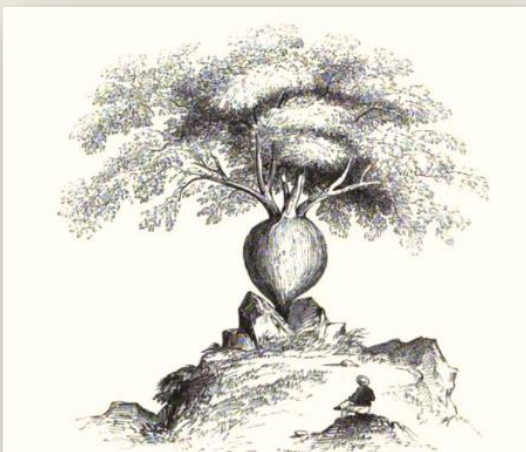
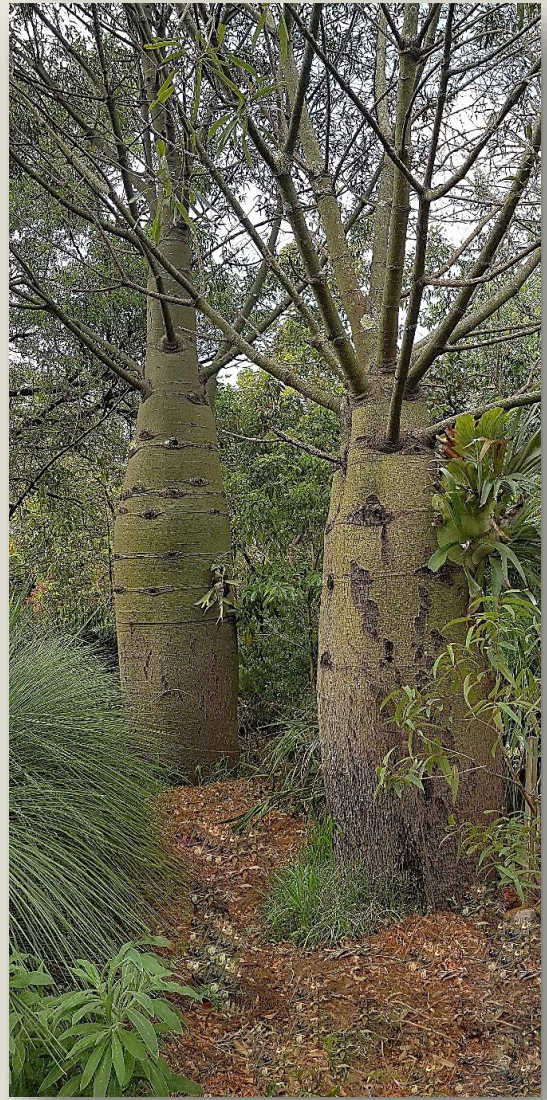


# Queensland Bottle Tree

## *Brachychiton rupestris*

In 1846, explorer Thomas Mitchell encountered Queensland Bottle Trees at Mount Abundance near Roma on an expedition into central Queensland. The extraordinary shape of the trees obviously took his attention, and he wrote in his journal: *The trunk bulged out in the middle like a barrel, to nearly twice the diameter at the ground, or of that at the first springing of the branches above. These were small in proportion to their great girth, and the whole tree looked very odd.* Included in Mitchell's account is a drawing of a bottle tree growing at the top of a basalt peak by his second-in-command, Edmund Kennedy.



December, but leaf loss can also be affected by extremes of drought and rainfall. They are key components of central semi-evergreen vine thickets of the Queensland Brigalow Belt. Farmers clearing land will often leave bottle trees standing because of their value as shade and fodder trees. In times of drought,

Bottle Trees, *Brachychiton rupestris*, occur in central Queensland, both on the tops and slopes of ridges in low hilly country on a range of soil types. They are drought deciduous trees that have thick, stout, trunks, 10 – 20 metres high, although much shorter in cultivation in cooler areas. They usually lose their leaves in the dry season between September and

