

# VERMONT BIKEPACKERS

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A black and white photograph of two men on bicycles at night. The man on the left is wearing glasses and a long-sleeved shirt, looking towards the man on the right. The man on the right is wearing a dark jacket and is looking back at the first man. They are both smiling. The background is dark with some blurred lights, suggesting an outdoor setting at night. The bicycles have large panniers attached to the racks.

**“MAKING CONNECTIONS IS WHAT  
WE NEED RIGHT NOW...”**

and seeing the world on a bicycle  
is amongst the best ways of doing this.”

-Cass Gilbert

# INTRODUCTION

What is it within the human spirit that compels us to push against convention and constraint?

How does the spark that lights the flame of courage and commitment,  
dedication and devotion, grow to become an illuminating blaze?

And how does this profoundly human desire to embody what it means to be fully alive—regardless  
of daunting challenges and long odds—present itself? Often, and most vividly,  
it is through the poetry and purpose of humans.

Even in this current period—perhaps especially in this current period—of near daily reassessments and adjustments to our definition of what is possible, there are those among us who embrace change and challenge, and see doing so as necessary as oxygen.

Though they often go unnoticed, these individuals are all around us. They are the ones who insist to themselves, “I can do better. I can go further.”

Driven by their own inner urges, and sustained by the communities that nurture and applaud their ambitions, they come to represent that desire in all of us to overcome long odds and reimagine what is possible on an individual and collective level.

Most vividly, such individuals immerse themselves within the beautifully indifferent landscape of the outdoors and the grandeur of nature, where human efforts are constantly tested and recalibrated, and ultimately, rewarded through practice, patience, perseverance. And it is here that we often recognize that the greatest individual successes are backed by the community as a whole.

Bikepacking, commonly regarded solely as an individualized sport, dramatically illustrates what happens when people—from myriad walks of life—set out to redefine what their limitations are while discovering how community effort and cohesion yields benefits far greater than individual achievement and informs a rewarding approach to life both in and out of the saddle.



# STORY

The Vermont Super 8 is a 640-mile bikepacking route reaching to all four borders of the state. With participants ranging from longtime experts to first time riders, the event welcomes anyone willing to take on the challenge. With notoriously rugged terrain and an incredible amount of vertical gain, even considering an event of this nature is not for the faint of heart. The film explores the individual stories that brought riders to the Grand Depart, observes the stories evolving along the way, and highlights the overarching importance of community.

The route itself tells a story of gratitude, a connection to the land, and an admiration for the overlooked wild places in the rolling green hills of Vermont. Route development began in the early 2000's by the Vermont Mountain Bike Advocates. It first came to fruition as

the border-to-border XVT Bikepack Route. Over the next decade, extensive route development brought riders around Vermont's countryside covering rocky and rugged class four town highways, overgrown paths, washed out bridges, a smidge of pavement, and of course the iconic and beautiful gravel roads.

In 2009/2010 the route rapidly evolved thanks to extensive saddle time from David Tremblay and Dave Blumenthal. Their efforts contributed to a crowd sourced route development page which still receives contributions today. In 2010, Dave Blumenthal was killed in a truck collision while bikepacking the Tour Divide leaving behind his wife and their young daughter. Today's Super 8 is a fully realized vision of Dave's early development.

## STORY



The story of the Vermont Super 8 is about the riders and the legacy of this future classic route. The folks who enjoy spending valued vacation time on the saddle of a bike questioning their reality and sanity for an average of three to ten days. Why would someone willingly choose to spend an absurd amount of time succumbing to the mercy of the trail and whatever the day might put in front of them? The film explores the mental battle of persistence, perseverance, and the motivation behind the miles.

With varying strategies and expectations, each rider experiences a journey unique to whatever is presented to them along the way. Riders must face a critical decision at several stages: quit or continue to the next checkpoint. Both outcomes carry intense emotional, mental, and physical consequences.

“Packing our own food and supplies makes us especially aware of the importance of self-sufficiency and sustainability. It slows us down and brings a heightened sense of awareness for where we are.” Cass Gilbert, co-editor and professional stoke builder at [bikepacking.com](http://bikepacking.com).





