

FREE ISSUE 48, NOVEMBER 2022

southerly

magazine

Dr Pratha retires

Medico bows out in style

Special Jaycees end of
an era pull-out feature

No bluffing glider
pilots of Narrogin

Georgette left a
colourful chapter

A new era for our iconic attraction

A special feature
produced by
Southerly Magazine
for the Jaycees
Community
Foundation



PHOTO: HEDWORX DIGITAL

A proud association comes to an end

❑ NEW Year's Day 2023 marks the end of an era. After 35 years of operating Australia's last whaling station as an iconic heritage tourist attraction, the Perth-based Jaycees Community Foundation set an objective to transition its ownership to the Albany community. That seven-year process will see the owner entity's name change to Albany Heritage Foundation Inc during November and Jaycees representative Directors retire in 2023.

❑ DISCOVERY Bay Tourism Precinct Ltd, which the Foundation established in 2015, has operated the business under licence since then and will continue to do so under Chairman Glenn Russell and General Manager Elise van Gorp.

❑ AND so will end a 42-year accidental involvement in what became an extraordinary community project for an enthusiastic bunch of volunteers who were committed to making Australia a better place – collecting state, national and international awards along the way.

AND TO think, it call came about because of tomato juice!

Little did Peter Snow realise, but his need for a tomato juice nearly 45 years ago would lead to a remarkable chain of events and creation of an iconic heritage tourist attraction.

Working out of a hotel room in Queensland's Gold Coast in early 1979 and due to return to Perth the next day, he still had much to do to complete an administration contract. The need for a sustaining tomato juice saw him in the hotel's lobby bar in late afternoon.

From a group in the corner of the near-deserted bar a waving hand caught his

attention. He recognised Colin Green of Harvey Beef – a client of five years before. With contract completion in mind, Snow declined offers of drinks and dinner and, with tomato juice in hand, returned to his room.

At about 9pm, he received a call from Green repeating the dinner invitation. With project nearing completion, the invitation was accepted and he joined Green in the hotel's restaurant.

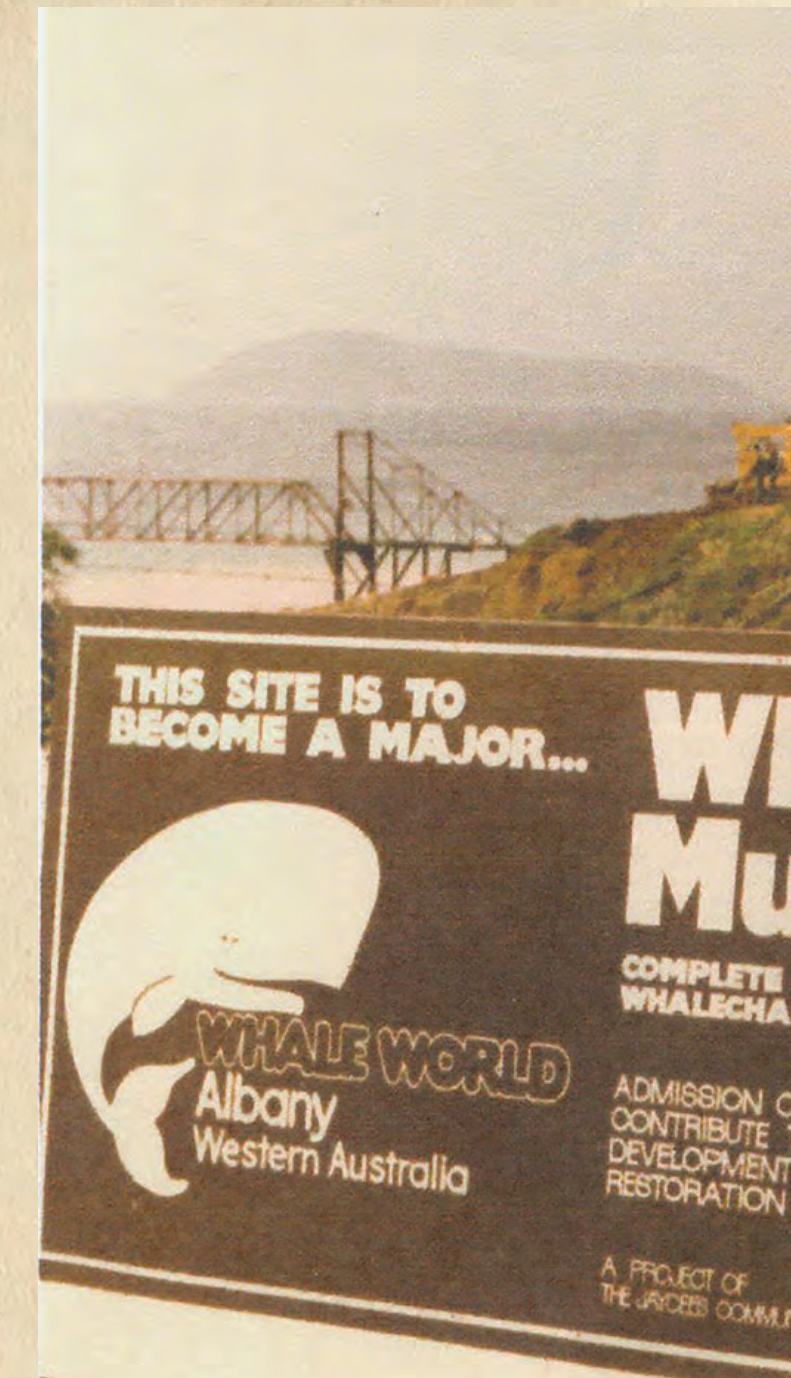
Somehow, discussion turned to the Green family company's takeover of the publicly-listed Cheynes Beach Whaling Company Ltd of which they had long been shareholders.

