



SUNDOWN @ UZALD ROCK - WOGALNO STN

WE HAD CANAPES & CHAMPAGNE, WATCHING T



Wogalno Station

Wogalno



# Awash with colour

A LANDSCOPE Expedition with a difference

...ING, THE SUN GOING DOWN ON THE GRANITE



... FOR HORIZONS



HOPE

STAN DIXON LAYING SOME  
PAINT OUTSIDE THE SHEARERS  
COOKHOUSE DAIRY CREEK  
AUGUST 2000

81 Year old Stan has the  
energy of a man a third of  
his age. Whenever we stopped,  
he bounded out of the bus to do  
a sketch. He was a Catalina  
pilot during WWII and now lives  
in Marparat River. I consider it one  
of life's bonuses to have met him  
and hope to catch up with him again

HOPE



With raw sienna, cerulean blue, rose madder, cadmium red and olive green to colour our palettes, we set off to record the landscapes of the Murchison and Gascoyne on our journey to the largest rock in the world, Mount Augustus.

by Sue Patrick



**O**ur journey was a *LANDSCOPE* Expedition that would, for the first time, combine painting with botanical collecting. Brian Hoey, artist and author, would guide us in drawing, painting and photography. Botanical activities would provide an additional scientific and artistic focus on this expedition. Collecting would be led by Sue Patrick and Anne Cochrane, botanists at CALM's Western Australian Herbarium. The resulting visual diary would record the expedition from an artist's point of view.

Visual diaries have been used for centuries by travellers to record their experiences, and were an integral part of early scientific journeys of exploration. They encourage travellers to heighten awareness of their surroundings, to hone their observation skills and create a record that is both personal and historical. It is also a lot of fun and very satisfying.

Although our itinerary was designed to take us through some of the State's best wildflower country, there would be few carpets of everlastings to capture in our diaries this year. The winter of 2000 had been dry throughout much of our intended route. Instead, we would focus on more robust visual feasts—geological, botanical and historical—during 10 days of travel through this fascinating country.

On the botanical front, we knew that about 80 poorly-collected plant species occurred in the Murchison and



**Previous page**  
Three pages from Brian Hoey's visual diary (from top): sundown at Lizard Rock, Wogarno Station; far horizons, on the way to Mount Augustus; and Stanley Dilkes laying paint outside the cookhouse, Dairy Creek Station, shearers' quarters in background. **Inset:** Wildflowers on the way to Mt Augustus.  
Photo – Michael Holt

**Left:** The bus framed by river red gums at Flintstone carpark, Mount Augustus National Park.  
Painting – Brian Hoey

Gascoyne regions. Many grew in isolated areas that we would not visit, but we hoped to find and record some of them and learn more about their conservation status. Other opportunistic collecting would increase our knowledge of the area, in which the plants were not well known.

We left Perth on a crisp winter's morning in early August, heading for Wogarno Station via the Benedictine monastery township of New Norcia. The diverse group—from Perth, Margaret River, Melbourne, Sydney and Canberra—travelling in the bus quickly became acquainted. The botanists tagged along behind in the support vehicle.

As we headed north into the Eremaean Botanical Province and with a lot of ground to cover, the bus rarely stopped on this first day of travel. The paddocks of the Wheatbelt gave way to acacia shrublands and we spotted first Mount Gibson and then Mount Singleton rising from the undulating plain. North of Paynes Find we entered mulga (*Acacia aneura*) country, where the small grey-leaved trees dominated the local vegetation.

Wogarno Station, south of Mount Magnet, was a welcome sight. The lack of recent rain was obvious, with few flowers to be seen. Between the mulgas were the withered remains of annuals that had germinated after early rains, then died. However, country hospitality was in full bloom. We were treated to champagne as we watched our first outback sunset at Lizard Rock, where rock and sky glowed with rich, changing colours. Then it was back to the homestead for a splendid country dinner and a good night's sleep in the shearers' quarters. Next morning we left, hoping our hosts at Wogarno would get more rain. Little did we know how soon our wishes would be realised!

