**PRESS KIT**

**Final Ascent: The Legend of Hamish MacIness**

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TAGLINE: ***His Final Mission: To Rescue Himself***

SYNOPSIS:

The legend of Hamish MacInnes began early. At 16 he climbed the Matterhorn. At 17 he built his first motor car – from scratch. He attempted Everest in 1953 with his friend Johnny Cunningham, and almost stole the peak before Hillary and Tenzing. As an explorer, expedition leader and engineer he achieved world fame. As inventor of the all metal ice axe, author of the International Mountain Rescue Handbook and founder of Glencoe Mountain Rescue he has been responsible for saving hundreds of lives, if not thousands. But at the age of 84, his accomplishments could not save him from being institutionalised against his will, suffering from delirium. After a spell in psychogeriatric detainment in a hospital in the Highlands of Scotland, during which he made many escape attempts – he emerged to find his memory gone. This film tells the story of his life by mirroring his greatest challenge: to recover his memories and rescue himself.

**DIRECTOR STATEMENT**

The idea of doing a film about Hamish MacInnes was first suggested by my old friend Douglas Eadie, who had interviewed Hamish during the course of making a film about the equally storied and tragically life-shortened Scottish climbing superstar Dougal Haston. The more I read and researched about Hamish the more fascinating he became.

The film was accepted initially by the BBC as a simple one hour retrospective. However when we first sat down to interview Hamish the topic he wished to discuss immediately was his 'illness' of four years prior - something we knew nothing about. He went on in that interview to describe his being sectioned, a bewildering and deeply traumatising experience for a man who had spent so much of his life in pursuit of the sense of freedom given by climbing, and who had done so at the tip of the global elite.

He told us how he had tried repeatedly to escape from the psychogeriatric ward. His memory was hazy, and the story came out in a non-linear way. He described over the course of that interview - and his hospital notes bore out - how he managed to make his way to the roof of the hospital, pursued by staff who presumably thought he was suicidal. But in fact he was simply trying to return to his happy place: up, to the highest point available.

When he came out of care, he told us that all memory of his previous life had gone. What he did next seems extraordinary. As well as undergoing physical and psychological rehabilitation with the help of his friends, he seems to have rebooted his mind, using the vast collection of images, films and writings from his 60 year career and back into his childhood. This is a fascinating feat in and of itself. But it also struck a personal chord with me. My own father suffered a brain injury several years ago, resulting in memory loss, cognitive impairment and dementia-like symptoms. Like Hamish, my father was highly successful as an individual in his own sphere. (Not that he ever put on a crampon, to my knowledge.) And like Hamish, my father came close to death during the worst dip, but has recovered to a large degree.

All this throws into focus for me questions of memory, identity, and the way in which we treat older people when they slip - or seem to slip - towards the edge. The level of an individual's contribution in life does not matter to me (nor, I am sure, would it matter to Hamish or my father). But I hope that in telling the story of one man whose life's accomplishments were almost uncontainable in one 80 minute film, we can re-examine the way we respond to those who may otherwise be deemed (as Hamish himself puts it in the film) to be 'on the scrapheap'.

Dir: Robbie Fraser - 2018

**FULL CREDIT LIST**

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The Hamish MacInnes Collection

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**With special thanks to:**

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