



FESTIVAL DE CANNES

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One hundred and fifty spears, ten canoes, three wives...trouble.

TEN CANOES

A FILM BY ROLF DE HEER AND THE PEOPLE OF RAMINGINING

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CRUSOE KURDDAL, JAMIE GULPILL, RICHARD BIRRINBIRRI, PETER MINYGULLU, FRANCES DJILIBING with DAVID GULPILL as the Storyteller
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Producers ROLF DE HEER, JULIE RYAN, Written by ROLF DE HEER in consultation with the PEOPLE OF RAMINGINING, Co-Director PETER DJIGIRR, Directed by ROLF DE HEER



TEN CANOES

A FILM BY ROLF DE HEER

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Contents

Short Synopsis	3
Long Synopsis	4
Glossary and Explanations	6
The Place	7
We Need Ten Canoes!...Origin of a Film	8
The Donald Thomson Photographs	9
Life Then, Life Now	10
A Story to Please Two Cultures	11
Language...the Cosmological Divide	12
Who Does the Casting?	13
The First Swamp Canoe	14
The Camp	16
Crocodiles, Leeches and Mosquitoes	17
Many Canoes	19
How the Community Has Received the Film	20
What the Film Means:	
Djigirr Speaks	21
Bunungurr Speaks	22
Dawu Speaks	24
Djulibing Speaks	25
Gulpilil Speaks	25
The Cast:	
Crusoe Kurddal	26
Jamie Gulpilil	26
Richard Birrinbirrin	27
Peter Minygululu	28
Frances Djulibing	28
Philip Gudthaykudthay (Pussycat)	29
David Gulpilil	30
The Crew:	
Rolf de Heer, Writer/Director/Producer	31
Peter Djigirr, Co-director	32
Sue Murray, Executive Producer	33
Julie Ryan, Producer	33
Domenico Procacci, Executive Producer	34
Bryce Menzies, Executive Producer	34
Belinda Scott, Associate Producer	35
Nils Erik Nielsen, Associate Producer	35
Ian Jones, ACS, Director of Photography	35
Tania Nehme, Film Editor	36
Beverley Freeman, Art Director/Hair/Make-up	36
James Currie, Sound Designer	37
Tom Heuzenroeder, Sound Designer	37
The Credits	38

Short Synopsis

It is the distant past, tribal times. Dayindi (played by Jamie Gulpilil, son of the great David Gulpilil) covets one of the wives of his older brother. To teach him the proper way, he is told a story from the mythical past, a story of wrong love, kidnapping, sorcery, bungling mayhem and revenge gone wrong.

In English storytelling (by David Gulpilil) and subtitled Ganabingu language, this is a film unlike any you have ever seen.



Jamie Gulpilil as "Dayindi".

Long Synopsis

It is a thousand years ago, tribal times in the north of Australia. Ten men, led by old Minygululu, head into the forest to harvest barks for canoe making. It is the season of goose egg gathering, and the men are looking forward to getting out onto the swamp and hunting the magpie geese and their eggs.

Minygululu learns that young Dayindi, on his first goose egg hunting expedition, has taken a fancy to Minygululu's third and youngest wife. Tribal law is in danger of being broken: Minygululu decides to deal with the situation by telling Dayindi an ancestral story, a story that will take a very long time to tell, all through the next days of canoe making and swamp travelling and goose egg gathering. And this is that story:



The ten canoeists on their way to gather goose eggs.

It is long ago, mythical times, just after the great flood came and covered the whole land...after then, but a long, long time ago. Ridjimiraril lived with his three wives, wise Banalandju, jealous Nowalingu and beautiful young Munandjarra, in a camp with others, including Birrinbirrin, the fat honey man who always ate too much.

Some distance away, in the single men's camp, lived Yeeralparil, Ridjimiraril's younger brother.

Yeeralparil had no wives yet, and none promised, but he was keen on that beautiful Munandjarra, who he felt should be his. He would always make excuses to be near Ridjimiraril's camp, in the hope of catching a glimpse of her.

One day, while the men are engaged in cutting each other's hair, a stranger approaches, without warning. The men are alarmed, especially when the Stranger claims he is there to trade in magic objects. The Stranger is given food and sent on his way by Ridjimiraril, although some of the other men want to kill him. The sorcerer comes to warn the men of the possible dangers, but declares the camp is safe. Life goes on as normal.

Then Nowalingu, after a fight with Banalandju, vanishes. There's no trace of her. Ridjimiraril is convinced his beloved second wife was taken by that Stranger, but the consensus is that being jealous, she simply ran away. There's nothing Ridjimiraril can do.

Months later an old uncle turns up for a visit and reports having seen Nowalingu in a distant camp with that stranger. The men are galvanised into action: a war party is prepared; it sets off, but without Yeeralparil. Both brothers cannot go...if the older brother is killed, the younger brother must take over the other's wives. Yeeralparil hangs around the main camp in the hope of seeing Munandjarra, but Banalandju ensures a safe distance between the two.

The war party returns, without Nowalingu: the old uncle's eyes must have deceived him. Ridjimiraril, still convinced it was the Stranger who took Nowalingu, slides into depression, until Birrinbirrin runs into camp with the news that the Stranger has been seen near the waterhole.

Ridjimiraril tells Birrinbirrin he's going to talk to the stranger but grabs his spears and takes off, Birrinbirrin puffing behind.

Deep in the bush they see the Stranger, squatting for a shit. Ridjimiraril launches a spear. An inspection of the body, however, reveals that Ridjimiraril has killed the wrong stranger. There are sounds of approaching people. Ridjimiraril breaks the spear off and they quickly hide the body.

But they did not hide that body well enough. Days later Ridjimiraril and Birrinbirrin are accosted by a group of warriors including the Stranger. They have identified the spearhead in the Stranger's brother's body as having been made by Birrinbirrin, and they want payback. Ridjimiraril owns up, and the location and time for the payback ceremony is agreed to.

A sad little procession of men leave camp for the payback. This time Yeeralparil can go, as only one person is to be speared, either Ridjimiraril or his payback partner. Yeeralparil argues that it should be he, young and nimble, who ought partner his brother. Ridjimiraril agrees, and together the two brothers face the spears from the aggrieved Stranger's tribe. That is the law, and the law must be upheld.

Ridjimiraril is speared. Justice done, he is helped back to camp. Banalandju tends his wound, but instead of getting better, as he should, Ridjimiraril declines: it is as if a bad spirit has invaded his body. Even the sorcerer can do nothing. In his last moments before dying, Ridjimiraril staggers to his feet and begins to dance his own death dance...then he collapses and dies.

After all the correct ceremony has been performed, Yeeralparil finally moves into the main camp, to be with his Munandjarra. But he's inherited a great deal more than he expected...

Minygululu's story is over, the goose egg hunters return home. Dayindi has learnt his lesson, and when opportunity presents, he declines...maybe some day he will have a wife, but it won't be someone else's.



Ridjimiraril's death dance.

Glossary and Explanations

Below are a number of terms used by the people local to the area where the film was made, which may need explanation. There are also some places and processes that are helpful to know about when reading the press kit or writing about the film.

Yolngu: The literal translation of Yolngu is simply, "the people", but it is used nowadays as a term to describe the group of Australian Indigenous people (aboriginals) living in or originating from central and eastern Arnhem Land in Australia's Northern Territory.

Balanda: A word meaning "white person(s)", coming from the word "Hollander"...the Dutch were the first white people to come into contact with the Yolngu.

Ramingining: A town of about 800 Yolngu people in the northern part of central Arnhem Land. The town was created in the early 1970s when the Mission of Millingimby became overcrowded. This meant that Yolngu from different areas were brought to live together, some quite a long distance from their traditional lands. There are fifteen or sixteen clans represented in Ramingining and about 8 different language groups.

Arafura Swamp: A large area of freshwater wetlands just south and east of Ramingining. The swamp extends to 130,000 hectares during the wet season, and is home to an incredible variety of bird, plant and animal life, including possibly the largest biomass of crocodiles in the world.

Magpie geese or *Gumang*: One of the many species of birdlife on the swamp, the Gumang is a black and white native goose which was an important food source in times gone by.

