

Recreation Characteristics of Western Australian Forests

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As working hours have decreased and apparent nett disposable incomes have increased, the population of Australia in general and Western Australia in particular has found much more opportunity for leisure.

Although Perth takes great pride in its swimming and surfing beaches, and the boating opportunities of the Swan River, there are many days, especially in winter and spring when people turn to the forests for their recreation experience.

The picnic ethic is well known even though inadequately researched, but the more active forms of recreation are little appreciated by other than the participants.

The natural forest areas of Western Australia are meagre by world standards and occupy only 1.8 million hectares or 0.72 percent of the state.

It is fortunate for the forest recreationist that the forests are almost entirely within the most densely populated portion of the state, that some attractive forests occur only 40 kilometres from the city of Perth, and that even the remotest portions of State Forest are within 500 kilometres.

From 1954 to 1971 there was a seven percent increase in the proportion of the state's population living in Perth and a three percent decrease in the South-West land division. To some extent at least, part of the rural population from the forest zone moved to the city, but retains a nostalgic regard for the forest environment.

Past activities

Use of forest areas for public recreation dates back prior to 1939 when weekend excursions by rail

were provided to a public which was much less mobile and independent than it is today. Family groups, school parties and sporting teams used places like Mundaring Weir for holidays, education or team training, and the "bona-fide" traveller system for Sunday trading helped to maintain this interest when railways closed and the level of motor car ownership rose in the fifties.

Observations of increasing recreation activity were reported from several forest headquarters near Perth in the late 1960's and this led to the first forest visitor survey for near city forests in 1969.

Similar surveys were conducted at Dwellingup, Manjimup and Gngangara in 1970 and 1971.

The initial survey was directed almost solely at dispersed picnic groups and other low key forest uses, and revealed a level of some 250,000 forest visits per year within 60 kilometres of Perth city.

The Forests Department is committed to a policy of managing its forests for multiple use, but this should not be taken to infer multiple use of all areas of forests at all times. Some of the major constraints to the universal application of multiple use principles, include those of mining activity, forest disease quarantine areas and water catchment areas. In addition to these relatively fixed constraints there are also difficulties with respect to planted forests, contemporary logging,

regeneration and protective programmes, as well as the immediate on-site difficulties of compatibility between various recreational pursuits.

Recreation policy of the department is directed toward achieving control of established use and the limited provision of facilities to service them. The competition for use of specific areas is such that it is not considered wise at this time to actively encourage or promote additional forest use until finance is available to service it properly. Funds available to date have been directed to the provision of simple picnic and barbecue facilities, self-guiding nature trails and marked bushwalking tracks. Most of the current expenditure is directed solely to the maintenance of established facilities.

Current activities

Active recreation demand is being investigated from an organisational viewpoint to assess the number of people involved, current growth trends and the environmental impact likely to occur. Particular attention is being given to motorised recreation for which there is a large and growing demand.

Motor rallies

Motor car rallies have been using forestry roads and tracks for many years during their autumn to spring rally season. The larger clubs are affiliated with the Confederation of Australian Motor Sport—C.A.M.S., through which all official rallies, including some events of the Australian Rally Championship are run. A system of route survey by rally directors and approval by relevant Forests Department district staff was initiated in 1973 and has worked well. Planning will become more difficult as a consequence of Quarantine Zones established to reduce the rate of spread of the forest pathogen *Phytophthora cinnamomi*, the cause of jarrah dieback.

Liaison with informal sport's car groups is more difficult to effect but the position is improving as more people in this category learn of the C.A.M.S. approval system.

Of a rather different nature are the Western Australian Motor Cycling Association—W.A.M.C.A., the Western Australian Mini-Bike Association—W.A.M.B.A., and the Recreation Vehicle Association—R.V.A., which collectively represent 12 motorcycle clubs, 10 mini-bike clubs and 3 or 4 dune-buggy and four-wheel-drive clubs.

Trial, trail, mini bikes

The invasion by foreign motor cycles since the late 1960's has been felt Australia-wide, and Western Australia has a significant share of mini bikes, trial bikes and trail bikes. Official statistics record only licensing of machines so that assessment of total numbers for off-road motorcycles is at best an estimate. W.A.M.C.A. and W.A.M.B.A. cater for some 1,000 motor cycles of all shapes and sizes, and are genuinely concerned with maintaining amicable relations with state and local governments. However, it is estimated that another 5,000 unlicensed machines exist in Western Australia, and since the primary attraction of trail and mini bikes is lone, pioneer riding, there seems little chance for organizing this majority group.

