

# RECREATION - AN IMPORTANT ASPECT OF FORESTRY

by

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## INTRODUCTION

During the term from January 26th until March 22nd I was fortunate to be able to attend my first of a possible seven, one month courses on Recreational Leadership. This programme is conducted at the National Fitness Council's training centre at Narrabeen N.S.W. As a result I have a greater awareness of the concept of recreation; how a recreation programme can be set up in a Forestry centre and the influence of the recreation needs of the people (in the South West) on future forest policy. Before discussing these items it is necessary to define what recreation is.

## DEFINITION OF RECREATION AND LEISURE

Recreation when defined embraces a multitude of activities done by people usually during their leisure time, for some constructive purpose; without compulsion; for enjoyment; "and not consciously performed for the sake of reward beyond itself" (1). It serves as a balance to the increasing complexities and mental pressures of life and results essentially in "the refreshment of strength and spirit after toil" (2). Such a definition can be expanded by saying that "the purpose of recreation is not to fill in time but to fulfill life" (3).

Leisure refers to the time remaining after work has been accomplished, plus other obligations to the family, and to the community.

## THE IMPORTANCE OF RECREATION

"At work, one is told what to do and how to spend one's time. Recreation implies voluntary use of time and thus denotes self-responsibility. A person who regularly engages in some form of recreation as a balance to his work enjoys a rich, full, and abundant life, and also performs better at his job" (3). Those who regard play as frivolous and hold a second job to keep "up with the Jones'" could miss the fulfillment of life and expose themselves to needless mental and physical pressure without any break. Mental illness often results from this common approach to life.

## THE NEED FOR RECREATION LEADERSHIP

Leisure is increasing and unless we are taught to use it fully and effectively it could be the downfall of our present social system (compare the fate of the Roman Empire). "Therefore it is essential that education, as at present, is not just restricted to training for a career but also how to use our spare time productively" (4). "Learning how to live is as important as preparing oneself for a particular vocation of profession." (3). The training of professional leaders is the best approach as these people can go into the community (as do doctors, school teachers and policemen) and organise activities for all ages to keep people occupied during leisure. Experience in the U. S. A. which is more "advanced" socially than Australia, shows that the provision of facilities is not sufficient to ensure the success of community recreation (e. g. athletic tracks, gymnasiums, swimming pools.) Leadership is imperative to provide and vary programmes to retain interest, as people soon become bored if they are not stimulated with something new.

## THE PRESSING NEED FOR RECREATION PLANNING

Australia probably has not reached its saturation point yet where recreation facilities have fallen disastrously behind the needs of the people. This has happened in the U. S. A. and is a major contributory factor to racial tension and riots. "In fact, suggestions indicate that riots are a twisted, malignant type of recreation caused by boredom, frustration and discrimination, coupled with ignorance and lack of understanding by the governing bodies" (5).

However, in Australia the major factors which will force the need for recreation planning are reduction in working hours, high wages and hence more disposable income, automation in industry and technological advances culminating in the taking over of office jobs by computer. A few examples both here and in the U. S. A. are:-

- "(i) Dr. Brian Corrigan suggests that a twenty hour, four day working week is not far off, with six weeks annual leave and two hundred leisure-free days per year!
- (ii) Automation in industry in the U. S. A. results in 50,000 jobs per week going out of existence resulting in retrenchment, retraining or early retirement on Government benefits!
- (iii) America's annual supply of 800 million light bulbs could be made by 16 men!

- (iv) An economic advisor to Senator Barry Goldwater suggested a negative form of income tax as it would be cheaper to pay men not to work than create work situations which are unnecessary!"(6).

If Australia develops along these lines, the time could conceivably arrive when many people do not work at all during their lives! Recreation would be the only way to enable these people to lead normal lives.

#### ESSENTIALS AND BENEFITS OF A SMALL TOWN RECREATION PROGRAMME

1. Basically a leader of a Recreation Programme must have some training and knowledge of the diverse activities which can be incorporated.
2. He must have the skill and perserverence to see his programme carried out.
3. He must be able to improvise and vary activities to suit ever-changing popularity.
4. He must make the goals meaningful to the participants via experiences that have direction and purpose. This is essential before monetary assistance can be provided by Government bodies and service organisations.

#### "Programmes must cover:-

1. Emotional and Physical Health
2. Character Development
3. Widening Interests
4. Citizenship
5. Skills - mental and physical
6. Social living
7. Economic values
8. Community stability

#### The tasks of the recreation leader are:-

1. Planning
2. Organising
3. Staffing
4. Directing
5. Co-ordinating

6. Observing
7. Reporting
8. Evaluating" (6)

The benefits of a successful recreation programme in a town such as a Mill and Forestry Settlement are:-

- "1. Employees weld themselves into a more co-operative industrial family.
2. Artificial barriers between companies and between various levels of authority are largely eliminated - workers learn that supervisors are human.
3. They discover the company has interest beyond their jobs.
4. Off-hour habits have an important bearing on job performance - no programme of activities - off to the pub!
5. Employees experience morale-boosting experiences during recreation triggering loyalty and community pride.
6. Happy discussion on the previous nights or weekends activities replace gossip, rumour and often unjustified gripes.
7. Job monotony is combatted especially if regular programmes take advantage of before and after work and even during lunch periods"(9).

#### THE IMPORTANCE OF FOREST LAND FOR RECREATION

Besides recreation within a community there are a number of factors causing people to use the forests for recreation more than ever before.

