



## Spring 2007

### In this issue

Yourka Station, Noongar cultural heritage on Chereninup Creek Reserve, Bidjara cultural connections at Carnarvon Station Reserve, Using fire at Reedy Creek Reserve



## An iconic property in far-north Queensland

Ecologist **David Baker-Gabb** and Bush Heritage's **Mel Sheppard** were part of the initial team that assessed the property Yourka Station for potential acquisition by Bush Heritage

The thought of heading north in May to assess a 43 500 hectare property for possible acquisition by Bush Heritage had particular appeal. After living for months in the drought-ravaged brown landscape of southern Australia,

far-north Queensland was guaranteed to be green and wet. But just how green and wet we were yet to find out!

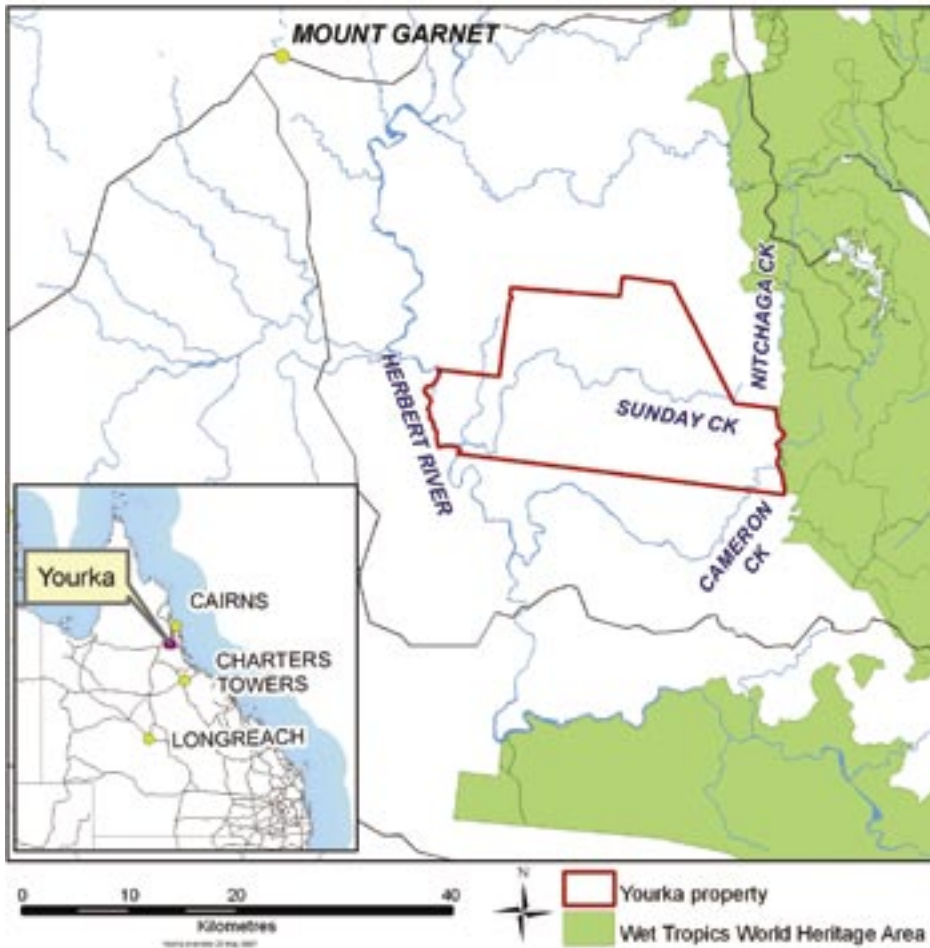
Our trip to Yourka Station was delayed because of the wet. At that time the soaked ground would not allow us access to most of the property even by quad bike. When we finally arrived and gazed up at the flood debris lodged 20 metres above the ground in the branches of the trees, we appreciated

just how much water must have surged through this extraordinary landscape. Much of the rain had fallen in the high-altitude tropical rainforests of the Wet Tropics World Heritage Area along the property's eastern boundary. It had then rushed through the foothills down a series of major creeks and across the plains to join the swollen Herbert River on Yourka's western boundary. The result was a lush, green and exuberant landscape.



