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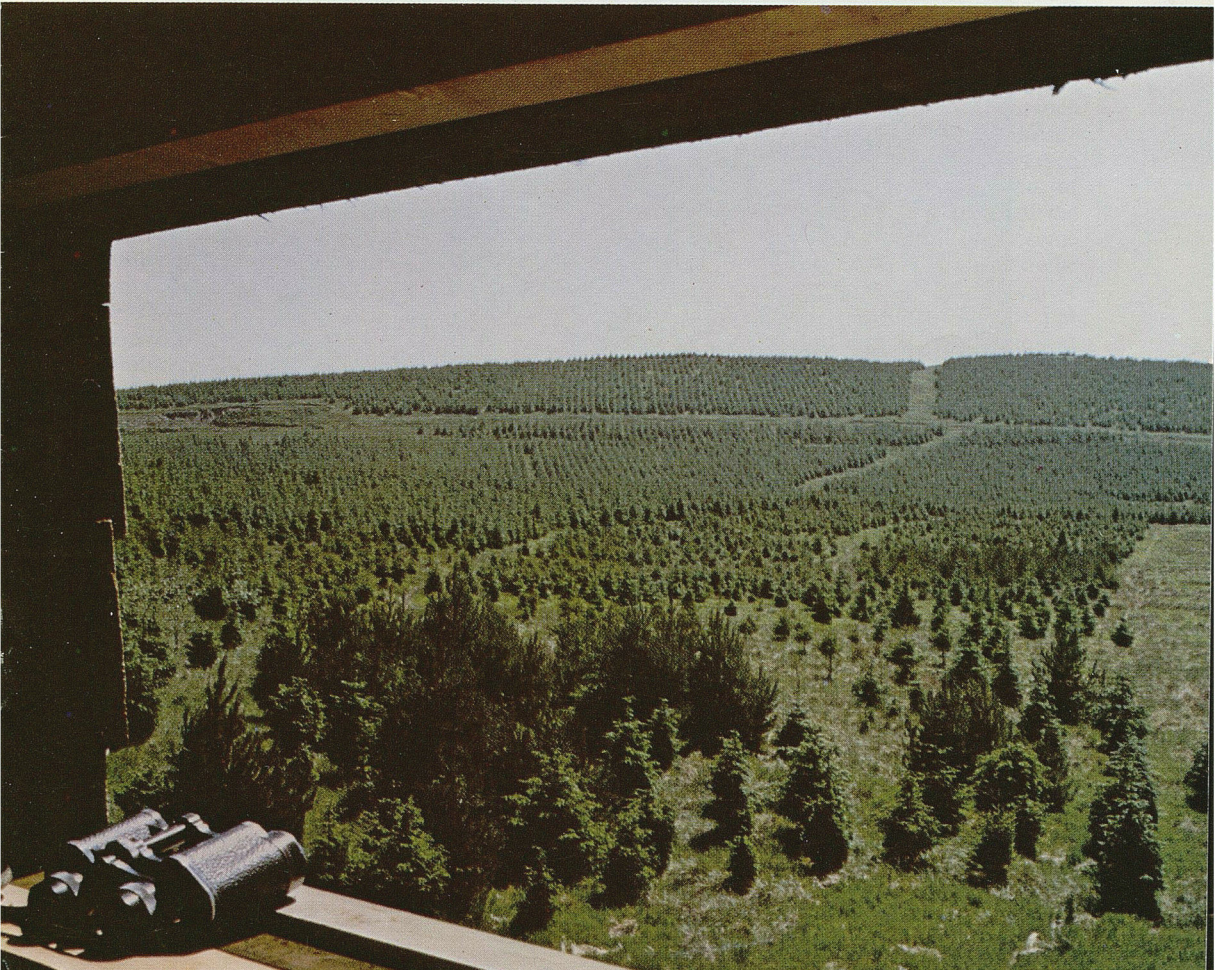
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