

In the Wake of the Bounty

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Directed by	Charles Chauvel
Produced by	Charles Chauvel
Written by	Charles Chauvel
Narrated by	Arthur Greenaway
Starring	Mayne Lynton Errol Flynn
Music by	Lionel Hart
Cinematography	Tasman Higgins
Editing by	William Shepherd
Studio	Expeditionary Films
Distributed by	Universal Pictures
Release dates	15 March 1933
Running time	66 mins



Country	Australia
Language	English
Budget	£6,500
Box office	£7,000 (Australia)



In the Wake of the Bounty (1933) is an Australian film directed by Charles Chauvel about the 1789 Mutiny on the Bounty. It is notable as the screen debut of Errol Flynn, playing Fletcher Christian. The film preceded MGM's more famous *Mutiny on the Bounty*, starring Charles Laughton and Clark Gable, by two years.

Plot

Chauvel's film uses introductory enacted scenes showing the mutiny, followed by documentary footage, anthropological style, of the mutineers' descendants on Pitcairn Island. Chauvel also used footage of Polynesian women dancers; and film of an underwater shipwreck, filmed with a glass bottomed boat, which he believed was the *Bounty* but was probably not. This was Chauvel's first 'talkie' and he had clearly at this stage not yet learned to direct actors: the dialogue is very stiff and amateurish. The use of long sections of documentary footage with a voice over, combined with acted scenes, is similar to the hybrid silent and talking pictures that were produced during the transition to sound. It also represents the combination of interests of the director, and he returned to documentary toward the end of his career with the BBC television series *Walkabout*. Despite the poorly written dialogue, the documentary sections retain their excellence. A return to enactments at the end of the film, with one scripted modern scene in which a child suffers because of the lack of regular ship visits which could have taken the child to hospital, probably sought to make the film a useful voice for the Pitcairn Island community, who had been generous with their participation.

The film mixed re-enactments with documentary, and focused not so much on the mutiny itself as on its consequences.

Cast

- Mayne Lynton as Lieut. Bligh
- Errol Flynn as Fletcher Christian
- Victor Gouriet as Michael Byrne - The 'Bounty's' Blind Fiddler
- John Warwick as Midshipman Young

Production

There was at least one other film of the Bounty story prior to Chauvel's film, by Australians Raymond Longford and Lottie Lyell, *The Mutiny of the Bounty* (1916), filmed in New Zealand. This film was to be the first of a series of travel adventures to be made by Chauvel for his new company, Expeditionary Films.

Documentary Filming

In March 1932, Chauvel left Australia with his wife Elsa and cameraman Tasman Higgins and sailed to Pitcairn Island. They were there for three months shooting footage under sometimes extremely dangerous conditions, having to travel around the coast in whaleboats and climb up cliffs on ropes. They then joined a passing boat and went to Tahiti where they spent two months filming more footage.

Chauvel and his crew returned to Sydney in September. His unedited footage was confiscated by the Customs Department and viewed by the censors. They requested cuts of scenes of bare-breasted Tahitian dancers. Chauvel protested and succeeded in having the footage released to him uncut, subject to a censorship review after the completion of the film.

In October 1932 Chauvel registered a script *The Story of Pitcairn Island*.

Errol Flynn

The re-enactment scenes were shot on sets built at the studio of Cinesound Productions in Bondi. There are different stories how Errol Flynn was cast, but the most common one is he was discovered by cast member John Warwick. He was paid £3/10 a week for his performance.

Flynn would later claim to be descended from Bounty mutineers.

Release

When the film was submitted to the censors, they objected to several scenes, including the bare breasts and depiction of floggings. Chauvel protested that the dancing scenes were supervised by a Methodist clergyman. Chauvel announced he would appeal and was successful in getting the film passed after a compromise version was agreed upon. Chauvel had criticised the censors so much that the Minister for Customs was moved to defend them.

The movie was released by Universal Pictures, whose Australian managing director, Herc McIntyre, became an important supporter of Chauvel throughout the director's career. It was described as a "middle grade" success at the box office.

Critical opinion was generally positive about the documentary footage but not the dramatic scenes.



In 1935, some of the documentary scenes from Chauvel's film were bought by MGM and re-edited into trailers for the 1935 Hollywood film about the mutiny, as well as for two short

