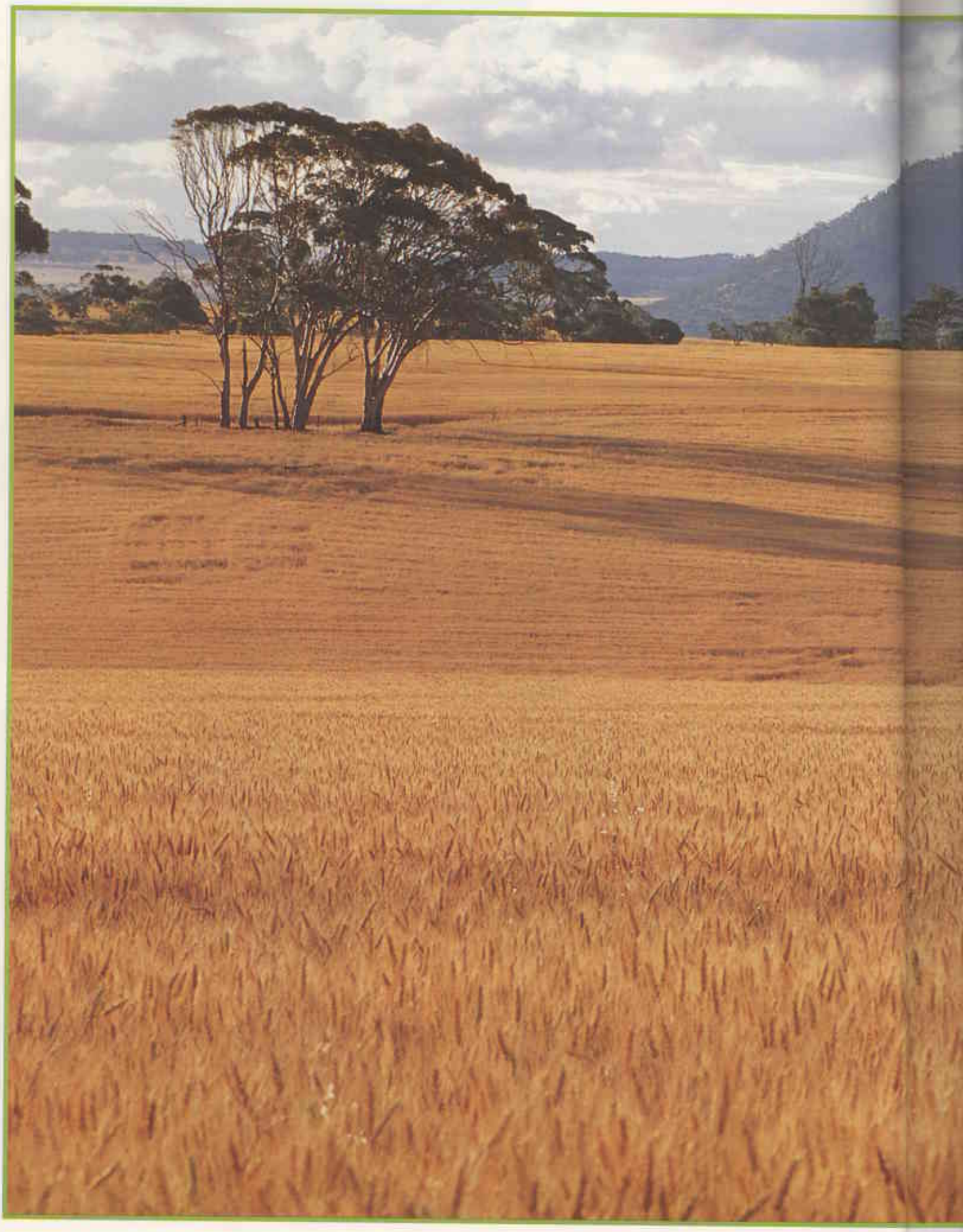

SUMMIT OF THE WHEATBELT

The historic town of York has a looming backdrop, a mysterious mass of rock cloaked in bushland that keeps vigil over the paddocks and buildings of WA's founding Wheatbelt settlement.