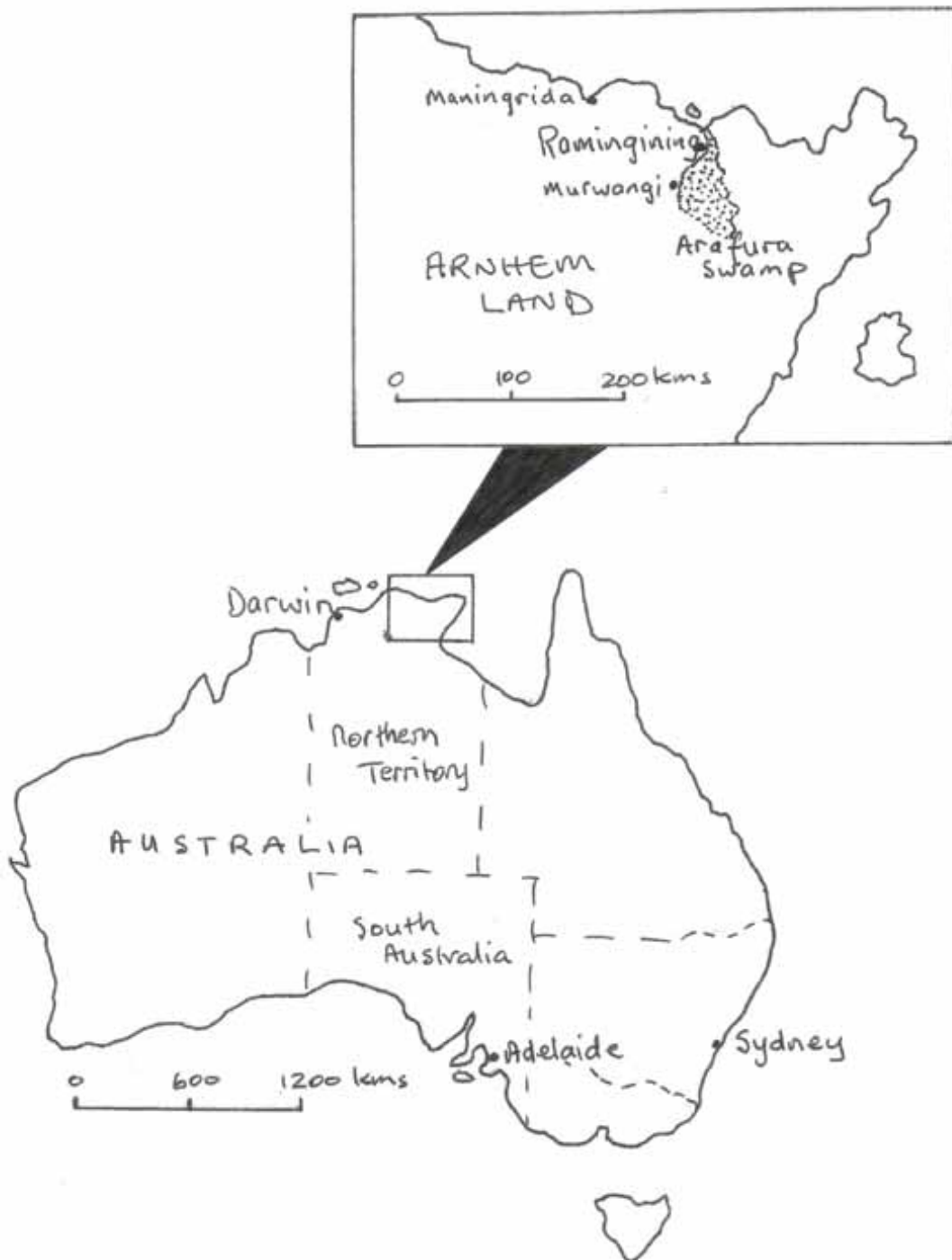
Goose Egg Gathering: Also known as Goose Egg Hunting. Expeditions by canoe of up to a week at a time used to be launched onto the swamp towards the end of the wet season, when the magpie geese had laid their eggs. Eggs were collected in numbers and the birds hunted for their meat.

Ganalbingu: The name of one of the clans local to the Arafura Swamp area. Ganalbingu means "magpie goose people". It was hence an important clan in the life of the swamp (and in the making of 'Ten Canoes').

Payback, or *Makaratta*: A formal and ritualised form of punishment or retribution, usually with attendant ceremony. Warriors from the aggrieved tribe throw spears at the perceived culprit until blood is drawn. Sometimes the wound is fatal, sometimes only minor. Occasionally a partner is chosen by the culprit, and both face the spears. Justice is deemed to be done when either one, the innocent or the perceived guilty, is hit. In many areas payback has been further refined to be a simple close-range spearing of the culprit in the leg.

Death Dance: When someone was at the edge of death, ceremony would start. People would gather and initially a dance would be performed for the dying person, to help him begin to make connections with his ancestors in the spirit world. Occasionally a person, still capable but knowing he was going to die, would perform the death dance himself. Ceremony would continue on and off for up to twelve months after the person had died.

The Place



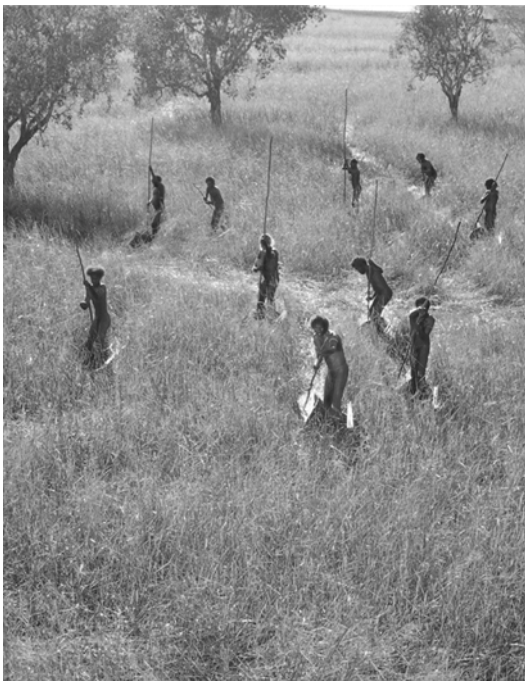
We Need Ten Canoes!...Origin of a Film

The country of the Arafura Swamp area is traditional to David Gulpilil, the great Indigenous performer (dance, film, theatre) who is an Australian screen icon. When not out performing somewhere in the world, David generally lives in Ramingining, close to his traditional land, although more recently Darwin has also been a home.

Towards the end of 2000, David was cast as the lead in the film that was to become 'The Tracker'. Upon meeting director Rolf de Heer in Adelaide some months before the shoot, David invited Rolf to Ramingining, to meet with him among his family, to see his traditional lands, to travel the Arafura Swamp. Rolf accepted the invitation and the two of them spent the time between Christmas and New Year together, talking, fishing, eating bush food and learning to understand each other. Even then David was keen on Rolf making a film up there with him and his people.

During the filming of "The Tracker", and on a number of subsequent occasions, David renewed his invitation to Rolf to make a film in Ramingining, any film, maybe a Western with cowboys and cattle, or a massacre film, even "The Tracker 2". Finally, in June 2003, David received a phone call from Rolf...could he come up and talk to David about making a film together, David to star in it and be the co-director, all shot up there on the traditional lands of his people, in their language.

The initial discussions that took place included a number of David's influential contemporaries, such as Richard Birrinbirrin and Bobby Bunungurr. A vague decision about the nature of the film was made: set it in "old times", maybe a century ago; make it some sort of Aboriginal story that ends, just before its own climax, with the massacre by Balanda of most of the Yolngu characters. This was not, however, to last very long as the idea for the film.



The ten canoeists in the style of Donald Thomson's photograph.

On the morning of Rolf's departure, David came to see him. "We need ten canoes," said David. Rolf looked at him blankly. "We need ten canoes," David repeated. Suddenly Rolf understood that David meant this for the film. "David, we don't even know what the film is really about, how can we need ten canoes?". David looked at Rolf as the ignorant Balanda he was and left, re-appearing half an hour later with a photo, black and white, taken almost seventy years before. Rolf took one look at it and said, "You're right, we need ten canoes".

The photo, of a group of ten men in their bark canoes on the swamp, was profoundly cinematic. It spoke of a world of long ago, where things were different, life was different to anything that could be imagined by almost any Balanda anywhere. To enter that world would be the essence of real cinema. And there were more of these photos. The film had started to form.

The Donald Thomson Photographs

That photo of the ten canoeists was taken by Dr Donald Thomson, an anthropologist who worked in central and north-eastern Arnhem Land in the mid-1930s, when life for the original inhabitants was still very traditional and culturally little influenced by the coming of white people...there had been wars against the Yolngu people of Arnhem Land, and massacres of them, but they had never been conquered and had thus retained, in very large measure, their traditional lifestyle.

Thomson lived there with the people for many months, by himself, funded by the government in the hope that understanding the Yolngu would bring peace, not only with the outside world, but amongst the warring factions of Yolngu themselves. Though many of his specific recommendations were ignored, he was very largely successful with his broader aims.

Thomson left a legacy of immense importance. He was an extraordinary photographer, of both still and moving image. The Thomson Collection of some four thousand black and white glass plate photographs of so many aspects of Yolngu culture is held in Museum Victoria (there are another seven thousand photographs taken in Central Australia and on Cape York); the many thousands of feet of nitrate film he took were all lost in a Melbourne warehouse fire.

The photographs are of many things...they depict daily life, like gathering and preparing food; they document the creation of artefacts like canoes and huts and spears; they trace special events, like a goose egg hunting expedition; they show people, a great range of people, precisely what they looked like and how they did their hair and what they wore...they are a portrait of a people in a slice of time that would otherwise have been lost.

