

THE VOLUNTEER

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"Today we lay our fallen comrades
to rest,
continue to mop up
and wait for the next call.

"The messages of comfort and support
have done much to help all of us
through our time of terror,
despair and sorrow.

Lloyd C. Johns
Director,
S.A. Country Fire Services



ASH WEDNESDAY II BUSHFIRES



MR J. C. BANNON
THE PREMIER OF SOUTH AUSTRALIA

Mr. Lloyd Johns
Director
Country Fire Services
20 West Beach Road
Keswick 5035

Words are inadequate to express the gratitude South Australia feels for the efforts of your members on February 16, and the days following. But I could not let the opportunity pass, to record officially the thanks of the Government, on behalf of all South Australians, for the bravery and dedication of Country Fire Services volunteers, in the face of overwhelming odds.

I have offered my condolences to the families and friends of members who lost their lives in the disaster. I know many others were hurt, and virtually all who turned out were exhausted by the awesome task of trying to hold the fires.

You will know that we have organised the S.A. Great Bushfire Lottery, to raise money for the CFS. This can never compensate for the loss of life, but it is a symbol of our continuing commitment to provide as much support as possible for your essential and much appreciated services.

Yours sincerely,

J.C. Bannon
Premier

LETTERS OF CONDOLENCE / PRAISE . . .

Following the Ash Wednesday II fires the South Australian Country Fire Services have received "letters of condolence" from Federal, State, Local Government departments, Members of Parliament, Fire Services and organizations around Australia and overseas.

The letters expressed sincere condolences to the people of South Australia, in particular, fire fighters and their families, relatives, friends or workmates who were injured or died in the tragic Ash Wednesday II fires . . . and wished a quick and successful recovery of those fire fighters and citizens who were injured.

Praise from Fellow Fires

Praise for the fire fighters has come from fellow fire fighters in other Australian States, in the United Kingdom, Los Angeles and many other United States West Coast fire departments, United States Department of Forestry, New Zealand Fire Service and fire organizations around the world.

"The courage and dedication of the volunteer fire fighters is in the highest tradition of the Country Fire Services and reflects great credit on the service."

A letter from Interim Director, Mr Al Owyong, Department of Forestry, Sacramento, U.S.A. — also spoke of the international brotherhood of fire fighters, of the deep kinship felt for fellow fire fighters in Australia and of the loss of lives; with 13 Victorian Country Fire Authority and 3 S.A. Country Fire Services members dead — "All fire fighters share in the sorrow of their loss."

The concern expressed by fire services, organizations and individuals alike is deeply appreciated . . . Editor.



EDITORIAL

What is there left to say

It's human nature that families fight amongst themselves, but when someone or something threatens the family itself everyone becomes united in a common cause.

Whatever the arguments, the dissention, the differences in opinion within the C.F.S, which might have been present before February 16, it was all cast aside on that day, and not only was there a fight for survival, but a fight for tomorrow!

And three of our comrades in S.A. and thirteen in Victoria paid the supreme sacrifice.

Out of it all must come a better trained, better equipped S.A. Country Fire Service.

However, what is undisputed is that the bravery and sacrifice of those who died and those who lived, was what lay between control and containment and sheer total devastation.

231 brigades, 300 appliances and 5,000 C.F.S. personnel stepped forward on the day. Three failed to return home.

To every one of you — I am overwhelmingly proud to be your leader — I am humbly proud to be a very small part of what must be one of the greatest volunteer organisations in the world.

On behalf of my self, and my staff
On behalf of the CFS Board
On behalf of the people of South Australia
THANK YOU
FOR A JOB SO WELL DONE!
LLOYD C. JOHNS,
Director,
S.A. Country Fire Services

FRONT COVER

City shows its respect

Flags on Commonwealth and State buildings in S.A. were flown at half mast on Wednesday, 23rd February in respect for the 73 people who died in S.A. and Victorian bushfires.

A total of 28 people died in the Ash Wednesday II bushfires in South Australia.

Flags in Victoria were also flown at half mast to honour the fallen.

Front cover photograph of Ash Wednesday II bushfires reproduced courtesy "The Advertiser".

"The Volunteer" acknowledges the support given by Country and Metropolitan media organizations throughout South Australia, in collating this historical report.

Media editors, journalists and photographers have assisted greatly in the compilation of the events and stories of South Australia's Ash Wednesday II Bushfires, Wednesday 16th February 1983.

Thank you for your co-operation . . . Peter Mills, Publicity.

Drought Conditions

In the summer of 1982/83 South Australia had been reeling in one of the worst droughts experienced; with large stock losses being recorded, parched ground, dried up seed and crops, ruined farms and little or no water in the catchment dams. Some farmers near ruin sought Government assistance, while others too proud struggled on.

The rainfall for the 10 month period from 1st May 1982 to 28th February 1983, was the lowest on record for the Murray Mallee, Riverland, Upper and Lower North, Flinders Ranges and most of Eyre Peninsula.

A serious rainfall deficiency existed in most areas of South Australia with the exception of the north-west corner of the State.

... Fire

And just when it seemed the land and man could endure no more torture, nature under the guise of a hot February summer's day showed its full wrath, and wrought havoc on the land and its people with a holocaust of fire.

That fateful day was Wednesday, 16th February, 1983.

It began as a combination of heat, wind, dust and then fire which spread so rapidly and laid to waste so much land, houses, property, stock, fences, lives that the Ash Wednesday II bushfires became South Australia's worst natural disaster ever.

The prevailing weather conditions of Ash Wednesday II were similar to those of Ash Wednesday February 20th, 1980, with temperatures over 40°C the relative humidity below 15% and strong dry northerly winds; low moisture content in the ground fuel and lack of summer rainfall . . . but the devastation was much greater . . . with the Adelaide Hills, Clare in the Mid-North and the Lower South-East ablaze.

But warnings of the impending disaster had been given earlier . . .

In the thirty (30) days before the Ash Wednesday II fires the Fire Danger ratings prepared by the Bureau of Meteorology for the Mount Lofty Ranges alone and broadcast daily on *radio had been Extreme (total ban) on 10 days. Very High on 12 days; High to Very High on 7 days and dropped to High on only 1 day. Fire danger ratings are taken for the whole State, so the public were aware of the fire risk, if not the extremity of the danger.

*Fire Danger Rating Broadcasts issued by the Bureau of Meteorology commenced on 19th October 1982. Some councils had imposed fire bans for their districts, prior to the official proclaimed S.A. Fire Danger season commencement date of 1st November, 1982; as the fire danger then was already high.

Media Release from C.F.S. Headquarters . . . 7/2/83

—S.A. FIRE RISK EXTREME—

The Country Fire Services has declared a "Red Alert" for today — the second in EIGHT days — as South Australia again enters an extreme fire risk period.

There is a total ban throughout the State on the lighting of fires in the open, with the maximum penalty for a first offence being \$1,000.

C.F.S. Director, Mr. Lloyd Johns, said this morning that the need to again impose a State-wide ban on fires, emphasized the critical fire danger rating in all areas.

"We are now into one of the hottest periods of the summer where high temperatures, combined with winds, and the extreme dryness of ground fuel cover, gives South Australia an explosive bushfire situation . . .

The C.F.S. called for continuing public support in obeying the total ban and in quickly reporting to the nearest police station or

C.F.S. brigade any suspicious activity which could point to firebugs being responsible for any outbreaks that might occur.

A forecast of warning . . .

In the early evening of Tuesday 15th February 1983, concern was growing at the Bureau of Meteorology on the forecast of extreme conditions predicted for the following day.

Wednesday's early morning balloon flights indicated a strengthening of the upper level northerly winds and when the 6.00 a.m. data was received it substantiated the earlier forecast and concern of the bureau personnel.

Alerted to the onset of: "*squally hot dry northerly winds that would raise the temperature to over 40°C and reduce the relative humidity to well below 15 per cent*", Bureau Regional Director, Mr. Lynn Mitchell prepared a special C.F.S. work bench, called in additional personnel from other sections and requested that special meteorological observations regarding wind speed, direction, temperature and humidity be taken from key locations around the State.

By mid morning further data obtained showed that the conditions were even more extreme than earlier indications had predicted: "*Significant increases in wind velocity and an impending dust storm, accompanied by searing heat . . .*" read the report.

The broadcast . . . Wednesday 16th February, 1983

In the Adelaide Hills some home dwellers were commuting to their work in the city, while others prepared their shopping lists, got children ready for school and attended to their daily household duties. At the same time in the north at Clare and at the Lower South-East, farmers property owners and business employers and employees and families were attending to their daily work routines and commitments; when . . . radio stations broadcast the following fire ban information, issued by the Bureau of Meteorology:

"THE DIRECTOR OF COUNTRY FIRE SERVICES HAS BANNED THE LIGHTING AND MAINTAINING OF ALL UNAUTHORIZED FIRES IN THE OPEN FOR THE WHOLE OF THE STATE INCLUDING THE INNER ADELAIDE AREA . . ."

A media release from C.F.S. Headquarters alerting the public to the "EXTREME FIRE RISK" also hit the radio airwaves almost simultaneously as a news report. Extracts from the release were:

SOUTH AUSTRALIA IS AGAIN UNDER A TOTAL FIRE BAN THROUGHOUT THE STATE — THE THIRD WITHIN A MONTH AS THE BUSHFIRE HAZARD AGAIN BECOMES EXTREME.

THE COUNTRY FIRE SERVICES THIS MORNING DECLARED A "RED ALERT" FOR TODAY AND TONIGHT.

C.F.S. DIRECTOR MR. LLOYD JOHNS SAID THIS MORNING THE STATE-WIDE BAN, WHICH INCLUDES THE INNER ADELAIDE FIRE BAN DISTRICT, EMPHASIZED THE CRITICAL FIRE DANGER RATING IN ALL AREAS.

HE SAID: "FEBRUARY IS ONE OF THE HOTTEST PERIODS OF THE SUMMER AND HIGH TEMPERATURES, COMBINED WITH WINDS AND THE VERY DRY GROUND FUEL CONDITIONS, MAKES THE STATE'S BUSHFIRE SITUATION EXPLOSIVE."

C.F.S. FIRE FIGHTERS THROUGHOUT SOUTH AUSTRALIA, ALONG WITH NATIONAL PARKS AND WILDLIFE AND WOODS AND FORESTS PERSONNEL, ARE ALREADY ON STANDBY ALERT.

