

MULTIPLE LAND USE

MULTIPLE VALUES OF REMNANT VEGETATION, AN EXAMPLE FROM THE AVON DISTRICT

by Sue Patrick

THE high biological value of remnant vegetation is without question, but some remnants have other values as well. These usually occur in the early settled districts, where heritage and historical values add to their importance.

Mount Bakewell is such a place. The mountain overlooks the town of York and was important to humans long before European settlement. For the Nyoongar people, the mountain top is of cultural significance and both Mount Bakewell and nearby Mount Brown are the background to a Dreamtime legend.

For Europeans too, Mount Bakewell has been significant since before settlement of the Avon region. In 1830, when Ensign Dale first explored the area, he climbed the Dyott Range and named the mountain at its highest point, which serves as a lookout over the surrounding countryside.

Subdivisions of the surrounding land were made in about 1842, but even before then, in 1839, the young German botanist, J.A.L. Preiss, visited the area and, over five September days, made plant collections on Mount Bakewell. As a result, like many other areas where he collected, such as Mount Eliza in Perth (now Kings Park) and the Suzannah Brook Valley in the hills above the Swan Valley, the locality is important because some of his collections were used by botanists to describe new species (at least six from Mount Bakewell).

Although a thorough botanical survey has not yet been made of the remnant vegetation on Mount Bakewell, we already know of its values, partly as a result of visits there by a number of well known botanists this century. The

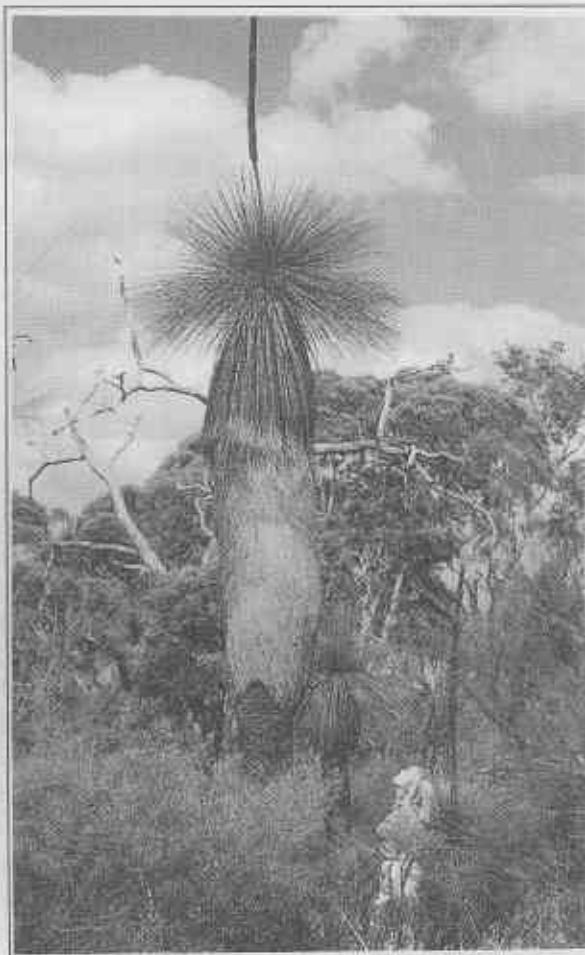


Mt Bakewell ▲

Sue and a skyscraper! ▼

countryside around is heavily cleared but this remnant is generally in good condition. The lower slopes are all privately owned, making access restricted, and lessening likelihood of disturbance, fires and the introduction of weeds, diseases and rubbish.

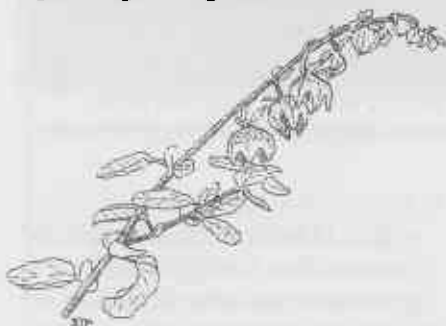
The geology of the area is complex, giving rise to a variety of soils which support a number of diverse plant communities, representative of the natural vegetation now cleared from the surrounding area. Soils derived from the massive quartzite of the summit support wandoo and powderbark woodlands. York gum and jam woodlands grow on fertile red loams, with marrionsandier soils and



MULTIPLE LAND USE

rock sheoak around the summit and lower slopes. Shallower soils result in species-rich heath and shrublands.

Apart from the importance of the species which were described from Preiss's collections, including the rare Mountain Hibbertia, Hill Thomasia and Broad-leaved Hemigenia, several others found more recently are also either known, or thought to be, rare. The mountain reaches a height of 457 metres above sea level and, perhaps as a result of this, some of the plants growing here differ from those of the same species growing elsewhere.



Thomasia montana, Hill Thomasia

Unusually tall grass trees, some over six metres tall, are found on the upper slopes. These are thought to be over 300 years old and therefore may provide an opportunity to study bushfire frequency before European settlement. The most recent bushfire to burn over the range was in 1985 and regeneration of the bush since then is continuing.

The area is also a valuable haven for fauna, including a population of Euros. Based on surveys made in nearby bushland it is possible that up to five species of mammals, 70 species of birds, and eleven species of reptiles could occur there.

The value of this important remnant was officially recognised in 1996, when a comprehensive Management Plan was prepared by the Shire of York and the York LCDC funded by the State Landcare Program and the Shire.

Until then, management of the area had rested largely with the surrounding landholders, although in the mid-1980s a draft plan had

proposed formation of a 'Regional Park'. Ownership of the remnant vegetation is complex, involving private individuals, the Shire of York, a mixture of vested and unvested reserves, and freehold land owned by the State and Commonwealth governments. Future management aims to consolidate the crown land reserves and crown-owned freehold land into a single A Class reserve to be managed by the Shire of York.

Conservation issues include elimination or control of threatening processes, restoration of degraded areas and encouragement of research on the flora and fauna of the area. Heritage values are also to be identified and protected. The plan aims to ensure that all values of nature conservation, visual landscape and heritage will not be degraded by use for recreation and tourism. There is much to be done to implement the recommendations in the Management Plan, but already the first steps are being taken and its guidelines will enable this important area to continue to exist as it has done for over 150 years since so many changes have taken place around it.

The Mount Bakewell bushland exemplifies the value of a small remnant of natural vegetation. It contains plant communities now largely cleared from the surrounding area, and a unique assemblage of species of this particular locality, including both rare species and those of taxonomic importance. It is a haven for wildlife, and is of importance in the cultural heritage of both the Nyoongar people and European settlers. In addition the mountain is a dominant and attractive feature of the local landscape.

Sue Patrick is a Senior Research Scientist at the W.A. Herbarium, Como. She can be contacted on (08) 9334 0485.

Illustrations and photos by S. Patrick.