

Shooting and Editing Foley for God's Own Country



I'm writing about the processes I went through to cover the Foley for God's Own Country, what I did and why I did it. There's quite a lot of text well north of 3000 words so am supplying as a separate doc rather than snarl up my mrsteveproductions.com blog I've put in some photos, click on them to expand. The rough and ready panoramas were taken by me, nice stills by Duncan Campbell the Foley recordist for this session who was very much involved throughout the process. Nb although I've put this in the public domain by sticking it on my site please talk to me first before sharing 😊

The film is still touring, going on general release in The UK on 1st September and-I believe-will be out in the states in October. [You can find more by clicking on this link to the Film's website](#) I don't want to use any material that is not already out in the public domain so no clips for the moment-sorry.. If you've watched the film already and are a bit anoraky in the two panoramas at the end you will see loads of props used in the film lying around the studio (click on them to download larger versions).

I'm going to assume that you know a little about film production as I'm not going to have time to explain every detail. Still, I will try my best to keep the technical jargon to a minimum and cluster anything techy together in paragraphs labelled as such so you can skim through if kit isn't your thing.

1 Signing up and Getting A Brief: What Can Foley Do?

[Vincent watts](#) (Who supervised the sound and did the final mix of the film) brought me on board by sending me a copy of the script to read (which I enjoyed) and told me good things about the director. I completed an MA in sound design alongside Vincent in 2000 and have completed over 40 features together so if he says there's something about someone, I usually take it at face value.

I could tell from listening to sound on the offline version (sound as assembled in the picture edit suite) and looking at their final audio exports to the sound team that Francis Lee (director) and Chris Wyatt (Editor) had put a great deal of effort into laying in extra bits of sound that they liked right down to picking certain bird calls. It was clear that this particular job could not and should not be a case of stripping things out and replacing them- (it would hurt the warts and all nature of the film and I'd expect a few quizzical calls to come my way if I tried it)- I was there to work as foley artist and :

i) Cover the usual nuts and bolts- (give a sense of people moving around the set by continuing footsteps off screen and leading in with them before people arrived on screen

ii) Replace any sound that had a technical flaw (not really necessary in this case as it was well recorded by Phil Cape and his crew.

iii) Reinforce the sync sound

Above and beyond filling holes, foley is mostly concerned with making everything that people interact with feel a bit more present. Reinforcing sounds that are already there may seem surprising in a very naturalistic film such as this, but it is important to bear in mind that sound recordists- use microphones that are focused on actors' speech and exclude extraneous noise, then dialogue editors and sound mixers often use fairly heavy processes to strip back any hiss/extraneous lighting hums etc which are getting in the way. The result is that all the footsteps and things that people touch can sound a bit distant which can stop a film from being as immersive. It may sound pretentious, but I think of good foley and sound effects editing as something that- just like picture colourists do- brings out the textures of sound that was already there. The audience by and large is less aware of what is going on with naturalistic sound (anything other than a cartoon or scifi etc) than they are with colouring, music editing, and all the rest. While you can get away with pretty minimal low quality foley as some people do, it really does give films a lift- particularly one like this- large sections have minimal dialogue and bar the front titles and second half of the final reel, there is no score.

iv) Guide the Audience

Because it is generally self-effacing and very easy to overlook, another thing foley can do is help steer the audience's attention- if a key is important to the plot it can have a little jingle just to make people aware it exists. You can also pique people's interest with unidentified sounds that guide them in- Bergman would do something like have a tinkling chandelier that would gently demonstrate a far of nuclear strike- in this film we had a bit of cloth rustle and regular tapping rhythm which leads Alec to realise that Johnny is getting a jump in the pub toilet ;-)

v) Give a sense of Place

As well as covering the obvious things on screen, foley can also add subtle elements to the soundtrack that can bring a room or location to life. For example, I recorded a rattle tracks which mirrored Alex and Johnny's moves in the caravan, helped give a sense of motion in the car, and picked out a few things i'd seen like barbed wire chinking in the wind and just do a quick pass to have them as an option.

and pretty well trashed the joint. by the end. Pictures later.



2 Prep Work and Prop Work:

I was working in the Foley room at the SA film Corp which is a good set up- picture bellow- I'll give a brief kit list for the geeks later. The picture below shows the studio as it was with the standard traps (surfaces to walk on) shelves full of props. This is before I trundled in with fleeces, hay bales, mud, chicken carcasses, spaghetti hoops
Normally for drama I try to up the force of performance when prop handling by about 20%, for this- bar some of the hand work for the brief fights and some of the physicality the sex scenes I tried to keep things as close to the original as possible.

