

THE NEW BEARD TOWER

23.

by R. J. Underwood.

It is saddening to record that another of the great "Tall Tree" Lookout Towers in the Karri forest has been taken out of service. Beard Tree (176' to the cabin floor), located on the Deeside Coast Road in the northeast of the Pemberton Division, has now been replaced by Beard Tower, a metal construction.

Beard Tree Tower was built in 1952 and was an extremely valuable lookout during the 17 years it saw service. The tree overlooked portions of the Pemberton, Shannon and Manjimup Divisions, and provided an important "right angle" to bearings from Burnside, Boorara and Kepal Towers. However, a routine inspection of the tree during the 1967-68 season indicated that the top of the bole and one major limb supporting the cabin were dangerously decayed. The tree was condemned and later felled so that close study of the extent of the internal rot could be made. This study completely vindicated the condemnation of the tree.

In February, 1969, work commenced on the replacement of Beard Tree with Beard Tower. The new tower, located about $1\frac{1}{2}$ chains west of the old tree, is a four-legged structure made of galvanised steel. It towers 200 feet above ground, topped by an 8 feet diameter circular cabin. The view from the top is tremendous, surpassing that from the Tree. The climb is still a rigorous one, and it is surprising to find that the whole structure sways considerably. The cost of the new structure is expected to be in the vicinity of \$16,000 which compares unfavourably with the cost of the tree lookout it replaced (cost of tree, nil; cost of pegging and cabin, about \$400).

Incidentally, the old tree being felled, the iron pegs were lifted out with a kangaroo jack and a 28-load log cut and sent to Jardee Mill. A mundane end for a mighty tree!

The new tower is certainly a spectacular structure, but somehow it lacks the appeal and the romance of the tree.

Another of the trees to go recently was the old Gardner Tree Number 1. This tree was used as a lookout between 1939 and 1942, at which time the Gardner Tree Number 2 (about $\frac{1}{2}$ mile to the southeast of Number 1) was brought into service. The old tree snapped off last winter at a point about 15-20 feet below the crow's nest - a sight which brought a mild sense of alarm to this writer who had climbed the tree only two years previously. Examination of the break indicated that there

was only about 1" of wood around the bole holding it up. One gets a sense of history at the foot of this old tree - there is a sign there reading "persons who climb this tree do so at their own risk, (signed) S. L. Kessell, Conservator of Forests" !

The other tree towers still in use in the Karri country are Gloucester Tree, Boorara Tree, Gardner Number 2 and Diamond Tree. In addition there is a small tree outside the Pemberton office which is occasionally climbed by brave officers. It seems likely that Gardner will have to be replaced during the next 10 years, and the other major trees perhaps over the next 20-30 years. It is doubtful that any new tree towers will be built because (i) the best trees on the best spots have now gone and (ii) George Reynolds and Len Nicol would probably no longer relish the job of pegging and cabin construction.

One finds the prospect of the old tree towers going an extremely sad one. They seem to represent an era of development and originality in the history of karri forest management.