MR. JOHNS APPEALED TO THE PUBLIC TO STRICTLY OBSERVE THE TOTAL BAN AND TO ACT QUICKLY IN REPORTING TO THE NEAREST POLICE STATION OR C.F.S. BRIGADE ANY SUSPICIOUS ACTIVITY WHICH COULD POINT TO FIREBUGS BEING RESPONSIBLE FOR ANY OUTBREAKS WHICH MIGHT OCCUR.

The Imminent Danger

The drought had left trees, vegetation and surface litter exceptionally dry thus creating an enormous fire potential.

Similarly in the Adelaide Hills some paddocks had a light covering of dry grass and natural bushland and scrub was tinder dry.

From the drought affected areas, top soil whipped up by gusty northerly winds, was carried towards the city of Adelaide.

A fierce dust storm moved across the city and blanketed the Adelaide Hills in a red dust haze.

Dust obscured the Adelaide Hills from the city.

Clare Valley in the North of the State and townships in the South East experienced similar conditions.

Observations taken by the Bureau of Meteorology at Kent Town, Adelaide, recorded the following visibility readings:

9.00 a.m. (40 km); 12 noon (average visibility was reduced between 10-15 km); by 3 p.m. (visibility was only 1500 metres (1.5 kms). In the Adelaide Hills face zone, dust reduced visibility even further, to less than 1 km.

Residents and fire fighters alike were unable to receive early fire warnings by visual observation. Fire spotting towers and aircraft carrying out routine smoke spotting patrols were equally restricted.

The air spotting plane which flies the Mount Lofty Ranges every fire ban day was grounded after only 2 hours in the air when visibility from the National Parks and Wildlife Services Mount Lofty tower was reduced to less than one hundred metres.

Ash Wednesday II

Temperatures soared to 43°C and relative humidity was between 15% and 8%, when fires raged at Clare; in the Adelaide Hills and in the Lower South-East of South Australia, fanned by 50 km/h north-westerly winds, gusting from 75 to over 100 km/h.

Although the Country Fire Services brigades and Woods and Forest and National Parks and Wildlife Service units were already alerted, the speed with which fires occurred and travelled, caught communities by surprise.

Fires were "concealed by a cloud of dust".

C.F.S. Turn Out

Leaving back-up crews behind on standby in case fire broke out in their own district(s) Country Fire Services units headed out on Wednesday to join the fight against the worst bushfires in the State's history.

For the South Australian Country Fire Services a total of 231 brigades, 300 fire appliances and in excess of 5,000 volunteer fire fighters battled the Ash Wednesday II bush and forest fires.

Fire fighters risked injury and death to fight a fire storm whose ferocity and speed was horrendous. Powerless to stop the holocaust, units changed their strategy from: head the fires off and stop them from spreading — to: save people and property. Soon it was to be, "Save lives."

Fires gutted houses and outbuildings, forced the evacuation of many towns and farming properties, claimed lives, property and personal possessions, incinerated forests, laid to waste pasture, farmland and recreation parks, killed thousands of head of sheep, cattle and other animals and destroyed thousands of kilometres of fencing in its path, along with fodder and hay supplies.

All fires were declared major fires.

By mid afternoon on Wednesday a vigorous south-westerly wind change, relieved the dire threat to some property and townships and turned the inferno tragically on others.

For many men, fighting the fire meant leaving their own homes unattended and in danger. Some even after seeing their own homes, sheds, stock, fences, farmland or orchards burnt, fought on to save other properties.

Concern grew for residents in the fire areas as power and telephone lines were cut.

Some families were trapped in their smoke-filled homes as flames licked at the outside walls . . . and roared overhead.

A combination of smoke, hot ash and dust resulted in a shroud of darkness which preceded the spread of the fire. There was panic and confusion even by property owners who had had fires in the past but had not experienced such a phenomenon before.

There was no shortage of bravery in South Australia, but C.F.S. resources both human and material were stretched to the limits.

Three C.F.S. volunteer fire fighters made the supreme sacrifice in loosing their own lives, while helping to save others.

State Disaster Act Invoked

At approx. 5.15 p.m. (1715 hours) Wednesday 16th February, the South Australian Governor, Sir Donald Dunstan at Government House, Adelaide signed the emergency declaration of a statewide disaster invoking for the first time the sweeping powers of the State Disaster Act.

It is the first time the powers have been used since the Act became law in 1980 soon after the destruction by the Ash Wednesday bushfires.

The State Disaster Act established a State Disaster Committee, headed by State Emergency Co-ordinator, Police Commissioner J. B. Giles and three others whose duty it was to prepare a disaster plan.

The State Disaster Act gives the state emergency co-ordinator power to take almost any action necessary. He can enter and take control of any property, direct the evacuation and removal of persons from disaster areas, prohibit the movements of persons, cut off power and fuel supplies and remove or destroy any building, structure or vehicle. He can direct any person required to engage in counter disaster operations and appoint officers to help him put the disaster plan into effect.

The signing of the Act by the Governor was arranged in a series of crisis meetings organized by two senior S.A. ministers, the Attorney-General Mr Sumner and Chief Secretary, Mr Keneally.

About 3.00 p.m. (1500 hours)—The Chairman of the State Disaster Committee and head of the Premier's Department, Mr. Max Scriven alerted the Governor of the possible need for a special Executive Council meeting to sign the declaration of emergency. Prepared papers needed to invoke the powers.

3.30 (1530 hours)—A meeting of Messrs. Sumner, Keneally and Scriven assessed the need for emergency powers.

3.40 (1540 hours)—Meeting between S.A. Police Commissioner Mr J. B. Giles, C.F.S. Director Mr L. C. Johns and Metropolitan Fire Services Chief, Mr A. W. Bruce. Prepare a report to the S.A. Government, recommending a declaration of a state of emergency.

4.45 (1645 hours)—Mr Giles presents Messrs Sumner, Keneally and Scriven with a request for emergency powers. Papers are conveyed to Government House.

5.15 (1715 hours)—Sir Donald Dunstan signs the emergency declaration.

Fire continued on its path of destruction with even more ferocity, razing a large slice of South Australia's heritage.

It burnt historic buildings, and many famous land marks and houses classified by the National Trust as well as private collections of books, paintings, antiques, furniture, photographs and historical records — all are irreplaceable.

Light rains and a cool change on Wednesday evening February 16th, helped quell the Ash Wednesday II bush and forest fires to the relief of thousands of volunteer fire fighters and co-emergency service personnel.

The long awaited report finally came: "All fires are contained", but it was several days before the fires were under control.

Supportive services

Assisting the C.F.S., District Councils, Woods and Forest and National Parks and Wildlife Service personnel; were private farm fire fighting units, local townfolk, Police, Department of Agriculture, St. John Ambulance, Salvation Army, regular Australian Army, Royal Australian Air Force troops, State Emergency Services, Wireless Institute Communications Emergency Network (W.I.C.E.N.), Australian Civil Radio Monitors (A.C.R.M.), R.S.P.C.A., S.A. Metropolitan Fire Service, Red Cross, Department of Community Welfare, neighbouring councils, Women's auxiliaries, business houses, petrol and cement carriers (providing tankers as water carriers) and members of the community — who took up various supportive roles:

On Thursday 17th February: many weary volunteer fire fighters still staggered on with little or no sleep to keep "spot flare ups" under control and continued the "mopping up" task; while strong winds again threatened problems.

Fire fighters maintained patrols and attended to flare ups as they occurred. Mopping up of hot spots continued throughout the next week.

By Thursday, the State of South Australia consisted of a community of victims and heroes. Every South Australian was in some way involved personally by the terrible events of Ash Wednesday II — some tragically, through their loss of life, home, family, property, stock, livelihood — others through their generous contributions with either money, clothing, offer of shelter, donations of fodder, and stock. Assisting with cleaning up of devastated properties, erecting fence posts on fire damaged land or making available their properties for grazing of stock from the fire affected areas. Acts of heroism were performed by all — who fought the fires; acted in a supportive role; or were involved in protection of property, often risking their own lives for others.

Australia and the world flooded South Australia and Victoria with offers of financial and material support for the bushfire victims.

Money flowed in from State Governments, businesses and corporations; from Councils and communities in several States, from overseas — and from the pockets of hundreds of thousands of South Australians.

Statistics

The Ash Wednesday II bush and forest fires claimed 28 lives in South Australia (14 died in Adelaide Hills, 14 died in South East).

Among the fatalities were three (3) registered Country Fire Services volunteer fire fighters.

Many volunteers suffered severe burns and eye injuries.

Fires destroyed or damaged over 312 homes, 1 hotel and 1 service station (13 historic buildings were among the statistics).

A total of 973 properties were affected by the fire; 8,500 kilometres of fencing destroyed and 158,700 hectares (1587 sq kms) of bush, grass, pasture and orchard land, forests and National Parks reserves were burnt.

97 sheds/outbuildings and 564 vehicles (includes farm vehicles) were gutted.

Stock killed amounted to 246,900 sheep; 9,690 cattle; over 120 horses, 140 goats and over 500 poultry.

A conservative damage estimate for South Australia's Ash Wednesday II fires, was almost \$400 million.

VICTORIA'S TRAGEDY

Victoria also experienced a "major bushfire catastrophe" on Ash Wednesday II.

For the residents in the southern part of the state the holocaust raged on Wednesday and Thursday, 16th and 17th February. With temperatures over 40°C and 40 to 50 km/h northerly winds, over 5 major fires erupted on Wednesday, 16th February 1983. The final figure amounted to 10 fires burning in Victoria.

Over 500 Country Fire Authority (C.F.A.) tankers, 100 Forest Commission tankers supported by 34 bulldozers and hundreds of privately owned farm fire fighting units and Army personnel battled the fires.

45 lives were lost, which included 13 volunteer fire fighters, who died in the course of duty.

In addition many fire fighters and others suffered painful burns during the fires; some of these being quite serious with the victims still receiving hospital treatment.

Some 1700 homes were destroyed in some cases practically whole towns were razed. Fire burnt in excess of 184,000 hectares.

An estimated 5000 or more people were left homeless following the disaster.

Farming properties suffered most in the Cudjee-Ballangeich fire where 363 farms were affected, with 179 within the Beaconsfield vicinity and 69 farms were burnt out in the Deans Marsh district.

More than 300 significant outbuildings were destroyed, a lot of these being dairies, shops, schools and halls etc.

Stock losses were 18,126 sheep and 6,653 cattle. Nearly 1.1 million bales of hay were burnt and farm fencing losses were over 10,000 kilometres.

PRAYERS FOR THE FALLEN THANKS TO THE BRAVE

Time of prayer/mourning

The then Prime Minister of Australia, Mr. Malcolm Fraser called on religious leaders to declare the weekend a time of national prayer and mourning. Mr Fraser said the tragic loss of life and the destruction of homes and possessions in S.A. and Victoria was one of the greatest disasters in Australian history.