A paragraph for the audio geeks-skim if you're not into kit. Duncan Campbell (Foley recordist) often went with a Neumann shotgun mic (less flattering than the larger studio mics we had to hand but a very similar sound quality to the mic used in the boom on set and a foley mainstay. We also used one of my Schoeps Mk4s for a similarly focused but ever so slightly smoother sound which I prefer for cloth and paper and a TLM 105 large studio mic for some of the high level sounds (slams on trailer doors) Duncan also did the usual trick of mixing between the microphone closest to me and another placed further back so the foley got a sense of perspective to match the picture (near and far-). I had a couple of DPA lavaliers to hand which I had planned to get some of the detailing of close delicate stuff such as hens pecking at the ground but to be honest once we got going the room got filthy and chaotic with no real time to tidy. I sensed since the DPAs weren't on stands it was inevitable that they'd get splattered in mud, but more concerningly they would quite possibly end up being crushed by some of the heavy props I was humping around - so they stayed in their case back in the control room and away from harm. I did the hen pecks onto the Schoeps and was pretty happy with the result.

Working as foley artist on a film set in a farm has a pretty big set of challenges. Farming involves a lot of manual labour with a lot of tools. The two leads are pretty constantly doing something- building dry stone walls, humping bits of fencing across fields, feeding sheep etc etc... My prop list before the shoot was really big for what was essentially a chamber piece.

The foley room at the SA Film Corp. has a good set of props, but this film had a lot very particular things. Given the naturalistic approach to this sound track and the fact that pretty well everything was exposed without music to hide behind I knew I had to put in some put in before the record session to find props that were sonically- but not necessarily visually a good match. I went through my prop store, house and shed with a fine tooth comb also my Father and Mother in laws shed proved handy for agricultural stuff (possum cage, not far off a mole trap and bird cage, older hand tools which often have a bit more weight to them.) While it's subtle, recording simple things like touching the wooden handle of a hammer gives it more of a tactile presence in the film. The old club hammer I used sounds far better than contemporary tools.

Below is a photo of the hammer in action. In this case another film- [Justin Edgar's The Marker](#), where I had been covering the sound of someone being shot point blank in the head (messy). Worth noting that there is one close up head shot in the film on the dead calf, but this film was not about being sensational so I gave the melons , spaghetti hoops etc a miss.



The amount of prep work I did in terms of sourcing props was a lot greater than I would usually do for something without a substantial budget but this was one of the first jobs I had done at the film corp and I didn't want to waste time hunting through a less familiar prop store. Also the exposed nature of the sound track meant that busking things with props that were poor matches would most risk breaking the spell and I wanted to get it right at the time rather than spend ages on my computer repitching and filtering things to make them a better fit. I had to do a lot of shopping around at car boot sales, charity shops grain sellers (hay and animal feed), fossick around in a creek bed for rocks which had a similar size, texture and density to the stones used in the walls here- and as I have mentioned already- my in-laws tool sheds and garage was a great place for agricultural sounding props and I am very greatfull for the lends.

Most props I sourced cheaply or for free, the only comparatively expensive prop was a pair of wellies (gum boots) which would be ubiquitous in charity shops in the UK but aren't really necessary for suburban life in the driest state of the driest country on earth. Funnily enough even though I spent a bit of time and effort finding a pair that had a good sound to them- once we were in session I found that as they had a 'ponk' sound to them that can be a bit distracting especially when people are running, I tried folding over the tops and dampening the sound with various thicker socks but ended up using them mostly as hand props for when people put on/took off wellies and covered the footsteps with some much shorter gum boots. The short gum boots substitute were recognisably 'welly like' without having the irritating bits. Other foley elements were trickier as they involved being a bit more creative in my approach. The external ground on which the characters walk is constantly changing with varying amounts of mud, shingle, different lengths of grass etc etc.. I'll cover foley walking in another post, but basically you walk on the spot on different surfaces. While it would be possible to cover most of the exterior steps in one pit using mostly the same surface, this would be missing a trick as the different textures of the feet can help to emphasize time lapse/geographical distance in cuts and on a less mechanical way, work with the visuals to give the audience a greater feel for the variety in the landscape.

Getting the right sound for claggy Yorkshire mud with Australian soil (more sandy) was tricky. I grew up in the West Country of the UK so most weekends we went walking/wadding through bits of Somerset or Wales- Getting the sense of mud was really high up Vincent Watt's (Sound Supervisors) wish list (He, like the Director is a Yorkshireman, he is also a keen walker and all too aware of the mud). On previous jobs- while living in the UK, I would just dig up a bit of the garden and add a few things to give it a bit more texture and stop it becoming unworkably clingy. This time it involved a trip to a garden centre and a fair amount of trial and error before the foley session. The 'Yorkshire blend' mud create lots of mess everywhere during the event! Below is a picture of the watering can we were using to keep surfaces sounding wet complete with the mud that splattered most things around the main foley pit.