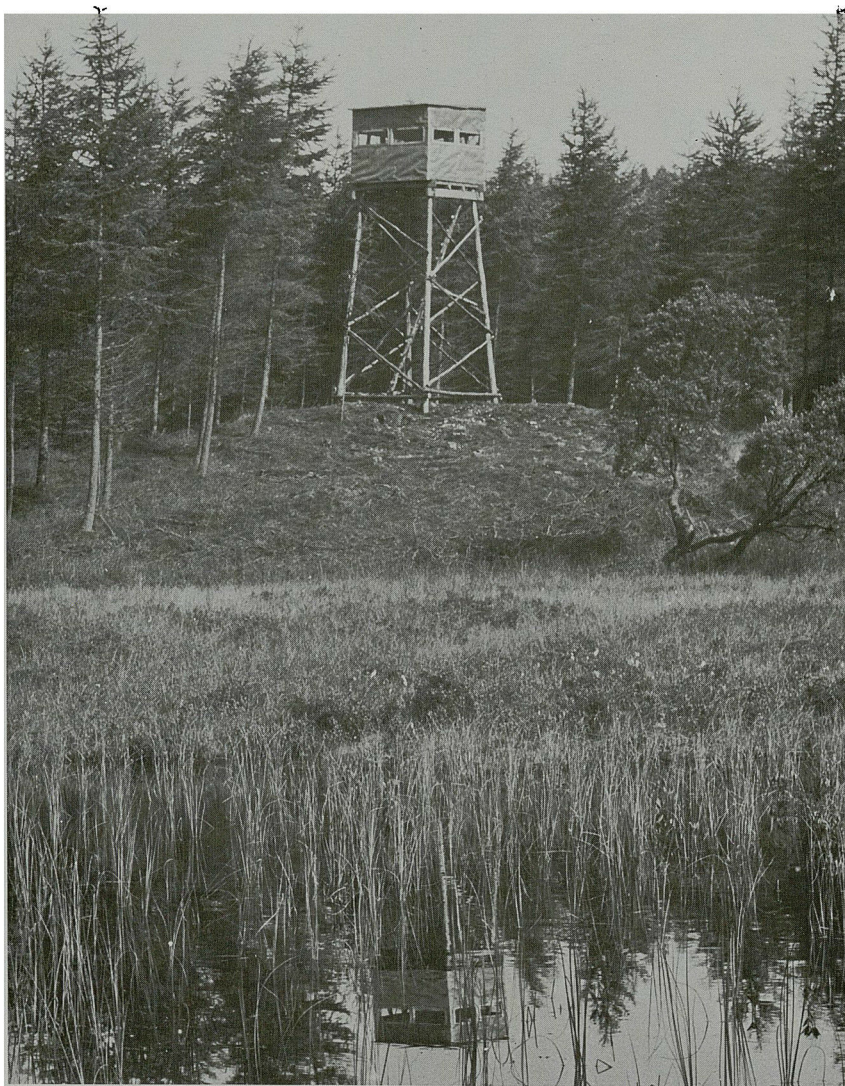
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High Seats for Deer Management

