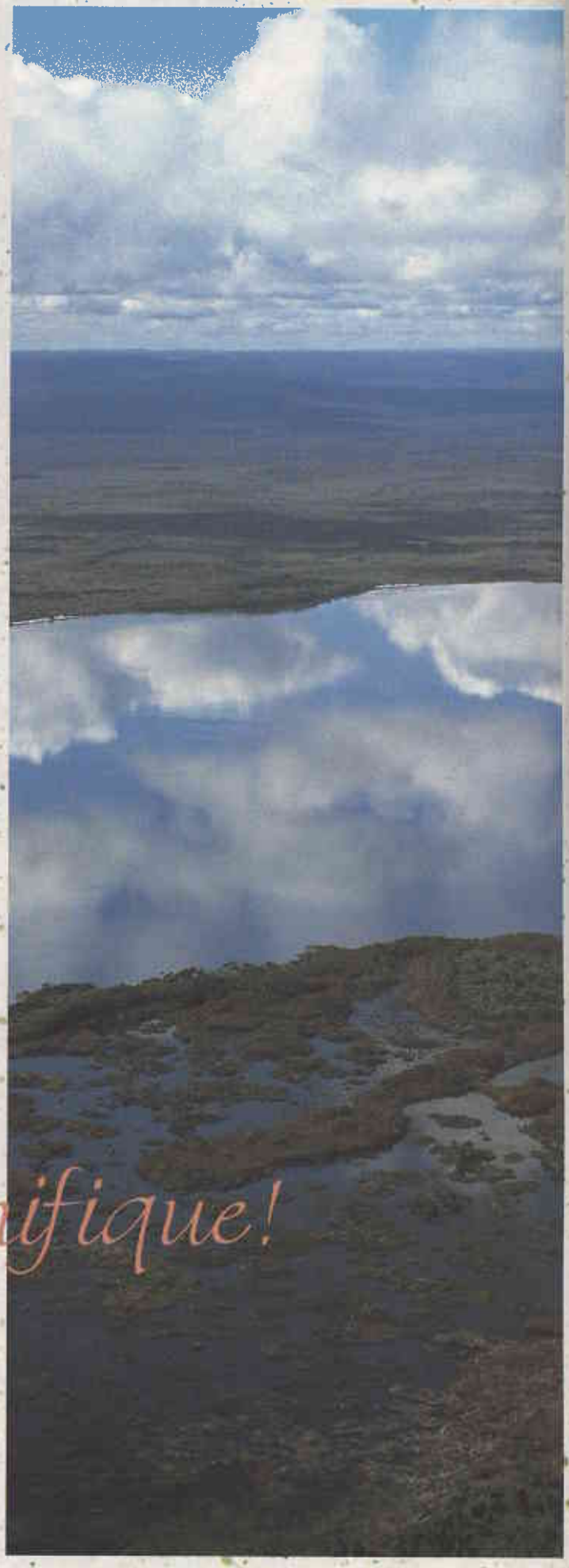
Stretching 130 kilometres along the south coast between Augusta and Walpole lies a national park with long white beaches, rugged cliffs, and vast coastal dunes backed by

