



GOLDEN VALLEY TREE PARK

— B A L I N G U P —

Introduction

Golden Valley Tree Park is a sixty hectare arboretum, set in steep rural countryside 1.5km south of Balingup. It is managed by an incorporated association. The land is freehold title held in the name of the Executive Director of the Department of Environment and Conservation (DEC) and is scheduled to be formally gazetted as a reserve. The Park is open daily. The Bibbulman Track traverses the site. At the entrance to the Park stands the original Golden Valley Homestead which was fully restored during the 1990's. The house was built in the 1880's, and its large Organ Room is used to house the administration of the Park.

The Botanic Collection

Golden Valley Tree Park is the largest arboretum in Western Australia, both in terms of area and number of species. The Park is divided into two sections, one area of 25ha for Australian trees and the other area of 35ha for the World Collection. There are over three thousand individual trees planted of over one thousand different species, some specimens of which date back one hundred years to when the original farming properties were established. Every year the collection is increased.

The landscaped Australian Collection seeks to showcase the diversity of native tree forms, from tall eucalypts through mallee woodlands to wide-spaced dry season deciduous specimens. The World Collection has also a diverse range of genera. Many beautiful exotic favourites are represented alongside rare and unusual trees. In particular there are over thirty different species of Oak growing (Genus *Quercus*).

Since the decision by the Board of Kings Park in Perth to focus on increasing its natural bush, Golden Valley has become the most senior botanic collection of trees in Western Australia. Therefore the botanical project is of local, regional and State significance.

Heritage Listing

In 2001 Golden Valley Tree Park was given a permanent entry on the Register of Heritage Places protected under the Heritage of Western Australia Act 1990. I quote

“Golden Valley, with its natural topography, creek, the homestead and early cottage form a significant cultural landscape. The inter war tree plantings and subsequent arboretum plantings have significant landscape value.” (Heritage Council Assessment Document p.1)

History of Golden Valley Tree Park

The land comprising the Park was formerly two farming properties, namely Golden Valley whose homestead was built in the 1880's, and Yungerup, which was settled in 1898. The spring at Yungerup was a favoured hunting site for Nyungar people, according to Balya Balinga, the Aboriginal man after whom Balingup was named. The property name denotes this story through a misspelling of 'yonger' meaning kangaroo in the Nyungar language. (Miss Olwen Cleveland *pers. comm.*)

In the late 1970's the two properties were acquired by the then Forests Department for the establishment of pine plantations. However the Shire of Donnybrook-Balingup intervened in this intention by announcing a two-kilometre zone around the townsite of Balingup to protect the town from further encroachment of plantations. It was a very well supported community concern at the time and the subject of various lively public meetings. In 1980 the Minister for Forests, Hon David Wordsworth, agreed to a community proposal that this parcel of land should become an arboretum in government ownership and in partnership with the newly formed Balingup Progress Association. The proposal was based on the significant landscape and heritage attributes and exotic tree plantings that were already on site. Thus the park was established, resolving the dispute between the Shire and the State Department. So Balingup had a community-managed arboretum, on land owned by the Department of Environment and Conservation. These arrangements have persisted to this day and both DEC and the community have invested significantly in the project.

On the 22nd July 2005 the WA Governor Lt-General John Sanderson and his wife visited the Park and planted two ceremonial oak trees to commemorate the achievement of the twenty-fifth anniversary milestone since establishment of the Park. Mrs Sanderson, as State Patron of the CWA, planted a tree donated by the Balingup branch of the Country Women's Association, who also provided the morning tea. Shire President Cr Bruce Hearman attended and spoke at the ceremony.

Community Support for the Arboretum

Golden Valley has received extraordinary support from Balingup locals. Many have sponsored trees there, more regularly walk in the Park, and significant numbers do voluntary work there. Last year alone there were five community busy-bees to plant trees, and perform other land management tasks. At the 25th Community Spring Picnic on 5th November 2005 approximately 300 people, mostly locals, got together to join the celebrations and to watch a beautiful spring procession and dance that was performed in partnership with the Balingup Primary School. The event was non-commercial and supported by the Balingup Lions Club and the Origins Centre who provided food stalls. These various activities have involved approximately one hundred local volunteers in 2005 alone.

Three members of our committee have been involved in the Park since its inception, three other members have heritage links with the property, and all other Committee members except one have been involved for some years.

Economic Role of the Park

Balingup has very limited local economic activity. The role of primary industry has declined in our district. Without other major industries the Balingup economy increasingly centres on tourism. There are a lot of small-scale tourism operators such as

bed and breakfast accommodation providers, craft outlets, cafes and so forth. However the central attraction of Balingup is its scenic landscape, its imaginative events like the Small Farm Field Day in April and the Medieval Festival in August, and of course Golden Valley Tree Park, which provides the desperately needed all year tourism venue for visitors. The central role of the Park in the local tourism led economy is the reason why the Balingup Progress Association promotes Balingup as the “Arboretum Town.”

The Shire of Donnybrook-Balingup has recently constructed a 1.5km walk track between the town and the Park.

In 2003 the DEC counted 9,960 visits to the Park. In 2004 this had risen to 14,558. We do not have the figures more recent than then, but are confident that the next census will reveal substantial increase since the 2004 due to the 2005 upgrade of visitor facilities and increased promotion. This major upgrade of visitor infrastructure at the Park included the construction of three new information shelters, the identification of hundreds more trees with engraved plaques, and in November 2005 we launched six new walks at the park, three in the Australian Collection and three in the World Collection. These visitor services have been funded under the Federal Government’s Regional Assistance Package.

The investment of the Shire, the State Government through the Dept of Environment and Conservation, and the Commonwealth Government are all indicative of the local, regional and State significance of the Tree Park.

Current Management Activities

2009 saw our biggest tree planting in some years. 1250 West Australian species were planted by over forty volunteers on 21st June. This planting included all ten Mallet species from the Wheatbelt plus Flat-topped Yate and a grove of Salmon Gums. This new planting can be found on the Hill Cairn Walk. We are also applying to take over the Balingup water supply dam for Park use, which is just upstream of our site, when it is decommissioned by the Water Corporation. Lastly we are redrafting our Park Management Plan. This plan intends to accompany the formal gazettal of the land under the Conservation and Land Management Act.

The 2009 Spring Picnic is on Saturday 31st October, from midday to late. This event will feature a poetry competition, local music and a bonfire with special effects.