Some of these photos have made their way back to Ramingining, and there they're considered with a lot more than idle curiosity. They've been consumed by the culture, become part of it. There's such a concept as "Thomson Time", fondly remembered. The web of kinship is complex: everyone is related to someone in the photographs, and everyone takes pride in them. They are their continuity, their history.



Peter Minygululu and Jamie Gulpillil collecting magpie geese eggs, in the style of Donald Thomson's photograph.

Life Then, Life Now

Life for the pre-contact Yolngu may have had its hard times, but the Yolngu had adapted very successfully to their environment. Their ceremonial and spiritual life was extremely rich and complex, due in part to the abundance of the food supply...Yolngu spent a lower proportion of their time obtaining food than any other known Australian Indigenous tribe; this allowed them more time to develop ritual and ceremony.

They were semi-nomadic hunters and gatherers, moving seasonally within well-defined boundaries depending on the best availability of food. They had a very complex kinship system, which determined extremely strict marriage rules; a highly developed system of law; and an extensive trading network with other tribes great distances away.

Macassans from the island of Sulawesi in Indonesia began to visit five or six hundred years ago, introducing new technology and a new economy. In return for camping rights and Yolngu help with their trepang (sea slug) fishing, the Macassans would trade items such as metal knives and axes, unknown in Australia to that point. That gave the Yolngu real advantage when ontrading to other tribes.



Richard Birrinbirrin at Ramingining airstrip.

Western culture, mainly in the form of cattlemen, didn't really arrive until the 1880s, and was strenuously resisted. Many Yolngu were massacred, but the Yolngu continued to hold out against white incursion. It was not until Thomson in the 1930s that peace, and ultimately a conversion to a mixture of white and Yolngu ways, came.

Nowadays life is very different for the people of Ramingining. There is a supermarket and a takeaway shop. People live in houses with plumbing and

television, and do their banking over the internet. Some of the old ways remain: the kinship system, though modified, is still strong; some of the ceremonial life is as important as it was a century ago; people still go hunting and fishing, though 4-wheel drives, guns and fishing lines are increasingly the tools of choice. Conventional work is scarce and increasingly there is engagement with the arts and craft, which in turn helps keep some of the traditions alive.

A Story to Please Two Cultures

It was with this community in transition that the story and script for the film were created. The Yolngu storytelling tradition is strong but its conventions are very different to those of Western storytelling. It was soon clear that the challenge would be to create a story, to make a film, that would not only satisfy local tastes and requirements, but that would also satisfy a Western cinema-going audience, used to Western storytelling conventions.

The Thomson photos were a great starting point. They were an invaluable reference, and having become part of the local culture, here were images that could be discussed, incident that could be derived from image...each photo had, in some way, a story that illuminated the whole of the endeavour.

Over the next year and a half, Rolf visited Ramingining on numerous occasions. Each time he came, more of the Yolngu would get to know him, and the circle of consultation became wider. This was crucial because by now David Gulpilil, Rolf's initial chief collaborator, was spending more and more time away from the community, but the work of the film had to continue.

There were several storytelling problems that needed to be overcome. The first of these was the desire of the locals who worked with Rolf to have the process of goose egg gathering (the ten canoes photo was taken during such an expedition) central to the film. The practice, and the ceremony that went with it, had been discontinued many years before, and it had been decades since one of the specialised swamp canoes had even been made. There were thoughts of a revival, and the film seemed an opportunity to trigger that revival. The only problem was that goose egg gathering itself is particularly non-dramatic in the paradigm of Western cinema.

'Drama' was also a problem of what should not be in the film. The old times, Thomson Time and before, were precious to the community, part of cultural continuity, and the Yolngu collaborators did not want to depict them as times of conflict. And conflict, being the essence of drama, was essential if the film was to work also for a Western audience.

And the third major problem was that the Thomson photos, which were somehow being represented in the film, were in black and white...the cultural history of the people was in black and white, but the film was contractually bound to be a colour film.

In the end, those and other problems were solved by introducing one device into the film, which was to have the main dramatic part of the story set in mythical times, when for the Yolngu anything was allowed to happen, and shoot that part in colour...that dramatic story could then be told as a cautionary tale during a goose egg hunting expedition, which would be shot in black and white to reflect the Thomson photos. A script which pleased both cultures was then possible.



Michael Dawu and Frances Djulibing in the Stranger Abducts scene.

Language...the Cosmological Divide

As noted before, Ramingining is a place of many languages. People speak to whoever in their own clan language, which is well understood by most others, who then tend to reply in their own particular language, also understood by most.

In the film, for example, a number of the ten canoeists are Ganalbingu speakers, but Minyngululu speaks Mandalpingu, also David Gulpilil's language. Crusoe Kurddal, who plays Minyngululu's ancestor Ridjimirail, speaks another language still, one from Maningrida about 150kms west of Ramingining. But in general, each understands the other perfectly well and apart from some on-set merriment about the way something would be said in a language other than Ganalbingu, each was perfectly comfortable acting with someone who spoke a different language.



"Canoeists" on the first day of the shoot - Michael Dawu, Steven Wilinydjanu, Crusoe Kurddal, Jamie Gulpilil, Carl Dhalurruma, Billy Black, Bobby Bunungurr, Peter Minyngululu, Peter Djigirr, and "Sorcerer" Philip Gudthaykudthay (Pussycat) seated.

For many of the Yolngu residents though, English is perhaps their fifth or sixth language...they speak it only rudimentarily if at all. They understand a little more than they can speak, but not speaking it, it becomes very difficult to know what of it they understand. And there is an immense difference between the Yolngu languages on the one hand (how they are spoken and structured, their tenses and syntax, even the very cosmology they describe), and English on the other hand.

In David's absence then (he pulled out of the film for complex reasons some weeks before the shoot), it was fortunate that several of the cast, notably Peter Djigirr and Richard Birrinbirrin, plus Frances Djulibing among the women, were good English speakers. They and others would work through the two-way communication problems between actors and director until everyone seemed well to know what to do and what to say.

A good example of the difficulties encountered was when there was an attempt to write down some material for Minyngululu, who spoke little English, so that he had a better opportunity to learn what roughly he should be saying. In the event it took five people to achieve the task...Rolf would explain the sense of the words to Djigirr and Billy Black, who would discuss and restructure in Ganalbingu and present this to Minyngululu. Minyngululu would then restructure further and tell Frances Djulibing in Mandalpingu how he would say what was required, and Frances would write it down according to Yolngu phonetics. But despite understanding Mandalpingu perfectly and being a fluent reader, Frances literally could not make sense of the words when trying to read them back. The three Yolngu men could not read, so it was left to the Balanda director to read it back in Mandalpingu for checking, though not without an immense amount of mirth at the fluent but badly pronounced language coming out of his mouth. The attempt was so time-consuming that it was soon abandoned.

Who Does the Casting?

Another area of unusual problem was the casting of 'Ten Canoes'. There were a number of stages to the casting, and each was more unconventional than the previous.

The first stage was during the construction of the story. Those participating in the story consulting had clear claims to being in the film and assumed they would be in it, but they weren't always obvious casting. Birrinbirrin, for example, was substantially overweight, in a way that no Yolngu was even seventy years ago, let alone pre-contact. And so a role was created especially for him, a comedic part of a man always after honey and always eating too much. This made his appearance in the film not only credible, but a real contribution to it.



Honey Man Richard Birrinbirrin with Rico Pascoe and Scott Gaykamangu.

Then there were the canoeists. The ten men in Thomson's canoes photo have, over the years, been individually identified, and many in Ramingining are related in some way to at least one of them. Those with the strongest claims to heritage chose themselves to play their ancestor, as they saw it, and that was the end of that. So much for directors being all powerful.

The third stage of casting was the most complex. If the characters in the film had a certain kinship relationship (for example a man and his wife), then the actors playing those characters also had to be able to have that kinship relationship. Every Yolngu is classified as being of one of two moieties: everyone is either Yirritja or Dhua. A Yirritja man cannot be married to a Yirritja woman, and hence half the women in Ramingining, being Yirritja, were immediately excluded from consideration for that role. But then there are a number of moiety subsections...if you're of the wrong Dhua subsection, then you can't be seen on screen as being married to a Yirritja man either...half of the rest of the women excluded. And if a character has a relationship with two other characters, then both relationships have to conform to the kinship system. From an already small pool of available actors, there was sometimes only one person who was possible for a particular role. No such thing as screen testing...if someone culturally appropriate and willing was found, they had the part, irrespective of looks or ability. And in the final reckoning, they all had both the looks and the ability.

The third stage of casting was the most complex. If the characters in

The First Swamp Canoe

As the shoot drew nearer, it became time for the Yolngu to begin making all the artefacts needed for the production: the spears and stone axes; the dilly bags and canoes; the arm bands and the shelters. As in old times, the work was divided very distinctly along gender lines...the men made the canoes and the weapons, the women the huts, the bags and the body decorations. At each step there was the feeling of doing something special, of cultural renewal, of bringing back the old times.

