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Brigade Newsletter

A replacement Cat 9 arrives - the faithful warrior retires!

After some time, the long-awaited arrival of the new Cat 9 took place in December 2004.

The original Cat 9 commenced service at Glenbrook/Lapstone in September 1985. This vehicle (bottom left) was transferred to Mt Wilson on 5th Sept 1997 and was driven on that day by Peter Raines from "Fire Control to Mark's [former Brigade Captain Mark Austin] place" according to the original log book entry which was recorded with a youthfully exuberant flourish.

This vehicle served the Mt Wilson/ Mt Irvine brigades well for over 8 years and 12,930 kilometres.

After 20 years of active service in the field, that vehicle has now been retired and we have now received the replacement Twin Cab Cat 9 (below centre and right)

The replacement will carry five moderately sized Fire Fighters, instead of two in the previous Cat 9.

In addition, instead of the antiquated and dangerous crank handle pump start, we now have an electric Pump Start and plumbing similar to the existing Cat 7 truck.



Small tip—the battery isolator switch in the new Cat 9 is underneath the passenger seat!

Six Foot Track Marathon

Four Brigade members are needed to assist at the start (Katoomba) and the finish (Jenolan Caves House) on Saturday April 12th. This event is a cross-country marathon and attracts over 600 runners. All members who have assisted in previous years attest to the great time the day provides. If you would like to help out, please contact Barry Freeman ASAP

So you think it's dry now – you should have been here in the 1940's!

Everyone says it's a dry time. To confirm this, I thought I would do some research of the Bureau of Meteorology records to understand if in fact this has been the case.

The first rainfall readings were taken at "Nooroo" in 1876, and almost continuous recordings have been taken since 1887, with the exception of the period from 1911 until 1925. In 1969 Richard Prentice started taking weather readings and continues to send in daily readings to the Bureau.

The graph below shows the annual rainfall since 1887. The actual yearly rainfall is marked in blue; the ten-year moving average (which smooths annual fluctuations) is marked in pink.

As could be expected, annual rainfall has been very variable – from a maximum of 2511mm (almost 99") in 1950, to a low of 584mm (23") in 1944.

The average annual rainfall for Mt Wilson is 1233mm (48"). Interestingly, the average rainfall at Sydney is only slightly less at 1221mm (47.5").

Looking at averages over a decade, the ten years to 2004 was indeed low at 1126mm, but not as low as the decades which finished in 1909 (987mm) or 1944 (984mm).

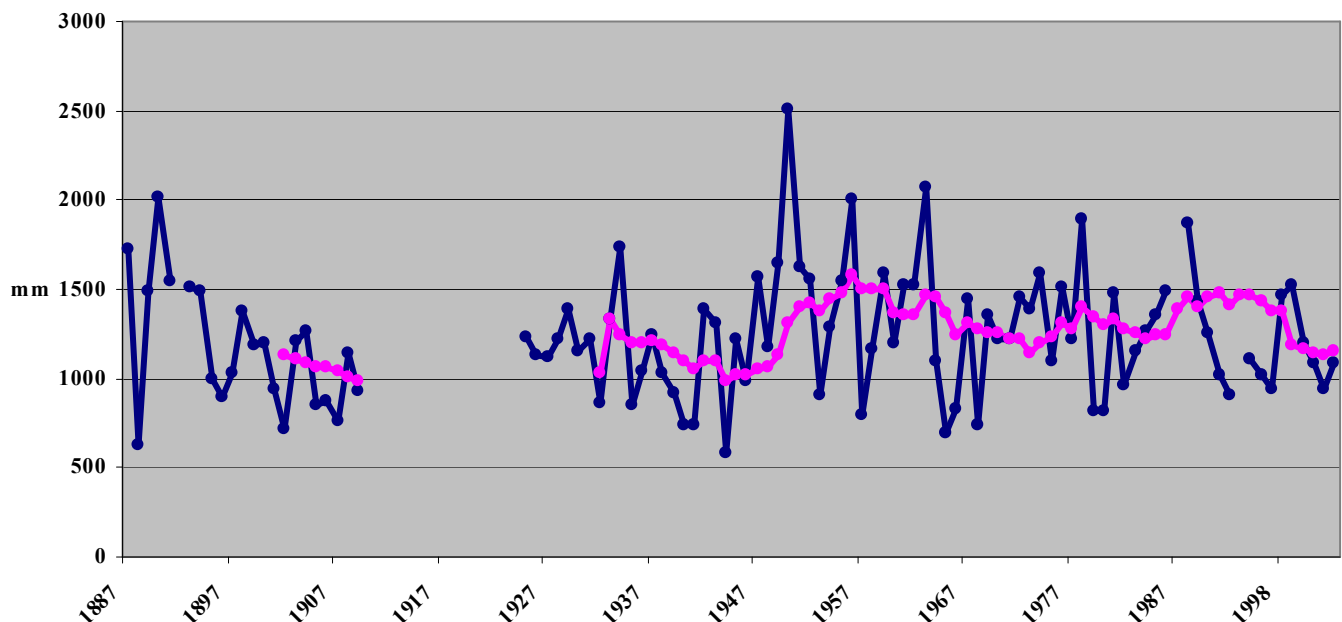
The decade to 2004 was only the 18th driest ten-year average of the 80 ten-year averages that have been recorded, putting it firmly in the lowest 25% with a percentile ranking of 22%.

