



Premier Park



John Forrest National

Park is Western

Australia's oldest national park.

Straddling the Darling Range,

the park protects jarrah forest that

is still largely in its natural state.

In late winter and spring, wildflowers

are profuse and colourful.

Having long attracted visitors,

the park has an interesting history.

by George
Duxbury



The country now protected in John Forrest National Park was preserved because it was too steep, too rocky and too rough to settle in the early days of the State. But it is this very ruggedness provides much of the park's attraction.

John Forrest National Park consists of 2,676 hectares and is about 28 kilometres east of Perth. The main road to York, one of the first over the Darling Scarp, was built to the south of the present park boundary. Little notice was taken of the area until the second railway line was built over the range in 1895. After its completion, people began to see the beautiful scenery of the range, the profusion of wildflowers and the waterfalls. It is said that the first official recognition of the area was made at the opening ceremony for the railway line in 1896.

FIRST NATIONAL PARK

The area was set aside for future conservation by the Western Australian Government in 1898. On November 19, 1900, an area of about 1,500 hectares was proclaimed as a national park,

making it the first in Western Australia and one of the oldest national parks in the world. Originally called Greenmount National Park, after the area of scarp on which it lies, the name was changed to Forrest National Park in 1926. In 1947, it was changed again to John Forrest National Park, after Lord John Forrest. It may have got the tag of Forrest National Park as a result of a bequest of about 80 hectares of land from the estate of Alexander Forrest (brother of Lord Forrest). This was a block below the tunnel site towards Rocky Pool, on which he had intended to build his retirement home. His beneficiary decided the land should be added to the national park.



Previous page

Main: Jane Brook Falls.

Photo – Mike Pelusey

Inset (top): Red and green kangaroo paw.

Photo – Cliff Winfield/CALM

(below): Stonework on the old railway tunnel.

Photo – Dennis Sarson/Lochman

Transparencies

Below left: Bushwalkers on Eagle

Lookout gain magnificent views to Perth.

