



The TREE TOP WALK widens your view of the different levels of this remarkable forest. It provides a view usually reserved for...

As you walk around, feel the wind sooth...

The Tree Top Walk is a one-way loop of path close to 40 metres above the ground.

Care has been taken to make the Tree Top Walk safe. Please exercise caution at all times. Maximum...

The Art of Interpretation

There is more to national parks, reserves, forests and recreation areas than a random collection of plants, animals and old buildings. But how each element fits together to create a unique heritage site is often not obvious to the casual visitor. The art of interpretation links all the elements and helps us see how they interact with one another and with ourselves. Ultimately, it encourages us to appreciate and care for such places.

Tree Top Walk provides you with a unique opportunity to explore the remarkable forest. It takes you up above the understory and into the usually reserved for the birds that live at this level. Feel the air and soak in the forest atmosphere. The walk is a one way loop of 600 metres. It is suitable for assisted wheelchair users. The highest point is 10 metres above the ground. To make the Tree Top Walk as safe as possible. Nevertheless please wear sensible footwear and follow the signs. Maximum loads, 20 people per span and 10 people per circular platform at any one time.

By Gil Field and David Gough

Interpretation is the art of explaining cultural or scientific processes. It seeks to enrich visitors' experiences by enhancing awareness, appreciation and understanding of our environment and heritage. It helps us get more out of our experience as visitors. If it is successful, we not only learn to value our environment and heritage, we also become committed to protecting and managing them.

You can visit any number of recreation sites, national parks, marine reserves and the like throughout Western Australia. At many of these places, you will encounter some form of interpretation—trailside signs, information shelters, visitor centres or guided activities—each contributing to enriching our experience of the place we visit. Part of the job of the interpreter is to decide which form is appropriate to which area and audience, and how far to take the interpretation before it becomes intrusive. This is not always a simple or clear-cut process.

PLANNING FOR YOUR EXPERIENCES

Before interpreters can help enrich a visitor's experience of a place, they need to know 'who's coming to dinner'



and what he or she wants 'on the menu'. Interpreters also need to get to know the place itself—experience its ambience, research its history and consider its values. By blending this information, they create themes that are likely to interest visitors, to answer their questions and, more particularly, to answer the questions they might have asked, if they had known enough to ask them.

The next step is to decide how to present the information. There are many possibilities ranging from static

Previous page

An invitation to an enriching experience at the trailhead to the Tree Top Walk near Walpole.

Photo – Ann Storrie

Left: Spotlighting in Karakamia Sanctuary. The most powerful interpretive experience is to actively participate with a trained guide.

Photo – Ann Storrie

Below: The Tree Top Walk. The experience is so provocative, it enriches without words.

Photo – Michael James/CALM

media such as brochures, leaflets, magazines or newspapers and displays, to active media such as video, moving exhibits or aquaria and, especially in visitor centres, interactive exhibits. But the most powerful communication strategy is to actively involve visitors with a trained guide.

Design of the actual interpretation starts with a 'hook'. It might be a visual image, something we hear or something we can do, or it might be some catchy humour in a sign or poster. Perhaps it is a guide's anecdote giving a personal perspective on a heritage site. Once we are hooked, interpreters develop the story and present it in language that is relevant to us and in a way likely to provoke us into responding.

But how far should they go? Like all forms of communication, interpretation is continually being refined. Years ago, when visiting sites, we may have encountered enthusiastic tour guides who took us through magnificent cave systems showing us all the weird and wonderful formations that developed there over centuries. Frequently, these formations would be given names like 'the elephant', 'the Virgin Mary' and so on. The problem with this type of interpretation is that we all see things differently. What might look like an elephant or the Virgin Mary to one person, might look like a wombat or a candlestick to another. The interpreter and the interpretive media should be catalysts for revelation not a replacement for it.

Modern interpreters are developing and modifying their skills to take a





cooperative rather than prescriptive approach to the enlightenment process. Indeed, in many areas it's now considered desirable to have interpretive-free zones, where nature is left to speak for itself.

Let's take a look at some recent examples of interpretation in action.

DISCOVERING THE FORESTS

The forest communities are a major part of WA's natural heritage. Interpreters have adopted a number of different strategies and techniques to interpret the forest to visitors.

For example, The Hills Forest (see *LANDSCOPE*, Winter 1992 and Winter 1997) was designed to bring the forest into the lives of city people. It is a key component of the Perth Outdoors program and focuses on increasing awareness and appreciation of the value of the forest. The Hills Forest guided activity programs are aimed at value adding, so casual visitors to the forest gain more from their visit.

For instance, a guide introduces the theme of how native animals have adopted a nocturnal lifestyle to avoid the heat of the day, conserve body water and reduce dependence on waterholes. Participating in a spotlighting tour at night, with the sight of nocturnal animal eyeshine, can create a memorable impression that enriches our experience of this theme. Similarly, by participating in Aboriginal dance and song we can generate an empathy with indigenous ceremony and celebration far more successfully than by just watching.

