

did you know?

Troy Lennon

How Derek planted a tree-saver

ALTHOUGH we are often cutting trees down because they get in the way of urban development or agriculture, there are times when we can admire trees for what they are and leave them to grow.

When trees are left to grow they can attain some awe-inspiring proportions. So efforts are sometimes made to preserve a piece of natural heritage.

Tree-lover Derek McIntosh (pictured) has been doing his bit to ensure that some respect is afforded our large woody friends by starting the National Register of Big Trees two years ago.

Born in South Africa, McIntosh was inspired by a similar register he saw in the US when he lived there for a time. "It was the most stunning collection of information about the biggest trees of every species," he says.

"That's what really spurred me, because I have often wondered what is the biggest tree."

There are different criteria for judging which trees are the biggest. Some trees are extremely tall, others have a broad spreading canopy, while others have



impressive girths for their trunks.

McIntosh says: "The Americans have developed a formula to compare trees. There is some debate about the formula but the fact is it has been going for 75 years and at least it is a standard comparative tool."

When McIntosh moved to Australia he wondered which of our trees was the biggest in this country. He began collecting the information and publishing it on the internet.

"I started with 19 trees in the Sydney Botanic Gardens and now we are up to 460. I've travelled a lot around Australia, but I have also had one fellow down in South Australia who has nominated nearly 50 trees."

People often nominate trees or spot them for McIntosh, who then checks them out for registration on the website: nationalregisterofbigtrees.com.au

The register has trees from all over Australia, with quite a few from Sydney. "There are ones in the Botanic Gardens of course but also Centennial Park, Gordon, Killara," McIntosh says.

Some of the trees have been threatened by development or sometimes they just grow too big to continue living in an urban environment.

"I certainly get a lot of people calling me and asking can you help with this tree. They say can't you list the tree and save it. I'm pretty sympathetic, of course, but I say I can only list it." Listing doesn't give the tree any protection other than drawing attention to it.

Sometimes there is nothing that can save a tree even if it is on the list. "Two trees on the list have burned down in forest fires," says McIntosh.

Gardens offer journey down memory lanes

TIME travel may remain a frustrating impossibility. But thanks to displays recently installed at the Sydney Botanic Gardens, it is possible to get a glimpse of what visitors might have seen there in the 19th century.

Banners showing images from postcards from the late 19th and early 20th centuries give some idea of the major changes in the gardens over the last century and some of the things that have largely remained the same.

Before European incursions, the area that would become the Botanic Gardens was used by the Aborigines as an initiation ground. The transformation of the area from virgin forest to landscaped garden began with the arrival of the First Fleet in 1788. Cattle were put ashore from the ships at what the Aborigines called Wocannmagully, but is now known as Farm Cove, and convicts were set to the task of clearing the land in preparation for planting food crops. But the experiments in planting grain were a failure, thanks to the poor soil and the rats eating the crops.

The gardens were originally part of the Government Domain, lands set aside by Governor Arthur Phillip in 1792 exclusively for the use of the governor. The governor's house was built on the edge of the domain with areas planted with gardens of native and imported plants as well as an orchard.

Under Phillip and some successive governors, portions of the land were being leased out to people for homes, market gardens and businesses. A windmill and a brewery were just some of the uses for the land.

When Governor William Bligh evicted some of the

tenants on the government domain during his brief reign as governor it sowed some of the seeds of discontent that led to the Rum Rebellion of 1808. Even though some of the evictees were allowed back during the time the rebels ran the colony, Governor Lachlan Macquarie eventually kicked out the last of the lessees and tore down the windmill. He built a wall around the gardens so that he and his wife Elizabeth could have some privacy. Parts of the stone wall still exist within the gardens.

Work on a roadway through the gardens was completed in 1816, when Macquarie declared the now landscaped gardens a public park. However, it would not actually be opened to the public until 1830, during which time a succession of landscapers worked on transforming the land into a colonial showpiece to rival the great gardens of Europe. Macquarie was later called to task by Commissioner John Thomas Bigge for his spending on landscaping the gardens.

It was money well spent, not only did the gardens preserve a green space for the growing town of Sydney but they were also the site of important botanical research, gave starving cattle a place to graze and even played host to the inaugural first class cricket match in the colony.

In the 1870s such was the pride of the city in its gardens that the site was selected as the site to build the Garden Palace to house the International Exhibition. Bedecked with Italian marble copies of

Time goes by: Images featuring the Royal Botanic Gardens in 1914 (above) and (below) ruins of the palace, with the Huntsman and Dogs statue Pictures: Royal Botanic Gardens

classical sculptures the Palace was a showpiece of the colony until a fire destroyed the structure in 1882.

A photograph on display at the gardens shows the ruins of the palace, its marble statues destroyed, with the familiar Huntsman and Dogs statue in the foreground. The statue, an iron and copper "imitation bronze" was erected in the gardens in 1879 and despite moving a few metres can still be seen.

After the fire the space on which the Palace stood became part of the gardens again and more statues were acquired creating an avenue of marble statues that can be seen in old postcards. Over the years of the statues were defaced, some stolen, some of the nudes were removed after protests from an archbishop in 1910. By the 1970s many of the marbles, decaying or simply starting to look unfashionably old, were finally removed.

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on this day

44BC

Julius Caesar, dictator of the Roman Republic, is assassinated by a group of senators led by Gaius Cassius.

1877

Australia's first official cricket Test against England begins at Melbourne Cricket Ground. Australia will win by 45 runs. Australia's Charles Bannerman scores 165 runs in the first innings before a ball splits his finger to the bone.

1937

The first central "bank" to preserve blood by refrigeration to be used for transfusions is set up at Cook County Hospital in Chicago, US.

1953

Detective-Sergeant Ray Kelly shoots safecracker Lloyd

Edward Day, 32, dead in Drummoyno in a car chase.

1955

The Labor Party begins a federal conference in Hobart that sees it split in the wake of its Opposition leader Bert Evatt's attack on its anti-communist right wing.

1973

Labor attorney-general Lionel Murphy leads federal police on the first of two raids on ASIO offices. He feared that the spy agency would not protect the Yugoslav prime minister on his coming visit to Australia.

2002

A Brisbane jury finds Robert Long guilty of murder and arson. He set fire to a hostel at Childers in 2000, causing 15 deaths. Long, a fruit picker, is later sentenced to 20 years jail.

1933

Errol starts a loud movie era

Australian filmmaker Charles Chauvel, 35, releases his first sound film in Sydney. Errol Flynn, 23, makes his debut in *The Wake Of The Bounty*. It includes an enactment of the 1789 mutiny against British naval captain William Bligh but is part documentary.

Flynn, who plays mutiny leader Fletcher Christian, is shown (centre) in 1954 with Chauvel and his actress wife Elsa, or Elsie. Tasmanian-born Flynn had taken up acting after managing a tobacco plantation in New Guinea, where he became notorious for unpaid debts.

