

# Water diviner Brother Clem brings security to National Arboretum in Canberra

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Science and witchcraft found the underground streams now securing the future of trees at the National Arboretum Canberra.

That's how water consultant Austin Goodfellow explains using hydrologists to map likely places before water diviner Brother Clem Holz revealed the arboretum's underground story of streams.

Brother Clement Holz is a water diviner in the Galong area. When an underground stream bends the wire, he cannot stop it from pulling down.

*Photo: Karleen Minney*

For decades Brother Clem's gift, which his uncle Leo Holz showed him when he was 18, lay dormant while he milked cows for Redemptorist priests in a monastery near Galong. The crippling drought in 2000, and a cry for help from the National Arboretum, brought out his skills with a rusty piece of 8-gauge fencing wire.

From a vehicle crawling over the arboretum, Brother Clem poked his wire out of the window until a force came from the Earth, up through the wheels, through the 87-year-old's body and down to wire, which trembled.

When wires cross like this they are indicating potable water.

*Photo: Karleen Minney*

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He got out, watching where the wire dipped and pulled, and pointed to where the driller's peg needed to go. Later, after drilling through 60 metres of fractured rock, a new bore delivered 20 litres per second, and is still yielding a megalitre a day.

"We hit the jackpot there," Brother Clem says with a satisfied smile, back at the old monastery, now known as St Clement's Retreat. His big fingers slide up and down the wire, as if it were a line following a creek.

"A stream coming down a hill, down here," he says pointing to the end of the wire, "I could be getting brackish, hard water. I'll follow the stream up, I am getting soft water. A little manoeuvring, I find where soft water changes to hard. Where I find the changeover

happens I'll move back 20 metres up stream and a peg goes in there and that's where your supply will be."

His rusty wire is worn back to silver where it bends for his hand grip. He runs his finger along the wire again, explaining what it tells him, and that when it bends, he can't stop it, "not even for \$1000".



Brother Clem says when the wires part like this they are indicating brackish water.

*Photo: Karleen Minney*

"About every three or four metres, on either side of what I call an artery, little veins feed into the main stream artery. If they feed in one side, they'll feed in the other side. "

The arboretum bore's exceptional flow comes from tapping into where one stream crosses another stream. The discovery was made several years ago, and the bore commissioned late last year, after Mr Goodfellow's water masterplan was completed, with the bore at its pumping heart.



Brother Clement Holz is a water diviner in the Galong area. He can find water at any depth, and when the wires cross, it is potable water.

*Photo: Karleen Minney*

Senior horticulturalist Owen Bolitho says instead of being only maintained through summer, trees will thrive with the extra water. "If there was a catastrophic fire, we now have gravity-fed, mains pressure," he said.

"The key for us is the bore's supreme quality, the water maintains its energy and life, it is fantastic, it is a beautiful, opaque, almost aqua, full of minerals, it hasn't come through turbines and thousands of miles of pipes."

Called in when the arboretum's original bore wasn't delivering enough supply, Mr Goodfellow said most people in his industry used either hydrologists or a water diviner. He uses both.

"Brother Clem is one of the old-fashion diviners, but he has been very successful. He's picked up a fair few holes for us, we have had a few misses every now and then. The way I describe it to people is we are using science and the witch doctor."

Brother Clem says people don't always let him know the outcome of drilling. But at the height of the decade-long drought, grateful farmers told him he had saved their marriages, and prevented suicides, when their new bores found water for livestock dying of thirst.

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