J J Rowe





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PLATE 2 Permanent seat used mainly for recreational purposes. Fully protected and capable of holding several people. Sited so that ground approach of party is through trees behind. Possible that brushwood (bare twigs) on support frame would help disguise movements of people mounting ladder without markedly increasing wind resistance.

PLATE 1 The view from a high seat. (33792)

HIGH SEATS FOR DEER MANAGEMENT

by Judith J Rowe

Wildlife Research Officer, Forestry Commission

Introduction

High seats are an important part of the woodland deer manager's equipment. While the main purpose is to permit safe shooting of the beasts to be culled annually, they are also useful for making observations for census purposes and can provide revenue from non-sporting recreation — for photography, for local school parties and other educational purposes, and for naturalists who want a chance to observe undisturbed animals (Plate 2). In flat terrain, high seats may be essential to give the stalker safe shooting. In the uplands the hills are often high enough, but even there a high seat can add considerably to the rapidity and ease of survey of areas which may be difficult to approach without disturbing other ground. Even in hilly areas, the use of a high seat makes the chances of achieving safe shots considerably greater where public access is a problem.

One of the advantages of the high seat is that a deer once shot can be observed for reaction more readily than often happens when stalking at ground level. It is much easier to see the direction in which it goes and the searching time can be considerably reduced.

Construction

High seats may be permanent, semi-permanent or temporary; free-standing or supported; portable, semi-portable or fixed. They may be made of wood or metal. Where hillsides give sufficient height, local materials such as rocks or brushwood can be used or fox-holes dug in sandy hill-sides to serve the same purpose. However, such constructions are better described as hides (Schirme) than high seats (Hochsitzen).

Whatever the type and constituents, some features are common to all. High seats are not usually more than 3-4m above ground level. To get appreciably higher requires stronger and more robust structures to withstand wind and weather. The materials of which the seats are constructed must be related to the expected life of the seat, particularly if these are permanent immovable objects. They must be sufficiently solid not to creak or squeak when being climbed or when the need to stretch cramped limbs becomes paramount. They must provide a safe platform from which a shot can be taken in any weather. The design loading (no. of people) must be within the safe limits of the structure and there must be room for some movement. The floor and the seat must also be reasonably freely draining and a tip-up seat or unattached padded plank which can be put quietly down as the stalker moves into the seat is often a useful refinement, particularly in permanent and semi-permanent locations.

Protection from cold, cramped conditions adds considerably to the period for which a stalker can concentrate efficiently. It is worth draught-proofing the floor with old linoleum or conveyor belting (but allow for drainage) and padding the seat. If the sides are made wind-proof, as well as effectively camouflaging the stalker, they will protect him for a longer period. A Spartan disregard for cold, miserable conditions then becomes an additional asset rather than an essential attribute of a stalker!

There are a number of factors determining the most appropriate seat for particular conditions. There is little point in using materials in a permanent seat that will last for 30 years if the area which is viewed will only require observation and removal of deer for the next 5

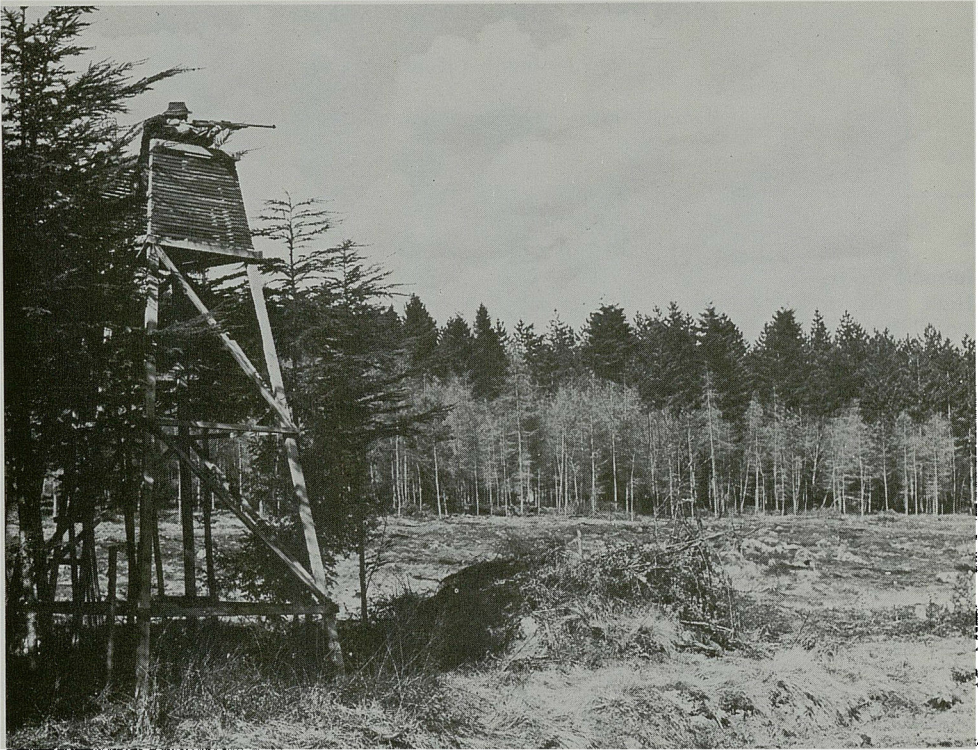


PLATE 3 Permanent seat used mainly for culling deer. Minimum protection for stalker using it. Trees behind provide background against which slight, slow movements of stalker are lost.

