Burning Table Mountain

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About this Publication:

In January 2000, two wildfires torched more than 8 000 ha of the Cape Peninsula, swept through the Table Mountain National Park, and burned houses and property. There were more than 120 fires in the region on that one ‘fire-storm Sunday’.

The challenges faced in the Cape are shared by major cities and nature reserves in similar Mediterranean-type ecosystems in the USA, Australia and Mediterranean Europe. Wildfire has destroyed hundreds of thousands of hectares and killed people in Greece, Australia and the United States. It has become a global, and a local, research and management challenge.

In Burning Table Mountain the author tackles the environmental and social challenges of fire management on the wildland-urban interface of South Africa’s Cape Peninsula, where a UNESCO World Heritage Site for Nature protects the unique fynbos vegetation and incorporates the iconic Table Mountain, and abuts the suburbs, townships and informal settlements of South Africa’s parliamentary capital. He combines narrative, the history of ecological science in the region and the role of fire in fynbos ecology, to provide the first integrated history of wildfire and its management on the Cape Peninsula. He reflects on the need to use a holistic approach to understanding the range and conjunctions of causes that conspire to cause large fires and increase fire incidence over time.

This book will demonstrate the contribution environmental history can make, through combining scientific and social approaches, to understanding past environments and managing the environment today. It is a seminal contribution to a neglected area of South African history, but also offers an important contribution to global histories of fire.

Contents Include:

Chapter 1: Prehistory of burning
Chapter 2: Fynbos and fire – science and the history of the science
Chapter 3: Cape Town in the 20th century
Chapter 4: The people and the mountain
Of Interest and Benefit to:

Ecologists, historians, biologists, policy-makers and the general public interested in ecosystems and the Cape’s natural history.