Clockwise from top: Northern quoll. PHOTO: JIRI LOCHMAN/LOCHMAN TRANSPARENCIES Colourful poison pea *Gastrolobium* sp. PHOTO: DAVID BAKER-GABB Mareeba rock wallabies. PHOTO: JIRI LOCHMAN/LOCHMAN TRANSPARENCIES Lowland wetland. PHOTO: DAVID BAKER-GABB





We had not expected to be so captivated by the diversity of Yourka's waterways. They ranged from the dark, wide Cameron Creek, which meandered through the south of the property, to the rushing milky blue waters of rocky Blunder Creek, which tumbled past pandanus and through eucalypt woodlands in the north. In between were the deep, sparkling waters and white sands of Sunday Creek with its fringing billabongs and ephemeral wetlands. As its name suggests, the underlying rock and character of Basalt

Creek on Yourka's rich alluvial plains were different again. We were to learn that the diversity of these seasonal wetlands and waterways was amplified in Yourka's vegetation communities.

From early on in our assessment we had the strong impression that Yourka Station could become one of Bush Heritage's iconic properties. The more we explored, the more excited we became by the thought that Bush Heritage and its supporters might be able to protect this stunning piece of

country within the year. Located in one of Australia's biodiversity hotspots, and in a Bush Heritage anchor region, it would be a significant addition to the national reserve system.

There are things about Yourka that make it truly special and a very significant property to protect.

Firstly, it is highly diverse. Within its boundaries are 39 regional ecosystems. Five of these have very little protection in any other reserve and fourteen are listed as threatened or 'of concern'.

This remarkable level of diversity is due to the variability of the underlying geology and also the changes in altitude and rainfall across the property. As we journeyed from west to east we travelled through a variety of vegetation types. There were eucalypt and *Corymbia* woodlands, some with understoreys of native grasses and others with shrubby understoreys, impressive stands of grass trees, rocky escarpments and wet eucalypt forests that fringed the rainforest of the Wet Tropics. Along the waterways giant melaleucas, which towered above our heads, whispering she-oak woodlands and stream-side thickets helped create an impressive diversity of habitats for the local wildlife.

Secondly, Yourka provides habitat for a significant number of threatened species. Its multi-aged woodlands with old, hollow-bearing trees are a key resource for forest and woodland species.

One of the great delights was finding nests of the red goshawk, our rarest bird of prey. This species is nationally



From left: Native hibiscus. Milky blue water of Blunder Creek. Nationally vulnerable red goshawk.  
PHOTOS: DAVID BAKER-GABB

vulnerable and there are probably only about 700 pairs left in Australia. The species' range has shrunk as coastal developments have pushed it back to the more remote northern rivers.

Another potentially even more exciting discovery was of the telltale scratchings of bettongs. Dr Graeme Harrington, an experienced tropical ecologist who was travelling with us, was optimistic that, considering the habitat in which we found the diggings, they could well be those of the endangered northern bettong. Only four isolated populations of this species are known to remain. Finding a fifth population on Yourka would be very exciting.

Other threatened species that may well be found here include the endangered northern quoll, spot-tailed quoll, Sermon's leaf-nosed bat and greater large-eared horseshoe bat, and the vulnerable fluffy glider, masked owl and painted snipe. In the rocky country we saw Mareeba rock wallabies hiding in the rock crevices and bouncing like rubber balls up the rock faces.

The property is also significant for threatened plants. Around ten per cent of the property is listed as potential habitat for geographically restricted or threatened plants, including the endangered *Phalaenopsis* sp. and the vulnerable *Acacia purpureopetala* and *Homoranthus porteri*.

