

LOST HORIZONS

40 kilometers from Verona, in the remote mountain town of Giazza, a culture is dying. 'I Cimbri', or the Zimbers, now less than 250 strong, are the last representatives of a Germanic culture dating back to the 13th century. An

autocratic group that lost its rights under Napoleon, the Zimbers further faded into obscurity as the 20th century progressed. Isolated by geography and bad roads, the Zimbers in the little church town of Giazza held on the longest, but as the elder generation dies out, their language and way of life is being buried along with them.

Peter Schreiner, a somewhat experimental and personal maker of documentaries, first visited Giazza in the spring of 1988.

'I Cimbri - the Zimbers, his study in observation, was filmed over four consecutive visits, beginning in Feb. 1989 and ending in May 1990.

He recorded what he, as an outsider, saw of their slow-paced life. And he recorded what the villagers - at least those who would speak to him - said, though the Zimbers, he notes, are people of very few words.

His film makes no thematic pretensions. 'I Cimbri is not an ethnological study or a modern Brigadoon. Nor are the Zimbers exceptional in their fate, Schreiner suggests. 'We live in a time when all is disappearing, so fast that we can't understand what is happening. The Zimbers are just one example of an occurrence all over the world.'

Melissa Drier, Berlin 1991