The canoes were a particular example of this. The canoes of the Arafura Swamp were of a design and function that took into account the precise environmental conditions of the swamp. There were no other canoes like them anywhere in Australia, but none had been built here for decades.

The expertise, however, still existed among the older men, in particular with Minygululu (in his sixties) and Pussycat (mid-seventies). Minygululu was away, so Pussycat, ably assisted by Djigirr and Dawu and several others, went bush to find barks.

Appropriate trees were selected and a sheet of bark up to four metres long and a metre wide was cut and pried off each tree in a single piece. The barks were soaked in a creek overnight and then the next morning firewood was gathered, and sticks from a certain plant to provide the string to sew the canoes, and sticks from a certain shrub to provide the supports. The first bark slab was removed from the water and thrown on the fire, heated through and softened, then bent into shape and clamped between two sticks that had been driven into the mud. One end was sewn, then back onto the fire for the other end, the prow.



Peter Djigirr cutting bark for the first canoe.



Pussycat secures the canoe supports.

There was gathering excitement, more so among the younger men who had never seen this before, as the canoe took shape. Then a moment's hesitation...Pussycat is not originally from one of the swamp tribes and was unsure about the exact way to sew the prow. Thomson photographs were consulted, and a drawing by Thomson in his monograph about the goose egg hunters. Work resumed in a new direction, and when the prow took shape in the manner of a "Thomson canoe", there was a sudden understanding and real pride.

By the end of the day, the first canoe had been completed. It sat there on the ground, on display. One of the younger men kept stepping into it and miming the poling action. The older men walked round it, admiring it. This one canoe was a small miracle, even for the Yolngu...forgotten aspects of their culture were being brought back from the brink extinction, and they knew it.



Steven Wilinydjanu tests the first canoe.

The Camp

Meanwhile the production crew arrived and began to transform Murwangi, an old cattle station at the edge of the swamp which was to serve as the base for filming, into something at least notionally habitable. Tent city sprang up among the scattering of rusty sheds, but at least there was power, a kitchen and some bathroom facilities (including an open air shower and toilet that had a grand view of the swamp but that was hell with mosquitoes).

The Yolngu cast were delighted with their accommodation...the tents had power, a light and a fan, and were largely mosquito proof. The civified crew had slightly different ideas about it all, and resigned themselves to many weeks of roughing it. Everything is relative...

The camp was a living, vibrant, noisy entity. The cast generally brought wives, husbands and families and friends, and it was not long before more tents had to be shipped in to accommodate the overflow. Children played around the camp and roamed the surrounding areas, those not working would go fishing or hunting and often enough the crew and cast would return from a day's shooting to the smell of fresh fish cooking on little fires scattered throughout the camp.



Murwangi Station and the beginning of tent city.

Extra food had to be shipped in to alleviate the pressure on catering...more than once there was an unexpected influx of visitors and all the food was gone before everyone had eaten. The Balanda crew, to their credit, took the stresses mostly in good humour. It was not easy for them, working hard through the hot days, then returning to a noisy, mosquito plagued camp with food shortages, no alcohol to wind down, nowhere to go to get away from it all, not even any real respite in one's own tent because it was surrounded by other tents, other people.

But there was a real benefit to this cheek-by-jowl living, and that was on set. The Yolngu and the Balanda, by their enforced closeness and intermingling during time away from shooting, were very quickly and very substantially demystified to each other, both personally and culturally. Accommodation to each other's ways was found in camp, had to be found. This led to a very easy and trusting atmosphere on set, which was generally much calmer and quieter than camp. With the increased understanding of both cultures, people were able to really enjoy working together on set.

Crocodiles, Leeches and Mosquitoes

The shoot itself was divided into distinct halves. First would be the black and white canoe making and goose egg gathering material, based on and at the edges of the swamp, then would come the colour material from the mythical times, to be shot mostly at the camp the Yolngu women had built and also in the forests and surrounds.

Of the goose egg hunting expeditions, Thomson wrote, in 1937, "...the irritation and loss of sleep due to the bites of mosquitoes and leeches, added to the physical exertion, makes the journey a severe ordeal." That describes fairly accurately the first half of the shoot. And crocodile numbers in the Arafura Swamp had built up enormously since hunting them became regulated in the 1970s and to the crew and cast, so had mosquito and leech numbers.

The swamp shoot was a long, hard haul for Yolngu actor and Balanda crew alike, much as a goose egg hunting expedition would have been. None of the cast had acted in a film before, and they were not only having to relearn old skills, such as poling a bark canoe through thick reeds without falling out, but they had to learn the new skills associated with screen acting, understand things like shooting out of sequence, storytelling that was fictional rather than based on reality, as even the most distant myth has a reality level to it for Yolngu that Balanda find difficult to understand.



Rolf de Heer directing in the swamp.

And there was also a sense of responsibility for these mad Balanda, who obviously weren't aware of the dangers of the swamp, otherwise why would they stand, vulnerable to crocodiles, waist-deep in the swamp all day? Good to have a croc spotter with a gun, even though old Pussycat's eyesight was deemed questionable, but better still to have croc spotting as a way of life, which it is for the locals. And so it was that there were eleven croc spotters on set, the ten canoeists plus Pussycat, enough to ensure the safety of the Balanda.

First screening of rushes was both riotous and awesome. Every Yolngu in camp crammed into the editing hut and every Yolngu in camp laughed at the repeated antics of the cast, and at what they said. But the style of the black and white filming had been chosen to reflect the Thomson photographs, and in a number of cases the shots, down to composition, had been planned to almost duplicate them...whenever such a shot appeared, there were gasps and mutterings of recognition, recognition that those on screen, and those Yolngu contributing

in other ways to the film, were, in some almost magical way, rebuilding their history.

Eventually the black and white section of the film was completed, and everyone moved to dry land. New cast members started, refreshing those that had been working solidly for weeks. The shooting style also changed, from still compositions to a camera that moved almost all the time. Everything became easier. Instead of doing only two or three shots a day, up to twenty a day

were possible. Instead of eating a dry sandwich standing in the mud or water, proper sit-down lunches were possible. Instead of long slogs through reeds, there was vehicle access and easy walking on dry land.

And by using a bit of local knowledge, there was usually a solution to every problem. During the death dance sequence at night, for example, layers of smoke were needed, but rather than flying in expensive smoke machines, good use was made of crumbled up termite mound set alight, freely available in large quantity. Not only was it possible to have dozens of smoke "machines", but the resultant smoke kept the mosquitoes away during the only night shoots of the film.

The pace of filming picked up to such a degree on dry land that the shoot finished some days early. Mixed with the satisfaction of having achieved what had seemed impossible, with the happiness for both Yolngu and Balanda of being able to return to some sort of normality, there were tinges of regret all round that this great, glorious and difficult adventure was over, and that the like of it would probably never again be experienced by anyone, ever, anywhere.



Co-director Peter Djigirr talking with camera operator Greg Gilbert (front) and focus puller Ricky Schamburg.

Many Canoes

From almost the beginning, there were too many things that too many people wanted for them all to fit in just one feature film. Additional, associated projects arose almost at random. Some have been completed, some are works in progress, other await finance while a few of them languish, perhaps to be re-activated once more time and resources can be found.

First there was *Eleven Canoes*, which was a project to teach the young people of Ramingining how to use video recording and editing equipment so they could make their own mini-documentaries. This was highly successful, with almost twenty shorts and a renewed and improved media course at Ramingining School coming out of it.



Sylvester Durrurmga, Marcus Dhamarranydji and Valerie Malibirr learning camera skills during the Eleven Canoes project.

Then *Twelve Canoes* came into being. This is a website project, not about the film, but about the environment, culture and people of Ramingining...the people there have much they wish to communicate to the outside world; not only is a film insufficient, but a website can do much more, and transmit it instantly to the entire world.

Thirteen Canoes soon followed...a multi-media art/cultural exhibition, using the artefacts made for *Ten Canoes*, the artworks commissioned

for *Twelve Canoes*, some Thomson photographs, perhaps videos from *Eleven Canoes*. And *Fourteen Canoes* was a logical extension...a book with the original Thomson photographs, the colour equivalents from the *Ten Canoes* shoot, photos of the Yolngu participants in a modern context, words to demystify the people in the photos.

Fifteen Canoes, a music preservation project; *Sixteen Canoes*, a project to restore the functioning of the closed-circuit television set-up at Ramingining; *Seventeen Canoes*, a video-making young people's exchange project with other remote communities; *Eighteen Canoes*, a one-hour television documentary about the effect of *Ten Canoes* on the community.



Steven Wilinydjanu interviewing Michael Dawu for the Eighteen Canoes project.

It is clear that the Many Canoes will resonate in Ramingining for a long time to come.