The Forest Heritage Centre at Dwellingup takes a different focus



when interpreting the forest to visitors, and it targets a different audience.

It showcases and explains the fine woodcraft products that come from our forests. The combination of a fine wood gallery, interpretive displays, trails and the School of Wood brings the jarrah forest alive to the visitor by introducing the human element of creativity and interactivity with our forest environment and resources.

Taking these two facilities together, The Hills Forest explains why we value our forests and the Forest Heritage Centre looks at what we value.

In contrast, at Wellington Discovery Forest—a south-west 'Living Window' ecomuseum module—the focus is on the study of forest ecology and how we manage the jarrah forest. Here, we go on a journey along two walktrails and see trailside signs that provide an

Top left: Innovative trailhead signs at the Forest Heritage Centre, Dwellingup, borrow shape and colour from the surrounding forest.

Top: One of the interpretive sites along a trail at the Forest Heritage Centre, Dwellingup.

Above: A diversity of display techniques offers something for everyone at the Forest Heritage Centre.
Photos – John Davies

explanation of how the forest is managed for wood and wildlife.

Farther south, near Pemberton, the treetop fire towers of the Diamond Tree, Gloucester Tree and the Bicentennial Tree provide an historical perspective on managing forest fires. The story is told in display shelters at the base of the trees, but the interpretive experience for the brave (or foolhardy, depending



on your perspective) comes when we climb the trees. It gives us a feel for the innovation, the dangers and the exertion of the forester's job and clearly demonstrates the vast areas that can be surveyed from fire lookouts. Now that is interactive interpretation!

Perhaps the high point of interpretive design, where both facility and service come together to create a unique experience, is the Tree Top Walk

at the Valley of the Giants near Walpole (see 'Saving the Giants', *LANDSCOPE*, Spring 1996). This 600-metre walk reaches out into the canopy 40 metres above the floor of the tingle forest.

The experience is so provocative that it enriches without words. However, visitors now get some help to digest the tingle forest experience. Interpretive products provide answers to the many questions generated by

visitors, or to questions we might have asked had we thought of them: How was the walk built? What birds, insects, reptiles and plants live in the canopy; why do they prefer that habitat to another and what happens when the canopy is disrupted by fire or logging? How and why did the forest community develop and what is its future?

Back on the ground, the Ancient Empire Walk complements the Tree Top



Top left: A trailhead sign along the boardwalk at Hamelin Pool, Shark Bay, entices interaction.
Photo – Gil Field

Top: Visitors participating in a cultural immersion experience with a local Aboriginal guide—CALM Wildlife Officer Trevor Walley.
Photo – Dennis Sarson/Lochman Transparencies

Above left: Simple, mechanical, interactive exhibits beneath a large mural at the Milyering Visitor Centre in Cape Range National Park.
Photo – Gil Field

Above: Children's activities at Yanchep National Park. The human element can significantly enrich the interpretive experience.
Photo – Gordon Roberts/CALM

Left: *WA Naturally* is more than an information centre, it is a simulated experience of Western Australia.
Photo – Robert Garvey/CALM

Walk and focuses on our perspective from the tingle forest floor. Leaf-shaped plaques along the boardwalk entice us to contemplate the experience.

The Valley of the Giants enriches an experience through changing perspectives on the forest with walktrails, the development of facilities and guided activities.

LOOKING AT WILDLIFE

Zoos, museums and wildlife parks provide us with an opportunity to see and sometimes interact with native animals, but they usually don't provide the environmental context for us to appreciate their natural habitat. Current trends with both plants and animals now focus on interpreting the context as well as the content.

At the Perup Forest Ecology Centre, near Manjimup, tour groups who visit or stay at the Wilderness Lodge can enjoy a wildlife encounter on guided spotlighting tours to seek native animals, including five endangered species.

A similar program operates at Dryandra near Narrogin. A recent innovation there is a wildlife enclosure. This is used for captive breeding of endangered species to restock habitats depopulated by foxes. When fox populations have declined, following extensive baiting with 1080, the newly bred animals are reintroduced to their original habitats. In this example, the learning experience consists of observation, presentation, demonstration and interaction with wildlife researchers, managers and interpreters, all within the context of the woodland community.

OUR CULTURAL HERITAGE

Millstream Homestead Visitor Centre, in the Pilbara, interprets a rich and varied past. This historic homestead is an impressive sight. It is built close to a wetland oasis of palms and paperbarks, surrounded by an arid landscape of spinifex and snappy gums.