years. However, against this point must be set the need to ensure that the seat is totally safe throughout its working life. This is particularly essential in areas where there is high public access and children playing may be at risk if some component fails. In such conditions it may be inadvisable to remove ladders as even this is unlikely to prevent children from swarming up supports which have not been designed to withstand such use. The use of portable seats cuts down the number required to cover an area, but against this is the fact that moving a seat creates some disturbance, even if the operation is carried out during the middle of the day when the animals are least likely to be disturbed. Moreover, portable seats tend to be lighter and less stable than the permanent

type and need rigorous maintenance and care in erection if they are to be used safely. Vandalism is also a risk. Temporary and semi-permanent seats can be removed and scattered and ladders stolen. Permanent seats may be vandalised but being more robust structures can normally be repaired relatively quickly. They tend to be expensive — and it should be remembered that a high seat is only effective when it holds a stalker or observer. Unmanned high seats can be an expensive luxury.

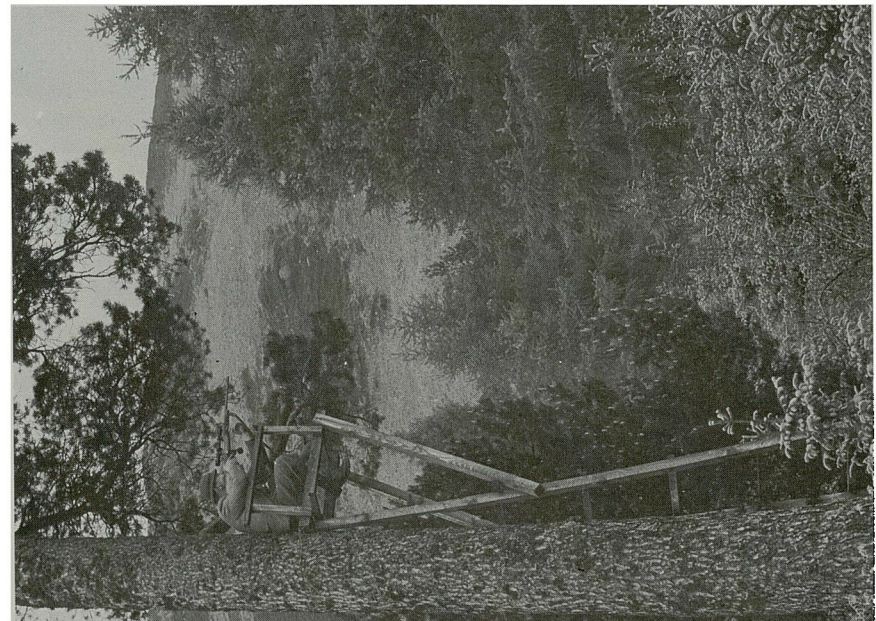
By and large, **permanent seats** (Plates 2 and 3) are usually fixed and free-standing. They are most useful where the land is very flat; where there is a high demand for recreational use by naturalists and the general public in addition to a need for their use for stalking; where the area

Do-it-yourself designs

<i>Plans available from</i>	<i>Seat description</i>
Forestry Commission Santon Downham Brandon, Suffolk	Thetford High Seat: wooden permanent/semi-permanent/free-standing 2-3-man seat. Fixed ladder. Can only be moved complete by lorry or after dismantling.
Forest Research Station Alice Holt Lodge Farnham, Surrey	Alice Holt High Seat: tubular aluminium alloy semi-portable 2-man free-standing seat. Removable ladder. (Stickland and Delap 1970). Can be erected and dismantled for moving by one man.
Forest Research Station Alice Holt Lodge, Farnham, Surrey	Alice Holt Lean-to: portable 1-man lean-to seat with integral ladder.

