



The Mounts

The Community Newsletter of Mount Wilson and Mount Irvine



November 2013

**Lithgow State Mine Bushfire – Mt Wilson/Mt Irvine
Thursday 17th October 2013**



Photo: Tim Vollmer

**A special edition of The Mounts to record the recent bushfire event
at Mt Wilson and Mt Irvine.**

"This fire made the 1994 fires look like a Sunday school picnic"

This statement was made by Bill Scrivener, the Mt Wilson/Mt Irvine Fire Captain during the 1994 fires, during an interview with Linda Mottram, the well known ABC 702 presenter.

Bill is not known for his overstatement; when the State Mine bushfire was finally brought under control, it has burnt 56,590 hectares of bushland. It had a perimeter of 520 kilometres.

For the second time in two and a quarter years, the Mounts have been hit by unprecedented natural forces. As in the July 2011 windstorm, this fire caused major damage with a hitherto unseen ferocity. And yet, it needs to be put into context: the damage sustained to the villages during the windstorm was dwarfed by that of parts of Blackheath; similarly, the Springwood, Winmalee and Yellow Rock areas suffered building loss beyond our comprehension. This is in no way to downplay the tragedy of the loss of two homes (one of immense historical significance to the area), multiple sheds, several cars and tractors as well as damage to some much loved gardens.

That we escaped relatively unscathed is, and will continue to be, subject to much discussion. We did have luck with the weather; we had the support of many Blue Mountains and out-of-area crews and resources for which we are eternally grateful; we had prepared well over the recent past and were relatively well equipped given our size. But the glue that held it together was the community spirit of all and a grim determination to defend what attracted us to the area in the first place.

The Brigade has received an extraordinary amount of donations since the fire finally subsided. Almost \$40,000 has been received to date. Donations can still be sent to Mt Wilson/Mt Irvine Rural Fire Service (BSB: 062 559 Account Number: 10334493). The donations have been earmarked for the training room extensions at the Mt Wilson Fire Shed.

Coles North Richmond deserve particular praise—they donated food and supplies to many Mounts residents who were wearing yellows and buying supplies for the Village Hall and RFS shed.

Many thanks to the many people who have sent photos—there were far too many to include in this newsletter. We will publish a good selection of these on our website in the next week or so.

It has been agreed that the 2nd Mt Wilson and Mt Irvine Photography and Art Exhibition will now be rescheduled for Saturday 30th December and Sunday 1st December. Proceeds will again go to our Brigade.

The joint Mt Wilson Progress Association, Mt Irvine Progress Association and Mt Wilson/Mt Irvine RFS Christmas Party will be held on Saturday evening, November 30th, as previously announced.

Details of both the Christmas Party and Photography Exhibition will be distributed separately in the coming days.

This will be the final edition of The Mounts for 2013. I thank you for your ongoing interest, support and contributions.

Wishing you and your family a very peaceful and happy Christmas.

Tim Gow Tel. 4756 2032 or 0412 133 559

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Lithgow State Mine Bushfire – Mt Wilson/Mt Irvine
Thursday 17th October 2013

This fire travelled fast.

To give people an idea of the speed of this fire, it started on Wednesday 16th October at the Lithgow army base at Marrangaroo. Overnight attempts to contain it were unsuccessful and though it was predicted that it would get to Clarence on the Thursday afternoon, it made it all the way to Mount Tootie. On its way it ran the full length of Mt Wilson and Mt Irvine, running into our streets and properties in a number of areas at the same time. It impacted on Church Lane, Farrer Road, Smiths Road, Scrivener Pass, Danes Way and the north end of Mt Irvine all on Thursday afternoon and evening.

Much good work was done to save the properties that were saved and huge thanks must go to the visiting crews that assisted with this work – Hawkesbury Strike Team, Hornsby Strike Team, NPWS crews and Blue Mountains Crews. These crews, along with our local brigade, managed to save many properties and secure the majority of the north side of Mt Wilson and Mt Irvine before dawn on the Friday.

I spent much of the first night of the fire travelling back and forth from Mt Wilson to Mt Irvine checking on the hot spots, assisting crews with local knowledge and getting back burning operations underway. I hope this account will give local people an insight into how much was achieved that night and how close we came to losing many more houses.

In the 1994 fires, it took us five days to back burn around Mt Wilson and out towards Mt Irvine – we got as far as *Touri*. In this fire, by dawn on Friday the majority of the north side of both Mt Wilson and Mt Irvine was black. In less than 12 hours, we blackened from the corner of *Denarque*, right down the north side, around the end of Mt Irvine and back under *Tallawong* and *Bowen Lea* – with only a few hot spots still going around Lambs Hill, *Touri* and Scrivener Pass.