North to Cue, where gold was discovered in 1892. We glimpsed some fine buildings, including the Masonic Lodge, said to be the largest corrugated iron structure in the southern



**Left:** Breakaway on Curbur Station.  
Painting – Malcolm Calder



hemisphere. Heading west, our goal was Walga Rock on Austin Downs Station, a monolith of red granite with water-stained sides and dark weathering. Its Aboriginal rock paintings impressed us. Snakes, emu and kangaroo track motifs, hand and boomerang stencils and a controversial white painting of a sailing ship ranged along the walls of a high, weathered cave.

Later, a patch of desert peas, crimson and black, were the only plants of this species that we would see during the entire journey. Further north, the botanists travelling at the rear to search for plants noticed an enormous line of fast-moving clouds in the south-west. Would the approaching front hamper our journey northwards? At the Royal Mail Hotel in Meekatharra we discovered the answer.

## MEEKATHARRA

Meekatharra is thought to be an Aboriginal word meaning 'place of little water'—but not for us. Early next morning the first raindrops fell, and by breakfast time it was raining steadily.

**Above:** Mount Augustus foxglove (*Pityrodia augustensis*) growing in a steep creekline on the lower slopes. Photo – Michael Holt

**Above right:** Cave Rock at the Granites, Meekatharra. Painting – Margaret Leavesley

**Right:** Observing and collecting plants after rain at Meekatharra. Painting – Stanley Dilkes



Brian was concerned about the conditions for driving. To the north were unsealed roads, crossing the Hope, Murchison and Gascoyne Rivers. Would the rivers rise? Telephone calls were not reassuring. The hotel could provide accommodation for another night. Reluctantly, we decided to postpone our first view of Mount Augustus for at least another day.

We put the wait to good use. A poorly known plant was found here in 1986. Braving the rain, we headed for an area of granites and breakaways and there it was—red drummondita (*Drummondita miniata*). Growing from bare reddish rock on breakaway edges, old gnarled shrubs bore tubular orange flowers with yellow and mauve fluffy stamens. Some of us counted the population, others painted. The

landscape, clothed sparsely in small shrubs and surrounded by grey mulga shrubland, featured reddish conical hills, caves, cliffs and tumbled boulders, tilted and eroded. Rain drove us away before lunch, but we continued our painting and botany in an impromptu workshop in the hotel dining room, until the cry went up: 'The rain has stopped, the sun is out,' and we went back to the gorge to finish our work.

Away by 7.00 am next morning, we were eager to make up for lost time. The mid-morning stop was at Mount Gould, the site of the first police station in the Murchison. The restored building and mountain backdrop provided more inspiration for the artists. Evidence of local rains showed in small patches of pink, white and yellow annuals further along the way.







**Top:** Expeditioners view Mount Augustus at sunset, from Emu Hill Lookout.

Photo – Sue Patrick

**Above:** Painting on the banks of the Geeranoo Creek, Dairy Creek Station.

**Left:** Anne Cochrane, Gwenyth Bray and Kevin Bray using WATTLE, a new electronic, interactive key for identifying acacia species.

Photos – Michael Holt

**Top right:** Green birdflower (*Crotalaria cunninghamii*).

Painting – Malcolm Calder

**Above right:** Plants of the Gasgoyne: fuschia bush (*Eremophila maculata*); turpentine bush (*E. fraseri*); cassia; and swainsona species.

Painting – Margaret Leavesley



*Crotalaria cunninghamii*  
11.9.00



*Eremophila maculata*  
flower & fruit

## MOUNT AUGUSTUS

Mount Augustus at last came into view—blue hazed by the time we reached the Mount Augustus Outback Tourist Resort, our destination for the night. The largest known isolated monocline, Mount Augustus is, in simpler terms, the world's biggest rock. This eight-kilometre-long segment of sandstone and conglomerate strata has been folded and uplifted, with ancient granite beneath. It is incredibly ancient—between 1,650 and 1,900 million years old.