This is Mount Bakewell, a natural phenomenon that intrigues all who behold it, from the earliest Western Australians, the Nyoongar, to the early European botanists, the first settlers, and present-day residents and visitors. Just as York's distinctive architecture represents early agricultural settlement in Western Australia, so Mount Bakewell represents the rich botanical, cultural, and historical heritage of the Wheatbelt.

BY SUSAN PATRICK

You can't miss Mount Bakewell. At 457 metres above sea level, it is the highest point of the Dyott Range, which runs from it in a north-easterly direction. It looms against the tidy streets of York, dominating the townscape on its northern side, with a dark cloak of bushland standing out against the seasonal greens and golds of the surrounding farmland.

This is more than a geographic landmark. Mount Bakewell is a treasure trove of unusual botanical features and rich cultural and historical significance. The area surrounding it is one of the richest and longest-settled agricultural regions in the State, and the farmlands are heavily cleared. The natural vegetation remaining on Mount Bakewell and the adjoining range is like a time capsule of the original bushland, before the advent of agriculture. Although the ownership of the mountain's large area is complex, there has been a recent unified push to conserve and properly manage it, recognising it as one of the most precious remnants of bushland in the Avon region.

MANY FACES, MANY USES

Mount Bakewell has a variety of uses. It hosts a number of telecommunications masts, and is the site of a trigonometrical station, which is part of Western Australia's survey grid. Botanists and naturalists visit the bushland to study the unique assemblage of species. The summit is a target for walkers looking for a view, and is used as a launch site for hang-gliders and para-gliders.

Despite its many present-day uses, Mount Bakewell maintains its element of the wild and inaccessible. There is no public road to the summit; access is possible only through private land with the permission of the owner. Parts of the mountain are under private ownership, while the rest is a mixture of unvested and vested reserves, and freehold land owned by the State and Commonwealth governments. Most of the bushland area is within a reserve dedicated to parkland, while two small reserves near the summit are allocated to radio mast sites and a survey station.

Previous page
Mount Bakewell rises above ripening wheat and York gums. The southern slopes loom darkly beneath telecommunications masts on the highest peak.
Photo – Dennis Sarson/Lochman Transparencies

Above: The historic town of York viewed from Mount Brown to the east. The lookout there provides extensive views across the town to Mount Bakewell.
Photo – Jiri Lochman

Below: Purple enamel orchid (*Elythranthera brunonis*) is one of several species of orchid that grow on Mount Bakewell.
Photo – Babs & Bert Wells/CALM

Below: Gilbert's groundsel, a poorly known species from Mount Bakewell, has been collected only a few times in the past, from three other locations farther west.
Photo – Sue Patrick

BOTANICAL SMORGASBORD

Mount Bakewell is a rich and intriguing botanical resource. Its summit is composed of massive quartzite rock, which is resistant to erosion and, therefore, forms areas of high relief, similar to nearby Mount Brown, Red Knob and the Needling Hills. The geology of the area is complex, giving rise to a variety of soils, which in turn support a wide range of vegetation types.

The remnant bushland features a wide range of types of woodlands. Wandoo (*Eucalyptus wandoo*) and powderbark (*E. accedens*) grow on the quartzite soils, while York gum (*E. loxophleba*) and jam (*Acacia acuminata*) occur on the more fertile red loams. Some of the York gum woodlands are unusually high in the landscape. On sandy areas there are marri (*Corymbia calophylla*) woodlands; on more shallow soils, species-rich heath and shrublands abound. Woodlands of rock sheoak (*Allocasuarina huegeliana*) are found around the summit as well as on many of the lower slopes. The heathlands are particularly rich in plant species, forming a colourful carpet in spring, with flowering shrubs, orchids, and everlastings.