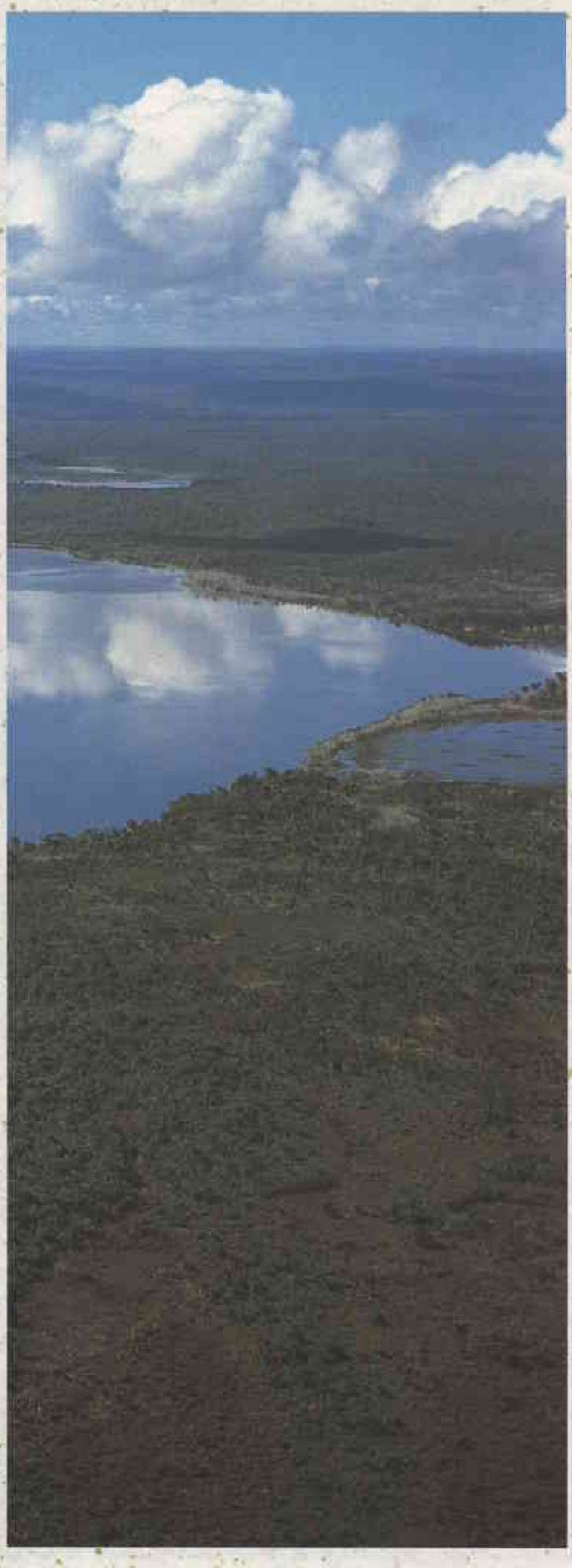
D'ENTRECASTEAUX

extensive wetlands with islands of karri forest. Visitors from around Australia are discovering what those who live nearby already know...

C'est Magnifique!



Story and photos by Cliff Winfield



D'ENTRECASTEAUX

In December 1792, Admiral Bruny D'Entrecasteaux sailed east along the western south coast of New Holland. Despite a brief to explore the land for its water supply and agricultural potential, and to report on the local inhabitants, the sailors did not venture ashore until they reached what is now Esperance. Consequently his impression was that the land between Cape Leeuwin and Point D'Entrecasteaux was harsh and arid with no sign of habitation. Yet he had just sailed past the Blackwood and Warren Rivers, whose upper catchments have become the most productive agricultural land in the region, and where Aboriginal people migrated through the area hunting and fishing.

SETTLEMENT

Fifty years later, towards the mid-1800s, land in the rolling hills on the upper reaches of the South West rivers was being taken up for grazing. Descendants of pioneer families such as the Muirs, Roses and Blechyndens describe how their forebears followed the local Aboriginal practice of going down to the coast as the hinterland dried out towards the end of summer.

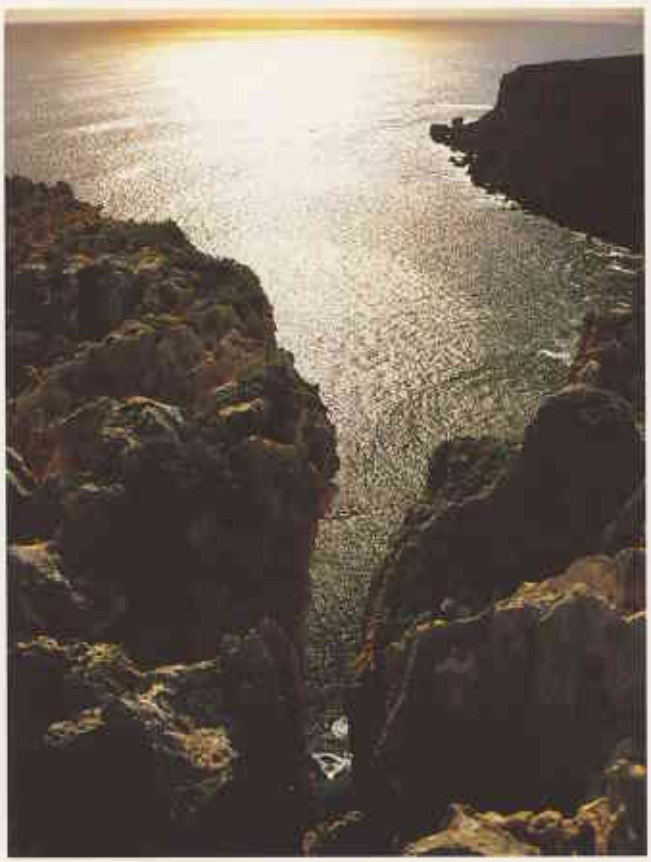
They drove their cattle down to the coast to graze on native grasses and scrub. At first the pioneers just 'squatted' on the land, but by 1920 most graziers had either purchased freehold coastal blocks or negotiated pastoral leases. Soon most of the land in the coastal strip between the karri forest and the Southern Ocean shoreline, in what is now D'Entrecasteaux National Park, was under some form of stock grazing.