In 1989, Mount Augustus and the land immediately around it were declared a national park. Pastoral stations surround the mountain—Mount Augustus Station to the north-east and Cobra Station to the south-west. Both stations surrendered portions of their



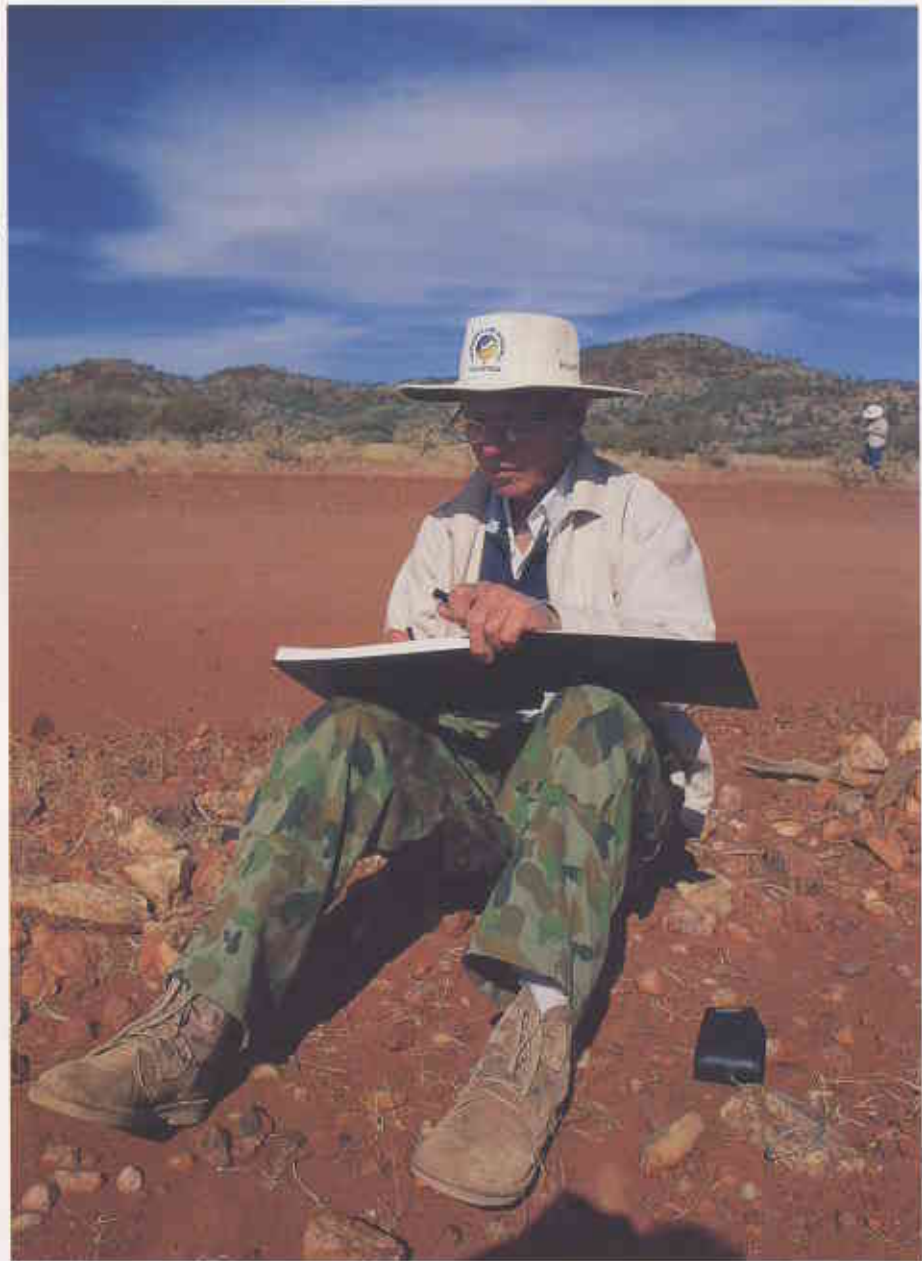
leases so that the park could be created (see 'Mount Augustus National Park', *LANDSCOPE*, Winter 1995).

