

SITES FOR SORE EYES

by Rae Burrows

When you are out in the bush barbecuing a juicy steak or photographing a little Rufous Treecreeper pecking at the crumbs on the picnic table, have you ever thought about how that forest recreation site was developed or is managed? If you are like most people you never have, nor are you likely to. It is enough that the weather is fine, the bush is great and the steak delicious.

Recreation areas don't just happen however. They are carefully planned, developed and maintained. In State forest the Forests Department is responsible for the recreation sites.

State forest is of major and growing importance to the State for recreational activities and provides one of the last large areas of relatively intact landscape available for recreation on an extensive scale. It is also close to most of the State's population and is easily accessible.

The Forests Department has been providing recreation facilities for the public for many years. It has

The giant Gloucester Tree has been a favourite recreation attraction in the karri forest for many years. Developments have taken place here to cater for the changing demands of visitors.



recently begun planning for recreation on a regional scale. This means that new sites will be located in areas best suited to a particular type of recreation and facility. Once the location for the site has been decided the work of effectively designing the individual facilities begins.

Changing Demand

Forest based recreation has always been popular. In the early days of settlement bush picnics, forest train rides and flower gathering were all common leisure activities. As the car began to dominate the forest scene, more vehicle-based forms of recreation like touring and sightseeing became important, but the forest picnic generally remained the main objective.

The Forests Department responded to the recreational demand by keeping special scenic routes open and in a reasonable condition - an example is the Rainbow Trail near Pemberton. Rustic tables, barbecues and bins were also provided in areas where it was obvious that people were congregating.

The advent of the 1970s and the increase in environmental and personal health awareness brought even more people into our forests for recreation and solace. In Western Australia they were encouraged by promotion of the appeal of the forests by such bodies as the Department for Youth, Sport and Recreation and the Education Department.

At about the time that the popularity of the forests was increasing, fuel prices were also escalating. Although no detailed studies were done in this State on the effects high petrol prices had on recreational patterns, it seemed apparent that Western Australians were reflecting the behaviour of people elsewhere. Indications were that petrol was saved for the leisure time but people would choose their recreation site carefully so that they could satisfy their range of recreation requirements without moving too far from the one place.

These economic developments, added to the fact that many unplanned picnic sites were becoming degraded and unattractive, prompted the Forests Department to begin the

process of redesigning old and planning new sites so that they could better serve the needs of the recreating public without causing unacceptable damage to the surrounding environment.

Redevelopment

Some existing sites had problems with their redevelopment and maintenance. These were generally the sites that had been developed by the Department in the wake of visitors. Some had been unwisely located on environmentally sensitive areas such as river banks which cannot withstand the constant pressure of large numbers of visitors. They become severely damaged.

Other facilities had been located actually on the feature that attracted visitors to the site. For example, at Boulder Rock near the Canning

Redeveloping recreation sites protects the natural environment itself, makes the sites functional for the user and produces a pleasant recreation environment. Here are site plans of Gloucester Tree before and after it was developed by the Forests Department.



