ANCIENT DREAMS,

NEW DIRECTIONS

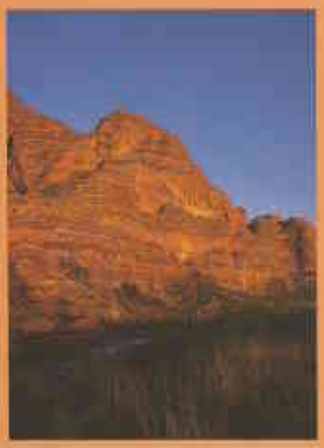
NEARLY four years ago on a cold, windy morning in Roebourne, a small team of people from the Department of Conservation and Land Management (CALM) addressed representatives of local Aboriginal groups about proposals for training some of their people to be national park rangers. I was momentarily stunned when about halfway through the meeting an old man who has now passed away suddenly spoke with great passion and force about how quickly the people wanted the training program to start.

The result of this meeting was a ranger training program for Aboriginal people with traditional ties to land that is now in national parks in the Pilbara. Four full-time Aboriginal rangers are now employed at the Millstream and Hamersley Range National Parks and their traditional affiliation with the land, their bushcraft skills, and, in many cases, their intimate knowledge of the geography and wildlife of the area their ancestors roamed for thousands of years, is proving to be an invaluable asset.

Word of the Pilbara program's success quickly spread to other Aboriginal communities in the State, and CALM began to receive requests for similar programs in other areas including the Bungle Bungle, Dampierland, Rudall River and the Western Desert. We were also aware of similar needs in the Gascoyne, other parts of the Pilbara and the Kimberley and various places in the south of the State. CALM wanted to help provide jobs and training in areas where Aboriginal people have natural abilities and very strong interests, but how could this be achieved with no budget and little infrastructure?

Fortunately the Aboriginal Affairs Minister stepped in with financial assistance and for the last three years made funding available from the Aboriginal Community Development Program to assist in two substantial directions.

The first of these was further Aboriginal ranger training in national parks. A major project was developed at the Bungle Bungle under the direction of training officer Peter McGlew, and six Aboriginals have now almost completed their year's training. Right from the outset of the declaration of the new National Park in 1987, the Government acknowledged that its spectacular natural features and



PURNULULU (BUNGLE BUNGLE) NATIONAL PARK

We are Aboriginal rangers in the area which is now the Bungle Bungle National Park which we call Purnululu. It is divided into two different tribal areas; the northern side of the park belongs to the Kija people, and the southern side belongs to the Tjaru people. Our traditional ties to this land are from our grandparents.

There are six of us involved in the Aboriginal ranger training program, four are descendants of the Kija tribe and two are from the Tjaru tribe. Most of us have spent all our lives in the Kimberley.

The reason why we are training as national park rangers is because of our Aboriginal skills and knowledge of the area. The traditional elders of Purnululu decided they wanted the younger generation to live and work in their homelands to help protect and preserve their culture, and to help Park visitors to learn about, and understand, our ties to the Bungle Bungle area.

When we have finished training, our jobs as national park rangers will include a wide variety of activities, such as flora and fauna protection, Aboriginal site protection, educating people about the environment, the Aboriginal and European history of the area, and taking general care of Park visitors.

By Neil McGinty, Ricky Drill, Gordon Carrington, Vincent Edwards, Alex Rogers, Paul Butters.

Trainee rangers planning a nature trail at Cape Leveque on the Dampierland Peninsula. This area's Aboriginal communities have established a tourist resort here, so it is important that the land and visitors are effectively managed. Photo-Gil Field ◄

interesting plant and animal life would be enhanced by the rich Aboriginal history of the area.

Just like the Bundjima and Indjibandi groups of the Pilbara, the Kija and Tjaru people of the East Kimberley had not lived on traditional lands for many years. But they still had great knowledge of and a strong cultural association with the place they call Purnululu (the Bungle Bungle). Part of the training program concerns the interpretation of these traditional ties to Park visitors.

Tribal elders are involved in the teaching as much as possible. Traditional Aboriginals have their own names and uses for local plants and animals: they know their medicinal or craft value, cultural significance or value as food. Retaining these traditional names and associations is important. Involving tribal elders will ensure this knowledge is kept alive in the younger people.