"I know all Australians extend their sympathy to the relatives and friends of those who lost their lives and those who lost their livelihood," he said.

"I know all Australians also will join with me in expressing gratitude to the thousands of fire fighters who are fighting the fires with determination and bravery and without whom the devastation would be very much worse".

England shocked and distressed

LONDON — Her Royal Highness Queen Elizabeth II expressed her shock at the "sad toll" in lives and property of the Australian bushfires.

She said in a telegraph to the Australian Governor-General, Sir Ninian Stephen, she was "shocked and distressed" by the news of the "sad toll of human lives and destruction of property".

"Please convey deepest sympathy from Prince Phillip and myself to the relatives of those who have died, to the injured and to those who have suffered the grievous loss of homes and possessions".

The English Prime Minister, Mrs Thatcher also sent a message of sympathy to the then Prime Minister, Mr Fraser.

WEDNESDAY 16th FEBRUARY 1983

INSIDE CFS H/Q CONTROL CENTRE —OPERATION'S ROOM

Information was regimentally recorded as the initial fire reports were supplied to C.F.S. H/Q Operation's Room, on that fateful day, soon to be christened under a baptism of fire:— "ASH WEDNESDAY II".

BEFORE NOON:

C.F.S. H/Q Operation's Room received reports of outbreaks of fires near Port Lincoln (Eyre Peninsula) at Clare (Mid North), McLaren Flat (Southern District) and Anstey Hill (Adelaide Hills, N.E. of Adelaide).

C.F.S. brigades were turned out.

BUREAU OF METEOROLOGY REPORT READ:

"N/NW 50/75 km/h shifting to NW/W at 5.00 p.m. (1700 hrs) and moderating at 50/60 km/h. Then at approx. 9.00 p.m. (2100 hrs) shifting SW 40/50 km/h with gusts to 70 km/h. Moderating gradually."

Winds gusting to 75 km/h swept a red dust haze in from the drought ravaged areas of the State. Dust clouds moved across the city and blanketed the Adelaide Hills. Visibility severely hampered smoke sightings.

Fires were obscured by smoke and dust.

EARLY AFTERNOON

Grass/scrub fire near Lucindale (South East).

All fires were out of control and spreading rapidly. (Country Fire Services H/Q realized the worst and called additional C.F.S. brigades out).
Fire near Hahndorf.

Fire at Devils Elbow heading towards Eagle on the Hill.

Scrub fire spotted in Bridgewater area.

Clare fire had reached the town's showground after skirting township.

Fire approaching homesteads and property.

Anstey Hill fire first believed contained flared up . . . out of control.

All fires out of control. Now classified as major fires.

A radio broadcast is issued requesting: "All C.F.S. volunteer fire fighters throughout the Adelaide Hills to report to their fire stations".

C.F.S. calls on armed forces to contribute fire units and men.

The Weather Bureau posted an up-date which continued to paint a serious picture:

"WIND GUSTS TO CONTINUE. TEMPERATURE MAXIMUM 42 °C".

South Eastern Freeway closed to traffic.

Telephone lines cut by fires.

Blackout — E.T.S.A. power to Adelaide goes.

C.F.S. Headquarters automatically switches to auxiliary power.

Fire near Hahndorf. Fire penetrates boundary of Mount Barker district.

Anstey Hill flare up spreads towards Paracombe and Houghton.

MID AFTERNOON:

Mt. Osmond fire hits Cleland National Park and impinges on Crafers.

Most main roads into Hills blocked by Police road blocks.

Brigades instructed to change strategy from fighting fires to saving homes and property.

Confirmed reports of Eagle on the Hill service station and hotel destroyed.

UPDATE ON WEATHER FORECAST:

Forecast N/NW 50/75 km/h possible stronger gusts, shifting W/SW 40/60 km/h. Possible change to WNW, 1 hour before cool change arrives.

Fire sweeps into Crafers. Wind change turns fire up onto Mount Lofty and into Greenhill Estate.

Fire near Lucindale in South-East out of control.

Anstey Hill fire has crossed Paracombe golf course.

H/Q alerts C.F.S. brigades in the Riverland to be prepared to assist with fire suppression in various fire areas.

Hahndorf nursing home evacuated. First reports received of property damage and many injuries in fire areas.

Meeting between S.A. Police, C.F.S. and M.F.S. Chief's discusses need for State Emergency.

LATE AFTERNOON:

Confirmed reports of deaths in Adelaide Hills.

S.A. Governor Sir Donald Dunstan signs emergency declaration to invoke the State Disaster Act.

Lucindale (S.E.) fire reported to have covered 60 sq km. Fire threatening farming properties near Glencoe.

Evacuations of homes in Glencoe area and Tarpeena and Mt. Burr (S.E.) townships underway.

Meadows township (Adelaide Hills) evacuated.

BUREAU OF METEOROLOGY WEATHER REPORT:

Forecast given at 5.30 p.m. (1730 hrs) Adelaide Hills SW/S 55/75 km/h, moderating rapidly to 20/40 km/h which will continue tomorrow.

Isolated thunderstorms possible Central and South East Districts particularly South East.

EARLY EVENING

Fires throughout Onkaparinga, Mt. Barker and Meadows districts were being contained.

Report of over seven fires have devastated the Lower South-East . . . possibly ten.

LATE EVENING:

Clare fire contained but not controlled.

Police report 7 dead in Adelaide Hills, 11 in South East. Figures could go higher.

Rain starts in Adelaide Hills.

Police confirm 22 dead, 9 in Adelaide Hills, 13 in South East.

Figures could go higher.

All fires contained, but flare ups occurring.

PORT LINCOLN FIRES

Lower Eyre Peninsula had its own day of searing heat, bushfires* and dust. CFS volunteers and MFS battled raging fires fanned by 30 knot winds. Blinding dust rolled in and enveloped the district. Rising as high as 300 metres in the air about mid-morning dust blanketed the area for hours. The wind brought down power lines and trees, caused chaos on country roads, cut telephone communications, broke boat moorings, disrupted business and schools and caused untold damage in drought-ridden rural areas. Wind seriously eroded top soil on farmland on Lower Eyre Peninsula.

A power blackout over most of Port Lincoln and North Shields at lunch time was caused by flying debris striking power lines.

Gale force winds also caused damage in Tumby Bay. Street lights, windows were blown down and roofs were blown off farm buildings.

* A grass fire started at Little Swamp next to Kiplingcotes Fauna Park, one hectare of scrub including some fencing was burnt. The swamp stopped the front of the fire allowing fire men to put out the flanks.



Lincoln C.F.S. volunteer fire fighters "turn out to a fire". (Photograph courtesy "Port Lincoln Times".)

* Both CFS and MFS units were called out to the dump where a fire already alight got out of control in nearby scrub. A council truck became bogged in the path of the fire and a council tractor was also bogged attempting to assist the truck. St. John Ambulance team treated some firemen for smoke inhalation.



St. John Ambulance officer, Barry Letheby, treats an eye injury for C.F.S. volunteer, Peter Gaskell in the first-aid post set up at Holiday Village. (Photograph courtesy "Port Lincoln Times".)

Strong north-westerly winds swept a fire at the Port Lincoln dump into scrub.

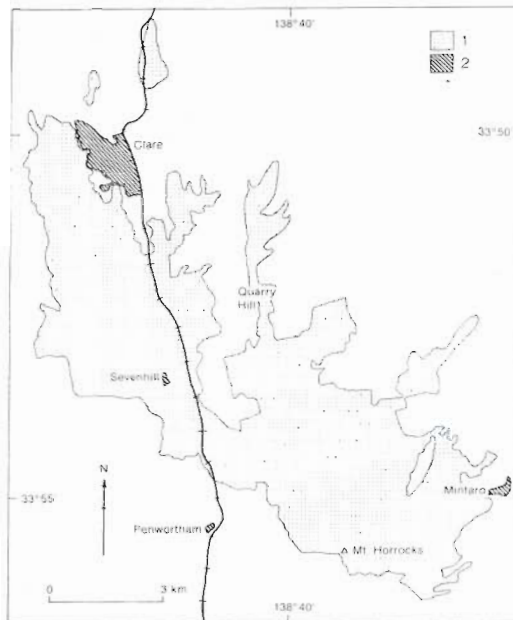
Port Lincoln and North Shields CFS units and MFS battled the fire which swung east to Murray's Point with a westerly change of wind — burning through to the sea.

The danger of an expected wind change to a south-westerly direction caused the Port Lincoln holiday village, G.H.P. Line — sand loading facility and Port Lincoln ship constructions to be evacuated. The fire at one stage came within 500 metres of the Holiday Village.

The potential disaster was averted when a cool change accompanied by rain, helped quell fires on the outskirts of Port Lincoln.

* Firemen also attended a small fire at Puckridge park and Lincoln Springs on Wednesday.

THE CLARE FIRE



Clare fire area: Map courtesy Australian Geographical Studies

A bushfire which blazed through the Clare Valley on Ash Wednesday II (16th February, 1983) caused over \$4.5 million damage, and burnt approximately 6,100 hectares.

The fire which started in West Clare moved onto Sevenhill and Mintaro. Hundreds of volunteers left work to help C.F.S. units in a desperate bid to save properties and remained to fight 15 to 20 smaller outbreaks that developed in the following days.

Fire Co-ordination . . . support groups

CFS Regional Officer, George Polomka, rushed from Jamestown to join local F.C.O. John Donnellan, Clare C.F.S. Group Captain, who supervised Clare units in the field and assisted F.C.O. Norm Fry, Area Supervisor, in directing operations. While all trained volunteers were required on mobile fire units the Clare Fire Station's communications room became the fire co-ordination centre for hundreds of vehicles.

St. John Ambulance Brigade immediately set up a main command post at the Clare Fire Station, as well as organizing mobile units later, aided by the Salvation Army. Volunteers rendered first aid treatment to many hundreds of fire fighters with saline solutions for smoke/eye irritation and heat exhaustion.

The State Emergency Service was mobilized immediately the fire began. Spalding and Burra SES assisting other SES crews delivered food and drink to volunteer fire fighters, reported spot fires with map co-ordinates, and liaised with police and C.F.S.

Some 40 Country Fire Services Brigade units backed up by many hundreds of volunteers from the district and surrounding areas, battled for hours in frustrating and dangerous conditions to save the Clare Valley.

