

High Above the Trees

TOWERING above the surrounding trees, this karri serves as an ally of man in guarding the vast expanse which may be viewed from the look-out at the top of the tree. Situated on the Manjimup-Pemberton road, the Diamond Tree look-out, as it is called, was built by the State Forests Department.

The observation hut is 170 feet above the ground. It had to be built on a framework extending above the height of the trunk of the tree, so that the view obtained was not obstructed. It would not have been necessary for the look-out to have been so high were it not for the featureless nature of the country, which afforded no vantage points where a lower structure would have been effective. In order to reach the hut, the towerman has to scale an improvised ladder constructed by driving 3ft. galvanised steel spikes into the tree at intervals of 1ft. 3in. Constructed of timber hewn from surrounding trees, the observation hut contains equipment for sighting and locating fires. Binoculars, maps, a direction and range finder, and a telephone connected to other fire look-outs and to the divisional headquarters are all at the disposal of the tower-man.

Smoke from a fire 10 to 15 miles away may be detected from a look-out.

Completed at Christmas, 1940 only a little over three weeks had to be spent to convert this forest giant into a fire look-out with a greatly increased value to the State forest industry.

This is not an isolated post to guard thousands of acres of otherwise unprotected forest—it is merely one of a system of 26 look-outs extending from Sawyer's Valley to Pemberton. Of the look-outs, 20 of them are man-built towers, while the other six make use of trees in their construction. The total acreage viewed from these look-outs approaches three and a third million, although their main work is to protect the 500,000 acres of regenerated forest under State care.

The tower-men work as a team and not individually. The smoke from a fire will usually be visible to two or three look-outs, because the towers are so spaced that they are usually not more than 10 miles apart. When the smoke is sighted the tower-man stationed in the look-out finds the direction and approximate distance of the fire from his look-out and phones this through to divisional headquarters. This is also done by any of the other look-outs in the vicinity, and the consequent cross bearings on the fire give the position of the outbreak to within a few chains. Divisional headquarters then detail men who are normally engaged in caring for the managed areas, to form a fire-fighting squad to quell the outbreak.

The efficiency of the methods used by the State Forest Department to guard this State's timber is shown in that of the 160 fires which occurred in the managed territory of State forest half of them burnt over an area of less than one acre.

