

# SAVING OUR NATIVE ORCHIDS

While the Main Roads Department was planning the realignment of a bridge, known as Muirs Bridge, over the Frankland River on the Manjimup to Mt. Barker Road, it was brought to their notice by the Curator of the Western Australian Herbarium that the roadworks being planned in conjunction with the bridge could destroy an area in which many orchids grew.

The bridge in question is made of local jarrah and was built in 1944. In the 1970s the bridge began to show signs of stress due to pile settlement and sections of the bridge were beginning to move. It was decided to construct a new timber span and approaches in 1978/79.

During the investigation stages three alternative crossings were examined and these showed that a new line down stream of the existing bridge appeared to be the best and most economic choice of route.

It was while the third line was being surveyed that the Curator of the Western Australian Herbarium wrote to the Main Roads Department and expressed concern about the fate of the orchids. It seems that twenty species of orchids have been recorded in the area as well as many hybrids. Some of these hybrids, like the one between the enamel orchids, *Elythranthera emarginata* and *Elythranthera brunonis* are known only from that locality. The area was also the site of orchid pollination studies by the visiting American botanist Dr. Warren Stoutamire in 1977.

The Curator of the Western Australian Herbarium asked that the Main Roads Department look at the possibility of avoiding the important orchid locality when the highway was reconstructed and asked for a meeting between Mr. Alex George of the Herbarium and the Main Roads Department. The meeting took place on the site and another line, which avoided the orchids, was investigated. This fourth line, which ran even further south of the existing bridge, was surveyed. It was found that although the length of the Manjimup approach was about the same, the length on the Mt. Barker approach was increased. Work started on the bridge and approaches in June 1979 and thanks to the interest and co-operation of the Main Roads Department many unique and scientifically important orchids have been saved from destruction.



The Purple Enamel Orchid (*Elythranthera brunonis*).

Photo Ian G. Crook