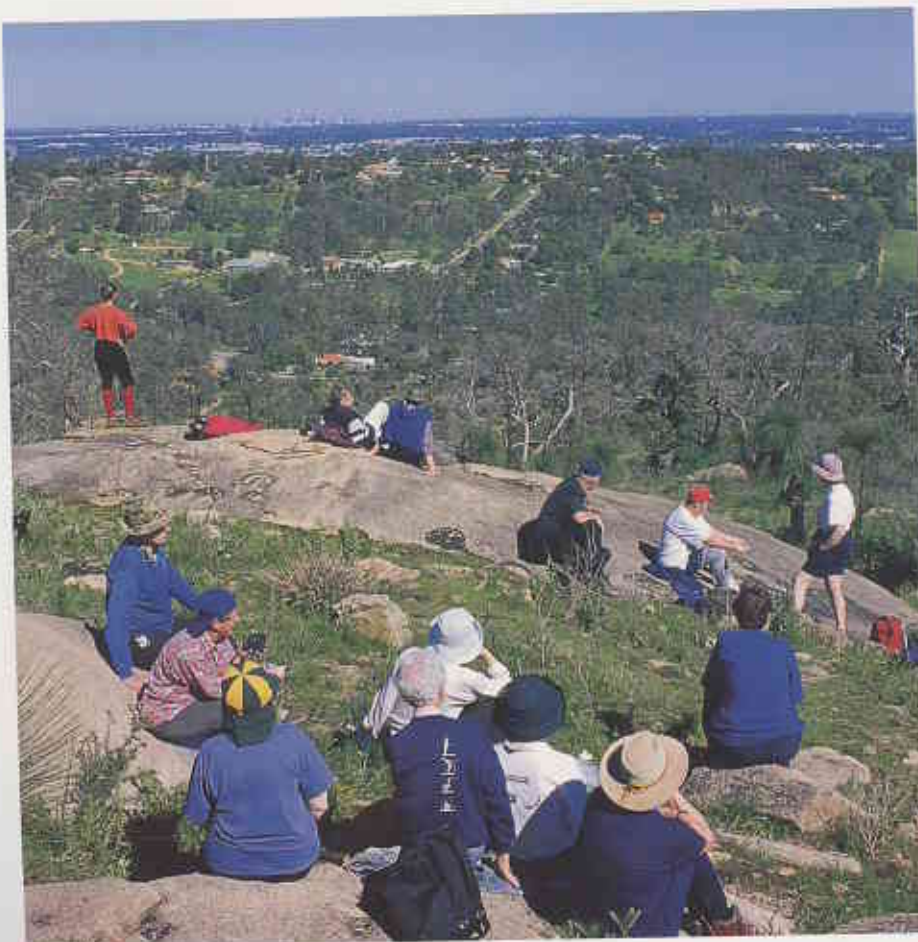
Photo – Gordon Roberts/CALM

Lord John Forrest was born at Australind, just north of Bunbury, in 1847 and as a youth was apprenticed as a surveyor. At only 20 years of age he led his first expedition through the Great Victoria Desert and led several subsequent explorations to earn himself an excellent reputation. He eventually became Surveyor General in Western Australia, a position he held for many years. His interest in politics led him to become the first Premier of Western Australia when the State gained its independence from British home rule. John Forrest National Park was set aside during his time as Premier.

Lord Forrest was heavily involved in the formation of the Australian Federation and left State politics to become a Federal member once the Commonwealth was formed. He had varying success at the federal level, but was always a strong advocate for his beloved Western Australia. Having been granted a Knighthood for his services to the State, he was later raised to the Peerage. Sadly, he died on his way to England to take his place in the House of Lords in 1918. His remains were brought back to be interred in Karrakatta Cemetery.

DEPRESSION AND DEGRADATION

For many years, the park was a national park in name only, as a number of activities that wouldn't be countenanced today were carried out within the park's boundaries. Logging throughout the park went on until the mid-1950s, and left a legacy of jarrah stumps and dieback caused by a water-borne fungi (*Phytophthora cinnamomi*). A number of tracks in the park were originally logging tracks. The McGlew family of Glen Forrest ran a dairy herd in the park where Glen Brook Dam now



Right: John Forrest (centre) and his companions leave Perth in 1874 to cross through the centre of Australia. Alexander Forrest is on the far right.

Below right: A photograph, believed to have been taken during the 1940s, of the tearooms and swimming pool.

lies. On the front of the scarp, just below the Rotary Lookout, there was a small orchard and a house, together with other farm paraphernalia.

During the Great Depression, hundreds of tonnes of firewood were taken from the park to use for cooking and heating fuel in the city. There was also a period when hundreds of kangaroo paw plants were dug up from the park. These were transplanted into Kings Park, as the authorities of the time felt it would be more convenient for more people to see them there, rather than having to go to the park and see them in their natural setting.

Mining, mostly in the form of gravel extraction for road building, left huge areas of open ground. Much of this has been rehabilitated over the years, but the scars can still be seen. There was even a small amount of gold mining in the park, without much success.

Another form of degradation inflicted on the park over the years was the introduction of many weed species. With the main eastern rail line running through the park for 70 years, seeds were inevitably blown out of the carriages, along with people planting bamboo and the iniquitous watsonia, both of which compete strongly with the native vegetation.

PROVIDING SUSTENANCE

When the Great Depression hit the country during the late 1920s, and lasted so long through the 1930s, there was a need to give people work so they could earn just enough money to sustain their families. Thus, the sustenance scheme was devised.

As the park had existed for almost 30 years and there had been no development, apart from removing some of its riches, it was decided to use sustenance workers to build



a recreational site. Much of the subsequent work was promoted and funded by philanthropist Charles McNess and his wife. The site for the picnic area was chosen for two main reasons. It was at the junction of two main streams, Jane Brook and Glen Brook, and because of its proximity to the railway line. This gave people access to public transport as few families had cars in those days.

The original intention was to form up garden beds to create a botanical garden for the people of Perth and Western Australia. The first dam across Jane Brook was built for water storage for the gardens and later became a swimming pool, which was to be enjoyed by thousands of people over the ensuing years.

