



The formation of The Bibbulmun Track and the Bibbulmun Track Foundation



The purpose of this document is firstly to provide a history of the evolution of the Bibbulmun Track, from its conception up to the present day. Secondly it describes the formation and current operation of the support system that exists to ensure the sustainability and development of the Track as a major recreational and tourist facility, and thirdly offers advice to others who may wish to develop a similar facility of their own.

Section One of the document describes the history of the conception and construction of the Track through its various phases.

Section Two describes the management, marketing and maintenance of the Track after its construction was completed. It also records the formation of the 'The Friends of the Bibbulmun Track' (FOBT), now known as the 'Bibbulmun Track Foundation' (BTF), and briefly describes how the organisation operates at the present time.

Section Three is designed to provide information and ideas for any organisation that wishes to undertake what the BTF has done.

Section One. The Evolution and Construction of the Bibbulmun Track.

a) Early History.

1972. Geoff Schafer, an avid bushwalker, approached the then Minister for Forests with an idea for a long distance walking trail in WA to encourage people to discover the bush. The concept was approved and a team from the Forest Department began planning possible routes.

1974. A number of ideas were considered, and finally a route from Kalamunda to Northcliffe was selected. The first alignment was marked on the ground in March 1974.

1979. The Bibbulmun Track was officially opened in October, as part of WA's 150th year celebrations.

1988. The Department of CALM (Conservation and Land Management) undertook a significant overhaul of the Track, including an extension to Walpole. By now it was estimated that between 5,000 and 10,000 people were using the Track annually.

1993. By the early nineties, the growth of the mining and forestry sectors, increased water catchment areas and road development were impacting heavily on the Track. In October 1993 CALM made the decision to undertake a major overhaul of the Track and to turn it into one of the world's great long distance trails.

For this purpose, the "Building a Better Bibbulmun Track Project" (hereafter referred to as "The Project") was set up, which, for the purposes of this document, will be taken as the starting point of the recent history of the Track.

b) The Project.

The Project was run by a Steering Committee, consisting of:

Jim Sharp, Wayne Schmidt and Marg Buckland, all from CALM, Les Cousins of the Peel Development Commission, Fred Robinson of the SW Development Authority, Jay Cook of the Great Southern Development Authority, Peter Kemp of the WA Tourism Commission, Mike Wood from Mountain Designs and Jesse Brampton as the Project Contractor.

Four Stages of the Project were envisaged:

- 1) Alignment, planning and selection.
- 2) Assessment of a management models, resource availability and funding options.
- 3) Development of information systems.
- 4) Construction of the Track and facilities.

A preliminary target date of September 1995 for the opening of the new trail was set.

The “model” chosen for the new Track was the Appalachian Trail in the USA, and close connections were made with the Appalachian Trail Conference. Requests for information were also sent out to the trail managers of other long-distance trails in Australia.

1) Alignment

A great number of factors had to be considered with regard to the physical alignment of the Track. The goal to achieve was to produce a Track which:

- a) Maximised the quality of the users’ experience.
- b) Minimised conflicts of interest.
- c) Attained a high level of integrity as a world class trail.
- d) Offered a safe experience to as broad a range of people as possible.

Visits were made to all the CALM District offices along the Track by the project coordinator, Jesse Brampton, and discussions also held with officers of the forest Regions, the Water Authority and Westrail, the latter with a view to incorporating old railway formations into the new Track.

As a result of these meetings, and much painstaking ground work, the Committee were able to present a recommendation for the new alignment, including the extension of the Track to Albany, in February 1994.

The recommendation took into account six major parameters:

- 1) User amenity and Track integrity - scenery, track surface, permanence, proximity to towns, access, campsite locations.
- 2) Minimisation of conflict of interests - mining, forestry, water catchment, private property.
- 3) Management and maintenance.
- 4) Tourism potential.
- 5) Finance - construction costs and potential income.
- 6) Environmental issues - erosion, spread of die-back.

The recommendation was accepted, which meant that less than 20% of the original alignment of the Track was retained.

2) Construction Management, Finance and Information.

Stage two then commenced, with a target completion date of June 1994. Its brief was as follows:

- a) Investigate various means for the administration and management of the Track, discuss them with the various stakeholders, assess them with regard to the financial, administrative and community involvement and recommend the most appropriate format.
- b) Prepare a communications plan to inform the wider community of the Project, and brief the community at large.
- c) Identify sources of sponsorship and funding.
- d) Prepare a budget for the construction phase of the Project.

