

BUSHFIRE

BULLETIN



CHRISTMAS FIRES 2001
COMMEMORATIVE EDITION



FIRE REPORTS

DETAILED ACCOUNTS AND PHOTOGRAPHS
FROM THE CHRISTMAS FIRES

THANKS FIRES

LETTERS OF THANKS FROM THE PUBLIC

AIR OPERATIONS 2001

FULL DETAILS OF THE AIR SUPPORT

THE PARADE

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SYDNEY CHRISTMAS BUSHFIRES PARADE

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Photograph by Dean Sewell

CONTENTS

BUSHFIRE BULLETIN COMMEMORATIVE EDITION
CHRISTMAS FIRES 2001

Cover photograph Sean Davey



Accuracy of Fire Reports

This commemorative edition of the Bushfire Bulletin contains detailed reports of firefighting activities during the Christmas Fires. These reports are based on preliminary information and do not in anyway pre-empt the outcome of pending coronial or other investigations. The information contained in this magazine is supplied without prejudice. Stories are true and accurate to the best knowledge available at the time of writing.

The views expressed in articles in the Bushfire Bulletin do not necessarily reflect the views or policies of the NSW Rural Fire Service.

Commissioner's Forward	2
The Storms	4
Fire Reports	6
"Firecom, This is Spotter 67"	21
Letters from a Grateful Public	22
So What Did You Do?	39
Chaplain's Message	43
Air Operations	45
The A.C.T. Fires	48
Campaign Fires	61
Thanks Furies	62
Make CFA Tankers 80	72
Hillside Rural Fire Brigade	76
'Fire Call'	77
Joint Services GIS Unit	90
St Johns Involvement	98
Letter of Thanks	109
Does That Hurt Mate?	117
State Emergency Service	119
'Black Christmas'	126
Bulletin Subscription Form	127
Albion Park Rural Fire Brigade	132
Sydney Celebrates	138
You Want What? Where? When?	142
Hidden Heroes	144
Interstate Liaison Unit	145
A Right Royal Visit	146
Fire Investigation	148
QFRS Assists	149
Northern Task Force Three	150
Hornsby Forward Communications	155
Excuses, Excuses	158



Photographs by Adam Hollingworth

COMMISSIONER'S FOREWORD

DESPITE THEIR REMARKABLE EFFORTS IN SAVING SO MUCH, EVERY HOME THAT WAS LOST WAS TAKEN PERSONALLY, AS THOUGH IT WAS THEIR OWN.

Christmas Eve 2001 marked the beginning of 23 days of ferocious bushfire activity. At the end of those terrible 23 days some 733,342 hectares had been impacted upon, 109 homes were destroyed and many others damaged. The fires raged across 25 local government areas stretching from the Richmond Valley in the north, out to Narromine and as far south as Batemans Bay. Nearly 50,000 volunteer and salaried emergency service workers combined to meet these fires head-on.

While it is often the case that we tend to remember devastating bushfires for the damage that they cause, these fires should be

remembered for what was saved - over 20,000 homes and not a single life lost as a direct result of the fires, despite terrible weather conditions for bush firefighting. This can only be described as a testimony to those people from emergency and support agencies who rallied to the call, for it was their combined and cooperative efforts that ensured so many lives and homes were saved.

The emergency services and support personnel came not just from the four corners of the State, but from all of Australia and, indeed, even New Zealand. Our interstate and overseas colleagues joining the battle against the fires quickly and seamlessly to bolster our efforts, reinforcing our local crews.

If there was a common theme I felt while meeting firefighters in the field during the crisis, it was the sense of loss that they shared with those who lost their homes. Despite their remarkable efforts in saving so much, every home that was lost was taken personally, as though it was their own. This shows not only the dedication of

our firefighters, but the heart that they put into battling these blazes. There is no doubt that the community has recognised this and the overwhelming support given to those firefighters not only during the fires but in the outpouring of gratitude and thanks following them has had a lasting a positive effect on the morale and standing of those who put themselves on the line for their communities.

The enormous number of organisations involved in not just combatting the flames, but in providing the logistical, infrastructure and welfare support shows to us just how broad ranging the firefighting effort was. Every role played was as integral as that of the person at the end of the fire hose. The community of New South Wales, owes all of these people a great debt of gratitude.

Phil Koperberg



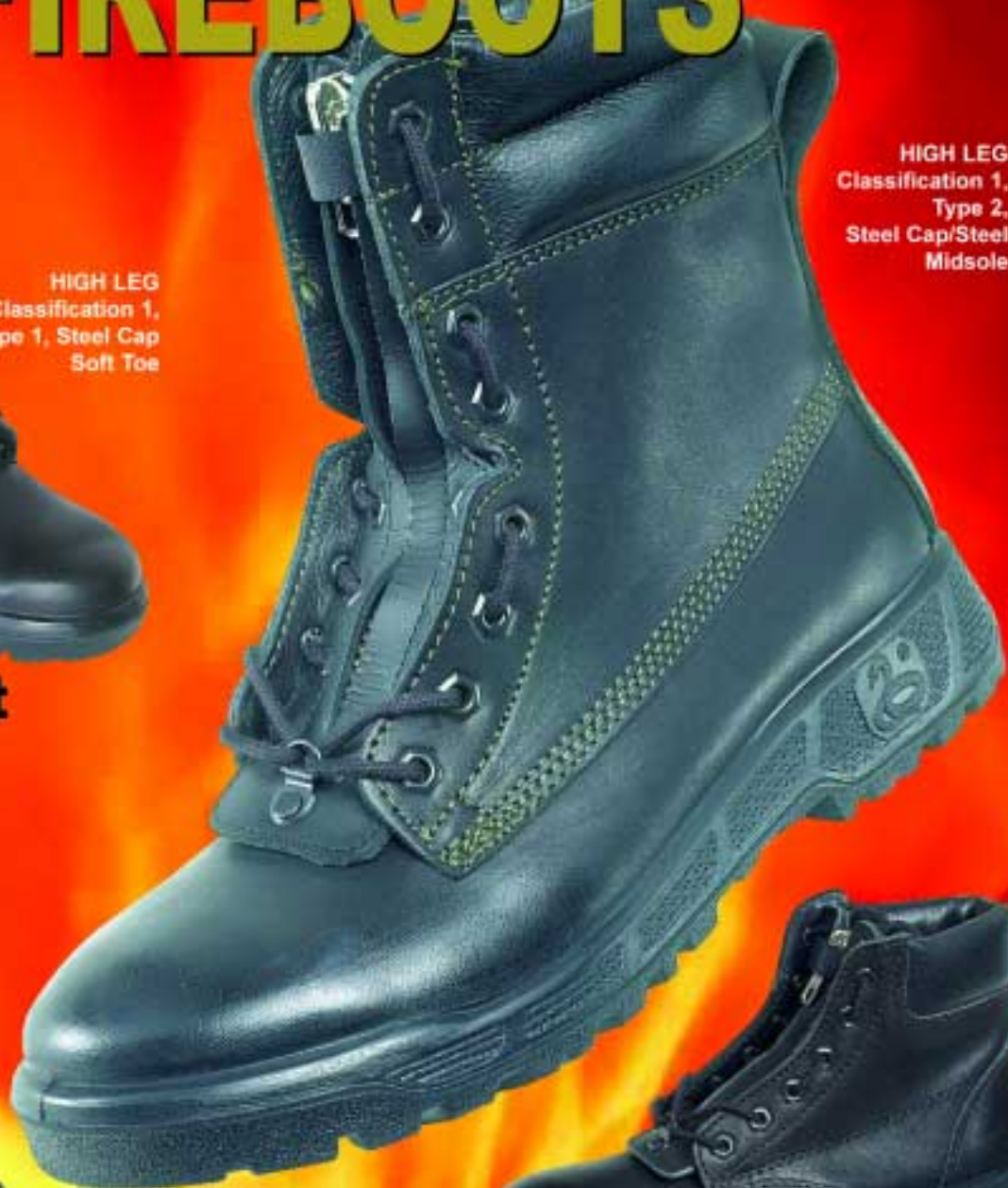
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THE STORMS 3 DECEMBER 2001

IT ALL BEGAN WITH A STORM

Mother Nature chose her method well. Who would have expected the initial major Christmas bushfires to have had their origin in a single storm? Don't storms usually bring rain, high winds and generally inclement weather? Not at all the weather that should cause concerns for a Rural Fire Service. After all, it wasn't Total Fire Ban weather. How wrong can one be! There is no doubt that several of the Christmas fires resulted from lightning strikes from storms that tracked from the west towards Sydney some weeks earlier. Although these brought rain it was insufficient to prevent lightning ignitions when they hit the Greater Sydney region, caused a lot of damage, and started a number of fires in the inaccessible country around Burrangorang. It was these fires that first threatened, and then impacted so heavily on the township of Warragamba, before continuing their destruction through the Blue Mountains for over two weeks.

The following story, from Hornsby Rural Fire District, written by Rowan Dollar, a member of the

Galston RFB, gives a detailed account of how the Hornsby brigades handled the consequences of the storms:

We start this account on Sunday 18 November at around 1530 hours.

After the storm had passed through, some 100,000 homes were without electricity in over 40 suburbs in Sydney's north as well as areas of the Central Coast particularly around the Port Stephens area. Brigades throughout Hornsby District were called upon to assist in removing trees from houses, tarping roofs and generally helping people with access to homes and streets.

At the height of activity, eight brigades, with 22 vehicles and crews were in the field assisting the local SES units. This continued well into the early hours of Monday, 19 November with about 290 calls for help registered at Hornsby Fire Control. The western side of the District escaped relatively unscathed and available brigades from that area worked on the upper north shore in an area bounded by Killara to the south-



Photograph by Rolf Poole

east, Mt Colah to the north and Epping in the south-west. It was normal for brigades to be given a job in the morning and continue working along the same street for the rest of the day. The job count rapidly reached over 400.

Radar showed a series of storms heading east from the Blue Mountains towards Sydney. It was an eerie picture. The storm-front was only a kilometre wide but one hundred kilometres long stretching from the Upper Hawkesbury down to Goulburn and moving east. The bright pink colour on the radar indicated very severe weather conditions heading our way.

But today had been a particularly hot day with temperatures of over 40 degrees celsius by midday and most brigades were expecting a fire call. Ominously, just after lunch, the sky went a dark black, the temperature plummeted and Sydney knew it was in for a storm. Throughout the region, pagers activated with a severe storm warning for the Sydney metropolitan area.

According to the Bureau of Meteorology, a "downburst of storm energy" carrying with it torrential rain and winds in excess of 175 kph struck Sydney's north shore. Media reports estimated some 300,000 homes were initially blacked out and many stayed that way for several days.

Dural, a tree lined rural area on the western side of the District was amongst the worst hit. An area about 500 metres wide and a kilometre long covering 3 streets (Carters Road, Farnborough Road and Murraban Road) was flattened, leaving the area looking as though it had been hit by a bomb. In some yards trees were broken in half like matchsticks; many houses had lost their roofs; gardens painstakingly built over many years were destroyed; power and telephone lines were down; and the entire area was inaccessible by road.

The affected streets were sealed off for a number of hours until safe access could be established. After showing personal identification, residents were then escorted to their homes by RFS and police personnel and, if after inspection the homes were considered safe, residents were allowed to stay.

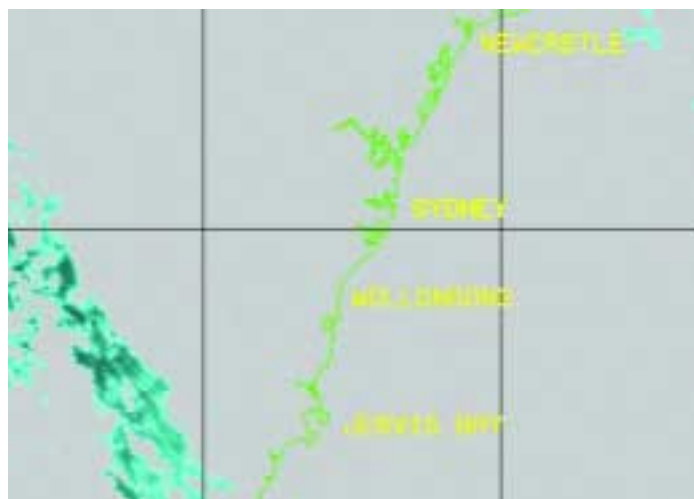
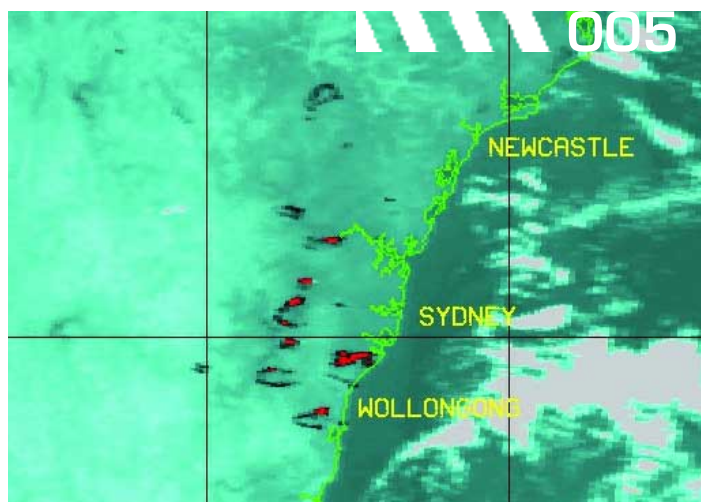
Cutting a path through the carnage was the next step and 15 Category 1 tanker crews worked until 0203 to open roads and make safe the worst hit houses. In some cases, 50 tonne cranes were used to lift whole trees off houses so that crews could work to repair roofs, and council earth moving equipment was utilised to move trees and debris. The sheer scale of the damage was overwhelming.

It was while the crews were working in the west of the District that news came through that the township of Hornsby and surrounding suburbs had been badly damaged by the storm. Sadly, two schoolgirls at a camp had been killed by a falling tree.

Crews from the RFS, NSWFB and SES worked together for four days with most of the work being completed before operations were handed back to SES. Over 680 jobs in twenty suburbs of the District were attended by nearly 40 RFS local and regional crews in a four day period, the worst affected being Berowra, Dural, Hornsby and Wahroonga.

The two storms had caused two deaths, a number of injuries, with damage estimated in the hundreds of millions of dollars. Over one thousand jobs were attended by RFS crews in Hornsby District alone and 400,000 homes affected throughout Sydney. Power and phone lines were restored in many areas damaged after the first storm only days before the second storm hit. Not surprisingly, generator sales in the area have reached record levels.

Rowan's account can probably be mirrored in countless other areas and illustrates just how flexible the Service has become and has to be to meet the challenges of nature.



EARLY IN THE AFTERNOON OF 4 DECEMBER RADAR SHOWED A SERIES OF STORMS HEADING EAST FROM THE BLUE MOUNTAINS TOWARDS SYDNEY. IT WAS AN EERIE PICTURE.

What Rowan could not know, was that only a couple of weeks later, his Brigade, together with others from the District, was to be among the first RFS units to be responded to a very large bushfire in Pennant Hills Park that spread to the Lane Cove National Park in a heavily built-up area of metropolitan Sydney. It was here that Rowan, his colleagues, and the public of Sydney, made the very welcome acquaintance of 'Elvis' the Air Crane.

Michael Watts

- 01 CLAGGERS CREEK **007**
- 02 WINMAREE **013**
- 03 SERENDIPITY **014**
- 04 CLARENCE VALLEY **024**
- 05 THOMPSON ROAD **026**
- 06 BLUE MOUNTAINS **028**
- 07 HAWKESBURY **051**
- 08 PENRITH/BLACKTOWN **064**
- 09 SUTHERLAND **068**
- 10 EUROBODALLA **078**
- 11 WOLLONDILLY **092**
- 12 WOLLONGONG **100**
- 13 SHOALHAVEN **110**
- 14 CESSNOCK/WYONG **120**
- 15 MUDGEES **128**
- 16 PENNANT HILLS **134**



FIRE REPORTS

3 DECEMBER 2001 – 16 JANUARY 2002



Photograph by Dean Sewell



FIRE REPORTS

01 CLAGGERS CREEK

CANOBOLAS ZONE AND
NARROMINE RURAL FIRE DISTRICT

Claggers Creek Fire

Area of fire

30,160 Hectares

Perimeter of fire

104 Kilometres



The Claggers Creek fire was reported at 1730 hours on 3 December 2001 by the Washpen Rural Fire Brigade as they were attending a fire at a property east of the Goobang National Park. The brigade reported seeing smoke in the Wandawondong section of the Park, and this advice was passed from the Brigade to the Canobolas Rural Fire District at 1730 hours.

The fire followed a dry lightning storm at approximately 1600 hours on Monday 3 December. A fire had started on a property which the Brigades were extinguishing when they noticed this fire in the Park.

The S44 declaration was made on Tuesday, 4 December 2001 at 1700 hours.

Monday 3 December pm

NPWS crews arrived on site at 1830 hours. They could not find the fire in the remote terrain but they could smell smoke. The crews returned home later in the evening without having reached the fire.

It was decided that it was too dangerous because of the

vegetation in the area to put firefighters into the fireground at night.

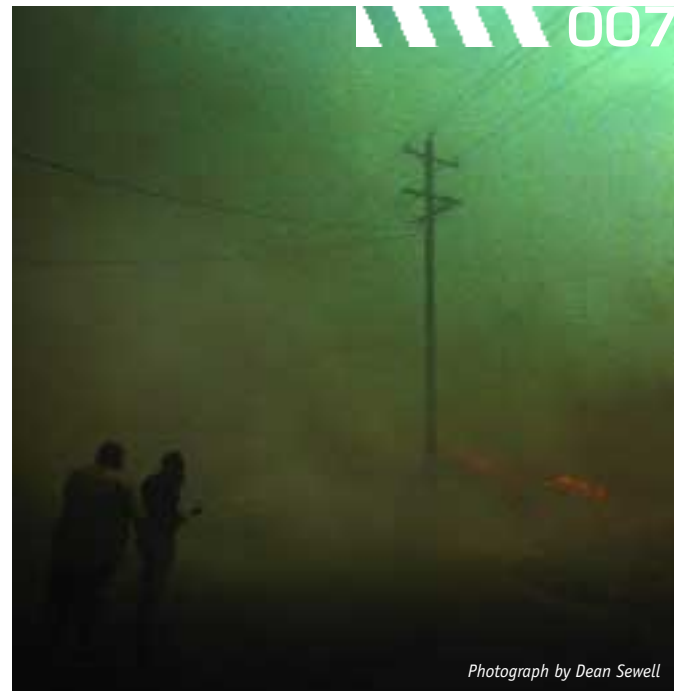
Tuesday 4 December

Crews located the fire. The terrain and vegetation prevented direct attack by air and containment by dozer lines was investigated but was not considered an option due to the rocky ground. NPWS determined that the only containment option was backburning from existing trails.

The fire was burning on the eastern boundary of the Narromine Shire and the traditional run of fires in this area was for it to burn into the Cabonne Shire.

The Narromine Bush Fire Management Committee met and the Claggers Creek S44 declaration occurred at 1700 hours on Tuesday, 4 December 2001.

The control centre for the incident was established at the Canobolas Zone Fire Control Centre in Orange. A forward control point was established at the northern entrance to the National Park on



Photograph by Dean Sewell

THE NARROMINE BUSH FIRE
MANAGEMENT COMMITTEE MET
AND THE CLAGGERS CREEK S44
DECLARATION TOOK PLACE AT
1700 HOURS ON TUESDAY,
4TH DECEMBER 2001.

the Tomingley to Obley Road.

During the night the strategies were for backburning to continue along the Claggers Creek, Nico's Trail and the Tintinvale Trails.

Wednesday 5 December

During the day the backburning operations continued. The Tintinvale Trail line did not hold and a secondary containment line to the Obley Road was established with the addition of a new dozer line to tie in with the containment line. Spotovers occurred along the Claggers Creek trail at 1600 hours. These were contained.

Fire behaviour became erratic at times during the day and the establishment of a western boundary trail was completed by the dozer. During the night backburning along the western boundary trail to the Obley Road was completed.

Thursday 6 December

Deepening of backburns and consolidation of containment lines continued and blacking out began. Aerial incendiary work of the unburnt area within the fireground was carried out.

Approximately 10 millimetres of rain fell across the fireground which interrupted the incendiary work so deepening of the backburns was not possible. Blacking out continued.

Friday 7 December

Continuation of the blacking out and consolidation of containment lines. Later on that afternoon a meeting of the Narromine Bush Fire Management Committee resolved to revoke the S44 declaration at 1900 hours. The Incident Management Team allocated patrol status to the fire. An area of 2163 hectares was burnt as result of the fire with a perimeter of 30 km.

Monday 17 December pm

Claggers Springs fire ignition was reported at 1730 hours.

Strategies were implemented for containment with new dozer lines from the Claggers Springs Trail meeting up with the Wandawondong Trail and backburning along the Wandawondong Trail began. Erratic fire behaviour was experienced during the night and

Photograph by Dean Sewell



ERRATIC FIRE BEHAVIOUR WAS EXPERIENCED DURING THE NIGHT AND HIGH FLAME HEIGHTS WERE ENCOUNTERED DURING BACKBURNING OPERATIONS

high flame heights were encountered during backburning operations.

During the night it was decided to move the control centre to the Peak Hill NPWS Workshop on the morning of Tuesday 18 December. This would give the opportunity for Divisional Commanders to brief the IMT at changeover time.

Tuesday 18 December

During the morning the fire was classified as a Class 2 fire.

Spotovers occurred east along the Wandawondong trail in the afternoon south of the Sandy Creek Trail which required all

ground crews to fall back to the eastern Park boundary. The fire was contained along the eastern boundary fire trail. Approximately 50 hectares of private property was burnt at "Belmore".

A very high fire danger existed all day and was forecast to remain very high on Wednesday and Thursday with hot N to NW winds.

During the day the fire was burning in the Cabonne Shire area which is part the Canobolas Zone.

The S44 declaration was implemented at 1800 hours following a resolution of the Canobolas Bush Fire Management Committee.

On the fire ground in the afternoon, local brigade members and landowners were consulted regarding containment strategies.

It was proposed to put in a containment line and for backburning north/south along the eastern perimeter of the Park from the Tomingly/Obley Road to the Baldry/Peak Hill Road.