Call-out — Clare

The Clare C.F.S. units attended the first call just before 11.00 a.m. to a fire off West Terrace, in a residential area of Clare. The fire units put out the flames on the front of a hillside property before moving onto stop a second flare-up at the rear. While the fire fighters were drenching the area to contain the second outbreak a large tree flared up again, and fire sparked into an adjoining property.

With the temperature over 42 degrees, and hot northerly winds gusting up to 80 km/h the spread of the fire was devastating.

The fire was relentless in its fury and heat, burning heavy scrub at Neagle Rock Reserve before moving onto threaten houses backed onto West Terrace and further south of the township. All houses were saved due to the efforts of fire fighters and home owners.

The major worry then was the historical homestead on the western side of Clare "Wolfa Wolfa". C.F.S. units had been rushed in from Blyth and Spalding along with private farm units to begin a long and frustrating fight to save the homestead.

First Victim

The fire burnt through Mr. John Hope's property, but at that stage "Wolta Wolta" homestead and its unique collection of antiques had been saved, so the C.F.S. units sped off in an attempt to move in front of the fire.

Those left with Mr. Hope were then to experience their own hell, as while in the kitchen quenching their thirst after the brief fiery battle they saw too late . . . the roof and ceiling had caught alight, leaving only a short time to rescue a few valuables. Some of the early history of the State in papers, photographs etc., were saved for future generations, including some antiques. Other items 300 years old, and valued at \$200,000, along with the Museum were lost. Flames then took hold and guttered the 110 year old historical mansion.

At the front, the fire had developed, its tongues spreading through the rubbish dump, police paddock, wood yard, even closer to residential homes, eventually reaching the caravan park.

Park . . . in the path

As the fire was nearing the park, caravans had to be moved to the safety of the showground/oval, and many on-site vans had no vehicles to tow them. One van was lost with a number of tents and a motor cycle. Other caravans came close to burning, but volunteers sprayed them with water. The park pond provided a good supply of water with 100,000 gallons available for tankers.

The oval on the showgrounds eventually caught alight, but fortunately with low grass fuel, fire damage was minor.

Fire then hit the wool pavilion, amenities block and destroyed fencing . . . damage estimate was up to \$35,000.

50 small trees planted as part of "Year of the Tree" were lost. The Clare Museum was in the path, however it swept around its corners and while the roof timbers in the chimney caught alight, the main body and sheds escaped.

C.F.S. fire fighting appliances had been rushed to the Caravan park which had been evacuated but by then the fire was at its strength, rushing through the park and showgrounds onto Sevenhill. It swept through the town and spread east and west to Sevenhill College and Gillentown.

Road blocks

Police set up road blocks at Main North Road, south of Sevenhill and the scenic view road of Spring Gully, and were sent out to ensure no-one was trapped in homes.

Slow burn

The greatest danger and heartbreak to volunteers was the notorious "slow burn" of fires . . . no sooner did it seem fire fighters had saved properties than the fire would creep up behind and raze sheds and houses. It burnt to the walls of at least 12 houses in Sevenhill. Tractors, trucks, cars and fences were destroyed. Power lines fell while other houses burned. Smoke reduced visibility dramatically.

Drama At Sevenhill Township



Clare Valley: Flames rip through a building at Sevenhill. (Photograph by Dick Joyner).

Sevenhill had two fire fronts enter the township — one from the eastern side which they controlled. The western was the one that did the main damage burning houses and two sheds. Also the Sevenhill Hotel caught alight three times and the fires were put out each time.

Sevenhill became the command post for many units. Sightseers blocked the road as units tried to refill water supplies from tankers. (Sheppard's tankers Kadina and fuel tankers from Cleve).

CFS volunteer fire fighters also were heavily involved in releasing stock from paddocks — unfortunately there were still big losses.

"Protect lives"

As fire raged through the district, fire fighters efforts were directed desperately at trying to save lives, and protect houses and properties at great personal risk to themselves.

Many telephone lines were destroyed between Clare and Sevenhill, but immediately the fire went through, Telecom technicians set about restoring lines.

Further frustration

C.F.S. fireman Gus Leighton, Clare, said fire fighters thought they were on top of the fire on a number of occasions however in these instances burning trees falling across roads; tracks, dry creek beds, railway lines and hilly terrain temporarily stopped the fire fighters, but not the fires. Further frustration came when the wind carried flames over fire breaks prepared.

Dust storm

Fire fighting conditions were worsened by the dust storm that swept through the State and cut off visibility, preventing volunteers from marking the flames and halting any hope of aerial aid.

The dust storm blew into Burra at about 5.00 p.m. (1700 hours). Under searing temperatures and roaring north westerly winds; dust, smoke and ash hundreds of feet high enveloped the area blotting out the sun.

Wind change

With Mintaro again under threat as it was in 1965, a large stud property "Kadlunga" owned by Mr. John Melrose, bore the full brunt of the flames. The entire eastern flank of the property caught alight, then as the wind changed direction the main front destroyed houses, property, sheds, machinery and stock. This wind change also placed properties near Clare under threat a second time, as the front opened up on four different fingers, heading towards Inchiquin and Armagh, West Clare (second time), Spring Farm and Hill River.



Volunteers watch as the flames and smoke are pushed south by strong, hot winds. (Photograph reproduced courtesy "Northern Argus".

The township of Clare could have been endangered if the wind change had come earlier but when it did come, at about 4.10 p.m. (1610 hours) a lot of ground already burnt between the houses, acted as a fire break to protect property on the return of the fire.

A second and third fire believed caused by spotting of sparks roared across the White Hut Road and the Clare Golf Course onto a farm property. When the fire wasn't being fanned by the winds, clumps of cow and horse dung would catch on fire, only to be propelled by the wind to spark off further outbreaks.

Spot fires also occurred in the town limits, but were extinguished by residents.

Support 4 to 1

The response from townspeople and property owners was excellent, backing-up the C.F.S. volunteers 4 to 1. Sometimes there was more men than equipment. However, the back up units were able to move in once fire trucks had saved an area, and mop up to prevent re-occurrences.

Flare-up

Just when things looked like quietening down a flare up occurred in the S.E. corner, of the Clare township which had not been previously touched.

A grader prepared a fire break, but fire caused some concern until it was extinguished 2 hours later.

The C.F.S. crews said they were indebted to the work of three grader drivers, Ross Partridge, Ross Haige and Gerald Day, who burnt back areas of scrub along the western side of Clare township at risk to personal injury. While not intending to single out personal efforts and acts of bravery that could be said to all who fought the fires, CFS crew members said work done by these men was "invaluable".

Rain . . . area safe

Following a rain shower at 10.02 p.m. (2202 hours) Wednesday 16th February, by 3.30 a.m. Thursday, 17th February, the area was declared safe.

In retrospect:

Saddleworth/Auburn in fight

The entire D/C area of Saddleworth and Auburn took part in controlling a local fire and assisting in fighting the tremendous bushfire in the Clare/Sevenhill/Mintaro area. Involvement commenced at 11.00 a.m. when a north-west gale and fallen power lines blackened out the town. Dense smoke was detected in the north west. Lack of power prevented the CFS fire alarm being sounded, so the fire truck siren was sounded. Fire crews from Saddleworth and Manoora CFS brought under control a dangerous outbreak about 4 km north/west of the town of Saddleworth, by 1.54 p.m. (1354 hours). Fire on a property damaged 12 ha of stubble and fencing.

At the same time a report from Clare of the big and dangerous fire outbreaks resulted in the whole district CFS organization being put on standby; with Riverton CFS being the first brigade to be deployed to the Clare fire front area. Saddleworth and Manoora were then turned out. Waterloo CFS remained on standby along with private farm fire units.

All district CFS units from Saddleworth, Auburn, Watervale, Tothill Creek, Riverton, Black Springs, Manoora and Marrabel were committed.

All farm fire fighting units were by now also committed and the radio communication revealed tense action. The towns' womenfolk attended to catering. The C.F.S. radio base was manned constantly until tired wet fire fighting crews were stood down at approx. 1.45 a.m. on Thursday, 17th February.

Relief crews organized at various intervals, moved to Clare and Mintaro.

CFS district supervisor, Norm Fry thanked Frank Walsh, who manned the radio all day for his untiring service and all volunteers for the work.



(Photograph courtesy "Northern Argus").

"C.F.S. units came from far and wide.

Acknowledgement is also made to the Ardrossan CFS unit who answered a call for help to fight fire at Clare. District Supervisor, Washington Parker of Watervale did a fine effort in controlling the southern front. Communications Officer, Frank Cousins,

commended radio operations by the Clare C.F.S. Crews from local CFS brigades who helped every day right up to Sunday, 20th February, patrolling and watching the fire perimeter. "Some CFS members required medical treatment by St. John Ambulance medical team for smoke inhalation and burns," said Mr. Fry.

STATISTICS

Over 80 private units assisted some 40 CFS brigades.

Two C.F.S. members were injured with burns, as was a grader driver and another local man, trying to save his house.

Nine (9) homes were destroyed in the Clare Valley at Kadlunga (1); at Sevenhill (3); near Sevenhill (1); Wolta Wolta (1); homes unoccupied — Gillentown (1) and Benny's Hill (2). Sheep killed 1,900; (sheep without feed — dependent on emergency supplies 12,500); cattle killed 190; (cattle without feed 520); horses killed 25; (horses without feed 100); poultry killed 25.

Vineyards already affected by the drought and hit by the fire resulted in 105 hectares (262 acres) being damaged. A conservative estimate by an Agriculture Department spokesman was \$¼ million loss in vintage income. The estimated 1983 vintage of 5,000 tonnes will be reduced by over 900 tonnes.

Clare wine makers say that vineyards acting as firebreaks saved 20 or 30 houses in the region from destruction.

Fire passed through 90 sq kms of ground, burning approximately 6,100 hectares.

The fire toll damage reports continued: 69 sheds, 4 yards, 36 machines, 12 cars, 5 trucks, 16 tractors, 9 trailers/caravans.

Damage was also caused to railway lines in the district. Australian National estimates damage up to \$150,000 to its equipment and property; with about 8 km of track, 10 km of fencing, 4,000 sleepers, one bridge, and other minor damage.

Supporting services

The Country Fire Services brigades put in a mighty effort, as did the local farm fire fighting units, townspeople, police, S.E.S. St. John, Salvation Army, R.S.P.C.A., hospital staff, welfare workers, Telecom and other helpers. Some 28-30 police were in the area for over 4 days including crime command investigation teams and Star force members.

Commercial groups supplied tankers for carrying water.

The welfare side of disaster preparation was well organized with ladies supplying food for fire fighters through the many hours of fire fighting.