The third reason that Yourka is so special relates to its gradients of rainfall and elevation. These increase as you travel from west to east. As we begin to better understand the impacts of global



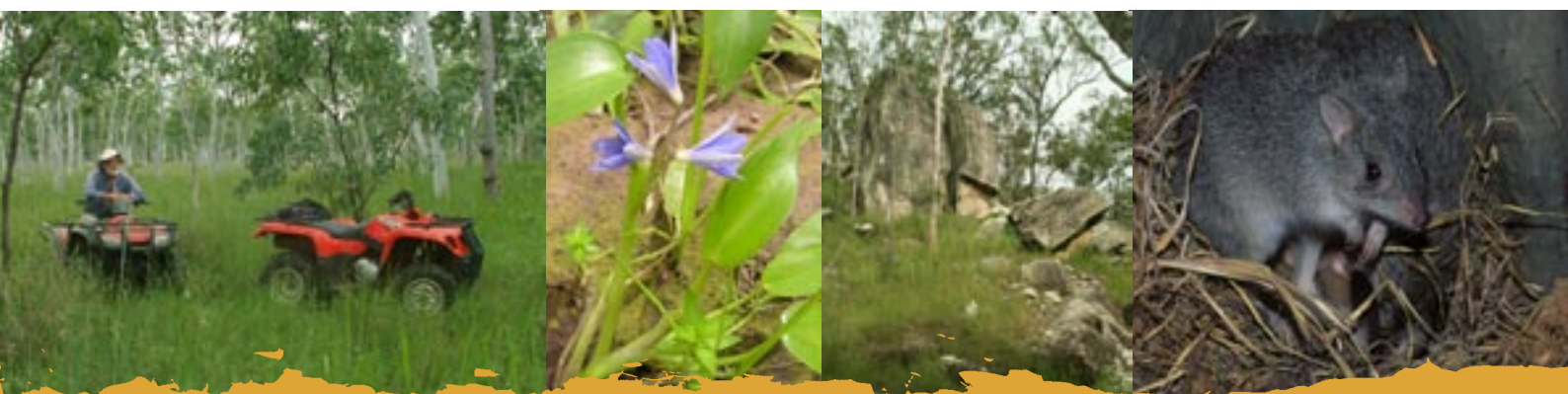
warming and realise that every one degree increase in temperature will be equivalent to a particular habitat being subject to the conditions experienced formerly 100 kilometres to its north, we can see that it is important to protect land that extends through a range of altitudes. As changes in the patterns of rainfall and temperature occur as the climate warms, habitats will be altered as a result. They may no longer support the species that depended on them in the past. By protecting extensive areas of land with differences in elevation, we can provide displaced animals and plants with more suitable habitats to move into.

At present Yourka faces a number of threats. Grazing pressure from stock is the most severe and is having the greatest impact, particularly as the best grazing land is also where most of the threatened ecosystems occur. Weeds, especially lantana, are also an issue in the grazing areas. Pigs are damaging the wetlands. Fire has been suppressed and as a result the wet eucalypt forests

are being invaded by rainforest species. The birds and animals that are unique to these forests are therefore under threat.

If you can help Bush Heritage to secure Yourka, the greatest threat will be removed. The cattle will go. Management of pigs, weeds and fire will follow, as permanent reserve managers, supported by volunteers, take over the land management. Traditional Owners will be invited to contribute to the reserve's management and the protection of Yourka's cultural heritage. The property will then begin its transition to becoming the iconic reserve it deserves to be.

Following our assessment of Yourka Station, the Bush Heritage Board approved its purchase. The Australian Government has committed significant funds for the acquisition from the Maintaining Australia's Biodiversity Hotspots Programme.



Clockwise from top: Mid-altitude grassy woodland. PHOTO: DAVID BAKER-GABB Northern bettong. PHOTO: JIRI LOCHMAN/LOCHMAN TRANSPARENCIES Rocky Tiger Mountain. PHOTO: DAVID BAKER-GABB *Monochoria cyanea* was flowering in some of the wetlands. PHOTO: MEL SHEPPARD Quad bikes were the best form of transport. PHOTO: DAVID BAKER-GABB





## Noongar cultural heritage on Chereninup Creek Reserve

Bush Heritage Indigenous Partnership Officers **Ken Hayward** and **Sarah Eccles** explain the cultural heritage assessments being undertaken at Chereninup Creek Reserve

Noongar traditional lands extend across the Gondwana Link properties in Western Australia, including Chereninup Creek Reserve. In May, Noongar Elders and young Noongar people, and staff from the Gondwana Link partner organisations, began an assessment of the cultural values of Chereninup Creek Reserve.