I first heard of the fire after ringing M & N Produce at Marrangaroo for some fencing materials. They are located opposite the access road to the army base and hence knew that RFS crews had been unable to get access due to unexploded army ordinance. I rang Fire Control and followed its progress that afternoon, recognising that there was a good chance that the fire could come our way. I requested both a bulldozer and grader on Wednesday afternoon so that we could start preparing our fire trails. This was followed up a number of times on Thursday, but although promised, they did not arrive until Friday morning after the fire front had been though.

We are very fortunate that the fire took a run to the north of Mt Wilson and Mt Irvine, not straight over the top of both villages. The timing in the early evening was also better than getting it mid afternoon.

After it spotted over Clarence Colliery and the Hanson Sand Mine, the fire started its run into the headwaters of Yarramun Creek. At this point, we thought the fire would hit Mt Wilson around *Breenhold*, the Fire Station, School and the back of Church Lane.

Soon after this, the wind changed to a south westerly, and the fire started a massive run, parallel with Mt Wilson. It pushed around the end of Mt Wilson to the north, before disappearing in its own smoke. We needed more crews to assist us, but by this time there were other fires at Mt Victoria and Winmalee and Yellow Rock. Knowing that all crews in the Mountains and Lithgow were busy, we requested crews from the Richmond side. At this point we only had our three trucks and the Cat 9. I told Fire Control that we would save what we could with what we have. Crews were positioned at Church Lane and Mt Irvine Road (from *Pine Lodge* to Cathedral Reserve).



Fire over Clarence Colliery and the Hanson Sand Mine, 2.00pm Thursday 17th.

After a run out to Farrer Road and Smiths Road and finding thick black smoke coming out of the valley, the decision was made to take most of the Farrer Road residents back closer to home and set up to defend what we could with the Cat 1 and Cat 9. The Pumper and Cat 7 set up to defend areas in Mt Wilson. About this time, a couple of other mountain crews arrived and were slotted into properties on Mt Irvine Road and Church Lane to defend them when the fire emerged from below. Once on Farrer Rd, the Cat 1 was set up to defend *Wedgewood*, while the Cat 9 patrolled the rest of Farrer Road. Communication was via landline back to the station as the terrain prevented the fire ground radios and mobile phones from working. The fire soon crossed the Wollangambe and started its run up the hill.

We then received news via the landline that the fire was impacting on the end of Mt Irvine around *Irvineholme*. Allen Hyde and I headed to *Gowan Ross* for a ute and started out to Mt Irvine. On pulling out of Farrer Road East, we met two trucks from the Hawkesbury Strike team headed for Mt Irvine. By Scrivener Pass we could see the fire rapidly approaching and I was concerned about being able to get back, so I decided to put Allen onto one of the trucks to complete his trip and I managed to slip back though Scrivener Pass just before the fire arrived.

On arrival back up to *Wedgewood* I could see the fire racing up the side of Smiths Hill. I quickly returned to *Gowan Ross* to pick up my truck with the tanker trailer attached and raced up to Smiths Hill to try to save my shed. Driving up the hill, I could see that Nancy Fox's shed was well alight and knew that in another ten minutes my shed at Smiths would probably be the same. Thinking that the shed would probably burn, I moved a ute and bobcat out into the paddock and set up the tanker trailer above the shed in the paddock away from the trees. After some issues

with hose fittings, I managed to get the pump going and dial-a-jet on the hose ready to go.

After an unsuccessful attempt to phone for help, I jumped in the ute and raced back down to Nancy's place where things had quietened down after the fire front had passed. I got a drip torch off the Cat 1 and asked David Howell who was Crew Leader if he could spare Tim Gow to help me save the shed.

Tim and I jumped in the ute and flew back up to Smiths. With one drip torch and 800L of water in the tanker trailer, we managed to save the shed, though not without a bit of excitement. In between, I raced over to Taylor's block and put out wood chip around the house that was burning. On the way back, I kicked some embers off a stack of timer slabs I had in the paddock, thinking that this had saved them, only to look over later and see them well alight with no hope of saving them. With the burn completed most of the way around the shed, the pump ran out of fuel.

Tim went back to Nancy's for fuel, while I stayed to watch the edge with the pump now running on drip torch fuel. Since I had been unable to get a phone call out during all this, due to no mobile phone coverage in the area, Beth was quite concerned, as she had not heard from me since I had headed out to Mt Irvine, hours beforehand. Out of the smoke came our Pumper and a Blue Mountains Cat 1 – the Pumper headed out to Taylor's and the Cat 1 assisted me for a bit before heading back up to Farrer Road West where the fire was now closing in.



Farrer Road West, evening Thursday 17th

Meanwhile, the Hawkesbury strike team had made it to Mt Irvine just in time to save four houses at the end of Mt Irvine. From reports the fire was still a couple of ridges back from Mt Irvine when it spotted into the valley on the Bowens Creek side and took a run out of the valley threatening the houses at the end of Mt Irvine – *Irvineholme*, *Booralee*, *Chesterman's* and *Dougan's*. There was some great work done by this strike team, the crews from NPWS, property owners and family to save these four houses. The fire then moved in under Mt Irvine Road and reduced intensity due to running into the areas that were hazard reduced over the last couple of years. During this time, crews attempted to access Danes Way but were stopped by fallen trees at the cemetery on Danes Way. With fire still burning in this area and big trees still falling, they retreated back off Danes Way.

