

PLANTS & PEOPLE

Jim Bauml, Ph. D., Senior Biologist

Wollemi™ Pines are Coming

In 1994, a ranger hiking a remote part of the Wollemi National Park in northeastern Australia returned with a dried leafy branch of a tree he did not recognize. It was later determined to be a new species, one presumed extinct for 90 million years. Botanists named it *Wollemia nobilis*, in 1995, 'Wollemia for the forest where it was found and 'nobilis to honor David Noble, the New South Wales Parks and Wildlife Officer who first stumbled on the trees. "Wollemi" is an Aboriginal word that translates to "look around you, keep your eyes open and watch out".

Only 100 mature trees have been found to date. The largest is about 40m or over 130 feet tall. This species tends to grow new stems from the base, so the largest trunks we see today may not be the originals, and these trees may be quite old. The Wollemi™ pines belongs to the Araucaria family (Araucariaceae) and is most closely related to species of Araucaria such as the Kauri, Norfolk Island, Hoop, Bunya and Monkey Puzzle trees.

After its discovery, conservation immediately became a top priority. Secrecy has helped protect the few known sites for this rare tree. The Australian government developed a plan to produce a huge number of plants by tissue

culture from the original living samples and seedlings from these sites. The idea is to make many thousands of these young trees available on the world market and to use the proceeds to help further protect the Wollemi™ pine, its habitat, and other endangered Australian plants. As you can see, the name is trademarked; only one nursery with a contract with the Australian Government is allowed to produce trees for sale.

The first release was in Australia. Plants are slated to be released in the US through the National Geographic Society. Their web site indicates that trees can be preordered now for shipping in April, 2007.

The Wollemi™ pine has proven quite adaptable to a variety of growing conditions. It has been show to tolerate temperatures from 10 to 113 degrees Fahrenheit. Trees are fast-growing, and they prefer acid soils.

The Arboretum is on the waiting list to acquire specimens of this extraordinary tree. We look forward to growing and interpreting this living fossil for our visitors. More information can be found at www.wollemipine.com.





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