

# Southern Highlands home of champions

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THE Southern Highlands is the home of champions.

That statement will likely conjure up images of a long list of local legends like the great Sir Donald Bradman. But, in this case, it refers to a more unlikely victor - the big tree.

Founder of the National Register of Big Trees, Derek McIntosh, has dedicated his retirement to uncovering Australia's Champion trees.

His quest has so far uncovered more than 380 Australia Champions, nine of which the Southern Highlands can lay claim to.

The register lists both indigenous and foreign trees and measures them with a point system using a specific formula that includes trunk girth, the tree's height and crown spread.

It is a measure that Mr McIntosh, a South African expatriate, adopted from the American Forests Register of Big Trees.

Of the Highlands' nine, Burrawang boasts the biggest beauty found so far.

Standing 35 metres with a 30 metre crown and 10.25 metre circumference, a 200-year-old Brown Barrel (*Eucalyptus fastigata*) located on the corner of Dale and Region Streets was awarded 542 points under determining formula. That makes it Australia's largest Brown Barrel on record.

It has never been truer that champions are nurtured at school, at home and under the watchful eye of the community.

The nation's biggest Peppermint Narrow leaved (*eucalyptus radiata*) lives on the grounds of the Frensham School, Mittagong.

Similarly, Oxley College in Burradoo is home to Australia's Champion Oak - Pin (*Quercus palustris*).

At the heart of Moss Vale, stands the biggest pine - Jeffrey (*pinus jeffreyi*).

Just last week Mr McIntosh uncovered the biggest white-topped box (*euclayptus quadrangulata*) at a residential property on Wombeyan Caves Road, Mittagong, after landowner Peter Bennett nominated the 250-year-old tree for measuring.

While Mr McIntosh hopes his "hobby" will help strengthen the argument for conservation of Australia's biggest and oldest trees, his main aim was to "just a have a lot of fun".

"Just the sheer majesty of these trees is fascinating to me," Mr McIntosh said. "These trees are true survivors, particularly your native trees given they have had so much going against them.

"Trees have been heavily used as firewood and building, so I think it's wonderful to find those that have survived against the odds. But, for me, learning about these trees is really just a whole lot of fun.

"I often speculate as I sit under them, almost worshipping them (laughs), and think of the fun and people that have passed by.

Mr McIntosh has called on anyone who knows the location of a big beauty to register it for measuring at [www.nationalregisterof-bigtrees.com.au](http://www.nationalregisterof-bigtrees.com.au).

Australia's Champion trees, including the nine in the Highlands, are also listed on the site.

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AUSTRALIAN CHAMPION: Founder of the National Register of Big Trees, Derek McIntosh (right), uncovers the nation's biggest White-topped Box (Euclayptus quadrangulata) at a residential property on Wombeyan Caves Road, Mittagong, with the help of landowner Peter Bennett who nominated the 250-year-old tree for measuring. Photo by Roy Truscott

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