Back in Mt Wilson, a Strike Team from Hornsby had arrived with a fresh crew for the night shift. We stood most of our crews down, knowing that we would have a busy day the next day. The Hornsby team were split up – two to Mt Irvine, one to Church Lane and two to back burn from Cathedral back to under Church Lane. The fire had overrun both the outer fire trail and the inner fire trail at the back of Church Lane, and was in under the houses *Donna Buang*, *Nooroo Cottage* and *Farcry*. A Hornsby crew from Westleigh did a brilliant job throughout the night, working up to half a kilometre from their truck for most of the night. They wrapped up the edges at the back of *Donna Buang* and *Nooroo Cottage* before continuing the burn though very difficult terrain, from *Farcry* under *Koojanup Park* to join in with the crews working back from Cathedral. A portable pump was taken down though *Farcry* and plumbed into a 200,000 tank under the maple barn in *Koojanup Park*. This allowed the crews to wet line the fire edge as it was impossible to get trucks into this area. By morning, the fire had joined up with the back burn, and the area from Cathedral right back to *Denarque* was burnt out.

At 7.00am on Friday morning the plant arrived – two dozers, one trackscavator and one grader. One dozer was deployed to link the fire edge at the back of *Denarque* back to the fire station. The fire was just starting to get into the piles of timber at the bottom of *Denarque*, so the Cat 1 was also deployed here to work on putting it out.

For most of the night as I moved back and forth between Mt Wilson, Farrer Road and Mt Irvine, I had been trying to find an opportunity to get up onto Danes Way. Knowing that with all the trees across Danes Way, I would have to go up though the properties from Mt Irvine Road. About 5.30am things had quietened down a bit, and the night shift crews were close to completing their tasks. We started on a mission to get up to Danes Way via the paddocks of *Kookootonga*. After many gates and a few laps around paddocks looking for gates, we emerged onto Danes Way mid way between *Mending Wall* and *Carisbrook*. Unable to go left due to fallen trees, we went right, up and over the bank to get around fallen trees at times. Upon reaching *Carisbrook* we found the smoking ruins of the house and three sheds with the front gate still locked. We continued on towards *Yurunga*, our path blocked by another big tree across the road.

Back past *Carisbrook* and down the side fence past Carruthers and Nicholas (both of which were still standing) across and out Nicholas driveway back onto Danes Way, at the gate of *Yurunga* we discovered a burnt out car still smouldering. Cold shivers ran down my spine as I examined the driver's area and looked around the paddock as the first rays of sun started to arrive. A quick drive over to *Yurunga* house also confirmed that this had also been lost.



Back burning from Mt Irvine Road into Zircon Creek.



Mt Irvine International Airport!

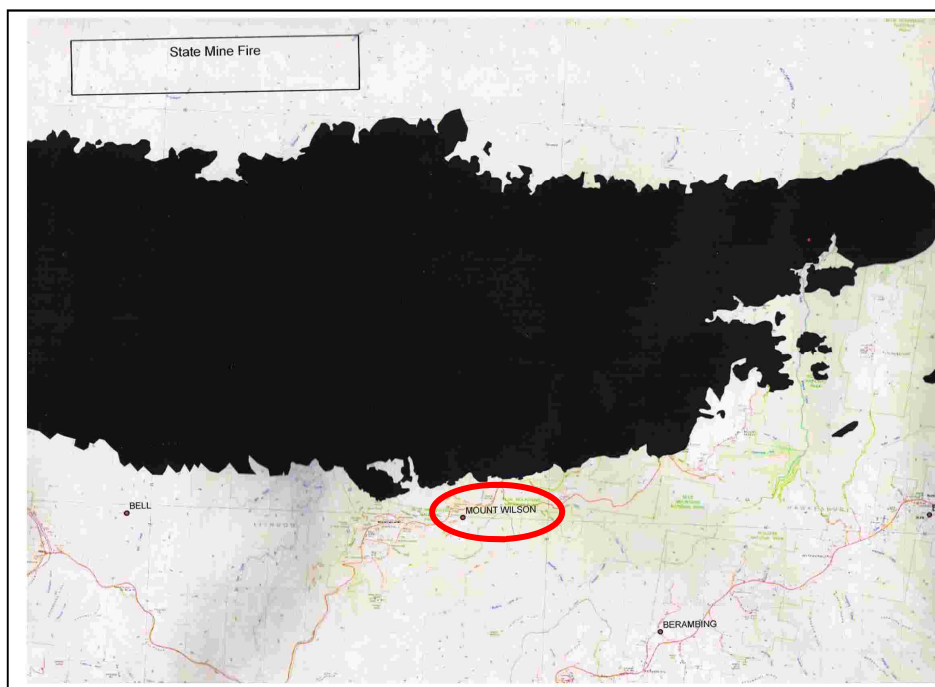
Much was learnt from this emergency. A few key things were highlighted.

