



Knock-off time for two interpreter-training groups. They had spent an afternoon navigating (using aerial photos), and field interpreting in Donnybrook Block, Bunbury. From left, they are Tony Raudino, David Tarrant, Jodie Watts, Christine Nicholas, Julia Northern, and Alex Moylett. Photo by Tammie Reid

Learning to spot plant diseases

NINE new field officers recently attended a course in **Detection Diagnosis and Mapping of Disease in Native Plants Caused by *Phytophthora cinnamomi***?

They were fit, enthusiastic and all capable of applying 'stereo vision' to a type of detective work called 'disease interpretation'.

Understanding, detecting and mapping the occurrence of *Phytophthora cinnamomi* (the pathogen that causes dieback), involves skills, knowledge and understanding that develop over time.

When the senior interpreters from Forest Management Branch decided to run the course, they were mindful that these skills and talents couldn't be acquired overnight.

Senior interpreter Peter Blankendaal said that this required a fair degree of 'sleuthing', whereby the interpreter must observe and process many details to assess a situation.

by Tammie Reid

"By gathering information about vegetation, soils, drainage characteristics, and other environmental factors like the fire intensity and years since the last fire, the interpreter builds a likely scenario of how the disease is or isn't expressing itself," Peter said.

"This is backed up with laboratory tests of root tissue and soil samples.

"Our task is to produce current maps, demarcate disease boundaries in the field, and identify protectable areas.

"From here, operational staff, with the assistance of interpreters, can plan hygiene to protect demarcated areas from the risk of human activities spreading roots and soil infested with *Phytophthora cinnamomi*.

"Our training courses are intensive with a trainer-to-trainee ratio of about 1:3.

"The four-day program involves a large amount of field-based coaching, combined with indoor theory sessions and photo interpretation—and we immediately follow up the classroom learning with on-the-job experience."

Peter said that it probably took about two years of full-time practice before a new interpreter could confidently take a lead role.

"We team up people to make the most of their experience, while nurturing their development during their daily work," he said.

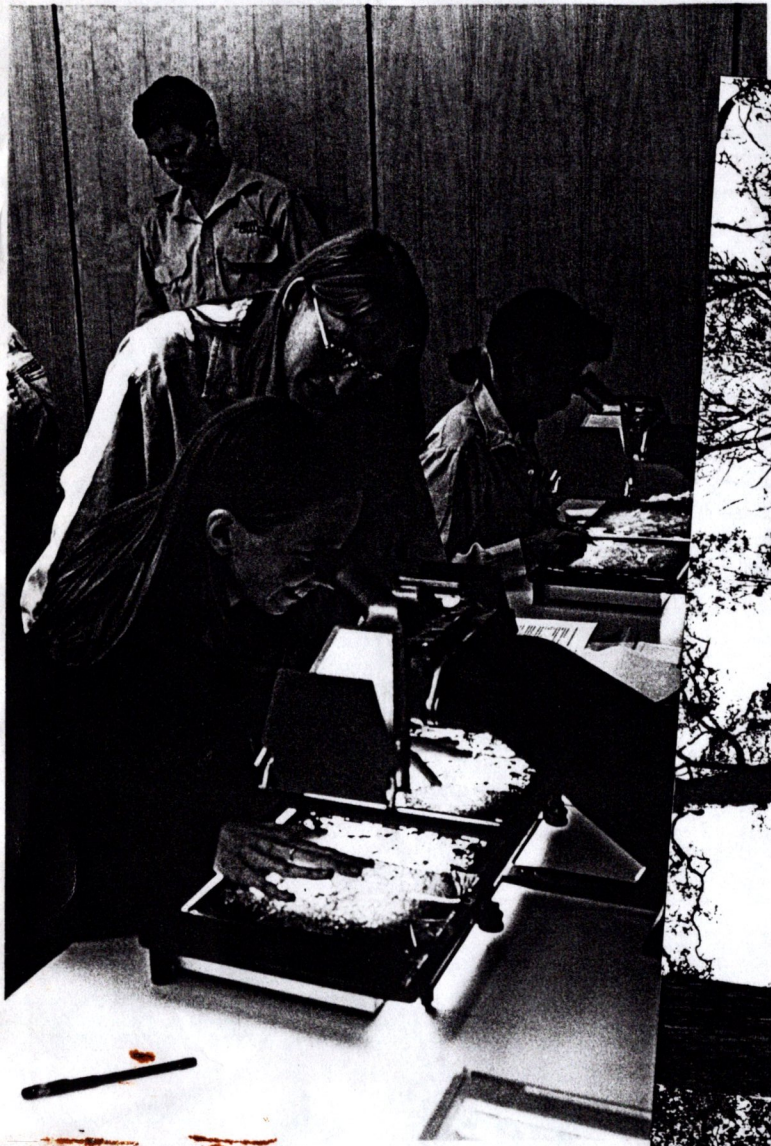
"It's hands on, eyes on, with course participants building up eye muscles with the photo work, and confidence in their field navigation and observations.

"Our courses are run on a needs basis, and are listed in the training manual. Anyone interested in this line of work can phone Greg Strelein at Forest Management Branch in Bunbury on 9725 5922.





Vema, One of these pics will go with a CACM News Story
on interpreter training - they interpret the forest for the
fungus Phytophthora. / which photo do
you like?



The story still to come.