

# The Secret of the Missing Lake

by Hiltrud Schulz, DEFA Film Library



The lake has disappeared! Is it a miracle or a rare geological phenomenon? The people who live in the closed and artificial paradise around the lake stumble uncomprehendingly across the endlessly wide mudflats. They agonize about and question the event—“Everything was so beautiful. Could we have foreseen this?”—and come to the conclusion that “it’s over, and nothing will be as it was.”

This is the final scene of Ulrich Weiß’ film *Miraculi*; but the disappearance of the lake is already announced at the beginning of the film:

*In the summer of 1978, the water of a lake near Sagsdorf, in the Sternberg area, District of Schwerin, vanished overnight . . . along with hundreds of meters of roads, trees, an excavator and all the other equipment.*

Director Ulrich Weiß, it turns out, was inspired by a real event and used it to start and end his film.

On June 15, 1978, a few lines from *ADN* [the East German news agency] announced that the Schwarze See (Black Lake) near Sagsdorf had disappeared overnight. Soon, East German papers were filled with sensationalist headlines, people were buzzing with excitement, and conspiracy theories made the rounds. Rumor and speculation spread, as people sought an explanation for the mystery. “Nobody was there the night it happened or watched this unbelievable event with their own eyes. Residents only heard an odd, dull rumbling.”<sup>1</sup>

Filmmaker Jörg Foth, a colleague and friend of Ulrich Weiß, remembers that they had many discussions about the disappearing lake. Foth himself wrote a grotesque about it, but the manuscript was never made into a film or published. Weiß, deeply impressed by the story, incorporated this real event into his film *Miraculi* as a metaphor for an apocalyptic turn of events.

Almost exactly 20 years later, the secret of the missing lake was cleared up.

“Although a phenomenon like this rarely happens on flat land, it is not mysterious at all. The disappearance of the lake was caused by a massive shift of earth resting on an inclined layer of clay and boulders. Thousands of cubic meters of soil slid, like on a chute, and filled up the lake. The cause was the dumping of gravel on the sloping shore by [a nearby] backhoe, which also disappeared. This may have destabilized the existing balance of the geological layers.”<sup>2</sup>

In addition, the shifting ground created a powerful wave that threw a boat up onto the shore . . . “Where is my boat, my yacht?” we hear in the film.

*Special thanks to Jörg Foth for sending us this news item.*

<sup>1,2</sup> *Hamburger Abendblatt, Das Geheimnis des Schwarzen Sees*, June 13, 1998