

Whitfield giant wears mighty crown

■ Brittle gum pips Beechworth contender by 14m

A BRITTLE gum – *Eucalyptus mannifera* sub-species *maculosa* – long growing at the top of the King Valley above the Darling family's vineyard has been named an Australian champion.

The spectacular tree – assessed by the National Trust's Victorian division to be more than 42 metres tall – has achieved a score of 424 points from the National Register of Big Trees.

It pipped another of the species growing in Beechworth's Mayday Hills' parkland by a stretch of 14m and 56 points.

Big Trees' register co-ordinator Derek McIntosh – who visited the North East two weeks ago on a tour with the International Dendrology Society Australian branch – said the tree on the Darlings' 'Kooambahla', near Whitfield, had a trunk girth of 6.7m and an averaged crown spread of 28m.

The Beechworth tree had a trunk diameter of 6.19m, reached to 31m and also had an averaged crown spread of 28m.

The measurements of the Whitfield tree are to be confirmed but Mr McIntosh said there was no doubt that it was the champion of the species given the American Forest Service weighted points formula – accounting for girth, height and crown spread – used by the National Register of Big Trees to calculate tree size.

Vigneron John Darling said his late



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father, Guy, had named the property on which the giant grows from an Aboriginal word for 'gum tree'.

Mr Darling senior, whose parents farmed at Cheshunt, had bought the land in 1970 to grow grapes.

The tree stands sentinel above the vineyard that he developed and his son manages and its image is used on the estate's wine label.

A plaque at the foot of the tree also marks the place where Guy Darling's ashes were interred after he died in 2008.

Mr McIntosh – a quantity surveyor – was a small boy growing up in South Africa when his father first took him to the famed Kruger national park in which not only native animals but also trees are protected.

"The park had a system where the trees were numbered and the trees' names were there," he told the *Ovens and Murray Advertiser*.

"We indirectly started learning about trees.

"That is where, you might say, the seeds were germinated.

Mr McIntosh emigrated to Australia as an adult and, living in Brisbane, wrote to the city council suggesting a

tree register be established.

"The council said 'Go for it'," Mr McIntosh said.

"It was the mid-1980s – and then the internet arrived.

"Suddenly I realised that my big dream could become a reality.

"I started with 18 big trees in Royal Botanic Gardens in Sydney and then took a trip to Cairns.

"I came back with five more trees and it grew from there."

Mr McIntosh said the Big Trees' register was self-funded and not-for-profit but the interest of people and the media in trees generally – and larger trees in particular – had built significant awareness of the register.

It had also delivered nominations from the public.

"At RMIT University in Melbourne the students of arboriculture nominate about 20 trees a year to the register," Mr McIntosh said.

The register has also benefitted from the interest of Dean Nicholle, a South Australian botanist regarded as the leading international expert on the genus *eucalyptus*.

Mr McIntosh has recently confirmed an English elm – *Ulmus procera* – growing in the southern NSW town of Tumut as a world champion.

It is 40m high and achieved 516 points.

For information go to nationalregisterofbigtrees.com.au.



SENTINEL: John Darling and Christine Behm in the lee of the national champion brittle gum thriving above Darling Estate vineyard near Whitfield.
PHOTO: Luke Plummer



RARE: Big Trees' Register's Derek McIntosh measures a silver-topped ash – *Eucalyptus sieberi* – at Mayday Hills.

Dendrologists branch into Indigo hills

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It took in Beechworth's extensive collection of historic and unusual trees at Mayday Hills, Town Hall Gardens and Queen Victoria Park.

Society Australian vice-president Brian Myers believes the region's impressive trees are in good hands and that Beechworth community is particularly fortunate to have two active tree groups – one which works

with the Mayday Hills' collection and another which advises Indigo Shire Council.

He said public awareness of trees in Australia and of historic trees was high.

"I think were very much in a good place," he said.

"You're fortunate here because you have a lot of enthusiasms and knowledge about trees in the com-

munity and that makes things work.

"Not many communities have that. And you have some pretty significant and impressive trees to protect and preserve."

The IDS is an association of people who collect, study, grow and preserve trees and shrubs from all over the world.

Yackandandah's late Ross Hayter was a leading member.