



These 2 pages are taken from Ian Lillington's book *The Holistic Life*. It covers the principles and ethics, and actions we can take in a clear, simple and interesting way. There are lots of practical examples, and great photos and diagrams.

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A brief history of permaculture

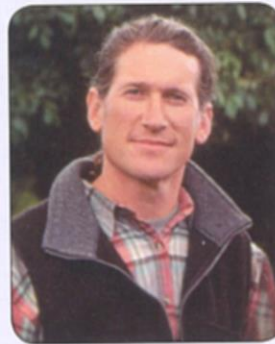
The word permaculture was originally a blend of permanent and agriculture. However, it is increasingly used to mean permanent culture. Throughout history, civilizations have collapsed when they over-reached their food supplies, and left deserts in their wake. Are we about to do the same?

The 'traditional' starting point for newcomers to Permaculture is a book called *Introduction to Permaculture* by Bill Mollison with Reny Mia Slay. The *Introduction to Permaculture* is an amalgamation and revision of *Permaculture One* (the original book) and *Permaculture Two*, with additional chapters. This book; *The Holistic Life* aims to make accessible the best of permaculture from the last 30 years, and develop the people-centred approach to permaculture, which has steadily grown alongside permaculture's original land-based approach.

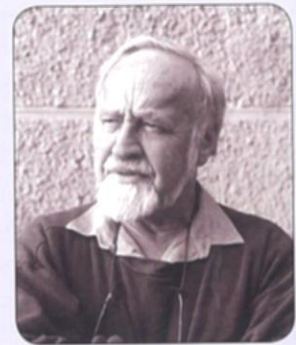
Whether it means culture or agriculture, permaculture has always focussed on natural systems, especially forests, because they are self-sustaining.

If we are to have any chance of sustaining human life, we have to replicate natural systems and use good design to create our own systems. These systems have to encompass social and economic systems that sustain us, as well as systems that produce our food, fibre, timber and clean water and air.

The scientific basis of permaculture comes from both natural systems ecology (an ecological approach to agriculture) and from thermodynamics. David Holmgren's work, (and this book), is significantly influenced by the work of Howard Odum and the need



David Holmgren



Bill Mollison

to understand energy—where we get it from, how we use it, and what happens once we have used it. In particular, we need to better recognise our current and almost complete reliance on fossil fuel energy, which is both polluting and finite.

The essence of permaculture is ancient in origin—taking inspiration from the civilizations of the world that have survived for thousands of years—including the indigenous peoples of Australia. However, permaculture is an integration of many skills and disciplines, brought together to design ways of living sustainably in the 21st century.

The early concept (in the 1970s) was a combination of ecology, landscape and agriculture. David Holmgren and Bill Mollison collaborated on the original permaculture concept in the 1970s in Tasmania, with David as student and Bill as lecturer. Under Bill's guidance, David's graduate thesis became the main body of the book *Permaculture One*. This book showed how ecology and agriculture could be combined, by conscious design, to create a landscape filled with sustainable food production systems.

David Holmgren describes that time in an article on Radical Origins of Permaculture:²³ "Permaculture arose from interaction between myself and Bill Mollison in the mid 1970's. We were two (very different) social radicals on the fringes of (different) education institutions, at the global fringes of western industrial society in Tasmania.

Bill Mollison as bushman turned senior tutor, in the Psychology Department of the Tasmanian University, attracted large student audiences to hear his radical and original (pre-permaculture) ideas while outraging the academic establishment.

I was a student in the Environmental Design School, a revolutionary "experiment" in tertiary education at the Tasmanian College of Advanced Education. This design school ran for ten years under the inspired leadership of Barry McNeil, a Hobart architect and education theorist. Visiting and local professionals accounted for a substantial part of the staff budget. There was no fixed curriculum but a strong emphasis on decision making processes and problem solving. Self assessment, democratic organization and many other elements which radicals within tertiary institutions only dream about, were reality within the school.

Even within the intellectual freedom and stimulation of Environmental Design, I was on the fringes, with my all consuming permaculture work and my student-mentor relationship with Bill Mollison. My work was largely ignored within Environmental Design although Barry McNeil has since acknowledged it was probably the most important concept to emerge from the school."

By the mid 1980s, Bill Mollison was roaming the world, on a shoe string budget, teaching

Permaculture Design courses—a minimum of 72 hours of intensive study, in the classroom and outside—where instant food gardens were created from whatever materials came to hand. This travel and teaching led to the publication of Mollison's 580 page book, *Permaculture—A Designers' Manual* with Reny Mia Slay and Andrew Jeeves in 1988. The *Designers' Manual* advocates a strong ethical and social dimension to permaculture and remains the 'Bible' for serious permaculture study.

Meanwhile, David Holmgren and partner Su Dennett were developing their demonstration property 'Melliodora' in central Victoria and publishing a series of books on designing and creating permaculture buildings and landscapes. David has recently produced a *Collected Writings 1978 – 2000*²⁴ and new look at permaculture principles in *Permaculture: Principles & Pathways Beyond Sustainability*.



Colin Endean has his face painted by Aboriginal Elder Bobby Brown for the celebration at the end of a Permaculture Design Course