

Southeast Tlingit Boy Stars in 'Jonico and the Koosh-Da-Ka'

Chuck Keen of the Alaska Pictures Corporation has apparently produced and filmed an Alaskan epic which could come out as one of the most colorful and artistic efforts.

"Jonico and the Koosh-Da-Ka" has as its star Tony Williams, a 12 year old Tlingit Indian boy from Haines, Alaska, who played the role of Jonico in the film.

Another interesting and unique feature of the film is that its cast is all-Indian actors from southeastern Alaska except for one Harry Swanke, a White man, who played the role of a geologist.

Richard and Teresa Stitt, real life Tlingit Indian man and wife, also portray the parents of Jonico and the mischievous twins of the family.

Although the film is based on the southeastern Indian heritage and ways of the old days, it has two modern touches, a plane that brought the geologist and a motorboat.

Jonico's father (Richard Stitt) had gone with other men to hunt seals after visiting Jonico's grandfather for summer's camping. The father left after instructing the boy to take care of the family. That was the time the geologist came on the plane.

Jonico assumed the role of his father, a guide, and guided the geologist to the rugged mountains. He left the scientist after instructing him of certain dangers which the geologist did not follow. As a result, tumbling rocks broke his leg.

When Jonico found out about this, he decided to go to his father for help and the real gist

of the story began. His grandfather produced a seaworthy dug-out canoe and the boy began his epic voyage.

Alone, Jonico encountered hair-raising obstacles along the way. He paddled through heavily vegetated, swollen streams, portaged over beaver dams and bravely paddled among several salmon fishing brown bears almost close enough for hand shaking.

(The Jonico-brown bear sequence took 11 days to film at Pack Creek, about an hour's flight from the Alaska Capitol City of Juneau.

Jonico finally arrived at the sea and was promptly overturned by a heavy surf. He persevered and made it through the heavy breakers only to encounter the biggest obstacle of all—the king of the sea, a huge humpback whale.

As did his forefathers, Jonico queried for permission of the whale to travel on his waters. The whale surfaced time after time very close to the tiny, fragile canoe. The great animal finally raised its great flukes far out of the sea and slammed them down on the surface creating huge waves and sprays. Soon after, it sounded indicating its permission for the boy to continue his travel.

(It took Chuck Keen 29 days to film this sequence.)

Another spectacular scene

Jonico encountered was the splendor of the LeConte Glacier. Gigantic blocks of glacial ice plunged into the waters.

By this time, the little heroic boy was exhausted and he could hardly move. This was the moment when the dreaded "Koosh-Da-Ka" appeared in a shadowy form by the weary and frightened Jonico.

("Koosh-Da-Ka" seems to be the counterpart of the Himalaya's Abominable Snow Man to the southeastern Alaska Indians. It is a superstition that is still believed by some Tlingits today.)

At this point, Taku, a husky-like dog of Jonico's, sensed that his young master was near. The dog broke away from Jonico's father's sealing camp and crossed through perilous ice floes and arrived in time to help his little master.

Taku's wild barking aroused Jonico that gave him strength to fight the unnatural Koosh-Da-Ka. The monster faded away.

The seal hunters joined Jonico in a happy reunion. They then went home in a motor-driven boat.

"Jonico and the Koosh-Da-Ka" is scheduled to be shown in premier showing in Alaska soon. The film has had some glowing reviews, one from none other than the Variety, the bible of show business.

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