The next significant wave of agricultural development in the region came with the advent of the Group Settlement Scheme. The plan was to give post-World War I Britons the chance to settle their own farms in Australia. Areas around Denmark, Pemberton and Northcliffe were allocated to hopeful, but inexperienced, immigrants. But for many reasons the plan went awry, and people suffered slow, heart-breaking failure. The collapse of the settlement scheme probably saved thousands of hectares of surveyed blocks around the Gardner River from being turned to farmland.

Nevertheless, the influx of people to the area created the first major recreation demand on the D'Entrecasteaux coast. Many families were forced from their non-viable farms into the workforce of the flourishing timber milling industry, with its company towns and basic-wage existence. For many, the concept of 'going down to the coast' for weekends was the only reason they stayed in the area.

To accommodate this demand, the Shire of Manjimup acquired reserves at the mouth of the Gardner River, Windy Harbour and Camfield (Broke Inlet) for camping and holiday cottages. Squatters also built holiday shacks at the mouth of the Donnelly River, reached by taking a boat down the last 10 km of the river.

The isolation of the area kept the number of people using the sandy tracks to a minimum, though, with low tyre pressure and high patience, skilful drivers



were able to get two-wheel-drive vehicles to most of the coast.

By the 1970s, however, four-wheel-drive vehicles were more common and the subsequent increase in traffic led to the demise of the sandy tracks. With only two conventional roads to the coast, the grand scenery and good fishing was still largely the province of locals with four-wheel-drives, horses or boats.

A NATIONAL PARK

This was soon to change, as more people began to discover the wild beauty of the coast. Some of its features include the varied cliffs and the continuous beach, the huge mobile dunes, the smaller coastal karri trees with their twisted trunks, and Lake Jasper, the largest freshwater lake in the southern half of Western Australia. Perhaps most impressive of all was that all this is in a large area free from human development.

Among those enjoying the area was a small group of foresters who would head to the coast to go fishing. One of them, Barney White, described the area as 'a glorious wilderness where you felt as if you were the only person for miles around'. Going to the coast was a trip of contrasts: from heavy karri forest to coastal forests through swamps and lakes and swales to huge dunes and finally the beach.

The foresters checked on the tenures held in the area and found them to be a muddled assortment of leases, private property, and Crown land. Afraid that if nothing was done the area would be developed and the natural isolation and wilderness values destabilised, they put forward the first major proposal for a western South Coast national park through the Institute of Foresters. Later, in 1976, the Environmental Protection Authority also recommended the creation of the park, and Government accepted the recommendation. By the early 1980s, large areas of vacant Crown land, State forest and expired grazing leases were gazetted as the D'Entrecasteaux National Park.

In 1984 a management strategy for the area was prepared jointly by the Forests Department and the National Parks Authority. Among other points, the strategy recommended closing a number of beaches to four-wheel-drive vehicles. The increasing use of four-wheel-drives along the coast had created a great number of access tracks, and it was felt that continued use of these tracks would cause erosion and spread dieback disease, as well as destabilise the dunes.