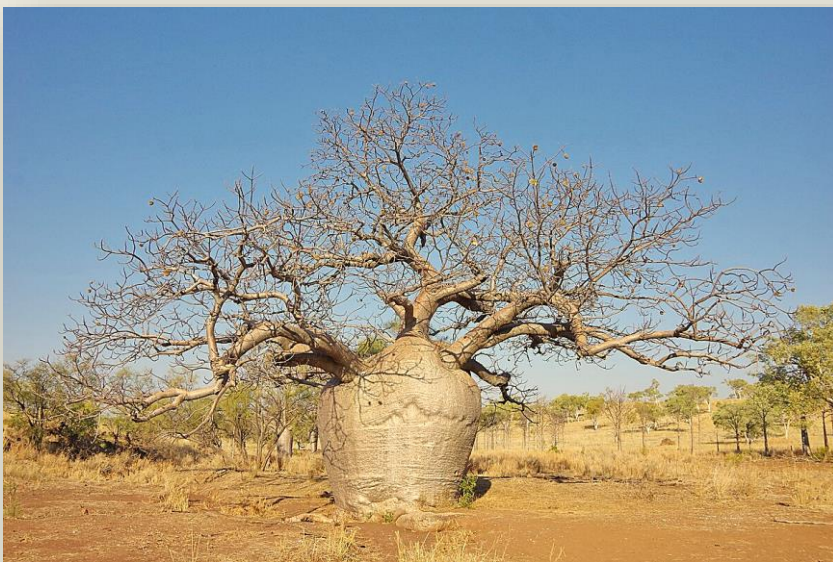


branches and trees were cut to feed cattle, not only the leaves but even the soft pulp of the tree trunks is edible. A considerable amount of water is stored in the trunk, another justification for the use of the name *Bottle Tree*. Roots of seedlings were eaten by Indigenous Australians, so too secretions from the trunks, and fibre was used to make nets.



From time to time, we are asked if Queensland Bottle Trees are related to the *Boabs* (*Adansonia gregorii*) of the Kimberley, in north-western Western Australia and the Northern Territory. They are often confused because of their very similar bottle-shaped trunks, an adaptation to prolonged drought. These days, thanks to modern day molecular science, we now know that Boabs (*A. gregorii*) and Queensland Bottle Trees (*B. rupestris*) belong to the pan-tropical plant family Malvaceae. *Brachychiton* species, including the Queensland Bottle Tree, have their origins in Australian rainforests from Gondwanan times. However,

Australian Boabs come from Madagascar, where their close relations (other *Adansonia* species) are known as *Baobabs*. The progenitor of our Australian Boabs likely reached Australian shores from Madagascar within the last 12 million years, probably as seeds or seedlings carried on rafts of floating debris carried out to sea by flooding river waters.



A Boab, *Adansonia gregorii*, from Western Australia. Photo: hibaudaronson, CC BY-SA 4.0 <<https://creativecommons.org/licenses/by-sa/4.0/>>. via Wikimedia Commons

These days, many *Brachychiton* species, such as the Illawarra Flame Tree (*B. acerifolius*), Lacebark (*B. discolor*) and Kurrajong (*B. populneus*) are valued for planting in parks and gardens. More recently, the Queensland Bottle Tree has become very popular with plantings of these unusual trees becoming extremely

fashionable ‘landscape statements’ in recent years. Look for the Queensland Bottle Trees planted in the garden on the northern side of the Biology buildings.

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<https://doi.org/10.1038/s41586-024-07447-4>

Wikipedia: [Brachychiton rupestris - Wikipedia](#)

Map modified from: Australasian Virtual Herbarium:

[https://avh.ala.org.au/occurrences/search?taxa=Brachychiton+rupestris#tab\\_mapView](https://avh.ala.org.au/occurrences/search?taxa=Brachychiton+rupestris#tab_mapView)

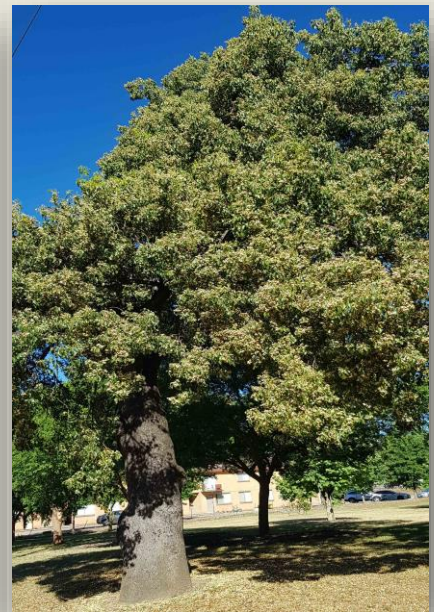
Alison Downing, Brian Atwell, Robert Kooyman, Karen Marais, Kevin Downing



Illawarra Flame Tree  
*Brachychiton acerifolius*



Lace Bark  
*Brachychiton discolor*



Kurrajong  
*Brachychiton populneus*



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