## STORY

With bikepacking events it is difficult to understand the intensity of the event unless you are along for the ride. The list of what can go wrong or right is endless, the most important lesson is learning how to let go. Every day presents a running tab of challenges dependent on trusting yourself, your environment, and the community that surrounds you. Bikepacking is paradoxically a combined experience of saddle time and connecting with the world around you. The seemingly trivial, unplanned interactions are sometimes the most influential moments of someone else's journey.

Riders move in parallel, experiencing the same locations at different times bridging the gap of individualism and camaraderie. A shared experience with different perspectives. The film taps into the psychological connection developed by experiencing different journeys along the same path. As humans, naturally we are drawn to connection with

others as a venture for self alignment. Through bikepacking and the Vermont Super 8, individuals pursue the opportunity to explore their own strengths while tuning into the experience of others.

2020 broke the mold of human connection presenting the world with exceptional challenges in social distancing, social justice movements, and a historical election for the United States. These life changing events have shifted the role of community and the importance of human connection, a privilege once taken for granted by many. Throughout the film, we introduce the role that community plays in our lives moving into 2021 and how we navigate the constantly shifting landscape of our future. Without these valuable connections, the human race is robbed of the opportunity to grow in empathy, understanding, and diversity.





# THE APPROACH

Vermont Bikepackers Project is shot from an observational view allowing an in depth look at several of the riders before, during, and after the race. The film begins at the Grand Depart where riders set out from the State House of Montpelier. Every rider has different strategies, goals, and timelines for the event shedding light on the nuances of bikepacking. Riders choose between one of the loops (North Lobe or South Lobe) or tackling the entire figure 8. As the first stage of the event begins, viewers are introduced to select riders through footage acquired during the months leading up to the event. The audience gets a first-hand look at the extensive amount of mental, physical, and emotional prep that goes into an event like this along with gear, nutrition, and time. An experience like this doesn't end at the finish line and our filmmaking team will continue documenting our riders after they return back home, providing a full spectrum of the journey for the audience.

This project draws heavily on producer Brittini Gorman's experience of riding to a first place finish in the 2020 Vermont Super 8.

With her insight to this specific bikepacking event, understanding of route development, and an appreciation for the community surrounding bikepacking, the film crew is in a unique position to uncover the depth of bikepacking as it relates to the participants and the community it reaches.

The film also builds on director Jon Mercer's history of working within the cycling community. His 2019 feature length documentary SISU joined ten riders from a small community in Maine as they embarked on a 1,358km race around the perimeter of Iceland. SISU developed the relationships of a team, the importance of community driven fitness, and explored the role of adventure in modern life. Our Vermont Bikepackers film continues this exploration of adventure and the impact of both team and solo endurance riding. The observational style of this film aims to engage the audience as if they were on trail experiencing the journey of the rider. The film aims to show the audience an intimate perspective into the emotional and physical challenges of the course as if they are out there themselves.



# TIMELINE

Production on The Vermont Bikepackers project begins in the spring of 2021 capturing the lead up to the September race date. Filmmakers follow several of the riders as they begin preparing for the season. Throughout the summer, we will gather footage as riders take on gravel adventures on their home terrain, testing gear and limits prior to the race.

In addition to the observational filming style, interviews with race directors, coordinators, and other community members provide details about the history of the route and the bikepacking community. Post production will begin in winter of 2021, with distribution planned for spring of 2022, about six months after the race date.

# BRAND ENGAGEMENT OPPORTUNITY

Vermont Bikepackers Project speaks to an audience with a passion for community, connection, and finding adventure on the path less traveled. Our film highlights the inspirational aspect of bikepacking which speaks to both the novice riders and newbies alike. For the people who want to live every bit of life to the last drop by experiencing an unknown path, Vermont Bikepackers Project reveals the highs and lows of the willingness to be vulnerable.

We seek to engage with brands who value the contributions of individuals related to their community as a whole. Our partners are brands that represent inclusion and diversity of experience, knowing that each participant is a piece of the larger puzzle and every story has value within the human race.

