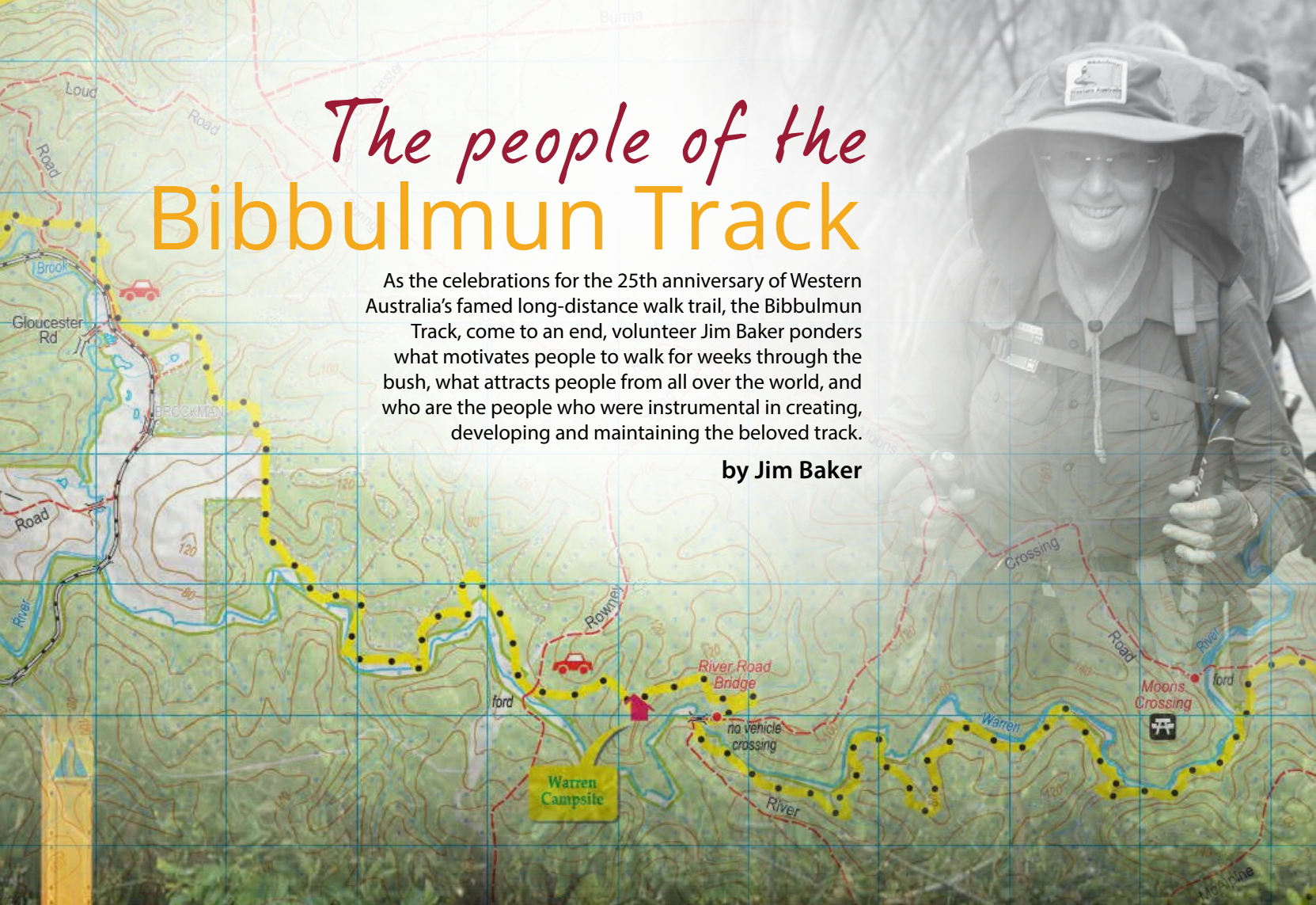




The people of the Bibbulmun Track

As the celebrations for the 25th anniversary of Western Australia's famed long-distance walk trail, the Bibbulmun Track, come to an end, volunteer Jim Baker ponders what motivates people to walk for weeks through the bush, what attracts people from all over the world, and who are the people who were instrumental in creating, developing and maintaining the beloved track.

by Jim Baker



BIBBULMUN TRACK

The spirit of the Bibbulmun Track is alive in the people that enjoy it, love it and freely give up their time to support it, which begs the question—what is it about the Bibbulmun Track that attracts such a staunch following?