How the Film Has Been Received by the Community

There are three versions of the film in existence so far: there's the version that has Yolngu languages dialogue with English subtitles and English storytelling by David Gulpilil; there's the version that has both Yolngu languages dialogue and storytelling in Mandalpingu by David, with English subtitles; and there's the Yolngu version, no subtitles, everything in the languages of the people whose film it is.

It was this last version that played open air in Ramingining one steamy wet season night, as soon as it was ready enough to be screened and before any public screening of any of the versions.

For months the phone calls had been coming into the post-production office in Adelaide, starting almost as soon as the shoot was finished..."When is that *Ten Canoes* gonna be ready?", "When can we see that film?", "Can you send us a DVD?", "Why are you Balanda taking so long with the film?"

David Gulpilil was first to see it, for he had to record the storytelling in both English and his own language. He cried and laughed in equal measure. Peter Djigirr and Gladys Womati, who had worked on the translations, were next to see it, also in Adelaide, to check that everything was right and permissible in the film. They both cried and laughed and suggested only one change.



The first public screening of Ten Canoes at Ramingining, December 2005.

Then finally, after sound mixing, it was ready to show to the whole community. A projector and screen were flown in from Darwin and people began gathering on the basketball court as the set up commenced, hours before the screening. By the time it was 7.30 and dark, there was not a soul in the streets and houses of Ramingining...it would have taken four basketball courts to hold everyone who was there.

The film brought laughter, pride and joy to an entire community, even to those who'd had their doubts about the film being made at all. For days afterwards it was a dominant topic of conversation and set off many tangential conversations. Old ways were questioned, new ways were questioned. Culture was discussed, and history, and what it means to be Yolngu.

And numbers of people who were in the film, and those who'd made contribution to it, were changed by it...they had a confidence of their place in the world not seen before.

What the Film Means...Djigirr Speaks

We come from this land. People, Balanda, always come, miners and that, and we always say no to them, no mining, because we don't want to lose our culture. White man's ways will just destroy us.

We have our law from long time ago, important law for everything, but all them white men come more and more and we can't stay in that law. That law just dropping away.



If we go more further with losing our law then maybe white men can tell us, "Where's your culture?...Nothing, you're lost, all bad luck for you."

But you film mob came here to lift up this law for us, to show how they used to sit a long time ago, them laws. So white men can see, we can see, anyone can see, we got that law.

If we can't do this movie, all them Balanda put us down, but you people just come to lift us up, to teach them, because we don't want to lose our culture, you know.

We gonna try and lift up that law for us with this movie, so they can recognise, "Ah, these people still got that law for them, culture, all that." It's really important this movie get done from the start to the end. We gonna show this film, and then they can recognise, all them white mens...that's nicer.

*Peter Djigirr
April 2005*

What the Film Means...Bunungurr Speaks

When I'm acting out on the swamp in the canoes, I feel full of life. The spirits are around me, the old people they with me, and I feel it. Out there, I was inside by myself, and I was crying.

I said to myself, why I being like my people from long ago? And I would think way back and then I feel. Everything, like my hair, I'm going to be like my people and I said "Yeah!", because I remember...because the spirit of my older people they're beside me and they're giving me more knowledge.



And that never happened before...and that's why we all worked and no one was bitten by crocodile, because the spirit of the older people were with us. I feel them, and I see them through the dream, they talking to us, slow, smooth.

These old people went through this swamp in the past...no one can tell you now, but you can feel this, the spirit of the older people giving you more knowledge.

We're in the middle of the movie now. This is good fun, everyone together, teaching each other things, that's good.

We're looking to the future, not just acting, not for ourself, not for the money, but for our children.

*Bobby Bunungurr
May 2005*

What the Film Means...Dawu Speaks

Old time, maybe 100,000 years, me and you, we were all the same. We've got blood, eyes, nose and walking and laughing exactly the same...beginning, beginning, beginning, *beginning!*

But now my people, we're sleeping at the ceremony. Important, because our memory, she's gone...old people, and old women, they took our memory with them when they dies, you see?

And at this time, couldn't understand Aboriginal people. Couldn't wake up, fighting and argument, no people singing and dancing. They was forgetting culture, because everytime we sit in town, sugar, damper, air-conditioner, light, we forget. We forget it, longtime. Us people, children, grown up, we was doing wrong thing.



But for your memory, you have to go back. You show us..."All right Michael, bring your memory, your culture", but my memory was gone, only half memory left, full memory was gone far away, rest-in-peace...drink kava, ganja, grog...too hard for me.

But then I asked that woman, spirit, "Bring me my energy!" *Ten Canoes* done that, bring me my memory back and my energy. You wake me up.

I have to thank you for it, because you was like this..."Hey, come on, get up, you'll have to bring your memory." But memory gone. "Here, you'll have to follow like that then, like the old people, and you can make this one film and bring that memory back!"

Rolf, you bring us memory. We got culture because we got memory...what a story, brother...

*Michael Dawu
June 2005*

What the Film Means...Djulibing Speaks

When I first came here for the film I thought, I'm not gonna do this, I'm not gonna do that. But they took me out to the mosquito huts our women built for the film. I felt free then, I could feel the old people was with me, I could feel them.

Now I'm getting brave and I'm gonna do whatever I have to do, whatever the director tells me to do. I'm very proud of myself...it's good to be playing a traditional woman, the way I look for the film.

It is my destiny to do this, so all over the world they can see how my ancient ancestors had been like this before. Behind the black and white photos is the big story, and the kids of Ramingining have never heard that story...they just laugh at the funny photos, which is no respect. If they make fun of me I'll crack their heads together.



This film is for the kids' future, so when they grow up they're gonna see, because not enough of the older people is trying to teach the younger kids. It's very important what we're gonna do here with the acting so everybody can see and understand how people was first like this. This is not just only for me...I'm doing this for my grandkids and for the next one generation to generation. They can learn what's in this film, this movie is gonna remind

them about our ancient ancestors.

Everything is changing, everything is going going gone now. The only thing they know is some ceremony...they not even normal kids anymore. Maybe they gonna keep this film with them so they can put it in their head.

*Frances Djulibing
June 2005*

What the Film Means...Gulpilil Speaks

I got tears falling down, I been crying seeing that movie, it's such a good movie. I'm proud of my people who are in that film, acting is beautiful, just perfect, everything, everybody is just great. It will hold them in the heart, the people who will see it, it'll take you way down to the wilderness.

I showed a photograph from Donald Doctor Thomson to Rolf de Heer and said what do you think? Rolf de Heer started to write that story with Ramingining people, my people, and we started to work together.



I had to talk to Gudthaykudthay and Minyngululu and Bunungurr and Bunyira and Djigirr and Birrinbirrin and I said okay, we'll make that canoes. I wasn't even there but they started to work on the canoes and it's really hard work but it was really perfectly done.

I thought it wasn't gonna work but you know it was a thousand millions of mosquitoes and leeches and you name it but I tell you what, lucky it was Rolf de Heer, if Rolf de Heer wasn't there it wouldn't have been happening this story, this story of my people.

All I did when they showed me the film and the film started, I start to cry...I remember those days, I remember...and now I can see it in the film. I saw it. I really want to thanks to Rolf, what he done for my people and my people's story and a true Australian story, fair dinkum.

That story is never finished that *Ten Canoes* story, it goes on forever because it is a true story of our people, it is the heart of the land and people and nature.

David Gulpilil
November 2005

The Cast

CRUSOE KURRDAL (Ridjimiraril)

Crusoe Kurddal is the son of Crusoe Kuningbal and Lena Kuriniya, and the brother of Timothy Wulanjirr and Owen Yalandja. He is known for his large mimih sculptures, which are reminiscent of those made by his father. Crusoe Kurddal started making these sculptures following his father's death in 1984. He is also an accomplished dancer and has performed throughout Australia and overseas.



TEN CANOES is Kurddal's first acting role. A natural performer, he had always wanted to be an actor. When he heard that TEN CANOES was shooting in Ramingining, he approached director Rolf de Heer for a role. After thoroughly enjoying the filmmaking process, Kurddal is now looking forward to appearing in more films in the future.

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JAMIE GULPILIL (Dayindi/Yeeralparil)

Twenty-two year old, Jamie Gulpilil, is the son of the great actor, David Gulpilil. His interest in acting began when accompanying his father to various film shoots and film premieres.

He was born and continues to live in Ramingining, north-eastern Arnhem Land.

TEN CANOES is his first acting role.



RICHARD BIRRINBIRRIN (Birrinbirrin & Associate Producer)

Richard Birrinbirrin is Treasurer of the Aboriginal artist's co-operative, Bula'bula Arts, in Ramingining.

A man with a keen intellect and empiric understanding of balanda and yolngu "ways of life", he is an excellent ambassador for the Art Centre, as well as for Aboriginal Art in general. Birrinbirrin is also an Executive Member of ANKAAA (a peak Indigenous Arts advocacy organisation).

Born in 1953 at Milingimbi mission Birrinbirrin, was initiated on the beach outside his father's (David Malangi) self constructed tin-shed home.

