

Review: *Burke and Wills*

# Epic tale beautifully filmed in Australia

by Ross West

Led by Robert O'Hara Burke, The Great Victorian Exploring Expedition of 1860 set out from Melbourne with 19 men, 28 horses, 26 camels (!), six wagons, and 21 tons of equipment. Their goal—to cross the vast uncharted Australian interior.

At Burke's side William Wills carried out the team's scientific research, charted their course, and provided a levelheaded counterpoint to Burke's wild-eyed zealotry. The explorers pushed ever onward through 3,700 miles of swamp, dust storm, and desert. Their perilous adventures are an Australian legend, though virtually unknown in America. But with the limited release of *Burke and Wills*, the beautiful, epic-sized retelling of this enthralling tale, Americans may soon know a great deal about Australia's Lewis and Clark.

At times *Burke and Wills* meanders a bit, but this seems appropriate to the wanderings of the ramshackle expedition. The aim of the film seems to be on nearly as grand a scale as the expedition itself. In 140 minutes of running time not only do we see the courageous progress of the expedition,

but also the passions of its complacent: early manifestations of the racism that has nearly obliterated Australia's native population, the greed that so often propels exploration, and the romance-novel love affair between Burke and opera star Julie Mathews (Gretta Scacchi, seen most recently in *The Coca Cola Kid*).

Australian star Jack Thompson says one of the reasons he accepted the role of Burke was that "the script is about winners and being proud of the human spirit." As the strong-willed Irish expedition leader, Thompson swaggers, his eyes burn with the fire of a true believer. His Burke walks a fine line between charismatic leader and megalomaniac. Thompson is familiar to audiences from his roles in *The Man From Snowy River*, *Merry Christmas Mr. Lawrence*, and *Breaker Morant*.

Playing Wills to Thompson's Burke is Nigel Havers, another familiar face. Havers' credits include *Chariots of Fire*, *Upstairs Downstairs*, and the role of Ronnie Heaslop in *Passage to India*. The Englishman Wills is nearly the mirror opposite to Burke, softspoken,



Australian star Jack Thompson plays Robert O'Hara Burke in *Burke & Wills*.

thoughtful, and restrained. But the two men have in common their great courage and determination.

Not listed in the credits, but as central to the film as either of the leads, the rugged Australian landscape is the tremendously powerful force against which the expedition must toil. The arid expanse of central Australia, where the real Burke and Wills trudged and where the film was shot, looks much like the American west. The temperatures Burke, Wills and company suffer are sufficient to melt the lead in a pencil, induce hallucinations, kill camels.

Director of photography Russel

Boyd deserves special praise for capturing this torturous landscape on film. In one of the many scenes memorable for their visual impact, a storm rages on the desolate plains; to the left of the screen the tiny silhouettes of several men and a camel stand listless under a gunmetal sky. At the right, while lightning zigs and zags in the distance, Burke's silhouette extends an arm at a slumped heap we know to be his fallen horse. A pistol cracks and more lightning flashes.

*Burke and Wills* director and co-producer Graeme Clifford first read about the exploration while a

boy growing up in Sydney. The powerful story remained with him while he made his reputation in the entertainment industry. Clifford edited a number of films including *The Rocky Horror Picture Show*, *The Man Who Fell to Earth*, and *The Postman Always Rings Twice*. His best known directorial work is the much-loved British TV series "The Avengers."

Of the original expedition Clifford says, "It was a time of mystery, fear, excitement, and heroes striking into the unknown." His film does loving justice to these heroic adventurers and to their heroic adventure.

## now showing

### NEW TO TOWN

**Back to the Beach:** Late '50s pop stars Annette Funicello and Frankie Avalon reappear on movie beaches. This time they're a couple visiting a daughter at her California pad. Starts Friday at Valley River Twin (686-8633).

**Burke and Wills:** Director Graeme Clifford (*Francis*) recounts the true 1860 story of a ruffian and a gentleman braving the Australian outback. Starts Friday at the Bijou (686-2458).

**The Care Bears Adventure in Wonderland:** The Care Bears meet Alice and other creatures in this animated, G-rated movie. Cinema World (342-6536).

**Gothic:** Julian Sands (*A Room With a View*) plays Percy Bysshe Shelley in a Ken Russell (*Tommy*) re-creation of the 1816 evening which inspired *Frankenstein* and *The Vampires*. Starts Friday at Cinema 7 (687-0733).

**Masters of the Universe:** Dolph Lundgren and Frank Langella face combat in this live-action sci-fi adaptation of the toys/cartoon series. A Cannon/Golan-Globus release, it starts Friday at Movieland (342-4142) and Springfield Quad (726-9073).

