Judging from a distance is not very new to me, as I have written critiques from home for the British International Film Festival. The only advantage of judging for the International Festival is that the star rating created by three judges has been already awarded to each film, so you can figure out what to write to help the filmmaker make better films and also to tell them why they didn’t achieve a higher rating.

It must have been very expensive in the earlier days before the internet when packages of 8mm films, VHS tapes and even DVDs were posted to the remote Judge for viewing. Nowadays we can generate a private link on You-tube or even better still send a link from your Google drive where all the films are stored. That way the judge can download them at his/her leisure and view them offline when there is no internet available

So, the star rating was not used for the Cemriac Festival as I had my own way of rating each film, one which the contributor never sees. What I also thought was that the films for the Festival were made by experienced Filmmakers and that since it was a competition, there was no need to try and help them make better films. (They know how to do that!). The judging was either for a poor film, a good film or an extremely good one.

The problem is you must look at ALL the films before making a judgement on the parameters for each film, so that I can set a benchmark for the complete set. Then what I do is go through each film again and mark each one accordingly with reference to this benchmark. For instance, if all the films were superb, then I would have to raise the benchmark to find a winning film and the two runners up. The winning film this year “The Wheel That Never Turned” was remarkably well made and did stand out quite a bit from the others. The two runners up were the best of what was left, so finding a winner this time was quite easy. Had they been all the same calibre it would have been quite difficult to judge.

In the BIAFF most of the filmmakers enter their films so they can read their critique which generally comments about how they could have made their film better, rather than entering it to win something. However, I feel that the single paragraph judging for the Cemriac competition is more critical of what is wrong with the film, or what isn’t wrong with the film!! I did go through each one with a fine-tooth comb but didn’t really comment on the picture quality of some of them, which were quite poor. Content is king and I don’t see why a film made in High Definition is any better than one in Standard Definition, although the winning film strangely enough was made in HD.

These are amateur films and must be judged accordingly. I would have said that the acting standard in all the films I judged was of equal quality.

One advantage in judging from a distance is that you can go over and over again looking at each film in your own time and not have to stick to an agenda, and also to pause, start, and rewind at your own leisure. Unfortunately, this has a minor disadvantage; that is you can pick out flaws like jump cuts, bad edits, and also poor colour matching, where when in BIAFF the film is only played once and a rating swiftly follows. In fact, at BIAFF you only get seven minutes to rate any film after only seeing it once.

To summarise I did enjoy having the time to thoroughly view the films many times and judge them accordingly, something I would be delighted to do again.

Alistair Biggar