

Atop The Dale By F. G. KILPATRICK

MARKED in the Darling scarp on a map of the Darling Ranges, about 40 miles from Perth and roughly east, is Mt. Dale (1,780ft.).

With a friend who, like myself, rode a bicycle, I set out to find that mount. We equipped ourselves with compasses, road maps and even Army ordnance maps. As soon as we left the bitumen road we struck a bewildering series of criss-crossing Forestry Department tracks, railway routes minus rails (they had been pulled up) and creeks which refused to flow where they were shown on the maps. We bumped and skidded over tracks which often petered out in a confusion of granite boulders and gnarled jarrah trees. Only on our third excursion did we reach our objective. A Small Cabin.

On a dreary winter day we found ourselves standing beside a small cabin which contained a large fireplace, a rough-made chair, a tin of ant exterminator, fixtures for a telephone switchboard, and very little else. On the walls were chalked such items as: "Bog-in to 'roo steak," "Emu burghers" and "a far-flung out post of the British Empire." At one side of the hut the ground fell away to form a small cliff. A few yards from the hut, on the opposite side from the cliff, crowning the very apex of the hill, stood a fire-spotting tower, some 35 feet high. This was Mt. Dale. The tower made an excellent eyrie from which to take photographs, but the moaning wind, squally rain and tattered fragments of cloud about the hill-top were rather discouraging.

Spring Change.

We revisited Mt. Dale in the spring. It was transformed. Giant kangaroo paws, together with robust specimens of hovea, leschenaultia, devil's eyes and various orchids flourished everywhere.

The great boulders were covered with masses of white creeper, and clear spaces carried carpets of exquisite and very large daisies, shaded delicately in pink, cream and white. The thickets were splashed with colour in the form of hakea blossom, wattle, and crimson bottle brush. But once more it was raining.

After Summer Heat.

This last autumn I journeyed yet again to the mount. The day was sunny. At last, I thought I will be able to take photographs. I climbed the look-out tower only to realise that although that day the visibility had increased to about 20 miles, something was lacking. I think it was the rain.

The cabin, the tower and the boulder-piled hilltop were there, but the effect was different.

Everything looked so dry and ordinary, and hardly a flower was to be seen. I left with the impression that perhaps drenching rain brings out the best in the summit of Mt. Dale.