It was decided, given the magnitude of the task in hand, that CALM would retain the responsibility of management, at least through the construction phase of the Project. At this stage the alignment was accepted, and public support was evident. Funding became the pressing need. An early budget had indicated that if everything were to be obtained on a cash basis, the Project would cost \$1.25m over the next few years.

In order to reduce this cash burden, investigation was made of possible supply of both materials and labour, key requirements being materials, especially timber, transport for the construction crews, tools and man-power.

Initial positive responses were received from the CALM/Alcoa Forest Enhancement Programme, Great Southern and SW Development Commissions, Westrek and the Ministry of Justice. In addition many local bush-walking clubs offered support as well as a variety of service clubs and local government authorities.

The first edition of Bibbulmun News was produced in November 1993.

At this stage of the proceedings, more emphasis was placed on involving the community at large in the Project. In April 1994 a submission outlining the Project was forwarded to the State Cabinet for consideration, and the Premier made a public announcement regarding the upgrading and extension of the Track. This spoke of the Track's capacity to become an icon for the tourist industry of WA and stressed the need for community involvement in the Project, and demonstrated the support of the Government for nature-based tourism initiatives.

In addition, letters and information brochures were sent out to local government bodies, regional tourist centres, Aboriginal corporations, community groups and bush-walking clubs. The response was outstanding, and it became clear that some means of harnessing the public enthusiasm to make it productive was necessary. It was at this time that the first concept of a "club" or association which interested people could join began to surface. All people who contacted the project office were placed on a mailing list for Bibbulmun News that kept the community and stakeholders informed of progress.

3) Construction

In September 1994 an important development occurred with the formalization of the involvement of the Ministry of Justice, through a trial joint-venture. Six weeks later the first four kilometres of the new Track had been constructed by a work crew from Wooroloo Prison Farm, and the first new shelter built at Waalegh campsite.

The completion dates for the construction were revised at this time, and more realistic goals of September 1st 1995 for the Northern section and September 1st 1996 for the Southern section were set.

Construction work continued at a steady pace over the next few months, assisted by the approval of Landcare and Employment Action (LEAP) projects in Collie and Albany, whereby local unemployed youth would construct new campsites and Track facilities. At this time the necessity for volunteers to maintain the campsites became apparent.

In August 1995 the first section of the new Track, from Kalamunda to Brookton Highway, was officially opened, and a new map of the section, incorporating Track notes, produced. Funding was still a matter of on-going concern. The absence of large scale Government financial support meant that funding consisted of small to moderate commitments from various sources, without a major allocation, which restricted clear forward planning.

Goals therefore were reset for completion of the Northern section by late 1996 and the Southern section by late 1997, depending on the availability of resources. Construction work continued, with a steady increase in the number of individual sponsors.

Circumstances changed dramatically on February 10th, 1996, when it was announced that a grant had been made to the Project, from the Federal Department of Housing and Regional Development (RDO). The grant was worth \$1.38 million dollars over a two year period, and included a contractual obligation to complete the Track by May 1st 1998. This enabled the contracting of extra staff so that the project team grew from one to five by September 2006.

This influx of funds enabled the pace of construction to speed up considerably over the next twelve months, and in February 1997 the Project Team announced firm dates for the opening of the whole, redeveloped Track as 15 August 1997 for the northern section and 15 August 1998 for the southern section, and the Northern section was formally opened by the Premier of WA, Richard Court on 14 August 1997. The 'new' Northern section of the Track was 453 kilometers in length and featured 26 upgraded campsites. It connected with the 'old' Southern section at Karri gully on the Brockman Highway. Four new maps were produced to cover the new Track.

At this point, Jesse Brampton, who had spent four years as the contract Project Coordinator, elected to stand down. His position was taken by Peter Bidwell, a CALM staff member and Assistant Coordinator.

Work continued apace on the 'new' Southern section, including the extension of the Track from Walpole to Albany. Further funding was obtained under the Federal Government's Green Corps Aboriginal Traineeship scheme for construction work in the West Cape Howe National Park. The close working relationship established with the Ministry of Justice also bore fruit with the inmates from the Pardelup prison work camp performing a range of tasks on the Track in the Walpole area.

