

# Improving the tra



**The Bibbulmun Track, Western Australia's world-class walking track, has captured the imagination of thousands of people since its realignment and revamp seven years ago, and has been a catalyst for changing the face of bushwalking in WA.**

The Bibbulmun Track stretches for almost 1000 kilometres from Kalamunda to Albany on the south coast. It winds through some of the most beautiful natural areas in the State's South West and through nine rural communities. It was designed for use by people with varying fitness levels and interests and can be walked as part of a relaxing day in the bush, an overnight or weekend camping adventure or as an eight-to-10-week end-to-end hike. Campsites and shelters are a comfortable day's walk apart, while towns along the way provide accommodation for those who prefer a comfy bed.

## A step back in time

The idea of the Bibbulmun Track was born in 1972 when avid bushwalker Geoff Schafer approached then Minister for Forests H D Evans with a concept to encourage urban people to get out in the bush (see 'Building a better Bibbulmun Track', *LANDSCOPE* Autumn 1997). The track was officially opened in 1979 as part of WA's 150-year celebrations. In 1988, the Department of Conservation and Land Management (CALM) significantly overhauled the track, which was realigned and extended to Walpole. After a major upgrade in the mid-1990s the 'new' track, from Kalamunda to Albany, was opened in 1998.

A survey conducted by CALM in 1997-98 revealed that the majority of walkers in all age categories were male. Since then, products and services have been developed by the 'friends' group—the Bibbulmun Track Foundation—for men, women and children of all ages, resulting in a shift in the trend of the track's usage.

## Who's using the track?

Data now indicates that use of the track is evenly divided between the sexes. Eighty per cent of walkers are between 25 and 60 years and the rest are evenly spread between the younger walkers and over-60s. A survey in 2003



**Opposite** As many as 75 per cent of the track's users enjoy a one day walk.  
*Photo - Francis Andrijich*

**Top** Monadnocks Campsite in the Darling Range is a popular spot to stop and take a break.

**Above** Trail markers, featuring a Waugal, guide the way at regular intervals.  
*Photos - Annie Keating*

**Right** A CALM team work together to cross the 'Raging River' during the Mountain Designs Bibbulmun Team Challenge.  
*Photo - Courtesy of the Bibbulmun Track Foundation*



also showed that use of the track had increased significantly, with more than 137,000 walks undertaken during a 12-month period. Almost three quarters of walkers enjoyed a day walk, while the rest walked for between two days and eight weeks.

Although 90 per cent of walkers were WA locals, the survey showed that the number of interstate and overseas walkers had increased. As many as one in three had planned to walk the track before arriving in WA.

Many companies, groups and schools also use the track for team building and personal development activities. One-day walks have proven to successfully enhance group dynamics and communication, and the



**Above left** Women's events are always popular and a great way to get started on the track.  
*Photo – Annie Keating*

**Above** Meeting native animals up close is a treat during special programs for kids.

**Left** Support for the Bibbulmun Track often takes the form of track maintenance.  
*Photos – Courtesy of the Bibbulmun Track Foundation*



give novice bushwalkers the confidence and skills to walk longer distances without a guide. They also provide an opportunity to meet like-minded people and potential walking partners. So, regardless of what experience you're seeking, you're likely to find a guided activity that will cater for you.

annual, four-day Mountain Designs Bibbulmun Team Challenge has become a 'must-do' event for some organisations.

### Guided walks

The Bibbulmun Track Foundation has developed guided events to enable people of all ages and fitness levels to 'go bush'. These programs range from half-day walks to week-long treks. Kids events often incorporate activities such

as camp cooking or meeting native animals. Women's events, such as 'Dwellingup Damsels', are popular for those who want to try their first overnight hike and camping experience. Experiences such as 'Balingup Belles' cater for women who prefer to be pampered with a hot shower, three-course dinner and massage at the end of the day.

Events such as 'Get Lost with Steve' and the 'L-Plates Walk' are designed to

### Roles and responsibilities

The Bibbulmun Track Foundation has developed these programs and activities in line with its mission to support the management of the track so it becomes, and remains, a long distance trail of international significance and quality. The foundation aims to generate community participation, ownership and education as well as develop opportunities for tourism, employment

**Right** Walkers crossing the Balingup Brook Bridge.  
Photo – Jesse Brampton

and training. The foundation is responsible for marketing and fostering community support for the track under a Memorandum of Understanding with CALM, which manages the track.

This relationship is regarded as a 'best practice' partnership between a government agency (CALM) and the community (represented by the Bibbulmun Track Foundation). The partnership has been emulated by other states and was showcased as a model for community-based tourism and conservation partnerships by the Commonwealth Department of Industry, Tourism and Resources.