It has been 25 years since the Bibbulmun Track was realigned and extended to stretch from Kalamunda to Albany, and commemorative events throughout this year have brought together followers from around the State, the country and the world to celebrate.

It seems the 1000-kilometre long-distance trail affects all those who experience it in some way or other, which cultivates a loyalty and affection that stays with them long after they've left the bush. Walkers are people of all ages, from all walks of life, from all over Australia and the far reaches of the globe.

We remember the original walkers after whom the track is named—the Bibbulmun people—who walked in the forest for thousands of years before Europeans arrived in Australia and continue to care deeply for the land.

Most walkers are there to enjoy the beauty of the bush—the flowers, trees, birds and other animals and the fantastic scenery of the forests and the coast.

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Main The track near Pemberton.

Photo – Peter Nicholas/DBCA

Inset Volunteer guide, Charmaine Harris on the 25th anniversary walk.

Photo – Justin Macatangay

Above Volunteers on a maintenance work day at Beraking Campsite.

Right The 1998 walkers at the Southern Terminus.

Photos – Bibbulmun Track Foundation



For many, a walk in the bush is an escape from the stress and strain of everyday life:

“We never expected each day to be filled with such adventure, wonder, beauty and spiritual enlightenment. Life as we knew it was thousands of miles away from the simple existence we lived on the Bibbulmun Track.”—Extract from a walker’s note written in the campsite register on the Bibbulmun Track.

For others it is a sense of competitiveness—to walk, or even run more quickly than anyone else for 1000 kilometres—or to prove to themselves that they are physically capable of walking long distances carrying a heavy pack.

There are those for whom the track is an escape route from a powerful emotional event in their lives, the opportunity to use the solitude of the bush to think calmly and regain their hold on life. And many who use it as a teaching aid.

“Bliss—showing my son that there are joys in life that don’t require the use of a power point or the close proximity of a McDonalds.”—Extract from a walker’s note written in the campsite register on the Bibbulmun Track.

Most people who set out to complete an end-to-end enjoy the camaraderie of other walkers and the relish of simple pleasures after weeks of deprivation.

PEOPLE OF THE TRACK

It’s not only the walkers who are the ‘People of the Track’, but also those who made and continue to make their journey possible.

Six people who were instrumental in the development and ongoing enjoyment of the Bibbulmun Track are profiled on pages 16–18, but there are a huge number of others, past and present, including Bob Dixon and Denzell McCotter from Ministry of Justice and the many prisoners who worked, and those that



Discover more about the people of the track

Scan this QR code or visit Parks and Wildlife Service’s ‘LANDSCOPE’ playlist on YouTube.



continue to work, on the track including park rangers and officers in the regions.

It is also important to acknowledge Peter Bidwell from the original project team, Annie Keating, Trail Coordinator with the department as well as Raelene Hicks and Noel Davenport, and those long-serving members of the Board of the Bibbulmun Track Foundation such as Simon Holthouse and Bruce Manning.

The track is managed by the Parks and Wildlife Service at the Department of Biodiversity, Conservation and Attractions in partnership with the Bibbulmun Track Foundation, which is primarily a volunteer organisation utilising some 450 volunteers.

