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The Clue of the Missing Ape

UK : 1953 : dir. James Hill : Children's Film Foundation / Gaumont British : 60 min
prod: Frank Wells : scr: : dir.ph.:
[Roy Savage; Nati Banda](#)
Patrick Boxill; George Cole

Ref:	Pages	Sources	Stills	Words	Ω	8	∞	M	⊗	Copy on VHS	Last Viewed
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"I dunno guv" shrugs Jimmy, "She's been following me around all day! I can't get a blind word out of her!"
This still from Children's Film Foundation Catalogue & Index of Films 1972. All stills on subsequent pages from The Boys' and Girls' Cinema Clubs Annual 1954

Radio Times well-informed listing:

"Children's adventure. (60 mins, 1953) "

The Boys' and Girls' Cinema Clubs Annual
(1954) 4-page photo-synopsis:

"At great risk to himself, Jimmy (Roy Savage), a Sea Cadet, rescues Lt-Comdr Collier from a plane that has crashed and burnt out – sabotaged. The gallant pilot is very grateful to the brave boy....."





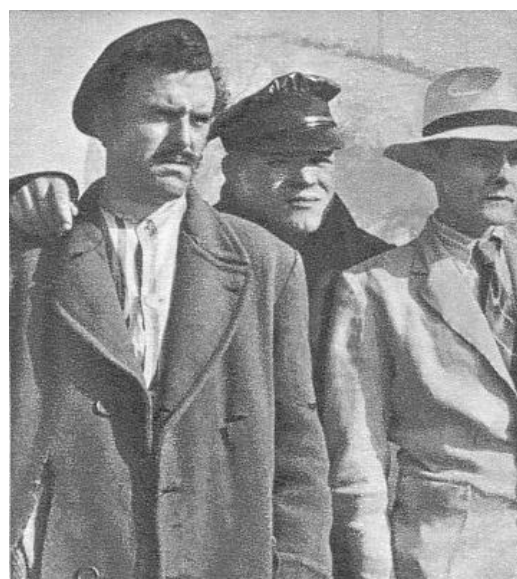
Watching in silent fury are Mr Palmer (Patrick Boxill) and an accomplice, who are responsible for the wrecking of the plane and who now see part of their plot foiled by Jimmy. "Confound him!" snarls Palmer.¹



As a reward for his bravery, Jimmy flies with Lt-Commander Collier to Gibraltar, where he stays with Petty Officer Ellis, head of the frogmen, and his young daughter, Pilar (Nati Banda).



Pilar shows Jimmy the famous apes of Gibraltar and tells him of the legend that when the apes leave the rock of Gibraltar the British will go too. Gibraltar people believe in the legend, she says.



Mr Palmer, who is working as a spy for a foreign country, arrives in Gibraltar and is met by accomplices. One of these, Gobo (George Cole), is instructed to leave poisoned food for the apes.

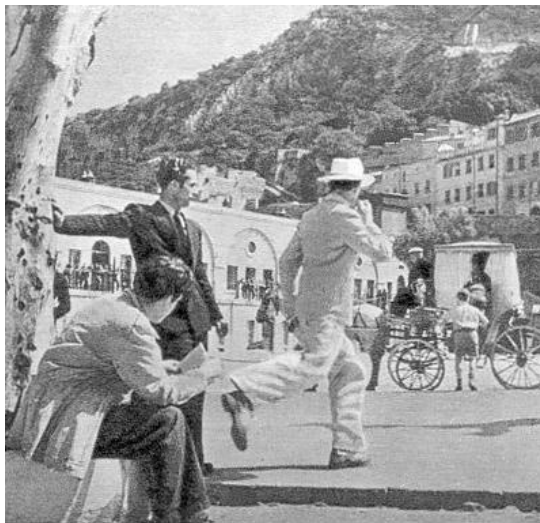
¹ well you would, wouldn't you?



Gobo is seen doing his dark work by the children, who tell Lt-Comdr Collier and P.O. Ellis. But they are not believed, and nothing they can say will convince the grown-ups, who ask for proof.



They run Gobo to earth in his cottage, but are trapped when Mr Palmer arrives on the scene. They fight bravely, but are finally overpowered. Then they are thrust into a storeroom and locked in.