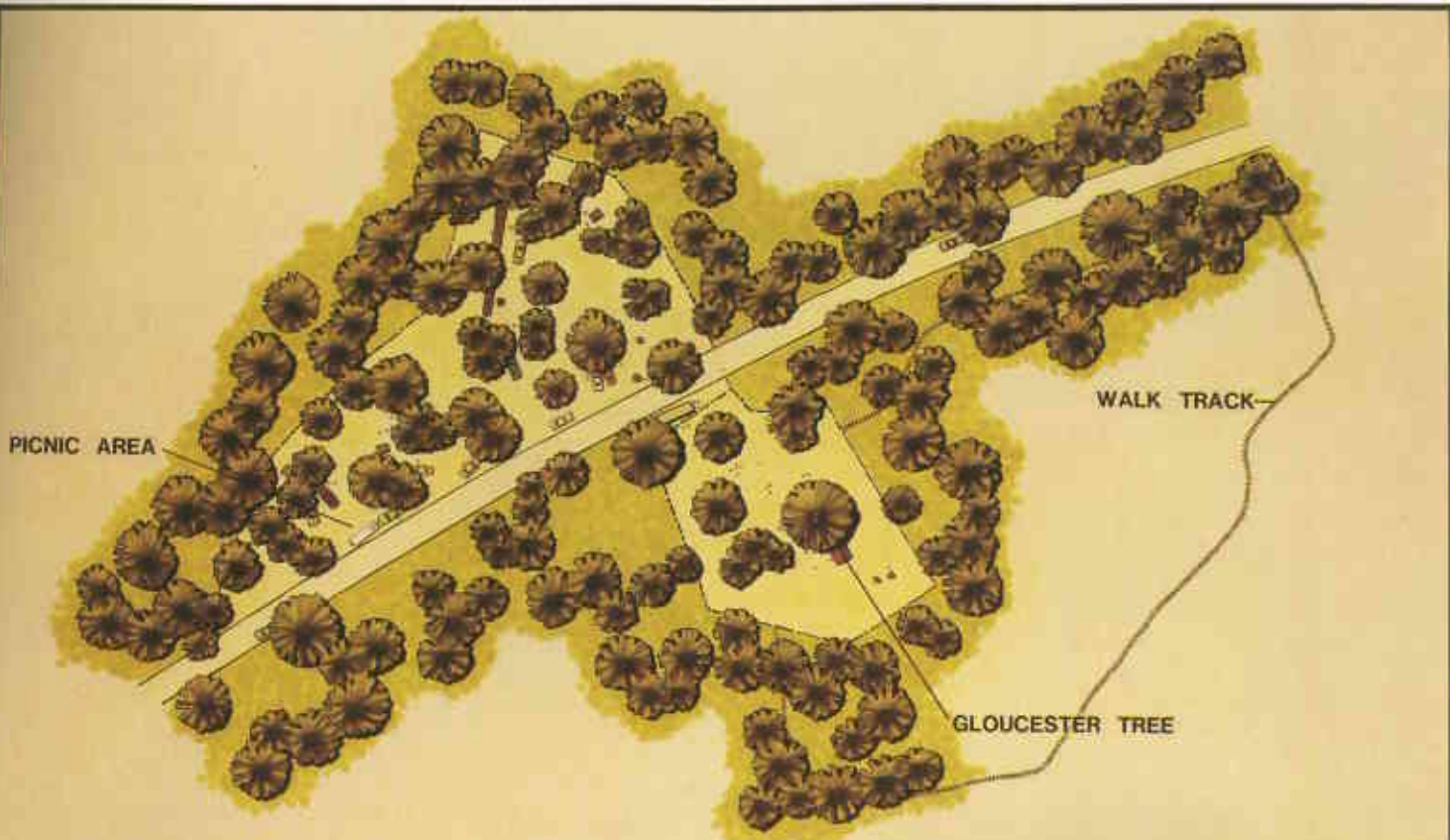


FIG. 7

GLOUCESTER TREE

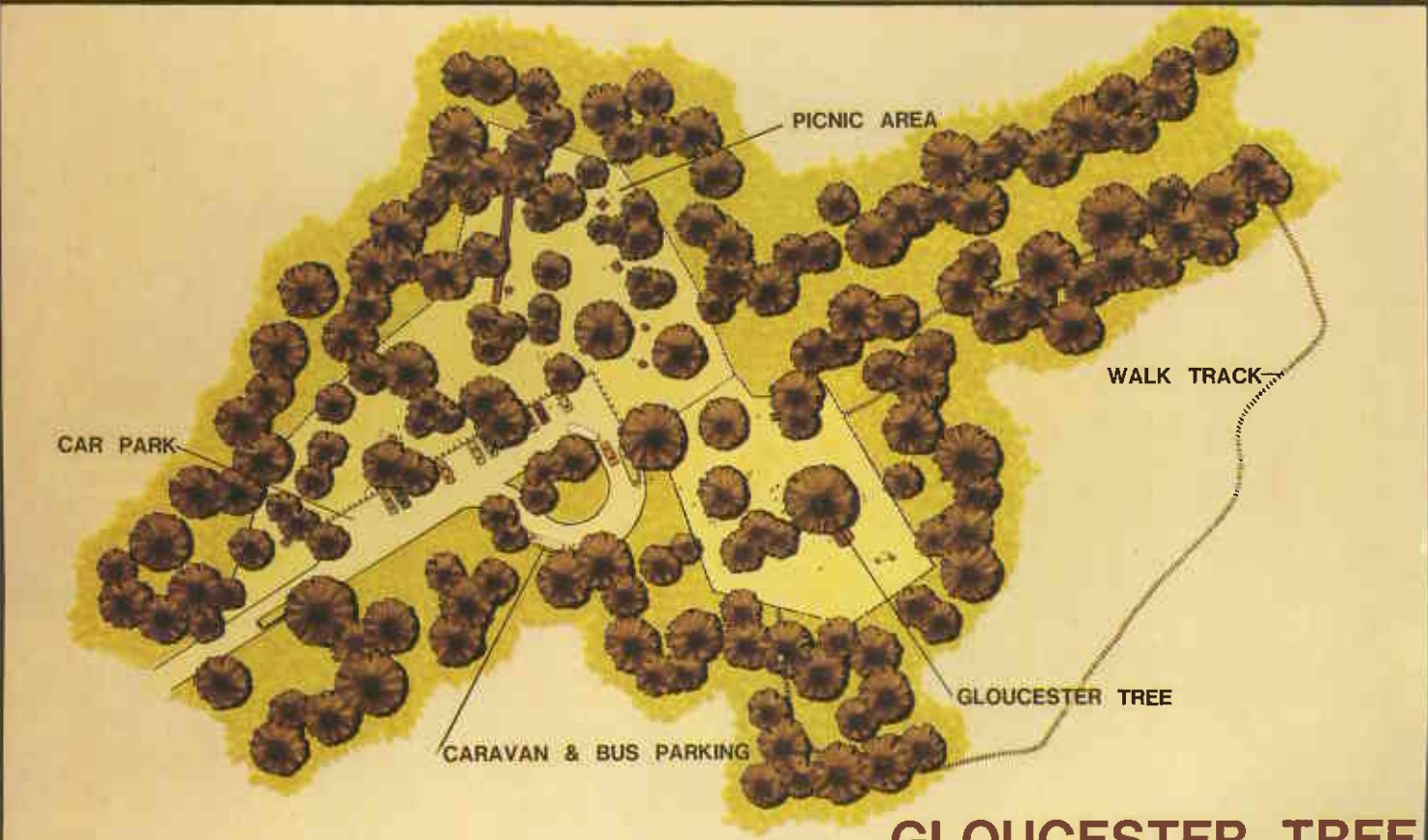


FIG. 8

GLOUCESTER TREE



C. Winfield

◀ Aerial view of the fire tower built on top of the towering Gloucester Tree. Although no longer used for fire surveillance, the tower provides a striking view of the surrounding karri forest.

Dam, picnic facilities were originally located on top of the Rock. This detracted considerably from the natural features of the site and its surrounds.

Still other sites had to be completely redeveloped to better meet the needs of the users and provide for a range of recreational activities without causing undue damage to the forest environment. Gloucester Tree is one such site.

Gloucester Tree

Gloucester Tree is an extremely popular and renowned fire lookout tree tower in Pemberton. Each year it is climbed by thousands of tourists from all over Australia.

The original recreation site below the tree was unsatisfactory, being centred around concrete barbecues and a 44 gallon drum that served as a rubbish bin. Cars could be driven right up to the base of the tree, creating a dust bowl in summer and a quagmire in winter. Compaction of the soil immediately around this huge karri also reduced the amount of oxygen reaching the surface roots, affecting the vitality of the tree.

These problems prompted the Department to draw up a detailed plan for the redevelopment of the

site in 1977. Rustic wooden picnic tables, stone barbecues and improved rubbish bins were provided in an area adjacent but not extending to the immediate vicinity of the Gloucester Tree. Vehicles were excluded from the whole recreation area by the use of vertical logs around a car park and bus turn-around area. The type of barrier was chosen to blend with the dominant lines of the environment - namely the stately karri trees.