Malangi was always keen that his sons and daughters recieved "two way" (balanda and yolngu) education and Birrinbirrin went on to become a mental health worker for the Ramingining Clinic for 10 years.



As a leader in ceremonies Birrinbirrin is not new to performance. Indeed, he made his public performance debut in New York in 2002. As an accompaniment to The Native Born exhibition, Birrinbirrin and his brother Gulaygulay were commissioned to perform a dada (smoking) ceremony. Birrinbirrin has travelled to Taipei, Tokyo and Canberra to make public art.

A keen supporter of TEN CANOES during its development phase, Birrinbirrin's enthusiasm and assistance provided important introductions of the filmmakers to the Ramingining community.

Birrinbirrin is currently (2005) a recipient of an Australia Council grant for New Work and a well travelled ambassador for Bula'bula Arts Aboriginal Corporation.

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PETER MINYGULULU (Minygululu)

Peter Minygululu, an exhibiting artist, and ceremonial leader, was born near Mirrngatja around 1942.



Minygululu paints the story of his father's country - the land around Mirrngatja, which is on the eastern side of the Arafura Swamp.

During the development of TEN CANOES, Minygululu was consistently supportive of the project. He is not only an authority on making traditional artefacts such as bark canoes, he also remembers the time when poling across the Swamp to collect the magpie geese was an annual event.

(Reproduced with permission from Bula'bula Arts Aboriginal Corporation.)

FRANCES DJULIBING (Nowalingu)

When director Rolf de Heer was casting in Ramingining during pre-production, he kept meeting the vibrant and vivacious Frances Djulibing, who at the time worked at the local shop. He quickly believed she would be perfect for the role of "Nowalingu" and promptly cast her as the second wife.

Her enthusiasm was second to none. She had always wanted to be an actor in a film but never thought it was possible given she lived in such a remote area of Australia.



PHILIP GUDTHAYKUDTHAY (The Sorcerer)

Born in 1935, Philip Gudthaykudthay is the most senior artist from Ramingining. Taught by great artists such as his father Dawidi and his uncle Djawa, Gudthaykudthay has been painting since the 1960s. A stealthy old man with a languid gait, *Pussycat*, as he is colloquially known, is a senior ritual leader. His nickname comes from one of his principal totems, *Burruwara*, the native cat —one just has to watch him walk to see the connection.



In the 1960s Gudthaykudthay first sold his paintings through Alan Fidock at the Milingimbi Mission. He was living on the mainland at Nangalala and worked variously as a fencer, stockman and crocodile hunter, while painting in his free time. Gudthaykudthay was the first Ramingining artist to have a solo show. Held at the Garry Anderson Gallery in 1983, the show was a sell-out. Since that time he has participated in numerous national and international exhibitions, including four more solo shows.

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DAVID GULPILIL (The Storyteller)

David Gulpilil was born in 1953, in Arnhem Land in the Northern Territory of Australia. He grew up in a tribal lifestyle in an area north east of the world famous Kakadu National Park where his ancestors have lived for thousands of years.

In 1969 the British director Nicholas Roeg chose David as the lead in the feature film WALKABOUT filmed on location in Northern Australia.

David Gulpilil is one of Australia's most accomplished exponents of traditional Aboriginal dance and the native wind instrument, the didgeridoo. He has toured his dances Australia wide and internationally and has performed with his troupe in the United States, Great Britain and France. He and a group of his native dancers performed at the Australian Pavilion at the World Expo 1985 in Osaka and also in Tokyo.



In 1987 Gulpilil was awarded the Australia Medal, one of the highest awards to Australian citizens, for his services to the Arts.

Gulpilil's career as an actor since WALKABOUT has been extensive. He has appeared in feature films such as MAD DOG MORGAN directed by Philippe Mora and also starring Dennis Hopper; THE LAST WAVE directed by Peter Weir and also starring Richard Chamberlain; STORM BOY directed by Henri Safran; THE RIGHT STUFF directed by Philip Kaufman; DARK AGE directed by Arch Nicholson; DEAD HEART directed by Nick Parsons and starring Bryan Brown; SERENADES directed by Mojgan Khadem; and the Wim Wender's feature film UNTIL THE END OF THE WORLD.

Gulpilil also appeared alongside Paul Hogan in CROCODILE DUNDEE, and choreographed the Aboriginal dance sequences. He also starred in the Australian film RABBIT PROOF FENCE directed by Phillip Noyce.

TEN CANOES is the second feature film working with director, Rolf de Heer. In 2002, Gulpilil received numerous acting awards for his role in THE TRACKER, notably winning Lead Actor at the AFI Awards, IF Awards and the Film Critics Circle Awards. He also won Best Actor at the Tudawali Awards.

The Crew

ROLF DE HEER (Writer/Director/Producer)

Born in Holland, Rolf de Heer migrated to Australia with his family in 1959. From eighteen, he spent seven years working at the Australian Broadcasting Corporation. In 1977, he was granted entry into Australia's prestigious Film Television and Radio School, completing the three-year course with Diplomas in Production and Directing. Since then, de Heer has become one of Australia's leading filmmakers.



De Heer's first film, the children's feature *TAIL OF A TIGER* (1984), attracted both critical and commercial success and played at the Berlin Kinderfest. *INCIDENT AT RAVEN'S GATE* (1987) was an atmospheric science fiction mystery thriller, followed by *DINGO* (1990) a musical odyssey that travelled from outback Western Australia to the streets of Paris starring Colin Friels and jazz legend Miles Davis in his only film role.

BAD BOY BUBBY (1993) marked de Heer's first collaboration with Italian producer Domenico Procacci. It won the Grand Special Jury Prize and the International Film Critics Prize at the 1993 Venice Film Festival, as well as four Australian Film Institute Awards. De Heer spent the next two years working on *EPSILON* (1995) which made extensive use of motion control cinematography. During a break in filming, *THE QUIET ROOM* was shot. The story of a family breakdown as seen through the eyes of a child, *THE QUIET ROOM* was selected for Official Competition in the 1996 Cannes International Film Festival.

In 1997 de Heer directed *DANCE ME TO MY SONG*, selected for Official Competition at the 1998 Cannes Film Festival. In 1999, de Heer spent three months in the jungles of French Guyana shooting *THE OLD MAN WHO READ LOVE STORIES* starring Richard Dreyfuss and Hugo Weaving. De Heer's next film, *THE TRACKER*, was shot on location in the rugged Gammon Ranges in outback Australia and debuted to standing ovations at the 2002 Adelaide Festival of Arts and in Official Competition at the 2002 Venice International Film Festival. The film won, among others, the Special Jury Prize at the 2002 Valladolid International Film Festival. In Australia it won Best Film at both the 2002 Circle of Film Critics Awards and the 2002 IF (people's) Awards.

ALEXANDRA'S PROJECT was selected to participate in Official Competition at the prestigious Berlin International Film Festival in 2003 and went on to screen at numerous international festivals including Puchon, Edinburgh, Telluride, Toronto and Montreal.

TEN CANOES is de Heer's eleventh feature.

PETER DJIGIRR (Co-director & Canoeist)

Djigirr is a key member of the Arafura Swamp people. He was born in 1963 in the country around Djilpin Gorge.



He is known as the “crocodile man” and is regarded as the local expert on catching crocodiles and locating their eggs for harvest on the Swamp each year.

Djigirr’s assistance as co-director was vital during the shoot. He was involved extensively in casting, locations and logistics, and was a key liaison between the Yolgnu community and balanda crew.

SUE MURRAY (Executive Producer)

Sue Murray has worked in the Australian film industry since 1977 when she joined the Australian Film Institute as manager of the annual Australian Film Awards and film programmer. Murray moved to Sydney in 1981 and joined the Australian Film Commission [AFC], where she worked in research and policy before becoming Director of Marketing in 1987. This position involved the promotion of Australian cinema internationally and the provision of marketing advice to Australian filmmakers.

On leaving the AFC in 1998, she became Acquisition Consultant for US distributor Fine Line Features, sourcing projects and completed films from Australia and New Zealand. When this arrangement finished in June 2001, she consulted to the New Zealand Film Commission and Australian film agencies prior to setting up Fandango Australia in February 2002 with fellow directors Domenico Procacci, Rolf de Heer, Richard Lowenstein and Bryce Menzies. As Executive Director she is involved in development, financing and marketing of Fandango Australia projects and is co-producer on ALEXANDRA'S PROJECT, and executive producer on Alkinos Tsilimidos' TOM WHITE.

JULIE RYAN (Producer)

After briefly working as an assistant in a film publicity company, Julie Ryan entered the Australian film industry in 1996 when she worked as production secretary with Rolf de Heer on THE SOUND OF ONE HAND CLAPPING.

She joined Vertigo Productions as production manager on de Heer's feature film DANCE ME TO MY SONG, which was selected for Cannes in 1998. She then produced the award winning SBS documentary, HEATHER ROSE GOES TO CANNES.

