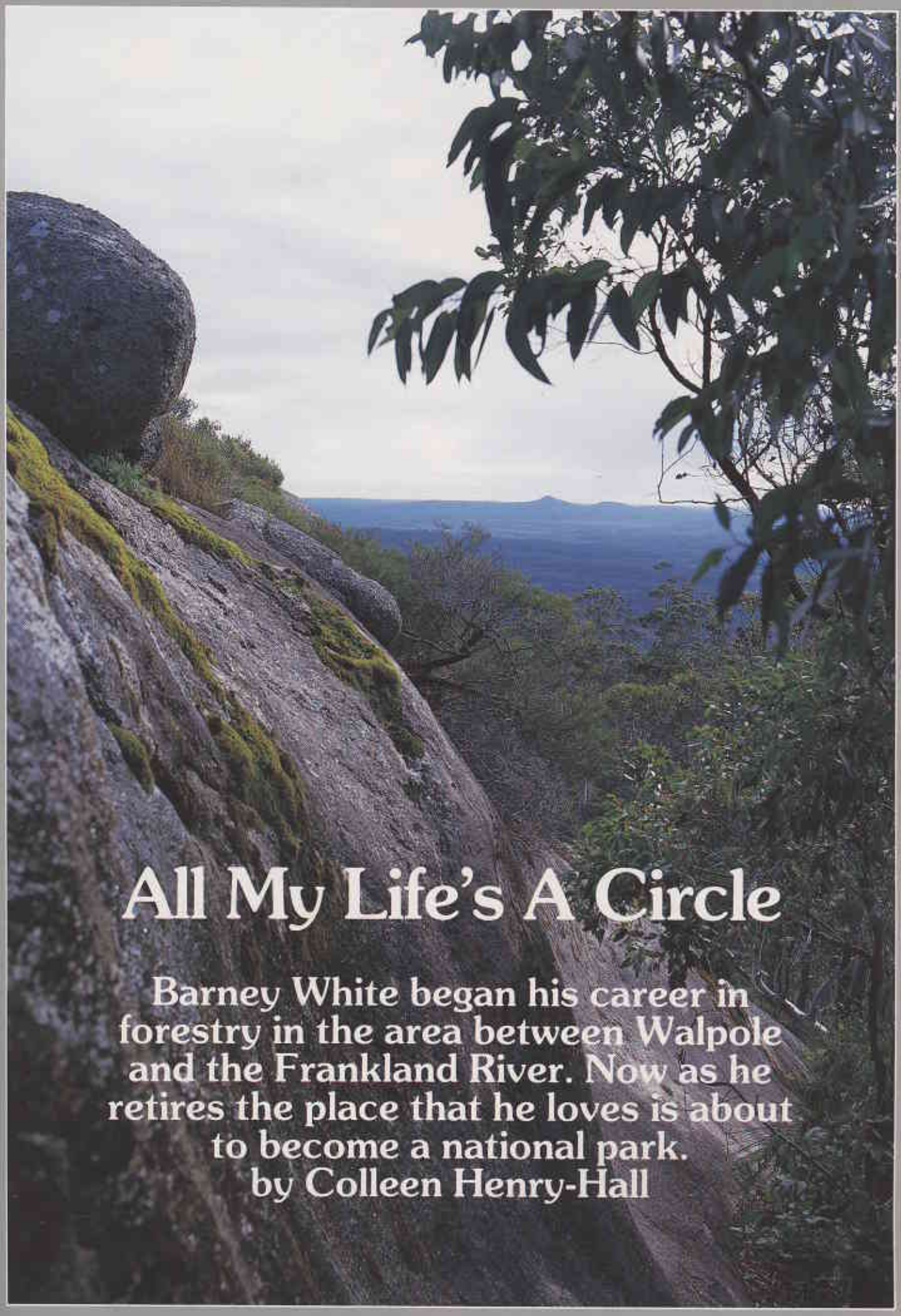
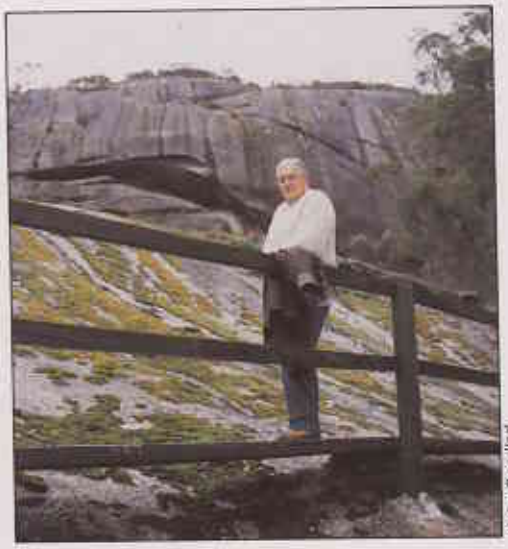


