

## RECREATIONAL USE WITHIN STATE FORESTS

by

F. Batini

This article is based on observations made during a visit to the National Parks and National Forests in the States of North Carolina and Tennessee.

### GREAT SMOKY MOUNTAINS NATIONAL PARK

The Great Smoky Mountains National Park, situated in the Appalachian Mountain chain, is located on the border between North Carolina and Tennessee. It is one of the most popular of the U.S. parks with 6.78 million visits in 1970. This represents an increase of 50% over the 1960 figures. Over half these visits occur in the months of June, July and August. The six months from May to October account for about 83% of all visits.

The themes of this park are to show the visitor a forested mountain scape and to provide an insight into the lives and culture of the mountain pioneers. The park can be used for either camping (1,400 campsites are provided) or day use (the nearby town of Gatlinburg and private caravan parks cater for the excess). Park fees are \$3 per day per campsite with a maximum stay of one week in the summer months.

A full time staff of 125 caters to the needs of the public. This staff is greatly increased during summer using casual staff recruited primarily from colleges and schools.

The organisation is divided into four Divisions (excluding the Superintendents' Office) these are :

Division of Interpretation	7 positions
Division of Administration	9 positions
Division of Resource Management and Visitor Protection	33 positions
Division of Maintenance	71 positions

### DIVISION OF INTERPRETATION

This division operates the visitor centres (over 900,000 visits in 1970). These centres are excellently

laid out with maps, models and photographs of the park. Literature is available on a wide range of topics and is supplemented by films, tape - slide shows and a museum.

Guides for all nature trails are available at 10c. each. (This is based on an honour system and 49% are in fact paid for.) Demonstrations on the following aspects of mountain life are available : Ploughing with oxen, firing a muzzle loading rifle, grinding corn, arts and crafts of the mountain people, splitting shakes, brewing moonshine, etc. This is in addition to the natural history and camp fire programmes on vegetation, wildlife, black bears, bird watching and fishing.

Some of the mountain settlements have been rebuilt and are an appealing attraction. Damage and graffiti by vandals are an unfortunate but common occurrence. During 1970, informational and interpretative programmes contacted 3.68 million visitors (over 50% of all visitors).

#### DIVISION OF MAINTENANCE

It is obvious from its staffing that this Division has plenty of work. Nevertheless, the Park was extremely clean during the period of my visit. Undoubtedly this is influenced by the attitudes of the park user. Americans, in general, appear to be much more conscious of litter than is the case here in Australia at the present time.

#### DIVISION OF RESOURCE MANAGEMENT AND VISITOR PROTECTION

This Division has, undoubtedly, the responsibility for managing the biggest problem of the park - the park user. The great increase in the number of visits in recent years is proving to be an ever increasing headache to the park planners and managers. On busy days, some 12,000 cars per hour (40,000 per day) enter the main gate. On the major routes through the park these visitors crawl along in bumper to bumper traffic that would rival that in the biggest cities in the U.S. The sudden appearance of a black bear causes an immediate stoppage and complete jam as people evacuate their cars for a "look see".

Rangers speak of the park being loved to death! I saw little evidence of damage to vegetation on a broad scale. However in limited, high use areas, there is obvious evidence of soil compaction, plant death and erosion. It is quite obvious that most of the visitors see and use only the half chain strip either side of the major roads or the nature trails. There is little evidence that large numbers of people explore the park in depth. Thus the user impact is restricted to a very limited area.

One of the more serious problems is the management of the visitor himself. A well equipped park ranger carries a loaded .45 revolver, handcuffs, a nightstick, a billy club, a can of chemical mace and a loaded shotgun in his car. The vehicle is equipped with radio, flashing lights, siren and yelp. The back seat of a standard sedan is separated from the front by a  $\frac{1}{4}$ " steel mesh. There are no door or window handles in the back seat portion.

All rangers have to attend an 8 week police school on law enforcement. Special schools on narcotics and crowd control are run by the F.B.I. The chief rangers' library would do credit to a C.I.B. detective - but not a forester. Over 700 court cases were dealt with by park rangers during 1970. Most dealt with driving offences and the breaking of park rules regarding vegetation, wildlife, fish, etc. There is an increasing drug problem in the National Parks in the U.S.A. Recently, over 1,000 hippies had to be physically evicted from Yosemite.

Temporary rangers are also armed after a brief introductory course of one week. One of these was involved in an altercation with some youths last summer and shot one of the youths dead. This occurred on the Lake Mead National Recreation Area and the court investigations of the case are still proceeding.

Another problem is to find adequate space for the ever increasing demand for campgrounds. Over 1,400 sites are available but these are totally inadequate for the demand. Campsites involve problems such as sewage treatment plants, adequate rubbish disposal systems and crowd control. The quiet hours of 10 p.m. - 6 a.m. have to be enforced, the one week's maximum stay likewise, children have to be rescued, Mr. Smith has to be found as there is an important long distance caller waiting .....

Increasing the number of campsites is no real solution. These are quickly filled, the staff needed to manage the park is no longer adequate and the problems are still there - in increased numbers. In 1960 82% of campers used tents and required minimal facilities. In 1970 this figure has fallen to 40%. The remaining 60% use either caravans or tent trailers. In increasing numbers, the "woodsman" of today wishes to hook up his caravan to electricity, water and sewage outlets. Shower and shopping facilities also need to be provided.

