The Shannon

Rae Burrows

Rae Burrows looks at the changing fortunes of the old mill town

It is almost dusk. Step quietly onto the wooden ramp. Water trickles beneath the boards; reeds and bushes nod in the breeze. The sweet scent of brown boronia tantalises. Reach the shelter and silently sit down. This may be the time that you finally see those elusive quokkas.

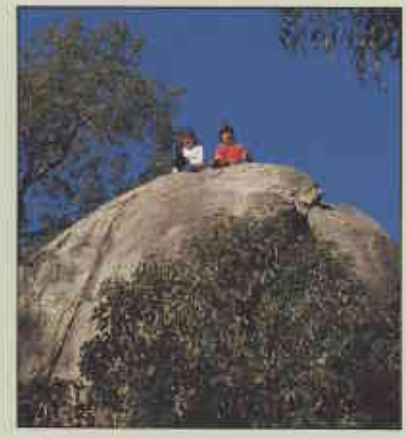
Whatever your luck, the starlit evening will refresh your spirit. At evening's close take a hot shower before turning in and retire to a cosy hut nearby. Tomorrow promises more adventure.

This is 'The Shannon', one-time mill town, where hundreds of timber workers and foresters lived, and recently reborn holiday spot. Straddling the South Western Highway about half way between Walpole and Manjimup, it is an ideal base for exploring the forests, granite outcrops and rugged coastal country for which the region is famous. The recreation site is the initial major development of the Shannon National Park (recently approved by Parliament) - an area of almost 60 000 ha which encompasses the entire Shannon River basin.

Facilities at the site were designed and built by CALM between 1983 and 1985. They cater for campers, picnickers and walkers, and are wheelchair accessible.

The structures are built of natural materials like timber and earth, and the design acommodates the local climate. It had to. In karri country it rains for nine months of the year and drips off the trees for the next three! With this in mind shelters were provided for campers, for walkers along the walktrails and for picnickers using the barbecues in the day-use area.

There are several bushwalks to explore.Try working your way over the river, through the great karri forest to the spectacular views from Mokare's Rock. Branch off the main trail for a moment - and suddenly find yourself high above the ground amongst the leafy crowns of the karri trees. Birds screech and



John Goodlad

chatter in the blossoms, then, darting off, become flashes of colour against the green curtain. For a while you are one with them. Eventually it's time to leave. Turn a corner in the trail and there it is. Mokare's Rock. Complete with colourful carpet of flowers, mosses and lichens.

A boardwalk above the surface ensures that clumsy human footsteps will not damage the delicate foliage of the plants or threaten their tenuous hold on the rocky surface. The view is excellent; the atmosphere magic. The trail winds on through shady glens of karri oak and across trickling creeks to reach the dam. Karri trees throw their majestic reflections across the surface. Feel the dark waters inviting you to refresh yourself. Stay still long enough and you might catch a drift of ghostly laughter as the children of yester-year play on the banks.

The dam was built upstream of the Shannon mill site. In winter water for the townspeople and the mill could be drawn from the Shannon River. In summer, however, the river sometimes dried up, so it was essential to draw water from the dam. Its picturesque location meant it became a popular swimming and marroning place, and in summer families gathered on the banks to picnic.

The natural environment that now attracts holiday-makers was a bonus for the original residents, but the lifeblood of their settlement was timber. An acute shortage of building timber after World War Two had prompted the Government to establish several mills. In 1947, plans were released for the construction of a mill and supporting townsite at Shannon, and work had begun.

First there had to be an extension of the railway line from Northcliffe to Shannon. This line would carry logs and sawn timber - and also transport supplies to the fledgling town. It was built almost entirely by hand through the thick bush and often hilly landscape, and finally completed in 1949.

The first mill was a portable 'spot-mill'. This cut timber for the train sheds and the first houses, as well as producing the timber that would shelter the permanent steam-driven mill. In 1953, the latter mill became fully operational and employed 162 men. The settlement itself was designed for 90 mill houses in a double 'U' shaped row. They surrounded a central 'communal' space where a hall, church and school were built. Next to the school site was the the business centre with a butcher, baker, general store, post office shop and nurse station.

The Forests Department settlement was adjacent to the mill townsite. As well as an office and workshop, single men's quarters and houses were built for the staff who were to oversee the logging and regeneration of the forested areas around the Shannon.

In 1968 the mill closed. The houses were sold and transported away from the site. The bustling and activity were stilled. The only sounds were the birdsongs and the secretive quokkas rustling in the rushes.

The surrounding forests burst with new growth as young karris thrust up to replace the trees which were cut for the mill.

Now, the building pads of the old houses make ideal sites to pitch a tent and the old logging tramways and roads are used for walk trails and scenic drives, because, with the coming of the new national park, people are returning to share in the harmony of 'the Shannon'.

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Cover Photo

We've heard of wolves baying at the moon, but frogs? Obviously, this amphibian is not above displaying a little lunacy. Nor is the photographer, Jiri Lochman, who must have been moonstruck to get this superb shot.

EDITORIAL

Every year at this time the subject of bush fires becomes a preoccupation with land managers. Steps must be taken to ready fire-fighters and their equipment; hazards must be identified and minimised; education programs for neighbours and visitors must be renewed. Fires are inevitable. The combination of hot, dry weather, inflammable fuels in the bush and ignition from lightning or careless people will see to it that almost every day over the next few months Conservation and Land Management Staff or Bush Fire Brigades will be fighting a bush fire somewhere in the State. Because of modern technology and efficient fire control practices, land managers these days can very largely determine the fire regime which is to be applied in a given area. For example, in most of the land CALM is responsible for, the policy is to try to keep fire out, pending a better understanding of ecological requirements. In a small proportion of the CALM estate (notably parts of the south-west forests), regular, controlled burning is done. The aim of this operation is to minimise the risk of serious wildfires in places where values are highest. The most important value to be considered in the South-West is human life.

In this edition of *Landscope* readers are urged to recognise their individual responsibilities. Most importantly, these are to make their own houses safe from bush fires and to learn how to look after themselves and their families if a fire occurs.

This dual approach by land managers and householders will help combat the worst consequences of one of nature's most dangerous and predictably-occurring events: the Australian summer bushfire.

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