At last, we stood below the mountain. Viewed from Emu Hill at sunset on the previous evening, its colours had changed from green and blue, through coppery pink and bronze to velvety purple. At dawn it had glowed red and now, in the early morning, its looming height provided an awesome spectacle. Rising more than 700 metres above the surrounding plain, its soaring rock faces, steep gorges and exposed summits support very different plant communities from those on the plains below.

We made an early start along the dusty road, aiming to search for several plants. Three small, short-lived species on our list had a fondness for wet places, so would we find them this year? On the south-west side, we found that the creek lines at the base of the rock were still wet. Partly shaded from the northerly sun by the mountain, and meandering beneath groves of river gums, they are fed by natural springs seeping from the drainage lines of the rock. We began our search.

In five localities we found the ephemeral raspwort (*Gonocarpus ephemerus*), collected only five times previously, and an undescribed sedge (*Schoenus* sp. Kalbarri) known from only one other locality and collected only twice before. Both were plentiful in herb swards on the damp soils, as was a small pink triggerplant (*Stylidium weeliwollii*). Known from two other localities, it grew here in four places. We admired the Mount Augustus foxglove (*Pityrodia augustensis*), a shrub with deep lilac flowers that is restricted to the mountain.

By late morning, we reluctantly left this fascinating flora and continued west to Cobra Station for lunch. The former Bangemall Hotel, built in 1896,



is now used as the homestead, and provided subject material for some quick sketches after our excellent lunch. After admiring the flourishing gardens, we turned southwards towards Dairy Creek Station, where we were scheduled to stay for two nights.

## DAIRY CREEK

The original homestead at Dairy Creek Station was built in 1890, but was replaced by another in 1904. The ruins of the old building, close to our accommodation in the shearers' quarters, became a focus for our paintings. The results were a wonderful example of different artistic styles and interpretations.

Wooded creeklines, stony flats, claypans and breakaways yielded much to interest the botanists. Two poorly

**Above:** Stanley Dilkes sketching on the way to Mount Augustus.  
Photo – Michael Holt

**Above left:** The shearers' quarters at Dairy Creek Station.  
Drawing – Stanley Dilkes

collected, locally restricted species were found: a grevillea (*Grevillea subterlineata*) that grows on damp red clay flats at the foot of breakaways, and an acacia (*Acacia atopa*) found on upper slopes.

Journeying south, we made an important discovery. A rocky landscape of low red siltstone rises had some uncommon plants in its sparse shrubland. We found a white-flowered shrub, not realising that it had been collected only once before, and was a new population of *Hemigenia* sp. Glenburgh.





We also found more of the grevillea and a yellow mulla-mulla (*Ptilotus asterolasius* var. *luteolus*) a long way north-west of any previous collections.

In the early afternoon, a shady pool beneath large old river gums gave the artists, aided by Brian, more to record. Bilung Pool is formed where Bilung Creek plunges about six metres, creating a waterfall at the head of a gorge. Beneath paperbarks and minniritchie (*Acacia cyperophylla*), along the creekline, we found more plants, including a pink-flowered turpentine bush and sedges a few centimetres tall.

### CURBUR

Standing on the shore of Breberle Lake, above breaking waves, it was hard to believe that in the early days no-one wanted much of the land that is now Curbur Station, because there was no permanent water. The lake had filled after cyclonic summer rain, increasing its size and causing a detour of the Carnarvon-Mullewa Road.

A story of a tragedy last century, related to the lack of water on Curbur (originally spelt Kurbur), is told by Frank Wittenoom in his memoirs. A shepherd was on the lease near water with a flock of sheep and rations to last a month. However, the water dried faster than expected and the shepherd had no means of letting his boss know. Most of the sheep died, and the shepherd, who was too loyal to leave them, was also found dead.