From the outside, the building is the homestead of the Gordon family. Inside, displays in the rooms of the homestead explore the concept of 'home'. The Yinjibarndi room features an Aboriginal bush shelter and demonstrates Aboriginal lifestyle and stories. A recording of a Yinjibarndi elder's song recreates the atmosphere of a bush camp of the distant



past. The early settlers' room simulates entering a stockman's hut similar to the one found at the rear of the homestead. The central room is a pastoralist's lounge room, complete with a photograph of an original 1930s drawing of the homestead and station by Doug Gordon when a teenager. The rest of the room interprets the ecology of the Millstream-Chichester National Park's natural communities—the homes of the wildlife.

The interpretation tells the park's stories—its natural history, cultural history and historic events—and the site provides the context for the interpretation. The homestead allows the use of interpretive media that could not be used outdoors, such as video, exhibits, artefacts and dioramas. These create a multi-dimensional experience of home from the perspective of an Aborigine, an early settler, a stockman, a homestead family and wildlife.

Western Australia's landscapes, forest, wildlife, historic or cultural heritage can all be interpreted to enhance the appreciation of their value. Without interpretation, they are at risk of being undervalued and could ultimately be lost.

We define our heritage in the things we want to keep. To keep it, we have to value it. That is what the art of interpretation does in many of Western Australia's natural places: it gently adds to our experience of the site, often unintrusively, in the firm belief that we will not only enjoy the moments we spend communing with our natural heritage, but will also care for it.



Top: Milyering Visitor Centre exemplifies the 'body language' of interpretive design. With its energy-efficient, solar-powered, rammed earth architecture it blends in with its surroundings.

Above: Millstream Homestead Visitor Centre in the Pilbara revitalises a pioneering family homestead by expanding the concept of 'home'.
Photos – Dennis Sarson/Lochman Transparencies

Gil Field is Senior Interpretation Officer in CALM's Visitor Interpretation Section (part of the Park, Planning, Tourism and Recreation Division). He can be contacted on (08) 9334 0580 or by email (gilf@calm.wa.gov.au).

David Gough is Editor of *LANDSCOPE* and can be contacted on (08) 9389 8644 or by email (davidg@calm.wa.gov.au).

LANDSCOPE

VOLUME THIRTEEN NUMBER 4, WINTER 1998



'Conserving the western ringtail possum' tells a story of rehabilitation, release and repopulation.



Discover the fascinating world of 'Starfish, Urchins and their Relatives' on page 10.



'The Art of Interpretation' on page 36 discusses how interpreters use a variety of techniques to enrich our experiences.



What have rabbits done to our land and what have we done about them? Find out in 'Run, Rabbit' on page 49.



Learn about a study of life in the tropical mudflats of Roebuck Bay on page 16.

FEATURES

STARFISH, URCHINS AND THEIR RELATIVES
ANN STORRIE..... 10

THE TEEMING MUD OF ROEBUCK BAY
THEUNIS PIERSMA, GRANT PEARSON AND MARC LAVALEYE... 16

THE SHEOAK'S TALE
TERRY JONES..... 23

CONSERVING THE WESTERN RINGTAIL POSSUM
PAUL de TORES, SUZANNE ROSIER AND GORDON PAINE..... 28

THE ART OF INTERPRETATION
GIL FIELD AND DAVID GOUGH..... 36

FROM HERE TO ETERNITY
NEVILLE MARCHANT..... 43

RUN, RABBIT
TONY START AND SANDRA GILFILLAN..... 49

REGULARS

BUSH TELEGRAPH..... 4

ENDANGERED
BIODIVERSITY IN MINIATURE..... 42

URBAN ANTICS
CHOOK OF THE BUSH..... 54

COVER

Computers and the Internet are putting CALM's Western Australian Herbarium within easy reach of researchers, students and wildflower enthusiasts. See 'From Here to Eternity' on page 40.

Illustration by Philippa Nikulinsky



Executive Editor: Ron Kawalilak
Managing Editor: Ray Bailey
Editor: David Gough
Story Editors: Carolyn Thomson-Dans, David Gough, Mandy Clews, Mitzi Vance, Penny Walsh, Verna Costello
Scientific/technical advice: Andrew Burbidge, Ian Abbott, Keith Morris, Neil Burrows, Paul Jones and staff of CALM's Science and Information Division
Design and production: Maria Duthie, Sue Marais, Tiffany Aberin
Illustration: Gooitzen van der Meer
Cartography: Promaco Geodraft
Marketing: Estelle de San Miguel ☎ (08) 9334 0296 Fax: (08) 9334 0498
Subscription enquiries: ☎ (08) 9334 0481 or (08) 9334 0437
 Colour Separation by Colourbox Digital
 Printed in Western Australia by Lamb Print
 © ISSN 0815-4465 All material copyright No part of the contents of the publication may be reproduced without consent of the publishers
 Visit LANDSCOPE online on our award-winning Internet site
 NatureBase at <http://www.calm.wa.gov.au/>



Published by Dr S Shea, Executive Director
Department of Conservation and Land Management,
50 Hayman Road, Como, Western Australia