

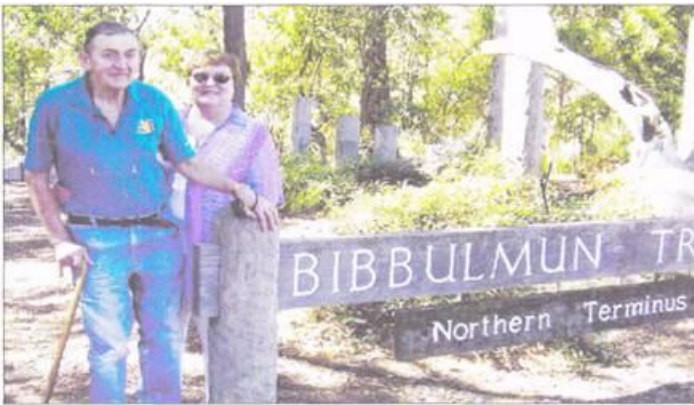
Hewett, Peter Neil

Born 5.12.1932 in Gawler, South Australia. Graduated from Australian Forestry School in 1954. Also completed a degree in economics at University of W.A. Initially worked as a soil surveyor for the Forest Department of W.A. Appointed District Forests Officer at Manjimup in 1956. Transferred to Mundaring in 1957 there until >1967. Chief of Division Extension, Services & Recreation in 1980, overseer of development of the Bibbulmun Track. Assistant Conservator of Forests. First CALM Director of Forests, in 1985. Early retirement for medical reasons 1990. A founding member of Greening Australia. A former chairman of the Boy Scouts Association of W.A. Secretary and Chairman of W.A. Division of IFA and Fellow of the IFA. Died 27.6.2010.

Wife Beverley. Children: Mandy, Carolyn, Penni (worked for CALM), Peter.
Died 2010.

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Vale Peter Hewett



Peter Hewett with his wife Beverly. Photo courtesy Peter Hewett Jr.

The recent passing of long-serving leader and mentor Peter Hewett gave friends and colleagues occasion to pause and reflect on a life well-lived and a career that took the lead in a transformation of a society's understanding of the value of forests.

When Peter first joined the WA Forests Department in the 1950s, the forests of the south-west were an economic asset, managed and conserved to provide a continual supply of timber to a state on the move—a living store of raw materials feeding a hunger for construction and manufacturing both locally and overseas. Over the following three decades this perception was to change dramatically as people came to understand that forests had an intrinsic value in their own right, as natural heritage and a place to enjoy the outdoors. From his appointment as Divisional Forest Officer in Mundaring in 1957, Peter was at the front of this trend, and would establish himself as a pioneering strategist in opening forests up for nature-based recreation.

It was a philosophical position he would take into the newly created position of Chief of Division of Extension Services and Recreation in the 1970s, and the depth of his commitment and professionalism in this new generation of public interface was an inspiration to others. Close colleague and friend Wayne Schmidt, speaking at Peter's funeral, paid tribute to him as "a consummate professional and one of Western Australia's and indeed Australia's truly outstanding foresters...who took to his new role with relish and began building what in time would become one of the most effective forestry extension programs in Australia."

He was both figuratively and literally a 'trail-blazer'. The early commitment to canvassing the opinions of forest visitors in planning and developing recreation facilities was to lead to one of Peter's greatest achievements: successfully negotiating the planning and construction of the Bibbulmun Track. The official opening of the track in 1979 as part of WA's 150th anniversary celebrations was the culmination of seven years of Peter's skilful management of relationships as well as considerable logistical challenges, with a high degree of community involvement. By the time the onset of Parkinson's disease forced Peter to take early retirement in 1990, walking the Bibbulmun Track had become a world-renowned experience, attracting thousands of local, interstate and international trekkers a year. Most importantly, true to Peter's vision, the track to this day sustains a profound sense of community ownership, run by a well-organised not-for-profit foundation governed by volunteers. Along the way, Peter left a lasting impression on many young foresters moving through the ranks. Tammie Reid remembers being inspired and a little overawed by him when she came to work in the Extension Branch in the early 1980s. In her first job after graduating from ANU's forestry program, Tammie found her natural passion for interpretation and community outreach had the full if somewhat daunting support of a powerful man and a lateral thinker.

"To a young, inexperienced forester just starting out he was a little scary," she recalled. "He was tall, imposing, calculating, different in his thinking. But inspiring. You felt in the presence of a man who enabled big things to happen."

He stood tall both in physique and influence. Paul Jones worked closely with Peter as his scientific advisor when he was appointed Director of Forests in the newly formed Department of Conservation and Land Management in 1985; and remembers him first and foremost for his leadership qualities.

"The thing I learned most from observing Peter was that it is not so much how hard you work yourself, but how effectively you can get other people working for your goals," Paul said. "Peter was a great observer of human nature and able to understand what made people tick, and as a consequence how to deal with them. He was a great relationship-builder and had contacts throughout Australia as a consequence of his departmental and volunteer work with the various bodies he was involved in."

Paul says the other attribute that most stood out about Peter was his generous interest in life in general—but within that, a particularly unabating dedication to the pursuit of knowledge about forestry.

"As the progression of Parkinson's disease made movement and speech laboured he did not shrink back and give up, but was still actively pursuing interests and would ring me periodically to get publications for him or to check some fact," Paul said.

"Despite struggling to make himself understood he persisted against all odds until he got what he needed. Peter was above all a decent and caring human being." **continued ...**