Recalling that Australia's last whaling station had

closed just a few months earlier, Snow asked why and what plans the family had for the now defunct industrial site.

Green explained that declining demand, competing alternative products, uncertainty about annual whale catch quotas, doubtful renewal of the annual noxious industry licence, coupled with the deteriorating ships and equipment and pressure from conservationists made it unviable.

And so, on November 21, 1978, the business ceased – putting 106 people out of work, causing significant angst and a big dent in the local economy. Usable abattoir plant was trucked to Harvey Beef and what remained on the site had

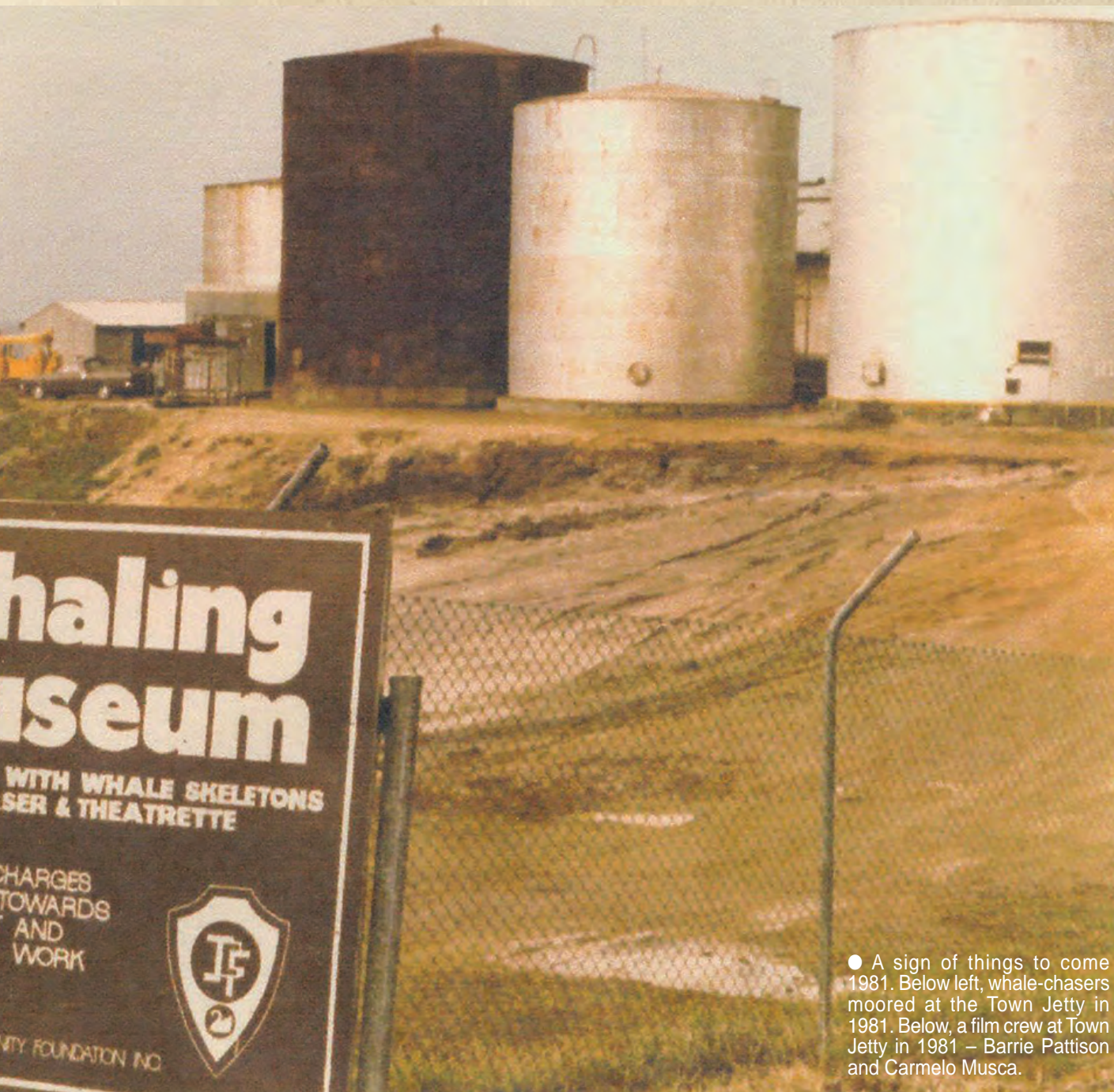


been auctioned.

However, Green lamented that he was stuck with three whaling ships - a problem Snow probed. A contract clause had allowed the successful tenderer to

walk away – unable to get heavy duty lifting gear onto Albany's town jetty where the ships were moored.

The intention to cut them up from the jetty and load the scrap metal onto trucks had been thwarted



● A sign of things to come 1981. Below left, whale-chasers moored at the Town Jetty in 1981. Below, a film crew at Town Jetty in 1981 – Barrie Pattison and Carmelo Musca.



by barnacles that had rendered the jetty pylons and jetty unsafe.

Fascinated, Snow queried the tender price. On learning that \$6,000 would secure a 700-ton, 50 metre ship, Snow

quickly offered: "I will buy one on condition that you deliver it to the Swan River."

Incredulous, Green offered one as a gift when he discovered Snow's plan was to find a donate it to



The Jaycees Community Foundation Inc that he had co-founded a few years earlier, recruit a gatekeeper/caretaker and use it as a fundraiser at \$2 a visit. Recognising that few people have been

aboard a whale-chaser, raising at least \$50,000 a year from visitors seemed feasible to him.

The parties departed and a mooring near East Fremantle was secured. Snow was then visited by

Harvey Beef's Finance Director Peter McGrath.

Confronted with a draft media release about the intended donation and news of a mooring location, McGrath announced: "Small problem. It will cost \$30,000 to fuel and crew it to Perth and that's not all. Because of its condition and risk of sinking in transit and becoming a maritime hazard, a \$1 million insurance bond is required. For those reasons we don't want to proceed."