- **Water Access** - During property protection, it's important to be able to plumb the trucks into a large static water supply at the property that is being protected, with an area for the trucks to be safely parked.
- **Fire Trails**- the importance of inner and outer fire trails being well maintained and ready to use to protect Mt Wilson and Mt Irvine.
- **Asset Protection Zone** – having a well-defined asset protection zone around infrastructure property/houses and sheds is crucial.
- **Property Maintenance** – Prior to fire season, ensure area around house is cleared, grass is kept mowed, gutters cleaned and leaf litter removed.

We had a great response from many people in all the different roles, including community liaison officers, street co-ordinators, station officers, catering and crews on trucks. There was a good turnout of newly trained fire-fighters as well as some people we have not seen for a while. Thanks to all for your dedication and hard work.

Peter Raines

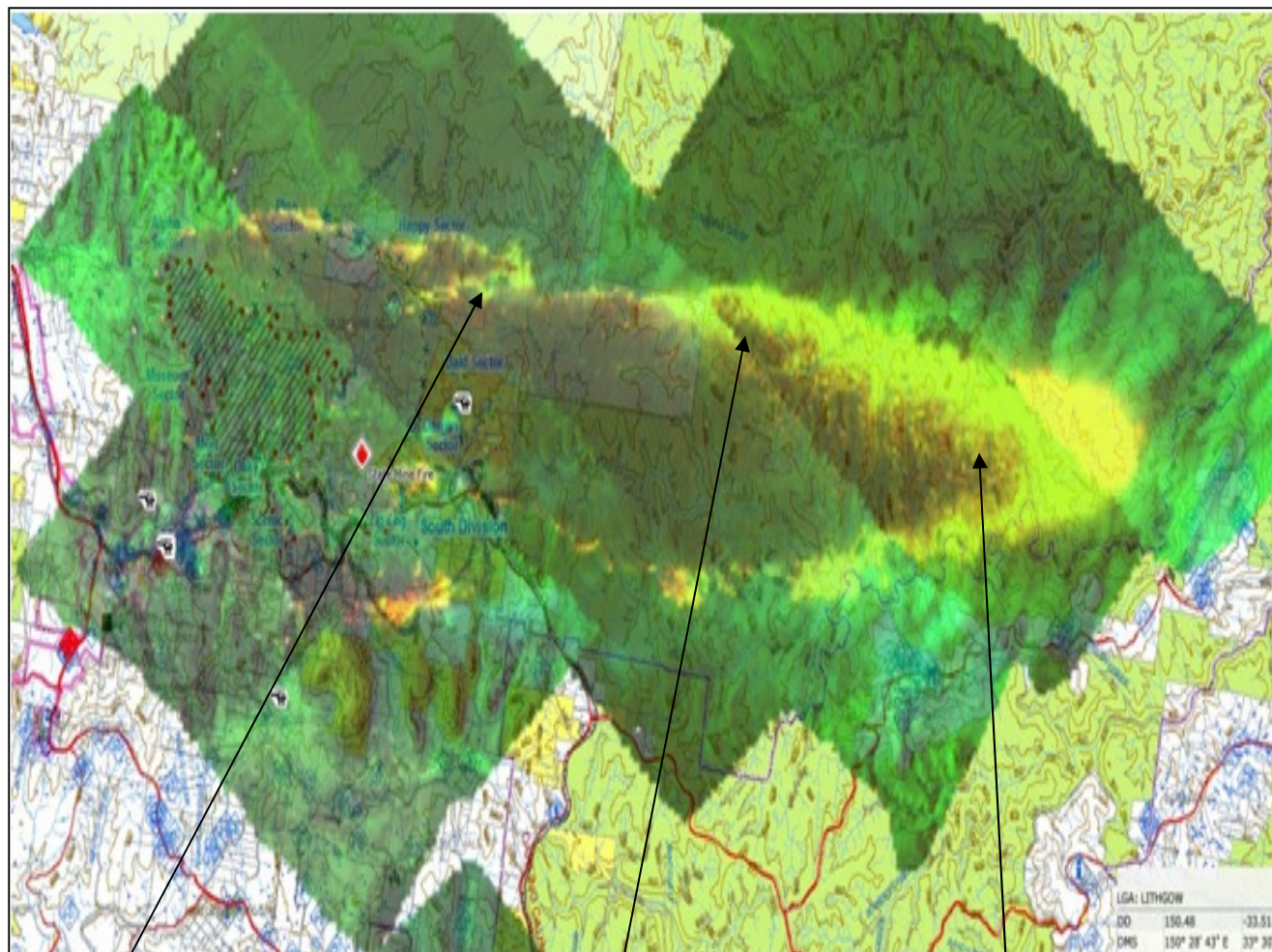
Senior Deputy Mt Wilson/Mt Irvine



The fire map above shows the extent of the fire on Thursday afternoon. Mt Wilson is circled in the centre of the map, just below the bottom of the black area.

