

The Making of

Rules of the Road

Though we have done a lot of traveling (to many remote places) for most of my documentaries, this was my first film focused on the journey itself. A non-fictional road movie, so to speak. Our protagonists were Irish Travellers. To get as close as possible to them, we chartered a converted *Magirus Deutz* four-wheel drive truck, shipped it to England, and set off on our six-week journey from London, with a team of four. We ate and slept on board.

The film was to be shot for wide screen, and the new Super 16mm format was the perfect choice. On the film negative, the area otherwise reserved for the soundtrack is exposed, as well – resulting in a wider aspect ratio. Later, for the release prints, the 16mm negative is blown-up to 35mm film. Due to the necessarily higher laboratory costs, our budget was € 200,000. Funding came from the North Rhine-Westphalia Film Foundation and the public broadcasters WDR, BR, and ARTE and with additional co-financing from Hans W. Geißendörfer. One problem arising from this production budget was the NRW film fund's stipulation that a considerable portion of money be spent in North Rhine-Westphalia. However, the film was shot in the UK and Ireland and edited in Munich, where we received postproduction contributions from the Bavarian Broadcasting Corporation.

The film itself (and our shooting) began in London, where many of the Irish Travellers were stranded after leaving Ireland long ago, in the hope of a better future. From there, we headed west, through England and Wales, to Swansea and Newport, the ferry port to Dublin. We did research on the outward trip and filmed on the way back from Ireland. The team also included location manager Paul Moody and driver and cook Rainer Herzog.

Operating the (handheld) camera was Jan Betke, who had shot my previous film. Our main Irish location was Dublin, but we also did the tour via Ballinasloe and Galway in the west and Limerick to Cork in the very north.

We usually stopped wherever the Irish travellers were at home: at garbage dumps, chemical works, a nuclear power plant, or parking lots under motorway overpasses. These were their caravan sites, shunned by the resident population who regarded them as gypsies and have-nots. Despite being called "itinerants", i.e. nomads, these people's journey had ended long ago – faced with pull-offs blocked by boulders and the local police pushing them across municipality borders, from one county to the next. So they wound up stuck in inhospitable industrial landscapes.

Shooting was extremely tough, as we constantly faced mistrust and rejection. This was largely due to the fact that nearly all reporting on the Travellers was defamatory and inaccurate. More than once, we were literally threatened.

In Dublin, the Church at least has taken care of the devoutly religious Travellers, devoting an extra parish to them. Father Paddy relentlessly stood up for them and their rights. He also gave us video footage he shot during the police eviction of a campsite. Here we also met Chrissy Ward, who described the Traveller life in poetry. I sound-recorded several poems and inserted them at the start of each film chapter.

Although under the "protection" of the Catholic Church, in Dublin's Dunsink Lane, and despite our cooperation with the Irish Traveller Movement, we had to stop filming several times, to prevent escalation. One night, as we slept there, our truck was broken into, though parked in the enclosed courtyard of a nunnery.

Despite all these circumstances, we met many great story tellers and musicians, who offered insight on themselves and their lives. Travellers are often illiterate, and their history is not written down anywhere. Their experiences are passed on in songs and stories, as "oral history". Their nomadic life is coming to an end, as the younger generation leads a different life today. Thus, their tradition is forgotten, along with the Traveller's language, the Gammon. With their old people, their legacy is perishing.

I discovered that the Dublin university had no film footage and very few photos (just a few b/w stills, from the 1930s) of this ethnic minority, which considers itself "more Irish than the Irish", rightly recalling its Gaelic origins. For this reason, I made the interview transcripts and other film documents available to the Ethnology department of the University College Dublin.

Rules of the Road was assembled by Uwe Klimmeck digitally on an Avid Media Composer, a relatively recent development at the time that replaced the traditional Steenbeck 16 mm editing table. The German narration was spoken by Munich film director Dominik Graf. This narrative element has made the film a real road movie – albeit one that does not romantically glorify travelling as escapism. The film was my eighth film premiere at the Hof International Film Festival and was shown (in English or with French subtitles) at ten other film festivals in 1994.

(Oliver Herbrich, 2016)