



How the Wollemi Pine was found

The Wollemi Pine (*Wollemia nobilis*) is a member of the Araucariaceae family which is thought to have existed 200 million years ago at the time of the dinosaurs. It is one of the world's oldest and rarest trees and its discovery in 1994 in Sydney's Blue Mountains is considered to be a major botanical find in human history - akin to finding a dinosaur alive today. Previously, the Wollemi Pine was thought to be extinct with only fossil records remaining.

A New South Wales (NSW) National Parks and Wildlife Services officer and avid bushwalker, David Noble, found the Wollemi Pine by chance in September 1994. David was bushwalking and abseiled into a deep rainforest gorge when he stumbled upon a group of ancient looking trees. They were up to 40 metres in height with main trunks of approximately one metre in diameter and featured an unusual fern-like, dark green foliage with a unique pattern of branching. The bark looked like bubbling chocolate. Taken by the unusual tree, David collected a fallen branch and continued his hike.

Returning to Sydney and puzzled by the find, David sought help to identify the tree. He approached NSW National Parks and Wildlife and the Royal Botanic Gardens Sydney for assistance. His report that the sample came not from a fern but from what looked like a strange, conifer-like tree, intrigued scientists Wyn Jones from NSW National Parks and Wildlife Service and Jan Allan from Mount Tomah Botanical Gardens.

Moved by scientific curiosity, the trio returned to the site to gather more specimens and undertake research. They were astounded by the find. The trees looked like nothing any of them had ever seen before. Jan and Wyn gave the tree the working title, the Wollemi Pine. It was named after the Wollemi National Park, the location where the Pines were first discovered. The scientific name *Wollemia nobilis* was in honour of the Pine's majestic qualities and the man who discovered them, David Noble.

Today, there are only a few known stands of Wollemi Pines with less than 100 mature trees. To protect this endangered population, the Wollemi Pine Recovery Plan (developed by Royal Botanical Gardens Sydney and NSW National Parks and Wildlife Service) has identified the propagation and worldwide release of the Wollemi Pine as a key conservation strategy.

When the Wollemi Pines are released in 2005/6, royalties from their sale will be invested in the conservation of the Wollemi Pines in the wild as well as other rare and threatened species. Having Wollemi Pines in homes, gardens and parks worldwide will safeguard against the species becoming extinct and minimise the threat of unauthorised visits to the wild population. Potential buyers wishing to register their interest in the Wollemi Pine should subscribe to the Wollemi Pine Conservation Club at www.wollemipine.com.

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Further information:

Please visit www.wollemipine.com or contact:

Sally McGeoch

Wollemi Pine International

sally@wollemipine.com

Tel: +61 (0) 438 153 655

Karen Masters

Upstream Australia

karen@upstreamaustralia.com

Tel: +61 (0) 2 9409 5120 / +61 (0) 427 497 433