Now, two questions for the weather buffs:

- What has been the highest rainfall in one month since records have been kept?
- The minimum rainfall in a month is obviously 0mm. How many months have recorded 0mm since records have been kept?

Answers to be provided in the next newsletter!

Mt Wilson Rainfall



Junior Membership

There are now 7 Junior members in the Brigade. It is planned that Junior training on a quarterly basis will be conducted in conjunction with Junior members from other West Sector Brigades. Training days are noted in the 'Diary Dates' section.

If any residents/members have 'Yellows' they are not using, please return these to Helen Freeman so that we can fit out the Junior Brigade members for training. As we are all aware, Junior Members grow at a fast rate!

Additionally, we need assistance from people who have sewing skills to alter the Yellows as required.



Find us at <http://mtwilson.rfsa.org.au>

Prescribed Burns (PBs) Hazard Reductions

In addition to two large burns that National Parks & Wildlife Service has scheduled and approved, the Brigade has a number of smaller burns approved and ready to go this Autumn. Let's all hope that the weather is kind to us this year so that they can be carried out. As well as providing some much need fuel reduction in key areas around the villages, these burns will provide some excellent actual fire-ground experience to our members.

Where a proposed burn encroaches onto private property, it is now a legal requirement that the landowner has given the Brigade their approval in writing before the burn can take place.

A list of the planned PBs is on display at the Mt Wilson Fire Station. Please take the time to check these and, if you have not already been approached by the Senior Deputy Peter Raines for your written approval, contact him ASAP.

Dates set aside for the PBs are shown in the 'Dates for your Diary' section of this Newsletter, however, if we can do some earlier due to benign weather conditions, we will.

Any questions concerning the PBs can be directed to either Peter Raines or Barry Freeman.



Training Activities

The 2005 Training schedules is now available. The full list of courses and dates is available on the Brigade's website.

http://mtwilson.rfsa.org.au/brigade_information.htm (See the full Web Site story on page 5 of this newsletter)

A summary of these details is also on display in the Notice Board at the Mt. Wilson Fire Station.

In particular, the Brigade needs as many qualified drivers and chainsaw operators as possible. Those with a standard car license are encouraged to complete the 'Rural Driver' course which covers a day of theory and a day of practical off-road driving.

To drive the larger Cat 1 Tankers, a Medium Rigid (MR) license is required. If any member is willing to obtain an MR Permit, then we have Brigade members who are willing to oversee practical driving experience. Please contact Barry Freeman if you would like to discuss this further.

Chainsaw training is also in high demand throughout the district and has limited vacancies, so it is "first in best dressed". We need at least one chainsaw operator in every crew that turns out to an incident, so if you are prepared to do the Chainsaw Training, please contact Barry Freeman or Peter Raines ASAP. This is a very handy skill to have for property maintenance as well! Those who have been on the course (including a very high proportion of females) speak very highly of it.

If you are intending to do the Basic Training course, please make sure your name is on the waiting list. Dates for the training will be finalised on 2nd March and publicised soon after. The nominees will be individually contacted. Current people on the list are:

Alan Rose ("Chinook")

David Welsh (Wynnes Rocks Rd)

Peter Laving (Wynnes Rocks Rd)

Andrew Naylor ("Booralee")

Stuart Naylor ("Booralee")

Gerry Travers ("Jules Park")

Phillip Beeby ("Ashridge")

Nicholas Beeby ("Ashridge")

Michael Lee ("Farcry")

Richard England ("Tolimount")

RFSA Membership

All brigade members are encouraged to join the RFSA especially if you are an "Active Operational Fire Fighter". The RFSA represents the volunteers in all Policy, Procedural and Operational areas. It is not a union, however.