# THE TEAM

## **Jon Mercer – Co-Director, Producer, Editor, Writer**

Jon Mercer is known for his ability to deconstruct a frame or narrative, employing a collaborative approach to distill essential elements and clarify underlying emotions. His work is a search for the unexpected and overlooked moments in a story – whether building drama, finding humor, or examining reality. As a director and editor his work has been broadcast nationally and creates lasting impact in educational and humanitarian sectors. Jon’s films have screened at festivals internationally and featured on PBS. His feature length directorial debut *Life Without Basketball* premiered at DocNYC in 2018 and was recognized by Human Rights Watch for its influence on global equality for athletes.

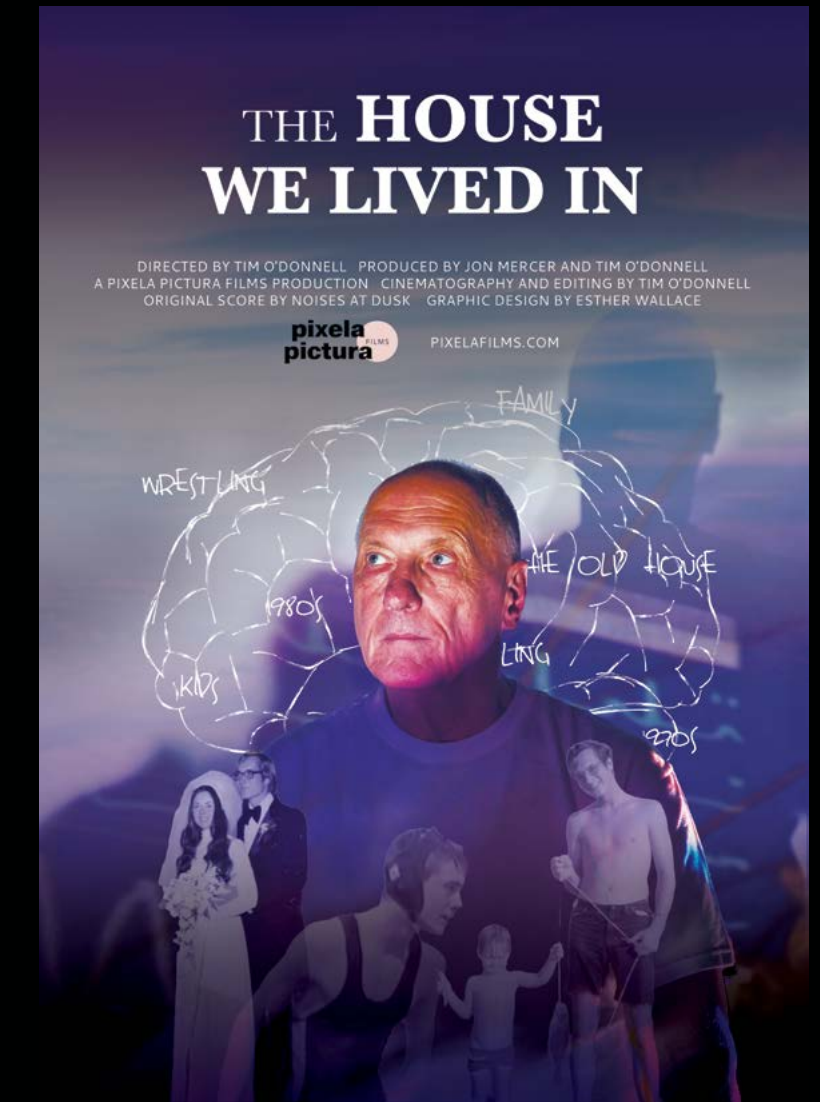
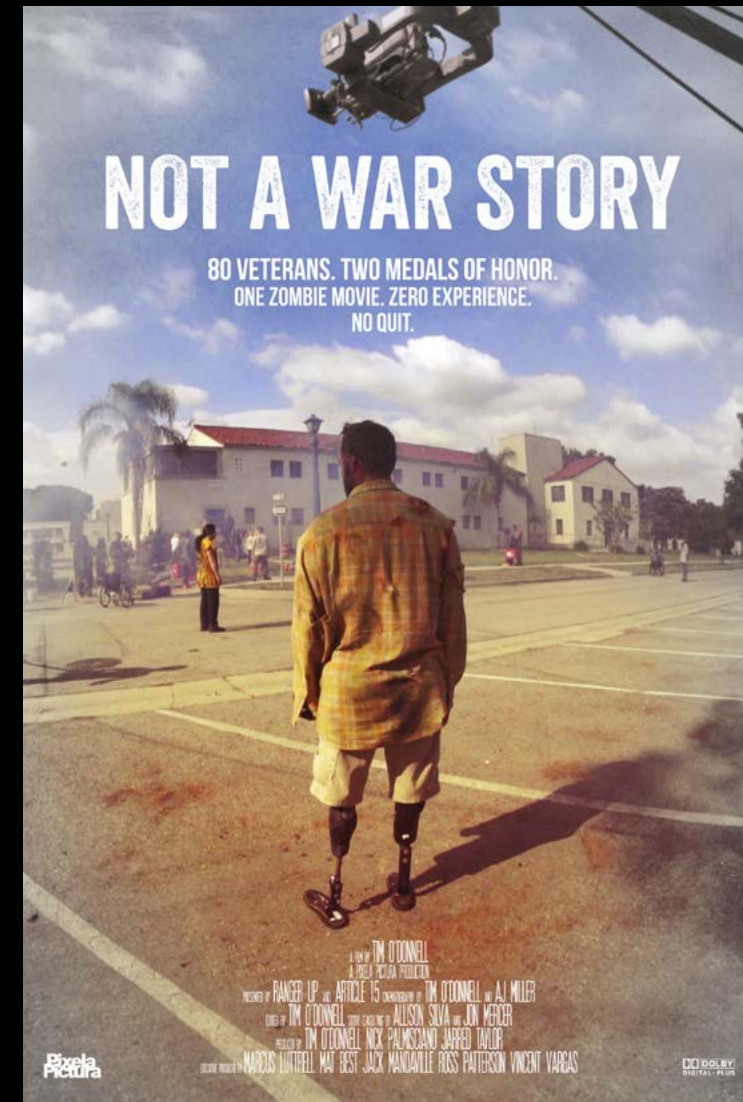
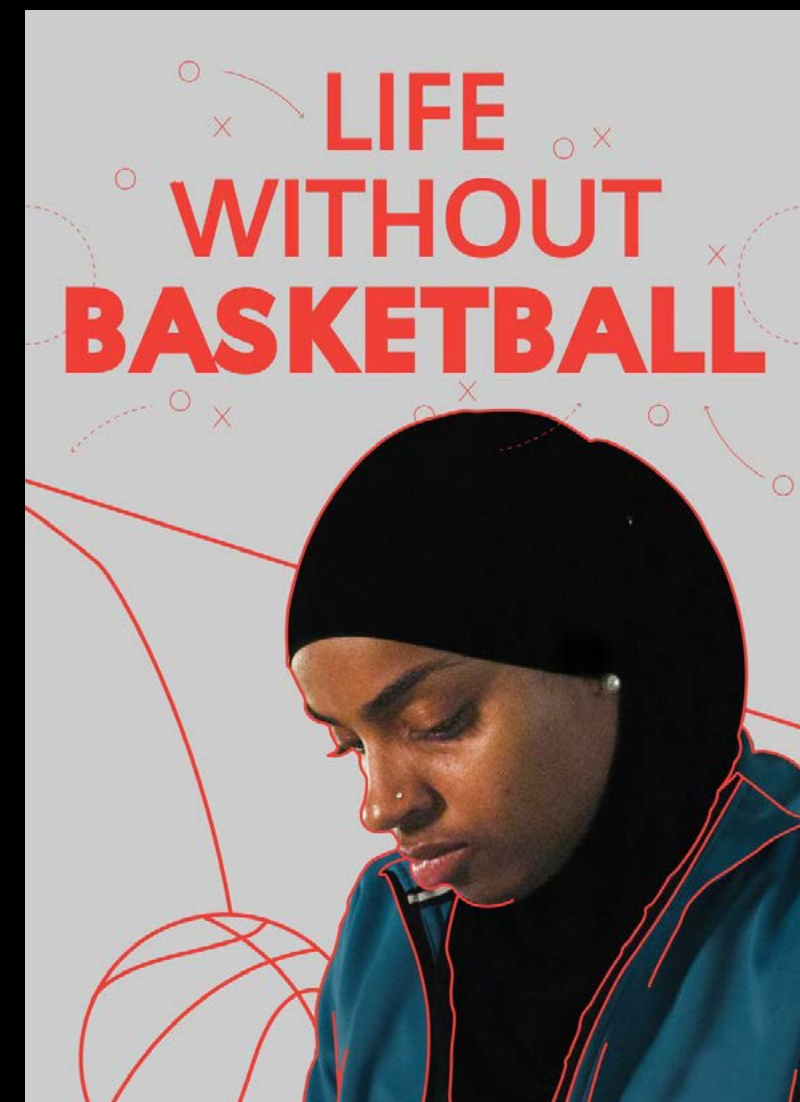
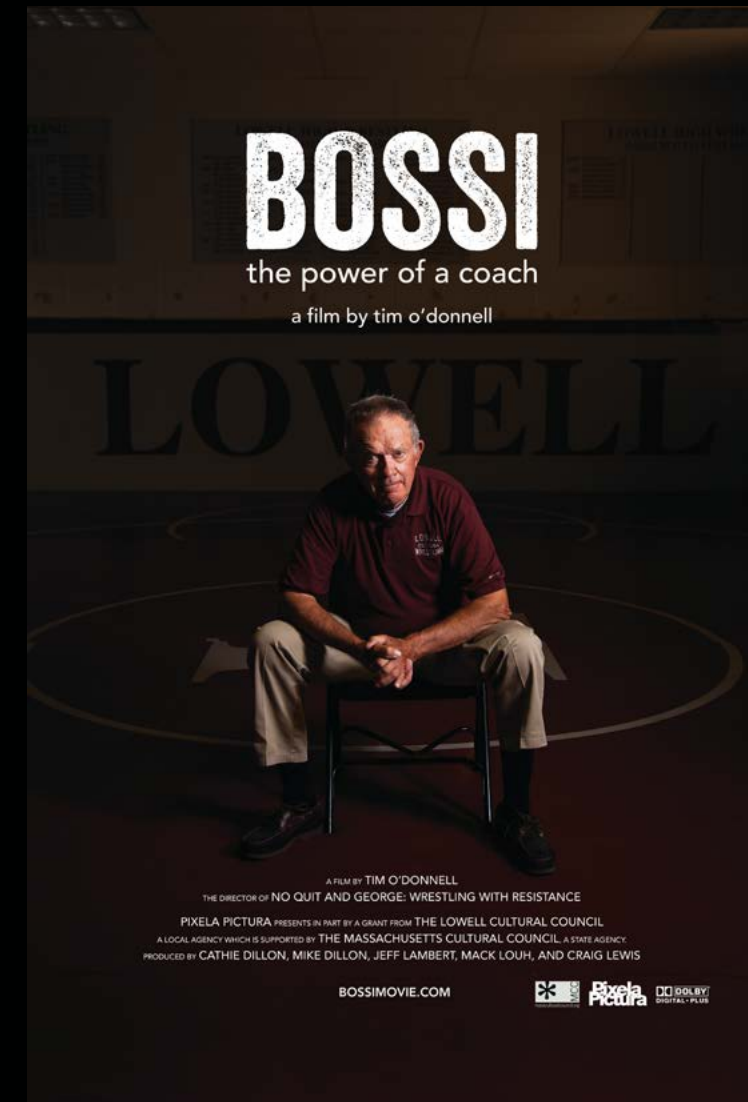
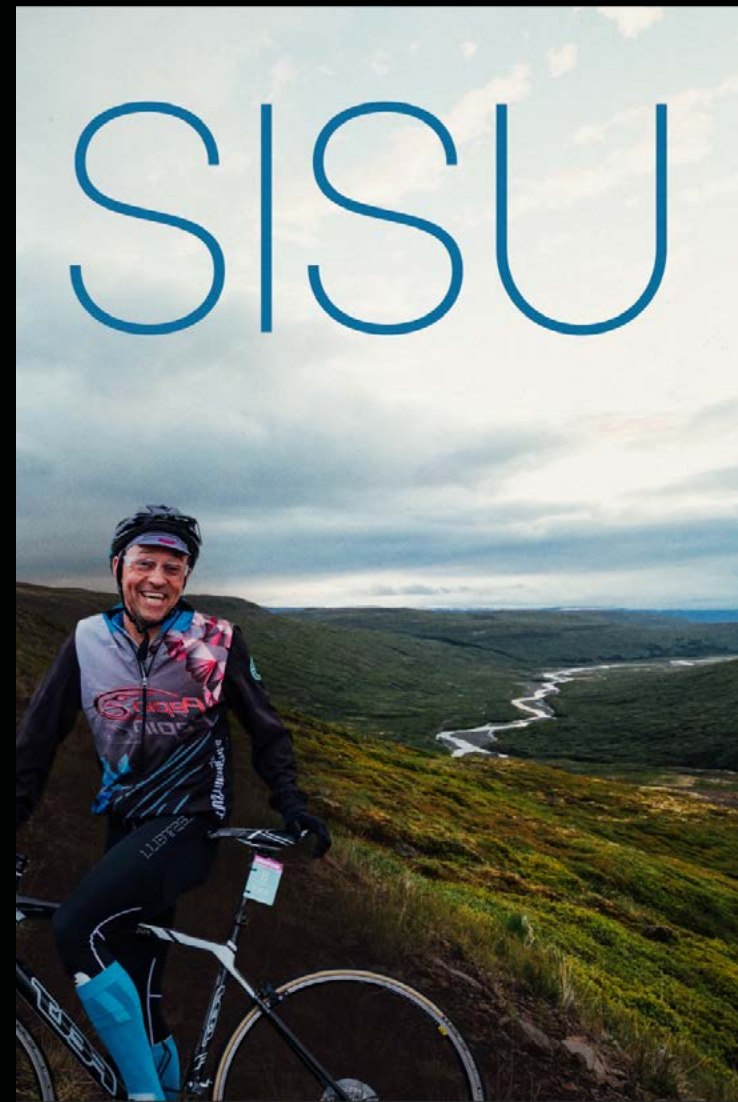
## **Tim O’Donnell – Co-Director, Producer**