Each picnicking unit, consisting of a table and barbecue, was separated from other units by distance and vegetation screens. This ensured a certain level of privacy for each recreating group while still keeping the area developed to a minimum. No units were located immediately under the popular fire tower so that it could never be perceived as belonging to any one group. It was and is a facility for everyone to use. Other facilities were provided to better cater for the needs of the public. Toilets were built and constructed in such a way that they didn't detract from the bush around them. The sturdy rough wooden structures are painted so that they merge into the surrounding forest.

A display shelter was also built. It houses information and photographs about the history of the Gloucester Tree and about the role of the Forests Department in managing forests like that around the site. The shelter is designed so that the displays can be easily changed or added to. It is also designed so that it is in keeping with the rustic appearance of the other facilities on the site.

Two walk loops were constructed through the forest around the tree. The trails are there to provide for those interested in becoming even more closely acquainted with the natural environment. The different length loops allow people with varying energy levels to appreciate the bush without needing to retrace their steps to get back to the picnic site. For those who are more energetic, an even longer walk trail

may be attempted. It is called the East Brook Circuit and is one of the circuit routes of the Bibbulmun Track - the marked bush walk trail that stretches from Northcliffe in the south of the State, to Kalamunda near Perth. The East Brook route is very scenic and takes about a day to complete.

People with other tastes can be catered for by the Pemberton Fitness Trail which was made within walking distance of the Gloucester Tree. It consists of a fairly gruelling signposted exercise circuit and a 1600 metre running track through a mature arboretum. Less energetic people can also enjoy themselves by driving down the Eastbrook Trail from Gloucester Tree. The one-way road passes through some magnificent karri forest and through some relatively rare pure marri (or red gum) forest. Glimpses of the pretty East Brook are also refreshing.