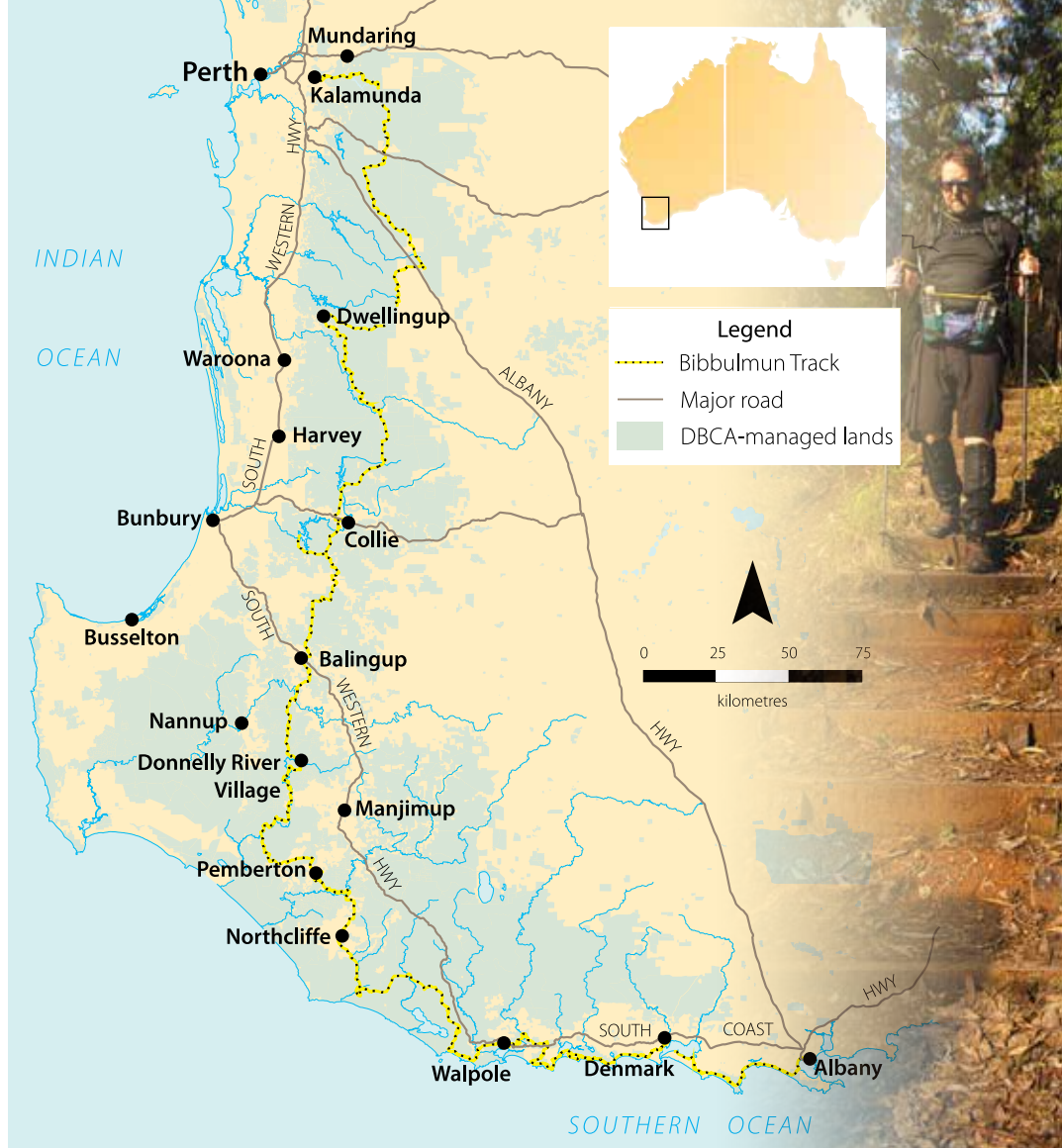
The majority of volunteers perform maintenance work along the track, keeping it in good, walkable condition. Volunteers also work in the Perth Bibbulmun Track Foundation office and from home, providing many services to walkers.

“Giving back” is the reason most volunteers give when asked why they are volunteering. They have enjoyed so much of what the track has to offer and want to offer something in thanks. Others see it as a worthwhile retirement activity.

But perhaps volunteering is more than that:

“I volunteer because of my absolute certainty that the Bibbulmun track fills a very important function in peoples’ lives.”—a volunteer.

“I believe that volunteering is very important for a well-rounded lifestyle. It is good for the soul and the psyche.”
—Steve Sertis.



The anniversary celebrations commenced on 14 July 2023 when eleven walkers set off from Kalamunda to complete the entire track. Other walkers joined them along various sections of the track enabling more than 70 people to take part in the journey. A community celebration was held in each town along the way as the walkers arrived, with the final event in Albany held on 13 September, the official anniversary date. Emotions ran high as the end-to-enders paraded up York Street to the Southern Terminus accompanied by the Albany Pipe Band and cheered by the crowd of well-wishers.