At 1830 hours the day and night IMT's agreed that it was too

dangerous to attempt containment lines on Keeni trail. Given the fire behaviour to date any attempt at containment along Keeni trail would probably be unsuccessful.

The decision was made to backburn from north to south along the eastern boundary trail. Due to the length of the backburn (24.2 kilometres) it was decided to do this over a number of nights, the first being the night of Tuesday, 18 December.

Weather considerations

The immediate forecast was for two days of W/SW winds followed by a swing to the N/NW on Thursday 20 December. This contributed to the decision to support the proposed eastern boundary backburn. The very high to extreme conditions that were to be experienced on Thursday had not been forecast at this time.

Local anecdotal advice was that previous fires had run the length of the Wandawondong ridge line in a southerly direction in twenty minutes and the IMT was

concerned that it may run out the bottom edge of the backburn into private property if not properly tied up in the south.

Local captains were appointed as Divisional Commanders to oversee the implementation of the backburn.

Blacking out and deepening continued until the shifts changed in the morning.

Wednesday 19 December

The aerial attack continued to knock down fire burning uncontained between Claggers Creek Trail and the Wandawondong Trail in the western division. Fire threatened the Obley Road containment line throughout the day. Forecast for extreme fire danger on Thursday 20 December with NW winds of 30 – 40 kph strengthening behind the SW change up to 40 – 55 kph. This forecast was received at Peak Hill control at 1553 hours.

During the day, consolidation of the backburns of the previous night continued.

Secondary containment lines were put in with graders in private property outside the eastern boundary of the Park and these consisted of a single width grader line to bare earth.

Advice was received that some locals were concerned about continuing the backburn operation. The matter was further discussed with the IMT and it was agreed that the backburning activities begun on the previous night had to be tied into the south or face the risk of the fire escaping out the southern end of the backburn. This was particularly important as the forecast for Thursday was for strong NW winds.

The second stage of backburning commenced at 2200 hours. At 2300 hours 1.5 kilometres had been completed. The IMT discussed the issues of where to tie in the backburn at that point, as it was not possible to tie it in at the current location.

Further discussions with the local landowners were held and an agreement was reached to proceed with the backburn to Sawpit Gully Trail at 2330 hours.

Photograph by Nick Moir



FIRE ACTIVITY WAS TOO INTENSE TO PURSUE THE RETARDANT LINE AND RAFT STRATEGY NEAR CALOMA TRIG AND THIS PLAN WAS ABANDONED.

Thursday 20 December am

An RFS crew was caught in an entrapment in the Tomingley Sector at 0200 hours but escaped the fireground safely.

The Transgrid power lines were de-energised at 0330 hours to enable backburning underneath the lines to be completed safely. backburning was completed to the Sawpit Gully Trail at 0400 on the 20th December 2002.

The second stage of the backburn covered 10.7 kilometres. The total length of backburning along the eastern boundary trail was 24.1 kilometres. Consolidation of the previous night's backburn began in the morning.

Fire activity was too intense to pursue the retardant line and RAFT strategy near Caloma Trig and this plan was abandoned.

Further and multiple secondary containment lines were put in by the graders in private property east of the Park.

The first major breakout occurred around 1150 hours in the Wanda Sector. This was observed as

having spotted some 4km. It was successfully extinguished by some excellent work from a tanker from the Washpen Brigade. The response was observed by the Air Attack Supervisor, Dave Crust, who said "they are to be commended for the work they did". This spotover burnt approximately 5 ha.

The Air Attack supervisor was of the opinion that this spotover came from the main fire burning up the western side of the Wandawondong ridge.

Further numerous spotovers occurred in the morning along the Evandale and Learmont Sectors. All of these were contained.

Thursday 20 December pm

Major spotovers occurred along the Evandale Sector at approximately 1230 hours. Large convection columns had formed above the active fire. Aircraft advised of numerous ignition points outside the containment lines. Crews were evacuated from this area by the Divisional Commander. Containment was

successful on this breakout.

The brigades are to be commended on the excellent work carried out by all firefighters to hold these breakouts during the morning and early afternoon. The multiple grader lines assisted the ground crews and worked very well.

The Air Attack Supervisor advised that the main fire was running up the west side of the Wandawondong ridge in the early afternoon.

FIRE BEHAVIOUR BECAME ERRATIC AT TIMES DURING THE DAY AND THE ESTABLISHMENT OF A WESTERN BOUNDARY TRAIL WAS COMPLETED BY THE DOZER.

At 1500 hours the flying conditions had deteriorated and were considered marginal. No readings were taken from the air but estimates were that the wind was 40 to 50 kph with gusts rising to 65 kph.

At 1515 hours the fire broke containment lines in numerous places. Air Attack advised that the main breakout occurred about 2km out from the Park "that just got bigger and bigger and could not be controlled".

The breakout that caused the escape appears to have resulted from a combination of the following events:

- A build up in the intensity of the winds to 65 kph.
- Wind moving from the NW around to the W.
- The main fire burning on the western side of the Wandawondong ridge behind the "Willows" in combination with the convection currents caused by the main fire meeting the backburn near the peak of the Wandawondong ridge.

- Spotting was occurring at up to 5 km.
- Conditions were extreme.

Following the breakout all ground crews were immediately deployed to property protection.

A staging area was established at Yeoval Police Station. This was subsequently moved into Keiran's Engineering at Obley. A decision was made to evacuate the bedridden from Yeoval Hospital after the fire broke containment lines.

A south westerly wind change gusting to 50 kph arrived at 1800 hours.

Approximately 12,000 hectares of grazing and cropping country burned during the afternoon and into the early evening.

The assistance of the Police, Fire Brigades, SES, Ambulance and Country Energy was requested. The Cabonne DisPlan was activated at 1800 hours. Wellington activated their DisPlan at the same time.

The daytime IMT remained past shift change due to the

circumstances of the afternoon.

Most dayshift ground crews remained throughout the night. Fire behaviour calmed around 2200 hours with containment lines established along Little River.

The following observations need to be made in light of the extreme fire conditions leading up to and following the breakout which were positive despite the damage caused by the fire:

- No human life was lost.
- No major firefighter injuries.
- No homes were lost.
- The importance of holding the major breakout until 1515 hours was crucial as the fire travelled some 16km in 3 hours. An earlier breakout would have increased the size of the fire significantly and made it impossible to hold within the size of the final containment lines.
- A breakout further north would have impacted country north of the Obley / Tomingley Road in country that would have made it virtually impossible to hold the fire.

- Weather conditions were too dangerous to put crews in the Park to directly attack the fire.
- If the backburn had not been put in or completed the crews would have been confronted with the main fire leaving the Park under the same prevailing weather conditions.

Unfortunately the fire impacted on 18 properties and caused the following losses:

- 3935 sheep
- 65 cattle
- 318 km fencing
- 4 sheds
- 18 properties affected
- Insured loss of \$604K
- A further loss because of lost opportunity or forced sale of stock from pasture being burnt

Friday 21 December

The fire danger was very high.

Friday saw the consolidation of containment lines. There was concern that the fire may escape from Little River Sector. Grader lines were completed along the western boundary of the Park.

The focus on the east of the Park moved to preventing the fire from

AT 1500 HOURS THE FLYING CONDITIONS HAD DETERIORATED AND WERE CONSIDERED MARGINAL. NO READINGS WERE TAKEN FROM THE AIR BUT ESTIMATES WERE THAT THE WIND WAS 40 TO 50 KPH WITH GUSTS RISING TO 65 KPH.



Photograph by Sean Davey



BACKBURNING TOOK PLACE DURING THE AFTERNOON ALONG THE WESTERN BOUNDARY AND UP THE BILLY SPRINGS TRAIL UNDER EXTREME CONDITIONS.

crossing the Peak Hill/Baldry Road in the south and entering the Hervey Range Section of the Park.

Saturday 22 December

A Fire Investigation team began their investigation into the circumstances surrounding the ignition of the fire.

Consolidation of the containment lines continued and there was a declining threat of further property loss. A strategy was developed for the containment of the western side of the fire along Sawpit Gully Trail and north of the Billy Springs Trail. The dozers were required to construct containment lines on the south end of Sawpit Gully where the fire had breached the trail.

During the night there was a consolidation of these containment lines and a continuing focus of containment along Sawpit Gully Trail. Construction of containment lines around the bridge over Sawpit Gully Trail was completed with the dozers.

Sunday 23 December

ARMs and FLIR mapping runs were undertaken throughout the day. Billy Springs Trail was widened by dozers and the secondary containment line at the Hang Glider trail was widened. The control centre was moved from Peak Hill National Parks & Wildlife Services Depot to the Peak Hill Primary School.

FLIR mapping runs confirmed that the fire had breached the Billy Springs Trail and erratic and severe fire behaviour was observed. Crews were evacuated from the Sawpit Gully Trail area.

Secondary containment lines along the western division were selected at the Barrabadine Peak line and at Hang Gliders Ramp Trail. Retardant was used to complete the containment lines over the escarpments. Further containment lines were established by clearing under the powerlines.

Monday 24 December

Landowners from the western side of the Park attended the IMT's changeover and discussed

strategies for the coming day.

Concern was expressed that the fire may breach the western containment lines if backburning was not undertaken. The IMT considered the advantages and disadvantages of all options and the backburning along the western division was agreed.

Work continued on the completion and widening of the Barrabadine Peak line, Hang Glider Trail and clearing under the power line using dozers. This provided three containment lines to prevent the fire spreading south. A fourth was established along the Peak Hill/Baldry Road with significant clearing of roadside vegetation.

Backburning took place during the afternoon along the western boundary and up the Billy Springs Trail under extreme conditions.

During the evening back burning operations north of the Barrabadine Peak line were completed strengthening this as a containment line in view of concerns as to whether the retardant lines would hold when the fire reached them.

Tuesday 25 December

Blacking out of previous days backburning continued.

Despite backburning the IMT remained concerned that the Barrabadine Peak line might not hold. This was further strengthened again with more retardant and numerous crews patrolling on foot.

An unrelated grass fire, 35 km west of Peak Hill, was detected by FLIR cameras and water bombers were dispatched to assist with the control of this fire.

During the evening consolidation of existing control lines continued but concern was still being expressed that the Barrabadine Peak line might not hold. The new strategy was to use the further three secondary containment lines to the south.

Wednesday 26 December

Consolidation of existing control lines continued. Aerial incendiary work was undertaken in the Barrabadine Peak area.

Retardant was again applied along the Barrabadine Peak line.

THE S44
DECLARATION WAS
REVOKED AT 1900
HOURS ON THE
3RD JANUARY
2002 AS A RESULT
OF SUCCESSFULLY
EXTINGUISHING ALL
FIRES IN THE AREAS
AFFECTED.

Photographs by Matt Black



The northern and southern divisions were well consolidated and posing no threat despite high fire dangers.

Aircraft resources on the fire were reduced to a single helicopter (Firebird 28) at 1500 hours as other aircraft had been deployed to other major fires around the State.

During the evening further consolidation of western containment lines continued with dozers pushing smokers where possible and ground crews aggressively breaking up hotspots.

Thursday 27 December
Consolidation of containment lines continued throughout the day.

Friday 28 December
Continuing consolidation of control lines. Aerial incendiary work of unburnt country adjacent to the Barrabadine Peak line.

The control centre was moved from Peak Hill Primary School back to the National Parks Workshop as the incident was scaled down.

Saturday 29 December
Consolidation of control lines continued.

Sunday 30 December
Consolidation of existing control lines continued.

Monday 31 December
Three storms passed over the fire ground in the afternoon. Numerous lightning strikes were observed. An observation flight was carried out at 1700 hours and no new outbreaks were sighted. Consolidation of existing control lines and blacking out continued.

Tuesday 1 January
Consolidation of control lines continued.

Observation flight carried out at 1500 hours. No smoke observed.

The Canobolas BFMC resolved to revoke the Claggers Springs S44 at 1900 hours.

The control centre was advised of a fire in the Curumbenya Section of the Park at 1850 hours. A request for the S44 to remain in place was approved and resources were deployed to the Scabby Jack

fire some 17 kilometres south of the Claggers Springs fire. It is thought that this fire was started by the lightning of the previous day and was close to the boundary in a rugged section of the Park.

Crews made up of local RFS volunteers (approx 20) and six NPWS staff (3 of whom and the volunteers continued on for a 24 hour shift) constructed a hand tool trail at the perimeter of the fire and a secondary dozer line was begun.

The ground crews who put in the hand trail are to be congratulated on an excellent effort at night, under very difficult rocky conditions. This effort ensured the fire could be contained overnight and prevented another major fire developing.

Wednesday 2 January
The completion of the secondary dozer containment lines at Scabby Jack and water bombing was carried out supporting crews on the ground who were breaking up the hot spots.



FIRE REPORTS 02 WINMAREE

CANOBOLAS ZONE

Consolidation of the existing containment lines continued at the Claggers Springs fire. At 1900 hours 72 new round bales caught fire at Valley Heights six km to the west of the Claggers Springs fire. With helicopter assistance, the fire was contained by NPWS crews *en route* (to/from the Scabby Jack fire) for a shift change. RFS crews then continued containment and blacking out into the night.

During the night of Wednesday 2 January there were no crews on the fire-ground at the Claggers Springs fire and consolidation of existing containment lines continued on the Scabby Jack fire.

Thursday 3 January

Consolidation of existing containment lines on both fires.

The Claggers Springs and Scabby Jack and the Winmaree S44s were revoked at 1900 hours.

The S44 declaration was revoked at 1900 hours on 3 January as a result of successfully extinguishing all fires in the areas affected.

At 1209 hours on Thursday 20 December 2001, Canobolas Rural Fire Control received a report of a fire in the vicinity of the Eugowra Tip and that local brigades were responding to the fire.

At 1214 hours on 20 December Forbes Rural Fire District received a report of a fire seven kilometres from Eugowra on the Forbes Road and brigades from the District were dispatched.

The weather forecast for 20 December was temperature 36°, RH 12%, with winds from the NW at 30 – 40 kph. **A total fire ban was in force.**

While responding to the call the Vychan Brigade reported that two fires were in fact burning and the one closest to Forbes had gone into the forest from the road reserve.

A request was made to the Parkes Police to close the Forbes/Eugowra Road at 1236 hours. At 1251 hours the Vychan Captain advised that fire in paddocks south of the Forbes

BY 1423 HOURS THE FIRE WAS ON THE EDGE OF TOWN HEADING TOWARDS THE HOSPITAL AND CROWNING IN THE TREES.

Road was controlled but still burning out of control in forest area on the edge of the road.

At 1305 hours he advised Firecom that he intended to backburn about 100 metres along the "Wimmera" driveway to try and stop the fire. In the meantime units from Canobolas were trying to contain the fire which originated in the tip area.

Operations were being carried out from the Canobolas Rural Fire District control centre in Orange in conjunction with the Incident Controller who was operating the Claggers Springs S44 from Peak Hill. Continual contact between the offices ensured effective management of the fire.

At 1319 hours fire on the western side of the "Wimmera" driveway began spotting over the eastern side with brigades from Forbes falling back to the eastern side to try and contain it where they could.

At 1332 hours the Police were contacted to close the road and carry out traffic control.

At 1334 hours the fire had crossed the Waugan Road and was heading directly towards the sawmill in Eugowra.

At 1348 hours the fire crossed the Mandagery Creek in the vicinity of the sawmill. Four minutes later the fire jumped the Forbes/Eugowra Road near the bridge to the west of Eugowra. Although a number of small units were in this area an urgent request for more resources was received.

By 1423 hours the fire was on the edge of town heading towards the hospital and crowning in the trees.

013

At 1430 hours the main focus was property protection on the western side of Eugowra.

From 1500 hours – 1600 hours extra units from Forbes, Canobolas and Cowra RFDs started arriving. At this stage there was some chance of stopping the fire along some cleared country in the range to the North of Eugowra, however, this seemed unlikely as the fire was well into the mountain and a southerly change was forecast.

The fire was divided into 3 sectors. The East Sector being from the Cemetery to Kiembah Lane along the eastern side of the range, the West Sector from Kiembah Lane to the Forbes Road on the western side of the range and the Town Sector from the Forbes Road to the Cemetery on the southern side of the fire.

The SW winds were pushing the fire along the range with the fire mainly contained in the Town Sector however a number of flare-ups were occurring.

It was decided to put in control lines with graders around the range and backburn along this line to Kiembah Lane in the north.

Approximately 2.5 kilometres of lines were required on the eastern side and 4 kilometres on the western side. These lines were completed by 2330 hours and the backburn was put in and completed by approximately 0200 hours on 21 December.

Friday 21 December

Water bombing by aircraft of any hot spots was commenced during the day and continued until the fire was considered safe on 24 December.

Local brigades from Forbes and Canobolas RFD continued to patrol the fire for several days.

THE WEATHER CONDITIONS LEADING UP TO AND INCLUDING DECEMBER 24TH WERE SOME OF THE HOTTEST THE DISTRICT HAD EVER EXPERIENCED.



Photographs by Sean Davey

FIRE REPORTS 03 SERENDIPITY

RICHMOND VALLEY AND MACLEAN
RURAL FIRE DISTRICTS

The extreme weather conditions that had been experienced throughout Northern NSW since late August continued without any respite. Some localised storms had produced light falls of rain but these were insignificant in lessening the fire danger in the North Coast area. The weather conditions leading up to and including 24 December were some of the hottest the region had ever experienced. Temperatures were exceeding 40 Degrees C on a regular basis and the winds from the northwest had reduced the RH to 10 % on several days.

The District had been experiencing significant fire activity for some time, with large fires in the Bungawalbin area burning approximately 5000 ha during November. The week beginning 17 December again saw extreme conditions with

temperatures regularly in the high 30 degrees C with north/north west winds predominant.

A lightning strike is believed to have started a small fire in the Bundjalung National Park south of Evans Head some time on 19 December. This fire did not become evident until approximately 1200 hrs on Friday 20 December. Crews from the RFS, NPWS and State Forests attended but due the inaccessible terrain were unable to contain the fire.

Extensive firefighting operations by all agencies were carried out during Saturday 21 December. Containment at this early stage was doubtful and with the potential for the fires to impact on extensive property both to the north and south, the fire classification was upgraded to Class Two.



Serendipity Fire

December 23 2001
to January 4 2002

Sunday 22 again saw crews working on containment lines and property protection. A backburn along the Pacific Highway provided a western containment line against further expansion of the fire to the west. By mid-afternoon on Monday 24, with temperatures approaching 40 degrees C, westerly winds gusting up to 112 kph and humidity of 13 %, several spot overs on the northern control line at Minumai Rd forced all crews to be withdrawn for safety considerations. During this period of extreme fire activity, several structures and vehicles were destroyed in the Serendipity.

With the weather conditions forecast to remain the same or deteriorate, and given the fact that the local crews had been fully extended for some time, the Executive Officer of Richmond Valley BFMC in consultation with RFS Manager Region North advised the members of the BFMC that a Declaration under Section 44 of the Rural Fires Act should be made. This decision was conveyed to the Commissioner and duly confirmed at 1500 on Monday 24 December. The declaration was made jointly to cover the area of the fire in both Richmond Valley and Maclean Local Government Areas.



The Incident Management Team, formed with members of all agencies who had been involved in the operation to date, quickly developing into focused unit. The northern spread of the fire was the main priority along with land share communities and other assets in the potential fire path. The operation to suppress this fire was carried out under the most trying and hazardous conditions experienced by the firefighters. Temperatures regularly exceeded 40 degrees C and the extreme volatility of the fuel made containment difficult. Erratic winds on several occasions forced crews to take evasive action, however no injuries or damage to vehicles was reported.

The overall situation of this fire was exacerbated by the ignition of another on Monday 24 December in the Jacky Bulbin Road area on the western side of the Pacific Highway and a further ignition at Chatsworth Hill on Thursday 27 December.

This extension of the fire perimeter within the Maclean Local Government Area placed

added strain on already stretched resources, however with the assistance of a task force from the Gwydir and Inverell area and neighbouring Districts, sufficient crews were available at all times.

After several days of constructing containment lines and re-adjusting strategies and tactics after containment lines failed to hold, crews managed to gain control over the fire, which by this time had consumed some 35,000 ha of National Parks, State Forest and private land.

There were no serious injuries to firefighters or civilians and there was minimal property loss considering the conditions under which the fire was running.

Light rain fell on the fire area on Monday 31 December, which enabled all lines to be further consolidated. In consultation with the Richmond Valley BFMC the situation in that District was considered to be sufficiently stable and contained, and it was believed that further maintenance of the fire was within the capabilities of the local agencies.

Weather Conditions

DATE	TIME	TEMP	RH	MAX WIND SPEED/DIRECTION
21/12/01	1400	38	20 %	W/NW at 42kph changing to SW at 1500 gust to 54kph
22/12/01	1500	38	28%	N/NW at 52kph changing to SE at 1700 gust to 60kph
23/12/01	1300	30	30%	SE at 26kph changing to NE at 1400 gust to 40kph
24/12/01	1500	38	20%	NW at 68kph changing to SW at 1500 gust to 112kph
25/12/01	1700	38	18%	SW at 94kph changing to W/NW at 1600 gust to 96kph
26/12/01	1300	32	29 %	SW at 38kph changing to SE at 1400 gust to 36kph
27/12/01	1200	28	28%	N/NW at 36 kph changing to SE at 1400 gust to 42 kph
28/12/01	1500	32	29%	N/NW gusting to 44 kph
29/12/01	1400	34	23%	W/NW gusting to 36 kph
30/12/01	1400	34	41%	W/NW gusting to 50 kph
31/12/01	1400	33	49%	NW gusting to 96 kph
01/01/02	1700	37	34%	W/NW gusting to 68 kph
02/01/02	1500	38	10%	W/SW gusting to 94 kph
03/01/02	1200	29	52%	SE gusting to 54 kph

Photograph by Sean Davey

THE PACIFIC HIGHWAY WAS CLOSED FOR SHORT PERIODS TO ALLOW THE REMOVAL OF TREES THAT WERE CONSIDERED DANGEROUS TO TRAFFIC.

The southern section of the fire in the Maclean Shire area was within containment lines and after consultation with the Clarence Valley District IMT this area was handed back to that District upon the revocation of the S44 in Richmond Valley District at 1600 on Thursday 3 January.

Day by day activities

At the time of Declaration, the Serendipity fire had been active for three days. Crews were exhausted by a prolonged campaign of fires in the District. The erratic winds and often fast moving firefronts accompanied by extreme temperatures hampered all containment strategies in these initial stages.