Finally the Southern section was completed, and the great day arrived, with the Minister for the Environment opening the whole Track on 13 September 1998. An 'end-to-end' walk was organised to celebrate the opening. The final Track was 963.1 kilometers in length, and contained 48 campsites. Prisoners were presented with certificates of achievement – as at the 1997 opening.

The Project had been completed, and the work of the Project Team was done. The Track with all its facilities was there but another era was beginning. Now it had to be managed, marketed and maintained. Peter Bidwell moved on and Annie Keating took over as Coordinator.

However, before embarking on the next stage of development and the formation of the 'Friends of the Bibbulmun Track', it is worth looking back in a little more detail at what was needed to make a project of this magnitude succeed. The answer being...

Vision, Enthusiasm, Belief, Dedication, Money, Politics and Serendipity...

...all of the above and a lot more besides.

The vision, looking at the concept of the Track from 1993 onward, has to be largely credited to Jesse Brampton. The idea of a long distance walk trail had come from Geoff Schafer twenty years earlier, and was a wonderful concept in itself. There were other visionaries, but it was Jesse, who had walked the Appalachian Trail between May 1987 and September 1988, and then subsequently walked the 'old' Bibbulmun Track, who initially approached CALM with his ideas regarding a 'new' Track.

The project was designated as a 'realignment' but in fact less than 20% of the original Track alignment remained when the new Track was opened.

The enthusiasm for the project to succeed was shared by many people, and that same enthusiasm remains with those who are involved with the Bibbulmun Track today. With the early enthusiasm came belief in the success of the project. The extent of the belief held by the group that comprised the original project team was enormous.

Just consider what they had elected to undertake—the construction of an almost completely new Track, almost a thousand kilometers long, with the necessary infrastructure of shelters, water tanks and toilets. All of which was budgeted to cost well over one million dollars—and they had little or no money allocated to the project. Yes, the application for the RDO grant was in place, but would they get it? The dedication of that team was enormous. It could be said that this was a project just like many others and that they were doing the job they were being paid to do, but each and every member of that team, and many others beside, gave far more in terms of time and effort than a mere 'job' demanded.

Money was of course of primary importance, and the early days of the work were necessarily conducted in a 'hand to mouth' scenario. A great deal of work went into wooing sponsors for the project. It must also be remembered that it was not just cash that was required. The community responded with money, but also with timber, tools and machinery and 'hands-on' assistance.

The individuals and organisations that sponsored the project are far too many to name in this short document. However one organisation which made a huge contribution deserves special mention. The then Ministry of Justice not only provided funding for materials, but had people of vision within the organisation who were in a position to initiate and implement very creative partnerships to build vital track infrastructure using prison crews.

Track shelters were prefabricated in the prison workshops and gangs of prisoners permitted to work on the construction of the Track itself. Not only that, but the very first prison work camp, which allowed prisoners to remain outside their walls of confinement overnight, was set up for men who were working on the Bibbulmun Track. A recent interview with a retired prison officer, who supervised some of these men, shed an interesting light on these events.

"Not only," he said, "was this an enormous boost to morale, but our records showed that the guys who worked on these projects had a far lower record of re-offending than normal. The lifting of their self esteem was enormous." A lesson to be learned?

Funding was given a boost of astronomic proportions by the Federal grant of \$1.38 million in 1996, which, with its contractual obligations, transformed the project, and allowed the Bibbulmun Track to be what it is today— a long-distance trail of international importance.

Politics may have been the reason that the Federal grant was made. Politics raised its head at many stages during the course of the project. Politics were possibly the reason the project was even allowed to begin. Internal politics were ever present. They are mentioned in this discourse simply as a warning—politics will ever be present.

And lastly, **Serendipity**— *'the occurrence and development of events by chance in a happy and beneficial way'*.

So many things came together at the right time. It couldn't have all been coincidental. There was a vast amount of hard work, sweat, blood and tears. But somebody, somewhere, had determined this Track would be constructed. But how to sustain it?

Section Two. Management, Marketing and Maintenance of the 'New' Track.

a) The Concept.

Again, credit has to be given to the vision of Jesse Brampton for the concept of a bush trail that would be sustained by the efforts of the communities through which it passed.