People of the track came from all over to celebrate, online and in person, and all have contributed in some way to the Bibbulmun Track becoming a huge asset and a source of pride for Western Australia.



Above left Volunteers Carol and Jim in the Bibbulmun Track Foundation office.
Photo – Bibbulmun Track Foundation

Top The track near Pemberton.
Photo – Peter Nicholas/DBCA

Above Celebrating completion of the commemorative walk in Albany.
Photo – Justin Macatangay

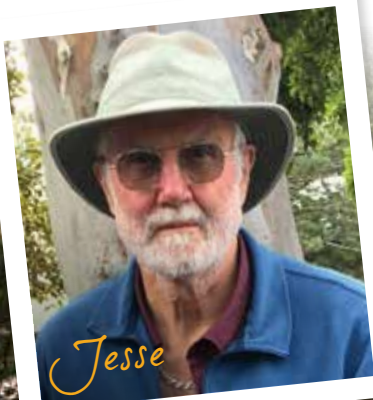
People of the Track

A selection of some key people who were instrumental in the development of the track and the formation and continued operation of the Bibbulmun Track Foundation.

JESSE BRAMPTON

Jesse took up bushwalking in the early 1980s, and in 1987–8 walked the 3450-kilometre Appalachian Trail in the USA. Highlights of this remarkable experience included the open-fronted shelters along the way and the extraordinary volunteer organisation that maintained the trail. On his return to Australia, he end-to-ended the 'old' Bibbulmun Track and was shaken by the comparison—in particular, the extensive road-walking, the lack of facilities and signage and the absence of a genuine connection to the bush.

This led him to submit a detailed proposal to the Department of Conservation and Land Management (CALM) that would see the track upgraded, extended and remodelled, based on the Appalachian Trail. In September 1993, funding from South West Development Commission enabled Jesse to become the Project Coordinator of the Building a Better Bibbulmun Track project.



For the next four years, he was at the centre of the action, working on all aspects of the project—the alignment of the track, the positioning and design of the campsites, the construction of the infrastructure—together with building awareness through the media, creating partnerships with a wide range of organisations and raising funds. Throughout these years, Jesse actively promoted the concept of a community-based association to support management and maintenance of the track, and when the Friends of the Bibbulmun Track was created, northern half of the new track was opened in August. Jesse elected to stand down as Project Coordinator, to become its first Executive Officer.

JIM SHARP

Jim, inspired by landscape architect Wayne Schmidt PM's commitment and desire to upgrade the track, established and headed up a steering committee within CALM in 1993, to redevelop the track through the Building a Better Bibbulmun Track project. Under Jim's guidance the concept became a reality,

producing the fantastic track that we have today. Jim became an inaugural member of the board of the Bibbulmun Track Foundation in 1997, as a representative of the government department responsible for the Bibbulmun Track, firstly representing CALM, then Department of Environment and Conservation and finally Department of Parks and Wildlife. Having Jim (who eventually became the Director General of Department of Parks and Wildlife) on the Board gave the Bibbulmun Track Foundation the confidence of government interest and support and ensured that any concerns and advocacy have been taken seriously. Jim's energy, vitality and enthusiasm for the track and the foundation have been highly instrumental in its success. On his retirement from the board in 2017 he was made the first honorary life member of the Bibbulmun Track Foundation.



Above Conspicuous Cliff near Walpole.
Photo – Marie Lochman

Left Campsites near Pemberton are deep in the forest.

Photo – Peter Nicholas/DBCA



MIKE WOOD

Mike's involvement with the track began in 1993 when he joined the steering committee that oversaw the Building a Better Bibbulmun Track project. Prior to that he had been involved in guiding treks and white-water rafting in Nepal between 1981 and 1986. On his return to Perth, he bought the Mountain Designs store in Hay Street in 1992. Mike was instrumental in establishing the Bibbulmun Track Foundation, recruited all its founding board members and chaired the board from 1997 to 2019. He negotiated the first memorandum of understanding (MOU) between CALM and the Bibbulmun Track Foundation and was instrumental in dividing up the work and responsibilities of the two organisations. He believes that the success of the track comes down to the successful relationship between the department and the foundation.