RFS modelling forecast on Wednesday that the fire would only get to Clarence by Thursday afternoon.

All photos in this section: Peter Raines



Denarque

Touri

Urunga

RFS Heat Scan showing the fire spread

Special thanks

The recent October 2013 State Mine Fire which really affected Mt Irvine and parts of Mt Wilson saw the Mt Wilson/ Mt Irvine Brigade perform well supported by teams from other RFS brigades, NPWS teams and teams from Victoria, South Australia and Tasmania.

The Mt Wilson/Mt Irvine Brigade learned a great deal from the July 2011 windstorm which destroyed so many large trees in the villages. From that event, there were lessons for the brigade on our response, how it ran the fire station and communicated with the community.

However, the brigade really owes a debt of gratitude to our Captain Beth Raines and Senior Deputy Peter Raines whose fine leadership saw us through the fire, reduced the risk we faced and helped the community strengthen.

This leadership was very apparent right at the start when Beth Raines led with clear plans, well communicated and helped the brigade respond to the threats on Danes Way, the end of Mt Irvine Rd and Farrer Rd/ Smiths Rd. We are sure Beth did not feel as confident inside, but her exterior was of a person who had a plan, knew what she was about and who communicated it well to her team. By Thursday evening/early Friday morning back burning of protection areas for both Mt Irvine and Mt Wilson was underway. So we woke on Friday morning with a great deal of action and a sense we were getting the situation under control.

Beth must have been relieved when a Divisional Command was set up in the Mt Wilson Fire Station by the RFS and a senior officer brought in to oversee the total response to the State Mine Fire. She could then focus on leading our brigade.

Her brother Peter started our response when he recognised the threat on Wednesday 16th October with the State Mine Fire having just got out of control in Lithgow, and with the forecast winds, understood we had a problem. He called a meeting of all Deputy Captains for 7.30am Thursday morning to plan our response. He organised earthmoving equipment to improve our fire trails and cut containment lines around the villages. His fine sense of fire behaviour and his wonderful sense of strategy meant he was always several steps ahead of the fire and we had plans and contingency plans prepared.

We were caught by surprise by the speed of the fires arrival in Mt Wilson and particularly Mt Irvine. The speed of the fire spread exceeded the Blue Mountains RFS' forecasts and our expectations; it arrived in Mt Irvine and Farrer Rd/ Smiths Rd as we were responding. The loss of property is very sad, but much was also saved and there was no injury to residents.

We also need to recognise other parts of the brigade performed extraordinary feats. Community Engagement with email status reports, website and recorded messages kept the community well informed, which was a real improvement on our response in the July 2011 windstorm.

The Station Officers did a wonderful job keeping the fire station running, supporting Beth and her team of operational people, and making up crews so we had trucks on the road when needed.

Then there is Catering. Need we say more! The food was wonderful. Breakfast, lunch and dinner for at times up to 120 people served in the Mt Wilson Village Hall for locals and visiting fire crews.

For eleven days we dealt with the fire, and following this period continued support has been provided to the helicopters and NPWS remote area fire crews operating from Carruther's International Airport at Mt Irvine. They are dealing with the northern edge of the State Mine Fire and Clews Ridge Fire started by lightning just north of the State Mine Fire.

Now for a quiet period with hopefully some rain.....

From the Mt Wilson and Mt Irvine Community

Did Brigade Training pay off?

Throughout its recent history, a great deal of resources and focus is given towards training of both new and experienced members. Against the backdrop of a major incident, how effective was the training program?

The Mt Wilson/Mt Irvine Brigade undertakes training from several sources.

Firstly, Blue Mountains RFS runs about 100 extensive training courses during the year. Typically each of these is for two weekends, with follow up post course practice and a one day assessment or exam to complete the course.

Secondly, our brigade is part of the West Sector of the Blue Mountains RFS. The West Sector includes Mt Tomah, Mt Wilson/ Mt Irvine, Bell, Blackheath/ Mt Victoria, Medlow Bath, Shipley and Megalong Valley Brigades. About four times a year we do joint training exercises so we know one another and can operate better as combined teams. We also learn a great deal from one another.

Thirdly, we run local training, usually on the first Sunday morning of each month plus some special training at other times of the year. Facing an oncoming fire is not the best time to try to remember how to start a pump!

We came to dealing with the State Mine Fire with members who were trained, knew how to respond, knew how to use the equipment and knew when it was too dangerous and when there was a threat to life.