Hay and grass foley is an interesting one.- I don't tend to use standard animal feed hay as something to record footsteps on- like the distracting wellies it can produce a lot of clicks which pull the listener out of things when you hear it in a film. It also gets really dusty really quick (hoover and garden plant sprayer are up near the top of the list for essential tools in a foley room . We went with pea straw which was fine for the dry stuff and then a blend of synthetic things that looked nothing like grass/straw but held up better to being trodden on repeatedly and soaked.-'Yorkshire mud 'so there were all sorts of things like old 1/4 inch cassette tape stirred through . Similarly it was hard to get Australian native grasses that were a good match to those of Yorkshire so I used a bit of real vegetation but most of the sound came from synthetic materials that looked nothing like it but sounded right.



'Can We Go Again With The Birth Scene'

The film involves a lot of animal husbandry- animals being one of the trickier things to record on set ('Can you go again with the birth scene') and hard to recreate in a studio without animals to hand. This involved the most thought in the film- as with everything I did with the foley I didn't want to make things larger than life and go into horror territory. I'm pretty much vegetarian- bar when people have already gone to the effort of cooking for me, so I didn't really want to get in a fresh killed lamb to poke about and batter if I had no intention of eating it afterwards. I put in several passes using different elements- a wet shammy leather got a good sound texture for the new-born lambs fleece- and the corners got a nice sound for it shaking its ears immediately after birth. For the hand delivery I scooped out a couple of melons prior just to get the beginnings of the right size for cavity, lined it and backfilled with a few elements to get the texture right (It's all a bit of a busk as I've never delivered a lamb, but again I had the rushes as a guide and if you google things and have a listen off headphones while the sound is often not the best you do get an indication of what you are trying to achieve and so can reverse engineer it by breaking it into the

mechanics and materials involved. The dead lamb skinning scene was probably the toughest to get right. I did a few passes with fleeces, shammys etc but you could tell that the material underneath wasn't flesh, so I had to compromise on my principles and get a dead chicken- stuff it with rag to stop it sounding hollow and then wrap it with a wet shammy +I think I might have had rubbery membrane sandwiched between the two- which just made things sound much more plausible- sorry chicken! An assistant who was embedded for the day that I had earmarked for all the wet stuff and all the sex. Was a little concerned that she would find it a bit much, but no. There was a review I stumbled across which complimented the actors for their rugged physicality, made me laugh as I thought of the poor assistant walking in on me intently covering all the hand moves as the leads get it together in the mud.

Foley Edit and Delivery

The film had arrived late so the final mix had to be pushed back to the next available slot in the dubbing theatre. Normally I'm given about a week to go through- find the best performances and get them in sync. In this case I had the option of more time (but unpaid) I knew that Francis, was very fond of his sync sound so stripping it out was not an option, but I also knew that the foley I had shot with Duncan would really raise the film.

Normally you make 'either or' decisions- much of the footsteps don't make the cut as you would hear a doubling between the location sound and the added sound (kerdunk kerdunk kerdunk) Where foley is not used it is either junked altogether or kept aside for foreign dubs.

In this case I went with an approach called 'topping' which lets you use both. Topping involves not just syncing the foley by eye (so to within 1/24th of a second) but looking at the wave forms themselves and matching everything that overlaps as much as possible to the sample (sometimes you can't see the hit point and then have to fine tune further by ear. Sometimes it's necessary but if you are playing sync footsteps alongside foley it is the only way to have both. Not standard practice except in exceptional circumstances or films with big budgets that can afford to pay for an extra week or so.

If I 'd employed a separate foley editor they'd probably hate me for this and there wasn't the budget for it in anycase so I just did it off my own back. Once I started the process and had a quick review I could tell it really helped and just needed to be done. This initially made the Sound designer [Anna Bertmark](#) wonder why I was taking longer to deliver, but I think the results justified the means. While the sound track is recognisably truthful (all the hard work done on location) the extra details in the foley helps to bring out the physicality of the acting performances- It's nice to really hear the mud and know we are on location and not just in a set.

Anna put a lot of time making the landscape feel like another character with her surround ambient recordings. The foley was generally centred on events happening front and centre. I hope the foley also immerses the audience in the world being portrayed that little bit more by giving a sense of the physical textures of everything that is touched.

Anyroads fairly long write up, which I hope explains some of the thought and processes involved in a foley gig. I'll post the trail etc separately. Si'thee. Mr Steve

