

'Tree of Life' gains national attention

REPORTS

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A BLAKELY'S red gum at Castle Creek has been listed on the National Trust's tree register.

It is the only tree on the register within Wodonga Council's boundary.

Ken Morrison, a retired forester who now lives in Bendigo, grew up at the Castle Creek property and was always aware of its significance.

In 2011 he applied to the National Trust for the Castle Creek tree to be listed and, late last year, his wish was granted.

This Blakely's red gum is 35 metres in height, much taller than most of its species, which usually range between 15 and 25 metres.

"I would suggest that it's probably the tallest Blakeley's red gum in Australia," he said.

He puts its height down to its situation — a moist gully — and not having any competition.

Mr Morrison estimates its age at more than 300 years old, which the National Trust has agreed with.

"Even the river red gums, slow growth trees, up around Mildura could be 1000 years old so I think it would be reasonable to put an estimate of 300 years old," he said.

"The only way to get the actual age would be to fell it and carefully count the rings."

Mr Morrison's nephew Peter and his wife Robyn are the fifth generation of the family to live on the property.

Their children always called it the "Tree of Life" but Mr Morrison says its official name is "the Rats Castle Tree", in honour of the property's name.



● Robyn and Ken Morrison near the Blakely's red gum, which has been listed on the National Trust's tree register. Picture: DAVID THORPE

He remembers his father commenting on the tree, adding that the family could have earned 10 pounds for its timber as a mill log.

He said he was very thankful none of his family had allowed that to happen.

"It's surprising that it was left," Mr Morrison said, given the rest of the landscape was cleared.

"But if you go along the Castle Creek Road, other trees on the roadside are quite big in size and you could imagine them

clearing the property, the Morrisons, with just an axe and a saw and a mattock."

The Morrison family cleared the property for land selection in the 1870s.

Mr Morrison said listing significant trees on the National Trust's register was worthwhile for their preservation, which is why he applied for the Castle Creek gum to be considered.

"I'm a forester, I'm a Morrison, and I think significant trees need to be

registered so that there is some kind of protection for them," he said.

Mr Morrison said Blakely's red gums were common along the east of NSW from the Victorian to the Queensland border, in the Warby Ranges, and there's another pocket between St Arnaud and Inglewood.

"It's a fairly rare species in Victoria but common in NSW," he said.

A small plaque will be placed at the tree in due course.