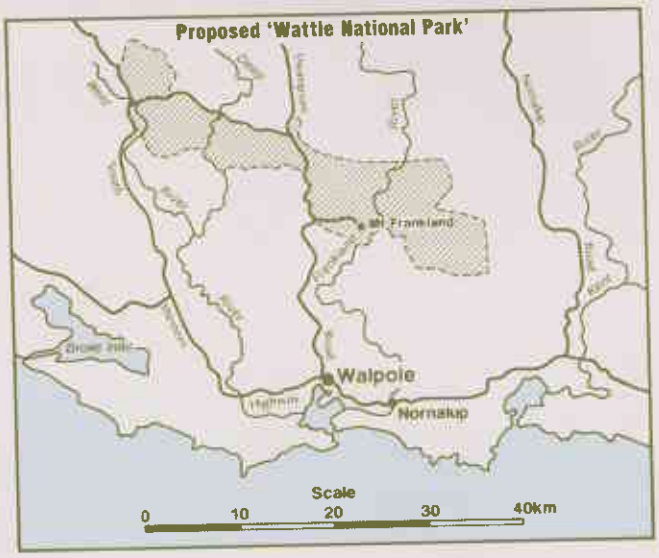
All My Life's A Circle

Barney White began his career in forestry in the area between Walpole and the Frankland River. Now as he retires the place that he loves is about to become a national park.

by Colleen Henry-Hall



John Goodlad



Barney White, climbing the track to the top of Mt Frankland, stops to catch his breath midway up this granite rock in the southern W.A. forest.

He gazes at the forest below him, and points to a peak in the near distance.

'We spent months camped at the base of Granite Peaks once.'

He tells of spending a day hiking with a friend near that camp, of an old emu egg tucked inside his mate's shirt, an unfortunate slip and a smell that dogged the camp for weeks.

Not so very long ago, just 40 years, this was unknown country when Barney was assessing timber and surveying tracks for the former Forests Department.

'I'd walk from the dense undergrowth of the karri forest to the bank of the river, and I'd feel I was the first white person to have seen such a sight,' Barney says.

It was, and still is, a special sight, this forest that surrounds Mt Frankland and stretches west to encompass 29 700 ha halfway between Albany and Manjimup.

It has within its boundaries what most regard as the best karri to be found anywhere. There are some spots deep within it that only a few people have seen, and some that no one has seen.

But what makes this country really special is the dramatic change in vegetation in a short distance: karri at the tops of hills gives way to jarrah on the slopes, which gives way to low-lying heath.

This area is proposed as a national park under the draft management plan for the Southern Forest Region, produced by the Department of Conservation and Land Management.

Tentatively called Wattle National Park because of its predominant karri wattle undergrowth, it encompasses five former management priority areas: Wattle, Soho, Johnston, O'Donnell and Mitchell Crossing, with Mt Frankland included for its scenic importance.

Barney spent several months in this country as a university student in 1946 and '47, running strip lines to get some idea of what timber was there. He later spent many months here locating and surveying tracks for fire protection.

The newness of the country, then unknown, and also the variation in its topography and vegetation impressed this young man.

'It was a wilderness, and I've always known I was very lucky to be here then. It was an experience very few people can have these days.'

In pursuit of his forestry career, Barney went back to university to finish his degree.

After graduating, he joined the W.A. Forests Department and was posted to Manjimup. He worked at Kirup, Busselton, Shannon and Pemberton in the next 15 years, until he was brought back to Manjimup and the country he loved in 1965.

This country had been State forest when Barney was a student.

The years since had changed many things.

