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The Dark Side of the Moon Landing

by **Richard Gehr**

February 9 - 15, 2000

*Did We Go?*

Directed by Aron Ranen

At the Museum of Modern Art

February 10 and 11



**A**ron Ranen went missing as a documentarian for most of the '90s, a decade he spent mainly filming segments for the likes of E! Entertainment Television and *Inside Edition*. Which would explain the slightly parodistic inquiring-minds tone of *Did We Go?*, his elliptically revealing examination of whether the 1969 Apollo lunar landing was a fraud or not. The doofus-on-the-street interviews, no-budget graphics, and cheesy techno score initially all scream tabloid, as does the Internet search that kicks off the film. "Presto!" declares Ranen when the predictable results appear. "Instant documentary!"

But Ranen dispenses quickly with the most prominent Apollo conspiracy advocate (the ursine author of *NASA Mooned America*) before hitting unexpected pay dirt. One of the Apollo mission's few black employees reveals that the Ku Klux Klan operated openly at the Kennedy Space Center during the '60s.

A retired tracking engineer rambles drunkenly about Nazi scientists helping the U.S. test hydrogen bombs in the South Pacific during the '50s, a claim substantiated by recently declassified documents. A former slave laborer recalls esteemed rocket scientist Wernher von Braun overseeing huge forced-labor camps in Germany during World War II (true). And, finally, it turns out that all the basic data taped during the Apollo 11 mission has been misplaced.

Ranen, whose deceptively nerdy behind-the-camera presence is reminiscent of filmmaker Jon Alpert, scores some impressive access in *Did We Go?* though he hits some dead ends along the way, too. Neil Armstrong, for one, refuses to speak with him, and gets slimed as a racist by association in return. But the two astronauts Ranen does interview, Buzz Aldrin and Gene Cernan, turn out to be memorably intense figures with gazes spacey enough to convince even the looniest skeptic that we did indeed put a man on the moon.

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