In 1999, Ryan spent three months in the jungles of French Guyana co-producing her first feature film, THE OLD MAN WHO READ LOVE STORIES, starring Richard Dreyfuss and Hugo Weaving. The film was nominated for Best Film at the 2005 Film Critics Circle of Australia Awards, Australian Film Institute Awards and the IF Awards.

Ryan's next feature with de Heer, THE TRACKER, was shot entirely on location in the rugged Northern Flinders Ranges and premiered to critical acclaim at the Adelaide Festival of Arts and at the Venice International Film Festival in 2002. The film also won Best Film at the 2002 Film Critics Circle and IF Awards, and received a Best Film nomination from the AFI Awards.

ALEXANDRA'S PROJECT, her third consecutive feature as producer with de Heer, was selected for official competition at the Berlin Film Festival. It was also nominated for Best Film at the Film Critics and AFI Awards in 2003.

DOMENICO PROCACCI (Executive Producer)

Domenico Procacci attended the Gaumont School of Cinema in Rome from 1981 to 1984, concentrating his studies mainly on film direction and script writing. Producing came about almost by accident, when in 1987 a group of young Italian filmmakers, including Procacci, decided to make a low budget feature. One of them had to produce it, and the resulting collaboration, IL GRANDE BLEK was both a critical and commercial success. A new career as a producer was born for Procacci.

Since that time he has produced over 40 Italian films, including the internationally successful LASTAZIONE (THE STATION), directed by Sergio Rubini (1989), LA CORSA DELL'INNOCENTE (FLIGHT OF THE INNOCENT) directed by Carlo Carlei (1992) and produced with Franco Cristaldi, two films with pop singer Luciano Ligabue, RADIOFRECCIA (1998) and DA ZERO A DIECI (2002) (FROM ZERO TO TEN), the highly successful L'ULTIMO BACIO (2001) (THE LAST KISS) and RICORDATI DI ME (2003) (REMEMBER ME) directed by Gabriele Muccino, Matteo Garrone's L'IMBALSAMATORE (2002) (THE EMBALMER) and PRIMO AMORE (2004) (FIRST LOVE) and Paolo Sorrentino's LA CONSEGUENZA D'AMORE (2004) (THE CONSEQUENCES OF LOVE). His films have been in competition at Cannes, Venice and Berlin.

In 1993 Procacci produced his first non-Italian film, BAD BOY BUBBY, directed by Rolf de Heer. The creative harmony and resultant success of this project led Procacci to produce a further four films with de Heer including the Cannes entries THE QUIET ROOM (1996) and DANCE ME TO MY SONG (1998), the Venice 2002 competition entry THE TRACKER, and Berlin competition entry ALEXANDRA'S PROJECT.

Procacci has also co-produced a number of European films including: Milcho Manchevski's DUST (2001) with Chris Auty and Vesna Jovanoka; Pan Nalin's SAMSARA (2002) with Karl Baumgartner and Christoph Friedel; and Emanuele Crialesse's Critics Week prize winner at Cannes 2002, RESPIRO, with Anne-Dominique Toussaint of Films des Tournelles, France.

The Australian connection was expanded in 2001 when Procacci produced Richard Lowenstein's HE DIED WITH A FELAFEL IN HIS HAND and the formation of Fandango Australia in early 2002. Procacci also set up his own distribution company in 2001, with recent successes including Ray Lawrence's LANTANA, SAMSARA and SPIDER. He also runs a book publishing division that published the latest novel by Alessandro Baricco.

BRYCE MENZIES (Executive Producer)

Bryce Menzies is a partner at Marshalls & Dent, solicitors in Melbourne. Prior to merging his film and entertainment law practice with Marshalls & Dent, he used to head the film and entertainment law practice at Roth Warren, solicitors in Melbourne. He holds the degree of Bachelor of Jurisprudence and Bachelor of Laws from Monash University. Menzies has enormous experience in all aspects in the Australian film industry extending beyond the practice of law into deal making and film financing.

Menzies advises some of Australia's best known and successful feature film, television and documentary producers. He has acted as executive producer, producer, as well as legal adviser on many well known films including MALCOLM, THE BIG STEAL, DEATH IN BRUNSWICK, PROOF, THE MAGISTRATE, STARK, COSI, MURIEL'S WEDDING, CRACKERS, TWO HANDS and COLLISION COURSE: THE CROCODILE HUNTER. In addition to acting for local producers, Menzies represents major international film companies in their negotiations with Australian filmmakers. Menzies also represents musicians and composers in both the record industry and film industry together with writers and directors. In the multimedia industry, Menzies advises computer games companies and internet content developers.

BELINDA SCOTT (Associate Producer)

Belinda Scott holds a BA majoring in Anthropology, a Graduate Diploma of Pacific and Aboriginal Studies and a Graduate Diploma of Art History & Curatorship. She has been involved with the artists of Ramingining since she first moved to that remote community in 1989. Previous to that Scott was a Research Anthropologist with the Darwin Office of the Northern Land, commencing there in 1985. Scott was fortunate to work with some of the great bark painters Paddy Dhatangu, George Milpururru, Jimmy Wululu and Philip Gudthaykudthay during her work for the Art Centre in Ramingining from 1989 until 1993. Patiently listening to stories over endless cups of tea, Scott learned much from these master painters. Now in her second sojourn to Ramingining, Gudthaykudthay is the only remaining painter of that generation.

Over the years Scott has travelled many times with artists. In 1991 she organised the opening celebrations for the newly established Bula'bula Art Centre. Over the years her research has contributed to a number of exhibition catalogues and other publications. In 1988 Scott travelled on The Anti-Bicentenary Bus Convoy from Darwin to Sydney. A short stint as a travel writer in 2001 saw Scott write the NSW Chapter in the Lonely Planet guide to Indigenous Australia. In 2003 she accompanied David Gulpilil to the USA on two occasions. One trip involved speaking about art from Ramingining and curating an exhibition, the other was as his minder for the New York premiere of THE TRACKER.

In 2003, Scott curated Out of the Dilly Bag, Bula'bula Arts first major exhibition in seven years. From Rolf de Heer's first visit to Ramingining in 2003, Scott became an integral associate of TEN CANOES.

NILS ERIK NIELSEN (Associate Producer)

Nils Erik Nielsen joined Vertigo Productions as financial controller and company secretary in 1998. He worked as Australian accountant on THE OLD MAN WHO READ LOVE STORIES, and associate producer on THE TRACKER, ALEXANDRA'S PROJECT and TEN CANOES.

IAN JONES, ACS (Director of Photography)

Ian Jones has worked extensively in Australia and internationally and is highly regarded for his stylish cinematography, including his exceptional steadicam work.

In 2000, Jones worked as 2nd unit director / Director of Photography on Rabbit Proof Fence with director Phillip Noyce. Jones has also worked with Noyce on CLEAR AND PRESENT DANGER as well as operating on such notable feature films as THE RUSSIA HOUSE for Fred Schepisi, BORN ON THE FOURTH OF JULY for Oliver Stone and Baz Luhrman's STRICTLY BALLROOM.

THE TRACKER is Jones's third feature film with Rolf de Heer having worked with him on both DINGO (1990) and BAD BOY BUBBY (1993).

In 2002, he won Best Cinematography for THE TRACKER at the Film Critics Circle Awards, and was nominated for both the 2002 AFI Awards and the 2002 IF Awards. In 2003 he also shot de Heer's ALEXANDRA'S PROJECT.

TEN CANOES is Jones's fifth feature film with director de Heer.

TANIA NEHME (Film Editor)

An editor since 1986, Tania Nehme edited numerous documentaries, commercials and short dramas before she cut her first feature, EPSILON, for Rolf de Heer in 1995.

A graduate of the Australian Film Television & Radio School, Nehme was nominated for an Australian Film Institute [AFI] Award for Best Editor in 1991 for her work on the short drama ONCE IN A TIME.

Working as both picture and sound editor, THE TRACKER was the fifth feature Nehme has cut with de Heer, earning her Best Editor nominations at both the 2002 AFI Awards and the 2002 Film Critics Circle Awards.

Nehme also edited, DANCE ME TO MY SONG, THE SOUND OF ONE HAND CLAPPING and THE QUIET ROOM.

Apart from feature films, Nehme edited the Barron Television children's series CHUCK FINN, the SBS Australia documentary KUMARANGK 5214 and the Australian Film Commission funded short feature THE 13th HOUSE.

Nehme worked on her sixth feature collaboration with Rolf de Heer, ALEXANDRA'S PROJECT, which resulted in nominations for Best Editing for Film Critic's Circle and AFI awards in 2003.

As well as film editing nominations, Nehme also received nominations for an IF and AFI Award as part of the sound team for THE TRACKER (2002) and ALEXANDRA'S PROJECT (2003).

In 2004, Nehme won Best Editor at the IF Awards for THE OLD MAN WHO READ LOVE STORIES. In that year, she also received nominations for Best Editing at the Film Critic's Circle and AFI Awards.