More and more people were looking to the forest for recreation, an escape from the city and a place to contemplate nature. And they were beginning to accept that the forest should be a secure home for the plants and animals that lived there.

The Forests Department in 1976 officially adopted a policy of multiple use, which set aside areas within State forest for conservation and recreation.

CALM still applies this concept to the land it manages, a concept that enables forests to be used for a variety of purposes indefinitely.

John Goodlad

The rare Rates tingle is identified easily by the way its bole flares at ground level (above).

Jiri Lochman

A large monitor, or goanna suns its black-banded back on a granite rock (left).

Jiri Lochman

Do you hear a small outboard motor in the karri forest? It could be a burrowing frog.

Jiri Lochman

Maiden hair ferns flank the base of Mt Frankland (above).

Jiri Lochman

The southern brown bandicoot digs and dines on an earthworm (above).

Barney had, by this time, become head of the Research Branch at Manjimup, and to him fell the great responsibility for nominating the areas to set aside.

One of his first choices was that area he had spent so much time in as a student and knew so well: The Wattle, Soho, Johnston, O'Donnell and Mitchell Crossing blocks became management priority areas for the conservation of flora, fauna and landscape in 1977. Mt Frankland became a management priority area for recreation.

'I knew this was my big opportunity, and I grabbed it with both hands.

'I reserved that area for which I had a great deal of affection, but it was obviously the first and best area to set aside because it was untouched and so diverse.

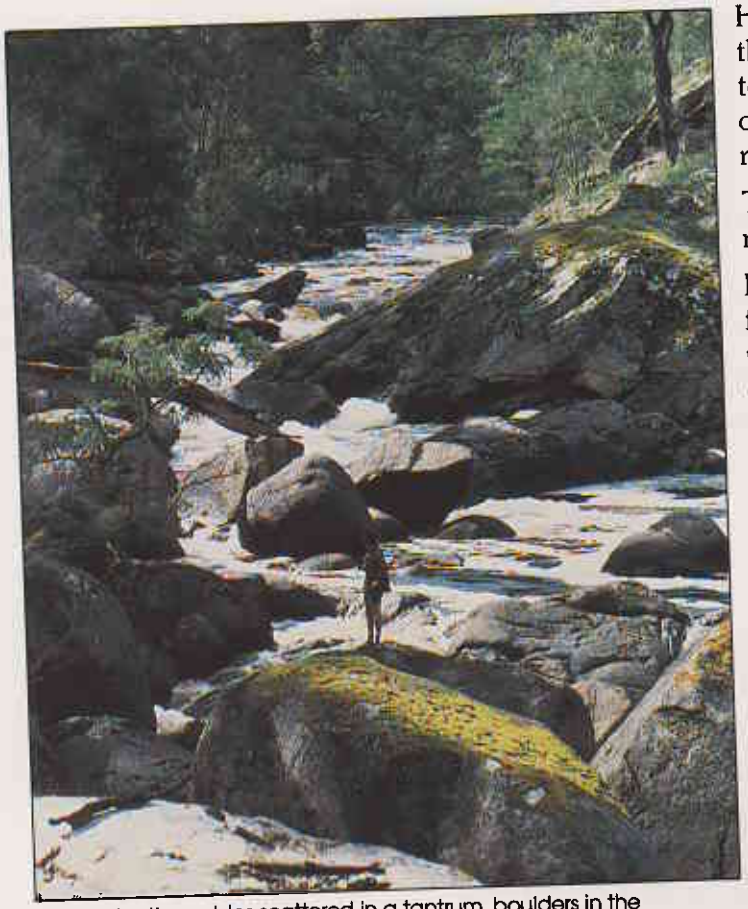
'It contains so many different types of forest associations, with both ordinary and rare vegetation.'

One rarity is Rate's tingle, *Eucalyptus brevistylis*. Another is the red flowering gum, *Eucalyptus ficifolia*.

When the karri is in flower, Purple Crowned Lorikeets throng the treetops. The whole forest is rich with birdlife: Emus, White-faced Herons, Brown Falcons, Wedge-tailed eagles, Quails, Bronzewings, Cockatoos, Parrots, Scarlet Robins, Tawny Frogmouths, Fantailed Cuckoos, and more.

The mammals here are those found throughout the southern forest. A drive through the Park will flush a western grey kangaroo, the banks of the Weld River are home to the water-rat, and there are many small mammals like the common dunnart, the mardo, and the western pygmy-possum.

