
Thousands gather to mark 50th anniversary of Wave Hill cattle station walk-off

Reporter: Felicity James
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KIM LANDERS: More than 5,000 people are gathering 800 kilometres south of Darwin, to celebrate 50 years since Vincent Lingiari walked off the Wave Hill cattle station.

Elders, community members and other supporters are retracing the steps of 200 workers and their families who began an eight year protest against poor wages and conditions on the station - a protest that brought the national spotlight on Aboriginal land rights.

Reporter Felicity James is in the remote community of Kalkarindji, and spoke to local community leader and traditional owner Rob Roy about what the anniversary means to him.

ROB ROY: Well, it's sort of, I feel proud of it. Me being from here, a Gurindji man, I'm proud of what people like Lingiari and all the other old people, the old ladies, old men, what they've achieved 50 years ago.

So to me it feels like, you know, we are continuing on the legacy of the old Vincent Lingiari's victory.

FELICITY JAMES: So what do you think Vincent Lingiari's legacy is for this community?

ROB ROY: Oh, it's something that is never going to be forgotten, it's something that we will continue celebrating every year because we do that anyway on the anniversary date.

I keep saying this to everyone but you know, every time we celebrate the walk off, we'd like to have all Indigenous Australians, all Australia to come and help us celebrate it.

FELICITY JAMES: And do you think that's what's going to happen?

ROB ROY: I think it's happening and I know it's going to happen and you know, we've got a lot of people coming in to help us celebrate for the 50th anniversary of the Wave Hill walk off and it's been, I hope it's going to be a success and it will be a success.

FELICITY JAMES: How much work has the community put into this anniversary event, all the logistics and everything?

ROB ROY: Oh my goodness, if I looking back, five years ago we didn't even have the Gurindji Aboriginal Corporation set up in this community.

Only in the last couple of years that we're starting to get balls rolling on the anniversary date of the walk off, we've now got the Gurindji Corporation organising for the 50th anniversary.

There's been a lot done over the years, since last year has been talked about, getting people coming in from outside of the community and helping us and I reckon that's really great. Like it's showing the rest of the other communities and probably showing the country that we can do it, we can live side by side and help one another.

FELICITY JAMES: What's the community feeling about the event?

ROB ROY: Well, actually that's - I'm glad you asked that because over the last couple of weeks I don't think anybody in the community had, was in that festive sort of spirit and the feeling but now that the communities are - it's getting closer and the community is now sort of in full colour with flags and banners and all that sort of stuff around the community, I think everybody now knows it's actually the 50th anniversary for the whole weekend, so they're feeling it.

It's the talk around town, you know, the talk of the town, so yeah.

FELICITY JAMES: And what have the old people told you about Vincent Lingiari?

ROB ROY: Oh, one of bravest old fella, one of the bravest men you know, for modern history of land rights which we are now celebrating and I think those people that travel all around, all corners of Australia to help us celebrate the 50th anniversary of the Wave Hill walk off, so thank you.

KIM LANDER: Kalkarindji community leader and traditional owner Rob Roy speaking to reporter Felicity James.