Encountering Gobo again, Jimmy and Pilar shadow him through the streets of Gibraltar. Unluckily for them, Mr Palmer sees what they are doing, and he tracks them.² Danger closes in on them.



Through the door they listen to the conversation of the two spies, and learn that they plan to fix limpet-mines to the British warships anchored in the harbour and blow them up. "We must get out!" says Jimmy.

² *well he would, wouldn't he?*



By a neat trick, the children manage to escape. As Mr Palmer opens the storeroom door they fling a net over him and Gobo, entangle them in it, and race out of the cottage, the two men after them.



Out on the open sea, Jimmy and Pilar's signals are spotted by planes of the Royal Navy.³ A rescue dinghy is dropped to them from an aircraft and they scramble into it after an exciting adventure.



Furious, Mr Palmer and his friends watch them slip out of reach. They do not know that the children have the poison bottle in their possession, but they do realise that their plans are threatened.

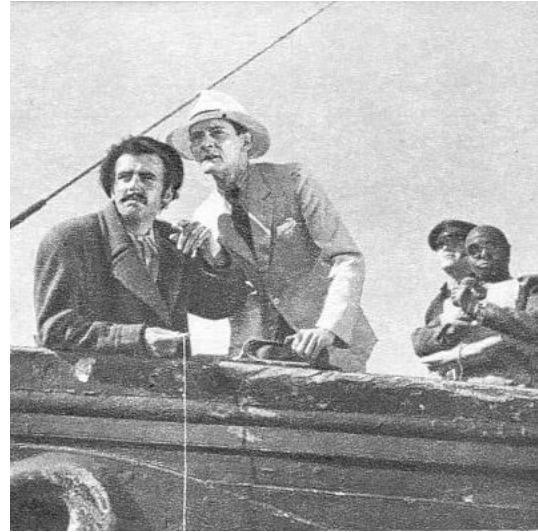


A naval launch picks them up and they are soon back in Gibraltar. But when they go to prove the truth of their story by showing the poison bottle, it is missing, having tipped over-board.

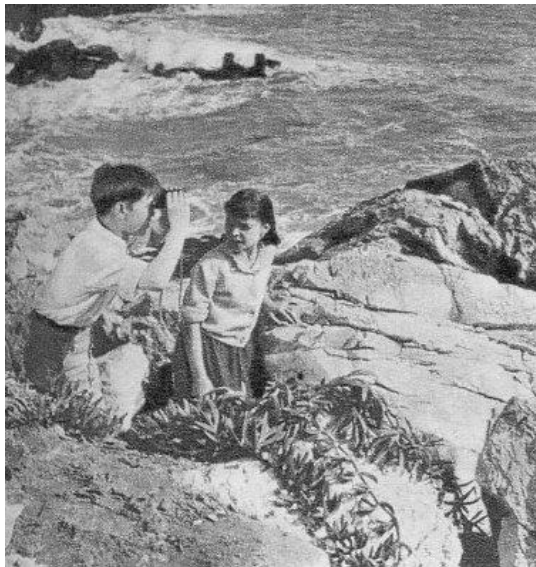
³ Hoorah !



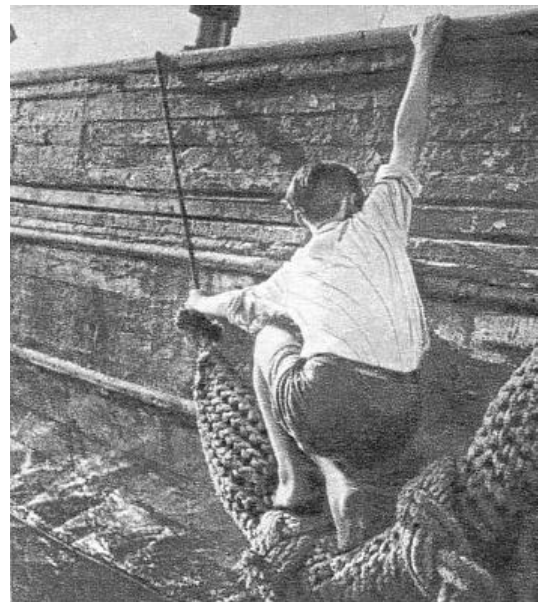
P.O. Ellis tells the children to keep out of trouble and not make a nuisance of themselves. Nothing they can say now is likely to win belief, but they determine to foil the spies' plot themselves.



