

The Lake of Scars

A Wedge-Tail Pictures film

95 mins

Australia, English

“A deeply moving, evocative and beautiful insight into how a battle to preserve timeless Indigenous culture found hope in a remarkable act of black and white conciliation.”

- Paul Daley, author and *Guardian* journalist.

An ancient site, a ticking clock, and the unlikely allies calling for change.

The Lake of Scars is supported by The Victorian Aboriginal Heritage Council, Documentary Australia Foundation, Eucalypt Australia, and The Dja Dja Wurrung Corporation.

In a corner of Australia exists a place of astounding natural beauty, archaeological significance, and age-old culture. But the Indigenous scarred trees and artefacts found here are at risk – until an unlikely intergenerational partnership comes forth to save the site for future generations. The Lake of Scars tells a story of allyship, environmentalism and cultural rebirth; a picture of what reconciliation between Aboriginal and European Australians might look like. But is that idea harder than it seems?

[Watch Trailer](#)

The Lake of Scars is as much a portrait of a hidden facet of Australian history and environment as it is



a musing on what reconciliation can look like in Australia. While exploring the beautiful, mysterious scarred trees, middens and stone scatters left at one remarkable site in country Victoria – the ephemeral Lake Boort and surrounds – we meet the people, Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal, who are working against the clock to preserve and promote what they can. With organic relics at its heart - hundred year old scarred and dying trees - the film examines the preservation of culture and environment as our protagonists fight for scarred trees to be preserved, for middens and stone scatters to be protected and

recognised, for environmental flows of water to be allowed into the seasonal lake, and for a 'keeping place' to be built.

Within the keeping place they hope to put remarkable already deceased trees, as well as dozens of artefacts stored in the former farmer Paul's garage, with the clan's permission.

For Paul, getting the town's almost entirely white population interested has been a slow, hard process. But slowly it takes note - it has an unusual shared history; some of the earliest photos ever taken in Australia were shot here, showing positive relations between settlers and Indigenous people. Paul works tirelessly with clan members - located in Melbourne and other towns, forced from their land in the subsequent 150 years - as together they try to forge a path forward to recognition.

Ultimately though, it is the arrival in Boort of a Yung Balug man much younger than Paul, Jida Gulpilil – son of legendary actor David – who brings his own flavour to his mother’s country.

Amidst a backdrop of treaty talks and the fight for water rights, can the relationship between characters of different backgrounds and generations survive the stresses of fighting for country, and overturn 200 years of protocol? Or does the road to reconciliation contain more bumps than we might imagine?



Main characters

Paul Haw: A white former sheep farmer, horticulturist, Vietnam vet and self-published historian who lives on the edge of Lake Boort, riding a segway thanks to childhood polio. In his later years he has become ever more obsessed with documenting and caring for the scarred trees, middens and stone scatters in and around the lake, convincing white townsfolk of the lake’s cultural and environmental value, and working alongside, and for, the absent Yung Balug traditional owners.

Jida Gulpilil: Jida Gulpilil is Yung Balug on his mother’s side; his father, David Gulpilil, is a Yolngu man from the Northern Territory. After spending time running cultural tours in Kakadu, Jida returns to his Yung Balug country and gets the ball rolling carrying out cultural tours in, on and around the lake and trees, receiving a grant from the local council to get the company its first ‘gigs’ with local schools. He returns ready to use and share the cultural knowledge he has received from his mother, from his father’s Yolngu country, and to learn from Paul, too. Jida is an achiever who is pragmatic in hosting cultural events, using knowledge from his Dja Dja Wurrung and Yolngu heritage, gleaned from Paul, mixing and creating as he goes.



Cathie Haw: Paul’s gentle, good-humoured wife who has, quietly, a similar moral fortitude. Like Paul, Cathie has for years talked the talk when it comes to reconciliatory acts at the local level.

Gary Murray: A strong and politicised spokesman for the Yung Balug, Paul’s main go-to concerning clan affairs over the years. Gary is the most outspoken member of the tribe, now living in Melbourne.