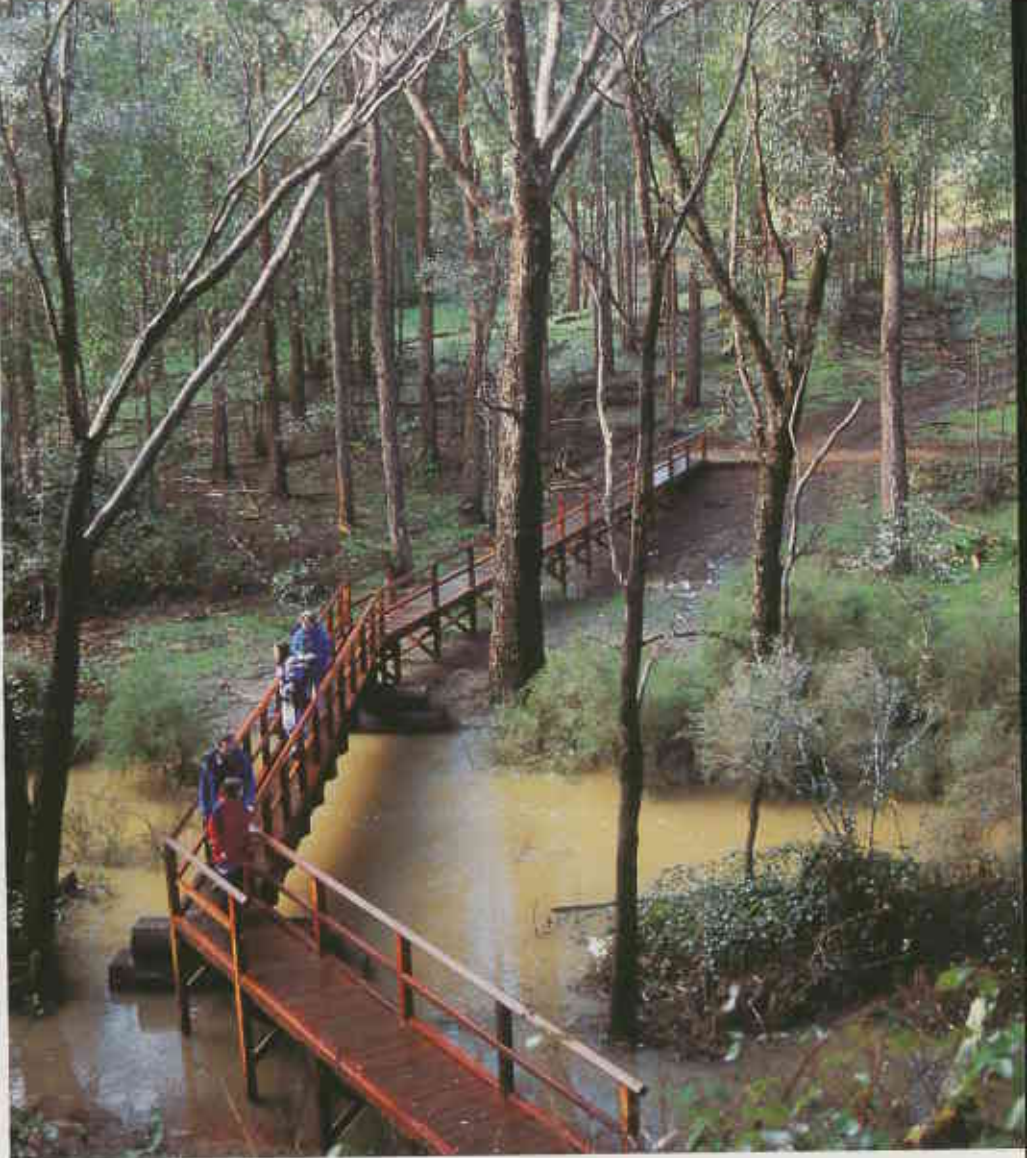
### Community involvement

The track, like other successful long-distance walktrails, relies on the involvement of dedicated volunteers for maintenance, management and marketing. More than 350 volunteers assist the foundation, many involved in the major track maintenance program—generously supported by the foundation's premier sponsor, Alphawest.

Maintenance volunteers develop a real sense of ownership of 'their' section of track and carry out tasks—such as lightweight pruning, clearing minor obstacles like rocks and branches, checking and replacing trail markers and keeping campsites clean—to ensure walkers have an enjoyable and safe experience. Track maintenance volunteers report regularly on conditions likely to affect walkers or the long-term future of the track itself. These reports are vital in formulating works programs for CALM or Department of Justice maintenance teams, which do the 'heavy' work.

### Tourism drawcard

The work of these various groups, and the track's increased popularity, has translated into formal recognition by government and tourism bodies. In 2004, the Bibbulmun Track won



a prestigious WA Tourism Award for 'Significant Tourist Attraction', recognition of the high standard of facilities and services on offer and the increasing number of walkers. CALM's Bibbulmun Track development project won a WA Tourism Award in 1999 in the 'Tourist Development Projects' category.

It is estimated that walkers along the track spend around \$21 million each year on accommodation, meals, transport and supplies, mostly in towns and regional communities along the track. Some increasingly popular activities offered by the foundation,

such as Bibbulmun Walking Break holiday packages, bring a steady supply of visitors to the many bed and breakfast facilities along the track.

### Take a walk

Facilities along the Bibbulmun Track are being continually improved with capital works funding for the track itself and projects in CALM-managed land through which the track passes. It's a fantastic, free community resource, so get out and spend time in the bush alone, or with your friends, family or colleagues.

Linda Daniels is the executive director of the Bibbulmun Track Foundation. She can be contacted on (08) 9481 0551 or by email ([friends@bibbulmuntrack.org.au](mailto:friends@bibbulmuntrack.org.au)).

For more information, an events calendar or maps and guidebooks, contact the Bibbulmun Track Foundation on (08) 9481 0551 or by email ([friends@bibbulmuntrack.org.au](mailto:friends@bibbulmuntrack.org.au)), or call into the office on the 1st floor, Mountain Designs Adventure Building, 862 Hay Street, Perth between 9 am and 4.30 pm, Monday to Friday. The Bibbulmun Track website ([www.bibbulmuntrack.org.au](http://www.bibbulmuntrack.org.au)) also has a wealth of helpful and useful information. Track maps are also available from CALM's online bookshop at [www.naturebase.net/bookshop](http://www.naturebase.net/bookshop) and the latest track news and conditions are available from [www.naturebase.net/tourism/bib\\_news](http://www.naturebase.net/tourism/bib_news) or from CALM's Tracks and Trails Unit on (08) 9334 0265.

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