



Melbourne Cricket Ground during a football final

Chapter 12

RECREATION

Adequate facilities for all forms of outdoor recreation have always been of prime importance in Australian cities. The warm, healthy climate and the spaciousness of the countryside have developed in the people a love of the outdoors and a fondness for sport and physical exercise. The demand for recreational facilities has been accentuated by the post-war population increase, the rising living standards and, most important of all, by the increase in leisure time resulting from the five-day working week.

Melbourne already has a large area of urban land devoted to recreational use, mainly because of the wisdom of the early planners, who established a pattern of large parklands and gardens around the city centre. Although new areas have been acquired in some of the growing outer suburbs, the general distribution of land for recreational purposes has become unbalanced, with many suburbs still relying on the facilities in the old inner areas and on the use of undeveloped private land.

In analysing the recreational needs of Melbourne, it is necessary to determine the land or "open space" requirements for all forms of field sports, for parks and gardens, for children's playgrounds and the like. It is also necessary to examine the existing and potential facilities with regard to beaches, fore-shores and natural parklands.

Within the urban area of Melbourne there are at present some 11,350 acres of land which can be classified as either public or private open space of which approximately two-thirds is used primarily for sport and one-third for parks and gardens and children's playgrounds. Some branches of sport, such as golf and racing, occupy large areas outside the urban boundary as well as areas within it, and therefore need separate consideration.

The importance of sport today is emphasised by the fact that more than 100,000 people play outdoor field sports in Melbourne on a Saturday, and another 200,000 are estimated to attend these sports as spectators during the winter season. If allowance is made for all sport including aquatic sports, nearly one-quarter of the total population are regularly engaged either as players or spectators on a Saturday. This is equivalent to almost every third person over the age of 14 years. During the summer season many of the number included in this total visit the beaches.

Table 74 shows the present broad distribution of all areas over five acres in extent within the urban area used for recreational purposes other than golf and racing.

These figures show that generally the greater deficiency with regard to space for playing fields is in the northern and southern districts while the greatest deficiency of parks and gardens is in the north and west.

Most large parks used for field sports are located in the inner suburbs within a radius of three miles from the city centre. Royal Park, Princes Park, Albert Park, Fawkner Park, Yarra Park and Yarra Bend are typical of the large parks surrounding the city which contain a high proportion of all the playing fields in the metropolitan area. All these parks, except Albert Park and Yarra Bend, are located within the municipality of Melbourne, but provide for players from many of the adjoining municipalities. Royal Park and Princes Park, for example, provide facilities for players from Brunswick, Essendon, Coburg and Fitzroy as well as those from the municipality of Melbourne. Yarra Park and Fawkner Park are used by people from adjoining suburbs. Albert Park provides for a wide area, including the surrounding suburbs of Port Melbourne, South Melbourne, St. Kilda and Prahran.

Outside this inner ring of large parks the facilities are mainly dispersed among smaller parks and Council reserves.

DISTRIBUTION AND USE OF PLAYING FIELDS

In 1951 a survey was made of each field sport to ascertain the number of regular players, the location and adequacy of existing playing areas and the general trend with regard to public participation in each sport. The survey included the completion of a questionnaire by the authorities concerned with all field sports and personal discussions with them. The information obtained from such organisations was augmented by information from municipal councils concerning the location and use of all playing fields throughout the area. Table 75 gives the number of playing fields used by each sport and the number of players that normally participate on a peak day, which, in most instances, can be taken as the number that play on Saturday. Map 49 illustrates the location and use of playing fields.