In particular we had five members who had just completed their Basic Bush Fire Fighting (BF) course and faced their first real incident. It was impressive just how well they responded and used their new skills.

In addition, there were times we were short of crew leaders and more experienced fire-fighters who had also completed Advanced Fire Fighting (AF) training were able to step up and lead crews. So we were able to handle this situation because of the depth of training and experience.

Each crew must be made up of a driver, a crew leader usually a deputy captain, a chainsaw trained fire-fighter, a first aid trained fire-fighter and other fire-fighters. In addition crew members need to be relatively fresh, so they need to be rested from time to time so they do not become exhausted. Making up crews is done by Station Officers or the Captain. It takes skill and judgement.

Our most pressing shortage of skills was fire-fighters with driver training to operate the larger fire trucks. This did limit our ability to respond at times and we had to take our Captain and some Deputy Captains away from their leadership role to drive trucks. This will be a focus over the next few months so our response is not limited by available drivers in future.

However, there are many reasons as to why an individual may feel that formal operational training is unsuitable for them. This fire has reinforced a message that the Brigade has been spreading for several years—just because you can't get on a truck does not mean there is not a role for you in the Brigade. As documented elsewhere, Catering, Station Officers, First Aid, Logistics, Street Co-ordinators, Air Support and general factotums proved absolutely vital. Operations would have ground to a halt in very short order if it were not for the support of Brigade members in a wide variety of non-operational roles.

The only requirement asked is that for insurance and legal reasons, volunteers must be a member of the Brigade. You are all most welcome to help make a difference.

Graham Tribe

Personal email to a friend in Texas

We had a scary night the Thursday before last, 17 October, with a strong north westerly rapidly bringing a big bush fire in our direction. I had a tanker crew at our place with hoses laid out ready around the house, the gutters filled with water, all curtains and internal doors closed and no external power. Luckily we have had a generator for a number of years and it runs the pump that provides good pressure water all around the house.

Around 8.00 pm a big glow began emerging from deep in the valley immediately in front of our house, perhaps 750 metres to the north. In no time fire emerged on the ridge but one in front of us and raced up the hill with the flames crowning above the top of the eucalypts.

In less than 30 minutes the fire was over the top of the hill and travelling east fast and out of sight towards Mt Irvine where two homes were lost.

Meantime another front was approaching further away from a more westerly direction with a long line of fire was gradually getting brighter and closer but it did not seem as intense. Luckily the wind and temperature dropped quite dramatically so by 11.00 pm it was fairly still and only 11 degrees. That change made it possible for the Rural Fire Service guys to stand down at midnight.

On Friday a big effort was put in to back burn from the fire trail in front of us and right around the northern perimeter of Mt Wilson down into the valley below where the Thursday night fire had travelled from west to east.

Then on Tuesday with a big bulldozer that had been mobilised to our area another fire trail that goes through the lower side of our properties on Mt Irvine Road was much improved.

With the fire, backburning and newly graded fire trails we should be pretty safe. The only place left with a lot of fuel on it is the area immediately below the homes on Mt Irvine Road and the Northern Fire Trail that has been waiting for a hazard reduction burn that always seems too hard to get done what with the regulatory high jumps that have to be cleared!

While doing fire prevention work on Thursday (clearing two months of accumulates leaves, winter fire kindling, gutter downpipe plugs etc) I was also emailing and phoning the residents of the 26 properties in Mt Wilson East I was responsible for advising on the situation and determining who was in residence, who was planning to leave or come up, and who might need special help.

That Thursday is a day I won't soon forget! Fortunately I was there by myself so Loretta and others in the family did not have to be evacuated.

I have attached three pix taken this morning of the same location to the north with a wide, medium and full zoom perspective *[not shown in this newsletter]*. It is clear to see how devastating, widespread and close the fire came to our place. Luckily the hill to our immediate northeast, Lamb's Hill, only had a small fire affecting a small area of it on the Friday morning after the devastation of the night before.

We were very lucky.

Richard [Beattie]



The outcome of the fire would have been very different if it were not for the arrival of tankers from far and wide. Photo: Ted Griffin

Random Thoughts

- The sun, traffic light red in the evening and morning
- The cicadas, deafening even with ear-muffs on and standing beside the (operating, noisy) pump on the Cat 7
- Sitting with David, Sarah, John and Eleanor having dinner; with a steak and a glass of red, as the ABC News trumpeted our destruction...
- Beth, managing to smile, keep cool and be (simply) friendly even after heaven knows how many days without a good sleep
- The black swathe across the fire map, plotting the State Mine fire
- The molten aluminium running out from under the burned out car on Danes Way
- Getting too close to Peter... and finding myself bounding through the virgin bush. Still exhausted
- A vast red yabbie in Waterfall Creek. No, it wasn't a foot long. But close!
- How fresh the ACT trucks looked, in their yellow and white livery
- Howling when my fingers got slammed in the door of the PC. And nobody caring much (appropriately!)
- A crew working hard at the back-breaking task of preparing around someone else's home. Truly, community spirit
- Six sausages in the breakfast silver foil container. Delicious, in fact
- Raoul and Leslie grinning over the barbie. So, lawyers have a purpose after all!
- Thousands of dead cicadas under the trees on Danes Way
- The humility, professionalism and commitment of everyone