Mike has been extremely generous in sponsoring and supporting the foundation. For more than 20 years he provided free office space and donated hiking equipment for hire to walkers, as rewards for volunteers and as prizes

for fundraising. He also sponsored the building of the track's Northern Terminus. He became the second person to be awarded honorary life membership of the Bibbulmun Track Foundation and continues as a board member and a volunteer guide. In 2020, Mike was made a Member of the Order of Australia for his work on the Bibbulmun Track, as well as his work in advocating for trail development in WA.

GWEN PLUNKETT

Gwen held down the role of Office Manager for the foundation for 16 years between 2002 and 2018. She and husband Chris developed a passion for walking after a visit to the UK, where friends introduced them to the wonders of the outdoors. They first walked on the Bibbulmun Track in 1996, joined as members of the foundation (then known as the Friends of the Bibbulmun Track) in 1997 and worked as maintenance volunteers in the Perth Hills.

Gwen offered her services in the office in March 1999 to work for one day a week but as the organisation grew exponentially,

Above left Wading through the Pingerup Plains in winter.

Photo – Chris Lee

Above Volunteers upgrade the Tom Road Campsite.

Photo – Bibbulmun Track Foundation

she rapidly became Office Manager, then Volunteer and Maintenance Co-ordinator, working five days a week. She loved her time in the office, meeting so many walkers from all over Australia and the rest of the world, finding that being able to offer advice and see people on their way to a wonderful experience was very rewarding. After many years Gwen began to work fewer days and concentrated her efforts on her work with volunteers, her favourite role. On retirement from the Bibbulmun Track Foundation, Gwen was deservedly made an honorary life member and she still continues as a maintenance volunteer.



Mike



Gwen

“Giving back’ is the reason most volunteers give when asked why they are volunteering. They have enjoyed so much of what the track has to offer and want to offer something in thanks...”



STEVE SERTIS

Steve is the Bibbulmun Track Foundation's Events Manager and Lead Guide. He has been with the foundation since 1997, firstly as a member and then as a maintenance volunteer. He began leading walks and became a member of the staff in 1999. As well as organising the extensive number of events held every year, and leading a number of them himself, Steve is responsible for recruiting, training and assessing the other guides that work as foundation volunteers. He has an extensive knowledge of the track and has walked it end-to-end nine times, including leading the anniversary walks in 2008 and 2023. He made an epic journey in the winter of 2013 when he and another walker undertook a detailed survey of the whole track to update the walk notes for the new version of the guidebooks. Steve continues to work as a Maintenance Volunteer, looking after the Nerang campsite.

LINDA DANIELS

Linda was appointed Executive Director of the Bibbulmun Track Foundation in 2003 taking over from

Becky Shrimpton who had held the role since 1998.

Her first priority was to establish financial support through corporate partnerships and to consolidate the work already started to build up the events calendar, tourism offerings and membership.

One of the first major projects was the development of a new website that was rich in useful information including interactive maps, distance calculators and service providers. This made trip planning far easier for walkers and provided a system to manage memberships, event bookings and other administrative tasks.

Promoting the track outside of WA was a challenging task, so she instigated the Trails WA marketing project to identify the top trails in WA and promote them collectively. This led to her involvement in the broader trails industry, contributing to the development of State trail strategies. Linda's efforts had a great influence on the recognition of the positive impact of trails on both health and regional tourism in Western Australia and in the establishment of Trails WA as a not-for-profit organisation.

Above left Through thick coastal heath, the Walpole to Denmark section.

Photo – Janine Guenther

Top The Northern Terminus in Kalamunda.

Photo – Chris Tate.

Above Bibbulmun Track website.

Below The Bibbulmun Track.

Photo – Peter Nicholas/DBCA



Jim Baker is a volunteer with the Bibbulmun Track Foundation and an avid bushwalker, having completed an end-to-end of the track four times. He can be contacted at jim_baker@bigpond.com

The important work of the Bibbulmun Track Foundation is made possible thanks to the generosity of its major sponsors, Lotterywest and Newmont.