FINDING THE HIDDEN TREASURES

Within a decade of the earliest European exploration of the York area in 1830, Mount Bakewell had come to the attention of botanists. Its summit had served as a vantage point for Ensign Dale, who, it is believed, named it after a friend, pioneer animal breeder Robert Bakewell. In September 1939, Mount Bakewell was visited by the German botanist Ludwig Preiss, who collected a number of plants, many of which are considered rare. The hill thomasia (*Thomasia montana*), for example, is declared as rare flora and has not been found there since Preiss

Top right: Marri woodland grows on the more shaded soils of Mount Bakewell.
Photo – Mike Braham/Lochman Transparencies

Centre right: Mountain hibbertia, one of the plants collected by Preiss on the 'rocky summits' of Mount Bakewell in 1839. It is still common there.

Right: Calytrix breviseta subsp. *stipulosa* grows in the rich heathlands, which form a colourful mosaic of flowering shrubs in spring.
Photos – Sue Patrick

DREAMING OF THE PEAKS

Aboriginal people were no less impressed than were the later explorers with Mount Bakewell's stark topographical presence, giving it its own Dreaming legend. The legend tells us that the taller mountain (Mount Bakewell) was called *Walwalling*, or 'the place of weeping', and the lower hill (Mount Brown) was called *Wongborel*, or 'the sleeping-woman'. Long ago in the Dreaming, the hill people used to meet the valley people at the foot of Walwalling for sports and games. Wundig, a handsome young warrior from the hill people, who excelled at games and spear throwing, fell in love with Wilura, a beautiful young girl from the valley people. This relationship between their family groupings was forbidden, so they eloped. When the valley people discovered that the girl was missing, they demanded her return, but the hill people did not know where the couple had gone.

A great battle ensued between the two groups. The valley people, who were outnumbered, called on their wise man for help. He used his magic powers to change the hill warriors into grasstrees as they surged down the slopes of Walwalling. The wide band of grasstrees can be seen to this day on Mount Bakewell, where the warriors were magically changed. The wise man then put a curse upon the two young people, who had caused so much bloodshed. Their dead bodies were found later, and the curse sent the spirit of Wundig to stay on Walwalling, and the spirit of the girl to Wongborel, so that their spirits would never meet again, until the mountains crumbled together.

collected it, but it may still be present. It is one of six specimens collected by Preiss on which the descriptions associated with the original publication of the species names were based.

There are other rarities more recently found on Mount Bakewell, and no doubt more yet to be discovered. Gilbert's groundsel (*Senecio gilbertii*), listed as a poorly known species and collected only a few times, has been found there, as have three other species, the smooth-lipped spider orchid (*Caladenia integra*), the broad-leaved hemigenia (*Hemigenia platyphylla*) and mountain hibbertia (*Hibbertia montana*). Another unusual occurrence is veined peppercress (*Lepidium phlebopetalum*), which, although widespread in arid areas, has been recorded only twice before in the south-west.

Preiss spent five days on Mount Bakewell, between 5 and 13 September 1839, and collected at least 26 different plant species. Six of these were known to have been described from his collections and it is possible that others were too. Three of the six are rare species, and while the other three are more common in the south-west, none appears to have been recollected there since that first visit.

Many notable botanists were to follow Ludwig Preiss. James Drummond, the first government botanist in Western Australia, almost certainly visited the mountain, although he did not record the precise locality of his specimens. Oswald Sargent, a naturalist and pharmaceutical chemist, collected a number of plants, mainly orchids, several times between 1906 and 1922. Charles Gardner, government botanist, went there in 1920, 1961, and 1962. Well-known nurseryman Fred Lullfitz was there in 1962 and 1963. Several past and present staff members of the Western Australian Herbarium have also contributed to the botanical knowledge about Mount Bakewell.

Above left: Dampieria eriocephala, with heads of rich blue flowers, grows with yellow-flowered *Labichea lanceolata* near the summit.

Left: In early October, the pink everlasting (*Rhodanthe manglesii*) and mauve-flowered *Olearia rudis* cover the upper slopes overlooking the outskirts of York.
Photos – Sue Patrick

Above left: Smooth-lipped spider orchid (*Caladenia integra*), once thought to be a rare species, was found to be common on Mount Bakewell after a fire in 1986.
Photo – Babs & Bert Wells/CALM

Above: A young grasstree and plants of the mauve-flowered daisy *Olearia rudis* grow in soil pockets of a rocky breakaway.
Photo – Sue Patrick

Nevertheless, only 101 collections from Mount Bakewell are represented in the WA Herbarium, from a total of only 48 species, some of which have been collected there many times. Despite every indication of profound botanical significance, no thorough flora survey has yet been made of Mount Bakewell.