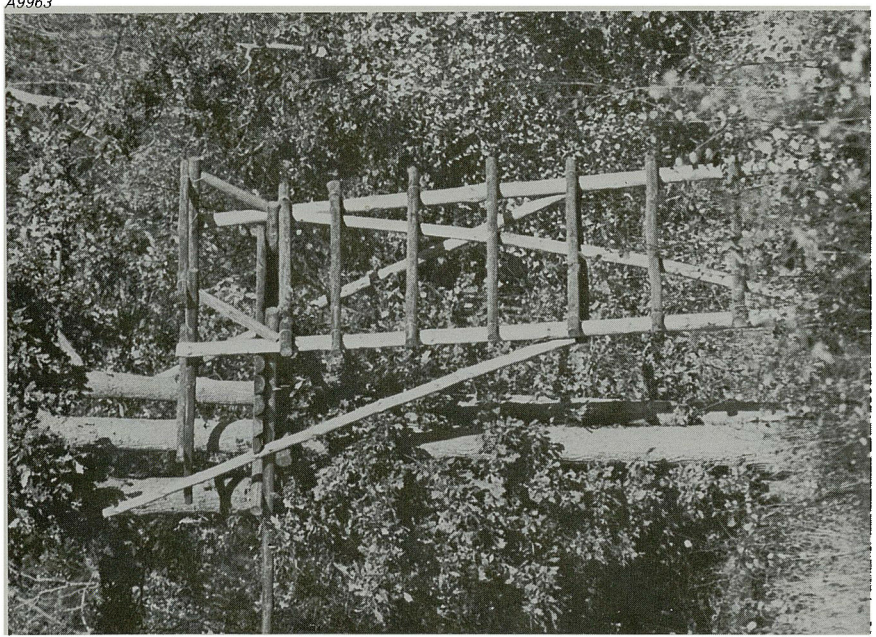
Commercially available high seats (1979)

<i>Manufacturer</i>	<i>Type</i>
G Andrews (Engineering) Pound Green Upper Arley Bewdley Worcestershire	Arley Junior: Free-standing 1-man seat, weight 36.7 kg (81 lbs). Arley Professional: Free-standing 2-man seat, weight 59 kg (130 lbs). Arley Lean-to: 1-man seat, weight 28.6 kg (63 lbs). Arley 2-man Lean-to: 2-man seat, weight 59 kg (130 lbs). All have integral ladders. Painted welded metal tubing construction with varying numbers of bolts. Covers available for Junior and Professional.
Martin Engineering (Brandon) Ltd Highbury Road Brandon, Suffolk	1-man, free-standing portable galvanised steel tubing with PVC canopy and sides. Integral ladder. Weight approximately 61.2 kg (135 lbs).
Ramsay Ladders 61 West High Forfar Angus DD8 1BH	Free-standing 2-man seat with removable ladder, weight 47.6 kg (105 lbs) approximately. Lean-to 1-man seat with integral ladder, weight 25.4 kg (56 lbs) approximately. Painted aluminium alloy rectangular tubing.
F Parkin & Sons Ltd Bonhay Road, Exeter	Observation platform. 1-man lean-to. Metal components. Integral ladder. Weight 21.8 kg (48 lbs).
Hö-Ma Maskin AB 940 16 Svensbyn Sweden	Hö-Ma Back-packable Tree-climbing hunters' platform. 1-man; synthetic abric on tubular steel frame-work; weight approximately 12 kg (26 lbs). Climbs tree by cranking up — no ladder required. Requires tree with clear stem to 3-4m and diameter 10-50cm. Roof optional extra.
Forestry Commission Grizedale Ambleside Cumbria LA22 0QJ	Grizedale Forest Observation Hide. Painted sectional wooden 8-man seat. Onduline covered wooden roof; binocular shelves and foot rests. Can be mounted at ground level or raised on suitable platform.
Mills Scaffold Co Ltd Bantam Dept, Winchester House 53/55 Uxbridge Road Ealing, London W5 5SE	Bantam Tower: sectional scaffolding tower of galvanised tubular steel. 3-4 man semi-portable. No ladder nor covers.



C3998

PLATE 4a Lean-to temporary seat with large mature tree as prop. Ladder would be unlikely to satisfy modern requirements for safety if used by an employee.



