



It takes a village:

Bibbulmun Track volunteers





Since the early 1990s, a dedicated army of volunteers have given their time, expertise and brawn to help look after 'adopted' sections of the Bibbulmun Track – Western Australia's premier walking trail. In recent years, a special contingent, known as Support Volunteers, have also been upgrading the trail and improving key infrastructure, to help maintain and improve this world-class facility. But it's not all work and no play, volunteers get to experience some of the State's most beautiful areas and receive immense satisfaction from the work they carry out.

by Rhianna King

What do you get when you cross a couple of ex-engineers (including an ex-aircraft engineer) with an ex-builder, an ex-planner and a couple of ex-business people? (No, this is not the beginning of a joke.) The answer: an extremely impressive collection of skills. These skills, combined with some 480-plus years of experience in various industries and a passion for the Bibbulmun Track, makes the group of Support Volunteers a formidable force. And these volunteers are lending their time and skills to the Bibbulmun Track to complete a number of key priority projects, which might otherwise not be possible.

INVALUABLE VOLUNTEERS

In 1998, when the Bibbulmun Track was realigned and extended to Albany, those in the then-Department of Conservation and Land Management Bibbulmun Track project team identified that maintaining the epic track, which now stretches more than 1000 kilometres

from Kalamunda to Albany, would have to rely on the support of the community. So, in 1997, the Friends of the Bibbulmun Track was established to administer and organise a team of enthusiastic volunteers to 'adopt' sections of the track on which they would carry out simple maintenance tasks. About 40 volunteers acted as the department's 'eyes on the ground' and reported any issues or work that needed to be completed. Since then this number has grown to almost 300 volunteers who continue to perform an invaluable service. In recent years, a faction of people emerged, who were keen to use their varied skills and vast experience to carry out more complex tasks.

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Main Support volunteers carry out a variety of tasks.

Photo – Dave Lathwell/DBCA

Above left The Bibbulmun Track stretches 1000 kilometres from Kalamunda to Albany.
Photos – Bibbulmun Track Foundation

ABOVE AND BEYOND

A team of about 20 Support Volunteers have undergone specialised training in disciplines such as working with chainsaws and brush cutters, working with pre-fabricated materials, providing a safe work environment for volunteers and working at heights. They also provide training for volunteers in track maintenance, construction and re-alignment.

A three-year maintenance plan has been developed by the Bibbulmun Track Foundation with DBCA's Recreation and Trails Unit, which outlines projects that need to be completed. When there is a need for particular skills, a call is put out to volunteers to help with a project. And, when their travel and grandchildren-minding schedules allow, they enthusiastically sign up for duty. They then work closely with Parks and Wildlife Service regional staff to carry out a range of projects.

PROJECT TALLY

The Bibbulmun Track Support Volunteers have completed a number of tasks that may not have otherwise been possible. Since 2016, they have installed several small pre-fabricated footbridges, including one over Bell River; installed a set of steps at the new suspension bridge, which replaced the old Long Gully Bridge that was lost in a 2015 fire; performed significant restoration work at the River Road Bridge; installed box steps at Peaceful Bay; carried out campsite upgrade work at Swamp Oak Shelter; and have completed much-needed track maintenance work in the Perth hills.

Recreation volunteer Charlie Soord said maintaining the Bibbulmun Track was an epic task.

"Parts of the track and some of the infrastructure is 20 years old, so many of the facilities require repair and upgrades," he said.

"This is on top of the ongoing maintenance required to secure the Bibbulmun Track as a world-class walk trail."

But, according to DBCA project manager Dave Lathwell, the Support Volunteer program is a win-win for everyone involved.



"A lot of our Support Volunteers get involved in the project because they were looking for something interesting to do post-retirement," he said.

"Many of them are end-to-enders and have an affinity for the Bibbulmun Track and enjoy spending time in the bush with like-minded people. They're a great group of people and have a lot of fun together.

"A lot of them also have a keen interest in keeping some of the old bridges and fantastic structures alive; without people being committed to protecting and retaining the heritage of the trail, some of these old structures would be lost and have to be replaced."

Right The Bibbulmun Track takes in various landscapes.

Photo – Deb Badger/Bibbulmun Track Foundation



Discover more about
the Support Volunteer
program



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Service's 'LANDSCOPE'
playlist on YouTube.



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For more information about the Bibbulmun Track, visit the Bibbulmun Track Foundation's website (bibbulmuntrack.org.au) or parks.dbca.wa.gov.au/know/bibbulmun-track