Monday 24 December

Serendipity: Going

Backburning operations along the Pacific Highway during the previous day assisted in consolidating an eastern control line. A southern containment line along Iluka Road was holding.

The Pacific Highway was closed for short periods to allow the removal of trees that were considered dangerous to traffic. Conditions deteriorated rapidly with the influence of a southerly change. Crews had to be removed from the containment line at Minumai Rd following severe spotting and potential overruns. Despite property protection activities of the previous days, the fire impacted the Serendipity community at mid-afternoon destroying several structures.

Crews were deployed to reported breakouts at the southern containment line at Woombah on Iluka Road.

Jacky Bulbin Fire: Going

A fresh fire was reported in the Jacky Bulbin Road area to the west of the Pacific Highway. This fire was being treated as suspicious.

Crews managed to contain this outbreak overnight but this fire posed major concerns with the possible extension north towards the New Italy area and west into the Double Duke State Forest.

Summary

Following the ignition of a fresh outbreak on the western side of the Highway and breakouts on the northern line the situation was quite grave. The potential for the fire to continue in a northerly direction on both sides of the Pacific Highway was very high. Crews were deployed for property protection to all known assets and tasked to hold the containment lines where possible overnight. The planning for the establishment and construction of control lines was put in place for daylight operations on Tuesday.

Tuesday 25 December

Serendipity and Jacky Bulbin Fires: Going

The overnight activities managed to limit the extent of the breakout to the north on Minumai Road to a narrow strip, however this front moved considerably overnight and threatened the Korandari Ridge

Settlement. The establishment of forward containment lines was hampered by terrain. The fire in the Jacky Bulbin Road area was proving difficult to contain and fresh reports were received of spotovers and breakouts in various areas of the fire. Investigation discounted all these reports but valuable resources and time was lost in this activity. The northern progress of the fire on the eastern side of the Pacific Highway was endangering the community at Korandari Ridge. Crews were deployed for property protection.

Strong winds caused a large front from the Jacky Bulbin Road fire to cross the Pacific Highway from west to east. This front entered unburnt country outside of original containment lines. Several items of machinery were destroyed and crews were forced to take evasive action while carrying out property protection. There were no injuries to crew members.

The potential was for this fire to endanger southern containment lines on Iluka Road. No injuries or damage were sustained.

Fresh lines were constructed to contain this outbreak on the eastern side of the Pacific Highway along Khan Rd and tie-in with previous lines. In consultation with Police and RTA, the Pacific Highway was closed until further notice.

Wednesday 26 December

Serendipity and Jacky Bulbin Fires: Going

Some consolidation of the northern line along Minami Road to the east and Range Road to the west of the Highway. Backburns proved successful in both areas. The Pacific Highway remained closed because of the number of falling trees and the smoke hazard. Police and RTA would be monitoring the situation.

Backburn operations consolidated the eastern side of the Highway, now a Patrol only function.

The original containment line on the western flank of the fire at Slys Road was breached. A new fall-back line was constructed along Jacky Bulbin Flat Road.

Thursday 27 December

Serendipity and Jacky Bulbin Fires: Going



Photographs by Steve Darti

The containment lines on the North Eastern Division along Minumai Road held and the fire in this area was contained and patrolled. The property protection role of units was reduced allowing these resources to be redeployed to other areas.

The Jacky Bulbin fire continued to prove difficult to contain.

New fallback lines were cleared to the west.

Chatsworth Hill Fire: Going

A new fire started in the Chatsworth Hill area several kilometres to the south of our line along Jacky Bulbin Road. This outbreak was considered suspicious and is being investigated by Police. This new fire was in the Maclean Rural Fire District and members of the Clarence Valley IMT were briefed in all matters regarding operational decisions.

LOCAL BRIGADES QUICKLY EXTINGUISHED THE FIRE. POLICE INVESTIGATED WHAT APPEARS TO BE A DELIBERATE ACT OF ARSON.



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PROBLY ASSURED
AND MANUFACTURED IN AUSTRALIA



HELICOPTERS AND MACHINERY WERE HARD PRESSED TO CONTAIN THE OUTBREAK BUT HAD IT UNDER CONTROL BY NIGHTFALL.

A fire reported during the early morning in the Broadwater National Park along the Broadwater/Evans Head road, was quickly extinguished by local brigades. Police investigated an apparent act of arson.

Photograph by Sean Davey



NOTE: The three fires that were running in Richmond Valley joined and were jointly named the Serendipity Fire.

**Friday 28 December
Serendipity Fire: Being Contained**

The main areas of concern remained the southern sectors of the fire around Chatsworth Hill. Containment lines for all the northern areas remain static and were patrolled and the black out deepened as far as possible. Small areas of peat on the north east of Minumai Road near Gap Road continued to burn. Crews monitored these areas. The trails along Jacky Bulbin Flat Road were threatened in several sections. Fall back options were put into place.

**Saturday 29 December
Serendipity Fire: Being Contained**

Containment lines continued to hold on all sections to the east of the Pacific Highway and patrol status allocated. The Range Road containment line to the west of the Pacific Highway was well established and patrolled. The western flank of the fire continued to move slowly with crews burning-off along the Jacky Bulbin Flat Road line. Two fires deliberately lit in the North West Division area at Bundjalung Crown Reserve and quickly extinguished. This area was burnt in October 2001.

The heavy machinery was having difficulty manoeuvring in some of the low country to complete a line in the Mangrove Creek Area.

**Sunday 30 December
Serendipity Fire: Being Contained**

Southern most containment line from Lewis Rd/Mangrove Creek was completed. There remained a considerable amount of unburnt country to the north to link up with the western lines. The fire in the Chatsworth Hill area was slow moving and all properties in the area were well protected with units on site. The strategies in this instance were not to introduce any more fire in this area as the potential for escape outweighed any possible advantage. The intention was to

let this fire burn to the line or out into more accessible country and extinguish when possible. Some quite active spots along the Jacky Bulbin Flat Road to the west required close scrutiny.

Small areas of peat in the north-east along Minumai Road flared up during the day. Bulk water tankers flooded the area which required constant monitoring.

**Monday 31 December
Serendipity Fire: Contained**

Slight rain fell over the fire-ground from a storm that caused two lightning strikes. One fire occurred in a sugar cane paddock that crews, along with the rain, contained and extinguished. The second fire was to the far west of the Richmond Valley District in the Hogarth Range area. Local crews attended and extinguished this spot fire. The State Forest tower at Gibberagee reported a further fire to the south approx 3km outside existing containment lines. This fire appeared to be a lightning strike and was extinguished by aircraft and ground crews who then made the area safe. Machinery improved and widened the trails in the Mangrove Creek area. The fire breached the line in several spots but was extinguished.

**Tuesday 1 January
Serendipity Fire: Contained**

The rain, although light and patchy over the fire area, assisted



Photograph by Adam Hollingworth

in dampening the active fire in most areas. Patrols were hampered by the wet conditions on the line overnight but the hot windy weather returned and conditions caused the fire to again pose problems. There were numerous false alarms during the day from concerned residents. The heavy machinery was tasked to clear several tracks, as fall back lines, if required. The fire activity in the Mangrove Sector continued to move slowly down hill. Small backburns were instigated to link-up any areas near the line. The part of the Serendipity fire in the Richmond Valley District remained contained and patrolled. All remaining fire activity was in the Maclean Rural Fire District.

The Clarence Valley Operations Officer was consulted in regard to handing this remaining fire to the Maclean District. A meeting of the Richmond Valley District BFMC was scheduled for 1500 on January 2 to advise members of the current situation and the recommendation to revoke the S44 if no further fire activity was reported.

Wednesday 2 January

Serendipity Fire: Contained

The weather returned to the previous hot and windy conditions. By mid afternoon the fire in the Jacky Bulbin Flat area had generated sufficient heat to spotover into new country. Helicopters and machinery were hard pressed to contain the

outbreak but had it under control by nightfall. At the same time a similar unburnt section well within the containment lines at Tabbimoble took a run towards the Pacific Highway and forced its closure for several hours. With such a large fire there remained several pockets of country that the initial fire run did not burn. These were well within the perimeters of the fire and posed no threat to property.

Favourable winds allowed crews at the Mangrove Creek sector to carry out backburns to deepen the control lines in that area.

All other control lines remained secure and patrolled.

At 1500, the meeting of the Local BFMC was advised of the current situation within the Richmond Valley District. The Operations Officer from the Clarence Valley Zone was briefed on the current situation and the proposed strategies for the Mangrove Creek Sector. The BFMC resolved that providing the Clarence Valley IMT was satisfied with the current situation in the Mangrove sector, then a recommendation should be made to revoke the current Section 44 Declaration for the Richmond Valley/part Maclean District at 1500 hrs tomorrow, Thursday January 3.

Thursday 3 January

Serendipity Fire: Contained

All containment lines of the fire

HELICOPTERS AND MACHINERY WERE HARD PRESSED TO CONTAIN THE OUTBREAK BUT HAD IT UNDER CONTROL BY NIGHTFALL.

GORDON'S CARPETS

No job too big or too small!

New and used carpet layed

PHONE: GORDON

0414 253 062
CENTRAL COAST



Photograph by Adam Hollingworth

within the Richmond Valley District remained stable. The black-out patrols deepened the lines to a considerable depth and were confident the area was safe. National Parks and State Forest crews were tasked to carry out regular patrols on all the lines.

The only remaining areas of any concern were the spot fire on Jacky Bulbin Flat Road and the Mangrove Creek Trail. Crews maintained patrols on these sectors and completed a containment line around the Jacky Bulbin Flat spotover.

The Operations Officer from the Clarence Valley Zone IMT and Richmond Valley IMT conducted an aerial investigation survey of the fire. Both considered the situation sufficiently stable on all fronts for local resources to monitor and patrol as required.

THE SECTION 44 DECLARATION FOR THE RICHMOND VALLEY RURAL FIRE DISTRICT WAS REVOKED AT 1600 HRS THURSDAY JANUARY 3.

Following on from this advice the recommendation that the Section 44 Declaration be revoked was communicated to State Operations. Confirmation of this recommendation was received and the Section 44 Declaration for the Richmond Valley Rural Fire District was revoked at 1600 hrs Thursday January 3.

Asset Losses

The major asset losses were sustained at the Serendipity community on Monday December 24 at approximately 1400, which is prior to the Declaration of the S44 at 1500 hrs.



Photograph by Sean Davey

“FIRECOM, THIS IS SPOTTER 67”



Christmas 2001 was far from a typical Christmas for many Rural Fire Service volunteers. For pilot Jim Drinnan of Curtis Aviation and myself, Simon Ferguson (Air Attack Supervisor Lakesland Brigade) a reconnaissance flight of the Sydney region should have been a different way of enjoying Christmas Day. However for Spotter 67, operating out of Camden Airport, our flight on 25th December 2001 was not an enjoyable one.

Christmas Eve was very busy with more than six hours spent in the air over southeast Sydney, from the Blue Mountains to the coast and as far south as Wingecarribee Shire. We had all prayed for a quiet Christmas Day but knew already in our hearts that this was not to be the case. By mid morning we could see that any plans for Christmas dinner were not looking good and by lunchtime it was a bottle of cold water, a GPS, a GRN and a screaming westerly wind of 90 km per hour.

Our previous day flying had forewarned us of the potential problem areas should the weather conditions continue to deteriorate but the full extent of what was about to occur was beyond our greatest fears. Our initial tasking was reconnaissance of the entire area from Wingecarribee to Hawkesbury and east to the coast, we soon realised that one aircraft was going to be insufficient.

With several active fires to the west, our only hope was that the current winds would not allow the fires to reach private land. Unfortunately the winds strengthened and, combined with the heat of the afternoon and low humidity, the Mt Hall fire took off spotting kilometres ahead of the main fire front, finally stopping at the Prospect Reservoir.

No amount of warning was sufficient for the townships of Warragamba and Silverdale. At first the fire was a long way out but with the poor weather conditions, it was soon bearing down on Warragamba Township. With a column of smoke billowing

some 4000 feet into the air the fire skipped the 200-metre stretch of water in Warragamba Dam like it was a dry creek bed. With no water in the hydrants on the ground, we wondered whether any houses could be saved.

As the situation worsened for Warragamba and Silverdale, they were not on their own. Another fire raced through Stevey's Forest Rd, Egans Rd, Old Jerusalem Rd and Dairy Rd in Oakdale faster than the RFS vehicles could warn local residents. A fire at Appin raised its head and took a run for the coast, but this again was not the end of it. Whilst keeping a constant eye on our own backyards at Camden and Lakesland, we saw the Alum Creek fire in Wingecarribee was now bearing down on the town of Thirlmere.

Our work at Christmas had originated some weeks earlier on 3rd December 2001 when a dry storm that swept through the Wollondilly Shire. Multiple lightning strikes kept both ground and aircrews busy for the

weeks leading up to Christmas. After Christmas efforts continued with invaluable support from many out of area brigades. The fires were finally contained in late January by a combination of a moderation in the weather, a little bit of luck and a record setting backburning operation, 150 kilometres in Wingecarribee Shire alone.

With the fires now behind us we have been able to reflect on our efforts as the “Eye in the Sky”. While airborne, we were not actually able to put the “wet stuff” on the “red stuff”, however we were able to provide important fire intelligence to those on the ground and our prime location enables us to relay messages when other communication channels were failing.

Being able to see the bigger picture allowed us to direct ground crews (saving precious time) and monitor the safety of the fire ground. At some fires it is not the problem of a lack of resources but the effective management of resources available. Having both crew leader and air attack training allowed us to provide incident management teams feedback on resource allocation and task prioritisation.

Last but not least, we feel that early detection is the key to optimising air and ground efforts, controlling small fires before they become a threat to property and life, and keeping to a minimum the time and effort spent on the fireline. With this in mind we hope for a safer and less active fire season in 2002-2003.

Spotter 67 out.

Simon Ferguson and Jim Drinnan

LETTERS FROM A GRATEFUL PUBLIC

DEAR FIREFIGHTERS...



Photograph by Adam Hollingworth

Today I want to give thanks, but that is not enough – a funny looking and sounding word that does not really express what I feel. Like many others, how do I really let the firefighters know what is in my heart?

There is not a word in the dictionary that I see and feel what my heart wants to say.

To all you fighters, men & women from all around Australia, what magnificent guys and girls you are. I owe my life to you, even though I was never in the firing line, just knowing you were there did it!

I have watched you on TV; listened to the radio, visualised you fighting against the winds and the devastation it caused.

You know you are 'God's Gift', nothing I can write or say can tell you how I really feel.

Bless you and yours.

My blessings go to all the families you left behind.

Love you for lending them to us.

Mrs Quinn

Enclosed is a poem I wrote on how I felt about each and every one of your very brave firemen.

Congratulations!!

It would please me if it was possible for them all to read or have a copy printed to keep.

Hope it says it all, God Bless you all!

Eileen Franks

POEM by Eileen Franks

*Our Heroes don't need a ribbon,
To show that they are brave
Their only reward is to show
How many lives they can save.
With a hose in their hand
And the love of a great land,
A pat on the back and a thank you
From me and you is their reward.*

*We will never forget
"Our Angels in the Ashes"
And not one of them
Would want to receive any
bravery sashes.*

I am writing to commend the members of your fire service who are involved in the current operations to control the outbreak of bush fires in New South Wales.

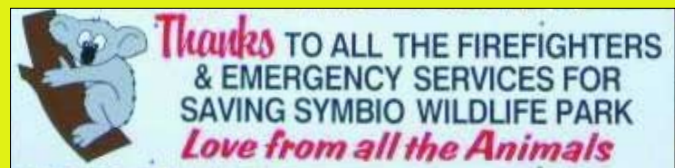
As a resident of Epping, I was not directly affected, however four families I know and care deeply about were saved from the flames, thanks to the efforts of your wonderful Service's members.

In a world which has as it's core values greed and egocentricity, it is heartening to watch images on our TV screens of men and women who are risking their lives to protect the lives and properties of their fellow men and women.

Of course we are fortunate that modern technology can provide us with sophisticated equipment and resources, however without the skill, willingness and sheer hard labour of your Service people, both on the ground and in the air, we would indeed be literally at the mercy of the elements.

I applaud the courageous acts of your Service's members, particularly those, who were involved in the North Epping, South Turrumurra and West Pennant Hills areas. They are to be congratulated and held in the highest respect.

Might I also mention that when I contacted your Service Headquarters at Rosehill, I was attended to with extreme courtesy. It is also clear to me



from this that you conduct a Service that deserves to be praised, beginning with those who administer at office desks, to those who valiantly come face to face with the flames.

I salute you all and I thank you most sincerely. I would be happy to know that my comments have been conveyed to all your members, whose community spirit makes me proud to be an Australian Citizen.

With immense gratitude,

Vania

I feel I have to write and express my thanks and gratitude to all 'furies' and volunteers who so valiantly fought the recent, very serious bush fires. They selflessly gave up their "Christmas Dinner" and family festivities to keep their fellow Aussies safe and for that I'm sincerely proud to be an "Aussie". I salute all concerned.

Even though I have not been affected by the fires, I feel for those persons who have lost everything. Thanks to the expert training of the furies and volunteers no loss of life occurred. I will continue to pray for all and would like to name the furies and volunteers "Helpful Angels".

In continued prayer in future fires that fighting and rescue "Helpful Angels" are kept safe.

Regards and "God Bless you all",
Wilma Cocking





Thank you

*Another hot day in town tonight,
With the wind comes the smoke
and another fire fight.*

*As we look up into the evening sky,
All shrouded in orange flame,
We know the country's burning,
Things will never be the same.*

*So you jump onto your old
blitz truck,
And drive into the fray,
With a tanker full of water,
To help keep the beast at bay.*

*Then you're lined out all along
the front,
With your mates on either side,
All give a nod as you glance about,
All know the fear that wells
from inside.*

*You flank around the edge all day,
Just to keep the thing on track,
To meet up with the backburn
done last night,
To break its bloody back.*

*All the while you're hoping,
That the wind it will not shift.
For a change will mean,
That you're now in front,
Of a demon borne from hell,
And hope to God that somehow,
It's just a story you can tell.*

*But for the while, just there
and then,
As the flames lick at your feet,
You think of family hopes
and dreams,
Not the maker you're about
to meet.*

*Then as the water comes
crashing down,
From the tree tops high above,
The chopper roars off into
the night,
While you're still thinking of the
ones you love.*

*Then, you scramble now at
spot fires,
No longer the one in need,
Let's hope your Country will
remember,
You're near sacrifice and deed.*

Ian Hill

Thank you from the Firefighters

Blaxlands Ridge was the hardest hit area in the Hawkesbury Region on Christmas Day. The fire came through so quickly that 14 residences were lost. The time for statistics, post mortems and debriefings has passed and now the Blaxlands Ridge Rural Fire Brigade would like to express a heartfelt thank you to everyone who helped out during the emergency. Of course the obvious recipients are the active firefighters themselves but thanks must also go to the support crew who man the shed and radios and maintain the vehicles, the catering and callout officers who were called on night and day. Then there are the families who are always in the background, worry, offering support, coping with fires at home while brigade members save someone else's home.

The influx of fire fighters from other regions and indeed other States was most welcome and to those fire fighters the Brigade sends a hearty thank you. We would love to thank you all personally but we have not record of who went where with whom. You know who you are and from the bottom of our hearts, thank you. A few brigade members in particular feel they owe their good health if not their lives to some of these out of area fire fighters.

We also wish to acknowledge the participation of the local community. Most were stressed if not distressed. Those that couldn't cope left, which under the circumstances were the most useful thing they could do. Fire fighters work better when not hindered by panickers. Thank you to those who were well prepared and stayed to save their own property, this enables RFS resources to move on the unprotected areas. Sightseers were a bit of a problem; none of us quite understands the mentality of the "gawker" feeding off others misfortune. Perhaps they were there for the adrenaline rush, next time they might like to try white water rafting.

The march in Richmond on Saturday, the 2nd of February was gratifying and enjoyed by most of the Brigade, as a photo in the local paper will testify. The sense of relief that it was all over was palpable. The camaraderie was running high. Community spirit certainly becomes apparent in times of disaster.

Again thank you to all and sundry that helped out during the State of Emergency. Some local ladies suggested the New Year start with the 1st of February, so, Happy New Year!

Sue McMaster
Blaxland Ridge Rural Fire Brigade

On Christmas Day

*On Christmas day when we were
playing games,
We heard there was a fire with
roaring flames.
We had to get moving, and we were
all hurried,
And I was especially very,
very worried.
The sun how it blazed! The sky how
it changed!
I knew this roaring fire could never
be tamed.
But finally it stopped, oh how we
were glad!
But a bigger one started and this
was really bad.
When will it stop?
When will it go?
Everybody wonders, nobody knows.
Firefighters are trying really
their best,
And if the rain comes, it will do
the rest.
To all the firefighters and my
own mum,
I would like to thank you for the job
you have done.*

Jessie-Lee, 9yrs



Photograph by Adam Holling



FIRE REPORTS

04 CLARENCE VALLEY

Clarence Valley Fires

December 23 2001
to January 7 2002

Area of fire
45,500 Hectares



Sunday 23 December

The Serendipity fire in the southern end of the Richmond Valley District is declared Section 44. Clarence Valley crews from Maclean District are deployed to assist the Richmond Valley firefighters. Crews continued to support this operation through to the 26 December.

Monday 24 December

Wallaby Lane Fire – at approximately 1500 hours Brooms Head Brigade responded to a fire in the vicinity of Clarence Peak. The fire, believed to have been caused by a lightning strike, had the potential to threaten Yuragir National Park and the coastal village of Brooms Head. The fire was virtually inaccessible.

At approximately 1645 hours RFS crews from Corindi / Red Rock RFB responded to a fire on the Dirty Creek Range north of Woolgoolga. The fire was contained at midnight.

Tuesday 25 December

The Wallaby Lane Fire escalated under extreme conditions and was a direct threat to Brooms Head. RFS and NPWS crews deployed for village and property protection.

Blackadder Creek Fire – new ignitions in the vicinity of Dirty Creek Range result in fire east and west of the Pacific Highway. Clarence Valley RFS crews assisted by Coffs Harbour District RFS units responded for property protection. Two dwellings and twelve other structures were destroyed. Eight other dwellings were damaged by the fire.

At 2200 hrs a recommendation was submitted to the Commissioner that a Section 44 be declared over the Clarence Valley.