After the fire . . .

Red Cross set up a registration office for victims at the Clare District Community Welfare Office to ensure they were eligible for all assistance. Once registered victims received emergency cash help, food, clothing, accommodation and other support.

Officers from the Department of Agriculture and other Government departments organized a public meeting to explain welfare, rural and drought assistance. Agriculture Department Officers toured the district totalling losses of property and stock.



Clare Valley farmers in fire-ravaged areas are overwhelmed with the generosity of their Lower Eyre Peninsula counterparts with donations of hay. (Photograph courtesy "Port Lincoln Times").

continued page 10.

Many donations of fodder were received and allocated to those in need. Supplies came from farmers on the Lower Eyre Peninsula, Clare Valley, Two Wells, mid North district, Yorke Peninsula, Buckleboo and the Defence Research Centre at Salisbury.

Mr David Lewis of the Department of Agriculture conveyed some 60 fire hit farmers deepest gratitude to the donors, as the supply of hay enabled them to keep their breeding stocks.

The District Council Clerks, acted as registrars and took names of people/organizations who could provide labour, fencing and materials.

Local Rural Youth groups and neighbouring district Rotary Clubs supplied labour to assist in the unloading of fodder supplies and clearing away the devastation.

Cattle owners responded to the appeal: The Queensland and New South Wales branches of the Australian Simmental Breeders Association launched an appeal for all members to donate; cattle, fodder; fencing materials or cash.

Bushfire relief

An immediate emergency aid was provided through the NSW-9 Bushfire Relief Appeal with all adult victims eligible for a community gift of \$250 and \$50 per child. An initial grant of \$2,500 was made available to those owner/occupiers whose homes were totally destroyed by fire.

Financial assistance was also made available through the Department of Social Security Special Benefit, with officers at Clare, providing emergency cash to those who had lost their homes in the fires.

Inspection of destruction

Chief Secretary, Mr Gavin Keneally, Member for Light, Bruce Eastick, the Mayor of Clare, Mr Fred Dinham, District Clerk, Mr Lindsay Chambers, Police, C.F.S. and S.E.S. representatives, toured all affected areas in order to assess the damage to compile a report for the Premier.

The Unselfish Acts

The Department of Community Welfare Office at Clare was swamped with offers of labour, and supplies of food, clothing, household items, accommodation, free transport of goods/materials, free legal advice over insurance claims, supplies of rain-water and donations of money. Help came from as far away as Kadina, Yacka, Spalding and Brinkworth.

Goods received included the much needed white goods, i.e. washing machines, refrigerators and other household items.

Appeals/Donations

The District Council of Saddleworth and Auburn conducted an appeal in conjunction with the GTS-4 Port Pirie/Northern Argus — "Clare Valley Appeal". The appeal was conducted under the umbrella of the Premier's Bushfire Appeal. Support came from donations raised by Red Cross branches, Lions Club, Rotoract and Rural Youth members, St. Vincent de Paul Society, pastoralists, schools, children, local businesses and from the community in general . . . even a visiting English cricket team donated the proceeds of an impromptu singing concert to the bushfire appeal.

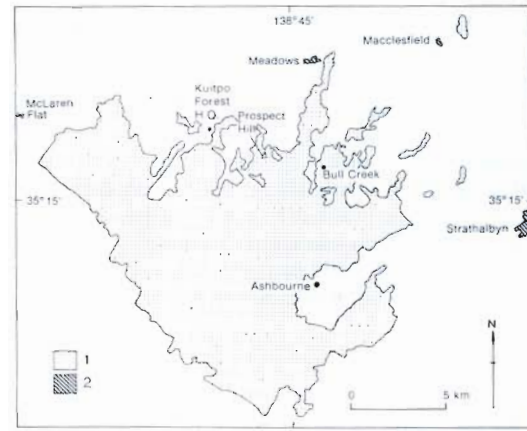
Message from the Mayor of Clare

The Mayor of Clare, Mr Fred Dinham extended his sympathy to people who lost homes, belongings, stock, plant and feed.

Mr Dinham acknowledged the support shown to the Clare District area by the surrounding councils, council employees, C.F.S. brigades, who came from as far away as Ardrossan, Paskerville and Port Wakefield, S.E.S. units, police and area supervisors of the various services.

"Tribute is also paid to the St. John personnel who were following the fire to tend to any injuries and render first-aid at the base . . . and to the women who volunteered to prepare and distribute food", said Mr. Dinham.

THE MEADOWS/KUITPO FIRE



Meadows/Kuitpo fire area: Map courtesy Australian Geographical Studies

In retrospect:

Monday, 14th February

A fire broke out just before 3.00 p.m. (1500 hrs) within the Kuitpo Forest. Woods and Forests units from Kuitpo and other forest areas were joined by over 20 C.F.S. units from within the Meadows District Council, assisted by fire units from outside the district.

93 hectares of pine plantations were burnt in the blaze. Because of the intensity of thermals caused by the fire, burning twigs and branches were carried to paddocks well away, from the forest. Spot fires kept C.F.S. and Woods and Forests units on constant alert. A light aircraft bombarded the forest blaze with fire retardants. By midnight the blaze had been contained and mopping up operations had started. With high temperatures forecast for Tuesday many units returned to saturate the trouble spots.

Wednesday, 16th February

More than 200 fire fighters involving Country Fire Services brigades, MFS units and privately owned units fought the Meadows/Kuitpo fire that originated about 10 kms south of McLaren Flat.

Control in the initial stages of the fire was very difficult because of the inaccessible nature of the terrain.

Fire fighters trapped

During the early stages of the fire four fire fighters from the Port Noarlunga-Christies Beach C.F.S. were trapped when their fire appliance was involved in accident as flames enveloped units near Range Road while battling to save a house. Stranded were fire fighters Ken Ross and John Luscombe of Christie Downs, John Dugey of Christies Beach and John Savage of Port Noarlunga.

"It came in two waves", said unit O.I.C. Ken Ross.

"It burnt through a paddock and came up again behind us. The main thing is all my boys are safe. John Savage arranged a truck to tow the C.F.S. unit to safety and within hours the damaged radiator was repaired and the unit was again in action, but by then the fire was too big to control," said Ken Ross.



Pictured above from left: John Savage, John Luscombe and Ken Ross, fit the repaired radiator to their fire truck.

Treatment by St. John

Several men were taken back to a command post at the corner of Pennys Hill and Range Roads for treatment by the St. John Ambulance.

One of the injured, 28 year old fire fighter Geoff Smith of Echunga CFS Brigade received 10 p.c. burns to his chest and shoulder. Before the incident, the crew had put out a few small fires on the top of Willunga Ridge, then headed off to protect a nearby house. Geoff got off the truck and began wetting down the area when suddenly "a wall of flame about 20 feet high came out of nowhere," he said. "I knew I had to make it back to the truck, so I ran through the flames, jumped aboard and turned the hose on myself," said Geoff Smith.

As fire raced across paddocks, fire fighters in appliances and four-wheel drive vehicles cut fences and herded cattle away from the danger.

But in other areas that contained many small holdings used for breeding cattle and sheep, the fire won out—

Breeding Stock perish

A 32 hectare breeding property owned by Mr Fred Cook, was in the path of the fire.

"Everything just went upside down . . . it was like a bomb," said Mr. Cook. When the fire hit all of a sudden there was intense heat and wind. First the hay shed caught fire, then the machinery shed." The Holden caught alight when it was driven into the open and Mr. Cook received minor burns. The house was sited in a clearing with undergrowth and trees cleared for 30 metres but there was still fire damage: the fascia board at the front caught alight and smouldered, canvas blinds, shade cloth and outdoor furniture were destroyed, plastic piping melted. The heat was so intense solder melted and dripped from the gutters. The family house filled with smoke remained defiant, but no mercy was shown to about half of the 40 stud beef cattle that perished before the fire moved on in its path of destruction.

South Coast volunteers join battle



A C.F.S. brigade travels through thick smoke and dust to fight the holocaust. (Photograph reproduced courtesy "The Advertiser")

Scores of volunteer fire fighters from the South Coast C.F.S. brigades were tackling the outbreak within an hour or so of the report. While many more were alerted to standby as relief teams.

With automatic reflex action C.F.S. units were despatched from all the southern districts to help save people, houses, stock and property in the path of the fire.

The blaze destroyed land in the Strathalbyn District, the Willunga District and threatened to cross the boundary into the Port Elliot and Goolwa district.

A wind change prevented the Mount Compass Area School from coming under threat from the fire, which at one stage was only 8 km from the classrooms.

Veteran fire fighter Mr B. H. (Bunny) Basham, District Supervisor of Port Elliot manned the radio and co-ordinated the efforts of the men and C.F.S. units from Mount Compass, Port Elliot, Middleton, Hindmarsh Island, Goolwa, Currency Creek, Tooperang and Finnis. Around 60 men answered the initial call and relief teams took over at night and the next day. "The winds and heat hampered their efforts and it was impossible to back-burn," said Mr. Basham.

At the Strathalbyn C.F.S. fire station (at about 12.40 p.m.) 81 people registered to assist, with fire fighting, catering and relief work. 23 helped in the kitchen which was operational for 24 hours a day until 9.30 p.m. Sunday, February 27th.



C.F.S. fire fighters worked without a break fighting the fires. With exhaustion showing on their faces they couple up a suction hose to refill their water tank . . . again, so they can continue the fight. (Photograph reproduced courtesy "The Advertiser")

Exhausted fire fighters battled to extinguish spot fires at Kuitpo Colony and Black Fellows Creek. There were desperate pleas from men in need of more water. Devastated residents worked together to remove burning logs from roads and cleared what they could from more than 20 burnt homes. One Group looked for a small girl reported missing.

In the inferno

Many houses had not been simply burnt out by the fire, they had been reduced to a shapeless pile of rubble. Fodder sheds, outbuildings and garages lay in ruins, next to the homes they had once serviced. The fire roared through the funnel formed by gullies, shooting out one end to incinerate forests, property, houses, stock and fences.

On the wind change

On the wind change tree tops still smouldering, threatened to rekindle, to destroy land which had escaped the initial onslaught.

At Ashbourne, with the power gone and homes in danger the women cleared out their stores of food to provide a constant supply to the weary volunteer fire fighters coming in to the Ashbourne C.F.S. Fire Station.



Nestled among trees and thick bush land this house at McLaren Flat comes under threat as smoke approaches. (Photograph reproduced courtesy of "The News")

Fanned by westerly winds of up to 70 km/h the fire swept on unrelenting towards Ashbourne. Several families were trapped in their homes in isolated areas between McLaren Flat and the small farming community of Ashbourne, about 40 kms south of Adelaide. Police could not contact some residents because telephone lines had been cut by the fire and falling trees.