Snow said his team would be devastated, to which McGrath replied: "What about the whaling station?"

"What about the whaling station?" Snow repeated in surprise.

McGrath asked if Snow wanted it, and Snow said, "Why not?"

After nearly two years of battling red tape, the site was rezoned to Museum & Youth Camp and occupancy converted to a 10-year peppercorn lease commencing on December 12, 1980.

Three days later, complete with two ships, six whalers' cottages, the defunct remains of the derelict processing factory and several hundred bent harpoons, it was gifted to The Jaycees Community Foundation Inc on December 15, 1980.

The Jaycees Community Foundation Inc, a community body established just four years earlier as a major community project spin-off of the WA Jaycees (part of the world JCI organisation operating in more than 110 countries) was now in heritage tourism and Whaleworld (the former name of what is now Albany's Historic Whaling Station at Discovery Bay), opened 11 days later on Boxing Day 1980.

The Foundation facilitated an award-winning documentary "Australian Whaling" produced by Carmelo Musca and Barrie Pattison of CM Film Productions that chronicled the history of the station up to 1980.

Another fateful meeting

THE Discovery Bay story is interspersed with tales of numerous fateful meetings. Another of these led to the establishment of The Richard Ellis Collection.

Acclaimed marine mammal artist Richard Ellis is the author of "The Book of Whales," "Dolphins and Porpoises" and "The Book of Sharks." His commissions include National Geographic, New York's Museum of Natural History, Audubon and the Smithsonian Institution.

Through an unrelated business appointment in New York on his way back to Perth after the Jaycees (now JCI) World Congress in Montréal, Peter Snow met the multi-talented conservationist.

A delegate to the

International Whaling Commission representing the USA, Ellis was suitably impressed at the high-impact submission that had garnered the Jaycees Foundation an award for the whaling station as the Best Project conducted by a group of Jaycees in JCI's 110 countries.

Appropriately, it was also recognised locally with The Sir David Brand Award – the state's top tourism award.

Ellis explained that this collection of 106 original marine mammal paintings were due to be returned to him after a two-year tour of the Americas organised by the Smithsonian and lamented that he only had a small apartment.

When encouraged to consider a possible

undertaken by John and Jill Bell. This partnership continued until March 1996 when John was tragically killed in an aircraft accident not far from Albany.

However, the family link was not broken as the Bell's oldest son, Peter, had joined the on-site team some six years earlier in 1990. After 32 years he remains as Operations Manager – the longest serving and most loyal key member of the Discovery Bay management team.

His skills on all aspects of the development and maintenance of any part of the extensive site and equipment have been a major factor in its smooth operation over that time.



● Richard Ellis with his Exhibition Introduction Board.

Albany destination, he willingly agreed to a three-month option at an extremely generous bargain-basement price.

Within the three months, the late Kevin Parry – backer of the 1987 America's Cup defence – agreed to purchase and donate the paintings and

Qantas agreed to freight them to Perth at no cost. Ellis attended a formal hand-over at a special function in Perth.

That is how the world's largest collection of original marine mammal paintings comes to be on display at Discovery Bay.

By way of a footnote,

and as a thank you, the Jaycees set up a call to Dick Smith who commissioned Ellis to do an extensive article and poster on whales of Australian waters for Australian Geographic. Of course, a full page was devoted to Albany's whaling station.

The Bells provide family connection

WHEN the Jaycees Community Foundation received Australia's last whaling station as a gift in 1980, it was faced with a dilemma. How was the project to be managed when the Foundation and its team were based in Perth?

The problem was easily overcome. The whaling company's former whale spotting pilot John Bell and his wife had already established a small museum operating in a small Nissen hut at the entrance to the site. It was natural that a "partnership" of sorts evolved between the two parties under which the day-to-day management was



At various times, Peter's younger brother Jamie has joined the team and his artistic and creative skills have been put to good use in the intricate mounting and assembly of what is the state's largest whale skeleton collection on display. The creation of the playground equipment including the whale tail swings, sperm whale slide and the pre-schoolers squid sandpit are part of his contribution to the multi-faceted attraction.