RFSA members receive a quarterly magazine called "FiresEdge", as well as discounts on many services and products from suppliers who support the RFSA.

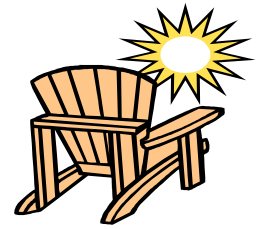
Through their fund raising efforts, the RFSA provides grants of up to \$7,500 to Brigades for equipment that is not otherwise provided by the RFS. For this reason alone, it is worthwhile supporting the RFSA in their activities.

Information on the RFSA and Membership forms are available from <http://www.rfsa.org.au/> or from the Mt Wilson Fire Station.

Membership is free.

Find us at <http://mtwilson.rfsa.org.au>

Dates for your Diary:



February:

Sat 26th 4pm Mt Wilson Progress Association - Special General Meeting

March:

Sun 6th 9am Brigade Training
 Sun 6th Clean Up Australia Day
 Wed 9th 7pm 6 Foot Track Briefing
 Fri 11th Lithgow Show for 3 days
 Sat 12th 6 Foot Track Marathon Event
 Fri 18th Royal Easter Show for 14 days
 Sat 19th Brigade Executive Meeting
 Fri 25th – Mon 28th Easter Weekend

April:

Fri/Sat 1-2nd Prescribed Burns Hazard Reduction (subject to favourable weather conditions)
 Sat 2nd 6pm Pig and Horn, Mt Wilson Village Hall
 Sun 3rd Blue Mountains District Championships
 Sat/Sun 9-10th Prescribed Burns Hazard Reductions (subject to favourable weather conditions)
 Sun 10th Junior Brigade Training – Emergency Operations Centre, Katoomba
 Sat/Sun 16-17th Prescribed Burns Hazard Reduction (subject to favourable weather conditions)
 Sun 23rd Jazz at the Turkish Bath
 Sat/Sun 30th RFS Easter Bunny Exercise

May:

Sun 1st 9am Brigade Training
 Sat 21st Mt Wilson Village Hall Special General Meeting

June:

Sat 4th 4pm Mt Wilson/Mt Irvine RFS Brigade AGM at Mt. Irvine Hall
 Sat 4th 6pm Pig & Horn Social at Mt.Irvine Hall
 Sun 5th 9am Brigade Training
 Sat 11th 10am Mt Wilson Progress Association Special General Meeting
 Mon 13th Queens Birthday Holiday

July:

Sat 2nd Mt Wilson Hall 'Yulefest' Dinner
 Sun 3rd Brigade Training
 Sun 10th Junior Brigade Training
 Fri/Sat 15-16th Mudgee Field Days

The Mt Wilson/Mt Irvine Rural Fire Service now has a Web site!

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The site aims to be another resource for both members of our Brigade and local residents. A variety of information such as community education material, latest weather details, fire updates, Hazard Reduction procedures and local Brigade news is now readily available at anytime to anyone who has Internet access.

Since telephone dial-up speeds from both villages is still slow; the site has been designed with minimal graphic content so that waiting times whilst screens are loading are kept to a minimum. It is worth noting that the site will load comparatively slowly when accessed for the first time, but, once it is stored in your PC's temporary files, access thereafter is good, even down a telephone line.

The address for the site is <http://mtwilson.rfsa.org.au> (Note that the address does not include "www")

The site is not "visible" to Web search engines such as Google, and, as such, the specific address needs to be known by the visitor. It is therefore best to add it to your Favourite Web sites from the menu path in your Web Browser.

For example, if you use Microsoft Internet Explorer, once you are on the Home Page of this site, simply select from the menu bar *Favourites > Add to Favourites*. This Web page will be then stored in your Favourites for future selection, without the laborious retyping of the entire Web address.

The hosting of the site has been generously provided by the Rural Fire Service entirely free of charge.

Beth Raines and the Volunteer Leader's Program

The Australian Fire Authorities Council has for the past two years been co-ordinating a program for training volunteer leaders. The residential 4-day course attracts people from the wide variety of Fire, Emergency and Rescue Volunteer organizations from within Australia and New Zealand.

Beth Raines was nominated for this course by the Blue Mountains RFS. Held on 8th to 12th December in part of the old Quarantine Station at North Head, the course was conducted by the Australian Institute of Police Management. The 18 participants - only two of whom were from NSW RFS - gained exposure to the latest practices in leadership and communication skills within the context of a Volunteer organization.

The training methods varied from lectures, role plays and workshops through to a hands-on exercise on the old three-masted sailing vessel 'Svanen' on Sydney Harbour.