**Nadine:** Takes place in Texas in the '50s. Jeff Bridges and Kim Basinger play a couple at odds, trying to avoid a murder rap. Comedy-thriller. Starts Friday at Cinema World (342-6536).

**Stakeout:** Emilio Estevez and Richard Dreyfuss are two undercover detectives. Comedy-adventure, it has just begun its run at Cinema World (342-6536).

**Who's That Girl:** Madonna plays a parolee seeking the man who actually committed the crime for which she did four years. Griffin Dunne is her attorney. Starts Friday at Movieland (342-4142).

### CONTINUING/RETURNING

**La Bamba:** Lou Diamond Phillips and Esai Morales star in this re-creation of the life of Richie Valens, a late-'50s rock star who died in a plane crash at the peak of his career. Los Lobos provides many of the musical numbers. Cinema World (342-6536).

**Dragnet 1987:** Dan Aykroyd portrays the nephew of "Just-the-Facts" Sergeant Friday, and Tom Hanks plays his side-kick, in a spoof of the TV series. Cinema World (342-6536).

**Full Metal Jacket:** The long-awaited Stanley (2001) Kubrick film, it never lets up revealing the mindlessness and brutality of war, climaxing at the 1968 Tet Offensive of the Vietnam War. McDonald (344-4343).

**Heartbreak Ridge:** Clint Eastwood plays a tough marine sergeant about to retire. Returns to town starting Friday as a double feature with *Witches of Eastwick* at Springfield Fine Arts (747-2201).

**Innerspace:** In this science fiction comedy about a secret government project, Dennis Quaid plays a macho brute reduced to miniature, then injected into grocery clerk Martin Short. Double feature with *Roxanne* at Cinema World (342-6536).

**The Living Daylights:** Two firsts are in this new James Bond flick: Timothy Dalton now plays Agent 007, and he is involved with a new intrigue—monogamy. Fantasy/adventure. Movieland (342-4142).

**The Lost Boys:** A new twist in the annals of vampire stories, it combines rock and roll with terror. With Jami Gertz, Dianne Wiest and Edward Herrmann. National (344-3431).

**Maid to Order:** Ally Sheedy goes from riches to rags. Co-stars Beverly D'Angelo, Michael Ontkean and Valerie Perrine. Comedy. Movieland (342-4142).

**Outrageous Fortune:** Bette Midler is the naughty half, and Shelley Long the nice, of an odd couple running after the same man, played by Peter Coyote. Returns to town Friday as the late-night feature at the Bijou (686-2458).

**RoboCop:** Sci-fi thriller about a cyborg employed to clean up on Detroit lowlife. With Peter Weller, it's graphically violent, satirizes TV newscasts, and is more than comix brought to life. Movieland (342-4142) and Springfield Quad (726-9073).

**Roxanne:** Steve Martin, with the longest nose since Pinocchio, and Daryl Hannah star in a modern-day comedy based on the story of Cyrano de Bergerac. Double feature with *Innerspace* at Cinema World (342-6536).

**Snow White and the Seven Dwarfs:** Heigh-ho! This re-release of the 1937 technicolor Disney classic is at Movieland (342-4142) and Springfield Quad (726-9073).

**Summer School:** Mark Harmon, whom *People* dubbed "the sexiest man alive," plays a phys-ed teacher who has to spend his summer with remedial readers. Valley River Twin (686-8633) and Springfield Quad (726-9073).

**Superman IV: The Quest for Peace:** Christopher Reeve again plays the Man of Steel, up against Nuclear Man. Gene Hackman plays a villain, with Margot Kidder as Lois Lane, and Mariel Hemingway. Movieland (342-4142).

**Witches of Eastwick:** Jack Nicholson as the devil, with Cher, Michelle Pfeiffer, and Susan Sarandon, star in this adaptation of a John Updike novel. Starts Friday as double feature with *Heartbreak Ridge* at Springfield Fine Arts (747-2201).

**Thursday, August 6 is the last showing for:** Hour of the Star at Cinema 7. Swimming to Cambodia at the Bijou. From Beyond late-night feature at the Bijou. The Untouchables at Valley River Twin. Beverly Hills Cop 2 at Movieland. Whitewater Summer and The Squeeze double feature at Springfield Fine Arts.



Timothy Spall, Gabriel Byrne and Natasha Richardson star in *Gothic*, a horror drama directed by Ken Russell, opening at Cinema 7, August 7.

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"A lavishly produced drama based on a real-life trans-Australian trek in 1860-61 by an adventurous explorer, an adventurous scientist, and a dwindling party of fellow trekkers. A well acted, impressively staged film that shows its heroes as far from infallible humans." -Ted Maher, The Oregonian  
- Ted Maher, The Oregonian  
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