



A BEAUTY
- Derek
McIntosh
measures a
Tasmanian
Blue Gum
in Western
Australia.

Measuring up Aussie trees

DEREK McIntosh has spent years marvelling at big trees.

Growing up in South Africa, he was interested in birds, and that led to a curiosity about their environment and the trees they lived in.

Later, in the United States, he came across a system of tree measurement used by American Forests - and the seeds of the National Register of Big Trees were sown.

Last year, Derek launched the register website, and already it features details of some impressive specimens.

Funding the project himself, he has travelled to Western Australia and Queensland measuring and photographing trees and talking to local government and residents to chronicle the biggest and best specimens.

"I started with 18 trees in the Sydney Botanic Gardens, then I drove up to Queensland and to Cairns and populated the register, talking to people," Derek said.

"A big tree is a big tree, so people know about it.

"Measuring the really big trees is one thing, but I also try to focus on the trees we see around our parks, gardens and homes."

The register will keep data on Australia's largest specimens of each species, as well as the champion trees in each state and region, with the goal of encouraging tree preservation and conservation.

Each tree is measured based on a points system which considers height (as calculated by triangulation), trunk circumference and crown spread.

"I've always wondered when I see a tree how big it is, and when I saw the American Forests system of giving points to trees I thought this is it.

"It's not just whether you have a big trunk or how high it is, you have regard for the whole tree and you can compare within species."

Trees on the register include a 1500-year-old boab in Derby, WA, and the Daintree's 1000-year-old Hope's cycad.

The biggest tree registered to date is a mountain ash in Geeveston, Tasmania, which scores a whopping 1067 points on the American Forests scale.

■ To nominate a tree or for more information phone 9948-0618, www.nationalregisterofbigtrees.com.au

All set to go digital

MORE than 2000 pensioner households have already received free digital set-top boxes in preparation for the switch to digital television.

The milestone was reached as Mildura prepares to complete the switch on June 30, when the analogue signal to the area will be turned off.

Communications Minister Senator Stephen Conroy said latest figures showed 95 per cent of households were now aware of the approaching switch, and more than two-thirds had converted to digital TV.

About 2000 age and disability support pensioner households have received free digital set-top boxes in the Mildura region, the first in Australia which will go digital-only.

Regional South Australian households which qualify for the Household Assistance Scheme will receive a letter from Centrelink this month in preparation for that region's switch to digital on December 15.

Mr Conroy said more than 90 per cent of Mildura-Sunraysia households were

digital ready and the Digital Switchover Taskforce would be in the region to achieve a smooth transition.

"We will be significantly stepping up our activities with the local community to ensure those households who haven't switched over yet know what they need to do before June 30, 2010," taskforce executive director Andy Townend said.

"This will include providing practical advice on how to switch to digital TV, dealing with local reception issues and helping people who can't get terrestrial digital TV reception to get access to the new satellite TV service."

The Household Assistance Scheme is available six months before and one month after switchover in each region. Eligible households will receive a letter inviting them to contact Centrelink.

A qualified service contractor then will call to make an installation appointment and send a letter to confirm the appointment time. The contractor will not charge for this service.

■ Phone 1800-556-443.