One of the major strengths of the training so far, has been its "on site" location. Each program was put together in consultation with communities and hand crafted to suit the needs of the individuals, the history of the area, and so on. But, at the same time, each course must impart the fundamental skills and knowledge needed by all rangers.

This is slower and much more expensive than, say, developing a program for 15 to 20 Aboriginal people in Bunbury or Perth, but it is much more effective.

The Aboriginal Community Development Program also allowed CALM to take a new direction in training; providing training programs for rangers employed by the Aboriginal communities themselves. In many remote areas, communities are extremely concerned about protection of sacred sites and the general care of their traditional country. The communities have realised that they cannot fulfil their obligations to Dreamtime Law by simply "policing" the available white man's laws, so they have turned to CALM for assistance.

Enforcement of rules and regulations in national parks and other conservation areas is always a last resort. CALM prefers to protect the land and wildlife and enhance its value in the minds of visitors by making them feel "at home"and showing them how to behave so that the values are protected.

Aboriginal communities are recognising that they can achieve many of their objectives by borrowing the range of strategies used in national parks. This includes signposting, visitor information, construction of better defined tracks, provision of printed material and most important of all, face to face contact.

There is still a great deal to be done, but the programs should achieve lasting results for the communities.

The benefits of such programs are twofold. They enhance CALM's objectives, in looking after the land entrusted to it and the wildlife of the State, while helping to fulfil the aspirations of Aboriginal communities to manage their land according to their traditional Law. ⊡

CHRIS HAYNES

IT is a warm summer night at the Lacepede Islands Nature Reserve, 120 km north-west of Broome, and a large green turtle drags her way towards the high tide mark to dig a nest.

When she starts dropping soft white eggs into the warm sand, local Aboriginals employed by CALM as technical assistants flick on torches and begin recording data on the nesting turtle.

The men are trainee rangers employed by communities at One Arm Point, Djarindjin and Beagle Bay on the Dampierland Peninsula.

Matthew Lawson, a one-time trainee ranger from One Arm Point, records data on the nesting turtles. Photo Bob Prince ▲

They are being trained by CALM in all manner of skills, including management of marine areas, first aid, interpretation, community education, sign construction and fire management.

The marine turtle work at the Lacepede Islands, co-ordinated by Dr Bob Prince, is one of CALM's regular wildlife research activities but it is an excellent opportunity for the rangers to put their skills to practical use.

The Dampierland Peninsula, where the training program is being held, is partly Aboriginal reserve. Although CALM is responsible for managing the wildlife, it has no land tenure on the mainland or resources to provide a management presence, so the program is a good example of what CALM and an Aboriginal community can achieve by working together.

Training officer Steve Szabo with Bruce Woodley, one of the original trainees at Millstream, in the Pilbara. He is now a CALM Ranger in the Millstream-Chichester National Park. Photo-Robert Garvey ►

LANDSCOPE

VOLUME 4 NO 4 WINTER EDITION 1989

Effluent disposal ponds from industry disfigure an idyllic strip of coastal land. But restoration work and a new conservation park are planned for the Leschenault Peninsula, near Bunbury. *Turn to p.8.*

Wood that was once only suitable for firewood can now be used to make high grade furniture. *Find out how on p.24.*

With spring approaching, the bush beckons...but without proper planning your walk could turn to disaster. *See p.40.*

A spectacular landscape, with an astounding array of plants and animals lies inland from Jurien Bay. *Read about the Mt Lesueur area on p.28.*

A population explosion of coral-eating snails threatens the unique reefs of Ningaloo Marine Park. How does CALM plan to counter their attack? *See p.14.*

COVER

In W.A.'s far north, Aboriginal rangers with ties to land now in national parks draw on the traditional wisdom of their people for use in Park management. Photo-Robert Garvey

FEATURES

REGULARS

SPECIALS

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Acknowledgements: Cartoon-Louise Burch, Illustrations-Ian Dickinson
Coral illustration p 20 - (from an original illustration by Jeff Kelly)

Colour Separations by Gibbneys Graphics
Printed in Western Australia by Kaleidoscope

Published by Dr S Shea, Executive Director,
Department of Conservation and Land Management,
50 Hayman Road, Como, Western Australia 6152.