Wednesday 26 December

0600 hours the Clarence Valley Section 44 takes effect.

Wallaby Lane Fire – firefighters with helicopter water-bombing support successfully prevented losses at Brooms Head. The fire continued to burn through Yuragir National Park and had the potential to threaten the coastal villages of Angourie and Wooloweyah.

Blackadder Creek Fire – East of the Pacific Highway. State Forest and NPWS resources deployed to protect State Forest plantation assets at Barcoongerie. The fire also had the potential to threaten the village of Red Rock. West of the highway, RFS units working together with contracted dozers

continued property protection and began fire containment strategies.

Yellow Cutting Fire – at approximately 0800 hours State Forests report fire north of the Blackadder Creek fire in the Yuragir National Park. The fire was contained by approximately 1200 hrs.

Thursday 27 December

Wallaby Lane Fire – 0700 hrs fire directly threatens Angourie. The fire later crossed Lakes Boulevard and threatened Wooloweyah and Yamba. A tourist resort was pre-emptively evacuated with NSWFB units standing by for asset protection. By approximately 1900 hrs all assets were considered safe. The day's operation involved 39 units, 184 firefighters, 3 dozers and 2 helicopter water-bombers.

Blackadder Creek Fire – at 1200 hrs the fire was considered contained. State Forest, NPWS and RFS crews continued black-

out, mop-up and patrol operations through to 30 December.

Friday 28 December

Wallaby Lane Fire – containment strategies implemented, and at 1400 hrs, the fire was considered contained. NPWS and RFS crews commenced black-out, mop-up and patrol operations.

THE WALLABY LANE FIRE ESCALATES UNDER EXTREME CONDITIONS AND IS NOW A DIRECT THREAT TO BROOMS HEAD. RFS AND NPWS CREWS ARE DEPLOYED FOR VILLAGE AND PROPERTY PROTECTION.



Photograph by Sean Davey

Photograph by Sean Davey



Blackadder Creek Fire – mop-up and patrol continued.

Yellow Cutting Fire – at 1330 hrs four new ignitions outside control lines reported. The fire potentially threatened isolated rural dwellings and a farm-stay tourist resort. RFS and NPWS crews responded for property protection. Heavy plant transported to fire for containment work.

Saturday 29 December

Wallaby Lane Fire – mop-up and patrol continued.

Blackadder Creek Fire – mop-up and patrol continued.

Mount Neville Fire – remote and inaccessible fire reported in the north west of the Zone. Aerial recon and assessment of the fire commenced. Local RFS & NPWS crews placed on standby.

Yellow Cutting Fire – assets made safe by RFS crews. NPWS and State Forest crews, working with 2 dozers established control lines. Aerial ignition considered as a possible strategy to consolidate control lines.

Sunday 30 December

Wallaby Lane Fire – mop-up and patrol continued.

Blackadder Creek Fire – mop-up and patrol continued.

Mount Neville Fire – containment strategies developed. Heavy plant moved into position to commence preparing control lines.

Yellow Cutting Fire – containment lines consolidated. Black-out, mop-up and patrol operation commenced. Fire considered contained.

Monday 31 December

Wallaby Lane Fire – mop-up and patrol continued.

Blackadder Creek Fire – mop-up and patrol continued.

Mount Neville – long range control and containment lines commenced with RFS and NPWS crews commencing backburning operations. Operation involved 18 units, 55 personnel and 5 dozers.

Yellow Cutting Fire – consolidation of control lines with mop-up and patrol continued.

Ewingar Fire – a new remote fire reported at approximately 1300 hrs. The fire posed no immediate threat to assets. Aerial recon and assessment of the fire commenced. Local RFS, State Forests & NPWS crews were placed on standby. Long range control and containment strategies were developed.

Tuesday 1 January to Tuesday 8 January

The overall operation was scaled down and generally focused on consolidation of control lines and maintaining mop-up and patrol over all firegrounds.

On Wednesday 2 January a reignition of the Wallaby Lane fire south of Brooms Head required local RFS crews and helicopter water bombers to again initiate village and property protection measures. All assets were successfully protected.

On Tuesday 8 January 2002 at 1800 hrs the Clarence Valley Section 44 was revoked.

A TOURIST RESORT WAS PRE-EMPTIVELY EVACUATED WITH NSWFB UNITS STANDING BY FOR ASSET PROTECTION.



FIRE REPORTS

05 THOMPSON ROAD

RICHMOND VALLEY DISTRICT



Thompson Road Fire

January 12 to
January 18 2002

Following the successful containment of the Serendipity fire, National Parks and Wildlife Crews had maintained a watching and monitoring brief on the containment lines. These regular patrols indicated the previous fire was out.

On Saturday 12 January at approximately 1500, a report from the State Forest watch Tower at Gibberagee indicated a smoke sighting in the Moonum/New Italy area south of Woodburn. This information proved to be false, but a fire had broken out in the Thompson Road area several kilometres to the South.

Fanned by a north/north-west wind the fire was quickly out of control and threatening properties in the area, forcing the closure of the Pacific Highway. Brigades assisted in evacuating several residents and provided protection to dwellings. At approximately 1900 hrs a strong southerly change impacted the fireground changing the direction of the fire towards the north and placing the area of New Italy in its path.

Under the influence of the southerly the fire travelled approximately seven kilometres in the initial run on Saturday January 12.

With the potential for this event to impact substantially on private property and State Forest reserves, the Executive Officer of the Richmond Valley District in consultation with the Manager Region North recommended that a Declaration under S44 of the Rural Fires Act 1997 be invoked for the Richmond Valley Rural Fire District. This recommendation was formalised by the Commissioner at 2200 hrs on January 12.

Given the continuation of the extreme weather conditions, the firefighting agencies combined to control this potentially serious fire in an extremely efficient manner with no loss of property – a magnificent effort considering the initial fire conditions.

The situation was stabilised sufficiently for the Declaration to be revoked at 1400 on January 18.

Chronology of Events

Richmond Valley District had



Photograph by Sean Davey

FANNED BY NORTH /NORTH-WEST WINDS THE FIRE WAS QUICKLY OUT OF CONTROL AND THREATENING PROPERTIES IN THE AREA AND FORCING THE CLOSURE OF THE PACIFIC HIGHWAY.

experienced several large fires over the previous weeks, the most recent being the Serendipity Fire that lasted 11 days. Both local and adjoining District crews were exhausted after these events. A fire, believed to have been deliberately lit in the Thompson Road area started at approximately 1500 on Saturday January 12. Initial tactics were to provide property protection where applicable and close the Pacific Highway against the approaching front which was fanned by a gusting W/NW wind, that later turned to the north under the influence of a 'southerly buster' which hit the fireground at approximately 1900 hrs.

Containment of this fire was out of the question during the initial hours.

**Saturday January 12
Going**

The speed and extreme condition under which this fire travelled made any suppression activities highly dangerous and futile. Initial activities centred on property protection and gaining accurate information on the actual fire. All property owners in the fire path were advised and prepared for any contingency.

Pacific Highway remained closed.

**Sunday January 13
Going**

The fire was subdued overnight. Control lines were identified and machinery cleared them in preparation for a backburn. Winds from the south east allowed the Pacific Highway to be reopened at 1200. Crews had difficulty in containing spotovers and new fall back lines had to be constructed.

Due to the tinder dry conditions the spotovers quickly became quite large. To assist in containment each sector was assigned a rubber tyred dozer to quickly run a line around the new edges.

**Monday January 14
Being Contained**

Light rain fell overnight at Evans head but nothing on the fire line. Breakouts continued to frustrate the containment of the fire especially in the Loop Road and Lonogans Road sectors. The S/SE winds were unfavourable.

Aerial support was hampered by the excessive turnaround time and reluctance to use BFFF from already low farm dams. Buoy walls were located in areas to assist the helicopters.

**Tuesday 15 January
Being Contained**

Backburns on Cypress sector went in well and crews continued to deepen the line. The Lockleys Road sector continued to frustrate containment strategies. The area was very rocky and spot fires started in difficult to reach areas.

Due to mechanical repairs and servicing requirements only one helicopter was operational for most of the day. This was rectified by late afternoon and was very timely.

As the majority of the containment lines were safe and patrolled; minimal crews were deployed overnight.

Crews were warned of the dangers of falling trees. Fire line chain-saw operators were tasked to patrol and remove any suspect trees.

Numerous reports of additional fires in the area proved to be false.

**Wednesday 16 January
Contained**

All perimeter lines were completed and held well. Crews continued to patrol. A storm over the area forced all crews to vacate the control lines due to the danger of falling trees. A lightning strike at Broadwater ignited a sugar cane paddock. Crews deployed and assisted by the light rain in extinguishing the fire. Approximately 2ha burnt. Small areas of fuel along the Pacific Highway caused concern, were rapidly extinguished and the problem removed.

Light rain from a storm fell over the entire fireline and effectively extinguished the majority of the fire.

Patrols were suspended overnight due to the wet conditions on some trails.

**Thursday 17 January
Contained and Patrol**

Fire activity remained low and crews continued to patrol.

Meeting of the Richmond Valley Bush Fire Management Committee held at 1500 and a recommendation made to revoke the Section 44 at 1400 on Friday 18 January.

**Friday 18 January
Thompson Road:
Contained and Patrol**

Fire well contained. Local resources of State Forests tasked to maintain a patrol presence. Recommendation to revoke S44 was ratified and formalised at 1400.

RICHMOND VALLEY DISTRICT HAD EXPERIENCED SEVERAL LARGE FIRES OVER THE PREVIOUS WEEKS THE MOST RECENT BEING THE SERENDIPITY FIRE THAT LASTED 11 DAYS, AND BOTH LOCAL AND ADJOINING DISTRICT CREWS WERE EXHAUSTED AFTER THESE EVENTS.



Photograph by Nick Moir



FIRE REPORTS

06 BLUE MOUNTAINS

MT HALL FIRE
LAWSON ROAD FIRE
MITCHELLS PASS FIRE
BLUE POOL FIRE

Blue Mountains Fires

25 December 2001
to January 13 2002

Area of fire

42,570 Hectares

Perimeter of fire

188 Kilometres



Photograph by Adam Hollingworth



MT HALL FIRE

Monday 24 December

Status: 'Going'

The fire was initially reported via radio to the Blue Mountains District Office from the Narrow Neck Fire Tower at 09:57hrs. The fire was reported in the vicinity of the area known as Mt Hall in the Blue Mountains National Park. SCA/NPWS Seasonal firefighting crews were initially responded to the area. After aerial assessment the ground crews initially commenced work on the Brereton Bend fire. Once the Brereton Bend fire was contained, the aerial support (helicopter) commenced water- bombing operations on the Mt Hall fire, while ground crews continued their mop-up on Brereton Bend fire. As with the Brereton Bend fire, all resources were withdrawn from the fire ground in the early afternoon due to the deteriorating fireground conditions. At the time of withdrawal, the Mt Hall fire was rapidly expanding.

No further aerial reconnaissance of this fire was carried out on 24 December due to all available

aircraft being committed to property protection on other fires.

Tuesday 25 December

Status: 'Going'

Overnight the fire continued to expand. The only intelligence about the fire's progress overnight was from the line scan conducted at approximately 01:00hrs 25 December. Throughout the day the primary fire run was to the southeast towards Warragamba Dam. The fire also expanded against the wind to the west and also across the wind to the northeast and southwest.

At 13:30hrs, aerial observation reported that the fire had spotted over Warragamba Dam in the vicinity of Monkey Creek and that the head of the main fire was 2 km from the stored water in Warragamba Walls. At this stage, the Blue Mountains Section 44 Incident Controller advised Wollondilly Rural Fire District.

Control of the section of the Mt Hall fire within the Wollondilly LGA and to the east of Warragamba Dam was handed to the

Wollondilly District.

No direct firefighting was conducted on 25 December due to extreme fire conditions and the need to deploy resources for life and property protection to the other fires within the Blue Mountains Section 44. Furthermore, as a result of the very strong and erratic wind conditions in the early afternoon (approximately 14:00hrs) all air operations ceased due to safety concerns.

Throughout the day strategies were being developed and assessed for the suppression of the Mt Hall fire.

Wednesday 26 December

Status: 'Going'

Overnight the fire continued to expand and again the only intelligence about the fire's progress overnight was from the line scan conducted at approximately 23:00hrs on 25 December.

Throughout the day, aerial observations of the Mt Hall fire continued. The fire continued to burn back against the prevailing

Fire Name	Order of Ignition/ Reporting
Brereton Bend	1
Mt Hall	2
Leonay (Below Lapstone Railway Station) Penrith Rural Fire District	3
Lawson Road (1)	4
Grandview Drive	5
Mitchell Pass - Lennox Bridge	6
Rocklily (Ongoing since last Section 44 Declaration 3-8 December 2001)	7
Blue Pool	8

NO ACTIVE FIRE FIGHTING WAS CONDUCTED ON 25 DECEMBER 2001 DUE TO EXTREME FIRE CONDITIONS AND THE NEED TO DEPLOY RESOURCES FOR LIFE AND PROPERTY PROTECTION TO THE OTHER FIRES WITHIN THE BLUE MOUNTAINS SECTION 44.

winds in a westerly direction and also across the wind in a northerly and southerly direction. With the northerly expansion and the prevailing westerly winds, spotting occurred over the Warragamba River and Nepean Gorge during the day and produced further fire runs in the Penrith and Wollondilly LGAs.

Due to the extreme fire weather and fire behaviour, no active firefighting was conducted on the fire during 26 December. Possible containment lines for conducting backburning operations were identified as the Victory Trail and Woodford Oaks Fire Trail.

At approximately 19:30hrs, the Mt Hall and Blue Pool fires had combined on their northern and southern flanks, respectively.

Thursday 27 December

Status: 'Going'

Overnight the fire continued to expand and again the only intelligence about the fire's progress was from the line scan conducted at approximately 23:00hrs on 26 December.

At approximately 06:00hrs the Mt Hall fire had progressed northwards breaching the identified containment line of the Woodford Oaks Fire Trail.

The containment strategy identified initially on this day was to utilise the western boundary of the Blue Pool fire from urban interface to the Duck Hole, then south along Glenbrook Creek, west along Kanuka Brook, west along Toby's Rill, then north along Woodford Oaks Fire Trail, south down Cooloona Brook, then

south following Bedford Ridge Fire Trail, Andersons Fire Trail and Tableland Road to Pearces Creek to the edge of Lake Burragarang (which formed the rest of the control line). Aerial reconnaissance continued throughout the day.

During the day water-bombing was conducted in an attempt to hold the fire at Kanuka Brook, however this proved unsuccessful. At this stage the initial strategy was abandoned and a new one was developed that allowed for combating the threat of the firefront progressing westwardly and then, under predicted weather conditions of strong southwest/ southerly winds, running northwards towards the townships from Blaxland to Wentworth Falls. Subsequently,



Photograph by Sean Davey

DURING THE DAY WATER-BOMBING WAS CONDUCTED TO HOLD THE FIRE AT KANUKA BROOK, HOWEVER THIS PROVED UNSUCCESSFUL.



the strategy developed incorporated the protection strategies outlined in the 'Bushfire Protection Strategy for the southern perimeter of townships within the City of the Blue Mountains - Public Discussion Paper - January 2001'.

The night shift crews continued to refine the strategy for backburning from the rear of the urban interface from Blaxland to Woodford, then down Bedford Ridge Fire Trail, Andersons Fire Trail and Tableland Road to Pearces Creek to the edge of Lake Burragorang.

A fallback strategy was also developed in the event Bedford Ridge Fire Trail or Andersons Fire Trail did not hold. The strategy was to continue backburning from the rear of the urban interface from Woodford to Wentworth Falls then south along Tableland Road to Pearces Creek to the edge of Lake Burragorang.

Friday 28 December

Status: 'Going'

The combined Mt Hall and Blue Pool fires were re-named the Mt Hall fire.

Overnight intelligence reported that the fire had remained fairly static with the exceptions of two

spotovers, one to the north of Kanuka Brook and the other to the west of Erskine Creek.

The implementation of the southern containment line strategy was refined overnight in consultation with field commanders and significant resources were made available to commence the strategy from Blaxland to Woodford.

The fire continued to make a run against the prevailing northerly winds, however there was no immediate threat to property and ground crews continued throughout the day with preparation of control lines,

assisted in some areas by heavy plant. Late afternoon and evening saw backburning operations begin. By midnight ground crews had completed the backburn westward to Coughlan Road, Blaxland.

Aerial reconnaissance continued throughout the day.

Saturday 29 December

Status: 'Going'

Backburning operations and containment line preparation continued throughout the day, with continued aerial support during daylight hours. Due to the urgency for the preparation of the control lines and the total



Photograph by Adam Hollingworth

THE FIRE MADE NUMEROUS RUNS AND THE INTENSITY WAS EXTREME AND DUE TO SIGNIFICANT SMOKE DRIFT, THERE WAS NO AERIAL SUPPORT FOR THE MAJORITY OF THE DAY.

Sunday 30 December

Status: 'Being Controlled'

Backburning operations and containment line preparation continued during the day, with continued aerial support during daylight hours. By 06:00hrs the backburn had been completed to Florabella Street, Warrimoo.

To increase the rate of containment line preparation and to release operational firefighting units for backburning and property protection, engineering resources (both personnel and equipment) were supplied by the RTA and begun control line construction. The RTA crews worked well ahead of the firefront and fire protection was provided by firefighting units.

During the day, the fire threatened to the southern section of containment lines. Crews and heavy plant were tasked to tidy up trails in the Pearces Creek area and to direct attack the advancing firefront as it reached the containment line.

Resulting from safety considerations, there was a cessation of backburning operations for several hours, the prediction of a strong southerly change, which did not eventuate on the fireground. During this period crews went into property protection mode.

In the late evening, ground crews began backburning east along the Andersons Fire Trail and south along the Tableland Road. By midnight they had completed the containment line preparation and backburnt to Deakin Close, Springwood, and approximately 1.3 km eastwards along Andersons Fire Trail and 0.8km south along Tableland Road. Containment line preparation by ground crews and heavy plant was now complete to the southern end of the urban interface on the eastern side of Bedford Road, Woodford. Construction of the containment lines for the fallback option between Woodford to Wentworth Falls was begun.

Monday 31 December

Status: 'Being Controlled'

Backburning operations and containment line preparation continued throughout the day. During the Bedford Creek containment line construction, the dozer damaged the trail surface making the trail impassable to all traffic. This meant alternative strategies had to be developed to allow backburning without vehicular support from this trail. Work on the construction of the fallback options from Woodford to Wentworth Falls continued.

The fire made numerous runs, the intensity was extreme and due to

significant smoke drift, there was no aerial support for the majority of the day. However no property was threatened.

The backburning operation along Andersons Fire Trail ceased about two kilometres short of the Bedford Creek crossing due to spotovers. Ground crews with aerial support attempted to round up these spotovers, but due to the severe fire activity, they retreated from this location. As a result the containment strategy was altered to incorporate the construction of a dozer line out along the Sally Wattle Water Hole spur and a hand tool line down into Queen Victoria Creek. This creek was to be used as a containment line back along to Bedford Creek Fire Trail. In the event that Queen Victoria Creek would not hold, a dozer line from Williams Ridge Fire Trail was to be constructed south to Queen Victoria Creek to meet up with the hand tool line off Sally Wattle Water Hole Spur. This allowed a fall-back option of dozer line and Williams Ridge Fire Trail.

By 16:00hrs, the backburn was completed south along Tableland Road to its junction with the W5 Fire Trail, then along W5 Fire Trail to the head of Pearces Creek, thus containing the advancing firefront into Pearces Creek. Later in the

length of work required, multiple sectors were commenced simultaneously.

Since the backburn was ahead of any potential fire run, and with the prevailing southerly winds, no immediate fire threats existed.

By midnight ground crews had completed the containment line preparation and backburnt to Baden Place, Blaxland. Containment line preparation had also been completed by ground crews, and heavy plant, in and around Davies Avenue, Faulconbridge; Martin Place, Chapman Avenue and Hepburn Road Linden.

afternoon the fire spotted over the containment line in the vicinity of Pearces Creek, near Dallawang Saddle.

By midnight ground crews had completed the containment line preparation and backburnt to Burns Road, Springwood. At this stage the backburn to the east had met up with the main Mt Hall fire.

Tuesday 1 January 2002

Status: 'Being Controlled'

Back-burning operations and containment line preparation continued during the day. Work on the construction of the fallback options from Woodford to Wentworth Falls continued.

By 02:00hrs, the dozer containment line along Sally Wattle Water Hole spur was complete, the hand tool line was completed during the day, as was the dozer containment line from Williams Ridge Fire Trail toward Queen Victoria Creek.

At 08:00, backburning operations ceased (until 21:00) due to erratic fire behaviour and extreme weather. During this time majority of crews were set up for property protection roles. Areas of concern

during the day due to spot fires and severe fire activity included the retirement village off Lalor Drive, Springwood; Yondell Avenue and Raymond Road Springwood.

The strategy for containment of the fire below the cliff line off Pearces Mountain Gully to the stored water was to use aircraft to deploy incendiaries below the cliff line, walking the fire to the gully to a point where the gully dried. From this point ground crews were to construct a hand tool line to stored water and then backburn off the hand tool line, with the backburn meeting the oncoming fire front. Due to the unavailability of remote area firefighting crews and water transport vehicles, this strategy was not implemented which resulted in the fire breaching this containment strategy by late afternoon.

By midnight, ground crews had completed the containment line preparation and backburnt to the vicinity of Sassafras Gully, Springwood.

Wednesday 2 January

Status: 'Being Controlled'

The 22:00hrs, 01 January, FLIR line scan of the fire had shown that the main firefront had crossed Bedford Creek, that meant the fire had the potential to make a direct run into Woodford. As a delaying strategy, a backburn was begun at 01:30hrs from the southern side of the corner of Murphys Glen and Bedford Ridge Fire Trail. This burn proceeded in both directions and was tied into the creek line at Murphys Glen. At the same time, backburning operations had commenced along the Sally Wattle Water Hole spur trail into the Queen Victoria Creek.

By 08:00hrs, crews had completed backburning to Stanway Avenue, Springwood. At 12:00hrs, backburning operations ceased just prior to Davies Avenue, Springwood due to the extreme fire weather and erratic fire behaviour. At 15:57hrs a spotfire was reported to the west of Davies Avenue, Springwood.