The spies see the children watching their boat and decide to capture them before they can do any further harm. This is just what Jimmy wants. Pilar acts as a decoy to lure the spies ashore.



Watching the fishing fleet through glasses, Jimmy spots Mr Palmer and Gobo on one of the vessels and realises with a thrill that the attempt to blow up the warships has begun. Quickly he thinks of a plan.



Jimmy swims out to the fishing-boat and stealthily hauls himself aboard. Meanwhile, Pilar is the quarry in an exciting chase all over Gibraltar. She just manages to keep out of the spies' reach.



Aboard the fishing-boat, Jimmy lies low and finally succeeds in getting hold of the vital plan that shows the warships to which the deadly limpet-mines have been fixed. Then he swims ashore.



Meeting again at naval headquarters, he and Pilar are at last able to convince the authorities of what is afoot. Now the Navy really goes into action. The frogmen are alerted, and the children see the Navy in action.



The naval frogmen plunge overboard and bring up the limpet mines affixed to the warship. There are moments of hair-raising suspense and peril when one mine defies all efforts to detach it.



Finally, it is yanked off by mechanical power, taken by fast launch out to sea, and harmlessly exploded there. Disguised as naval ratings, Palmer and Gobo watch the operations in impotent fury.



But when Jimmy and Pilar spot them, they take to their heels. The children race after them, the police join in, and after an exciting chase and a violent struggle the spies are captured.



Jimmy and Pilar now have the great honour of being thanked by Rear Admiral Vinson. They have been responsible for rounding up a dangerous spy-ring, and the Royal Navy is grateful.⁴ ”

Children’s Film Foundation Catalogue and Index of Films 1972 note:

“Adventure drama of a sea cadet and a little Gibraltar girl who round up crooks trying to destroy the British fleet in Gibraltar. Produced by Gaumont-British Picture Corporation Ltd. Original story by Frank Wells and Donald Carter, Comdr. Hackforth-Jones. Venice Film Festival 1954 – joint first prize for the Best Entertainment Film for Children.”

[no listing in "Halliwell's Film Guide", "Leonard Maltin's Movie and Video Guide 2001", "Speelfilm Encyclopedie", "The Critics' Film Guide", "The Good Film and Video Guide", "Movies on TV and Videocassette 1988-89", "The Moving Picture Boy", "Rating the Movies (1990)", "The Sunday Times Guide to Movies on Television", "The Time Out Film Guide", "TV Times Film & Video Guide 1995", "Variety Movie Guide 1993", "Video Movie Guide 1993" or "The Virgin Film Guide"]

⁴ well they would be, wouldn't they?

Any questions? The annual gives such an exhaustive account that its readers scarcely needed to see the film afterwards. Not the most inspired of titles though, if that was a fair summary of the plot and action. Especially in light of the fact there aren't any apes on Gibraltar (outside of tourist season), but monkeys. And look, *why* would Foreign Spies want to poison the wretched things anyway? Which one went missing? And what was the clue? I'd be no use at foiling foreign spies, I guess. Thank heavens for the Sea Cadets.

The film was presumably shot on location, and it does seem a marginally more ambitious title than subsequent Foundation productions. This did not, however, prevent it following precisely the same *kids-discover-rum-goings-on, are-not-believed-by-grown-ups, so-catch-the-blessed-crooks-themselves* formula of a thousand other children's productions. One rather wonders how many children's films were entered in competition with it at the 1954 Venice festival. Distance lends enchantment, all the same, and even standard issue kids' adventures of the forties and fifties are in some ways more entertaining to watch than comparable mainstream titles – though vastly more sophisticated in the technical sense – made today. Their guilelessness is endearing. Nothing else is known of Nati Banda or Roy Savage. He's not listed in *The Moving Picture Boy*.

See much the same formula worked out in much the same setting for the 1980s children's TV serial "[Adventures on Kythera](#)", and subject index under **BOATS & BOATING, BOY MEETS GIRL, [CHILDREN'S FILM & TV FOUNDATION](#), KIDS OUTWIT THE CROOKS, [OSCAR WINNERS / AWARD WINNERS](#)** and nominally **SEAFARING / PIRATES**. Sea Cadets will be found, if anywhere, under **SCOUTS & SCOUTING / YOUTH MOVEMENTS**.