Jesse walked the Appalachian Trail, on the east coast of the USA, between 1987 and 1988—all 3400 kilometres. He, like many others, was struck by the wonders of the wilderness, and affected by the camaraderie of other walkers, but one particular event stuck in Jesse's mind.

He walked into a campsite and encountered three generations of a family; grandfather, father and son. The grandfather explained that this was "Their section of the Trail." The Appalachian Trail was completed in 1937, and since that time had been maintained by volunteers who each had responsibility for "their" piece of the Trail.

He came back to WA and walked the Bibbulmun Track in 1989—on gravel roads, with no shelters, little water, limited signage—and so went to CALM to plead for improved facilities. But it wasn't just that—the concept of a community support group to sustain a long distance walk track was already in his mind.

By 1997, with half of the Track already open, and the southern half already well into the construction stage, it had already become clear that if the Bibbulmun Track were to be sustainable, support from sources other than CALM would be required.

The concept of an external body loosely based on the concept of 'The Friends of the Heysen Trail' in South Australia had been touched upon as early as 1994, when various management structures were being debated. However at that time it was decided that CALM would retain full management control—during the construction period.

In February 1997 the proposal to set up 'The Friends of the Bibbulmun Track', a group dedicated to provide resource assistance, both financial and 'in kind', to support CALM in managing the Track, was put to CALM.

CALM were initially opposed to the concept. I quote from a document dated March 1997:

"CALM does not support the establishment of such a foundation at this time. The concern that an alternative body would be established to develop and manage the track if a foundation is established is a real one. Recent publicity in the media has caused considerable concern because that publicity has created the impression that CALM is not responsible for the ongoing development and management of the track. As you will be aware the redevelopment is a Government initiative which has received direct and indirect support from CALM amounting to several hundreds of thousands of dollars."

b) The 'Friends'.

It was therefore left to a number of strong minded individuals to go ahead and set up a support organisation without the blessing of CALM.

Jesse had a powerful ally in Mike Wood, the Managing Director of Mountain Designs, who had been associated with the project from the start. Mountain Designs were one of the early sponsors of the Track, and had supplied the funds to construct the Northern Terminus, at Kalamunda.

Mike was a good friend of Bruce Manning, the Executive Officer for the Southern Province Projects Group, which had been the recipient of the Federal grant for the construction of the Track. They had trekked together in Nepal.

Mike approached Simon Holthouse, the Chairman of the WA Planning commission, another man with whom he had trekked in the Himalayas.

Others were approached, and so a group of people were established, through a network of friends and friends of friends—a collection of like-minded people who were prepared to give their time freely for what they saw as a very worthwhile cause. There is an echo of serendipity here too, I feel.

These people would make up the Board of what would become “The Friends of the Bibbulmun Track”.

c) Structure and Name.

For legal and financial reasons it was decided initially to set up the ‘The Friends of the Bibbulmun Track’ as a Not-for-Profit Incorporated Association.

The definition of such an organisation is fairly complex, but fundamentally requires that it is a listed company, it has a legal basis that enables it to sign contracts and open bank accounts, and that it offers no pecuniary advantage to its members.

There are no shareholders, and any profits made through its activities are used for the purpose stated in its constitution—in this case to provide resource assistance to support the Department of CALM (now DEC) in managing the Bibbulmun Track.

The period between April and July 1997 saw the necessary legal steps completed. Negotiations were continued with CALM which resulted in the Department’s acceptance of the clearly inevitable formation of the association. It was agreed that CALM should have two representatives on the Board.

Finally on 6 August 1997, the organisation held its inaugural board meeting.

The Board at that time consisted of:

Mike Wood (Chairman)	Managing Director of Mountain Designs WA
Simon Holthouse (Dep. Chair):	Chairman of the WA Planning Commission
Bruce Manning:	Executive Officer for the Southern Province Projects Group
Geoff Klem:	Principal Adviser to the Deputy Premier
Annette Knight:	Mayor of Albany
Bob Greig:	Previously a Manager with Griffin Coal, a corporate sponsor
Leonie Kirk:	Previous Assistant Principal of All Saint’s College
Jim Sharp:	CALM Director of Parks, Planning, Tourism and Recreation
Wayne Schmidt:	CALM Programme Co-ordinator for Parks, Planning, and Tourism

At this meeting Jim Sharp outlined the perception that CALM had for the future relationship between the two organisations. He stated that CALM welcomed the formation of the Friends of the Bibbulmun Track and acknowledged that the expertise, interests and experience of the Board would be of great value in the partnership between CALM and the Friends.