Air Support attacked this spot in an attempt to extinguish it.

BY MIDNIGHT GROUND CREWS HAD COMPLETED THE CONTAINMENT LINE PREPARATION AND BACKBURNT HALFWAY BETWEEN DAVIES AVENUE, SPRINGWOOD AND JACKSON PARK, FAULCONBRIDGE.





By midday, backburning had been completed along the containment line to the top of Pearces Mountain Gully. Ground crews supported by helicopter water bombing attacked the active fire below the cliff line during the morning. At 16:41hrs, air support left the McMahons Point area due to severe fire activity. At 17:39hrs, the fire was reported to have breached containment lines in the Pearces Mountain Gully area, had dropped over the cliff in the McMahons Point lookout area and was burning strongly.

At 20:24hrs, backburning operations re-commenced in the Springwood/Faulconbridge area.

By midnight ground crews had completed the containment line preparation and backburnt halfway between Davies Avenue, Springwood and Jackson Park, Faulconbridge.

Thursday 3 January

Status: 'Being Controlled'

By 08:00hrs, the backburn had reached the western side of Clarinda Avenue, Faulconbridge.

The spotfire south of Woodford continued to travel in a northerly direction towards the township and by early afternoon it had expanded and threatened to impact on the southern sections of the township. During the afternoon units were stationed strategically to meet the threat of the oncoming fire. At 18:00hrs the fire impacted on the southern end of Bedford Road, Woodford. Air support, including the Erickson Air Crane slowed the fires progress and subsequently the impact on properties was minor.

At 12:20hrs, the fire crossed the containment line of Queen Victoria Creek and made a run

towards Williams Ridge Fire Trail. Under the forecast conditions, it was highly unlikely that the Williams Ridge Fire Trail would hold. This meant that the fall back option between Woodford and Wentworth Falls had to be implemented.

A dozer trail was cut westwards from Tableland Road to cliff edge (1km north of McMahon Point Lookout) to contain the northerly progress of the fire along the cliff edge. Strategies for containment of the fire below the cliff edge in Kedumba Valley were being developed. One option investigated was below the transmission lines and preparation work was initiated with ground crews and heavy plant.

As the fireground and weather conditions moderated following the fire's impact on Woodford, crews went from active property

protection to progressing the fire eastwards by the use of backburning. At the same time, crews re-commenced backburning operations in the Faulconbridge area heading westwards. Crews had also commenced backburning westwards from Woodford along pre-prepared dozer containment lines, away from the urban interface. This was a holding strategy to allow crews time to burn behind the urban interface westwards from Woodford to Wentworth Falls.

By midnight ground crews had completed the containment line preparation and backburnt to the Linden Water Tower from the east and to Hepburn Road area of Linden from the west and had approximately 2.5km to link both burns.



Photograph by Sean Davey

Friday 4 January**Status: 'Being Controlled'**

By 08:00hrs, the backburn was complete from Blaxland to Woodford and the backburn had reached Lower Valley Road, Hazelbrook along the dozer lines and was tied down into Bedford Creek.

Throughout the day, the complete fall back strategy was implemented between Woodford and Wentworth Falls. Back-burning operations continued, as did infilling of the unburnt areas between the dozer containment lines and the urban interface as part of the fall back strategy.

The main fire ran northwest towards Aeroplane Hill and impacted on the Aeroplane Hill Fire Trail at approximately 12:00hrs. Prior to the impact, the fire had spotted into the Aeroplane Hill's Hazard

Reduction (HR) (September 2001) igniting the unburnt swamp areas within the hazard reduction area. Although the Hazard Reduction (HR) could no longer be used as a containment strategy (due to the fire burning through the HR area), it did dramatically slow the main fire's progress allowing other containment strategies to be implemented.

The fire also breached the proposed containment line from Williams Ridge Fire Tail south to Queen Victoria Creek. This meant that to contain the fire, the northern section of Tableland Road had to be burnt to its junction with Andersons Fire Trail. This was planned to occur when conditions would be milder and resources available for implementation.

The RAFT (RFS/NPWS) crews were inserted via road then boat to the

edge of the stored water in the Kedumba Valley. The crews cut a hand tool line approximately 1.3km long from the stored water to the base of the cliff, approximately 1km to the northwest of McMahons Point Lookout. The fire breached this containment line late in the evening. Ground and aerial support was available to the RAFT crews while working on the fireground.

A further dozer trail was cut westwards from Tableland Road to cliff edge (2km north of McMahon Point Lookout). The previously built dozer trail could not be used to contain the fire that had escaped below the cliff line into the Kedumba Valley. Strategies for containment were being developed. It was planned to cut a dozer trail up-slope from the road in Kedumba Valley towards the

cliff line and insert RAFT crews to continue a hand tool line from the end of the dozer trail to the base of the cliff line.

By late evening, crews had begun implementation of the Tableland containment line from Queen Elizabeth Drive to Andersons Fire Trail. To contain the main firefront burning west from Queen Victoria Creek, backburning was initiated adjacent to the Queen Victoria Hospital. At the same time crews began backburning east along the southern side of Queen Elizabeth Drive/Williams Ridge Fire Trail and south along the eastern side of Tableland Road from its junction with Queen Elizabeth Drive.

By midnight ground crews had completed the containment line preparation and backburnt around Terrace Falls Road, Hazelbrook.



Photograph by Adam Hollingworth



Photograph by Dean Sewell

GROUND CREWS INVESTIGATED THE ACTIVE FIRE AND REPORTED IT TO BE WELL WITHIN THE CONTAINMENT LINES AND BURNING AWAY FROM THE CONTAINMENT LINES.

ALSO DURING THE EARLY STAGES OF THE FIRE, A REPORT WAS RECEIVED OF PERSONS TRAPPED IN THE GLENBROOK CAUSEWAY AREA, THEY WERE SUBSEQUENTLY EVACUATED BY NPWS STAFF AND NSW POLICE RESCUE, BACK TO THE NPWS GLENBROOK HELIPAD.

Saturday 5 January

Status: 'Being Controlled'

By 08:00hrs, the backburn south along Tableland Road had locked the firefront into the Anderson Fire Tail area. The backburn on the southern side of Williams Ridge had prevented the advancing firefront from entering the western section of the Aeroplane Hill HR. The dozer trail had been completed west of Tableland Road and the southern side of the trail had been backburnt. Also at this time, backburns had been completed around the Central Blue Mountains Golf Course at Lawson including the areas of Ridge Street, Wilson Street and Bath's Road, Lawson.

The strategy for containing the fire outbreak in the Kedumba Valley was implemented. The dozer trail continued from Kedumba Valley Road upslope for approximately 1km, where at this point RAFT crews supported by aircraft continued a hand tool line for approximately 1.5km upslope to the cliff face. To contain the fire, crews backburnt from the south of the hand tool

line. Later that evening the fire breached the hand tool line, just below the cliff line.

Although high humidity slowed the progress of backburns, by midnight ground crews had completed the containment line preparation and were simultaneously lighting up from the heads of the gullies between Genevieve and Boronia Roads, Bullaburra and also between Boronia Road, Bullaburra and Ridge Street Lawson.

Sunday 6 January

Status: 'Being Controlled'

By 08:00hrs, backburning was completed to the western side of Genevieve Road to its junction with the Great Western Highway, Bullaburra.

During the morning the RAFT crews began a parallel attack on the breach of the hand tool line below the cliff line. To achieve this, the RAFT crews laid out 2.5km of hose with multiple pump relays.

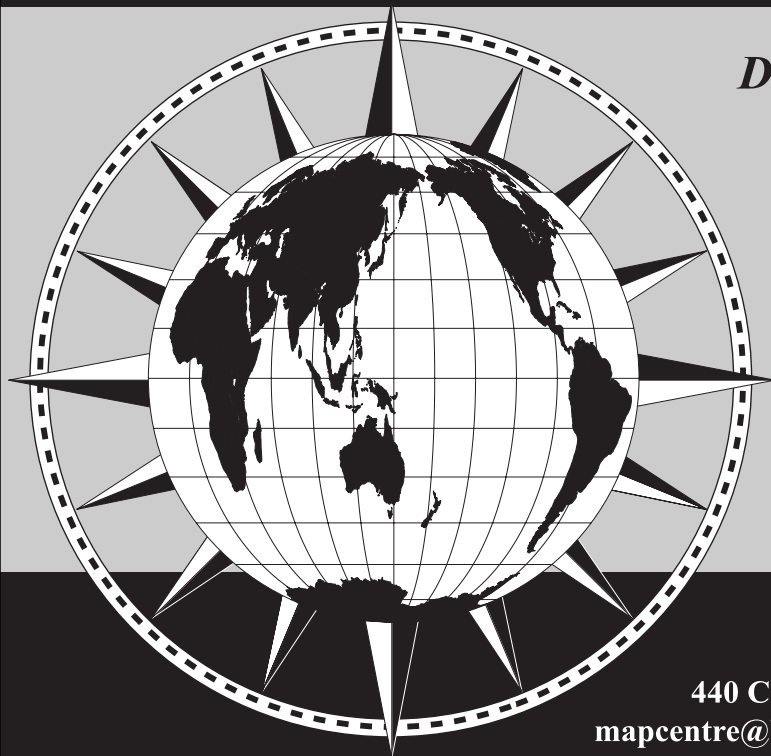
A spotfire was also contained in the Kedumba Valley, in the



Photographs by Matt Black

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Photographs by Sean Davey

THE OPERATIONS AND PLANNING SECTIONS OF THE IMT RELOCATED TO THE NPWS BLACKHEATH OFFICE WHILE THE INCIDENT CONTROLLER, SECTION 44 REPORT PREPARATION, REHABILITATION AND GEOGRAPHIC INFORMATION SYSTEM (GIS) TEAMS REMAINED AT FIRE CONTROL CENTRE, KATOOMBA.

vicinity of John Seymour Hill by use of air support (Air Crane) and ground crews.

During the day backburning operations continued south of the Great Western Highway towards Boddington Hill, Wentworth Falls. Additionally, crews were backburning east of Kedumba Valley Road, Kedumba Valley towards the main fire. Backburning operations were severely hampered by increasing humidity and at approximately 22:00hrs all backburning operations ceased due to steady rainfall and storm activity. At this point most crews were stood down with a few local crews patrolling overnight.

Prior to midnight, 8.0mm of rain was recorded at Mt Boyce and 3.8mm at was recorded at Penrith.

Monday 7 January

Status: 'Contained'

Rainfall was recorded during the morning (42.4mm at Mt Boyce and 31.4mm at Penrith), which prevented backburns from the previous night going in with any significant depth.

Aerial reconnaissance during the day reported no active running fire, with some smokers in the McMahons Sector.

Normal day shift crews were deployed to mop-up and blackout taking full advantage of the current weather current conditions and rainfall overnight. Due to heavy rain and minimal areas requiring attention, the majority of crews were stood down by 11:00hrs. For the remainder of the day, local crews continued patrolling between Bullaburra and Wentworth Falls. RAFT crews were deployed during the morning to retrieve firefighting gear left behind the previous day. While returning the crews continued mop-up and patrol.

During the late evening, a small amount of backburning was initiated in the McMahons Point area to strengthen the containment line.

Tuesday 8 January

Status: 'Contained'

During the day, crews tried re-commencing the backburn at Boddington Hill, but due to the



previous day's rain, this proved unsuccessful. Local crews continued patrolling and mopping up from Woodford to Wentworth Falls with another small contingent patrolling and mopping up in Kedumba Valley. Air support was provided to ground crews with water bombing occurring on certain hot spots.

With the exception of an active pocket south of Genevieve Road, Bullaburra, the main fire remained inactive. Ground crews investigated the active fire and reported it to be burning well within and away from the containment lines.

Wednesday 9 January

Status: 'Contained'

Overnight crews backburnt from the end of Boddington Drive to the junction of Chester Road and Tableland Road, Wentworth Falls. This completed the containment lines.

Pockets of active fire were present within the fireground but were well within the containment lines. Pockets of unburnt country between Genevieve Road, Bullaburra and Tableland Road, Wentworth Falls burnt out during the day.

One crew was deployed for the night shift for continuing mop-up and patrol. Night shift IMT scaled back.

Thursday 10 January

Status: 'Contained'

The fire remained within containment lines. Active fire was present within the fireground but well within the containment lines. The same threat existed as yesterday.

The strategy for the day was for aerial and ground patrol, continued mop-up and blacking out of the containment lines primarily from Lawson, west to Wentworth Falls and south along Tableland Road and the Kedumba containment lines to the stored water. Area of highest priority were the Kedumba containment lines.

Friday 11 January
Status:- 'Patrol'

The fire remained within the containment lines. The threats remained the same.

The strategy for the day was for aerial and ground patrol, continued mop-up and blacking out of the containment lines primarily from Lawson, west to Wentworth Falls and south along Tableland Road and the Kedumba containment lines, to the stored water. Area of highest priority remained the Kedumba Containment Lines.

No crews were deployed for the night shift on this day. The night IMT ceased and the Fire Control

Centre was closed overnight. This remained the case until Section 44 Declaration was revoked on the 22 January.

Saturday 12 January
Status:- 'Patrol'

The fire remained within the containment lines. Pockets of active fire were present within the fire ground but were well within the containment lines.

The strategy for the day was for continued aerial and ground patrol, mop-up and blacking out of the containment lines primarily from Lawson west to Wentworth Falls and south along Tableland Road and the Kedumba containment lines to the stored water.

Sunday 13 January
Status:- 'Patrol'

The fire remained within the containment lines. Pockets of active fire were present within the fireground but were well within the containment lines.

The strategy for the day was for continued aerial and ground

patrol, mop-up and blacking out of the containment lines. Increased aerial reconnaissance occurred to identify hotspots and to permit ground crews to target their patrol and mop-up operations. Ground crews felled several smoking trees along the dozer trail in the Kedumba/McMahons sector. By late afternoon aerial reconnaissance and FLIR run reported minimal hotspots with all reported hotspots well within the containment lines and burnt ground.

Monday 14 January
Status:- 'Patrol'

The fire remained within the containment lines.

An aerial reconnaissance and FLIR run was undertaken early am to identify hotspots within the Kedumba/McMahons sector. Three Category 9 tankers and crews continued to patrol and mop-up the Kedumba containment lines.

Ground crews blacked out numerous hotspots.

Tuesday 15 January
Status:- 'Patrol'

The fire remained within the containment lines and 3.4mm of rain occurring during the afternoon at Mt Boyce. The only possible threat from the fire was if the fire re-ignited and escaped into the Kedumba and Jamison Valleys.

An aerial reconnaissance and FLIR run was undertaken early am to identify hotspots within the Kedumba/McMahons sector and 30 hotspots were located. Ground crews blacked them out the hotspots within 200 metres of the containment lines and continued patrol, mop-up and blackout throughout the day. During the late afternoon and evening 15.2mm of rain was recorded at Penrith.

Wednesday 16 January
Status:- 'Patrol'

The fire remained within the containment lines with rain occurring during the early am (6.6 mm at Penrith and 4.0 mm at Mt. Boyce).

An aerial reconnaissance and FLIR

run was undertaken approximately 11:00hrs and identified three smokers in the within the Kedumba /McMahons sector and two smokers in the Bullaburra area. These were blacked out by ground crews who then continued patrol, mop-up and blackout throughout the day.

Thursday 17 January
Status:- 'Patrol'

Morning and afternoon aerial reconnaissance was carried out to determine any fire activity along the fire boundary, particularly in the Bullaburra area and the Kedumba/McMahon Sector.

Ground crews continued patrol, mop-up and blackout within the Kedumba/McMahon Sector throughout the day. The ground crew identified and blacked out four smokers along the containment lines.

Friday 18 January
Status:- 'Patrol'

The fire remained within containment lines. Aerial reconnaissance was carried out to determine any fire activity along the fire boundary, particularly in the Bullaburra area and the Kedumba /McMahon Sector. Both flights found no significant fire activity.

Ground crews continued patrol, mop-up and blackout within the Kedumba/McMahon Sector throughout the day. The ground crew identified and blacked out one smoker.

Air operations at Melrose Park were scaled down in preparation for relocating to the NPWS helipad at Blackheath.

The Operations and Planning sections of the IMT relocated to the NPWS Blackheath Office while the Incident Controller, Section 44 Report preparation, Rehabilitation and Geographic Information System (GIS) teams remained at Fire Control Centre, Katoomba. This remained the case until the Section 44 Declaration was revoked on 22 January.



Photograph by Adam Hollingworth



Photograph by Adam Robinson/ABC

SO WHAT DID YOU DO IN THE (BUSHFIRE) WAR?

AS A VOLUNTEER FIREFIGHTER WITH THE RURAL FIRE SERVICE, I HAVE BEEN ASKED MANY TIMES IN THE LAST WEEKS "WHAT WAS IT LIKE?" AND "WHAT DID YOU DO?"

As a volunteer firefighter with the Rural Fire Service, I have been asked many times in the last weeks "what was it like?" and "what did you do?"

The response to what was it like? has been covered excellently by first hand accounts from residents, firefighters and reporters. Radio coverage has been great. Television footage has been exciting and riveting. This special Bushfire Bulletin is chock full of the riveting, adrenalin charged action that typified the taming of the Christmas 2001 bushfires.

What about the question what did you do? I have related varying detail to family, friends,

work colleagues and people I meet in the street. I have found I relate different aspects of my experiences depending on who I am talking to and in what circumstance.

Unfortunately to most listeners, I don't have tales of heroics, of beating back the beast. In fact, after Christmas Day I never actually met the fire front. Faces soon reflected boredom and ho hum dreariness without real action stories to hear.

But in reality my story is like most firefighters – putting in long days preparing strategic lines and putting in backburns. And in my 20 years of volunteer firefighting I had never bothered

to write down the real firefighter experiences. Those stories the thousands of us dedicated to the Service can relate to most easily.

I had always understood that writing thoughts, activities and anecdotes can be a cathartic experience. The need to fully describe my involvement and experiences in the Bushfire War of Christmas 2001 struck me mid-way through the campaign. It was traumatic as well as a revelation.

The pager going off has always given rise to fear and dread in my wife Veronica. As I race off to the fire station she is left to ponder those personal fears – whether I will be safe, whether I will return home, what would I see and do. The uncomfortable feelings welling up inside would be dissipated by my triumphant return one, two, 6 or 12 hours later.

But of course an extended campaign fire, close to home is different. I did not realise this at the time though.

The Mt Hall (Blue Mountains) fire was obviously heading towards our village of Hazelbrook,

Communication with my family was becoming less frequent. After my third 12-hour shift and in my few waking hours, Veronica expressed her growing feeling of general sickness and migraine type headaches. That will pass I thought as I quietly left the house at 0500 for another day shift. Returning home that night, buggered as usual, Veronica recounted her day of being laid up in bed, vomiting violently.

Coincidentally that day my crew was involved in an "incident" – the sort that happens from time to time, a hazard of the job we do. I had told my 16 year-old son, Tim of the incident and its aftermath. No physical injuries to report, however lets just say my crew got rather hot. To me and my firefighter colleagues, nothing too serious. Given Veronica's underlying concerns for me, I implored Tim not to tell his mother.

**RADIO COVERAGE
HAS BEEN GREAT.
TELEVISION
FOOTAGE HAS
BEEN EXCITING
AND RIVETING.**

That night, as Veronica again expressed her concern for my safety, I dropped a comment inferring something went wrong that day. I said I had already told Tim. In tears, Veronica insisted I tell her. The story was short. A backburning operation got momentarily out of hand, with a resultant flare-up adjacent to our vehicle and exposed crew. No physical injuries. Many lights and fittings melted, sign-writing yellowed.

The recount was completed. Almost immediately the migraine disappeared. Good health returned very soon after. So what was the illness?

I had not realised her fear of me being hurt and the tension of the encroaching fire had consumed her physically.

For the rest of the campaign the good, bad and ugly needed to be told. Talking about this and that, explaining the days events in full, bringing home Incident Action Plans and the like. Ensuring that the whole family was involved in the firefighting effort.

So much information began passing around that I started making notes of the day's events. Not just the firefighting strategies and efforts, but the people and places.

In years to come my children will again ask – well what did you do in the war, dad? My collection of thoughts and experiences will be the reality that I may find hard to remember as the years pass by. Capture it while it remains clear and colourful now.

Write it down!
Tony Jarrett

Saturday 19 January**Status:- 'Patrol'**

Aerial reconnaissance found no fire activity.

No ground crews were deployed to the fire ground. Air Operations ceased at Melrose Park and relocated to NPWS at Blackheath.

Sunday 20 January**Status:- 'Patrol'**

Aerial reconnaissance again found no fire activity. No ground crews were deployed to the fireground today.

Monday 21 January**Status:- 'Patrol'**

Aerial reconnaissance was carried out to determine any fire activity along the fire boundary, particularly in the Bullaburra area and the Kedumba/McMahon Sector. The flight identified two smokers well within burnt area.

No ground crews were deployed to the fire ground today.

Tuesday 22 January**Status:- 'Patrol'**

The Section 44 Declaration was lifted at 1500hrs. At this stage the fire was reclassified as a Class 1 fire and was returned to local control arrangements.

LAWSON ROAD (1) FIRE**Monday 24 December****Status: 'Going' - 'Out'**

This fire was initially reported via landline to the Blue Mountains District Office at 12:41hrs in vicinity of Lawson Road, Springwood.

Both RFS and NSWFB appliances were responded and within one hour of the initial report, this fire was contained and crews commenced mopping up and black out. At 15:24hrs, advice from the fireground was that the fire was blacked out and all appliances were being released with the

exception of the Blue Mountains Rural Fire Investigation Unit (RFIU) which remained on scene until 15:47hrs.

MITCHELLS PASS (LENNOX BRIDGE) FIRE**Monday 24 December****Status: 'Going'**

This fire was initially reported via radio to the Blue Mountains District Office from the Glenbrook Fire Tower at 14:28hrs. Subsequent aerial and ground observations confirmed the location of the fire to be 50metres to the west of Lennox Bridge on Mitchells Pass, Glenbrook.

Due to the extreme fire weather being experienced at the time, the fire rapidly expanded and immediately threatened properties in the Mt Sion area of Glenbrook. Within 1 hr, the fire had travelled 2km to the east, threatened

Photograph by Adam Hollingworth



Photograph by Nick Moir



Photograph by Adam Hollingworth

properties in the west of Leonay and caused the M4 Freeway and main western rail line to be closed temporarily. Aerial support was provided for ground crews, both for reconnaissance and water-bombing.