Nor has there been any detailed fauna survey conducted to date, although the bushland is known to be inhabited by many species of mammals, birds, reptiles, insects and other invertebrates. There is certainly evidence that the euro finds refuge in the rocky upland areas.

GUARDING THE TREASURE

Not only is Mount Bakewell valuable for its diversity; it is also significant for the unusual nature of many of its plants. Some of them are markedly different from the same species growing elsewhere. The population of mountain hibbertia is regarded as the most representative of the species, and broad-leaved hemigenia also differs in some ways from the plants in other populations. A more common species, the forest pimelia (*Pimelia sylvestris*), has much larger flowers than normal. The remnant bush also features unusually tall grasstrees (*Xanthorrhoea* sp.). Several reach six metres in height, and may be more than 300 years old. The ages of these plants add to the mountain's historical and scientific significance, because they may provide information on bushfire frequency in the times before European settlement.

Until recently, management of the bushland was left mostly to the surrounding landholders. In the mid 1980s, a draft plan for the area proposed formation of a regional park, but this was not pursued. Recently, a management plan developed by the Shire of York and the York Land Conservation District Committee has formally recognised the area's significance. Funded by a grant from the State Landcare Program, the management plan calls for a consolidation of Crown land reserves and Crown-owned freehold land into an A-Class reserve, with an appropriate purpose, to be vested in and managed by the Shire. The plan brings into account conservation measures for the plant and animal communities, through the elimination and control of potential threats to the delicate natural environment. It also involves using conservation-based management to restore degraded areas, and encourages further research into the natural values of the mountain, identifying and protecting the manifold heritage values.

Elements of history, geography, and good fortune have resulted in Mount Bakewell and its remnant bushland surviving mostly unspoiled and available for the many uses required of it. It is fitting that, now, the same diversity of interests is combining to develop a sound management program that will maintain the rich resource in perpetuity, giving it its proper place in the social and natural history of York, and the botanical history of Western Australia.

Sue Patrick is a Senior Research Scientist in CALM's Science and Information Division. She can be contacted at the Western Australian Herbarium on (08) 9334 0485 (e-mail: suep@calm.wa.gov.au).

LANDSCOPE

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Noisy scrub-birds are rare in museum collections. This one, from a Dutch Museum, was probably collected by John Gilbert. See page 36.

This year, The Hills Forest celebrates its fifth birthday. Find out what's been happening there in our story on page 10.

The Kimberley region of Western Australia has some weird and wonderful landforms. Read all about them on page 16.

Mount Bakewell looms over the old town of York, but it is more than just a prominent landmark. Find out why on page 42.

The northern quoll is just one of WA's marsupials that have been part of a recent conservation status review. See page 22.

FEATURES

REGULARS

COVER

Get down on the ground, scramble through the leaf litter and compost in your garden, and discover the fascinating world of insects. 'Insects in the Garden', on page 28, shows how these seemingly insignificant creatures help keep the ecosystem running smoothly and how they are a vital part of nature's life-cycle.

Illustration by Philippa Nikulinsky

Managing Editor: Ron Kawalilak
Editor: David Gough
Story Editors: Ray Bailey, Verna Costello, Mitzi Vance, Mandy Clews, Carolyn Thomson
Scientific/technical advice: Andrew Burbidge, Ian Abbott, Paul Jones, Tony Start, Neil Burrows and staff of CALM's Science & Information Division
Design and production: Maria Duthie, Sue Marais
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Cartography: Promaco Geodraft
Marketing: Estelle de San Miguel ☎ (08) 9334 0296 Fax: (08) 9334 0498
Subscription enquiries: ☎ (08) 9334 0481 or (08) 9334 0437
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