A9963

PLATE 4b Safer, wooden design, wired and strutted. Needs regular, frequent checking.

under view is large and needs to be observed regularly for several years; where the deer management system is well-developed with local conditions and cull levels geared to a predictable sustained yield; and where the site has been proven by use of a temporary seat.

Comfort becomes more important if a number of people are to be accommodated for some hours. Care should be taken to check that the height of the seats, presence of a foot-rest and of a shelf for binoculars, flasks and sandwiches and observation windows are all designed to suit both adult and child viewing.

Semi-permanent seats (Plate 6) are perhaps the most useful for one season's stalking programme, either buck/stag or doe/hind seasons. They can be put into place before the shooting season once the cull targets and the areas most vulnerable to damage in that particular season have been determined. They may be free-standing or supported and do not need to be portable other than by a vehicle and/or several men.

Temporary seats are most useful when required for short periods (days rather than weeks) where damage occurs unexpectedly or a particular beast has proved difficult to stalk by any other method. These should be portable, preferably by one man and can be either the **lean-to type** (Plate 4) or the **free-standing type** (Plate 5). The lean-to is only suitable where there are sufficiently mature trees to allow it to be guyed and stayed firmly so that it provides a safe shooting platform. Metal free-standing types because they are light and portable, tend to rattle and be noisy and provide more cramped conditions for the stalker than do some semi-permanent designs. It is desirable for such temporary structures to be located against an adequate background so that the silhouette does not make an obvious change in the local environment of the deer. Often a temporary portable seat will give an alternative shooting position for an area where culling is desirable and where a semi-permanent high seat for some reason of change in wind or behaviour of the deer locally has become unusable. The other times at which temporary portable seats are particularly useful is to cover

a ride or crossing place where a particular beast is required and during the census when observations of a wide range of different areas must be made in a limited period of time.

Some high seat designs are suitable for semi-permanent or temporary use: the categories are not necessarily exclusive. When considering constructing temporary seats on site with local materials, the constraints outlined under Safety should be borne in mind (p.9).

Siting

High seats must be sited with due regard to the prevailing wind and sun and the likelihood of their being used most frequently for morning or evening stalking. Access paths to them can be cut or cleared to permit a quiet approach without disturbing lying-up grounds and with due regard to wind direction. These factors are obviously particularly important when using high seats around clearings and glades within the woodland. In addition, for cull purposes, it is often essential to site high seats at crossings or cross-roads in the ride system within the woodland. Shooting lanes can be created in thick cover to increase the observable area. If it is possible to achieve safe shooting within the boundaries of land ownership or where permission has been obtained to shoot deer on adjoining arable fields or pastures, it is often useful to have seats on the edge of a woodland to cover deer coming out. This can be particularly useful during the census periods when observations of what constitutes the local population are very valuable.

It is often useful to put a portable seat into a position which has been chosen for a permanent seat to ensure that it is the best possible site. Movement a few yards in one direction or another can often make a considerable difference to the field of view and adequacy of the observations made. The actual height will depend upon the background. It is usually best to site high seats so that the seat silhouette is obscured by the crown of trees immediately behind it. Generally, if movement is kept to a minimum, the high seat lifts the observer above both the sight and the scent lines commonly investigated by wildlife. A high seat can often



C3999

PLATE 5 Free-standing metal seat. Exposed position totally unsuitable for efficient use unless seat and ladder screened. Unlikely that stalker could approach such a position without disturbing field of fire of seat. In these circumstances approach to seat needs to be made some time before deer expected to come onto area.

be sited clear of the edge of the trees which give it background so that it produces maximum visibility. If so, however, care must be taken that the outline is sufficiently broken up (Plate 7) by adding wooden or canvas screens, camouflage netting or twigs and brushwood to ensure that movements of the stalker observing one way are not apparent to deer coming from the opposite direction.

If it is essential to have a high seat in an area with no background where it must inevitably be a silhouette, then it is better to make it a permanent feature of the landscape and to ensure that both the ladder access and the seat itself appear sufficiently solid to disguise the presence of the stalker on them. If seats are camouflaged with solid or semi-solid screens it is essential to guy free-standing seats as there will be additional wind resistance.