Initial strategies were for property protection only, due to the rapid expansion and erratic behaviour of the fire. To contain the southerly flank of the fire, backburning operations commenced late evening from the intersection of Marges /Elizabeth Lookout Fire Trail and Barnett Street, Glenbrook in the west and continued to the eastern side of the Glenbrook RAAF Base to the M4 Freeway. The previous fire on the northern side of Mitchells Pass (Blue Mountains Section 44 - 3 to 8 December 2001) helped contain the northern flank of the fire, except in the area of Bowaga Avenue, Blaxland. In the area of Bowaga and Maraket Avenues, Blaxland, crews constructed hand tool lines and attacked the fire directly.

Tuesday 25 December
Status: 'Being Controlled'

By 09:30hrs, aerial observations indicated that the fire was still within the containment lines with two pockets of active fire, one to the north near Bowaga and Maraket Avenues, Blaxland. The other active section of fire was between Barnett Street and Mt Sion, Glenbrook. Both areas were being worked on by ground crews complete with air support which ceased for a period of time during the afternoon due to high winds.

During the evening crews backburnt in the Barnett Street area to remove all pockets of unburnt bushland between the fire and properties. Crews also continued working on the Bowaga and Maraket Avenue areas.

Wednesday 26 December
Status: 'Contained'

The fire remained within the containment lines, with only small pockets of active fire burning under Bowaga Street, Blaxland. During the day, ground crews continued with mopping up and blacking out.

This continued until the majority of crews were responded to the Lawson Road (2) Fire.

Thursday 27 December
Status: 'Contained'

The fire remained within the containment lines. Crews responded to a re-ignition near Lennox Bridge at 05:00hrs. This was water-bombed during the day.

Friday 28 December to
Sunday 6 January

Status: 'Contained'
No active fire was reported on the fireground. Crews continued patrolling periodically throughout the day and night. Regular air patrols were undertaken throughout the day.

Monday 7 January 2002
Status: 'Out'

Following overnight and morning rain (Total 35.2mm recorded at Penrith), the fire was declared 'Out' at 16:00hrs.

BLUE POOL FIRE

Monday 24 December
Status: 'Going'

This fire was initially reported via radio to the Blue Mountains District Office from the Glenbrook Fire Tower and via landline from the NPWS Glenbrook Park Entry Booth at 17:04hrs. Both reports indicated the fire was in the Blue Pool area (Blue Mountains UBD Map 43, K4) and escalating rapidly.

Due to the prevailing extreme fire weather (Extreme Fire Danger Rating - Fire Danger Index 69.1), this fire expanded rapidly to the western side of Glenbrook Creek and because of its isolated location and limited available resources (due to other fires), initial containment was not possible. Resources were responded to the fire as they became available after being released from property protection roles on other fires.

During the early stages, a report was received of persons trapped in the Glenbrook Causeway area, they were subsequently evacuated by NPWS staff and NSW Police Rescue, to the NPWS Glenbrook Helipad.

By 18:00hrs, the fire had spotted, was making runs and threatening properties along Bruce Road, Ranch Avenue, Brook Road and Emu Road, Glenbrook.

At 19:36hrs, fireground information advised that the fire had jumped Glenbrook Gorge in

the vicinity of Mt Portal. At 19:40hrs, a message to the Penrith Rural Fire District Fire confirmed that the fire had jumped the Gorge. There was a high probability that it would also spot over the river. At 19:59hrs, an Air Observer reported that the fire had spotted in three locations at Mulgoa, from Mt Portal, and that substantial property protection was required.

At 19:40hrs, initial reports were received of the fire destroying /damaging the NPWS Works Depot, Fuel Storage Depot, Heavy Plant and vehicles.

During the nightshift, the strategy was to backburn around Governors Drive and Darks Common, Lapstone and also Brook and Bruce Roads, Glenbrook. The fire progressed in a northwest direction between Glenbrook Creek and the Railway line towards Wright Street, Glenbrook.

Tuesday 25 December
Status: 'Being Controlled'

Backburning operations were carried out overnight with mopping up continuing during the day in the Darks Common area of Lapstone. The fire also continued to travel in a southeast direction as well as northwest on the south side of Glenbrook Creek.

During the early afternoon the fire threatened properties in Wright Street, Glenbrook.

At 15:14hrs, a City Rail train was evacuated whilst stationary at Glenbrook Railway Station. All evacuees were transported to the Glenbrook Bowling and Recreational Club.

The fire slowed near a hazard reduction (Wright Street HR September 2001) at the end of Station & Cox Streets, Glenbrook. The fire continued burning around the western side of the Woodford Oaks Fire Trail.

During the evening, the containment strategy of backburning down into the Duck Hole walking track was initiated and was successful in slowing the progress of the fire in a northwest direction.



Photograph by Matt Black

Wednesday 26 December**Status: 'Being Controlled'**

During the morning, the containment strategy of backburning into the Duck Hole was completed successfully, with the exception of two spot overs. Ground crews contained the spot overs with air support.

The fire continued in southerly and westerly directions, south of Glenbrook Creek.

At approximately 19:30hrs, the Mt Hall and Blue Pool Fires had combined on their northern and southern flanks, respectively. The combined fires now referred to as Mt Hall Fire.

LAWSON ROAD (2) FIRE

Tuesday 25 December**Status: 'Going'**

At 14:30hrs, the Blue Mountains District Office received a report indicating that there was a fire behind the bus depot, north of the Great Western Highway, Valley Heights. The fire was in the area of the previous days fire (Lawson Road 1).

Due to the prevailing extreme fire weather (Extreme Fire Danger Rating - Fire Danger Index 78.7 for Penrith at 14:30hrs), the fire expanded rapidly to the east of the ignition point. Because of the fires location, the available resources, and the rapid expansion and erratic behaviour of the fire, initial containment was not possible and the containment strategy was for property protection only.

Additional resources, from both the NSW Fire Brigades and NSW Rural Fire Service, were responded to the fire as they became available after being released from property protection roles on other fires. Aerial Support in the form of air surveillance monitored the fire, and later aircraft with water bombing capabilities released from property protection on the Mitchells Pass Fire and the Blue Pool Fire, commenced property protection on this fire.

At 15:09, Aerial Reconnaissance reported the fire was behind the Industrial Estate at Lawson Road, Springwood and was running towards the rear of the Factories. At 15:10hrs the fire was reported 600 metres away from the Buckland Convalescent Hospital, Springwood. During the early evening, the fire impacted on properties in the northwestern section of Sun Valley. During the initial fire run and the early evening a number of properties in the area were fire damaged.

As conditions moderated during the evening, backburns were conducted to protect the Buckland Convalescent Hospital and Endeavour Nursing Home, Springwood.

Prior to midnight, the strategy for containing the easterly progression of the fire was to construct a hand tool line southwest from the Sun Valley Road loop to the Great Western Highway and backburn to the northwest of this line. This containment line was constructed and backburnt successfully.

Also, it was planned to use the Long Angle Fire Trail to backburn from Sun Valley to Singles Ridge Road, Springwood. The Long Angle Fire Trail was the only existing containment line to the east of the fire and hence the only possible containment option. On site assessments by ground crews, indicated that this was not a feasible option due to the limited time available, resource availability and vehicle access restrictions and as such could not be implemented. Due to the failure of this component of the strategy, it was identified that the fire would impact heavily the next day on Paterson Road, Springwood; Singles Ridge Road, Yellow Rock; and the streets north of the Great Western Highway in Warrimoo under the forecasted weather conditions.

Wednesday 26 December**Status: 'Going'**

Overnight strategies were identified and implemented for property protection. Under the forecast conditions of west-southwest



Photograph by Steve Dali

winds, it was predicted the fire front would impact on Patterson Road, Springwood and Singles Ridge Road, Winmalee/Yellow Rock and all adjoining streets. It was also predicted that the northern area of Warrimoo would be under threat by the flank of this fire. It was recognised early on that the containment strategy was going to be reactive property protection.

During the morning the fire impacted on properties along Patterson Road, Springwood.

At 11:02hrs, a helicopter reported a spot fire near Terryfont Road, Warrimoo. The helicopter commenced water bombing the area.

At approximately 12:00hrs, the northern end of Terryfont Avenue, Warrimoo was impacted by fire.

One house was totally destroyed with another partially damaged. The fire subsequently impacted on and destroyed properties in Cross Street, Warrimoo.

The main fire front continued burning in an easterly direction and impacted on properties along Long Angle, Purvines and Singles Ridge Roads, Yellow Rock; and in the town ship of Yellow Rock. Significant property damage was recorded in the area including the 'Sonters' and 'Oasis' Nurseries.

At 12:50hrs, Penrith Fire Control was given a situation report of the current status of the fires and that the Lawson Road (2) Fire would cross the Nepean River at approximately 13:30hrs. By 13:30hrs the main fire front had reached the escarpment above the Nepean River and subsequently spotted into the Penrith Lakes Area. At the same time the flanks of the fire continued burning north of Singles Ridge Road and to the south where it impacted on Mt Riverview and damaged properties along Grandview Drive. The containment strategy for the southern section of the fire during the evening was for backburning from properties in Sun Valley linking to the fire in Warrimoo, then south along the back of the urban interface in Warrimoo to Attunga Road, Blaxland. From the end of Attunga Road, Blaxland the backburn continued along the Cripple Creek Fire Trail to Elizabeth Road, Mt Riverview. At the north end of Grandview Drive, the fire was tied down the escarpment to the Nepean River.

The containment strategy for the northern section of the fire overnight was restricted to backburning from the back of the urban interface around Heather Glen Road, Winmalee and Buena Vista Road, Yellow Rock for property protection.

CHAPLAIN'S MESSAGE



The role of the Chaplain is a complex one in a time of emergency. A major part of it is being available at the point of crisis. This meant constant travelling. Each day the chaplains would check the state of the fires, taking into account locations where fires were most likely to impact on people and dwellings, and spend the day moving to Control Centres, staging areas and firefronts, returning late at night. We covered more areas of firefighting than most RFS personnel.

Chaplaincy at this time involved caring for the physical needs of firefighters. Our vehicles carried all manner of useful things. Goggles, breathing masks, sun block, a huge esky filled with ice, cool drinks, chocolates, mobile phones and eyewash. Nearly every conversation began with the boot open and the question "Is there anything you need?". There were many times when the other chaplains and I appreciated hospitality, shared "meals", and had some great conversations.

Importantly for us, we shared the tough times with firefighters. Often there was very real risk to life and property, and perhaps the hardest part for us was the waiting at staging grounds or in driveways working with tenuous backburns. Some areas resembled war zones, with scores of trucks ready to move into property protection. These are daunting places to be as you watch and wait as walls of smoke move closer. Fear is tangible but rarely spoken of. Chaplains moved among the crews; a word here, a pat on the shoulder there for reassurance and some chocolates, supplies and conversation. At these times, my faith in God and the ability of the RFS to cope with such monumental natural forces was important - not just to me, but to the people I spent time with. We all knew that this thing was bigger than all of us, and many of my conversations - especially those with people who weren't particularly religious - reflected this.

REV. STEPHEN ROBINSON IS A CHAPLAIN OF THE RURAL FIRE SERVICE IN THE HASTINGS DISTRICT, AND AN ACTIVE MEMBER OF THE LAKE CATHIE RURAL FIRE BRIGADE.

THE FOLLOWING ARE HIS REFLECTIONS ON A CHAPLAIN'S INVOLVEMENT IN THE NSW CHRISTMAS 2001 BUSHFIRE EMERGENCY.

At intense fires that threatened property, such as in Bowen Avenue, West Pymble, the Pennant Hills Park, Woodford and other mountain suburbs, chaplains brought assistance to people suffering smoke inhalation and heat stress. They advised and calmed residents who could otherwise have made life complex for firefighters themselves. There were other points of crisis care which involved driving the relatives of injured firefighters to hospitals and ensuring that Rosehill was kept fully informed. On other occasions we acted as mediators where people were tired and stressed, using our links to the CID team who were also kept busy for the duration of the fires.

RFS Senior Chaplain Ron Anderson and I kept in contact by mobile phone, never sure of where the other might turn up by the end of the day. I recall that on one occasion Ron had a conversation with me from a beach in the Shoalhaven with hundreds of other evacuees from the town.

At the end of the first week, I left, as exhausted as I had ever been and with the sense that I had let the side down by going home

while operations continued, even though I fully expected to be called back. During my time in Sydney I saw many people who would be at Rosehill at 7am and who were still there at midnight, and, on the firegrounds, there were many others who had put in strenuous 12 hour shifts in the field and still felt that was not enough. I was deeply privileged to be a part of such an operation with such people. Then on the Sunday evening, the rains came.

On February 8, together with other RFS chaplains and thousands of volunteers, I marched in the big 'thankyou' parade through Sydney, although I was constantly aware of the volunteers who were unable to be present. In that crowd of unique people I met many with whom I had shared time during the campaign. I realised that I had made meaningful relationships with scores of people at a time of great need for all of us.

Most encounters in chaplaincy will never be shared but they are a rich part of the network of care and comradeship woven into the life of the RFS.

Rev. Stephen Robinson

Thursday 27 December**Status: 'Being Controlled'**

In the early hours of the morning, ground crews reported that the fire had crossed Frasers Creek. This meant that the containment strategy for the northern section of the fire had to be altered.

The new strategy called for backburning from the rear of the urban interface at the junction of Patterson and Hawkesbury Roads, Springwood to the northeast towards Yarramundi. From the base of the 'S' bends on Hawkesbury Road (Springwood Road), Yarramundi, the containment line was to continue east into the Yellowmundi Nature Reserve to the Nepean River. Another major strategy identified was for the protection of the Sewerage Treatment Plant (STP) at Winmalee due to the long-term health implications on the Blue Mountains Community (This plant is the major sewerage treatment plant for the Blue Mountains and if it failed, it would have taken months to restart).

By 07:00hrs, crews had completed the containment line from Elizabeth Road, Mt Riverview to Cripple Creek and also from Mt Riverview down

to the Nepean River. Throughout the day, crews continued to implement the backburn containment strategies.

Crews were still committed a various stages to reactive property protection due to minor fire runs throughout the day.

By 22:00hrs, the southern containment strategy had been implemented successfully.

Friday 28 December 2001**Status: 'Being Controlled'**

Overnight crews continued on the northern containment strategy implementation and by 09:00hrs, they had successfully completed the containment line west of the Winmalee STP to the Nepean River. The backburn at this stage had a minimum depth of 200-300m. To further strengthen the containment line, Aerial Incendiary work was carried out south of the backburn from the Winmalee STP, east to the Nepean River.

During the late afternoon and early evening, backburning operations continued west of the Winmalee STP towards Patterson Road, Springwood.

Numerous calls were being received from residents in the area, and resources were responded to investigate and conduct property protection if required.

Saturday 29 December 2001**Status: 'Contained' - 'Patrol'**

Overnight, crews completed backburning operations in the Burwood Avenue and Buena Vista Road areas of Winmalee. This completed the northern containment strategy.

The fire continued to burn with the containment lines. Crews continued to mop and black out areas of concern.

Sunday 30 December**Status: 'Patrol'**

Towards the northeast of the fireground, active pockets of fire remained in the location of the remnant fire front. Throughout the day and night, ground crews continued to deal with flare-ups.

Monday 31 December to**Friday 4 January****Status: 'Patrol'**

The fire remained within the containment lines. The strategy for the day was for continued aerial reconnaissance whenever

possible and ground patrol.

A possible threat if the fire re-ignited breaking containment lines, was to the north into the Grose Valley.

Saturday 5 January**Status: 'Patrol'**

The fire remained within the containment lines. The strategy for the day was for continued aerial reconnaissance whenever possible and ground patrol.

Late evening, light rainfall fell across the fireground (3.8mm recorded at Penrith).

Sunday 6 January**Status: 'Patrol'**

During the AM, further rainfall fell across the fireground (31.4mm recorded at Penrith).

The fire remained within the containment lines. The strategy for the day was for continued aerial reconnaissance whenever possible and ground patrol.

Monday 7 January to**Saturday 12 January****Status: 'Patrol'**

The fireground was periodically patrolled with no reports of active fire, however some smokers were still evident. Occasional Aerial Reconnaissance was carried out as aircraft were available, the priority for aircraft throughout this period was for the Mt Hall and Limit Hill 2 (West) fires. Numerous reports of smokers through the '000' system and direct to the Fire Control Centre were investigated as and when required.

On 11 January 2002, the night IMT ceased and the Fire Control Centre was closed overnight with normal after hours arrangements in place. This remained the case until Section 44 Declaration was revoked on the 22 January 2002.

Sunday 13 January**Status: 'Out'**

At 16:00hrs, the fire was declared 'Out'.



Photograph by Matt Black

AIR OPERATIONS 2001-2002

THIS SUMMER SAW THE GREATEST USE OF AIRCRAFT EVER SEEN IN NSW WITH THE NUMBERS PEAKING AT OVER NINETY TACTICAL AND TRANSPORT AIRCRAFT.



Photograph by Matt Black



Photograph by Sean Davey

MEDIA ATTENTION FOCUSED ON THE ARRIVAL OF THE VICTORIAN CONTRACTED AIR CRANE 'ELVIS' WHICH WAS SUBSEQUENTLY JOINED BY TWO MORE FLOWN IN FROM THE USA FOR A TEN WEEK CONTRACT.



Photograph by Adam Hollingworth



Photograph by Troy Cashen



Photographs by Sean Davey

This summer saw the greatest use of aircraft for firefighting operations ever seen in NSW with the numbers peaking at over ninety tactical and transport aircraft. This of course stretched the resources of all agencies in terms of management and logistics infrastructure. Most aviation specialists were deployed on numerous occasions to fires as far apart as the north and south coasts. Many recently trained specialists received their first operational experience.

Specialists from NPWS, Victoria, South Australia and Western Australia once again supported NSW Rural Fire Service Air Operations in the air and on the ground as well as at various levels of incident management. Similarly aircraft from Victoria and Queensland joined the aerial assault, as did two helicopters from New Zealand and four from the Royal Australian Navy.

Fuelling specialists from the Army operated two forward area refueling points for an extended period at the Baulkham Hills, Hawkesbury and Blue Mountains fires. Other Defence assets supported logistics and remote sensing efforts.

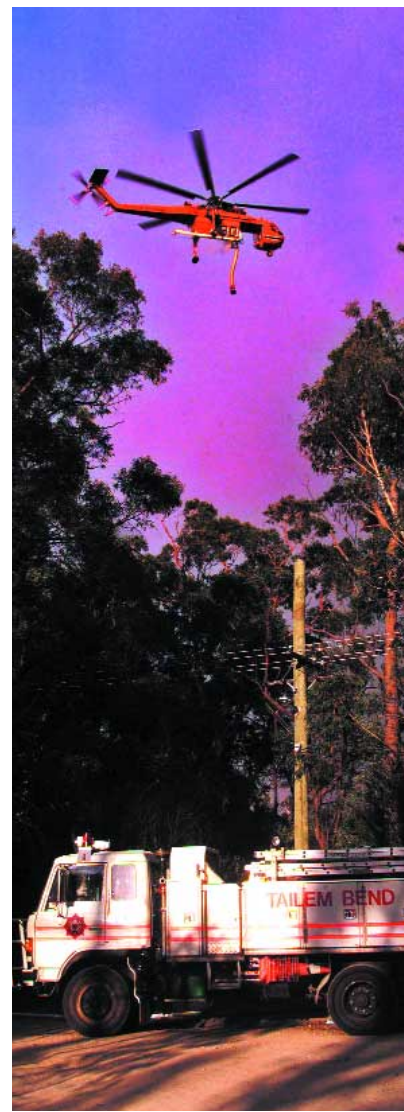
NSW Rural Fire Service Geographic Information Systems (GIS) were supported by numerous assets including broad area surveillance by NSW Police, infrared linescanning by no less than three aircraft and extended FLIR operations.

Fixed-wing fire bombing operations were conducted at several fires with extended operations at Hawkesbury, Shoalhaven and Eurobodalla. NSW-based aircraft were joined by several from Victoria. Additional airbases were set up at Camden and Goulburn to add flexibility.

Media attention focussed on the arrival of the Victorian contracted air Crane 'Elvis' which was subsequently joined by two more flown in from the USA for a ten week contract. This was the first time aircraft of this size had operated in NSW and we were fortunate to have the assistance of Victorian Department of Natural Resources (NRE) in setting up the necessary command, control and logistics infrastructure in a very short time.

Well in excess of 10,000 hours were flown and 1.2M litres of fuel consumed, including 400,000 litres in 200 litre drums. Three significant serious accidents resulting in the write-off of each aircraft occurred during this period. Fortunately, there were no major injuries but these statistics serve to remind us all of the need for safe practices at all times.

Tony Griffiths



THE A.C.T. FIRES

AT THIS POINT IT WAS OBVIOUS THAT WE WERE NOT GOING TO STOP THIS FIRE IN A HURRY. IT THREATENED THE EDGES OF FIVE CANBERRA SUBURBS.



Photograph by Sean Dovey

At around the same time that many parts of the NSW Hunter, Metropolitan and Illawarra were going into high flammability, so too was the ACT Region. We knew that the risk of a serious fire was steadily increasing, and we were watching what was happening in NSW. On the morning of Xmas Eve, the weather forecast was: temperature 28° degree C, relative humidity 16%, W to NW Winds of 40km/hr, gusting to 50.

A fire started just east of the airport in the late morning, and gave everyone a good exercise in skills that would be needed later.

The Uriarra Road leads down to the Murrumbidgee River from town. On the north is the grazing land of the valley of the Molonglo River; on the south is the scenic Mount Stromlo, home to pine trees and astronomers. At 13:31 three of our four fire towers reported a smoke plume from the northwest corner of the pines. This was called the Huntly fire. At 13:36 a second smoke plume was reported from a site 4.5km downwind from the first. This was called the Coppins Crossing fire.

Both were reported to be building rapidly. We responded units to the full weight-of-attack for the readiness on the day. At 13:39 reports started coming back that we needed a lot more than that.

In the ACT, the Bushfire Service is responsible for all bushfires. It uses the resources of the volunteers and all land management agencies – rangers, foresters and park workers alike. It also works closely with the ACT Fire Brigade.

The Huntly fire was burning in grassland with scattered trees on a steep upper slope. The grass fire was spreading at faster than walking pace. It crowned in the trees along the roadside. It threatened a paintball area. One of our officers went in and saw cars parked, but no-one was to be seen. Perhaps they thought it was a ruse by the “enemy”.