The organised clubs and to a lesser extent, spokesmen for some individual owners, have sought the use of state forest for regular motorcycle activities covering the whole range of events for which trial and trail bikes are designed. In addition some clubs have made application for leasing or alienation of parts of the forest for their exclusive use. However, there is limited availability of forest land which is free from jarrah dieback, readily accessible from the Perth area and not within a water catchment reserve. In some areas, even occasional use of large areas causes noticeable

deterioration of the site, and would need careful monitoring under regular use. Furthermore the establishment of a permanent headquarters for any recreation group always involves construction of buildings and removal of at least some tree cover. Purchase of private land adjoining state forest has been recommended as a preferred course of action.

Beach buggies

The dune-buggy or beach-buggy organisations have also made approaches for use of forest lands as an alternative to the near-city beaches where their reputation has become tarnished and to the comparatively remote Lancelin dunes which are 150 kilometres north of the metropolitan area. The firebreak areas of some plantations on the sandy Swan coastal plain have a limited potential for this group, but these will not be made available if their irresponsible behaviour, such as that on the south coast's giant Yeagerup Dune in late 1974, continues.

Four wheel drive

There are two or three clubs which represent four-wheel-drive vehicles in Western Australia although they represent only a minority of owners. These vehicles have the ability to use non-road conditions and appear to also inspire a degree of irresponsibility in their drivers.

There can be little doubt that much of the damage to frontal dunes of Western Australia's beaches, often attributed to dune buggies and to trail bikes, began when four-wheel-drive vehicles "blazed" a trail across the fragile heath ecotypes so common to this State's southern coastline. The desire of owners to repeatedly prove that vehicles of this kind can force a path anywhere is reflected in the rapid spread of jarrah root rot and increased turbidity of river systems.

For these reasons, recreational use of four-wheel-drive vehicles may be excluded from state forest.



▲ *Four-wheel drive vehicles are responsible for considerable damage to the environment, including erosion, increased stream turbidity and spread of jarrah dieback.*

Fishing

Streams and pools within forests of the South-West, are popular fishing spots during the open seasons, the issue of licenses being controlled by the Department of Fisheries and Wildlife.

There have been several types of fish introduced including, redfin perch (*Perca fluviatilis*), brown trout (*Salmo trutta*) and rainbow trout (*Salmo gairdneri*), mainly since 1930, and these are now well established from the Canning and Serpentine Rivers in the north to the Warren River in the south.

In many streams the most popular fishing is for the fresh-water crustacean, marron (*Cherax tenuimanus*) which is also widely distributed. Marron fishermen believe that declining catches have resulted from the introduction of trout, but little scientific investigation of this claim has been published.

Assessment of the level of fishermen and of their catch is virtually impossible because of the diversity of fishing spots, some illegal fishing, and the secrecy which surrounds the best places. There are several established angling clubs in the state, but fishing of one kind or another is almost universal and the clubs would cater for a very small minority.

The only Forests Department study of marron fishing was carried out in summer 1972-73 in the Murray River. It was estimated that in excess of 10,000 people fish for marron each year in this river, their average catch per fishing night being 0.92 marron.

Canoes

Western Australia has few permanent running streams and even fewer with "white water" suited to competitive canoeing. As with motor cycles, club membership reflects only a small fraction of canoe ownership, and the adoption of canoes as a high school sports activity has accelerated interest in ownership and hire of both kayaks and Canadian canoes.

Some of the best streams for canoes are said to be the Murray, Collie and Blackwood Rivers, all of which have considerable lengths within state forest and have potential for development as canoe "trails", unless they are modified by reservoir construction. Other streams in the so-called "deep south" near Manjimup and Walpole have limited present use, but should funds become available for removal of snags and improving access they could provide alternative sports canoeing. The Forests Department has provided some assistance to canoe groups by way of advice and provision of maps,

but has not been able to assist financially or physically.

Horses

Horse and pony clubs exist in several urban and country centres and in the past have concerned themselves primarily with gymkhana activities such as novelty events, dressage and hurdling. Since 1973 there has been a change in emphasis with interest in trail-riding.

The use of forest land for trail-riding has not been very extensive but can be expected to expand. The health and water pollution problems associated with equestrian activity have not been studied to any great extent in Western Australia but it is considered expedient to exclude horse activities from all water catchment, at least until such time as their presence can be shown to pose no serious health risks. In non-catchment areas horse riding can be permitted subject to the provision of feeding and stabling areas outside the forest.

