

THE WILD COUNTRY - IV

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The interest many foresters have in the South Coast is evidenced not only by the numbers of them who visit the area regularly for exploration and recreation, but also by the series of articles printed in Forest Notes over the last few years and the now well-publicized "South Coast Report" written by a group of foresters in 1972. Reviews of the "South Coast Report" appeared in the West Australian and the Australian Conservation Foundation Newsletter during October 1974 and this publicity has stimulated a welter of enquiries and requests for copies of the report from various individuals, conservation groups and outdoor clubs and organizations.

Naturally, it is encouraging to find such widespread support for the concept of reservation and planned development of this area. Whilst we might expect to find a rapidly growing public awareness of the beauty, biological interest and rare, wilderness adventure to be found in such abundance in this section of the coast, it is a little surprising to discover that our rather stumbling attempts to describe the values of the area are pre-dated by over 50 years by the efforts of others, considerably more adventurous and far-sighted than present-day explorers and writers.

Consider for example the following extract, from such an unlikely journal as "The Western Australian Tourists' Guide and Hotel and Boarding House Directory". Written anonymously and printed 51 years ago in 1923, no better description of the south coast has ever been set down.

"THE INLETS AND RIVERS OF THE SOUTH COAST

A GREAT NATIONAL ASSET

Between Cape Leeuwin and King George's Sound there looks out upon the great Southern Ocean a long stretch of coastland which, in a few years, is destined to become one of the great holiday resorts of Western Australia, if not, indeed, of the Commonwealth. There is nothing in Australia that in any degree resembles the region indicated. It is unique in every respect. In the first place,

it enjoys a climate with a lower average temperature than any other district in this island continent of anything like the same extent. Its latitude precludes high temperatures and its long sea-outlook tempers the cold of winter. Curiously enough, though only 400 miles from Perth, and with quite a number of populous centres, from 70 to a couple of hundred miles of it, the country of the inlets and the rivers is comparatively little known. The reason is not far to seek. Behind the coast and the inlets lie the great Karri forests for which Western Australia is famed. These forests have offered a bar to close settlement, and in them are to be found few besides those whose occupation is directly connected with forest exploitation. Again, although bush tracks are frequent, good roads suitable for vehicular traffic exist only to a comparatively small degree. Railways, too, are scarce at present. There is one from Albany to Denmark, and another from Manjimup to Pemberton, but neither of these reaches the inlet country. At present access can be gained best by car or buggy from Busselton, Pemberton, Manjimup or Denmark, according to the part of the coast which the visitor wishes to reach. At Augusta, five miles from Cape Leeuwin, there is good accommodation for tourists, and also at Denmark, but at other places on the coast, until the latter place is reached, the visitor must provide for himself. Proceeding Eastwards from Augusta there are in close succession a number of rivers entering the ocean. We find the Scott River, the Donnelly and the Warren, the Gardiner and the Shannon, the latter running into Brook's Inlet; then we have the famous Nornalup Inlet, into which the Deep and the Frankland Rivers run. Into Irwin Inlet run the Bow and the Kent Rivers, while the Denmark and Hay Rivers run into Wilson's Inlet; and still further to the East is King George's Sound, into which runs the Kalgan River, and upon which is situated the picturesque and attractive town of Albany.

In every inlet and river, and everywhere along the coast, the adventurous holiday-maker will find his time and attention full engaged. If he is a sportsman there is splendid sea fishing, and for

duck shooting abundant opportunities are offered. The whole region is a succession of scenic beauties and desirable spots. Those who wish to make the best of the Inlet Country must camp out, and the only difficulty they are likely to experience is that of deciding where to pitch their tents in a district which presents so many favourable situations. Among the rivers and inlets one finds oneself in a country that is unhackneyed, for its delight can be enjoyed only by those who are prepared to camp out, and to put aside for a time the formalities of city life. But none can go there without benefit to his or her health. It is proposed that a big area adjoining Normalup shall be reserved for all time as a National Park and tourist resort, and the proposal is, indeed, a wise one. Meantime, in that marvellous country nature is still primitive, and that alone is a powerful lure to many."

One of the interesting points arising from this 1923 description is the inclusion of the whole coastal strip between Cape Leeuwin and King George's Sound. By 1972, when the current "South Coast Report" was drawn up, less than 50% of this coastline remained available for reservation, almost the entire coastal strips between Augusta and Cape Beaufort to the west and Walpole and Albany to the east having now been alienated as private property. The "great karri forests" which "offered a bar to close settlement" have, of course also been decimated by alienation, mainly as a result of the Group Settlement Project, which was just starting at the time of our anonymous report.

Nevertheless, it is still wonderfully fortuitous that what remains inalienated today on the south coast is still largely unspoiled and the growing awareness and interest in the area promises to make any further alienation or disruptive activities unlikely. It is still indeed a "country that is unhackneyed" and a place to be enjoyed by those prepared to "put aside the formalities of city life".

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