● Peter and Jamie Bell – integral parts of the Discovery Bay Team. Above, the Late John Bell.

A long history of strong leaders

IN its 42-year history only five people have managed the day-to-day operations of the multi-faceted heritage tourist attraction.

John Bell, along with wife Jill, had that responsibility from Boxing Day 1980 until John's untimely death in 1996.

Fortunately, John's friend and local scrimshander Gary Tonkin introduced Les Bail as someone who might help out the Jaycees for a few months while alternative management arrangements were made.

As a registered builder with a heritage inclination, Les was an extraordinarily good fit for the interim role and had an earlier connection with the project.

As President of the South Coast Diving Club in 1981 he had overseen the scuttling of the other whale-chaser, the Cheynes III, as a diving practice wreck after its engine and other useful items had been recovered.

The rare triple-expansion steam engine was painstakingly restored by volunteer engineers from Fremantle Wharf's B Shed and is now a key working exhibit.

A few months turned into 13 years with considerable restoration, enhancements and new exhibits added over that time under Les's supervision. His last two years were devoted to the

major development of the degraded areas of the site to the south of the whaling station heritage precinct resulting in the creation of Albany Biodiversity Park.

This involved carving out a grassed amphitheatre to seat 2,000, living floral murals of local wildflowers and an Australian wildlife park boasting 130 animals of 30 species using recycled materials to create animal enclosures.

With Les focussed on this multi-million dollar additional development, Glenn Russell, a retired major hardware business general manager formerly of Queensland, stepped up from his part-time role as a volunteer tour guide to fill the general manager's chair.

He took the reins for seven years and retired again in 2015 to take up the chairmanship of Discovery Bay Tourism Precinct Ltd which the Jaycees formed to operate the attraction as part of a long-term strategy.

After a brief tenure by Glenn's successor Phil Cox, Elise van Gorp was appointed as the fifth general manager in early 2017. She shares the passion of her predecessors for the successful management of this unique heritage tourist destination that attracts more than 50,000 visitors annually.

Under their supervision, this community project



● The GSDC's Bruce Manning congratulating Dorothy and Les Bail on Les's Heritage Awards recognition. Left, Jane Hanson with Glenn Russell at the launch of Ed Smidt's book, "End of an Era". Below, O'Connor MHR Rick Wilson with Elise van Gorp at the launch of new interpretive signage.

has contributed more than \$40 million to the local economy and become

a premier tourism icon in the Great Southern Region of which they and

the Jaycees Community Foundation Inc can be extremely proud.



The changing face of Albany's Historic Whaling Station





Displays contribute to station's tapestry

EXTRAORDINARILY, it was a shared interest in Alpacas that led to the remarkable shell display at Albany's Historic Whaling Station at Discovery Bay.

Well known Albany breeder and businessman, Mahlon Hotker was chatting with Jaycees Community Foundation co-founder and past president of the Alpaca Association, Ron Raynor and was aware of Ron's and the Jaycees' involvement in the whaling station project.

Mahlon mentioned that his mother Hilda had an extensive shell collection that she had assembled over nearly 80 years and enquired whether there would be any interest in the collection having a permanent home at the whaling station.

Amazed at the extent and quality of the collection and the fact that more than half had been collected from the shores around the Great Southern, plans to develop a display in the John Bell gallery in the entrance complex were progressed.

The fit-out was generously sponsored by the Jack Family Charitable Trust and the Hilda Hotker Collection was donated by the Hotker family and officially unveiled in 2015 with many of the family present.

It is a tribute to a remarkable lady and her meticulous approach to a lifetime of collecting – but even more so the artistry of her final display which she oversaw with great precision over many weeks.

When an opportunity came up to



acquire the set of 56 photos that chronicled the last eight years of the whaling company's operations from the Albany Advertiser's photographer, the late Ed Smidt,

it was an opportunity too good to refuse.