## NORTH CAROLINA NATIONAL FORESTS

The National Forests of North Carolina are located within 100 miles of the Great Smoky Mountains National Park. These forests received over 2 million visitor days of recreational use in 1967. During 1970, over 6 million Americans drove through or camped in these areas. Recreational use is thus the fastest expanding use on these forest lands. Recreational development include 50 sites with 767 camping units and 500 picnic units. The development programme is far behind the demand for these facilities, in fact current demand exceeds the supply by more than 7 times. Demand projections show a total demand for 22,000 camping units and 8,000 picnic units by 1976. In the next 5 years it is expected that the existing gap between demand and supply will widen even more.

The pressure on environmental issues within the U.S. continues to increase. Forestry, which in that country has had a reputation and an image far better than it has in Australia, is suffering the back-lash of these activities. The public feels that too great an emphasis is being placed on production forestry. Conservation and pressure groups are badgering Congress into forcing the U.S. Forest Service into more and more recreational use. Silvicultural practices such as control burning and clear felling are under attack, though formerly these were quite acceptable. The Federal Service is finding, more and more, that publicity is an important aspect, if it is going to continue responsible management programmes. There is now a real need to "sell" these programmes to the man in the street.

Criticism of the lack of suitable recreational areas has led to suggestions that National Forests be excised from timber production and converted into National Parks. This has already occurred with some National Forests. Recreational pressure has already forced several water companies into the additional cost of water treatment plants in order to accommodate recreational use on the water resource.

The N.C. National Forest Supervisor and his foresters are keenly aware of this political pressure on the forest estate. "Travel influence" zones are mapped out along well used roads. The verges are managed for aesthetic appeal and not production values. These verges are also used as screens between the road and clear cutting coupes. Each Divisional office has 3 professionals, the O.I.C. and

2 assistants. One of the assistants deals with production values, the other solely with recreational, wildlife and aesthetic aspects. The Head Office staff includes 4 recreation foresters, 3 landscape architects, a soil scientist, a hydrologist, a wildlife biologist and 8 foresters. Of these 8 only 3 are involved with production forestry.

Land use and management plans for recreational areas have been prepared. Campground fees are \$1 per day with a maximum stay of one week during the summer months. Sewered toilet blocks and sewage treatment plants are being provided on the larger recreational sites. Lifeguards are also provided on recreation beaches and streams. This is apparently very necessary to avoid legal action being taken against the Department in case of personal injury. The North Carolina forests include part of the Biltmore estate. This is where the first forestry school in the U.S.A. was established. The school and ancilliary buildings have been reconstructed as part of the "Cradle of Forestry" project. Though far from finished, this project attracted 77,000 visitors in the first 6 months after it was opened.

National surveys indicate that conservation problems are ranked as the 6th most important issue among U.S. youth. 97% of the people polled wanted more access to green grass and trees, 95% favoured Federal funding of projects related to environmental issues and 75% were willing to pay added taxes in order to fund these projects. There is a feeling that, if foresters are too defensive in dealing with these issues, the potential conservationist can readily become hard-core preservationists.

### Conclusions

I am personally in favour of recreational development within the forest areas of this State. I think that it would be unwise to deny the people access to their forests. I also consider that a lot of good feeling can be promoted by encouraging more recreational use. The work being conducted by the Divisions is commendable and the preliminary "user" surveys are of great value. In the light of my U.S. experiences, however, very careful thought must be given before recreational programmes in Western Australia are to be expanded. Unless this development is carefully planned and budgeted for, we may end up with some of the serious problems which currently face the U.S. Forest Service - an unhappy public (there are too few facilities), a great cost (campsites, sewage and garbage disposal), drugs and crowd

control problems and the possibility of court actions against the Department in cases of personal mishaps to the forest user. These problems I consider to be very real. I cannot see any reason why they should only be peculiar to the U.S. and not be applicable to Australia in time.

Time appears to be one factor on our side of the ledger. If we plan adequately in advance, some of these may be alleviated, or even overcome. I shall base my thoughts on the premise that user pressure on forested areas for recreational enjoyment will continue to increase. The other assumption is that, even should we desire to stop this, we are in fact nearly powerless to do so. Both of these premises have some basis in the light of U.S. experience.

The major problems appear to be associated with permanent campgrounds. I consider that the Department should encourage drives for pleasure and day-users of the forest, but would have very serious misgivings about the development of campsites within the forest. This type of development could well be provided by the private sector, in areas adjacent to the forest. We could in fact provide advice on layout, silviculture etc., to these private developers. The forest could then be retained as the source of the recreational experience and foresters retained as silviculturists and not law enforcement officers. Whatever development takes place, it will cost money. Campsites cost a lot of money if they are to be adequately developed and conform to future air and water pollution regulations. It is difficult to see how we could justify these projects from the current timber royalties. If additional recreational areas are considered desirable, an alternative source of funds should be sought. U.S. experience suggests that this source should be considerable and available in ever increasing amounts.

Matters such as the respective role of foresters and police in supervising the forest user should also be considered. The likelihood of court actions against the Department must be given some thought and an approach to Crown Law could be desirable. It would indeed be a sad day if forest rangers have to be armed in order to perform their duties.

The silvicultural problems relating to forest use by the public are rather less serious than the social and economic problems outlined. This is also the sphere in which our basic training lies. Adequate land use planning in the early stages should help overcome these. Foresters

in W.A. should try to apply the U.S. experiences in their everyday forest management. The public is becoming increasingly conscious of the environment. If our management is inadequate, or even if it is considered to be inadequate, serious repercussions on the Department could occur.

We cannot enter into an expanding recreational programme lightly. If we do so, we may find that we have spawned a situation which we are unable to handle successfully.