With any seat it is always an advantage to put it in position as many days or weeks as possible before it is required to allow it to become a local landscape feature. When a high seat is first placed in position it is worth pacing out distances to land-marks so that range can be quickly and accurately estimated. Alternatively, stakes may be put in at fixed distances as marker points.

Use and Safety

As soon as a new seat is in position, the shooting field should be checked for safe shooting. Twigs or branches around the seat should be trimmed back so that the field of fire is quite clear. This should be checked frequently — especially, for example, when a seat has not been used for a few weeks or where deciduous trees are coming into leaf. The area covered should also be checked for stony areas where ricochets might be an additional hazard.

Attention should also be paid to the safe use of high seats. Rifles should always be carried unloaded up and down ladders. Cold weather can make the descent of ladders after a period of sitting quietly in confined space more hazardous than the initial ascent. It is necessary to be particularly careful in high winds or icy weather — indeed, it is preferable not to use high seats in such conditions.

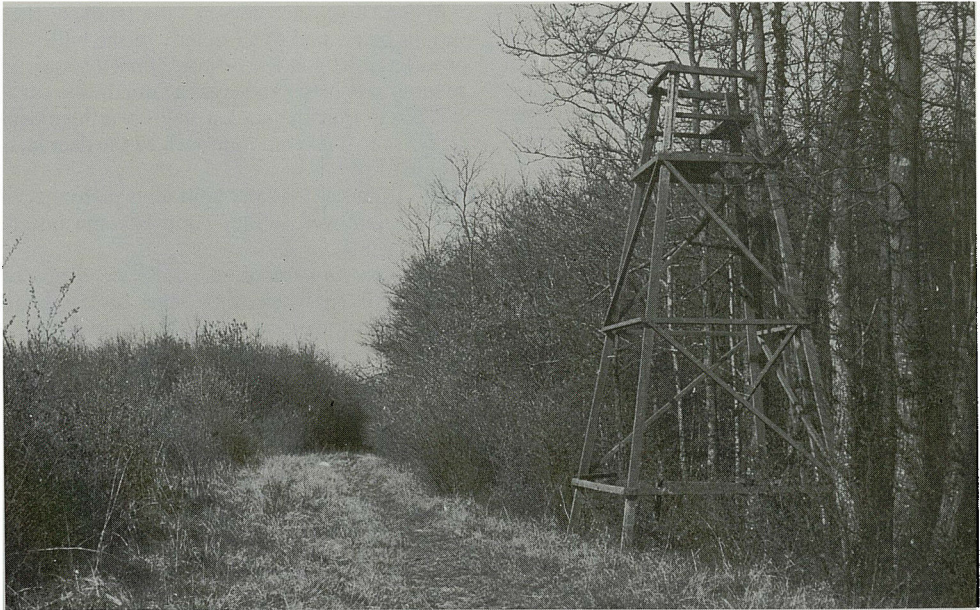
When dogs accompany the stalker they should be trained to sit quietly in the high seat or to lie quietly at the bottom if need arises. In general, it is better to leave the dog in the car if it is likely that the stalker will use a high seat rather than a ground approach to the deer he is looking for.

It is essential that any high seats no longer in use are removed — they soon become unsafe and unsightly.

Children and trespassers raise problems of liability. Even when high seats are in good condition it may be difficult in law to distinguish between an invited user of a high seat and an uninvited user or trespasser. This will apply particularly in woodlands where there is a public right of access or a policy of permitting access. It may be advisable to use notices on the seats to warn of the dangers of unauthorised use — and it is prudent to ensure that appropriate insurance cover is carried.

There are legal constraints concerned with safety for employees and/or people using seats under some form of licence for observation or stalking. The Health and Safety at Work etc Act (1974) requires that employers ensure that the equipment provided for employees is used and maintained for maximum safety. Indeed, the Act requires that, as far as is reasonably practicable, high seats are designed, constructed, erected and tested to ensure that they are safe when properly used. Defining reasonably practicable is impossible without reference to the context in which a particular seat is used (or misused) but it may be appropriate to observe in construction the standards which govern, for example, the construction of a scaffold (Construction (Working Places) Regulations 1966 (S.I.94)).