Many of the program's lecturers argued that finding an individual leadership style that is compatible within a volunteer environment presents some unique problems. The classic military style - remotely issuing order from the top down through a rigid and unquestioning hierarchy - was seen to be particularly inappropriate in today's environment.

The course drew on several real life scenarios - Shackleton's Antarctic adventures, the 1996 Townsville Blackhawk Helicopter disaster where 18 people lost their lives, and the 2003 Canberra fires - to analyse both positive and negative leadership traits and styles.

One of the common themes to emerge from these, and similar incidents, was the blind following of orders and the tendency of junior, or inexperienced, personnel not to ask questions, even when intuition suggested something was seriously wrong. The challenge for leaders is how to accommodate these concerns or suggestions against a background of proven procedure, fast decision making and rapidly changing environmental conditions.

As was the case with all participants, Beth was enormously impressed by the professionalism of the course, and the skills and dynamism of the presenters. Though the course involved some intense classroom learning and a large volume of information was presented, Beth considered the course a tremendous experience and one which she would enthusiastically recommend to others.

Beth felt grateful to be accepted into such a prestigious course. That honour however, is a true reflection of the esteem she is held in within our villages, for her volunteer leadership role over many years in both the Fire Brigade and Bushcare Group and her broader contribution to that community.



Easter Bunny Exercise (Sat 30th April & Sun 1st May)

The Easter Bunny Exercise is a two day practical Navigation and Radio Communication exercise held over a weekend. RFS Brigades compete with each other on their ability to follow radio directions, read maps and navigate obstacles to reach their destination in the shortest possible time. All Brigades meet at a camping site towards the end of the first day and camp out overnight. It is a great exercise and those who have not experienced the event are encouraged to do so. If you would like to participate please contact Peter Raines ASAP.

Find us at <http://mtwilson.rfsa.org.au>

Brigade Membership

As you all know, we have embarked on registering all Brigade members onto the "Firezone" system, regardless of whether they are 'Active Operational', 'Active Support' or 'Ordinary Financial' member.

To be formally regarded as an RFS member, it is necessary for an individual to have a Firezone number.

Recording our membership numbers and status in a way that is officially recognised by the RFS hierarchy enables the Brigade to form a formidable lobby group.

If you do not currently have a number, please contact the Brigade Secretary, Suzanne Daly who will forward you the appropriate forms, and guide you through the process. Whilst the procedure may appear lengthy and cumbersome, it has been designed by the RFS with the wellbeing of this, and other communities in mind.

In addition we would like to encourage as many residents as possible to support the brigade in one form or another. To date, we have the suspiciously rounded but independently verified number of 300 current financial members, of whom approximately 90% have Firezone numbers.

This is a tremendous demonstration of the community's support for the Brigade and recognition of the unique environment we live in. This is starkly contrasted with any number of other Brigades where, sadly, visible community support is not strong.

We fully realise that, in an aging population, not all members can physically do what they used to at an operational level. However, your financial and moral support is greatly appreciated and remains an integral part of the Brigade's well-being.

It would be great to have 100% of the community as Brigade members!



Whilst necessity maybe the mother of invention, it is hoped that it is not the third cousin of safe work practices.

The principle is simple: no job at the Brigade is important enough, or urgent enough, to be done in an unsafe manner.

Sponsorship

The funding of this, and other, Brigade newsletters is made possible through the continued generous sponsorship of both R&A Chainsaws & Mower Supplies and Lithgow Fire Protection.

Lithgow Fire Protection provides a percentage donation to the Brigade of all purchases made by Mt Wilson and Mt Irvine residents. R&A Chainsaws provides ongoing maintenance and servicing of Brigade chainsaws free of charge.

Lithgow Fire Protection

285 Main Street, Lithgow

Ph: 02 6351-2307

Fax: 02 6353-1365

Mob: 0417 437-236

A/H Emergency: 02 6355-2307

Ian Wilkinson

R&A Chainsaws & Mower Supplies

32 Main St, Lithgow

Ph: 02 6352-3014

Fax: 02 6353-1556

Mob: 0427 455-586

Rod and Anne Gurney

Following the Mt Wilson to Bilpin Fun Run held on Saturday 21st August, the Brigade has received a cheque from the Bilpin RFS Brigade for \$2,527.03, that sum being our percentage of the proceeds generated on the day.

Of course, this sum is a vital addition to the Brigade's coffers, and reflects the very popular nature of the run and the hard work put in by many volunteers to ensure the event is such a success.

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Comments, contributions and suggestions welcome!

Find us at <http://mtwilson.rfsa.org.au>