

FACT FILE

Getting there

The Bibbulmun Track runs 1000 km from Kalamunda near Perth to Albany in Western Australia.

Where to camp

There are 49 campsites along the Track, which are spaced a day's walk apart. Refer to **www.bibbulmuntrack.org.au** for locations

When to g

The best times to walk the Track are in autumn (April to May), winter (June to August) and spring (September to mid-November).

Further information

For more information: **www.bibbulmuntrack.org.au** Phone: (08) 9481 0551.

Please refer to the website for up-to-date information if you are planning a walk or if you are interested in volunteering.

Important Bushfire update information

The Bibbulmun Track Foundation recently advised that, for the first time since the summer 2015 bushfires, an Endto-End journey is now possible.

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Sections of the track have either been re-opened or diversions have been put in place. Please refer to the website for information on diversions. Do not rely on previous maps or books. Please note that some huts have not been rebuilt as yet so you might need to carry a tent or shelter.



he 2015 summer bushfires in Western Australia's south-west that destroyed thousands of hectares of bushland, national parks and private property, also had a devastating effect on parts of the 1000-kilometre Bibbulmun Track.

Listed by National Geographic in 2014 as one of the world's top twenty walk trails, the loss of four campsites and several bridges, including the historic Long Gully Bridge over the Murray River and the closure of large sections of the track in the Helena, Lower Hotham and Northcliffe areas shattered the Bibbulmun Track Foundation, its members, volunteers and those who have walked the track and feel a connection to it.

After seeing first-hand the tragic obliteration of the Long Gully Bridge I was interested to hear how the losses had affected those involved with the track and to learn about the maintenance work carried out by its 300 volunteers. So, I accompanied two volunteers, Wendy Pittick and Pat O'Leary, along 'their' section

either side of the Grimwade campsite north of Balingup.

It was the first time they had been there since the bushfires and as we approached the campsite they were brought to a standstill by a large section of bush that had been destroyed by bushfire only a few hundred metres from the campsite.

Their reactions were a mixture of sorrow at the destruction and relief that the hut had been saved. We could see where bulldozers had cleared a rough firebreak around the campsite to protect it.

'When we first heard about the bushfires south of Northcliffe and north of Collie everybody who has ever walked or volunteered knew that our track was at risk, and I did feel very sad, sick, sorry,' Wendy explained.

'I have always had a fear and respect for fire – the ferocity of it. When I went out to the Long Gully Bridge I was speechless. However, we live in Australia and we are never going to be totally fire proof. But I believe the Bibbulmun Track will always be here; it will be resilient. It might have to

be rerouted, but it will prevail.'

Wendy Pittick became involved with the Bibbulmun Track after moving to the south-west of the state in 1999 when she joined the Bunbury Bushwalking Club and then the Bunbury Adventure Pursuits Club.

'Both groups are passionate supporters of the Bibbulmun Track, did a lot of bushwalking and were very experienced and supportive. The Pursuits Club were the volunteers for this section of the track, so I started coming out with them,' she recalled. 'It was a great way to learn from experienced walkers about equipment and food, and to become more skilled in expertise and knowledge.

'In 2004, I became a registered volunteer and later invited Pat O'Leary to join me. Since then we've brought many friends out here and promoted the track. I enjoy bringing people here who perhaps have never had the opportunity.'

She also explained how the Foundation gives comprehensive training to volunteers.

'They hold annual field days for each region, which is an opportunity for all the

volunteers from the regions to meet as a team, have contact with the Volunteer Coordinator and Department of Parks and Wildlife (DPaW) staff.

'At the field days we're given a training update, for example, white ant management, constructing water bars to prevent the erosion of the track and how much trimming we need to do. You can access the Bibbulmun Track Foundation people any week day and they're very generous with knowledge and support. We feel very valued as volunteers, especially when we read notes of thanks from walkers.

'Pat and I volunteer to maintain the Grimwade campsite here and the nine kilometres of the track either side, which we do quarterly. We carry out light maintenance tasks including pruning, clearing debris from the track, replacing missing trail markers, installing water bars, removing litter, sweeping the shelter, and checking water tanks. All major maintenance tasks are carried out by the DPaW staff.

'We're fortunate that our section is only an hour from home and it's a relatively easy

section to maintain because the forest here is not as dense as in some sections where it's really hard work and almost needs mechanical assistance.'

Anyone wanting to walk the Bibbulmun Track can access information from the Foundation website or go into the office for advice.

'The website is very comprehensive,' Wendy added. 'There is track information, lists you can print off, tips about fitting and carrying a back-pack, weight distribution, first aid, preparation, safety, and track protocols.

'The Foundation recommends a variety of fabulous activities from short one-day walks to overnight and guided walks, group activities, and one-pot cooking classes. Plus, it offers valuable support to people planning to do an End-to-End (full length of the track journey).'

Wendy highly recommends both volunteering and walking the track.

'The Foundation is always looking for volunteers. Realistically, you don't have to be particularly skilled, as long as you have some fitness and you're prepared to use

your car. With the training and education you're given it's very pleasurable, but it does depend on the individual whether you think it's easy or not.

'Personally, I think the returns are enormous. You don't have to be a great bushwalker and the track is very well signposted with the Waugal markers.

'It's so peaceful being out here – getting back to nature recharges my batteries.'

Pat O'Leary agrees. 'Everyone's life is so busy, so when you actually come out here you realise how beautiful it is. You're reinvigorated to come out more often. It's just lovely getting out in the bush. It's amazing to see how the vegetation along every part of the track is quite different and how the changes happen so gradually.

'It's also a great way to reconnect with people because you're spending all day with them and you're not diverted by social media or anything.'

Wendy Pittick summed up the volunteer feeling beautifully when she said: 'It's a really special chapter in my life and I'll continue to do it as long as I am able to. &

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