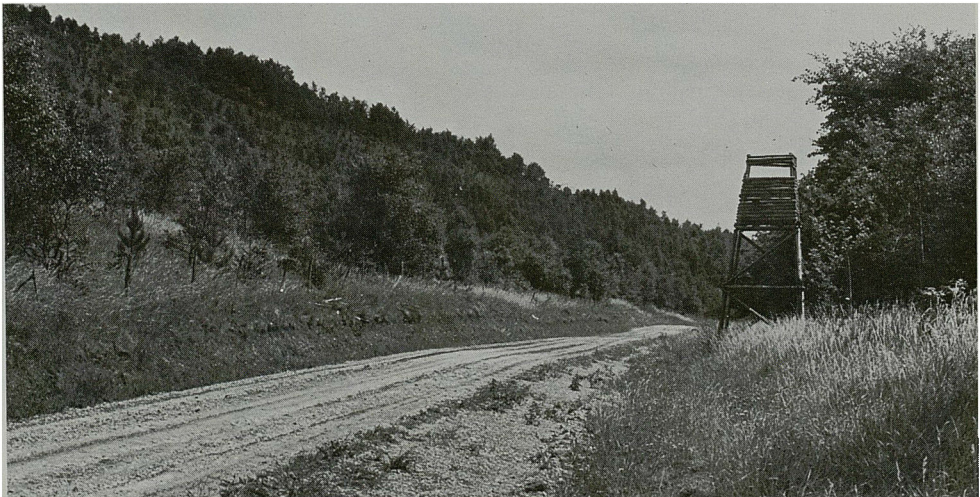
In the early days of deer management, a large tree was often deemed an adequate high seat, with perhaps the provision of additional planking across a fork in the trunk or on a branch to provide a steady platform. A ladder leant against the trunk provided access. Nowadays, it is essential that the ladder as well as the platform is entirely safe and if the seat is to be used by an employee or by members of the public (including trespassers), then the



A4731

PLATE 6 Semi-permanent seat in position.

PLATE 7 Semi-permanent high seat standing clear of edge of trees to increase the view along ride-side. Overhead screening, which could be roofed, has been used to reduce the likelihood of deer picking up stalker's movements. Could also use sacking curtains on hooks to mask silhouette between viewing slits. May be difficult to approach without disturbance - this sort of seat needs to be in use by the stalker before the deer start moving.



B5585

ladder access should measure up to the specifications legally required for safe ladder-making (Agriculture (Ladders) Regulations 1957 (S.I.1385)).

Maintenance

All high seats should be inspected at least twice a year and mended as necessary. Obsolete or irreparable seats should be dismantled and removed. Any moving parts should be oiled or greased regularly. Metal, galvanised, painted or plastic coated parts should be inspected for rust and replaced if there is any doubt about their condition. Re-painting should only be done on a touch-up scale; layers of paint built up over seasons of use can obscure signs of trouble. Aluminium parts or ladders should not be painted: they should be regularly checked for cracks. Wooden ladders should be treated with transparent or absorbed preservatives rather than paint and replaced at any sign of decay or weakness. The manufacturer's guidance on maintenance and safe use should be sought and followed where appropriate.

Conclusion

To sum up, the use of high seats allows safe shooting whether this is being done as part of a

cull in the interests of the animal, in order to prevent damage to crops or for sport. A high seat adds considerably to the ease and comfort with which observations can be made for census purposes, and can produce revenue when used for recreation by naturalist observers or by photographers. It is well worth considering how high seats can help in the local deer management system and which of those available can provide an adequate answer to local needs.

References

- Agriculture (Ladders) Regulations 1957 (S.I.1385)* HMSO, London
Construction (Working Places) Regulations 1966 (S.I.94) HMSO, London
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Stickland R T and Delap P 1970 — A Forestry Commission High Seat *Deer 2* (2),526

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