After several visits, numerous sites had been identified. They included several with scatters of stone artefacts, lizard traps or lizard habitats made out of stone slabs, and one stone quarry. At one of these sites there were over 300 artefacts. One of the Elders remembers her family using the lizard traps at a particular site when she was a child.

This assessment is part of a broader regional project called the Linkage

*'Elders have the vision for our people to be on country and realise the need for our youth to learn culture ...*

*This work has initiated a way for our people to not only return to country but also provided a path for our youth to learn more about Noongar culture, heritage and skills they can use towards employment. One of the real benefits is witnessing the growth in self-esteem of the youth. This project means this can happen.'*

Ken Hayward, Noongar Indigenous Partnership Officer

Project. It is a partnership between Bush Heritage, Greening Australia (WA), the University of Western Australia, the South West Aboriginal Land and Sea Council, the Restoring Connections

Program, the South Coast Regional Initiative Planning Team and the South West Catchment Council.

The Linkage Project aims to improve the community's understanding of Noongar values and knowledge of the area. Undertaking cultural heritage assessments of the areas important to Noongar people is a major component of the project. These assessments are guided by the Elders and include Noongar youth so that cultural knowledge and practices can be passed on. The staff of the partner organisations are also providing training in archaeology and contemporary natural resource management.

Cultural heritage management plans will be produced both at the regional level and for individual properties. They will identify how cultural places, values and resources should be protected and managed. These plans will be integrated into the broader regional natural resource management process.



Clockwise from top left: Noongar student displaying a scatter of stone artefacts. PHOTO: KEN HAYWARD Chereninup Creek Reserve. PHOTO: JIRI LOCHMAN/LOCHMAN TRANSPARENCIES Noongar students surveying the revegetation areas. Noongar students at a site where stone tools were found. PHOTOS: KEN HAYWARD





## Bidjara cultural connections at Carnarvon Station Reserve

**Bush Heritage Indigenous Partnership Officer Sarah Eccles** tells of the involvement of the Bidjara people at Carnarvon Station Reserve

Carnarvon Station Reserve lies within the Traditional Lands of the Bidjara people. It is a rich and significant cultural landscape and there is abundant evidence of a long and continuing connection between the Bidjara people and their country. There are extensive rock shelters covered in rock art and engravings, scatters of stone tools and flakes across on the slopes of the ridges and scarred trees along the terraces and banks of the Channin Creek.

Bidjara people and Bush Heritage staff are working together to identify, record, understand and manage these cultural sites. In May 2007, Bidjara community representatives, together with Bush Heritage staff, conducted a cultural heritage assessment. They visited and recorded information at seven sites including the colourful ochre pits, an

important resource which continues to be used for painting by the community.

*'All of these sites, whether it be one scar tree or a grinding stone, are all important, as it is evidence of our people, my relatives being here and that I am walking in their footsteps. This means a lot to me and I have a responsibility to look after these places,'* said Keelen Mailman, Bidjara community member.

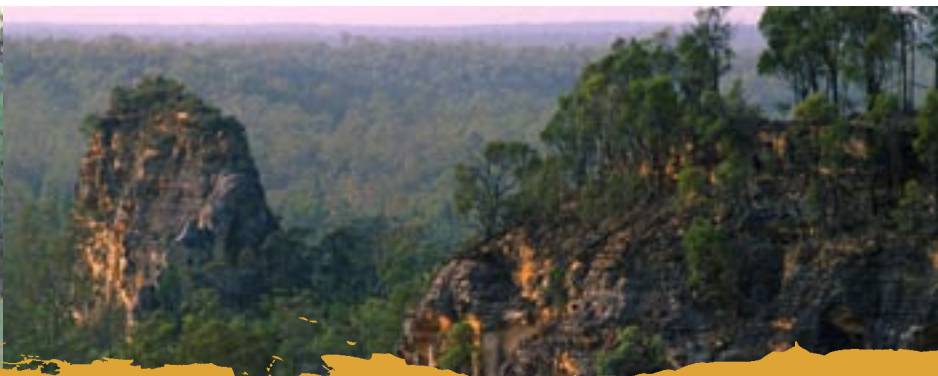
A cultural workshop planned for September will involve the Bidjara Elders. They will visit and record more places of significance to the Bidjara community. The knowledge gained through these cultural workshops will provide the basis for a cultural heritage management plan for Carnarvon Station Reserve. It will integrate the cultural and environmental values of the landscape and ensure that Bidjara representatives and Bush Heritage staff work together to manage and protect these values.