Local residents reacted strongly to proposals that would limit their access to the beaches. More than 1 000 people met at Manjimup town hall and a 'Keep Our Coast Open Committee' was formed. Four-wheel-drive, horseback riding, and fishing clubs demanded unlimited access to the beaches, while groups such as the Conservation Council, the South West Forest Defence Foundation and the Australian Conservation Foundation argued that access to some beaches should be closed. It appeared that a single management plan for the park would be impossible to achieve.

At this point, the newly formed Department of Conservation and Land Management (CALM) was made responsible for the area, and developed one of its first national park plans, a draft

Looking west from Point D'Entrecasteaux. ◄◄
An island of karris on Chesapeake Road. ◄
The massive Yeagarup dunes. ►▲
One of only two known occurrences of a rare banksia is in the swamp in the middle of Black Point. ►

Pages 10 and 11: Lake Jasper, surrounded by seasonal wetlands.

10-year management plan. Unlike the earlier management strategies, public involvement was an important component.

The strong feelings about access and use of the park inevitably resulted in controversy. There was debate about conservation measures restricting recreational use, such as the use of power boats on Lake Jasper, and the rights of squatters. Among the accommodations reached: water skiing and power boats remained on certain parts of Lake Jasper, and the 43 squatters' huts at the mouth of the Donnelly River had their tenure formalised and the owners' responsibilities clarified.

The planning process clearly illustrated that conservation, environmental and social issues are a complex intertwining of values with rarely one simple path to follow. However, the consultation with the community proved very successful and resulted in a workable plan that was largely accepted by the local community.

SOMETHING FOR EVERYONE

The management plan provides for different levels of access to different parts of the park. It has rationed access to recreation sites, depending on their social values, 'carrying capacity', or conservation values.

Many beaches with stable access tracks remain open to four-wheel-drives. However, Salmon Beach, near Windy Harbour, is an example where four-wheel-drive access to a popular spot was damaging a coastal area. The track was realigned and upgraded, to provide one of only two conventional vehicle access roads to a surf beach. This meant that soil erosion could be halted and enabled rehabilitation work to commence.

It had been traditional to ride to the coast on horseback, so the horse corridors became a unique feature of the park. Two corridors are still available for public access: one into the Broke Inlet area and one from Vasse Highway along Lake Jasper Road to the coast, west of Black Point.

At the other end of the spectrum, significant vehicle exclusion areas provide those who are willing to hike with the opportunity to experience seclusion on a deserted beach.

A revegetated and rehabilitated four-wheel-drive track at Salmon Beach. Photo - Vicki Metcalfe ▲

Paperbark trees, rocks and water on the shore of Broke Inlet.◄▼

Visitors get a taste of droving days riding along a horse corridor. Photo - Vicki Metcalfe ►▼

MANAGEMENT ISSUES

There were also other issues to be resolved. Fire is always a concern, and a wildfire in 1988 underlined how the dual role of national parks, as both recreation and conservation areas, can create a dilemma. On this occasion a back-burn operation designed to halt the progress of a small wildfire, started by a lightning strike in inaccessible country, escaped during a sudden wind change and the fire raced off into the banksia woodlands. Ironically, a tactic that protected the lives and property of people at the mouth of the Donnelly River had inadvertently been responsible for burning out nearly 9 000 ha over several days.

There is obviously a close relationship between fire and ecosystems in the park, but this is not yet fully understood. To accommodate social and ecological demands, the park has three fire management regimes. One regime is short-rotation (six to eight years) burns to reduce fuel in areas where wildfire poses a threat to human and conservation values. Other areas are protected where possible from encroaching wildfires, and are not deliberately burnt at all. The third fire regime is one of flexible management, areas in which fire is managed to achieve ecological diversity. Depending on the vegetation type, rotations may vary between three and 15 years.

Another issue requiring special attention is dieback disease. Dieback is caused by a soil-borne fungus (*Phytophthora cinnamomi*) that attacks

many of the park's plant species, especially members of the Proteaceae family such as banksias and hakeas. In D'Entrecasteaux, dieback threatens a plant of particular importance: the rare banksia known as the red swamp banksia *(B. occidentalis* subspecies *formosa)*. There are only two places where it is known to occur, and one site is near the tip of Black Point, a popular fishing and surfing spot. In order to preserve the banksia, there seems no option but to restrict vehicle access and ask fishers and surfers to walk the last kilometre, so as to reduce the risk of transporting the fungus there on the tyres or underbody of vehicles.