Part of the Federal Grant had been earmarked for use in establishing the future sustainability of the Track, and this gave the association a source of funding through which an office facility could be set up and preliminary marketing strategies initiated.

d) Goals.

There were three major goals set by the FOBT in 1997:

- 1) To establish a stable resource base to run the organisation and to make a significant contribution to the management of the Track.
- 2) To work with CALM to ensure the Track is of the highest quality.
- 3) To encourage widespread community involvement and environmental awareness to ensure the well-being of the Track and its surrounding environment.

In order to achieve these goals, an action plan was drawn up:

- 1) Develop resources (sponsors).
- 2) Derive a strong membership base, and a volunteer programme for Track management.
- 3) Establish the FOBT as the primary community based organisation of the Track and encourage community access to the Track.
- 4) Maintain a positive and productive relationship with CALM.
- 5) Develop tourism.
- 6) Develop a pool of expertise that could be applied to decisions affecting the management of the Track.

e) The First Two Years.

The first two years in the life of the FOBT saw the groundwork laid that still forms the basis of the organisation today.

Funding remained critical and was pursued from two sources; sponsorship and the setting up of a membership base, from which an annual membership fee would be forthcoming. At the same time the possibility of selling Track related merchandise was considered.

Maintenance of the Track was of primary importance, and the establishment of a Volunteer Maintenance Programme was a high priority.

Marketing of the organisation through radio, newspaper and magazine promotion was undertaken, and in November 1998 investigations began into the creation of a website.

Office facilities were obtained in the city through the generous support of the Perth branch of Mountain Designs which provided accommodation in its building. A Memorandum of Understanding (MOU) with CALM was drawn up, which laid out the obligations and responsibilities of both organisations with regards to the management of the Track.

In mid-1998, Jesse Brampton, who had taken on the task of executive officer of the FOBT after leaving the Project Team, resigned. Once again our friend serendipity stepped in, in the form of Becky Shrimpton. Becky called the FOBT to offer her services as a volunteer, and quickly proved to be an excellent candidate for the position of EO, which she held very successfully for five years.

In July 1998 a Strategic Plan was developed, in accordance with the following Mission Statement:

“To support the management of the Bibbulmun Track so that it becomes and remains a long distance walk trail of international significance and quality” through:

- Community participation, ownership and education.
- Developing opportunities for tourism, employment and training
- Advocacy for the protection of the natural and heritage values of the Track
- Attracting funds and other resources.
- Promoting the Track as accessible to all.

These objectives still remain in place today as the basis through which the organisation supports the management of the Track.

f) 1999 to the Present Day.

- In 2002 it was agreed that the FOBT would be renamed as “The Bibbulmun Track Foundation” to better represent the nature of the organisation.
- A new MOU was drawn up in 2005 between CALM and the Foundation that updated and expanded the obligations of both parties.
- The use of the Bibbulmun Track has grown exponentially over the last few years, which has meant an enormous increase in demand upon the staff and volunteers.

A few comparisons between the first two years and the present day emphasise the point:

- In mid 1998, there were approximately 300 members in various categories—today there are in excess of 2400. There were 32 trained volunteers working on the Track, compared to around 300 now. There was one computer in the office; today there are seven computer stations in full time use.
- In 1999/2000 the office was open three days a week, closed for the whole of January, with one part-time staff member and one (occasionally two) volunteers a day. Today, the office is open year-round, five days a week. There are two full-time and three part-time staff, and usually three volunteers a day in the office to handle enquiries, event bookings, memberships etc.
- A calendar of events was being prepared containing five or six events for the year, compared with the two half-yearly calendars now in existence, each containing 25 to 30 events. A website was being discussed—the current Bibbulmun Track website has in excess of 100 pages.
- With regard to merchandise, one or two items were being offered, compared to the twenty or so now, which do not include the books and maps relating to the Track.

Currently there is no indication that this increase in interest and use of the Track will not continue.

Section Three. How do we do what the BTF has done?