*'We are happy that Bush Heritage are doing this, looking after our country and*

*sites. Other than our [Bidjara] people owning and managing Carnarvon, we couldn't ask for a better mob. You mob have been respectful, providing access and consulting traditional owners and community members in management of our sites,'* said Floyd Robinson, Bidjara Cultural Heritage Officer.

A Bidjara trainee will begin work at Carnarvon Station Reserve in August 2007 supported by the Rick Farley Memorial Scholarship. This trainee will assist at both the reserve and Mt Tabor Station, a nearby pastoral lease managed by Bidjara people. The trainee will develop skills and experience in conservation and land management through on-the-job training and mentoring.

Bush Heritage has established the Rick Farley Memorial Scholarship for young Indigenous people working in conservation management. For more information please see [www.bushheritage.org.au](http://www.bushheritage.org.au)



Clockwise from top left: Exploring the rock shelters. PHOTO: SARAH ECCLES Bidjara community members and Bush Heritage's Indigenous Partnership Officer during the cultural heritage assessment (from left: Brendan, Sarah, Richie, David, Victor, Keelen, Travis, Floyd and Cissy [front]). PHOTO: DARREN LARCOMBE Keelen Mailman at one of the Bidjara art sites. PHOTO: SARAH ECCLES Rocky outcrops at Carnarvon Station Reserve. Diverse woodland on the reserve. PHOTOS: WAYNE LAWLER/ECOPIX





## Using fire at Reedy Creek Reserve

Reserve Manager **Steve Heggie** explains the fire management work at Reedy Creek Reserve

In 2004 Bush Heritage received a gift of 452 hectares of remnant vegetation and coastal habitats in one of Queensland's prime coastal zones. The gift was an environmental offset for the environmentally sustainable residential development 'Sunrise at 1770'. The residents contribute financially to support the protection of the adjacent conservation area, Reedy Creek Reserve.

Managing land adjacent to such a development creates unique management issues, particularly when it comes to ecological burning. Burning, however, continues to be a major focus of the work program at Reedy Creek Reserve.

Over this summer wet season, which never really arrived, we maintained and widened the firebreaks in preparation for the autumn burns we were to undertake as part of the Reedy Creek fire management strategy. This was necessary for our own safety and also to increase our efficiency when using fire as a management tool.

All Bush Heritage reserve staff who work with fire are now equipped with Australian Standard Proban Personal Protection Equipment, designed to offer a high level of protection from radiant heat and flames.

The onset of the calmer autumn weather saw our burning program begin but, as a result of the poor wet season, conditions were much drier and more challenging than normal.

Our fire management has two objectives. One is to protect life and property in the Sunrise at 1770 residential area by reducing the overall fuel loads on the common lands. Our second aim is to create a mosaic of burnt and unburnt areas on the reserve to mimic the natural order of fire and enhance the health of the local vegetation communities. This means that patches of some robust vegetation communities are burnt as regularly as every two years. Other vegetation communities will need at least ten years between burns. Ensuring that the fire remains within control lines, and reassuring anxious neighbours, creates a very challenging management scenario for Bush Heritage staff who use fire as a land-management tool on the urban fringe.

Once the burns are complete we map the blackened areas using Geographic Positioning System equipment, and the data are added to the Geographic Information System database to produce detailed digital maps of the reserve's fire history. These maps guide the selection of the sites for following years' burns.

Now we are heading into winter, the traditional period of high fire danger, well prepared.

Sunrise at 1770 has just won the Urban Development Institute of Australia award for best sustainable development in Queensland. It is now in the running for the national title.



Clockwise from top: Burning along the track. Monitoring the controlled burn. PHOTOS: STEVE HEGGIE

## From the CEO

In *Bush Heritage News*, Winter 2007, I wrote about our strategic approach to both buying land and developing partnerships, and the success that we have had with both. These exciting activities allow us to acquire, manage and safeguard land and water of the greatest importance for protecting our biodiversity.

