



▲ *The original-style One-tree bridge some time between 1904 and 1933.*

▼ *The redecked bridge—note the more sophisticated bridge timbers and also the more delapidated smaller house in the background. Tourists from two cars are admiring the scenery.*



## ANNIVERSARY OF A LANDMARK

A 70-year-old historic landmark, link with the past and long-standing karri forest tourist attraction, is still drawing tourists from near and far.

This winter is also the tenth anniversary of that particularly wet and stormy winter of 1964 which spelt doom to that veteran of many years' service—One-tree bridge.

The well-known bridge had its beginning in 1904 when Hubert and Walter Giblett, assisted by Jack Scott, felled a 4.9 m girth karri tree which was standing on the east bank of the Donnelly River. Their purpose was to fell the tree over the river and to construct a bridge so that graphite could be transported from a mine, lying 2.5 km to the south-west, to the Bridgetown railhead.

Up to that time the graphite had been transported over a natural rocky crossing about .5 km upstream. This was a hazardous undertaking and almost impossible in winter owing to the high flow of water.

### Jarrah decking

The tree spanned the 23 m wide river and a superstructure hand hewn from nearby jarrah trees was built on top to form a narrow bridge. Crosspieces, or bolsters 225 by 150 mm were set and spiked into the log at 1.8 m intervals. Jarrah slabs were laid across each end of the bolsters and jarrah decking was laid across each longitudinal slab or bearer.

One-tree bridge, as it was to become known, was duly completed and the first load of graphite (said to

be three tonnes) was taken over the bridge by Andrew Muir, of Fernhill, driving a 12-bullock team at the official opening.

### **Trial shipment of graphite**

The graphite had been discovered by a geologist named Walker, in 1889. The first consignment of 66 tonnes was despatched to England in 1906, however, the quality was only fair and although the mine was worked intermittently over the next few years, it was finally abandoned in 1927.

Indications are that during its short life it had a checkered but most unproductive career. It changed hands in 1908 and 1911, and in 1916 a London syndicate tried to float a company to mine the graphite, but the W.A. Government intervened. The lease was forfeited in 1921 and was taken up by Mrs. Elizabeth Taylor, who changed the name to the Lindsay Gordon Lease, after the poet Adam Lindsay Gordon who lived nearby during the late 1860s. She abandoned it in 1927, and though there have been various tentative inquiries since, including one from a Japanese concern and another from an oil syndicate, the mine has remained unproductive. The main shaft has collapsed, although numerous open pits can still be seen between the scrub regrowth.

### **Decking altered**

During a bushfire in 1933, the top of a burning blackbutt tree standing on the west bank of the Donnelly River, fell on to the bridge. The fire burnt the decking, which was later replaced with sawn jarrah and the bridge was slightly changed by laying the decking along the bridge's length—as it remains today. Although declared dangerous in 1943, there was no suitable alternative river crossing for local farmers like the Henwoods and Fouracres, and it



▲ *The log bridge as it stands today. in the middle of a picnic area.*

was in use until January, 1948, when the second bridge further downstream was opened to traffic.

An indication of the old log bridge's resilience was provided by Mr. Wes Forrest, a Forests Department employee on loan to the Main Roads Department. Mr. Forrest had driven a light bulldozer over the old log bridge about four times a day for two weeks during construction of the second bridge. This second bridge had a life of about nine years, when a third (and current) bridge was built in a position between the two older ones. The second bridge was later removed.

In the winter of 1964, a particularly wet and stormy season, the old log bridge broke under the pressure of water and fell into the river. With the weight of its butt end holding steady on the east bank, the crown end of the log swung diagonally across the river.

There is little doubt that the unprepared and uneven foundation under the western end, lack of central support in felling across the river, and heavy usage like the bulldozer, would have hastened its demise.

### **Reconstructed on west bank**

In autumn, 1971, the Forests Department arranged the resurrection of the old One-tree bridge. The log was hauled out of the river and placed on the west bank, where the superstructure was faithfully rebuilt by men from the Department's Glenoran settlement. The rebuilt section—now surrounded by a picnic area—is only 17 m long, because a 6 m section broke off and was swept downstream some years ago.

After 70 years, the log is still very sound inside, and it is a reminder of the pioneering spirit of the early settlers.

