

Wednesday August 16, 2017

THE UNLUCKY AUSTRALIANS
for the first time on Australian television
ABC Sunday August 20 at 10PM

In 1973 British filmmaker John Goldschmidt travelled to Australia to make a film for Associated Television UK. Having supported the American Civil Rights movement in the United States and People's Democracy in Northern Ireland, Goldschmidt arrived determined to make a film about the unfolding struggle for Aboriginal rights.

After visits to Alice Springs and Darwin, Goldschmidt went to Sydney where he met the author Frank Hardy. Soon the filmmaker had his story. Hardy provided Goldschmidt with an account of the 'Wave Hill Walk Off' and of the Gurindji people's ongoing campaign for land rights. Having been closely involved with the walk off of Aboriginal stockman from Lord Vestey's cattle station in 1966, Hardy had remained an ardent supporter of the Gurindji and their struggle to reclaim their ancestral homelands.

Hardy's book on the 'Walk Off', *The Unlucky Australians*, had also played a vital role in communicating the situation in the Northern Territory to audiences across Australia and overseas. Now Goldschmidt, his crew and Hardy travelled north to commit the Gurindji story to film.

The film documents the re-enactment of the Gurindji Walkout from the Vestey's cattle station at Wave Hill in 1966, and their subsequent setting up of a permanent community at Wattie Creek. Following this they filed a suit for the return of their traditional land. Throughout the film Gurindji leader, Vincent Lingiari, and Frank Hardy talk on the progress (or lack thereof) of the Gurindji people's ongoing campaign for land rights. The film contains a restricted sequence of ceremonial enactment at a Gurindji rock art site.

Mandy Chang, ABC's Head of Arts, TV Non Scripted Production, tells: "A bootleg copy of the film was sent to me and Sally Riley (Head of Scripted Production), by an academic who was keen to see it aired. I thought it important enough to send to our MD, Michelle Guthrie, who also expressed a desire to see this unique historical record shown on our screens.

"In the 51 years since it was made, for political reasons it was never broadcast in Australia. By coincidence, I discovered it was made by an English friend who had never mentioned it. It's taken well over a year and an epic search by a small team of us - both here and in the UK - who eventually tracked it down and acquired the rights. The ABC has had it restored to its full glory and I feel proud that Australians will now have the privilege of seeing the unfolding story of Vincent Lingiari and his Gurindji Mob, who having walked off Lord Vestey's property, were lobbying the government to protest their right to land that was rightfully theirs."

Goldschmidt's film eventually screened in Britain and Europe to an audience of millions, though it was never broadcast in Australia. Although Hardy and others took copies of the film to the Gurindji themselves (screening it on the side of a truck), in the heated political climate of the 1970s, a combination of political and commercial pressure over land rights conspired to keep it from view.

It finally screened in Australia in selected places in 2016, the 50th Anniversary Year of the 'Wave Hill Walk Off'. This is its first Australian television screening.

THE WAVE HILL WALK OFF OCCURRED ON 23 AUGUST 1966.

GOUGH WHITLAM HANDED BACK THE LAND TO THE GURINDJI ON 16 AUGUST 1975.

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