Another part of the park targeted for dieback control was what was known as The Blackwater - vast areas of wetlands behind the coastal dunes. Tracks that traverse this area become deep bog holes for eight months of the year. They are almost certainly infected with dieback and, to restrict the spread of the disease, some track closures - seasonal and permanent - have been introduced. This will also prevent further damage to tracks and vehicles.

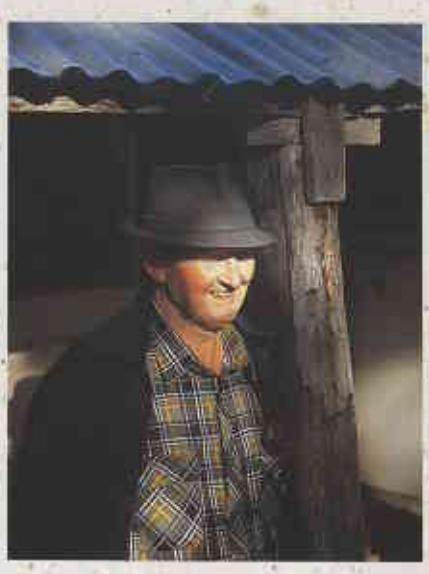
CHANGING TIMES

While much careful thought was given to the management plan, new issues and concerns have inevitably cropped up.

Since 1987 more than 12 000 hectares, including some outstanding landscape features such as Yeagarup dune (an impressive mobile dune 10 km long), Woolbale Hills, Mount Pingerup and other areas of important ecological value, have been added to the park.

A dilemma of park management is the question of what constitutes the optimal number of visitors. It is right that people should be encouraged to visit national parks and appreciate their natural beauty, yet greater numbers of visitors place greater pressure on facilities and fragile ecosystems. A mineral sand mine now proposed on private property adjacent to the park will mean that a gravel road linking the mine to processing facilities at Capel will have to be upgraded to highway quality. These improvements to adjacent roads could place D'Entrecasteaux within three and a half hours of Perth, making it more accessible

CATTLEMEN OF THE COAST



Last summer, former South Coast grazing leaseholders joined CALM fire officers and park managers for a tour of the D'Entrecasteaux National Park. The tour was arranged to review the fire management of the coastal heath.

The meeting brought together a unique group of men. They represented three generations of families who have driven cattle down to the coast each year to graze on native grasses and scrub. Amongst the graziers were members of some famous South Coast families, including the Muirs, Brockmans, Ipsens, Mottrams and Dicksons.

Frank Brockman remarked that the countryside had changed since the graziers had left, recalling grassy parklands beneath tall peppermints.

'As far back as white people can remember it's always been clean country,' Mr Brockman said, referring to the now dense thickets of regrowth after the wildfires. 'We used to burn it as often as it would burn, and that way we never got any really hot fires.'

The cattlemen said that they had learnt their fire management techniques from their forefathers. They, in turn, had learnt from the Aboriginal people who also came down to the coast to hunt in the summer months.

Many of the group camped the night at Moore's hut, a relic of the days when graziers' families stayed down on the coast with their stock. While some turned their hand to campfire cuisine, 80-year-old Andy Muir produced the 1893 diary of his grandfather, pioneer Thomas Muir, which gave an insight into pioneer life and corroborated the stories of early fire management.

Around the campfire that night, tall tales and true were told of the days of droving down to the coast.

▲ *Andy Muir reminiscing on droving days at Moore's Hut.*

◀ *'GOING ON TO THE DUNES AT YEAGARUP' by Jack French: one of the last mobs of cattle on the coast.*

for weekend trips and city visitors, and presenting park managers with this delicate problem of balance.

Park management must account for many changing situations in the park. One is the current proposal for mineral exploration, which could lead to the possible excision of up to one per cent of the park for mining. Part of the package that would enable companies to mine in the park is that 'where such excisions are approved, there will be compensation by the addition of an equivalent area of land'. A sand mining company owns one of the remaining freehold enclaves within the park boundaries which would be a valuable addition to the estate if mining goes ahead.

