climber Jamie Logan's transition at age 69. To make the film, Well Travelled Collective brought in award-winning cinematographer and Emmy-nominated Director Rose Bush, who is transgender. “Rose was a huge partner in that storytelling, and then we had a diverse, non-binary crew when we shot with Jamie,” Hennessey says. “We really tried to allow that story to speak through the lens of the people who made it.”

As Steele puts it, “You have to be the change you want to see out there and we wanted to combat bias and challenge gender stereotypes by embedding these principles into our work directly.”



Behind the scenes from the film *Jamie* (2024), photo by Tara Kerzhner

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The project solidified Hennessey’s belief that representation is critical to being able to tell not only a great story, but an authentic story—a value she feels was sometimes lacking in the earlier, male-dominated days of adventure film, when she was working as a professional mountain biker.

Fortunately, times have changed. According to Joanna Croston, Director of Mountain Culture at Banff Centre for Arts and Creativity and Director of the Banff Centre Mountain Film and Book Festival, in 2024 more than half of the award-winning films were either directed or produced by a woman. In 2025, for the first time ever, more women than men are participating in the Festival’s flagship training program, Adventure Filmmakers Workshop.

“Adventure films are reaching broader theatrical and online audiences and the narrative has changed to include many different voices,” says Croston. “We’re very proud to be part of that shift with our festival, world tour, and creative programs.”

The women of Well Travelled Collective concur that the landscape has evolved. But more change is still needed. “We’re no longer in that crux situation where we were five years ago of women having to prove they belong in the adventure film industry,” Wing says. “Now it’s about normalizing it, and providing opportunities for women to acquire

the skills and mentoring that they need.” The continued evolution is important because women are major players in the outdoor industry and adventure space, and now, more than ever, filmgoers want stories and topics they can relate to directly. “In order for more people to be able to see themselves in these films, we have to broaden our definition of what adventure films are, and what the human experience looks like within them,” says Steele. “It’s an ever-changing landscape and it’s key that the storytellers are accurately reflecting that landscape.”

To that effect, Banff Centre for Arts and Creativity, the post-secondary institution has partnered with Well Travelled Collective to offer women’s-only Moonlighter Film Camps starting in 2026. The first year will see three offerings, including not only the craft of storytelling but technical filmmaking skills, how to produce a film (from idea to funding), and post-production training.

The new program will adhere to the same guiding that brought Hennessey, Steele, and Wing together in the first place: to tell great stories, to be representative in building film crews, to provide a platform and a community of female filmmakers to learn from each other, and to elevate each other and each other’s work.