Orienteering

Orienteering as a competitive sport was established in Western Australia in 1972 and has shown relatively rapid growth. There have been small

events conducted in metropolitan pine plantations but most competitive meetings have been conducted in John Forrest National Park. The use of state forest for intensive orienteering can not be encouraged because of the limited areas of suitable forest close to Perth which are not on catchment.

Bushwalking

There is a growing interest in bushwalking as a group or family activity in Western Australia, and the three existing clubs, have a membership of approximately 200 people. To this number must be added Guides, Scouts, para-scout organisations including Church of England Boys Society, Y.M.C.A. and the Duke of Edinburgh Award Scheme.

The department, in association with these groups has planned and established the state's first long distance walking track which extends from Kalamunda (near Perth) to Northcliffe in the southern karri forest. Named the Bibbulmun Bushwalking track after an aboriginal group which formerly inhabited much of the southern coastal zone, it is more than 40 kilometres in length and its use awaits the publica-

ESTIMATES OF RECREATION LEVELS
IN W.A. FORESTS (VISITOR DAYS)

Activity	Area Demand per person	Organised Groups	Others	Total
Passive Recreation	Small	100 000	150 000	250 000
Motor Rallying	V. Large	500	200	700
Motor Cycling	Large	1 200	2 500	3 700
Beach Buggy Driving	Large	80	trace	80
Four Wheel Driving	V. Large	100	200	300
Canoeing	Confined	50	150	200
Horse Riding	Medium	30	160	190
Orienteering	Medium	150	trace	150
Bushwalking	Large	1 250	1 250	2 500
Camping	Small	300	300	600
Fishing	Confined	500	20 000	20 500
Totals		104 160	174 760	278 920

tion of a guide book and maps of the area. The Bibbulmun track will serve a wide range of forest users but is intended for the less experienced walker. The experienced walker will no doubt continue to map out his own journey as he has done in the past, but the marked track is expected to interest a much larger part of the population.

Camping areas

Amendments to Camping Regulations of the Health Act permit "wild" camping subject to the following conditions

- the use of the land is permitted by the owner or occupier of that land;
- there is not in force any by-law made by the Council under the Local Government Act 1960, prohibiting camping or use of a caravan in that place;
- a nuisance is not and will not be caused by a lack of or defective sanitary arrangements;
- the caravan is parked or the camp is occupied in that place for three nights or less;
- there is no caravan park within a radius of 16 kilometres.

It is known that "wild" camping occurs within state forest from time to time but the department does not intend to either encourage this practise or to establish camp grounds under its own management. There is an existing network of caravan parks in or near the state forest at a number of centres including Mundaring, Armadale, Pinjarra, Collie, Donnybrook, Manjimup, Pemberton and Walpole, and by arrangement with local government, campgrounds have been established within state forest at Waroona and Logue Brook dams. There are also properties controlled by the Youth Hostels Association within forests at Mundaring Weir, Byford, Noggerup, Darradup and Pemberton.

These camping facilities are complemented by those used by special interest groups such as Guides and Scouts.

In some areas even occasional use of trail bikes causes noticeable site deterioration.

Even so, the department receives numerous requests for leases of forest areas as campsites and although each is treated on its merits, the general policy is opposed to creation of additional camps within the forest. A camping area usually requires an open space within a forest setting and this can be readily achieved by purchase of private land, often only partly cleared, but adjacent to state forest.

Exceptions to this general approach have occurred on three occasions in the last few years whereby abandoned forest headquarters at Dryandra (near Narrogin), Wellington (near Collie) and Pimelea (near Pemberton) have been leased to community organisations for use as youth and family holiday camps.

The future

And what of the future? Current forecasts suggest that increases in demand of between seven to 10 times are likely within the next 25 years. This must accentuate the current problem areas such as the competition for land, overuse, sanitation, maintenance and supervision. Should we forecast possible changes in emphasis? Could these include a return to steam driven railway "nostalgia tours" of the forest areas, an increasing demand for museums and interpretive centres, a greater use of pine plantations (especially in areas close to Perth) and, possibly, spotlight "safaris" to observe some of the nocturnal native animals?

If these forecasts are all realistic, a greater input of resources (manpower, time and money) will be necessary if the character and appeal of the forest is to be conserved. 🌿

Queensland silver wattle at Gleneagle, (Albany H'way)—an old Forests Department settlement converted for use as a picnic area.



