



Big even before European settlement ... Derek McIntosh with a 400-year-old blackbutt surviving in suburban Killara. Photo: Peter Rae

## Giant task set for tree-huggers

**Ben Cobby**  
ENVIRONMENT EDITOR

DEREK McINTOSH'S love of large trees was kindled during a childhood spent birdwatching in South Africa.

But it wasn't until a couple of years ago that the former real estate developer was able to start Australia's first National Register of Big Trees.

"I always wondered which was the biggest tree, and how you could settle the debates and controversies around which was the biggest," Mr McIntosh, 70, said.

The answer was a points system based on measurements developed by the American Forests Register of Big Trees, which has

relied on a settled formula for tree size for decades. It allows one tree to be compared with every other of the same species, using a quotient based on height, girth of trunk near the base and the size of its canopy.

"I had been thinking along these lines for years but then finally the internet arrived and I thought I should just go for it and set up the register," he said.

The register started with 18 large trees from Sydney's Botanic Gardens, but Mr McIntosh said most of the biggest trees grow in the most unlikely places.

He has criss-crossed the country looking for particularly large trees. He assesses them with a

tape measure and a laser pointer to accurately triangulate height.

The biggest tree in Sydney is a lemon-scented eucalypt, planted in 1930 by a Mr and Mrs Masson of "the tree-lovers' league", next to Gordon railway station. It is not particularly tall, but its unusually broad base means it gets a high point score.

The second biggest is just a few streets away in Illeroy Street, Killara. It is a blackbutt, *Eucalyptus pilularis*, and is thought to be 400 years old - making it a large, mature tree well before European settlement. It survived even though a suburban street colonised its domain and a road was laid metres from its trunk.

More than 200 big trees, from mangoes to Moreton Bay figs, are on the non-profit register, at [www.nationalregisterofbigtrees.com.au](http://www.nationalregisterofbigtrees.com.au).

"The purpose of recording is to promote the preservation of beautiful trees," Mr McIntosh said. "There is the tourism element, too - it would be great for different areas to be nominating their biggest trees and then [people would travel] to see them."



**iPad**  
Interactive guide  
to the champion  
trees of NSW.