Crews were able to stop the fire just as it reached a series of homesteads and sheds, and even saved a full hay shed. It was stopped 130 m short of the pine plantation on Mount Stromlo.

It took many days to reopen the road, due to the danger from falling trees - chainsaw operators were to be in high demand. In the end only 33 hectares were burnt, but the main impact was on reducing crew availability for later fires.

The Coppins Crossing fire spread rapidly in grazing land down to the Molonglo River. Before crews could round it up, it crossed the River and started an uphill run in a pine plantation. With a mix of slash, young pines and mature pines, the fire behaviour was variable – but always spectacular.

At this point it was obvious that we were not going to stop this fire in a hurry. It threatened the edges of five Canberra suburbs. We issued the SEWS alert to the community for the first time, along with advice to the residents of those suburbs to take certain steps to increase their safety. SEWS (the Standard Emergency Warning Signal) is a distinctive sound broadcast over radio or television. [The signal sounds like a wailing siren. You can hear the signal by dialling 1800 24 SEWS

(1800 24 7397).] Residents needed little prompting to act due to the pair of very large, very dark smoke plumes passing very close by.

The fire crossed the main north-south road in Canberra (Tuggeranong Parkway) and burnt down to the shores of Lake Burley Griffin. It entered the grounds of both the National Zoo & Aquarium and the Governor-General’s residence. Fire crews were wary of what to do should the bears or leopards get free. The Parkway road and many others in the area would remain closed for many days, again due to the threat from falling trees.

The fire veered a little to the right and burnt right to the edge of the suburb of Curtin, and in fact to within 800m of our Headquarters. Around here it threatened horse riding schools, motels, a Military Staff College and a number of sites on Heritage Lists.

This fire destroyed millions of dollars of plantation pines, and eventually burnt out many hectares. In its last run it crossed another of our main arterial roads

HUNDREDS OF
OUR PAID STAFF
AND VOLUNTEERS
MISSED CHRISTMAS
– SOMETHING
THAT WE SHARED
WITH OUR NSW
COLLEAGUES.



Photograph by Sean Davey

and was pulled up next to the Australian Mint.

The exact area of this fire will never be known because it was overrun by a third fire (the Blewitts Fire), which was lit deliberately in very heavy pine slash 1.5km upwind. Being in such heavy fuels (up to 150 tonnes per hectare) it burnt ferociously and could not be approached. Even though burning downslope, the wind was sufficient to quickly whip it into a spreading fire. Now there were three large smoke plumes, and many of the fire crews were growing nervous about the activity of the arsonists. Later a pipe bomb was defused, by the Police Bomb Squad, near where this fire reached the crews working on the Coppins Crossing fire. The two fires merged and became the Stromlo Fire. The Stromlo Fire burnt a total of over 1200 hectares.

Now with almost all fire vehicles deployed and planning under way for the night shift, we became stretched to the limit when new fires were reported. At 16:00, just

after a fire tower reported winds at 90km/hr, we had a fire reported at the foot of Red Hill. This Nature Park is just south of the Lake, borders many embassies and is surrounded by suburbs. It is also downwind of the other three fires. This fire quickly raced uphill and crowned. It would eventually burn 170 hectares while switching between uphill and downhill runs, often as a crown fire.

At the same time that this fire was reported, we heard of another on Bruce Ridge next to the Australian Institute of Sport. This fire was also in Nature Park, in Scribbly Gum and Stringybark woodland, and rapidly became a crown fire. It was 5km upwind of the heart of Canberra and added another large smoke plume to the urban landscape. One hundred hectares of this park would be charred.

Not since 1985 had there been such a high demand on our resources. But the next day was going to be similar, and we expected more fires. We were right.

A fire was lit near Oaks Estate, which is an outer suburb of Canberra, just across the railway line from Queanbeyan. Fortunately for us our colleagues from NSW took on much of the effort at this fire. It burnt 100 hectares and was stopped from entering an industrial estate and from jumping the railway.

Another was lit on Wanniasa Hills above the southern suburb of McArthur. It was rounded up just before reaching houses, and was small at 17 hectares.

We were amazed that other fires like the ten hectare fire that burnt into Canberra University were handled with so little attention, when they would normally have been of such high profile.

The fact that the winds held on WNW for so long made suppression easy for us. Had there been significant wind swings or major fronts come through we would have struggled to achieve what we did. In the end the ACT lost lots of pine trees and lots of fencing – worth millions. But we

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Photograph by Adam Hollingworth

lost no-one, had few injuries, and lost no structures (apart from some minor rural ones).

Hundreds of our paid staff and volunteers missed Christmas – something that we shared with our NSW colleagues. Our community was united and supports our efforts. All levels of Government and all agencies worked together tirelessly. As I've said we got full support from NSW crews – who were later drawn into the fight further north. We hosted a major task force from the Victorian Country Fire Authority, who provided valuable manpower just when our own crews were feeling exhausted.

Helicopters proved valuable at all of the fires. It was so easy for fires to crown that it was consistently difficult for direct attack to succeed. We did no backburning. Partly this was because there was often no room for one to work, and partly because with the strong winds there was little margin for error. The only evacuations were of tourists from a motel and a tourist park.

All up over 1600 hectares burnt. While our fires showed up on satellite imagery, they didn't fill the image like the ones around Sydney did. We had over 50km of fire perimeters to patrol, and for up to 3 weeks afterwards smoke could be seen rising from the fire grounds. Salvage logging continues today and will for months to come. Restoring some of the historic landscape around the lake will take a long time. The firefighters received a civic reception late in February. And our community took a much more responsible approach to fire – the activity levels for January were right down.

Rick McRae
ACT Emergency Services Bureau



FIRE REPORTS 07 HAWKESBURY

Hawkesbury Fires

24 December to 23 January

Area of fires

112,607 Hectares

Perimeter of fires

455 Kilometres



FOR THE SECOND TIME IN DECEMBER 2001, HAWKESBURY RURAL FIRE DISTRICT WAS PRESENTED WITH A FIRE EVENT WITH VERY SERIOUS POTENTIAL.

Fires: Vale of Avoca, Grahame Creek, Limit Hill 2

For the second time in December 2001, Hawkesbury Rural Fire District on 24 December was presented with a fire event with very serious potential. This potential was soon to be realised, as deteriorating weather conditions saw fire behaviour, the likes of which tested the memories of even our most seasoned firefighters. Unfortunately, this fire behaviour was to persist over a period of two weeks, creating a campaign firefighting situation which saw a number of communities threatened by fire and associated property loss.

Again the emergency services, community groups and individuals of the Hawkesbury and beyond came together to suppress what was the most serious fire situation seen for many decades. The ability of these services to integrate for a single purpose is to be commended.

While thoughts are with those who lost their property through these fires, it is generally felt that the outcome may have been much worse if not for the efforts of those firefighters at the firefront. These people defended property in the most abysmal conditions and at serious personal risk. To do this without loss of life or serious injury is testimony to the training and awareness of the RFS. They also persisted when necessary, around the clock, to contain fires over many hundreds of kilometres of perimeter over a period of 29 days. Many sacrificing their Christmas and New Year celebrations, family and friends, holidays and business to do so. Special mention should be made of those crews from interstate and RFS out of area who chose to give their time during this emergency.

The following pages, while summarising the events of the campaign, in no way reflect the sense of emergency, stress or emotion associated with such an event. The ability of individuals



Photograph by Nick Moir

to ignore these aspects and get on with the job should not be forgotten.

Declaration of Section 44

Due to the potential of particularly the Vale of Avoca and Grahame Creek fires under forecast predicted weather conditions, it was recommended to the Commissioner of the NSW Rural Fire Service that a declaration under Section 44 of the *Rural Fires Act 1997* occur. This declaration became effective from 2300hrs on Monday 24 December.

Monday 24 December

Vale of Avoca

Status - Going

Initial direct flank attack supported later by aerial water bombing. Ground crews continued with direct attack with limited success and were subsequently withdrawn due to increasing fire activity and fatigue. Recognition of potential impact on Grose Vale, Grose Wold, Bowen Mt and Yarramundi areas with a further potential impact to the east of the Nepean River under extreme weather conditions. Identification

and preparation of control lines overnight for indirect attack.

Grahame Creek

Status - Going

Immediate recognition of major property threat to the areas of Blaxland Ridge, Kurrajong Heights and Kurrajong, based on historical movement of fires from this area under extreme weather conditions. The fire was burning in inaccessible country. Aerial recon carried out. Aerial water-bombing carried out to attempt to limit the movement of fire into topography, which would promote the movement of the fire towards the areas mentioned above. Potential containment lines identified.

Tuesday 25 December

Vale of Avoca

Status - Going

Continuation of preparation of control lines. Activation of property protection strategies in Grose Vale and Grose Wold areas during extreme weather conditions promoting erratic fire behaviour. Activation of property protection strategies in Yarramundi area, following

spotfire activity south of the Grose River. Moderating weather conditions later in the evening allowed implementation of direct, parallel and indirect strategies to contain the fire to identified containment lines.

Grahame Creek

Status – Going

Aerial monitoring of fire movement. Water-bombing of predicted spotfires to minimise fire movement. Ground patrol of Mountain Lagoon Rd to monitor any impact on assets from fire. Brigade briefed regarding possible need for preparation of property protection strategies in Blaxland Ridge area. Activation of property protection strategies in Blaxland Ridge area following a major fire “run” and extensive spotfire activity due to a change in wind direction and a significant increase in wind speed. Aircraft tasked to property protection roles. All available local resources committed to property protection as fire moved into the areas east of Blaxland Ridge and toward East Kurrajong. Direct and parallel attack during the early hours of the morning to secure around homes and fire edge.

Wednesday, 26 December

Vale of Avoca

Status – Contained as of 1500hrs. Continuation of suppression strategies including backburning to bring the fire edge out to more manageable locations. Use was made of existing and improved tracks, natural advantage lines, handtool lines and property boundaries. Direct attack was employed successfully on several spotfires in previously hazard reduced area in the Mountain Ave area of Yarramundi.

Grahame Creek

Status – Going

Property protection strategies along Blaxland Ridge Rd, East Kurrajong Rd and connecting side roads and tracks. Aircraft tasked to property protection roles. Identified potential containment lines breached due to erratic fire behaviour under extreme weather conditions. Property protection strategies implemented east of Putty Rd towards Sackville, Lower Portland, Ebenezer and the Hawkesbury River. Potential containment lines which included major roads, tracks, natural

advantage lines, constructed tracks and the Hawkesbury River.

Potential containment lines identified to prevent the movement of the fire towards Kurrajong, Kurrajong Heights, Bilpin and Mountain Lagoon. Direct, parallel and indirect strategies employed during moderating weather conditions overnight to secure fire activity to identified containment lines where possible.

Limit Hill 2

Status - Going

Sitrep from Blue Mountains RFD received at 1030hrs indicating Limit Hill fire originating in Lithgow LGA had spotted across the Colo River into Hawkesbury LGA. Immediate recognition of potential serious threat to property along Putty Rd from Colo Heights and north in coming days and the Macdonald Valley in the days following. Fire was in inaccessible country burning in 1997 fuels.

Thursday, 27 December

Vale of Avoca

Status – Patrol as of 1830hrs.

Aggressive mop-up strategies to significant depth were employed on all perimeters. Extensive patrols of all perimeters including aerial patrols were programmed during the day. Water-bombing was used on an outbreak in inaccessible area north of the containment line into the Grose River. This was followed up by walking crew successfully using direct attack to suppress and mop-up.

Grahame Creek

Status – Going

Tactical backburning to secure properties, following movement of fire over West Portland Rd and Lower Colo Rd at 2400 hrs. Aerial recon to identify extension of fire to the north and identify possible containment lines. Direct attack and parallel attack on spotover at Wheeny Gap with aerial support. Combination of direct, parallel and indirect attack used in all divisions to secure identified containment lines. Possible containment lines including fall back options in all divisions identified.

DIRECT ATTACK WAS EMPLOYED SUCCESSFULLY ON SEVERAL SPOTFIRES IN PREVIOUSLY HAZARD REDUCED AREA IN THE MOUNTAIN AVE AREA OF YARRAMUNDI

Limit Hill 2

Status – Going

Aerial recon of fire limited due to non availability of aircraft and higher priority tasking to other fires. Limited visibility due to smoke, restricted available aircraft recon. All indications were that fire was well west of Putty Rd. Doorknock of residents performed by National Parks crews advising of current and potential threat.

Friday 28 December

Vale of Avoca

Status – Patrol

Mop-up and patrol of perimeter including aerial patrol continued.

Grahame Creek

Status – Going

Mop-up and patrol of Bull Ridge Division. Backburn, secure and property protection as required within identified containment lines in Cedar Ridge Division. Direct attack with aerial support on fire in Wheeny Gap. Mop-up and patrol completed backburns in “The Islands”. Established dozer lines in Blaxland Ridge Division.

ALL AVAILABLE LOCAL RESOURCES COMMITTED TO PROPERTY PROTECTION.





Photograph by Matt Black

Backburn from established control lines in Blaxland Ridge Division. Fire identified north of Wheeny Creek Lower Portland at 1915hrs, resulting in the backburning of Comleroy Rd to Upper Colo Rd, Putty Rd to Upper Colo Rd, Upper Colo Rd. Aerial ignition of ridge tops above Lower Colo Rd and backburning along Putty Rd & Lower Colo Rd.

Limit Hill 2
Status – Going

Ground recon confirmed reports of fire close to Colo Heights as being the Limit Hill 2 fire. Residents of Colo Heights and surrounds advised of current and potential situation by a letterbox drop. Aerial recon carried out. Local prevailing weather conditions varied significantly from forecast and observations at Wilberforce. (Colo Heights weather station unserviceable) Fire activity and rate of spread significant due prevailing weather conditions.

Containment lines identified, being Putty Rd, Bob Turners Track and Grassy Hill Track. Fallback options include Womerah Trail,

Macdonald River, Cerone's Track and Culoul Range Track.

Saturday 29 December
Vale of Avoca

Status – Patrol
Aerial and ground patrols.

Grahame Creek
Status – Being Controlled

Prepared line at Gaspers Ridge backburnt at night. Other mop-up and backburning activities. Successful water-bombing in Wheeny Gap area to slow rate of spread as fire was burning in fuels from a 1997 hazard reduction.

Limit Hill 2
Status – Going

Air attack by fixed wing aircraft to slow fire progress aborted due to poor visibility due to smoke. Control line preparation carried out. Given the fire location, previous rate of spread and forecast weather conditions, backburning of control lines was performed overnight to secure properties from approaching fire-front. Difficulty experienced, with burning along Grassy Hill Trail due to cooler temperatures and higher humidities.

Sunday 30 December

Vale of Avoca
Status – Patrol
Aerial and ground patrols.

Grahame Creek
Status – Being Controlled
Water-bombing Wheeny Gap fire – including use of Air Crane. Suspected arson activity at Bells Line of Road, Mountain Lagoon Rd and Burralow Trail.

Fire difficult to contain to the Wheeny Gap area despite concentrated efforts to hold fire with aircraft over the previous two days. Backburning operations commenced from Wheeny Gap Fire Trail – Rossi's paddock – Cut Rock – Bells Line of Road to Glenara Road. Property protection in place in Warks Hill Rd, Coach House Place and Connelly's Track in event of spotfires.

Limit Hill 2
Status – Going

Preparation of Cerone's Track completed as fallback option should Bob Turners Track be breached. Improvement of Culoul Range Track by machine for fallback option should Grassy Hill

Track be breached. Deepening of Colo Heights backburn considered if conditions allowed. Poor visibility due to smoke delaying aerial recon and plotting of fire edge and backburn depth. Fire spotted over Bob Turners Track into remote country, hampering suppression activities. Cerone's Track became the containment line. Fire spotted over the Putty Rd and was water-bombed with ground crews supporting. This outbreak was contained. Fire spotted over Grassy Hill Track. Culoul Range Track became the containment line. Backburning of Cerone's and Culoul Range Tracks overnight. Light rain fell, restricting the effective movement of backburn. Mop-up and patrol of established control lines continued.

Monday 31 December
Vale of Avoca

Status – Patrol
Aerial and Ground patrols continued.



Grahame Creek

Status – Being Controlled

Improvement of dozer line and hand tool line in preparation for backburning behind properties along Bells Line of Road.

Limit Hill 2

Status – Going

Mopped up and patrolled established control lines. Established of dozer line behind properties to the south of Colo Heights village in event of spotting across Cerone's Track. Aerial recon of extension of fire towards Mountain Lagoon. Fire spotted over Putty Rd at Grassy Hill. Two further fires 2km east of Putty Road of questionable origin, given weather conditions at the time. Aerial observation reported four separate fires burning in a straight line in the bush adjacent to a power line access track. Six helicopters and one fixed-wing aircraft worked on these fires, but they continued to move east. Crews withdrawn from Culoul Range Track due to erratic fire behaviour. Recognised potential for fire to spot across the Colo River to the South at

Mailes Ridge. Extension and deepening of backburning overnight in Cerone's Track.

Tuesday 1 January

Vale of Avoca

Status – Patrol

Aerial and ground patrols continued.

Grahame Creek

Status - Going

Mopping up and patrol activity continued. Property protection in Kurrajong Heights as fire spotted across Bells Line of Road. Hazard reduced (Sept 2001) area on Tabaraga Ridge restricted southern progression of fire towards Bowen Mountain. At approximately 1600hrs, decision taken to evacuate some residents from Coach House Place was implemented. Police advised to evacuate parts of Warks Hill Road, Burrellow Road and Rain Ridge Road. Residents were allowed to return to their homes at approximately 1900hrs.

Limit Hill 2

Status – Going

There was a significant north-westerly air stream with very low



Photograph by Sean Davey

humidity which resulted in erratic fire behaviour when the winds abated later in the day. North-west winds reactivated the fire east of Putty Road. Aerial water-bombing tasked. Identification of possible containment lines both close and broad using machinery took place. Spotfire activity on Mailes Ridge to the South of the Colo River. Strategic backburning as required to protect property. Fire crossed Cerone's Track in two places and was contained. Further fires remained uncontained. Fire crossed the Putty Rd at Devils Hole, and crews performed

property protection and attempted to contain. Other spotovers across Putty Rd contained. Aerial recon of south-west movement of fire towards Mountain Lagoon.

Wednesday 2 January

Vale of Avoca

Status – Patrol

Ground and aerial patrols.

Grahame Creek

Status – Going

Fire movement into Burrellow Valley and Bowen Mt monitored and letter box drop of Bowen Mt properties. Strategic preparation



Photographs by Troy Cashen

for potential fire impact at Bowen Mt. Bowen Mt Evacuation Plan activated at 1500hrs, in response to location of fire (being within 2km of Bowen Mountain), prevailing weather conditions (NW gusting to 50kph on fireground) and required lead time of the Evacuation Plan to notify residents, being 6-8 hours. Aerial water-bombing used to slow fire progress and property protection at Kurrajong Heights.

AERIAL WATER-BOMBING CARRIED OUT TO ATTEMPT TO LIMIT THE MOVEMENT OF FIRE INTO TOPOGRAPHY.

Limit Hill 2

Status - Going

Attempt to contain spot fires over Cerone's Track unsuccessful due to erratic fire behaviour. Property protection along Putty Rd and Wheelbarrow Ridge Rd as fire spotted across Putty Rd at various locations. Evacuation of Putty Rd, Wheelbarrow Ridge Rd and other side roads in affected area at 1445hrs. Evacuation of Elim Heights Youth Camp (Womerah Track) due to fire moving north on east side of Putty Rd. Aerial recon impossible due to poor visibility. Fire crossed Culoul Range Track and moved north on both sides of Putty Rd. Units on fireground moved with extreme caution due to highly erratic fire behaviour. Womerah Track identified as potential containment line to the north and east in conjunction with Webbs Ck, to the south - Webbs Ck Fire trail, Wheelbarrow Ridge Fire Trail and Wheelbarrow Ridge Rd. Aerial recon of south west movement of fire towards Mountain Lagoon.

Thursday 3 January

Vale of Avoca

Status - Patrol

Ground and aerial patrols.

Grahame Creek

Status - Going

Containment works at Kurrajong Heights, Bells Line of Road and Glenara Rd. Aerial water-bombing of fire in Buralow Valley to slow rate of spread and allow ground crew access. Containment lines identified - hesitation to backburn due to extreme night time weather, erratic fire behaviour and associated risk of introducing fire into the Grose Valley. Raft crew deployed to mop-up spot fire east of Buralow Road after water bucketing.

Limit Hill 2

Status - Going

Property protection along Putty Rd - south to Central Colo, north to Womerah Track on both sides of Putty Rd, Wheelbarrow Ridge Rd and side roads, Mailes Ridge at Upper Colo. Fire moved rapidly to the north and crossed the Womerah Track. Units on fireground moved with extreme caution. Tanker movement on

Putty Rd hindered due to fallen trees (later removed by SES). Howes Range Track identified as potential containment line to the north and the Macdonald River to the east. Kings Waterhole Trail identified as northern containment line to the west of the Putty Rd. Aerial recon of south-west movement of fire towards Mountain Lagoon.

Friday 4 January

Vale of Avoca

Status - Patrol

Air and ground patrols.

Grahame Creek

Status - Going

Property protection and containment strategies undertaken along Bells Line of Road. Construction of containment lines behind properties along Bells Line of Road. Water-bombing occurred in Buralow Valley to reduce rate of spread and support ground crews in restricting movement of fire in Buralow Creek. Contained fire to western side of Buralow Creek. Fall back option activated after fire crossed Patterson Range Trail.

Existing fire trail network behind properties at Bowen Mt improved in preparation for backburning if required. Containment lines to the west along Bells Line of Road identified. Overnight RAFT crew unable to locate spot-fire on the eastern side of the September 2001 hazard reduction which posed a threat to the community of Bowen Mountain. Daytime RAFT crew successfully located and blacked out fire.

Limit Hill 2

Status – Going

Plotting of fire edges impossible due to smoke. Movement of fire towards Mountain Lagoon, Mt Tootie and Mt Irvine was monitored. Containment lines were established around properties in preparation. Fire moved north to the vicinity of Tinda Creek. Several isolated properties protected. Community meeting of residents in Macdonald Valley arranged.

Saturday 5 January

Vale of Avoca

Status – Patrol

Ground and aerial patrols.