Duncan Peppercorn



The Five Mile Photo: Robert Buchner



Scrivener Pass, Mt Irvine Photo: ABC Radio



Before and after - north of Sylvan Close, Thursday afternoon (above—Scott Leonard) and Packwood, Friday morning (below—Richard Beattie)



A wonderful and important project

Now that the crisis is past, it's a good time to capitalise on what the fire has done. The easy way to do this will be through a series of photos of the burnt bush, to document its recovery. To do that in a (moderately) scientific, rigorous and useful way, anyone who is interested should select a few locations - say with different aspects (i.e. facing different directions) and slopes, maybe even different soil types. Take a series of pictures of the vegetation at each location, documenting them (date, place etc) and repeat that procedure at the same locations at intervals of months - say in late summer, mid-winter, spring next year. The photos should also be from the same positions at each location. Keep it up as long as possible.

To ensure that this record is widely available it would be good to archive the photos on the community's website. Over a few years the record of vegetation recovery will be interesting and ecologically valuable.

Feel free to contact me— 47 562 167 or joelandsberg75@gmail.com—if you want further details.

Joe Landsberg

Dognapped at the Bushfire

It began when my minders decided to leave me behind, "Too hot to take you in the car" they said. "Look after the place" they said. Actually I think it was because I was wearing my favourite perfume "Eau de Wombat"; for some reason they don't approve, I can't understand it, I always wear it for Beth and she always gives me a good time.

Anyway I chased skinks for a while, gave a Wonga a scare and settled for a nap. Suddenly I became aware that the air was getting smoky and there was noise. I started getting a bit nervous - my minders should have been here. Then there were aliens coming—little yellow people. I gave them a mouthful and headed for my private door. I should be safe there, hit the sack and waited for them to go. But then they were calling me to come out, no way. Then, this was scary, a yellow arm, (sort of Chrome or not quite Lemon, more like Cadmium) came through my door (is there no privacy anymore?) and slowly reached for the door knob and turned it. My stupid minders hadn't locked it, had they?

Then, the yellow person came into my private sanctuary and made a grab for me. I was terrified. I wasn't going to stand for this so I took a hefty bite at the yellow wrist. That got a reaction (what language, must be yellow people dialect because I didn't quite understand but the general drift was clear). The yellow person overpowered me however and hauled me away. By this time I feared I would never see my loved ones again.

Suddenly my fears ended as I was deposited into the loving arms of Auntie Ruth and Uncle Bill. I felt a little embarrassed then when I realised I had been rescued, not dognapped. My rescuer I now realised was Robyn and our relationship has changed. I think it's called Stockholm Syndrome.



"Truffle"

Chalumeau, 256 Mt.Irvine Road



*The fire behind Wedgewood, Farrer Road West, the evening of Thursday 17th.
Photo: David Howell*

Stuck in Sydney

This has been a time of mixed emotions; we regretted that we could not be there to make a contribution, and we also realised that we could have done little.

Our main feelings were fear for all of you on the mountains and total admiration at your dedication, courage and sheer hard work.

The updates via emails from the Mt Wilson shed and wider afield from the RFS and the ABC allowed us to follow and to understand most of what was happening.

Finally, great regret for our beautiful bush, and sadness for the loss of houses and other property.

Alison and Alex Halliday

Mount Wilson & Mount Irvine Bushwalking Group

Our planned October walk

Friday 18th October 2013

A plume of smoke could be seen ascending above the horizon on the afternoon of Wednesday 16th October as Helen and I drove along an elevated section of Pitt Town Road while returning from grandparent duties at Cattai. "Looks as if it could be out past Mount Wilson" I casually commented; that was possibly the last *casual* comment relating to smoke that was made by anyone for the next couple of weeks.

That plume was a relatively benign-looking embryonic stage of a conflagration which erupted, fanned by strong winds – hot and dry, that night and the following day; the beginning of the now infamous State Mine fire.

This fire sent fiery fingers east and north from Lithgow, devastating the Zig Zag Railway complex and seriously threatening Clarence, Dargan, Bell, Mount Wilson, Mount Irvine where two homes were lost, Mount Tomah, Berambing, Mountain Lagoon and Bilpin; its northward spread took it across the Newnes Plateau.

While that fire raged in the northern sector of the Blue Mountains there remained an ominous portent in other areas of the mountains created by the high temperatures, low humidity and strong gusty winds. Worst fears were realised of course when the Linksvie Road fire raged into life at Springwood causing devastating losses in Springwood, Winmalee and Yellow Rock; thankfully no lives were lost.

