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Greatest never Heard of adventure

by KATHERINE KRAAYVANGER

A LONG-FORGOTTEN story of Southern Ocean adventure which paved the way for the STS Leeuwin, will be appearing on Freo's theatre screens this month after award-winning success in Europe.

The *Great White Whale* documents the story of the 1963 voyage of an "audacious" group of Australian adventurers to Heard Island – a volcanic island 2000 kilometres off the coast of Albany.

As part of the expedition, the team climbed the tallest mountain on the island, Big Ben, the summit of which is 500 metres taller than Mt Kosciuszko, making it Australia's highest mountain.

The film contains original footage from the 1963 trip shot on a 16mm film camera, and is paired with interviews from the crew, including expedition leader Warwick Deacock and famed WA surgeon Malcolm Hay.

Filmmaker Michael Dillon was amongst those who helped prepare the ship for the voyage in 1963.

"I was there when they set off, so I knew the story very well, and what an amazing, forgotten story it was," Mr Dillon said.

"I'm kind of at the end of my filmmaking career but I thought I just have to make that film, because it's such a good story, and so little known."

The original footage, shot on a 16mm camera, provides a brilliant authenticity to the film, the quality of which is "so good you feel like you're there" in the Southern Ocean wilderness.

"They took two 16-millimetre



Now and then: the great adventurers who conquered Australia's tallest mountain - and it might not be the one you're thinking of.

cameras with them which were very hard to use," Mr Dillon said.

"You had to wind them up for 12 seconds, and they only ran for 12 seconds, and it had to be loaded in a black bag and each film lasted for two minutes.

"Even under the best circumstances, those cameras were hard to use, but they were using them under the worst.

"They had waves flying over the boat and all sorts of disasters and difficult filming conditions on that journey to Heard Island, and then on the mountain itself."

Ingenuity

Stories of the crew's ingenuity and grit are woven throughout the film.

Setting off from Sydney, they sailed around Australia to Albany where they realised they needed to strengthen their anchor.

"They went to the very end of the Perth to Albany railway line and cut off a half metre section to



bolster it," Mr Dillon said.

"It was a mark of their brilliant enterprise that those guys would think of even doing that.

"They never told anybody... no-one ever knew."

Interviews with the crew also feature in the *Great White Whale*, the experience still "so alive in their minds" despite being filmed decades after their adventure.

"The characters are just so wonderful themselves... I think that's important in the film, that the crew get to tell their story," Mr Dillon said.

"One of them got up during

the interview and started singing all these kinds of sea shanty-type songs about the expedition, which have wonderful melodies.

"We've used them very much in the film... it's very much like a musical odyssey as well."

The story is very little known amongst legendary tales of Australian adventure, and Mr Dillon says it "probably didn't" get much publicity at the time.

"They just went off quietly in their little yellow boat and did it," Mr Dillon said.

"It was an amazing feat, and it might have got a few little lines here and there in the paper at the time, but, but people have just forgotten these things.

"They shouldn't be forgotten, because it was extraordinary."

It was because of this voyage to Heard Island that crew member Malcolm Hay thought all people should have access to such adventure – he would go on to be the driving force behind the

Leeuwin II, now an iconic feature of Fremantle Port.

The *Great White Whale* will be introduced to Australian audiences after it was "tested" at international mountain film festivals, winning the Grand Prize at the International Mountain and Adventure Film Festival in Bilbao last December.

Hillary

Award-winning filmmaker Dillon, who worked extensively with mountaineering stalwarts like Sir Edmund Hillary and Tim Macartney-Snape throughout his 50-year career, will be embarking on a tour around Western Australia to introduce his film and conduct Q&As this month.

Details of the *Great White Whale* tour, which include stops in Fremantle at the Lunar on Essex Theatre, are available through Mr Dillon's website - <https://michaeldillonfilms.com.au/>.