Ngarra Murray: Gary’s daughter Ngarra is picking up the mantle her father is leaving and fighting for the advancement of Victorian Aboriginal people - and her clan. The leader of Oxfam’s Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander program, Ngarra returns to country many times with her four kids in tow, striving with her cousin Jida to pass on Yung Balug culture to a new generation, with a focus on land rights and Treaty talks.



Bobby Nicholls: A thoughtful Yung Balug man who cares deeply about the young people in his community and wants the lake preserved and cared for to nourish culture for the next generation.

DIRECTED AND SHOT BY BILL CODE

Bill Code is a producer and DOP with a background in journalism and short documentary for Al Jazeera English, the BBC and others. Starting his career with SBS, he went on to head up video at Guardian Australia following its launch. *The Lake of Scars*, which he has been producing since late 2015, is his first feature length film.

STORYTELLER/CO-WRITER - UNCLE JACK CHARLES

Dja Dja Wurrung elder and Victorian icon Uncle Jack Charles carries out a unique writer/narrator/presenter role for this landmark documentary. Jack was selected by a group of Dja Dja Wurrung/Yung Balug elders and the film's co-producers. This original role will see Jack guide us through the film from the front row of Melbourne's Lido cinema.

PRODUCED BY BILL CODE AND CHRISTIAN PAZZAGLIA

Christian Pazzaglia is the producer of acclaimed experimental live cinema performances such as 'Miraculous Trajectories', directed by one of China's leading visual artists, Cheng Ran, and of the ground-breaking live documentary 'Those Left Waiting', directed by Michael Beets, which premiered at CPH:DOX in 2021. Christian is among the producers of the feature film 'Little Tornadoes', directed by Aaron Wilson and premiering at MIFF in 2021. In 2016 he co-produced the feature film Yamato (California), directed by Daisuke Miyazaki.

COMPOSER - JIDA GULPILIL

Jida Gulpilil, a talented musician who features in a key role in the documentary, scores the film with help from a range of producers. Jida is a Dja Dja Wurrung man through via his mother's family and also Yolngu via his father, legendary Australian actor David Gulpilil.

UNCLE GARY WYRKERMILLOO MURRAY - EXECUTIVE PRODUCER

Yung Balug and Dja Dja Wurrung elder Gary Murray has a long history as a community leader in Victoria and is on board as executive producer to tell the story of his clan and their work with the Haw family.

EXECUTIVE PRODUCER - SHAUN MILLER

Shaun Miller has helped multiple films to completion in the Victorian landscape and is assisting with funding navigation and legal representation.

CULTURAL ADVISOR - NGARRA MURRAY

Ngarra is a Dja Dja Wurrung (Yung Balug), Yorta Yorta (Wallithica), Wamba Wamba (Goirmjanyuk), Dhudhuroa woman whose country and family is at the heart of this film. She is the national manager of Oxfam Australia's Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander People's Program, a member of the National NAIDOC committee and a Board Member of the Pastor Sir Douglas and Lady Gladys Nicholls Foundation (she is also their great granddaughter).

EDITOR - NICOLA BLACKMORE

Nicola Blackmore is a specialist documentary and current affairs editor based in Melbourne. Her previous work includes a decade as a political filmmaker for the BBC.

IMPACT SUPERVISOR - ALEX KELLY

Fresh from impact producing *In My Blood It Runs*, impact producer Alex Kelly will work with the Lake of Scars team to develop an impact plan with an Indigenous impact producer. She was impact producer for Naomi Klein's *This Changes Everything* documentary and is a producer on the acclaimed 2019 documentary *Island of the Hungry Ghosts*. She lives on Dja Dja Wurrung country not far from the lakes at Boort.

Story Producer/Script Development: Belinda Lopez

An accomplished and award-winning producer, writer and audio-documentary maker. Launched ABC podcast 'This Is About'; and assisted with story on Bill's documentary *Inside Out*.

Drone footage, photography and assistant to director: Rodney Dekker

Rodney is an experienced documentary photographer in rural and remote Australia. His work on the effects of climate change in Australia and the Pacific has been widely published. He holds a masters in environmental analysis.

More information <https://www.lakeofscarsfilm.com/>
<https://www.facebook.com/thelakeofscarsdoco>

All photos by Rodney Dekker