Being strategic about where we work and carefully selecting the properties that we protect or manage with others are critical to our long-term effectiveness. Over the years we have been developing a more science-based approach, using the growing body of information on Australia's ecology, the collective experience of our ecologists, field staff and research partners, and the data emerging from the reserves themselves. As a result we now have well-developed techniques for managing conservation land.

And we are developing a new tool to assist us. The Bush Heritage Ecological Outcomes Monitoring program (soon to be available on the Bush Heritage website) is breaking new ground in improving our understanding of the Australian landscape and how our actions affect it, either positively or negatively. It represents the first attempt in Australia to find a simple, repeatable and reliable way of measuring environmental health over time and thus learning how the land and its wildlife respond to land-management activities. If we, as managers of conservation areas, can better understand the direct relationship between our management actions and the benefits they bring to the land and its animals and plants, we can use this information to improve our management strategies and report back on the progress we are making.

The National Reserve System Programme had its 10th anniversary in June. The Federal Minister for the Environment and Water Resources, Malcolm Turnbull, described it as 'one

of Australia's proudest conservation achievements'. Bush Heritage is a strong supporter of the program, which has bipartisan political support and is widely lauded here and overseas. We have been associated with it since its inception, acquiring one of the first private reserves funded by the program and also developing one of its first partnerships with farmers and the state government in Tasmania. The \$2 of government funding provided for every \$1 that our supporters give has meant that many properties have been protected that otherwise could not have been. I know this government contribution is very encouraging for our supporters. Thirteen reserves, and from every state, have received funding from the program. The National Reserve System Programme deserves still more government support as it delivers arguably the most cost-effective and efficient means of conserving biodiversity in Australia.

There are two additional strategies that Bush Heritage is developing that will be of interest to you. An Indigenous Engagement Strategy will increase our collaboration with Indigenous Australians. And we have set a target of the year 2010 to be operating in an environmentally sustainable manner across all our activities.

The Bush Heritage journey continues to be a wonderful ride, with so much to look forward to. I thank you for joining us on the journey and supporting Bush Heritage in whatever way you can.



Doug Humann

## In memory

Jane Castle gave in memory of her mother **Lilias Eve Fraser**. Stan and Margaret Telford remembered Stan's parents **Stan and Catherine Telford**, who loved nature. Shirley Storey sent a gift in memory of her husband **Peter** who loved wild places.

John and Jean Alexander remembered **Mary Stephens**, a dedicated conservationist. Elizabeth Beck donated for **Ian Mullins**, Susan Judge for **Desmond Judge**, Angela Pritchard for **Dolce Pritchard** and Elaine Valton and friends for **Tricia Pursell**.

Family and friends donated to honour the lives of **Alma Douglas, Sandra Heavers** and **Frank Lee**. Jennifer Gedye remembered her friend **Jean Konkes**. Carol Davis honoured her first husband **Rollo Davis** and her son **Daniel**, who died aged 17 in a bushwalking accident.

## In celebration

Carol and Dougald McLean celebrated the 100th birthday of **Eve Masterman**, 'who loved the Tasmanian wilderness all her 100 years'.

**Spiro Haginikitas** was honoured by Christine Austin when he turned 70. Family and friends donated for **Diana Whitfield** on her 80th birthday. Julie Hamilton remembered her mother **Margaret Hamilton** on her 75th birthday. The 60th birthdays of **Glenis Geldard** and **Pam Rawling** were remembered by family and friends, and the 50th birthdays of **Stephanie Haygarth** and **Matthew Higgins** were both honoured by Euan Moore and Jenny Rolland. John and Jeanette Carlsen celebrated the 21st birthday of their grandson **Adam Smith** and Deborah White the birthday of her sister **Christina Smith**.

The weddings of **Catherine Brouwer and Ray Jones**, and **Juliet Thomas and Peter Richards**, were celebrated by family and friends. Claudine Mueller donated to celebrate the golden wedding anniversary of her parents **Anne and Otto Mueller**.