Photographs by Matt Black



Photographs by Adam Hollingworth

Grahame Creek

Status – Going

Containment line preparation southern end Browns Ridge Trail. Backburn Burrellow Fire Trail & Browns Ridge Fire Trail. Water bombing to support ground crews. Containment lines identified east of Bowen Mt if backburning required. Mop-up and patrol of other containment lines.

Limit Hill 2

Status – Going

Containment lines identified and established for the Nayook Division (Mountain Lagoon, Mt Tootie, Mt Irvine) Preparation of Wheelbarrow and Webbs Creek Fire Trails in preparation for backburning overnight. Property protection along Putty Rd from Central Colo to Tinda Creek. Howes Range Track prepared as northern containment line. Community meeting information prepared for residents of Macdonald Valley to prevent an uncoordinated approach to backburning and to assist with information flow.

Sunday 6 January

Vale of Avoca

Status – Patrol

Ground and aerial patrols.

Grahame Creek

Status – Being Controlled

Continuation of the containment of the southern and western control lines. Backburning occurred along Pattersons Range Trail and Browns Ridge Trail. Water-bombing support and ground crews and contained fire to north of Grose River. Property protection lines prepared behind properties on southern and northern side of Bells Line of Road.

Limit Hill 2

Status – Going

Ground crews, helicopters and fixed wing aircraft worked to contain fire to Howes Range Track. Aerial recon of Macdonald River showed river bed to be dry. Investigation of potential control lines to the north west showed natural advantage lines to be unsuitable. Mellong Creek was dry, Long Wheene was marginal. Aerial recon of fire shows little movement. Letterbox drop of residents of Webbs Creek. Backburning of Kilo Sector to prevent south easterly fire extension. Aerial ignition of the ridges to effect deepening of backburn

took place, reducing possibility of spotfire activity to the south of the existing containment line which would have necessitated falling back to Greens Road on the Hawkesbury River. Easing property threat allowed resourcing of containment strategies.

Monday 7 January

Vale of Avoca

Status – Patrol

Aerial and ground patrols.

Grahame Creek

Status – Being Controlled

Overnight rain significantly reduced threat. Crews withdrawn due to slippery and dangerous track surfaces. Aerial recon and essential patrols only programmed. Extensive water-bombing of hotspots, pockets of active fire and smokers.

Limit Hill 2

Status – Being Controlled at 1200hrs.

Overnight rain of around 25mm greatly reduced fire activity. Identification of close containment lines to minimise area burnt. Movement of vehicles difficult due to boggy conditions. Water-bombing of any hotspots or re-ignitions.

Tuesday 8 January

Vale of Avoca

Status – Patrol

Ground and aerial patrols.

Grahame Creek

Status – Being Controlled

Aerial recon used to identify hotspots remaining after rain. RAFT crews deployed for mop-up of hotspots. Close containment option investigated along Mt Lagoon Road.

Limit Hill 2

Status – Being Controlled

Close containment line between Howes Range Track and Womerah Trail investigated. Bulldozers tasked to construct lines. Handtool line required to link dozer lines. Fixed and rotary wing aircraft supported work by slowing rate of spread of any reignition and monitoring threat to crews.

Wednesday 9 January

Vale of Avoca

Status – Patrol

Ground and aerial patrols.



Photographs by Sean Davey



Photographs by Adam Hollingworth

DIRECT ATTACK USING BULLDOZERS TO CONTAIN FIRE IN HOWES SECTOR WITH GROUND CREW AND AERIAL SUPPORT OF FIVE FIXED-WING AIRCRAFT.

Grahame Creek

Status – Being Controlled

Aerial recon of fireground took place. RAFT crews deployed to mop-up hotspots. Tactical backburning to secure properties along Mt Lagoon Rd.

Limit Hill 2

Status – Being Controlled

Warmer conditions resulted in an increase in fire activity. Mop-up and patrol of all established lines. Fire crossed the Howes Range Track at the Putty Rd end. Wallaby Swamp Track became potential fallback line. Preferred option was to stop the fire progressing through the Wallaby Swamp,

which would make suppression difficult. Aerial recon continued, identifying any reignition or hotspots. These were attended by RAFT crews and helicopters.

Thursday 10 January

Vale of Avoca

Status – Patrol

Ground and aerial patrols.

Grahame Creek

Status – Being Controlled.

Aerial recon and water bombing as required. Tactical backburning along Mountain Lagoon Rd. Control line identified – Pup Rd to Mountain Lagoon Rd.

Limit Hill 2

Status – Being Controlled

Further increase in fire activity resulted in abandoning close containment strategy to the east of the Putty Rd. Fallback option became Womerah Trail, Webbs Creek. Dozer work on Kings Waterhole Track completed through to Mellong Creek. Water-bombing slowed rate of spread in Mellong Sector. Dozer work on Wallaby Swamp Track continued through to short of the Macdonald River. Handtool line needed to link to River. Water-bombing of hotspots in Nayook Division. Letterbox drop completed in Macdonald Valley.



Photograph by Sean Davey

ONE TANKER BOGGED IN IVORY SECTOR AND ABANDONED UNTIL ABLE TO REMOVE.



Photographs by Adam Hollingworth

Friday 11 January

Vale of Avoca
Status – Patrol
 Ground and aerial patrols.

Grahame Creek
Status – Being Controlled
 Mop-up and patrol of containment lines. Aerial recon and water-bombing of hotspots.

Limit Hill 2
Status – Being Controlled
 Backburning of Mellong Sector completed. Bulldozer lines begun in Melon and Ivory sectors, as close containment strategy. Direct attack using bulldozers to contain fire in Howes Sector with ground crew and air support of five fixed wing aircraft. Work continued on establishing fallback containment lines. NPWS RAFT crews were deployed into Nayook Division.

Saturday 12 January
Vale of Avoca
Status – Patrol
 Ground and aerial patrols.

Grahame Creek
Status – Being Controlled
 Prepared dozer lines from north and south into Wheeney Creek. Tactical backburning along Mountain Lagoon Rd. Water-bombing of Gaspers Ridge.

Limit Hill 2
Status – Being Controlled
 Concentrated effort in Howes Sector to suppress fire with direct attack using bulldozers, fixed and rotary wing aircraft, with ground crews deploying extensive hose lays. Direct attack by ground crews in Terraborra Sector with helicopter support. Raft crews deployed into Nayook Division. Aerial recon and water-bombing as required. Dozer lines in Melon and Ivory sectors continued.

Sunday 13 January
Vale of Avoca
Status – Out
 Aerial recon has shown no activity from fireground over the previous 10 days.

Grahame Creek
Status – Being Controlled
 Identified Handtool line into Wheeney Creek. Concentrated

efforts were made to secure perimeters, ie Pup Road, Pattersons, Gaspers Ridge and Flat Rock.

Limit Hill 2
 Direct attack on fire in Gibba Sector in an effort to prevent need to use fallback lines. Trail preparation in Melon and Ivory Sectors continued. Water-bombing of Mellong Sector to slow rate of spread towards Mellong Creek. Extensive commitment to Howes Sector of both aerial and ground resources. Raft Crews deployed into Nayook Division.

Direct attack of fire edge in Fleetwing Sector. Active fire located through the south eastern extension of the fire, necessitating the improvement of the Womerah Track as the fallback option.

Monday 14 January
Grahame Creek
Status – Being Controlled
 Backburning took place along Mountain Lagoon Rd. Ground and aerial Patrols. Containment line from Pup Rd to Wheeney Creek completed.



Photographs by Sean Davey

Limit Hill 2

Status – Being Controlled

Completion of trail preparation in Melon and Ivory Sectors. Handtool line to link Sectors completed. Backburning took place in evening. Direct attack with helicopter support in Delta Sector. Direct attack with helicopter support in Fleetwing Sector. Water-bombing of smokers and hot-spots in Nayook Division. Womerah Track prepared for backburning in event of uncontained fire activity in Terraborra Sector.

Tuesday 15 January

Grahame Creek

Status – Being Controlled

Ground and air attack on Gospers Ridge. Light drizzle during evening hampered ground operations.

Limit Hill 2

Status – Being Controlled

Aerial ignition of Melon and Ivory Sectors to deepen backburn. Planning underway for backburning of Womerah Track (26km), including complex logistical and resourcing issues. Necessary due to reignition of fire activity, following rain, in Terraborra and Webbs Creek Division. Backburning and aerial ignition took place in Wards sector. Water bombing in Howes Sector slowed rate of spread. Priority given to Northern containment lines. Rain falling over all fire grounds in early evening.

Wednesday 16 January

Grahame Creek

Status – Being Controlled

Water-bombing supported ground crews at Gospers Ridge.

Light drizzle fell during the day.



Photographs by Matt Black

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Photographs by Sean Davey

Limit Hill 2

Status – Being Controlled

Overnight rain of varied amounts affected all firegrounds. Active fire edges knocked down by rain. Proposed backburn of Womerah Track postponed until Friday at earliest. Vehicle movement on tracks impossible. One tanker bogged in Ivory Sector and abandoned. RAFT Crew inserted into Nayook Division. Aerial recon and plotting of fire edge including FLIR run of Limit Hill 2 West and Nayook Division. Given minimal fire activity it was decided to identify hotspots, smokers and other areas of concern, for direct attack using RAFT crews and aerial support (to prevent any further fire activity when warmer weather returned). Containment lines that were able to be accessed by tankers mopped up and patrolled.

Limit Hill 2

Status – Being Controlled

Use of RAFT crews to mop-up hotspots and smokers with aerial support.

Friday 18 January

Grahame Creek

Status – Patrol as at 1600hrs. Both ground and aerial mop-up and patrol.

Limit Hill 2

Status – Being Controlled

RAFT crews, with aerial support, dealt with hot-spots and smokers.

Saturday 19 January

Grahame Creek

Status – Patrol

Ground and aerial patrols.

Limit Hill 2

Status – Being Controlled

RAFT crews dealt with reignition at Webbs Creek and mopped up hot-spots in Wards Sector and North of Womerah Track supported by aircraft. Crews withdrawn due to storm warning.

Sunday 20 January

Grahame Creek

Status – Patrol

Ground and aerial patrols.

Limit Hill 2

Status – Contained

RAFT crews inserted to mop-up as required.

Monday 21 January

Grahame Creek

Status – Patrol

Ground and aerial patrols. RAFT crew inserted into Flatrock Sector.

Limit Hill 2

Status – Contained

Insertion of RAFT crew into Ivory Sector. Aerial patrol of fireground perimeters. All edges secure except for logs burning close to containment lines on Womerah Track 1km east of Gorricks Trail intersection.

Tuesday 22 January

Grahame Creek

Status – Patrol

Ground and aerial patrols.

Limit Hill 2

Status – Contained

Logs on Womerah Track mopped up by ground crews. Aerial patrol of all perimeters proved all control lines secure. FLIR technology not available due to equipment failure.

Wednesday 23 January

Grahame Creek

Status – Patrol

Limit Hill 2

Status – Contained

as at 0800hrs

Due to fires now being listed as “Patrol” and “Contained” status as at 0800 hrs, more favourable weather conditions and little fireground activity, the Section 44 declaration was revoked as of 0800hrs on Wednesday 23 January. Both fires were handed over to the NPWS as Class 1 Incidents.



WHEN IT'S ALL SAID AND DONE, IT'S A MIND GAME FOR THE FIREFIGHTERS ON THE GROUND, THE FIRE MANAGERS AND THE FAMILIES BACK AT HOME, AN OFTEN FORGOTTEN BUT NO LESS IMPORTANT COMPONENT.

CAMPAIGN FIRES



Photograph by Adam Hollingworth

The recent fire emergency in NSW saw dozens of campaign fires burning, often in remote areas, hiding from the media's attention and cameras, but no less dangerous and threatening than their city fringe dwellers. Campaign fires such as the Spencer Fire in Gosford District, that sadly consumed some 70% of Dhurug National Park and ran for over two weeks, are a special breed of beast. They bring out the toughness and resoluteness in our volunteer firefighters on the ground, and in those running the fire.

Into this inferno throw in a potpourri of regional weather changes, daily temperature and humidity cycles, unpredictable local wind changes, terrain factors, communication challenges and medium-term firefighter fatigue. When it's all said and done, it's a mind game for the firefighters on the ground, the fire managers and the families back at home, an often forgotten but no less important component.

These fires are always there tomorrow, next day, and next weekend. They become further physically and psychologically demanding as they relentlessly advance, hungry to consume even more dry fuel, whatever is in their way. They inevitably get bigger demanding increasing firefighting resources, 24-hour planning and firefighting, and tolerance. They throw heat at us, stinging smoke and cinders into our eyes, make our nasal passages run like we have chronic hay fever and remind us what it must be like to be a heavy smoker. In all this it is still "hurry up and wait", still a mind game. Who can last the longer?

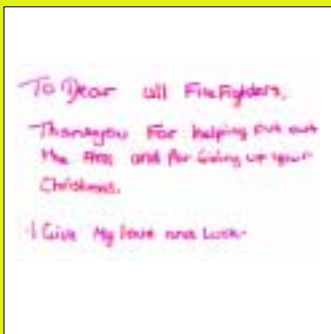
Campaign fires appear to us to be alive and without exception are treated with the utmost respect; their direction and speed often unpredictable not unlike a rogue elephant. Yes, they are truly living and dynamic with an almost innate intelligence and a mind of their own. During one of these campaigns it's not uncommon to hear talk such as

"it's taking another run", "it's sleeping", "we've got to cut it off before it changes its mind again", "if it breaks out we won't be able to catch it", "we have to outsmart it" "what does it have in store for us tomorrow", "when it creeps up this gully we will be there waiting for it, it won't know what hit it" and "we've got it beat".

At the time, campaign fires are seemingly there forever, but they never last. Otherwise we could never get back to our families for rest and comfort. Are they alive? You bet your life they are.

Larry Cook
Wamberal Bushfire Brigade

CAMPAIGN FIRES APPEAR TO US TO BE ALIVE AND WITHOUT EXCEPTION ARE TREATED WITH THE UTMOST RESPECT; THEIR DIRECTION AND SPEED OFTEN UNPREDICTABLE NOT UNLIKE A ROGUE ELEPHANT.



To The Fire Man and Women Thank
you for Saving lots of houses and the
wild life you are doing a very good
job i hope when you get home
you have a good late christmas. I THINK
WOTE you are doing is very nice LOVE
Taya Friedman

THANKS FIRIES!

The media coverage of the Christmas Fires also had an impact on children. The RFS received hundreds of letters from well-wishers, but some of the most moving were received from young children. Drawings, paintings, poems and cards were received from young people who were trying to express their support the best way they knew.

Their artwork also provides us with a reminder of how the community perceives the threat of bushfires and the role that we play in protecting them. There is no more touching testimony to the efforts of all of those involved in the firefighting effort.





FIRE REPORTS

08 PENRITH/BLACKTOWN/ LIVERPOOL/FAIRFIELD



Penrith Area Fire

25 December to 30 December

Area of fire

20400 Hectares

Perimeter of fire

102.4 Kilometres

DUE TO INTENSE
AND ERRATIC
FIRE BEHAVIOUR
FIREFIGHTING
ACTIVITIES WERE
LIMITED TO
PROTECTION OF
LIFE AND PROPERTY
THROUGH
DEFENSIVE
FIREFIGHTING
OPERATIONS.

Photograph by Nick Moir

On 24 December a number of fires were burning in the Local Government Areas of Blue Mountains and Wollondilly, to the west of Penrith and Liverpool.

The Mitchell's Pass (originally known as Lennox Bridge) fire burnt from Blue Mountains LGA into the Penrith area on 24th December, in the area of the M4 Motorway at Leonay.

On the evening of 24 December, about 2100 hours, fire was reported to have crossed the Nepean River into the Penrith LGA as a result of spotting activity from the Blue Pool Fire (Blue Mountains). Spot fires occurred on National Parks & Wildlife Service-managed land in the area of the Nepean River gorge approximately 3km south of the M4 Motorway.

Resources from Penrith Rural Fire District monitored activity overnight, but the spot fires were inaccessible to firefighters.

With fire weather conditions deteriorating on the morning of 25 December, the fire intensified, and crowning was observed with significant spot-fires occurring well ahead of the main fire.

As fire intensity and spotting activity increased and fire weather conditions deteriorated further, it became obvious that this fire activity would likely attain proportions that were beyond the suppression capabilities of local resources.

It must also be noted that, subsequent to the initial Section 44 Declaration being made, further significant fire activity was experienced as a result of spotting activity from fires in adjacent LGAs.

AS A RESULT OF THE SIGNIFICANT FIRE ACTIVITY IN THE MULGOA AREA, SELF-EVACUATIONS OCCURRED FROM A NUMBER OF PROPERTIES IN FAIRLIGHT ROAD AND PARK RIVER CLOSE, MULGOA, AND PARTS OF MULGOA VILLAGE.

Weather Conditions during the Declaration

Penrith Readings

DATE	MAX. TEMP	MIN. RH	AVG. WIND	MAX. WIND	WIND DIR. ¹	RAIN MM	KBDI	FDI (GRASS)
25-12	32.2	9	26	50	NW	0	142.4	10.7
26-12	30.0	17	26	46	WNW	0	146.7	33.3
27-12	27.8	18	12	26	SE	0	147.8	2.1
28-12	29.4	26	10	19	SE	0	148.6	1.5
29-12	35.9	18	10	31	E	0	149.6	2.2
30-12	32.1	42	14	24	ESE	0	151.4	2.1



A chronological summary of this activity follows:

Approximately 1600 hours 25 December, spotfires occurred in the Greendale area (Liverpool LGA) as a result of the Mt Hall fire burning east of Warragamba (Wollondilly LGA).

Approximately 1800 hours 25 December, spotfires occurred in the area to the west of Wallacia (Penrith LGA) as a result of the Mt Hall fire burning through the Warragamba area (Wollondilly LGA).

Between 1900 hours and 2000 hours 25 December, spotfires occurred in the area to the west of Mulgoa (Penrith LGA) as a result of the Mt Hall fire (Blue Mountains LGA).

The Section 44 Declaration

The initial S44 Declaration was made effective as of 1200 hours on Tuesday 25 December, for Penrith.

Subsequent to the initial declaration, and as a result of increased fire activity and area involved, the following amendments were made :

- Blacktown and Fairfield LGAs included effective as of 1530 hours 25 December
- Liverpool LGA included effective as of 1900 hours 25 December.

Tuesday 25 December

Initial activities on 25 December were limited to monitoring and patrolling the inaccessible area where fire had spotted across the Nepean River at Regentville.

With deteriorating fire weather conditions, the fire became active over a wide area, and burned eastwards into the Fairfield LGA.

Due to intense and erratic fire behaviour, firefighting activities were limited to protection of life and property through defensive

firefighting operations. As conditions eased, direct attack took place in an effort to contain the fires. Where containment was achieved, consolidation of control lines took place overnight.

These activities applied across all involved LGAs, and continued as a result of increased fire activity occurring from spot fires in the Mulgoa, Wallacia, Greendale, Badgerys Creek and Luddenham areas later in the day.

As a result of the significant fire activity in the Mulgoa area, self-evacuations occurred from a number of properties in Fairlight Road and Park River Close, Mulgoa, and from parts of Mulgoa village.

These people evacuated to open parkland in Mulgoa village, and as a result of concerns for their welfare due to the onset of darkness



Photographs by Adam Hollingworth

EASING WEATHER CONDITIONS ALLOWED FOR ACCESS TO AREAS THAT HAD PREVIOUSLY BEEN CONSIDERED TOO DANGEROUS TO OPERATE IN DUE TO THE POSSIBILITY OF ERRATIC FIRE BEHAVIOUR.

and lack of facilities, Police and welfare agencies coordinated their relocation to an evacuation point at Glenmore Park.

Wednesday 26 December

Activities began with continued direct attack and consolidation of control lines where they existed.

As fire weather conditions again deteriorated, the focus shifted to protection of life and property. During the day, fire activity was concentrated in areas west of Mulgoa and Wallacia. Spotfires continued to cause concern in the Luddenham area.

A fire burning in the Blue Mountains LGA in a location known as Yellow Rock (to be called the Lawson Road Fire) started spotting into the Smith St Castlereagh area and the Penrith Lakes development site. Numerous fires occurred and were attended to by approximately fifteen units.

As conditions eased in to the night, efforts again concentrated on direct attack, establishment of control lines, and consolidation of those lines.

Firefighting Resources

DATE	CAT 1	CAT 2	CAT 7	CAT 9	NSW FB	BULK WATER	AIRCRAFT	STRIKE TEAMS	PERSONNEL
25-12	36	4	6	3	8	2	3	22	361
26-12	32	2	6	3	6	2	3	18	349
27-12	28	2	6	3	4	1	2	14	295
28-12	22	2	6	3	0	1	1	6	199
29-12	14	2	6	3	0	1	1	0	131
30-12	14	2	6	3	0	1	1	0	135

Thursday 27 December

With the majority of active fire edge contained, efforts were aimed at extinguishing pockets of burning fuels within burnt perimeters, to reinforce all control lines.

Spotting continued into the Castlereagh area from the Lawson Road fire.

Direct attack on those spot-fires was initiated, and mop-up and patrol operations commenced as one of the primary objectives throughout the area of the declaration.

Friday 28 December

Spotting activity again occurred in the Castlereagh area as a result of the Lawson Road fire. This resulted in fire activity in the area of Hinksman Road and Firetrail Road at Castlereagh.

Although the fire was limited to approximately 20 hectares in size, mop-up and patrol operations were undertaken in the Castlereagh area in addition to the previous fire areas.

Saturday 29 December

Resources were involved predominantly in continuing the mop-up phase of operations.

Established control lines were reinforced and large areas of burnt ground were blacked out.

Easing weather conditions allowed for access to areas that had previously been considered too dangerous to operate in due to the possibility of erratic fire behaviour.

Sunday 30 December

The predominant activities across all involved LGAs was to maintain close patrols of fire perimeters, and to mop-up any areas of concern with regard to fire crossing established lines.

The greatest risks at this stage were from burning trees falling across control lines. Felling and clearing activities continued until all concerns were alleviated.

After consideration of fire and weather conditions, and in consultation with the Penrith BFMC and agency representatives, the Incident Controller recommended that the Section 44 declaration for Penrith, Blacktown, Fairfield and Liverpool be revoked on 30 December.

The Commissioner terminated the Declaration effective as of 2000 hours on 30 December.