Some 400 men were employed in the park during the Depression. Half the men would arrive by train early on Monday, work the Monday, Tuesday and Wednesday, then return to their homes with three days wages, which was just enough to sustain their families. Their counterparts would arrive on the Thursday train, work Thursday, Friday and Saturday, and return home on Saturday night. The main accommodation was at the Blackboy Hill Army Camp, about two kilometres west of the park. Workers based at Blackboy Hill came up the railway line each day to build rock walls, pathways and the dam across Jane Brook. Others built the road, now known as Scenic Drive, into the park. All the gravel was mined by hand onto tip drays and taken



Left: The John Forrest Heritage Trail begins at the site of the old railway station.

Photo – Gordon Roberts/CALM

to the road site. Scenic Drive was cleared by hand and once the gravel was tipped it was spread and rolled by hand, a big job indeed.

Another camp was set up, mainly in tents, in the north-western corner of the park. This operated for about eight months while the men cut firewood in

the park, which was taken to Hovea Station to be loaded onto railway trucks and sent to Perth for distribution by yet another group of sustenance workers.

PICNIC PROBLEMS

By the time the garden beds were built and the picnic facilities

established, the road had reached the heart of the park. However, park visitors arrived mostly by train. They had to disembark at Hovea Station, some two kilometres past the picnic site. As the train from Perth would pull rather slowly up the gradient, most younger travellers would jump off the slow-moving train rather than make the walk back from Hovea. The West Australian Government Railways therefore decided to build a station specifically for the national park. This was built and opened in 1936. From then until the line closed in 1966, many thousands of Western Australians, along with visitors from all over the world, enjoyed catching the picnic train to the national park.

Another problem was the use of wood-fired barbecues. There were 80 or 90 barbecues spread throughout the picnic area and every week the rangers had to find truckloads of wood from within the park to supply these with fuel. On a busy Sunday in the springtime, with all the fires going at once, it would seem like a bushfire was raging in the area. Nowadays the barbecues are either gas or electric and the risk of both fire and pollution is greatly reduced.

BUILDINGS

The first gatehouse used at the entry to the picnic ground so that fees could be collected was the wheelhouse of a ship. This was used for quite a few years before being replaced with a more substantial building. The little picnic huts, which are unique to John Forrest National Park, were first built by the sustenance workers. Originally, these





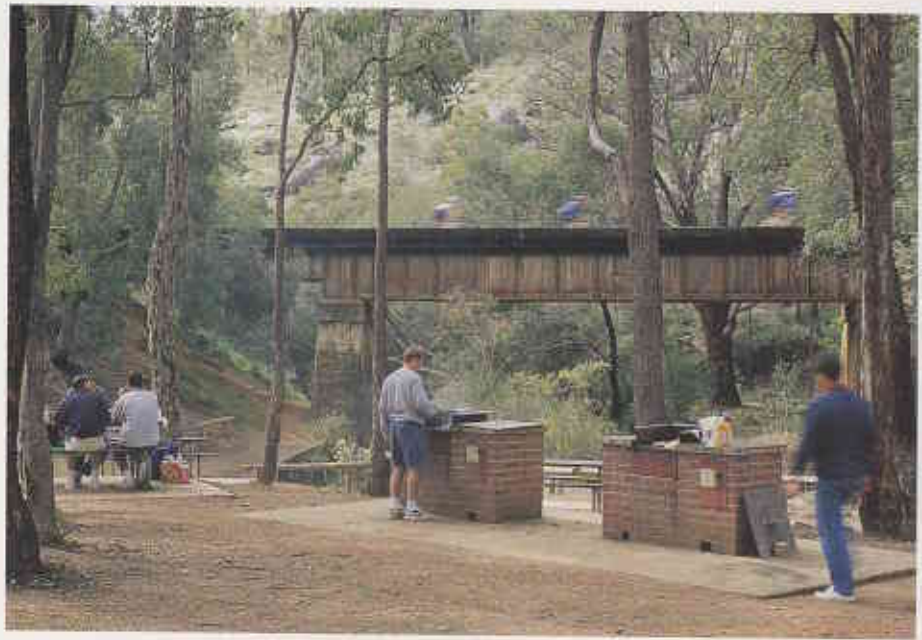
Above: A photograph of the tearooms taken in the 1940s.

Right: Today, picnickers enjoy a barbecue near one of the old railway bridges.

Photo – Gordon Roberts/CALM

Below right: The historic Swan View Tunnel, once a part of the Eastern Railway, is part of the heritage trail within the park.