Since the management plan was compiled, prehistoric Aboriginal artefacts have also been found on the floor of Lake Jasper. A proposal for redeveloping the lake's north-western shore for a day-use area will now be reviewed in the light of the site's archaeological importance.

D'Entrecasteaux National Park remains many things to many people. For CALM, one of the valuable lessons of the evolution of the D'Entrecasteaux National Park has been the public involvement in planning and the value of management plans at the local level. The changing circumstances within the park, and the changing land use in the park neighbourhood, emphasise that planning must have inbuilt flexibility if national park managers are to preserve both the natural values and the diversity of human experiences that the park has to offer. The local residents, the visitors and the managers all agree that the main feature of D'Entrecasteaux National Park remains its 'qualities of remoteness'. It is indeed magnifique!

Open banksia woodland - as the cattlemen recall it.

Cliff Winfield has contributed various articles and photographs to LANDSCOPE. He is now interpretation and community relations officer in CALM's Southern Forest Region Office. He can be contacted on (097) 71 1988.

BENEATH MURKY DEPTHS

The WA Museum's Archaeology and Aboriginal Sites Departments, representatives of the Gnuranen Association, and CALM park managers met in D'Entrecasteaux National Park, at Lake Jasper, the site of recent important archaeological finds. The museum stressed the archaeological importance of the site and the Gnuranen Association discussed the cultural significance. All agreed that future management of the lake would require careful planning.

WA Museum archaeologist, Charles Dortch, explained the importance of artefacts recently discovered on the lake floor.

'A diving operation in February 1990 by a museum archaeology team identified numerous tree stumps, blackboy stumps and stone artefacts at various depths up to seven to 10 metres in the deepest part of the lake. These finds show that what is now a lake was once woodland inhabited by human beings,' Mr Dortch said. Wood samples were carbon dated and revealed ages of 3 750-4 000 years old. The lake is thought to have formed as a result of a mobile sand dune blocking the path of a stream or river.

Mike Hill (standing) and Charlie Dortch (centre back) listen to Vicki Metcalfe explain plans for Lake Jasper.

'The Lake Jasper project is the first successful use in Australia of underwater archaeological techniques in identifying prehistoric sites. There are only a handful of similar projects throughout the world,' Mr Dortch said.

The Gnuranen Association is a Busselton-based group representing people of Nyungar Aboriginal descent who are interested in the social, spiritual and economic future of young Aboriginal people. Spokesman Mike Hill outlined their interest in Lake Jasper: 'This place can provide a significant spiritual link for Nyungar people - a quiet place where old people can visit to re-establish their natural bond with the bush, and to enable young people to feel a sense of place. Our values for Lake Jasper are pretty much in line with those of national park management generally.

'We are not making a land rights claim, but we are interested in setting up a co-operative management program for the lake,' Mr Hill said.

CALM Southern Forest Region Acting Manager Kevin Vear said he was pleased that the Gnuranen Association had expressed an interest in Lake Jasper.

'We are keen to work closely with the Aboriginal community to manage this area in sympathy with historical and cultural values, especially in view of the archaeological links at the lake,' Kevin said.

LANDSCOPE

VOLUME SIX NO. 3 - AUTUMN EDITION 1991

*Visitors from around Australia are discovering what those who live nearby already know - D'Entrecasteaux...*C'est Magnifique. *Turn to page 10.*

There's more to invertebrates than slugs, maggots and spiders. Turn to page 28 to find out just why invertebrates are so important.

What has happened to Fitzgerald River National Park since the 1989 wildfire? See page 34.

Seabirds nest on Pelsaert Island in the Houtman Abrolhos by the million. See page 17.

Explore the Dampier Archipelago, a group of rocky islands with a violent past and a wealth of wildlife. Turn to page 48.

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COVER

Invertebrates play an important role in the ecosystem of WA's jarrah forest. Earthworms, termites and ants fragment leaf litter and mix organic matter. Some soil and litter invertebrates stimulate plant growth. Soil insects such as larval beetles feed on roots, stimulating the plants' growth rate. Our cover illustration is Philippa Nikulinsky's impression of this process at work in the jarrah forest.

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