

Bibbulmun Track a lifeline for displaced timber workers

by Sue McKenna



The new Bibbulmun Track maintenance crew members are former timber workers. Steve Luff (left), Trevor Insley (second from left) and Peter Bracknett (right) are former Sotico workers. Sid Sepkus (second from right) oversees their day to day work for the Department.

Photo by John McKenzie

FOUR displaced timber workers have become the bushwalker's best friends as they work their way down the Bibbulmun Track in their new jobs as the Department's maintenance workers.

Trevor Insley, Steve Luff and Rod Collins—all former Sotico workers—are from Northcliffe while Peter Bracknett is from Manjimup.

They are joined by a fourth Northcliffe resident, Departmental Supervisor Sid Sepkus, who oversees their day to day work for the Department.

They are carrying out maintenance on huts and camping facilities, clearing debris from the track, building stream crossings, restoring directional markers and improving walker safety along 220 kilometres of the more difficult Bibbulmun Track terrain.

They began about four weeks ago from just south of Willow Springs, maintaining several kilometres a day. They will progress through Wheatley, Beedelup, Pemberton, Northcliffe, Pingerup and Broke Inlet.

The men bring much more than hands-on labour to the job, as Trevor, Steve and Rod are members of the Northcliffe Fire and Rescue Service, while Peter is a member of the Manjimup Fire and Rescue Service.

"They're the soul of the community down there," the Department's Parks and Visitor Services Officer in Pemberton, John McKenzie, said, adding that their value as a crew increased immeasurably because of their fire protection work in the district.

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The job with the Department means much for the men who found themselves out of work in the south-west timber industry at Christmas last year.

Trevor says he's now doing a job that he loves when, for a while, he thought he'd never have a job at all.

"I'd been working down here for six years when I was made redundant," said the husband and father of a six-year-old daughter.

"Everyone was expecting it but they didn't know who was going at the time. This job has increased the morale at home, certainly," Trevor said.

He spent three months working for the dole but jumped at the chance to work for the Department under the Government's timber industry's restructuring plan.

The men are working in one of the Bibbulmun Track's steepest sections, in the Donnelly River Valley.

"The scenery is absolutely beautiful and you never have smoko in the same place," Trevor said.

Trevor said when he first moved to the district he wanted to work for the Department but took the job at the mill because it was the first to come up.

"I find this job more enjoyable. It's a pleasant job but not an easy job," he said.

They have been joined by Ross Bernardin, another displaced timber worker. Ross has been rostered to work with the team for two weeks between working with local Departmental fire crews.



Four displaced timber workers
working on the Bibbulmun
Track for the Dept of
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Tussock.

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