The question was where best they could be displayed? Then General Manager Les Bail

Cheyne III and IV

WITH Port charges eating away at the Jaycees limited financial resources, there was an urgent need to move the two rusting whale-chasers from the town jetty.

In 1981 it was decided that the Cheynes IV was in the better condition of the two and, after salvaging the engine from the Cheynes III, it was scuttled as a diving practice wreck by the South Coast Diving Club under the supervision of Les Bail who would become manager 15 years later.

Relocating the remaining ship to the whaling station was put to tender but, with no bids received, it was left to John Bell to tackle the mammoth task. He did so with the aid of earthmoving equipment to build a pond and float the ship into position – until it hit a rock.

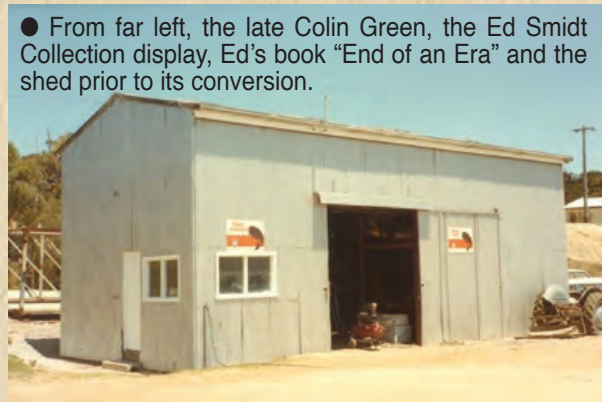
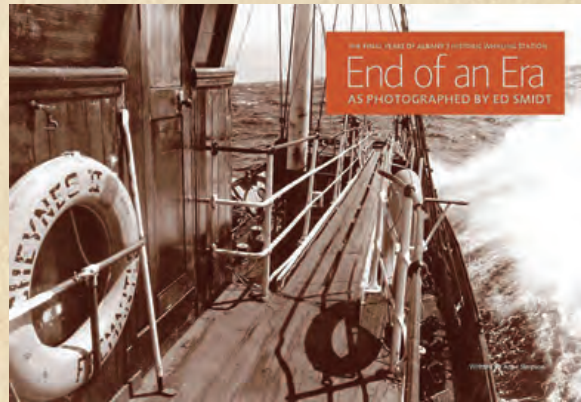
There it has stayed as a major drawcard inspected by more than two million visitors.

Ironically, in 1988, international research by Eric Harley identified that it was the very site where Captain George Vancouver and the crew of his ship "Discovery" had drawn water from a spring in 1791 - giving rise to the Foundation re-branding the site as Discovery Bay.





● The Hilda Hotker Collection display and, right, the Hotker family at the official opening.



● From far left, the late Colin Green, the Ed Smidt Collection display, Ed's book "End of an Era" and the shed prior to its conversion.

overcame all the restrictions imposed by Heritage listing and worked with the Heritage Council to deliver a fantastic example of sensible conversion.

An old storage shed became an art gallery with a second mezzanine level to properly display the Ed Smidt Collection. The building was named

the Colin Green Gallery to acknowledge the man who had initially agreed to give a whale-chaser to the Jaycees Community Foundation way back in 1979.

The Gallery is now a "must see" exhibit and has been reproduced as "The End of an Era" – a souvenir book available through the station's gift shop.

● Left, the salvaging of the engine from Cheynes III. Below, the chaser being scuttled. Right, Cheynes IV being located to its current site.



Tanks filled to brim with creative information

FIVE disused whale oil storage tanks provided unique opportunities for creative thinking at Albany's Historic Whaling Station. Three have been converted into theatres and two into galleries.

One theatre uses the floor as a screen to tell an abridged story of whaling in Australia while a second uses multi-media and theatrics to relate the interaction between sharks and the whalers.

The third features the world's first fully animated whale movie "Giants Exist" which was developed in Western Australia and is educationally based.