BEVERLEY FREEMAN (Art Director)

Beverley Freeman has worked as a production designer, art director, costume designer and make-up and hair supervisor on films and TV commercials in Australia, America, England and Germany for over two decades. Her feature credits include BLACK & WHITE, starring Robert Carlyle and Kerry Fox, EBBTIDE, THE LIFE OF HARRY DARE and HEAVEN'S BURNING.

TEN CANOES is Freeman's seventh film with de Heer following ALEXANDRA'S PROJECT, THE TRACKER, DANCE ME TO MY SONG, THE QUIET ROOM, EPSILON and BAD BOY BUBBY.

Freeman is well regarded in the film industry for being able to achieve extremely high production values on relatively low budgets. Her ability to multi-skill and work quickly on set makes her a valuable member of the Vertigo team.

JAMES CURRIE (Sound Designer)

James Currie has worked in the film industry for nearly three decades as location recordist, sound editor, mixer and sound designer. He has worked on seven films with Rolf de Heer including TEN CANOES, ALEXANDRA'S PROJECT, THE TRACKER, THE OLD MAN WHO READ LOVE STORIES, BAD BOY BUBBY, INCIDENT AT RAVENS GATE and DINGO for which he won an AFI award for Best Sound Track in 1991.

Sound designer on 26 productions, he has also worked extensively with filmmaker Paul Cox on films such as LUST AND REVENGE, FATHER DAMIEN, the recently released THE DIARIES OF VASLAV NIJINSKY and INNOCENCE, for which he won the IF Award for Best Sound Track. He also won an AFI Award for Best Sound Track for THE LIGHTHORSEMEN, and the Golden Clapper Award for Artistic and Technical Excellence at the 1993 Venice Film Festival for BAD BOY BUBBY.

James Currie was instrumental in developing the binaural sound system used on BAD BOY BUBBY, and is highly regarded within the Australian film industry for working on productions that test the boundaries of cinema sound.

TOM HEUZENROEDER (Sound Designer)

After gaining work experience on the set of Rolf de Heer's BAD BOY BUBBY, Tom Heuzenroeder has worked as a sound editor and composer since 1995, starting in radio, theatre and television. In the last six or so years, he has worked almost full time in the film industry, working again with Rolf de Heer, and Sound Designer James Currie, on THE OLD MAN WHO READ LOVE STORIES, THE TRACKER, and most recently TEN CANOES, where he worked in collaboration with James Currie on the sound design and sound editing.

Tom was also the sound effects editor on Greg McLean's WOLF CREEK, for which he was nominated for an IF Award and an AFI award. Other films he has worked on include LIKE MINDS (Gregory Read), THE 13TH HOUSE (Shane McNeil) and MODERN LOVE (Alex Frayne).

The Credits

Ridjimiraril	Crusoe Kurddal
Dayindi/Yeeralparil	Jamie Dayindi Gulpilil Dalaithngu
Birrinbirrin	Richard Birrinbirrin
Minyngululu	Peter Minyngululu
Nowalingu	Frances Djulibing
The Storyteller	David Gulpilil Ridjimiraril Dalaithngu
Banalandju	Sonia Djarrabalminym
Munandjarra	Cassandra Malangarri Baker
The Sorcerer	Philip Gudthaykudthay
Canoeist/The Victim/Warrior	Peter Djigirr
Canoeist/The Stranger	Michael Dawu
Canoeist/Uncle	Bobby Bununggurr
Canoeist/Warrior	Johnny Buniyira
Canoeist/Warrior	Billy Black
Canoeist/Warrior	Steven Wilinydjanu Maliburr
Canoeist/Warrior	Carl Dhalurruma
Birrinbirrin's Wife #1	Kathy Gonun
Birrinbirrin's Wife #2	Jennifer Djenana
Camp Women	Sylvia Nupunya Gaykamangu
	Silvia Gapany Gaykamangu
	Evonne Munuygu
	Mary Dhapalany
	Valerie Malibirr
	Julie Djelirr
	Susan Maliburr
	Belinda Gundjulma
	Madeline Gaykamangu
	Monica Maminyinawny
	Shirley Banalanydju
Honey Boy/Messenger	Rico Pascoe
Honey Boy	Scott Gaykamangu
Stranger's Men	Albert Gaykamangu
	Sammy Dhurrkay
	Meriyi Gaykamangu
	George Gaykamangu
Wrong Stranger	Jeffrey Buinyinyinwuiny
Painted Warrior	Lindsay Mace Gaykamangu

and with

Obert Durrungu	John Yarralmuka
Dino Wanybarrngu	Daniel Gurrulpa
Phoenix Malibirr	Hilston Gurrulpa
John Maliburr	Ryan Maliburr
Malachi Gurrulpa	Serena Maliburr
Roslyn Maliburr	Jayden Maliburr
Jordan Maliburr	Alison Durrunga
Jasmin Maliburr	Marissa Garrawuarra
Jayden Maliburr	Jordan Maliburr
Naomi Garrawuarra	Aristas Durrur
Dimitrius Durrur	Vanessa Yirwirri

Set Makers

Matjarra Garrawurra	Lena Walunydjunalil
Helen Ganalmirriwuy	Julie Djulibing
Belinda Gunydjulma	Mary Dhapalany
Dorothy Djukulul	Elizabeth Djutarra
	Lisa Wilders

Props Makers

Billy Black	Bobby Bunungurr
David Burmila	Mervin Mace
Michael Dawu	Patrick Mayarra
Peter Djigirr	Philip Gudthaykudthay
Sid Colling	Steven Wilinydanu Maliburr
	Roy Burnyila

Costume & Props Makers

Belinda Gunydjulma	Daisy Bulundhupa
Elsie Bulung	Evonne Munyungu
Helen Ganaimirrawuy	Helen Malibirr
Judith Djelirr	Judy Baypungala
Lena Walunydunali	Margaret Rarru
Mary Dhapaleny	Namiyal Bopirri
	Rosie Wudum

Incidental Music Performed by

Steven Wilinydjanu Maliburr
Rupert Gaykamangu
Kelvin Dangawarra Gaykamangu
Roy Gaykamangu

Traditional Music Performed by

Richard Birrinbirrin
Peter Minygululu
Billy Black
John Nudumul
Mark Muruwirri

Production Co-ordinator	Kate Croser
AD Attachment	Joseph Smith
Production Assistant	Sean Kavanagh
Unit Nurse/Continuity	Airlie Thomas
Unit Manager	Steven Russell
Catering Manager	Andrew Davies, Crew Food
Catering Assistant	Annabel Vickery
Unit Mechanics	Dennis Presello
	Peter Biddle
Post Technical Supervisor	Jon Armstrong
Final Cut Pro Consultant	Nick Myers
Edit Equipment	Brendon Field, Designwyse
Sound Mixer	Rory McGregor
Foley Artist	Adrian Medhurst
Dolby Consulant	Bruce Emery
Translators	Brian Yambal
	Gladys Womati
Additional Translators	Anthea Nicholls

	Daphne Bunyawarra
	Dick Yambal Durrurunga
Camera Gear	Cameraquip
Lighting Gear	Adam Williams, Film Lighting
Aerials	Great Barrier Reef Heligroup
Tyler Heli Mounts	The Dolly Shop
Stock	Kodak
Motorolas	Hirecom
Post House	The Lab
Post House Liaison	Steven Marolho
Laboratory	Atlab
DI Producer	Anthos Simon
Grader	Olivier Fonteney
Neg Matching	Neg Cutting Services
Sound Mixing Facility	South Australian Film Corporation
Post Script	Jo Stewart, Post Scripts for Export
Website	Digital Monkey
Completion Guarantor	Anni Browning, Film Finances Inc
Insurance	Tony Gibbs, HW Wood
Legals	Bryce Menzies, Marshalls & Dent
SBS Commissioning Editor	Miranda Dear
Distributor, Italy	Fandango, srl
Publicist	Cathy Gallagher
Stills Photographer & Video	James (Jackson) Geurts
Unit & Video	Charlie Hill-Smith
Grip	Rick Belfield
Gaffer	Tobias Andersson
Boom	Mike Bakaloff
Focus Puller	Ricky Schamburg
Camera & Steadicam Operator	Greg (Mango) Gilbert
Production Accountant/ Location Sound Assistant	Mark Kraus
1st Assistant Director	Karen Mahood
Art Director, Hair, Makeup	Beverley Freeman
Sound Design	James Currie
	Tom Heuzenroeder
Film Editor	Tania Nehme
Director of Photography	Ian Jones, ACS
Associate Producers	Richard Birrinbirrin
	Belinda Scott
	Nils Erik Nielsen
Executive Producers	Sue Murray
	Domenico Procacci
	Bryce Menzies
Produced by	Rolf de Heer
	Julie Ryan
Written by	Rolf de Heer in consultation with the people of Ramingining
Co-directed by	Peter Djigirr
Directed by	Rolf de Heer

Inspired by the photographs of Dr Donald Thomson

Filmed entirely on location in Arnhem Land, Australia

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