

Man goes out on a limb for biggest tree



Derek McIntosh with the banksia tree at Nutcote (right) which has made the biggest tree register. Picture: DAVE SWIFT

KATE CRAWFORD

DEREK McIntosh jokes that he no longer looks at pretty girls walking along the street – he's too busy looking for trees.

Armed with a tape measure, Mr McIntosh is on the hunt and out on a limb.

He's not after the best looking tree in town – it just has to be the biggest tree for its species.

Mr McIntosh has initiated Australia's first National Register of Big Trees and he's got the whole of Australia looking anew at their local branches.

Australia's biggest mango tree is outside Rockhampton Hospital. There's a whopper of a Norfolk pine at Raymond Terrace and check out the rain tree at the sugar mill in Mossman, Queensland.

And, while it's a bit scraggy and past its prime at 120 years old, there's a banksia tree at Neutral Bay that's scored a spot on the register.



It's at the bottom of the garden at May Gibbs' historic home Nutcote.

It's an iconic banksia that inspired Gibbs' tales of gumnut babies and all those scary banksia men that gave children nightmares for years.

But in Mr McIntosh's eyes, the tree is a beauty.

"I'm happy to be wrong. There may be a bigger banksia over the hill in someone's garden," he said.

Mr McIntosh, who lives at Manly, came up with the

idea of the national tree register last year after retiring from a career in real estate.

He has loved trees since he was a boy growing up in Pretoria in South Africa.

"My favourite was the umbrella thorn tree, although it was no good for climbing," he laughs.

Mr McIntosh was also inspired by the big tree register in America. Few states in Australia have any sort of tree register, much less a nationwide register of

big trees. Anyone can nominate a tree for the register. The tree's size, which is verified, is judged not just on height but takes into account measurements of canopy and trunk.

"The response to the register has been so positive, so exciting, and organisations like the National Trust and botanic gardens have been very supportive," Mr McIntosh says.

"The register is designed to encourage people to conserve and value their trees and the register can create a great project for children.

"I'm hoping that the register will be around for years to come and eventually I will hand it over to someone else."

Mr McIntosh said the Centurion tree at the Tahune Airwalk in Tasmania, was the tallest hardwood in the world at a staggering 101m.

» **Details:**
nationalregisterofbigtrees.com.au