C.F.S. volunteers were quick to extinguish hot spots and cleared roads to isolated homes. Water was brought to the fire by water laden cement trucks and petrol tankers.

. . . and then Prospect Hill (after the change)

With the wind change in the early afternoon the fire had roared

through the Kuitpo Forest Reserve and had earlier taken Ashbourne . . . then turned its vengence on the historic settlement of Prospect Hill.

Flames spread in all directions. Tragically two lives were lost.



The fire claimed the lives of a young couple and left the original five-generation Oakley family home of "Orange Bank" (built in the 1870's) in ruins. (Photograph supplied courtesy "The Southern Argus").

Over 14 homes were burnt down. The Church Youth Camp buildings, scout halls, sheds and the Country Womens Association Hall were burnt down and part of the museum and vintage cars were reduced to twisted shells.

Properties lost sheds, hay and fencing.

"Some of the volunteers on the fire trucks, their own homes gone still continued on to help others."

Shovels swapped for knapsacks etc. . .

Meadows Council rural road gang members swapped their picks and shovels for fire fighting gear as the fires approached the Meadows township. As it swept towards Prospect Hill, Meadows road gangs downed tools and volunteered to lend a hand to struggling C.F.S. brigades. They filled three water carts with 16,000 litres of water and were despatched to the fire with the carts and a grader. With the strong winds the fire was uncontrollable, and when Meadows became endangered, the council gang re grouped to help defend the township. Some fought the fire while others drove the water carts to refill C.F.S. units. A grader and front-end loader were used to prepare firebreaks at the Meadows boundary.

With the Meadows township now under threat, the residents were evacuated.

At the same time Macclesfield and Strathalbyn were placed on full alert.

As fire approached the Meadows township, roads were blocked and women and children were evacuated to the Meadows Oval.

C.F.S. units wet down the perimeter and were on constant alert for spot fires.



(Photograph reproduced courtesy of "The Advertiser").

C.F.S. volunteer fire fighters worked hard to save houses and property and buildings (outsheds) . . . then finally the long awaited fire report came into C.F.S. H/Q operations room . . . "The fire was now under control along the Goolwa-Macclesfield Road about 5 kilometres south of Meadows."

Many fire fighters weary from battling the fire for over 8 hours without a break, begun the tedious task of combatting "flare ups".

"Outbreaks"/"flare-ups"/"mopping up"

Units remained overnight combatting "outbreaks". On Thursday, 17th February, "flare-ups" were dealt with as they occurred.

On Friday, 18th February C.F.S. brigades were "mopping up". The "mopping up" and cleaning up operations took over a week to complete.

In Meadows, at a newly opened sporting complex, a group of young people organized themselves on a roster so that there was food available hot and cold, 24 hours a day throughout the next week of mopping up.

Search and Rescue

On Friday 18th February State Emergency Service volunteers from the Victor Harbor area assisted police in a search and rescue operation.

Members from the Christies Beach S.E.S. patrolled the fire areas over the weekend searching farm houses and helping to clear roads.

Hours clocked — by so many

Over 2,000 man hours were accounted for in C.F.S. fire crews from Strathalbyn, Woodchester, Langhorne Creek and Milang. The Strathalbyn Supervisor also had under his control C.F.S. units from Murray Bridge, Hindmarsh Falls, Inman Valley, Goolwa, Victor Harbor, Mount Barker, Tailem Bend, Tintinara, Karoonda and Narrung.

Counting the Losses:

STATISTICS—

One (1) person at Ashbourne and two (2) at Prospect Hill died in the fire.

Approximately 800 CFS Personnel were involved with some 87 CFS units.

About 40 fire fighters including 2 policemen were injured.

Many fire fighters received on the spot medical attention for eye injuries and smoke inhalation by St. John volunteer personnel.

Nine people were taken to the Flinders Medical Centre and treated for burns, heat exhaustion and eye injuries.

One volunteer fire fighter, Des Roche of Ashbourne, a member of the Mount Compass C.F.S. was treated at the centre for burnt hands.

Two (2) homes of the 33 reported destroyed or damaged were owned by C.F.S. volunteer fire fighters, who were elsewhere fighting the fires.

Fire destroyed hundreds of kilometres of fencing; hundreds of cattle and sheep were killed or so badly burnt they had to be destroyed; feed and machinery sheds were gutted.

Several C.F.S. units were inevitably damaged, quickly repaired and returned to the scorching scene to fight some more.

An E.T.S.A. truck was gutted and a police car damaged.

Total area burnt 16,946 hectares.

Kuitpo Forest

Woods and Forests Department estimates it has lost about \$5m worth of timber planted in 1970 and earlier. About 22% of the Kuitpo Forest was burnt, totalling about 2,400 hectares, which includes about 1,600 ha of "product" pinus radiata — prime timber mostly 40 to 60 years old.

Fifteen tree fellers, and two carting contractors with several trucks are working full-time, seven days a week. They are aiming to salvage about 1,000 cubic metres/day with a goal of about 200,000 cubic metres before "blue rot sets in".



Working faster than the mill can process the timber about 840 cubic metres a day of uncut felled timber is being stored under the effluent sprinkler system at Christies Beach.

Two pits in the forest were used to bury some 700 cattle and 4,000 sheep from surrounding fire torched areas.

Meadows District (Friday, 18th February)

Farms in the Meadows District were in desperate need of fodder, according to Meadows District Engineer, Mr R. A. Cooke. "Thousands of head of stock had been without food for two days and dairy cows had wandered through areas where fences had been destroyed. 60% of the Meadows area was blackened, three people were dead and in addition to the 33 homes burnt, hundreds of haysheds and outhouses were destroyed," he said.

"Bad outbreaks of fire were still being fought.

"Dairy farmers had trouble rounding up stock to milk.

"Communication was a problem as many victims now had no telephone, radio, television and were not receiving newspapers so were unaware of the relief operation that had begun.

"One woman was found living in a shed, another was found living in a car with two children," said Mr. Cooke.

R.S.P.C.A. Report

R.S.P.C.A. crews had shot 500 sheep and 257 cattle by late Friday. Stock loss figures were expected to be much higher because only half the farms in the area had been checked.

Meadows aftermath — Wednesday, 23rd February

The Mayor of Meadows, Mr G. Simpson said, "Two thirds of the Meadows rural area including all of the largest ward in the council area was devastated.

"Over 3,000 bales of fodder were distributed in the first weekend but more fodder was urgently needed, as there was no feed left at all in paddocks and hay stacks had also been burnt.

Volunteers and tools were needed to help re-build fences as many farmers had lost all their tools in the blaze that had destroyed more than 2,500 kms of fencing."

Fodder needed

The grim fight to maintain the demand for fodder continued around the clock. The Department of Agriculture stretched all its resources to attempt to meet the on-going demand of feeding the 40,000 head of stock in the Meadows area alone. A supply of up to 2,500 bales daily is required to feed 30,000 sheep, 10,000 cattle, 750 horses and 600 goats registered under the relief scheme.



(Photograph supplied courtesy "The Courier", Mt. Barker).

Some donations of fodder came from as far away as the North of the State and the West Coast where they were in drought conditions.

Councils/CFS Praised

District Council of Strathalbyn in a letter enthusiastically praised the marvellous support received from Murray Bridge and C.F.S. units in "fighting the bushfires and mopping up and clearing up after".

The letter continued, "Had it not been for the assistance from surrounding areas, it was quite likely the fires in the Ashbourne, Paris Creek, Meadows and Macclesfield areas would have been quite beyond the Strathalbyn capacity for control and mopping up."



Fire Supervisor, Charlie Dunn. (Photograph reproduced courtesy of "The News").

Practically the whole of my ward was burnt," said Mr Dunn. "I've seen a lot of fires in my time, 1939 and all of those but this is by far the worst."

Deadhorses, kangaroos, sheep and cows littered his large farm.

With a small smile of consolation Charlie said only one room of his two storey house at his farm near Ashbourne had been burnt, "thanks to a guy from down the road who came with a portable fire unit and put out the blaze in the ceiling and stopped the place from burning down."

In the face of adversity

"Thank you for a magnificent effort."

In the wake of the Ash Wednesday II holocaust that laid to ruin much of the Meadows District, the Mayor of Meadows, Mr Geoff Simpson paid tribute to the many people and organizations that rallied to help in the face of adversity.

Mayor Simpson said, the Meadows Council and the people of fire ravaged areas of Kuitpo, Prospect Hill, Bull Creek, Ashbourne, Paris Creek and Mylor wish to thank all those who worked so magnificently to protect lives and property during the fire and to provide relief and assistance after the fire.

CFS Headquarters has given advice and provided a radio control base.

Local supervisors Charlie Dunn and Len Brooks have co-ordinated large operations under difficult conditions.

Hundreds of CFS crew members from local units and other areas battled heroically in impossible conditions.

Wives and friends collected and prepared food for up to five hundred workers at a time.

Police officers worked most professionally directing and controlling people. St. John Ambulance workers attended injuries.

E. & W.S. and Highways workers buried stock.

Telecom restored telephones and provided transport. ETSA restored power.

Department of Marine and Harbors gave transport.

The Army fought fires and the Agriculture Department inspected stock and has begun the mammoth task of finding and distributing stock feed.

Red Cross volunteers registered people who have lost homes or suffered damage. They collected and distributed food and clothing.

Department of Community Welfare has arranged housing and distributed food, clothing and money. Department of Social Security has distributed money.

Other councils have sent work teams and service club members have begun to assist property owners with cleaning up. Church workers have been ministering to grieved people.

Numerous businesses and private people have generously donated a vast array of goods including food, good clothing, furniture, toys, stock feed, disinfectants, earthmoving equipment, water.

Meadows Council staff, after assisting in fire fighting, have established and manned a relief centre at the Meadows Office, cleared roads, buried stock, delivered water and have provided almost continuous support since the fire began. Engineer Roger Cooke has managed the operation.

Government relief measures have been well appreciated.

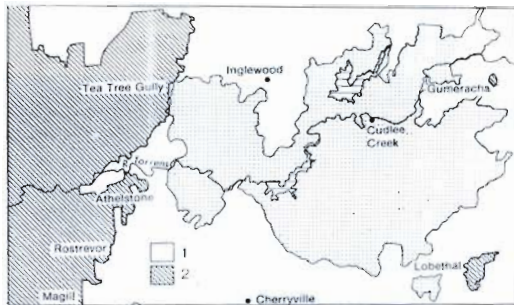
The spirit of victims and workers has been high and can be attributed to individual strengths and strong community ties.