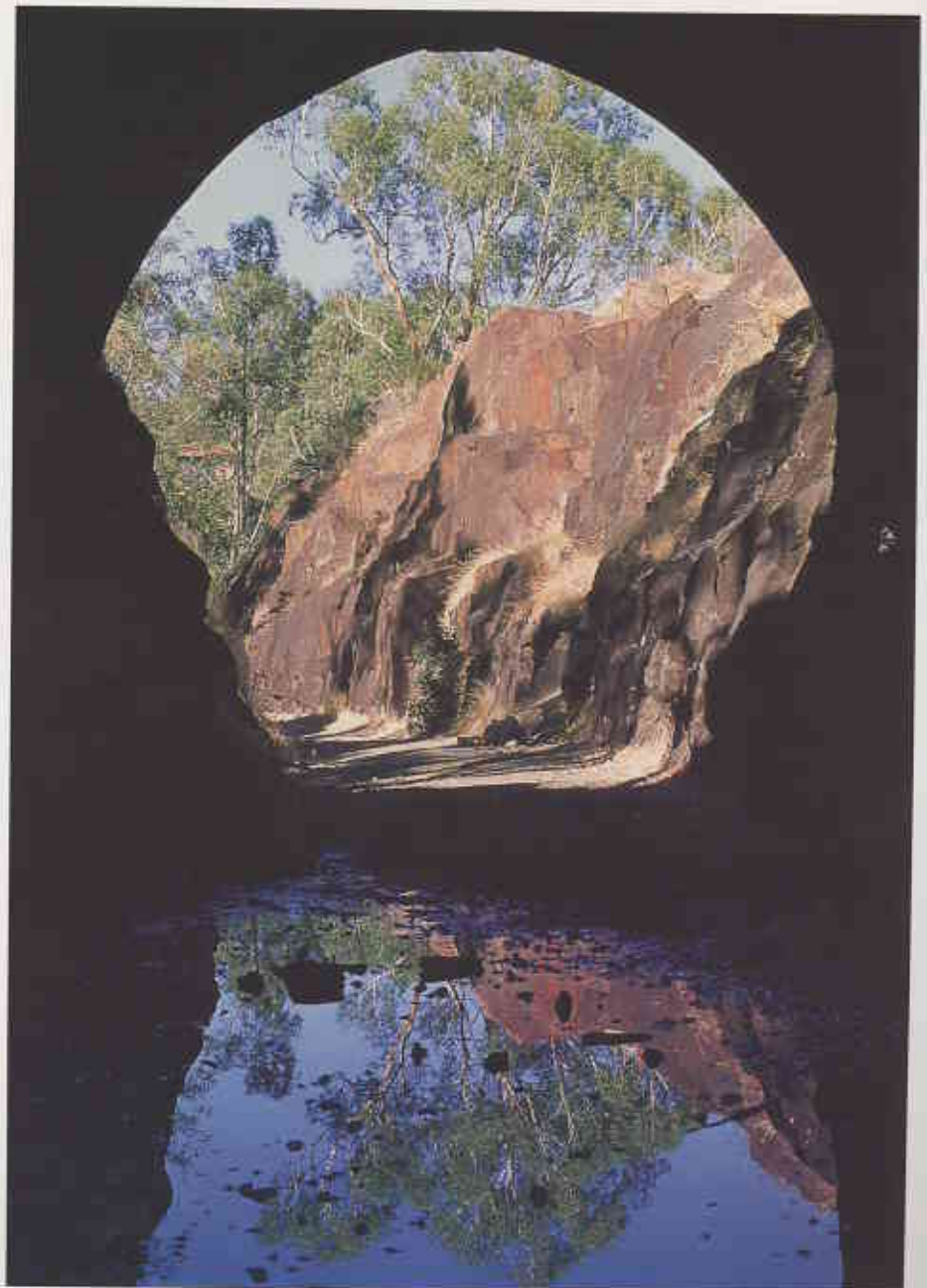
Photo – Dennis Sarson/Lochman Transparencies

