

The Wave Hill Walk-Off

On 23 August 1966, 200 Gurindji stockmen, domestic workers and their families led by Vincent Lingiari initiated strike action at Wave Hill station in the Northern Territory. Negotiations with the station owners, the international food company Vestey Brothers, broke down, leading to a seven-year dispute. This eventually led to the return of a portion of their homelands to the Gurindji people in 1974, and the passing of the first legislation that allowed for Indigenous people to claim land title if they could prove a traditional relationship to the country.

A Wave of Change

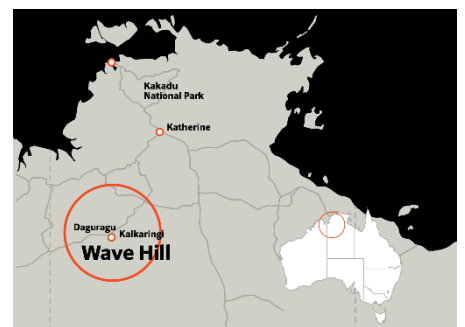
At the time the Gurindji strike was taking place in Australia, the worldwide civil rights movement was in full swing. Whilst many Australians are familiar with Martin Luther King Jr and Nelson Mandela, the history of the Indigenous Australian civil rights movement and its heroes, like Vincent Lingiari, is still largely unknown in our country.

Across the nation things were starting to change for Indigenous people. The Wave Hill Walk-off started just one year after Charlie Perkins led The Freedom Ride across NSW to protest against discrimination Indigenous people faced. And a year later, in 1967 over 90% of Australians voted in favour of counting Indigenous people in the census.

Recognition

The coming to power of the Labor Party in 1972 changed the political landscape. Prime Minister Gough Whitlam announced in his election policy speech that his government would 'establish once and for all Aborigines' rights to land'. In March 1973 the original Wave Hill lease was surrendered and two new leases were issued: one to the traditional owners through their Murrumulla Gurindji Company and another to Vestey Brothers.

In August 1975 Prime Minister Whitlam came to Daguragu and ceremonially returned a small portion of Gurindji land to the traditional owners by pouring a handful of soil into Vincent Lingiari's hand with the words, *'Vincent Lingiari, I solemnly hand to you these deeds as proof, in Australian law, that these lands belong to the Gurindji people'*.



The Gurindji strike was instrumental in heightening the understanding of Indigenous land ownership in Australia and was a catalyst for the passing of the Aboriginal Land Rights (Northern Territory) Act 1976, the first legislation allowing for a claim of title if the Indigenous claimants could provide evidence for their traditional relationship to the land.



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Questions

1. How long did the Wave Hill walk-off last?

2. Vincent Lingiari was a significant figure in the Wave Hill walk-off.

True / False

3. Who is the person in the photo pouring sand into Vincent Lingiari hand?

4. What state/territory is Wave Hill station in?

5. Aboriginal Land Rights (Northern Territory) Act 1976, was the first legislation in Australia allowing for a claim of title by Aboriginal people.

True / False

6. 'Across the nation things were starting to change for Indigenous people.' List two of the significant events that happened for indigenous people in the 1960s.

1) _____

2) _____