To everyone who has helped, go our sincere thanks.

Our sympathy goes to the friends and relatives of those victims who have died," said Geoff Simpson, Meadows Mayor.

TEA TREE GULLY/ANSTEY HILL/GUMERACHA FIRE

Summary Report: by Regional Officer, Brian Menadue



Fire area: Map courtesy Australian Geographical Studies

Between 0900 and 1115 hours on the 16th February, 1983, the Regional Officer for CFS Region 2 had contacted all the Corporations, District Councils or Fire Supervisors/CFS Group Captains within Region 2; initially to place their fire fighting resources on an alert, but further contact requested CFS units and private equipment **BE MANNED**. "If fire control was to be achieved in such weather conditions, the speed of response to a fire call would be critical."

The first response of Fire Fighting Equipment from Region 2 was from the Fire Group, comprising the District Councils of Port Wakefield, Balaklava, Saddleworth/Auburn and Riverton, followed by the 2nd Fire Group from the District Councils of Robertstown and Eudunda.

Due to Fire Group Planning, private equipment replaced the gaps left by the CFS fire appliances moving out of the District to the Clare area.

At 1156 hours a fire report was received for Perseverance and Bower Road, Tea Tree Gully. Tea Tree Gully CFS and Ridgehaven MFS responded immediately, followed by 7 adjoining CFS brigades.

The Para Fire Group — Corporations of Tea Tree Gully, Salisbury and District Councils of Munno Para, Gumeracha, Correctional Services (Northfield) — were mobilised with back-up support to their vacated areas coming from the Fire Group — District Councils of Light, Mallala and Owen.

Very poor visibility from the dust and smoke severely restricted the back-up attack on the fire. Fire crews could smell the smoke but not locate the fire in the Anstey Hill Conservation Park.

At 1351 hours the fire literally exploded from the park; wind speeds were estimated near "100 mph" and flames were "40 feet to 50 feet" high. The fire commenced its rampage of destruction in a south/south-east direction.

The fire sped through the Paracombe Golf Course, Paracombe, into the E. & W.S. catchment area, over the north east end of Kangaroo Creek Dam and from that point, hillsides in front of the head fire erupted into a sea of flames within minutes. Mount Misery was ablaze and smoke was seen billowing from the Lenswood Forest area.

At approximately 1545 hours the fire had reached the Lobethal township (16 km from the fire origin).

At approximately 1612 hours the wind changed from N.W. to S.W. This caused a fire front from the Lobethal end of the fire to burn in a N.E. direct towards Gumeracha, Kenton Valley and another front from the Torrens River through Milbrook, Chain of Ponds and into the Chain of Ponds and Kersbrook Forests.

Further fire fighting support was mobilised from the Riverland. The District Councils of Loxton, Barmera, Waikerie and Morgan despatched units which were immediately deployed to fire fighting and patrol mop-up duties on their arrival in the fire area.

At approximately 1600 hours Cudlee Creek was burnt out; the town was 'cut off' for approximately 1 hour.

With the wind change, the areas of Paracombe, Milbrook, Inglewood, Houghton and Range Road North were threatened, and as late as 1800 hours, fire crews were still battling to save homes along Churchett Road and Range Road South, Tea Tree Gully. (These locations being within 2 km of the fire origin).

Thursday, 17th February, 1983, brought further fire control problems in the Inglewood, Milbrook, Break Neck Hill area — this section of the fire was contained at approximately 1800 hours. Mop-up and salvage by CFS continued until Monday evening, 28th February, 1983.

As part of Region 2 Fire Control Procedures, the Gumeracha fire was split into 5 Group Areas, each under the control of a Fire Supervisor or Deputy Fire Supervisor; some groups were again split into sectors with FCOs, or Brigade Captains in charge.

Four 'local' CFS Radio Frequencies were used for "Fireline" control. Each Group "Supervisor", using 2 radio sets, maintained contact with each other and CFS Headquarters on local frequencies or by using CFS Radio Frequency "State Channel 2".

Each CFS Radio Base (Corporation Tea Tree Gully, Salisbury, District Councils of Munno Para and Gumeracha) used their 'local' frequency as a 'listening watch' and supported the Group Supervisor as required.

STATISTICS

CFS appliances — 95 from 27 District Council areas; 9 Group Command Vehicles; 4 Forward Control Assembly Vehicles; 5 Transport and Supply Vehicles.

CFS personnel — 1390.

Area Burnt — 9250 hectares—pine plantations, conservation parks, water catchment areas, mixed farming, residential.

Properties Damaged — 343.

Houses Destroyed — 30.

Vehicles — 181.

Stock — 2400.

Deaths — 1 person.

TOTAL COST — DAMAGE: approx. \$17 million.

Salisbury among the force

A 34-strong volunteer brigade from Salisbury C.F.S. were among a force of C.F.S. units that battled the infernos.

The brigade had started out battling a fire at Anstey Hill and ended fighting the flames at Breakneck Gully and Chain of Ponds.

Salisbury C.F.S. Fire Control Officer, Ken Potter said, "I have never seen any fire move as quickly . . . there was a moment or two when we thought we might not be coming back . . . but we were so flat out fighting fires that we didn't have time to delve on it. Fortunately for us there were no serious injuries . . . however our neighbouring Tea Tree Gully volunteers had lost a unit in the bushfires and now urgently needed \$86,000 to replace the lost unit," he said.

Athelstone in the fray

Athelstone C.F.S. unit was involved in some of the trouble spots at Range Road, Gorge Road, Anstey Hill, Slape's Gully and Syke.

Campbelltown Town Clerk and local Disaster Services Co-ordinator Denis Morrissey said the Athelstone C.F.S. unit and men had done a marvellous job.

"The unit provided a back up to adjoining CFS units during the fires and did an admirable job."

"The local State Emergency Service Unit had also been involved, two vehicles in seven-man-shifts were despatched by State S.E.S. headquarters on patrol and search activities under the direction of the Police Controller at Inglewood," he said.

"But not all the action was at the front. The C.F.S. Ladies Auxiliary and S.E.S. Welfare team members maintained a constant flow of refreshments to C.F.S. and S.E.S. bases during the disaster," said Mr Morrissey.

Women on front line



The Mt. Torrens C.F.S. Women's fire fighting team are pictured above from left: Mrs Jo Crofton (Lieutenant in charge), Penny Butterworth, Lee Watkins, Sheryl Hughes, Michele Edwards and Debbie Clinton. (Photograph supplied courtesy "The Stock Journal".)

The Mount Torrens Women's crew were formed in 1981 to protect their town and district and answer the fire siren during the day when most of the men are at work in the city.

Initial call out saw the Mount Torrens fire truck with four women and four men attend fires in the Houghton-Paracombe area where they fought until they were called back to the Kenton Valley area to fight fire threatening the Mt. Torrens District.

continued page 15.

Pump Replaced—fight continues

After fighting fires in the Paracombe, Kersbrook and Breakneck Cutting areas working with a Gumeracha C.F.S. unit the Mannum C.F.S. unit's pump broke down on a no-through road between Breakneck Cutting and Chain of Ponds.

The pump failure ended their efforts in the area and with no effective means of fighting fire the unit returned to base. Overnight the crew fitted a new pump borrowed from a local supplier and returned to the scene the next morning.

Southern Yorke Peninsula responds

Sixteen C.F.S. Brigade crewmen from Southern Yorke Peninsula volunteered for Adelaide Hills duty in response to a call for assistance from C.F.S. H/Q.

Five members from Edithburgh and six from Yorketown C.F.S. worked with men from up to 12 C.F.S. units in the One Tree Hill area, mainly chasing spot fires. On one assignment they experienced the danger of a hills timber fire when they had to flee from a sudden flare-up leaping overhead.

Five Minlaton C.F.S. volunteers worked out of Tea Tree Gully doing a Wednesday midnight to dawn shift, relieving a local unit. They too had the job of chasing spot fires and dealing with the hot spots.

The only fire which beat them was when they found the shearing shed of Mr Roger Goldsworthy, M.P., ablaze. Minlaton C.F.S. station officer Viv Clift said, "it was a grease-fed roaring inferno and the entire contents of their unit's water tank poured onto it, made not the slightest difference."

Pines and orchards incinerated . . .

Thousands of acres of pine trees on the northern boundaries of Lenswood exploded as fire raced up the steep gullies, creating an updraft like a chimney. In minutes the fire had reached the summit and exploded out of the 100ft tall pines with flames leaping hundreds of feet into the air. The whole country side in the immediate vicinity ignited with the immense heat, razing outlying orchards, sheds and houses.

Cudlee Creek . . . losses severe

The orchardists of Cudlee Creek just at harvest time lost most apple, pear and stone fruit trees in the fire. Jonathon apples and Duchess pears, cleos, delicious and golden delicious apples are gone . . . acres of them, caught in the fire's path as fires raced across orchard floors, killing trees and baking low hanging fruit. All orchard trees are dying and will have to be removed, it will take years to replace them.

A salvage operation was undertaken by the orchardists who worked from daylight to dark to salvage high up fruit that survived.

The fire claimed the life of one lady, while others were admitted to hospital with burns.

A young 17 year old C.F.S. member on the Cudlee Creek fire unit received burns to his face, hands and arms when the fire engulfed the truck. The driver David Newman who also suffered burns and the youth remained in the unit, which was gutted, until rescued by the Gumeracha II unit.

Twelve Cudlee Creek houses were burnt. The 104 year old Millbrook school last survivor of the Millbrook town now under the reservoir was destroyed. Lots of vehicles were lost.



The remains of a house near Cudlee Creek. (Photograph courtesy "The Bunyip", Gawler).

A large packing shed and cold room, stock, hay sheds full of fodder equipment, fencing and almost all of the Cudlee Creek district pine plantations of nearly 2,000 hectares were destroyed.

David Newman with his parents were virtually wiped out, saving only their houses, cold-room and packing shed.

Les Simon lost his fight to save his orchard and was burnt on the eyes, thankfully his sight was saved.

Orchardists who used to sell their fruit from stalls on their properties have lost everything.

While Cudlee Creek CFS Captain Ross Schlein was organizing men to fight to save what they could of Cudlee Creek, his own orchard was destroyed.



C.F.S. volunteer Chris and Lynda Osborne's home was among 7 destroyed in Cudlee Creek. Sadly destruction was so severe that even daughter Lynda's bicycle was not worth salvaging. (Photograph supplied courtesy "The Courier", Mt. Barker)

Tony Mandsley saved the 100 year old church single-handed, but while fighting to save their small school, Chris and Baden Cullen, through the smoke saw their own home go up in flames, along with their car and daughter's horse.