But most impressive are the large lumps of granite scattered like marbles throughout the forest: Mt Frankland, Granite Peaks, Mt Johnston and Mt Mitchell, along with many other unnamed rocks.



Like a giant's marbles scattered in a tantrum, boulders in the Frankland River, near Mt Frankland (above).

A taste of karri: one of the beauty spots in proposed Wattle National Park (below).

Here, you can climb through the jarrah forest, through and over the karri forest until the green tops of the karri look like a soft blanket and the only sound is the wind hurtling over the bald rock.

The granite rocks and the karri have a unique relationship in this forest.

Karri usually grows in the soils of gneissic origin found in drainage lines and on the sides of valleys where stream flow has cut through the laterite cap.

But here karri grows on the hill tops because the soils of gneissic origin have been formed there on these once ocean-surrounded hills.

Three rivers, the Frankland, the Weld and the Deep, traverse the area north to south, and small recreation sites — barbecue, picnic table and bin— dot their banks.

Mt Frankland is perhaps the best known recreation site in the Park.

A barbecue spot and information display welcome you to the forest. A walktrail circles the base of Mt Frankland, passing through karri forest. Another, mostly of concrete steps leading straight up, takes you to the top of Mt Frankland for a look at the same forest from above.

A detailed management plan for the proposed Park will be done, but until then the Park will remain as it has in the past.

Barney White had the vision years ago to suggest setting this land aside.

He is a gentle man, quietly spoken and with a love of forestry, a job from which he has recently retired.

A big part of that job was to conserve our natural environment.

Barney says he's happy to see the area be made a national park, but wishes foresters would receive credit for having set aside many of these important conservation areas.

With the proposed creation of this national park, the area will be given the greatest possible security of purpose and tenure.

Its status will not be able to be changed without the agreement of both Houses of Parliament.

Its range of animal and plant associations, diversity of forest types and rare species, its nearly undisturbed state, rivers, pristine catchments and landscape, will make Wattle National Park one of the most important conservation and recreation areas in W.A.□

LANDSCOPE

Volume 3 No. 1
Spring Edition/September 1987

Contents

Executive Editor: Sweton Stewart
Editor: Liana Christensen
Designer: Trish Ryder/Robyn Mundy

All maps by Department of Conservation and Land Management Mapping Section.

Offset plates by Photolitho-PM.

Typesetting by Printworks.

Printed in Western Australia by the Department of Services, State Printing Division. ISSN 0815-4465.

COVER PHOTO:
Stark silhouettes evoke the spirit of our remote regions. This photograph was taken near Quairading by Hans Versluis.

EDITORIAL

Public participation in land management sounds like a great idea: the community has a chance to study and comment upon the government's proposals. The scientists and managers can keep their fingers on the pulse of public demand. But sometimes good ideas are hard to put into practice.

Last April the Department of Conservation and Land Management released draft management plans for the south-west forest regions, and a draft timber strategy for W.A. The release of the plans was accompanied by a series of workshops and public meetings, and extensive media releases. Four hundred and thirty-five letters offering briefings and speakers were sent out. Ninety groups responded. Public comment on any aspect of the plans and the strategy was invited.

4070 responses were received. This included 3505 proformas (from 30 organisations) and 565 substantial submissions, some up to 200 pages in length. Many submissions endorsed the plans in their entirety; some rejected them out of hand; others suggested hundreds of minor changes.

How can so many, and such varied, views possibly be integrated simply and sensibly into a final plan? What weighting should be given to the views of different groups or individuals? Who decides what is 'right' when pure value judgements are to be made and values are in conflict? How should one resolve an issue when the views of a large section of the public are quite different from those of a small group of scientists working closely on the problem? These questions represent the sharp end of public participation. It's a relatively new game for W.A.'s land managers, and one in which the rules are still unwritten and ill-defined.

What is certain is that the Department's policy and planning staff have a big job ahead of them, and a job which must be done to the highest possible professional standard. It is important that the final plans for our south-west forests reflect the tremendous thought, effort and interest shown by the community; and it is essential that there are efficient mechanisms for public involvement in conservation and land management, because these processes will be the norm, not the exception in years ahead.

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