Quoting from an article by K. W. Cremer(7):-

"the average Australian may enjoy recreation in the forest environment possibly thirty times per year (The O. R. R. R. C. (8) suggests 86 times in the U. S. A. for some one over 11 years of age but allowance is made here for the great popularity of beaches). That is, driving for pleasure 16 times, picnicing 6 times, walking 4times, camping once and fishing or hunting once."

By extending Mr. Cremer's following paragraph where he suggests that each recreational experience may be worth 20 cents; for a population of 800,000 in our South West this would amount to \$4,800,000 or a sum equivalent to our total forest revenue. Thus a tangible estimate of our priceless national heritage.

With people having more leisure they are sure to come to the forests more often.

Besides this, the frustrations of urbanisation, growth in population, ease of transport, improving roads will bring more people to our forests.

"One reason why camping has become such a popular leisure activity is that it provides a balance to the brick and concrete of urban living" (3).

"People can get along without wood but not without trees" (7).

"Real contact with nature should help remind man of his place and maintain proper perspectives" (7).

Forests are aesthetic, scenic, natural habitats of indigenous flora and fauna, catchment areas for purification and perpetuity of water supply; places for contemplation, hiking and natural phenomena unspoilt by man. With careful planning and foresight they can be established as a vast expanding recreational resource.

In 1962 the Outdoor Recreation Resources Review Commission studied recreation with the view to implementation of a permanent policy for U. S. A. Their findings were:-

- "1. The simple activities are the most popular. Driving and walking for pleasure, swimming, and picnicking head the list, with driving for pleasure most popular, regardless of income, age, education, or occupation.
2. Outdoor opportunities are most urgently needed near metropolitan areas. Seventy five percent of the people will live in these areas by the turn of the century.
3. Across the country considerable land is now available for outdoor recreation, but it does not effectively meet the need. The land is where the people are not. The problem is not one of total acres but of effective acres.

4. Water is a focal point of outdoor recreation.
5. Outdoor recreation brings about economic benefits to the country"(8).

Although these are findings from an American investigation it appears that they can be easily applied here. Indications suggest that Australia is more like America than the people are willing to admit.

#### THE IMPORTANCE OF RECREATIONAL CONSIDERATIONS IN OUR FORESTS

To enlarge on the preceding paragraph it is interesting to discuss this subject under the headings of the O. R. R. R. C.

1. Our forest roading is very extensive for tourists and is constantly being upgraded. The very nature of our undulating timbered areas with gravel soils lend themselves easily to roading and ease of access compared with rugged forests in other countries. Our steeper areas, near the major rivers which cut the Darling Scarp, are (or will be) either well roaded for plantations or water catchment sites. All our major reservoirs have bitumen road access and are scenically landscaped.
2. Urban development is spreading. Most of the coastal plain has been cleared for farms and the remaining acres of natural forest and exotic conifers, which should be left as belts through our large cities, are gradually being swallowed up by the monstrous urban sprawl. People are still moving to the cities; 70% of the population of W. A. are in Perth; 85% are in the South West land division. Major towns spread around our forest, to the west along the coast and to the east in our open farming districts.
3. Our forest is not isolated. It is within easy reach of people from all the surrounding districts. It is in the middle of the most densely populated division of WA. It is also quite accessible, far from rugged and climatically favourable for most of the year. With the lack of timbered areas around our cities and farming districts there is little wonder that people go to our forests for a change.
4. "Water is the focal point of recreation". This is also so in Western Australia and the major rivers of the South West originate or flow through our forests. The statement that water will be the limiting factor in the development of W. A. is true (however much water is wasted).

Until cheaper methods can be found to readily extract pure water from the sea or ground, our forest catchment areas must supply the bulk of our states needs in the South and to the East.

Most major rivers in the Darling Ranges are ear-marked for one or more dams.

Perhaps a crisis will arise where pressure for recreational use of such vast areas of water will force a compromise on our present stringent catchment area laws?

5. The industry of sales of recreation equipment in U.S. A. with its 20 billion dollar per year turnover is something worth considering. It must be an important factor in top level government decisions of the importance of forest use. People like to camp, hunt, fish, boat and hike. To have a reasonable amount of success and comfort, equipment must be satisfactory and be renewed from time to time.

K. W. Cremer sums up the importance of the issue of recreation in forests in two sentences:-

"If the Australian forest services underestimate the demand for recreational use of their forests, they will be more pressured to relinquish control of some of their forests" (7).

"Conservation means wise use of resources and that conservation is for the sake of people not for the values conserved (wood, water, scenery, etc.)".

#### DISCUSSION

From all the evidence available it seems recreation is necessary for the wellbeing of mankind. Australia must make haste to assess the growth and foster this vital social phenomena.

The people who live in our forested area must be educated and encouraged to realise the benefits of recreating effectively if they are to conserve this area in the interests of the bulk of the populus of W. A.

It would seem advisable that recreation aspects should be considered when planning forest management. Evidence suggests that interest is accelerating, but is it swift enough to control the changing scene in our forests?

Perhaps an inventory is necessary to zone our forest in various categories for diverse recreational use?

How important are the effects of reforestation, dieback, mining, water catchments, clearing for exotics, pollution and control burning as factors affecting the provision of adequate recreational opportunities for our people?

Should more of our natural forested areas be left for perpetuity and important ecological research?

Destruction of indigenous forests for quick returns must be weighed against the impossible task of returning them to their original state. The aesthetic value of large trees and scenic landforms are priceless. The destruction of such should not go unchecked and strong legislation is needed for their protection.

Our forests remained the same for many years, however, escalation of activity and perhaps apathy of people using them is a threat to their conservation.

It appears the time is ripe for an increase in the present consideration for recreation as more people than ever before are using their leisure productively in our timbered areas.

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