The new development based around Gloucester Tree has worked well to date. However it must be remembered that a recreation area, like everything else must change with changing demands, pressures and as better planning methods become apparent. Already some more work is required to further improve the area even in the immediate vicinity of the tree. Further trampling of the soil around the fire tower ladder is beginning to cause problems in winter by creating puddles in the trampled area. This of course is rather uncomfortable for climbers so a wooden ramp is planned to be constructed directly under the ladder.

Further improvements will no doubt be made in time, particularly if natural hazards like fire and strong winds cause damage to the site. To date, the Gloucester Tree area has been free of these problems. Some sites however, have been beset by problems caused by natural hazards. One such site is the Cascades.

The Cascades

The Cascades is a very attractive area adjacent to some splendid rapids on the Lefroy Brook south of Pemberton. Set in the karri forest, it was redeveloped in 1977 - at about the same time as Gloucester Tree. Soon after its transformation into a well designed recreation area, a fire burnt a great deal of the surrounding

bush. A few months later, further problems were encountered when a farmer's dam above the site burst. The resulting flood washed away part of the walk trail, scoured out the valley in front of a lookout area, destroyed two foot-bridges and deposited logs and other debris in one of the feature sets of rapids. The damage took three years to repair both by natural processes and a rebuilding and clearing programme organized by the Forests Department. Today, there is little or no evidence of these damaging phenomena.

Other minor problems have continued to occur in the area requiring prompt attention and repair. Trees have fallen over the walk trail, another foot-bridge has aged, requiring replacement, and some planting has been required in certain areas where machines and high water levels have exposed the soil.

This sort of work supplements the ongoing maintenance programme for the site. The latter is carried out for all recreation sites and includes grading and gravelling of access roads, emptying bins, providing firewood, raking walk trails and generally tidying up. The frequency of work is dependent upon the level of use of a particular site.

New Sites

The locations of new recreation areas have been chosen carefully so that the expected visitor pressure can be absorbed without damaging the very environment that attracts the visitors. Other factors such as vegetation and soil type, slope, drainage patterns and type of use that is to be catered for are all taken into account when choosing a site. People's preferences for views, forest types, areas close to bitumen roads and population centres, have been determined by recent surveys so that these factors may also be considered.

Two of the most recently developed sites are Centre Road near Walpole, and Chappel Bridge west of Manjimup.

Centre Road

Like most redeveloped and new sites, Centre Road recreation area has been planned so that it serves as a centre for recreational activity in the



▲ The Forests Department is responsible for repairing natural damage to recreation sites in State forest. Here part of the Cascades is blocked by flood debris.

▼ The same area of the Cascades freed of the debris.



▶ The recently constructed hut at Centre Road may be used by picnickers, hikers and canoeists for shelter in inclement weather.

area. The site itself is located adjacent to the Deep River and has picnic and barbecue facilities and a hut for shelter from inclement weather. Centre Road can serve as a base for bushwalkers, canoeists and, in the near future, sightseers in vehicles, as it will be linked by scenic bush tracks to other beauty spots, like Gladstone Falls.

The hut is located on a hill overlooking the barbecue area and





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the Deep River. It is one of three shelters in the Walpole region. The other two are located at Mt. Frankland and at Fernhook Falls and are used frequently. They are left open for the convenience of visitors and are well cared for by those who use them.

Chappel Bridge

Chappel Bridge is a newly developed recreation area about 25km west of Manjimup. It is named after the historic but unfortunately delapidated wooden bridge which spans the Donnelly River at this point. The river valley is steep and densely vegetated with magnificent karri forest.

Although the present development consists of only a barbecuing/picnicking area and walk trail, it is planned that the site will become the centre of a historic development. There is much evidence of the old methods of logging and hauling in the area and the old timber tramway is still easily seen.

Chappel Bridge is within an 800 metre scenic walk from an amazing curved wooden bridge called Palings Bridge. This old railway bridge was built three decades ago and does not cross the river but rather curves around a loop in it. The reason for building the bridge was apparently to avoid the exceedingly steep hills which the locos would otherwise have had to negotiate while hauling the logs.

The site of Chappel Bridge is also a handy resting place for the hardy walkers of the Bibbulmun Track.

Future Developments

Planned future developments are designed to explain the unique features of the forest to the visitors with the help of self-guiding car tours, information shelters and signs. We also plan to encourage people to try different types of forest based recreation such as orienteering, canoeing and horseriding. A horse-riding trail is soon to be marked out from Manjimup to the south coast.

▲ Built for bygone logging traffic, the old Chappel Bridge spans the Donnelly River near the newly developed recreation site. This site is also part of the scenic Bibbulmun Walk Track.

Loading and unloading areas and stabling facilities will be provided at points along the trail for the convenience of users.

In addition to these future developments and the existing facilities provided by the Forests Department, there will always be thousands of hectares of undeveloped State forest that you can discover and explore by yourself. Bring your friends, and enjoy yourself.