Assuming that your objective is to set up a group to support an existing trail, these are some of the major points to consider, all of which relate to the discourse above.

- 1) What are you trying to achieve? Do you have a strategic plan of your objectives?
- 2) Who is physically responsible for the existence of the trail? If you intend to set up a management facility, where do bodies such as land managers, councils, Government departments, and private landowners etc, fit into the scheme? Where do your responsibilities obligations begin and where do they end? Do you have the support of these external organisations?
- 3) What will be the format of your organisation? A not for profit association is not difficult to set up, although legislation varies from State to State. You will need a Board of Directors. Can you attract people with sufficient influence? Who will do so?
- 4) Where is the money coming from? Corporate sponsors, government, members, sale of merchandise, events on your trail?
- 5) How are you going to market your organisation and set up your membership base? Press, media, website, mail-out?
- 6) Do you have a base of volunteers? If so, how are you going to organise it? If not, how are you going to create one?

As a further guide, the following are a series of questions that have been put to the BTF in the past. The answers may be of assistance in your planning.

1) What planning, management or organisational factors made your trail a success? Can you give a history of this?

Regarding the construction of the Track, refer to the paragraphs above relating to the Project. There was a great advantage in the fact that only one agency was primarily involved in the construction of the Track, and that agency had representation in all the areas through which the Track was planned to pass. The underlying management secret was to have a small team of dedicated people to run the project, who understood the bush and who believed in the need for such a recreational facility as a walk track

As far as the Foundation is concerned the success came initially from the foresight of those who, despite Government disapproval, set up the FOBT in the first place, and secondly from the calibre of personnel who were recruited on to the Board.

Even more important, success has come about because of the tireless work of the volunteers and the Foundation Staff. Without this resource the Track could never have the position it holds today. In other words you must have dedicated volunteers and a properly designed programme with which to organise them.

2) What was your vision and did you have a mentor—person or trail?

To answer the second part of the question first; yes and yes! It was undoubtedly Jesse Brampton, with his experience of the Appalachian Trail, who was the mentor, and the Appalachian Trail was the model for the Bibbulmun Track.

Without people with the vision and drive of people like Jesse and Jim Sharp of CALM such projects would never succeed.

The vision was for a trail which would primarily be a source of recreation, available to all, sustainable through the efforts of the local communities through which it passed and at the same time bringing benefits to those communities. It would have to be a tourist attraction, in order to raise funds from visitors and to be regarded favourably by State Government.

3) What was your strategy to achieve such a vision?

Once it was clear that sufficient funds were available to make the construction of the whole Track a viable proposition, the formation of an organisation that could raise funds and “in-kind” assistance became a high priority.

Refer back to the paragraphs on the formation of the FOBT/BTF.

4) What support was critical to the success of the Trail?

For the construction, federal government, corporate sponsorship, the immense assistance from the then Ministry of Justice, the agreement from many authorities such as Westrek, local shires, local bushwalking clubs, Aboriginal bodies...the list goes on and on. It is important that if a trail is to be constructed, all relevant bodies are involved at the outset.

From the perspective of the Foundation, support through corporate sponsorship has been extremely important. However, what really determines the success or failure of such an undertaking is the calibre of the people involved in the running of the organisation.

The reason for the success of the Bibbulmun Track Foundation starts at Board level, where high profile people are prepared to give time and effort for free. Add to this the drive and enthusiasm of the executive officer and her staff, plus the work done by the myriad of volunteers. This is the support critical to the success of the Track.

5) What were (are) the three most important factors for the Trail’s success?

- 1) The belief, vision and sheer hard graft of the Project Team and all the construction crews.
- 2) The setting up of what is now the Bibbulmun Track Foundation, and the subsequent co-operation with CALM.
- 3) The dedication of all the volunteers who work on behalf of the Track. (It should be noted that in addition to their paid work – all Foundation staff have also given countless volunteer hours over the years.)

6) What would you do differently next time?

This is impossible to answer. Nothing in the overall concept—it has worked, and if it ain’t broke, don’t try to mend it.

To conclude, you will need three things to make your Trail a success:-

Vision.

Belief.

Dedication.

Given those, you can achieve anything. Then go out, and in the words of one of our many Bibbulmun Track End-to-Enders:—

“Strap your backpack to a star...”

JPB April 2007