One gallery tank has featured the site's first high-tech exhibit – Spectravision - which uses a holographic-like effect to tell an emotional story "A day in the life of a Whaler" – with a Whaler and his wife hearing the closure of the station announced on the radio. It remains one of the most popular and fascinating exhibits and has been relocated to allow for the opening of an internationally significant and unique exhibit in 2023.

The fifth tank gallery is a Panorama Tribute Tower, paying tribute to the workers and details the different roles they played in a once supported and viable business enterprise as Australia's first industry drew to a close in 1978.



Trophy cabinet tells of success

THE Jaycees Foundation has received numerous JCI Asia Pacific and World awards for the whaling station as its most significant community project.

It has also been the recipient of multiple heritage, museum and tourism awards including the prestigious Sir David Brand Award for Tourism.

The most recent pre-COVID recognition was a silver medal for Cultural Tourism and for Contribution to Heritage by an Organisation, both in 2019.



A state of constant evolution

DETAILED market research commenced in 2004 and resulted in a comprehensive plan to create a suite of complementary attractions on the degraded land to the south of the heritage-listed whaling station precinct.

The aim was to support the preservation and ongoing maintenance of a deteriorating heritage asset in a hostile coastal environment that faced increasing costs.

The 15-year plan identified Australian fauna to address the interest of the 20 per cent of international tourists who visited the site and regional flora as a possibility – given the 3,000 species of wildflowers in the south coastal region. Potential as an entertainment venue was also flagged along with an integrated wetlands exhibit. All were to be educationally based.

The plan came to fruition with the majority of modules comprising the Albany Biodiversity Park officially opened in October 2014. The final module is now at architectural detail stage.

The formation of the Australian Wildlife Park partnership was arranged with experienced wildlife breeder Reg Reynolds who had an existing native fauna collection but the death of his son thwarted plans for family management and he retired leaving the animals in the care of the Foundation staff.

The 130 animals across 30 species remain a popular attraction with international visitors and younger folk.

The Regional Wildflower Garden was modelled on ideas gained from Chateau de Villandry in France and Butchart Gardens in Canada. The objective of living floral murals has only partially been achieved.

However, the wildflowers in the Walken Djet

● The Vancouver Wetland.



Picture: Frances Andrijich

(Rainbow flower) mural represent about 80 per cent of the floral species in the four south coastal zones from Walpole to Bremer Bay.

The 2,000-seat grassed Amphitheatre is to undergo an upgrade in 2023-24. Following a successful trial of “A Midsummer’s Night Dream” by the Fremantle Theatre Company in early 2021, development approval to construct a raised stage and sound shell has been obtained.

This will allow theatrical and musical performances in a more intimate and picturesque setting. Part of the grassed area is to be terraced – reducing capacity to a more intimate 500 to 1,000 depending on the type of performance.

Ever conscious of conservation and with 9km of roads and carparks, the site can collect more than 1.5 million litres of stormwater each year. This feeds an organic bio-filtration system comprising five interconnected ponds that progressively collect and settle sediments and filter out pollutants by appropriate plant species as the water flows through the system.

The Vancouver Wetland has attracted birds and

● The Amphitheatre.



other wildlife that can be viewed from nearly 2km of raised boardwalks.

The Foundation has always held a view that “edutainment” – educationally-based entertainment – is the best method of exciting interest in a subject, whether it be historical or current and all exhibits have been designed to tell a story.

Similarly, new ideas have been embraced in the 42 years of operation. These have ranged from nocturnal tours of both the animal park and whale-chaser to live performances of opera to sea shanties and festivals.

Critical to any quality attraction is food service. Whaler’s Galley, with its indoor and al fresco areas, is run by Russell Harris and has gained a top reputation for quality food

● Australian Wildlife Park.



and service over many years.

The Café has catered

for many events including dinner and nocturnal tour packages.

Bringing stories of Albany's
unique history to life



ALBANY'S
HISTORIC
WHALING
STATION
AT DISCOVERY BAY

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