

Field officer training 1917 - 1991

AFTER 74 years, the Cadet Field Officer Training Scheme officially closed its doors in December, 1991. The Scheme survived the Great Depression, World War II, and the devastating fires of 1961, successfully producing 350 graduates.

Alan Byrne looks at the history of the Scheme:

Forest field officer training began on March 17, 1917 with the appointment of Dick Perry and Bill Ross as four-year forest apprentices. They were joined by another four apprentices later that year, one of whom, J.H. Brown, resigned after only two months' training.

The appointments were made by the Department of Woods and Forests which became the Forest Department in 1919.

In 1921, the remaining five apprentices attended a six-month intensive training program at the Ludlow Forest Apprentice School under the tuition of Dr Stoate, who later became conservator of forests.

Six-day weeks

Before the six months' theoretical training, the apprentices had to work six days per week for the Department in various south-west districts.

The days were long and intense, with the apprentices learning nursery work, plantation establishment and hardwood silviculture, as well as maintenance of such implements as the broadaxe, crosscut saw and the adze.

Horsemanship was a strong component of a foresters' duties. A good forester was often measured by his ability to handle and care for his trusty steed.

The evenings were spent 'burning the candle' to complete assignments and reports for the correspondence studies each apprentice was obliged to undertake.

The first graduates from the original apprentices' scheme were Dick Perry, Bill Ross, Claude Kinsella, Jack Thomson and George Glover.

This system of training

continued until 1931, after which forest officers were recruited from the forest workforce and timber industry.

Forest trainees

The next official intake of forest trainees, as they became known, began in February, 1952 with 10 trainees working in forest districts throughout the south-west.

In December 1953, the trainees attended a three-week course at Ludlow under the tuition of Wally Eastman.

Jim Raper, Gordon Styles, Brian Baker and Frank Quicke, were among the last group of graduates from the Ludlow Training School.

Gordon Styles commanded great respect among his colleagues for his knowledge and skills in fire management. He retired in December 1991, after 39 years of service, vacating the position of regional forester, fire control.

In February 1955, 20 forest trainees began their two-year course with postings to forest districts throughout the south west.

Each trainee would spend about two months in one district, before being transferred to another.

Their work included clerical, workshop and crew member duties.

Guidance officers

A guidance officer in each district programmed the trainees' work and nurtured their progress.

After 15 months in the field the trainees spent six months at Dwellingup Training School.

The training school consisted of two Nissen huts

and a kitchen/dining room all of which were destroyed in the 1961 fires.

Training Officers Frank Podger and Joe Usher supervised six months of intensive theoretical and practical tuition.

The graduates from the inaugural Dwellingup scheme, appointed as forest guards in January 1957, included Eric Jenkins, Max Rutherford, Frank Vince and Les Robson.

Upon graduation, Eric Jenkins began a Bachelor of Science (Forestry) degree then a Diploma of Forestry.

He retired from his position of regional manager, Swan Region in August, 1992 after 35 years' service.

1961 fires

The existing training centre was built in Dwellingup in 1959 and was used as the district headquarters after the 1961 fires which destroyed the district office.

In 1964-65, the first full-time training officer was appointed. This was Roger Underwood, now General Manager of CALM.

In 1967, the trainees became known as forest cadets and were appointed under a cadetship program.

They were located at the Dwellingup Training Centre for two years, broken by six to eight weeks' practical training in the first and second years.

In 1969, the Forest Department appointed first year forest cadets to Mount Lawley Technical College to complete a one-year Certificate in Forestry Fieldwork.

The second year was spent at the Dwellingup Training Centre, with time spent in various forest districts.



The last of a long line of graduates - December 1991: back row, left to right, Iain Alexander, Andrew Milne, Nigel Sercombe (forester), Mark Lush, Alan Byrne (training officer), Bruno Rikli and John Edwards. Front row, left to right, Ian Gale, Joy Borison, Aminja Koch, Jeremy Spencer, Warwick Roe, David Atkins, Stephen White, John Fishwick and Matthew Jones. Delayed action photo by Warwick Roe

This continued until 1979 when first year studies were transferred to Bunbury Technical College so the cadets could undertake practical work in CALM's Central Forest Region each Monday.

First woman cadet

In 1982, the first female cadet, Kylie Kau, was appointed.

Kylie completed the two-year course with distinction and received the Keynes Award for outstanding performance in both theory and practical field work.

With CALM's formation in 1985, the course curriculum was reviewed and a new syllabus developed.

Three streams

This syllabus was designed to meet the needs of three occupational streams: forest officer, wildlife officer and national park rangers, as these groups now constituted CALM's field officers.

Syllabi were prepared and implemented for subjects such as law enforcement, recreational management, environmental education, terrestrial and marine park management, while retaining traditional units such as silviculture, fire management and environmental protection.

Tradition broken

The tradition of appointing graduates as forest officers was broken in 1988 when Bill Evans was appointed as a national

park ranger while Lyle Gilbert and Andrew Horan became wildlife officers.

Emphasis on skills

The emphasis on skills-based training and education provided the foundation on which successful careers are based.

Over the years graduates have progressed into senior positions within both the Forest Department and CALM.

Training officers such as Ross Gobby, Geoff Airey, Roger Underwood, Frank Pridham and Alan Scott, to name but a few, will long be remembered and respected by their

protegees.

The role of training officer involved much more than training and education - it was a role that developed and fostered a work ethic, a work culture and team camaraderie that was unique and difficult to quantify.

New training system

The new system of training has been developed to take advantage of qualifications provided by Technical and Further Education and other tertiary institutions.

This enables CALM to capitalise on the educational experience and

resources of these institutions which are directed towards courses in natural resource management.

The practical component

The practical component will be catered for via practicums (while studying), vocational employment and, on appointment, in-service training.

Each change in training over the years has been timely and successful.

While the cadet program has served CALM well and provided a Departmental tradition, I am sure that this latest change, the most dramatic of all, will be equally successful.



THREE of the first graduates from the apprentices appointed by the Department of Woods and Forests in 1917 are still going strong and turn 90 this year.

Dick Perry, Bill Ross and Jack Thomson spent their entire working lives with the Forests Department.

Dick Perry, a forester

with 50 years service specialised in the Forest Department's early tree-breeding program.

He was required to spend two years in the forest of Leira, Portugal, collecting seed and scions from 'plus phenotype' maritime pine specimens.

This material formed the basis of an intensive maritime pine breeding program throughout the

south-west of Western Australia, a major legacy of the program being the highly productive Gnarup and Yancheep pine plantations.

Dick (right) and Jack Thomson were pictured at Jack's 90th birthday party in August. Dick turned 90 in July and Bill's birthday is coming up. All three have remained good friends over the years.



The five original apprentices at the Ludlow Forestry School, were (left to right), D.H. Perry, W.A. Ross, C.V. Kinsella, J.A. Thomson and H.G. Clover. Photo courtesy Forest Focus