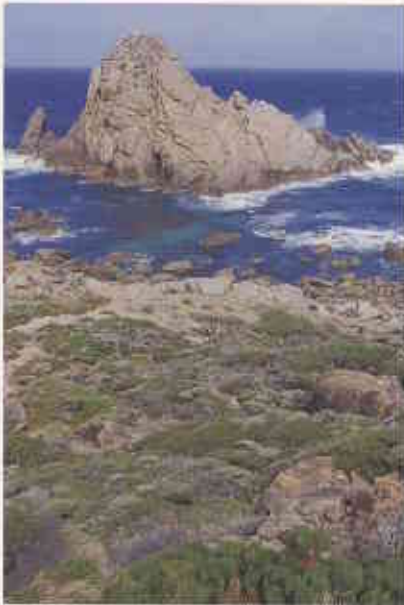


huts had either thatched roofs of rushes or zamia fronds. However, as the roofs were vulnerable to fire they were replaced with corrugated iron. One of the original huts was built in the shape of a church. Sadly, this was burnt down twice and after the second time it was not replaced. The original tearoom, a workshed and at least one set of toilets were all shifted to the park from South Perth Zoo. The workshed had been a monkey enclosure at the Zoo and was always referred to as the 'monkey hut'.

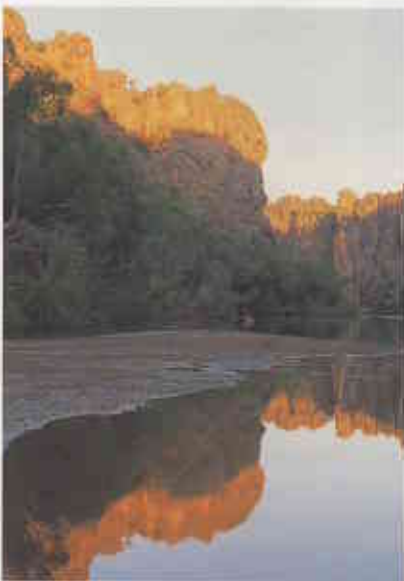
With the passing of time, John Forrest National Park has changed and undoubtedly will continue to do so as different use patterns emerge, along with changing requirements of people using the park. For example, the old railway line is now a heritage trail along which many thousands of people walk or cycle. The natural environment is now much better protected so that future generations can enjoy it as much as people have in the past. John Forrest National Park is a great place to visit and a special part of Western Australia's history.

Recently retired, George Duxbury was a national park ranger for 23 years, and Senior Ranger at John Forrest National Park for almost 12 years. He has a long-standing interest in the park's history. George can be contacted on (08) 9298 8367.





Sugarloaf Rock is just one of the many features that make Leeuwin-Naturaliste National Park the most visited park in WA. (See page 10.)



Windjana Gorge National Park holds important clues to the evolution of fish. See 'Old Fossils' on page 28.

Winner of the 1998 Alex Harris Medal for excellence in science and environment reporting.

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Premier Park: John Forrest National Park is Western Australia's oldest park, celebrating its centenary year. (See page 22.)



Pinnacle of Parks: These unusual formations make Nambung National Park well known the world over. (See page 36.)



William Bay National Park displays a miniature version of karri forest flora. (See page 42.)

F E A T U R E S

FEAST FOR THE SOUL

NEIL TAYLOR, JANE SCOTT, CAROLYN THOMSON-DANS & ROGER BANKS.....10

PLACES OF NATIONAL IMPORTANCE

JOHN HUNTER.....17

PREMIER PARK

GEORGE DUXBURY.....22

OLD FOSSILS

JOHN LONG.....28

PINNACLE OF PARKS

KEN McNAMARA & CAROLYN THOMSON-DANS.....36

KARRI FOREST IN MICROCOSM

NEVILLE MARCHANT.....42

THE WAY AHEAD

MANDY CLEWS, JIM SHARP & WAYNE SCHMIDT.....48

R E G U L A R S

BUSH TELEGRAPH.....4

ENDANGERED

HEATH COMMUNITY ON NOONDINE CHERT HILLS.....35

PARK ANTICS

.....54

C O V E R

With 67 national parks spread across the State, park rangers are often the first contact that visitors have with the Department of Conservation and Land Management (CALM). Apart from providing visitors with information and guidance, they perform a vital role in the day-to-day management of their local environment.



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