

Book Review

THE PUBLIC IN YOUR WOODS — An Owner's Guide to Managing Urban-fringe Woodland for Recreation

J. A. Irving, Packard Publishing Limited, Chichester, United Kingdom. 147 pages. Black and white photographs. Soft back. £5.95 Sterling or £6.00 Sterling including postage from Land Decade Educational Council, 9 Queen Anne's Gate, London SW1H 9BY.

They say that when a man is strapped into the electric chair he is well sedated first so that he can take what might come in his stride. Books of this type under review can benefit from the same approach. The work is crammed with compressed fact after compressed fact from the first sentence. It is, I suppose, on my part, a simple and innocent proclivity, but I would have preferred to have been eased into the study on the slow lane of a chapter on the history of woodland recreation. An introductory paragraph or two on why modern man, in particular, feels he has a need of woodlands as a place of recreation, would have done. Certainly the important element, the forest visitor, might have been brought more sharply into focus. Who is he? Why does he come? His expectations when he arrives? To some extent all of these points are covered but as a thin gruel that seeps through the general discussion. It would have made the work more readable to have concentrated this aspect as an introduction to the study. That the book is a result of the author's two year fellowship with the Land Decade Educational Council may account for the strict format.

The strength of Mr. Irving's book is that it is a box of condensed information on the state of the art of woodland recreation development. It is to be recommended on that account. It does not deal in depth with any one aspect of recreation. This is a benefit, not a disadvantage, to any one newly coming to this field. I find however, a difficulty with the publication. The answers offered to many of the problems are far too neat and tidy. The statement on page three — "This book also hopes to reassure landowners . . . that coping with increased access and other urban-fringe pressures, is no more difficult than the other forest management problems they face" — bears this out. I suspect the writer has had little direct experience in managing recreation woodland where a cross-fire of conflicting and often bedevilling and inconsiderate demands are common. This is not said to diminish the work but the book should be read as a useful introductory study to forest recreation and not as the final word on the matter.

Strangely, the author has chosen to aim this book exclusively at the private woodland owner. I feel it would also be of value in the

hands of those responsible for recreation management in state owned forests. The 27 pages of appendices is singularly useful, if not to Irish readers, then certainly to United Kingdom readers. These pages offer a comprehensive list of agencies from whom technical and financial advice in this area of woodland management can be sought.

One forceful point the author makes in the summary section is a statement that should be engraved with Franz Kafka's 'Harrow' on each woodland planner's heart — "planned provision for increased public use is far better than belated attempts to control de facto access". How true that is!

Pat McCusker.