Tim O’Donnell is an Emmy-nominated and award winning documentary filmmaker. His work has appeared on ESPN, NBC, PBS, OutsideTV, the Sundance Film Festival and events around the world. His films have garnered the Audience Award at the Independent Film Festival of Boston, Jury Prizes at the Phoenix Film Festival and Woods Hole Film festival, and IndieWire’s Project of the Month. His most recent film *Not a War Story* opened at #1 for all iTunes Documentaries and premiered at the Academy of Motion Pictures. HBO’s Mary Carillo said of Tim’s work, “The story is so beautiful, so lovingly told and so incredibly moving.”

## **Brittni Gorman - Producer**

As an empath, Brittni aims to find compassion and understanding of the human experience through her work in documentary film. She is known in the Northeast not only as an endurance athlete, but also as a community builder with a passion for young women’s leadership and holistic health. Brittni’s background in digital marketing and brand development brings new levels of engagement and connection to the creative team. In 2020, she became the first ever known female to complete the Vermont Super 8 as a soloist.

# OUR WORK



An aerial photograph capturing a scenic view of a riverbank during autumn. The left side of the image shows the dark, calm water of the river, with several large, smooth rocks visible beneath the surface. The right side is dominated by a dense line of trees with vibrant foliage in shades of yellow, orange, and red. A person in a yellow and black kayak is visible on the riverbank, and a small wooden structure is partially visible among the trees. The overall scene is peaceful and picturesque.

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