United States novelist Thomas Wolfe wrote "Fire drives a thorn of memory in the heart". How true that must be for so many in the mountain community, and indeed elsewhere in the State, who have suffered loss in the recent fires; our thoughts go out to them all. However, although thorns aplenty were driven into so many saddened hearts, the blossoming of community spirit is wonderful to witness in times such as these.

In these circumstances of course bushwalking is the last thing one would consider undertaking and our planned venture into the Blue Gum Forest was put off and subsequently rescheduled for the March 2014.

Although of a much lower order of importance, indeed shrinking into insignificance when compared to the loss of homes, these fires have affected many tracks we have walked in the past; the following are just some of them. In the Mount Wilson/Mount Irvine area one of the possible venues for our Christmas walk, Boronia Point, was burnt out. The fire also engulfed the tracks below Du Faur's Rocks to Pheasants Cave, those leading down to the Wollangambe River, also the Tessellated Pavements track at Mount Irvine.

The northward spread of fire took it across places we have walked - The Lost City pagodas, Bungleboori, Goochs Crater, Lunch Rock and up towards Deep Pass.

South of Bells line of Road the Jinki Ridge, Birrabang Ridge and Yileen Spur tracks were overrun. The fire surged across the tracks to Rigby Hill and Walls Lookout before running up over Mount Banks.

Across The Causeway several homes were lost in the Mount Victoria fire. Ikara Ridge and the

Asgard Swamp area were burned and a hazard reduction burn was carried out from near Victoria Falls to Perrys Lookdown; this would have impacted on the track to Balzter Head and Hanging Rock. The Mount Victoria fire also destroyed homes in the Mount York Road area and it appears the historic roads walking tracks in the area would have suffered.

Fortress Ridge, Lockley Pylon, The Butter Box and Mount Hay escaped the fires although at this stage Mount Hay Road is closed while the operations are being carried out in the Grose Valley.

The fires have not impacted National Park areas south of the great Western Highway.

John Cardy

Reproduced from the Mt Wilson/Mt Irvine Bushing Walking Group's October Newsletter



Danes Way, morning Friday 18th.

Photo: Robyn and Mark Scriverner

A tribute to *Carisbrook*

The Smart family came to Mt Irvine in 1939 - Hubert senior and his wife Florence, with their seven children. The house at *Carisbrook* was started in October 1946 and finished early the following year. The builder was Bill Kirkwood who owned *Sassafras* at Mt Irvine and he used local timber milled by Sid and Albert Kirk at their Mt Wilson mill. I was nine when *Carisbrook* was built, and my six brothers and sisters were all involved in building the house and developing the nursery.

There was a lot of happy socialising between the families on the two mountains, with tennis, dancing, picnics, annual sports days and frequent events at the Mt Wilson Village Hall. Life-long friendships were forged and I can think of at least three romances that led to marriages. A few more romances didn't progress quite that far!

Carisbrook was the much loved home for that generation of the Smarts and their extended families for more than 50 years. Several of us lived overseas but we shared a great fondness for the home and the village life that always was waiting when we returned.

After my brother Hugh died, the house and garden were sold to Eleanor and John. What a marvellous outcome for the place and for our family. We all have been very grateful for the way in which *Carisbrook* has continued to be cared for and greatly improved over the last 20 years.

Although the terrible fire on 17th October destroyed the buildings and no doubt much of the garden, a lifetime of memories have been stirred up and will not be diminished at all by this sad event.

Co-incidentally our father Hubert senior died on that same date in 1952. I am the last of that generation of our family, and with my nieces and nephews I am glad that Wilga, Bill, Ron and Hugh are not here to share the sad news.

Florence Smart

Thoughts from Bowen Lea

Once our power went out on the first day of the fires, we figured there wasn't much we could do (barely any water in rain tanks and no power to pump what little there was) and would only get in the way so we decided to head back to Sydney. Early next morning we had calls from our neighbours saying the fire was on our property so we came back to see what we could do. The fire was sweeping through the fire trail behind our property and had burnt the lower end of the garden but the fire crews had it under control on Friday. We stayed awake for a few nights putting out spot fires, keeping an eye out for glowing embers, hosing the decking, making sure gutters were kept spotless. The sound of trees exploding and falling was enough to keep us alert.

The fire moved through Bowen Creek valley and was heading to Bilpin..... then the winds changed and we saw the red glow and smoke coming back toward *Bowen Lea*. The fire crews had blacked out the entire property fence lines, so the only risk was if the fire crowned and came through the trees.

The various community updates, emails and discussion with the extraordinarily helpful fire teams visiting our property kept us well informed and at no point did we feel our house was under threat.

Martin Dillon and Mike Pearse

Suggestions, comments or contributions warmly welcomed!