

# We of the Never Never



Reviewed by Frank Davin (FVFS)

Initially released in 1982 this (almost) classic Australiana film has been available on DVD since 2004. It is based on the autobiography by Jeannie Gunn, 'We of the Never Never'. It takes us from Jeannie's genteel upper class family background in Melbourne via her marriage to Aeneas Gunn into the world of a very remote one million acre station in the Northern Territory accompanying her new husband. However, the real star in this spectacular Australian movie is the outback scenery which is best appreciated on a large screen where the cinematography really shines. Unfortunately, once compressed into DVD format, the sound quality can't match the visual which won an AFI award for 'Best Achievement in Cinematography' following its release.

The story is set in the very early 20<sup>th</sup> Century and the incredible remoteness of the station property, which initially disappoints the newlyweds, sets the scene for the stark prejudices against women and aboriginals that is carried throughout much of the film. It could be seen as more of an anthropological study of its time than a dramatic action movie. The men on the station are very much against having women in the outback and both resent the intrusion and make fun of the newlyweds as they take up residence in the very basic 'station homestead'. Jeannie does her best gain the confidence of the men, even going out on a cattle roundup at one stage. It is not an easy venture for her as, in keeping with the times, she rides the entire roundup side saddle, even narrowly avoiding a charging bull. Attitudes of the time are really brought to the fore when a dying stockman refuses to take any solace or treatment from a woman.

Over the year in which the film is set, Jeannie's positive attitude and her husband's willingness to improve conditions for her sees the homestead gradually transformed into more spacious and comfortable accommodation for them both.

The prejudice of her husband and all the men on the station against the local aboriginal people features very powerfully throughout the film. Jeannie causes affront to the men by showing kindness to the aborigines and through her efforts to understand their culture. Her husband has little sympathy for her attempts to help a young aboriginal girl, abandoned by the tribe, by taking her in as a housemaid.

As we all know, there is far greater detail about Jeannie Gunn's time at Elsey station than the film can convey in its 128 minutes, however the outback scenery alone makes it a must to watch.