Plant searches were very rewarding during our two-day stay at Curbur. Twelve new populations of six poorly known plants were found, particularly on granite outcrops and siltstone ridges. Anne Cochrane, manager of CALM's



**Above left:** Members of the 'Awash in Colour—Painting a Path through the Murchison' LANDSCOPE Expedition, August 2000. Photo – Michael Holt

**Centre left:** The shearing shed at Cobra Station.

**Left:** Bilung Pool, shaded beneath river red gums. Paintings – Stanley Dilkes

Threatened Flora Seed Centre, collected seed from two new populations of Jamieson's featherflower (*Verticordia jamiesonii*), one of which was a previously unrecorded colour form with yellow flowers.

### BACK ON THE BITUMEN

South of Curbur, after crossing the Greenough River, the country began to change. Higher rainfall resulted in several stops at patches of everlastings. Soon we encountered bright green wheatfields and the bitumen road, the first since Meekatharra, seven days before. The natural vegetation changed too, with more eucalypt woodland and acacia shrublands. At the Carnamah

Hotel we celebrated and reminisced about the wonderful hospitality we had experienced during our journey.

During the expedition, each member of the group had spent time with the botanists, and their sharp eyes helped to increase the collections. Kevin and Gwenyth Bray found time for bird watching and sketching, while Malcolm Calder, a botanist, painted plants as well as landscapes. Stanley Dilkes, probably the most prolific artist

**Below:** Photographing flowers.  
The last page in Margaret Leavesley's visual diary.  
Painting – Margaret Leavesley



*Kevin and Malcolm get down to it!*

*Around 3.30 pm our trip concluded in the carpark at U.W.A Extension where all our paraphernalia was unloaded, farewells expressed, promises to write etc and meet at our reunion. And so ended a wonderful trip.*

in the group, produced lightning sketches at every stop, and illustrated his entry in the collective diary as well. Michael Holt, who had been on a previous expedition, took many photographs. Margaret Leavesley, another experienced expeditioner, compiled an extensive bird list and painted plants and places. Jacqui Wisdom had a keen interest in plants and plant recording, besides learning to paint. The mainstay of the expedition, Brian provided artistic guidance, kept the schedule and drove the bus. He was in his element, travelling the outback while sharing his passionate interests in heritage and community arts.

### THOSE ELUSIVE PLANTS

Our journey achieved two aims: producing a series of visual diaries, and increasing botanical knowledge of the region we visited. We recorded 34 new populations of 15 poorly-known species. This work would not have otherwise been done. Sometimes it was not until the specimens were identified later that we realised the importance of our discoveries. We need to revisit some of the populations to find out more about them and survey other places, so the expedition will be repeated in 2002. Anybody interested?

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Sue Patrick will co-lead the following expeditions in 2001 and 2002:

**Night and Day under an Outback Sky—An Astronomical Adventure**  
August 18 – 25, 2001

*Astronomy and botany at Mount Singleton in the Murchison*

**Awash in Colour—Painting a Path through the Murchison**  
August 9 – 18, 2002

**Botanical Treasures in an Everlasting Landscape**

August 31 – September 7, 2002  
*A botanical survey at Muggon Pastoral Station in the Murchison*



Winner of the 1998 Alex Harris Medal for excellence in science and environment reporting.

# LANDSCOPE



VOLUME SIXTEEN, NUMBER 3, AUTUMN 2001



Armed with sketch pad, pencils, pens and paints, an intrepid group of artists set off on a brand new LANDSCOPE expedition. See 'Awash with Colour' on page 28.



Most of us only know of the exotic pest ants that invade our kitchens. But what of the great Australian ants? See page 23.



Ningaloo Marine Park and Cape Range National Park lie side by side in our north-west corner. Read about how they are managed on page 17.



Four more conservation reserves now offer greater protection to areas in and around the Mitchell Plateau. See 'Parks of the Plateau' on page 48.



Scientists continue to develop ways to locate, track and trap animals for research. See 'Tools of the Trade' on page 41.

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## COVER

For many years, the decline of frogs in various parts of the world has puzzled conservationists. A breakthrough came in 1996 when scientists isolated a new kind of fungus that infects and may kill frogs. Western Australian research now under way is beginning to answer some initial questions about the fungus and its impact on our unique frogs. See 'In Pursuit of the Frog Fungus' on page 10.



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