Evanston fought Kersbrook

C.F.S. Captain Harry Gillard, of Evanston Gardens has fought hundreds of fires over many years, but said he could not find words to describe the awesome combination of wind, flames, smoke and dust.

"At the Paracombe golf course he had seen the fire roll across the green fairway unchecked and at Chain of Ponds it had jumped across the Millbrook reservoir. Both the fairway and the reservoir had been considered useful and effective breaks, but high winds fanned the flames across huge tracts of bare ground," said Harry Gillard.

Evanston Gardens was first called to help Two Wells second unit put out a fire at the rear of the B.P. Service Station at Smithfield, but an urgent call sent them heading off towards Kersbrook.

One of the Evanston Gardens units was almost engulfed as flames roared across a road. At Paracombe C.F.S. members found an elderly lady in her rear garden glass house and as they helped her away a wind change came and fire razed the house.

Many local units were involved in the Kersbrook area while others travelled from as far afield as Waikerie and Blanchetown. C.F.S. units were assisted by Police, Army and Air Force personnel and St. John Ambulance members.

Waikerie called out

Following a request at 3.30 p.m. (1530 hours) from C.F.S. H/Q to assist with the fire suppression, Waikerie C.F.S. Group Captain and C.F.S. Board Member, Mr. Mike Arnold, said he and fire officer Mr. Brian Rogers contacted all C.F.S. units in the district from Morgan to Berri in readiness for deployment.

At 4.30 p.m. (1630 hours) units were called to report to Truro, then re-directed to Gumeracha. Waikerie C.F.S. Unit spent the next two days in the Hills, fighting a forest fire, stopping flames from flare-ups and protecting a house near Chain of Ponds.

Mr. Arnold said that the Waikerie service worked in two shifts of six men and returned home midnight on Friday night February 18th, 1983.

continued page 16.

Too young to salvage



(Photograph courtesy "The Bunyip", Gawler).

Most pine trees burnt in the huge areas destroyed within the Gumeracha District are too young to salvage.

Attempts are being made to cut pines, planted before 1970, for use as posts and strainers; which are now in big demand for replacing and repairing fencing.

Danger of further outbreaks

There was still danger of further fire outbreaks because of "hot spots". C.F.S. officers had warned that many stumps of trees burnt, still smouldered and could continue to do so for many weeks, and were concerned that the sparks could regenerate fires.



Freeling C.F.S. fire fighters extinguish smouldering logs in scrubland near Chain of Ponds. (Photograph courtesy "The Bunyip", Gawler).

Another fire in the Anstey Hill Reserve over the weekend all but wiped out the reserve.

Gumeracha/Anstey Hill fire

Gumeracha lost 17 houses mainly in the Paracombe and Cudlee Creek areas and about 70 per cent of the pine forests.

Lobethal was threatened when fire reached the western edge of the town and a spot fire broke out some distance north-east of the town, a wind change saved The Valley.

Hundreds of kilometres of fencing were destroyed in both Onkaparinga and Gumeracha Districts. Numerous sheds, orchards and out buildings were burnt out.

The State Government's huge pine forests at Mt. Crawford were decimated. Damage amounts to millions of dollars.

Fire was reported to have jumped kilometres through the forest making the task of the fire fighters much more difficult. C.F.S. units who helped to fight the fire came from the Riverland D/C of Berri, Loxton, Waikerie, Barmera, Morgan and the mid-North and Adelaide Plains areas.

M.P. gives thanks

S.A. Opposition's Deputy Leader, Roger Goldsworthy's 40 ha property at Anstey's Hill was hit. Half his stock were killed, his historic Chestnut grove became a scorched ruin, every out-building was reduced to ashes, but the house was saved. "I've got the C.F.S. boys to thank for saving the house," Mr Goldsworthy said.

Salvation Army praised



Northfield C.F.S. Fire Captain, Barry Chapman, was trapped in the Hills fire with fellow fire fighters for 35 minutes. His life flashed before his eyes several times and more than once he thought he wasn't going to make it, but thankfully he did. Friday morning and with only 12 hours rest in 3 days, Barry was still fighting fires, battling against strong winds to extinguish a fire which flared up during the night on Anstey Hill.

"Sure, we're weary, but we cannot praise the Salvation Army enough for the help they've given us", he said.

"Now if you'll excuse me, we've got work to do," and he went back to the fire as a small spotter plane and helicopter flew overhead to check the blaze.

Praise Given

Tea Tree Gully Mayor John Tilley paid tribute to all those involved in fighting the fires.

Mr Tilley praised the C.F.S. personnel who had fought long and hard and placed themselves in extreme danger to fight the bushfires. He said, "a measure of the danger in which the fire fighters were operating was that both Tea Tree Gully and Cudlee Creek brigades had had their units incinerated in the blaze.



The burnt out Tea Tree Gully C.F.S. fire truck. (Photograph supplied courtesy of "The North-East Leader", Messenger Newspapers).

"Praise must go to the St. John Ambulance Brigade which had several ambulance units operating at the top of Range Road at the height of the blaze. And to residents who had responded overwhelmingly with donations of clothing, food, furniture, and money to help the fire victims.

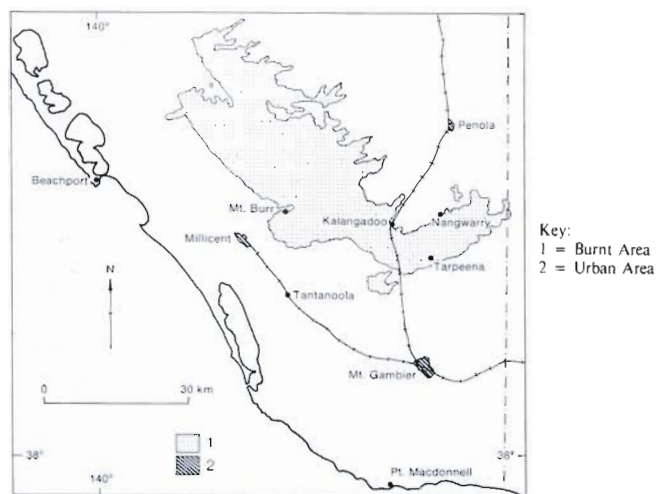
A small boy pays tribute to fire men

Dear fire fighters,

"Thank you for saving lots of people up in the hills from being killed and saving people from getting very badly burnt. Thank you for risking your lives to save other people's lives and for saving lots of the land from being destroyed from the fire. For helping school children from walking home through the fire and from getting very badly burnt. Thank you for doing your best at saving the cattle from being destroyed from the flames and from choking from the smoke. For being very brave fighting the huge flames and for standing the tremendous heat and for still fighting the fire even though you can't really see or breathe. Thank you for saving lots of houses from being destroyed by burning trees and falling power lines. Thank you for stopping the fires from spreading because I live very close to the Adelaide Hills."

Wayne Prestwood, Madison Park Primary School.

SOUTH EAST FIRES



South East Fire Area: Map courtesy Australian Geographical Studies.

The South Eastern districts of South Australia were experiencing similar weather conditions to that of the Adelaide Hills and were themselves about to feel the impact of bush and forest fires of a magnitude never before perceived.

From noon on Wednesday, 16th February, fires occurred with unprecedented regularity.



(Photograph by Dean Williamson, Naracoorte).

The first major fire commenced soon after 12.00 on "Narraweena", 8 kilometres east of Greenways. Under the influence of a strong north-westerly wind, gusting up to 70 kph, fire swept quickly down the flats between East and West Avenue Ranges heading for the Robe to Penola main road. The smoke column from this fire was soon visible up to 50 kilometres away. C.F.S. units from Lucindale and Robe were despatched to the area and the rest of the Lower South East fire fighting forces were soon alerted.

At about 12.40 p.m. (1240 hrs) another fire was reported on the roadside near the Greenways road intersection with the Princes Highway, adjoining "Koniak" station. The Robe units were diverted to fight this outbreak and took about an hour to control it, although it continued to cause a problem throughout the day. Because of the likely danger to the Kangaroo Inn Area School, the evacuation of the whole school was organised by C.F.S. officers, with everyone taken by bus to Beachport.

Just after 1.30 p.m. (1330 hours), the "Narraweena" fire had reached the Robe to Penola road east of the Legges Lane intersection, still out of control, and efforts to stop it on the main road were not successful. Around this time another fire was reported on the western side of the Kangaroo Inn Area School, on the edge of the Robe to Penola road about 4 km east of Clay Wells. This quickly spread through grassland into scrub and then into the Furner Conservation Park.

The two major fires were then travelling parallel about 8 kilometres apart and fire fighting efforts were having no effect on the run of them. It was evident that Furner was in immediate danger, Mt. Burr and Kalangadoo were threatened, and should the

wind continue from the NW even Millicent and Mount Gambier could be threatened.

The "Clay Wells" fire spread very quickly through the northern sections of the Mt. Burr Forest aided by very active spotting from the conservation park and scrub areas within the forest. By about 3.00 p.m. (1500 hours) this fire was south of Furner, having passed to the west of the town moving down the Reedy Creek Range. The evacuation of Mount Burr township was considered. Soon after this, the first death occurred. Mr L. M. Wallis was caught near his house on the edge of the forest in "The Mission" area.

Meanwhile, the "Narraweena" fire also travelling very quickly had passed to the east of Furner moving along Catalpa Lane and had reached the Chetwyn Road and Old Penola Road area.

Not long after this another fire started near the Millicent to Mt. Burr road, just south of Mt. Muirhead. It quickly spread into the pines and immediately crowned, heading rapidly toward Mt. Burr and the TV transmitter buildings and tower. By 3.30 p.m. (1530 hours) this fire was approaching the mountain. The "Clay Wells" fire was approaching Mt. Graham and the "Narraweena" fire was west of Kalangadoo. It appears that around this time, Mrs. M. Williams and her four children were trapped by the fire near their home and they died in their car. Mr. G. Rogers who tried to help the family also died nearby.

Yet another fire started soon after on "Konegin" about 5 kilometres south of Clay Wells, just before the wind change. Followed by another at "Hacketts Hill" 2 kilometres north-east of Glencoe, probably started by a spot from the Mt. Burr area.

Up to this time the wind had blown constantly from the north to north west, but with the passage of a cold front it changed first to come from the west, and then south west and increased sharply in speed. Gusts of 102 kph were recorded at Mount Gambier Airport, but it is likely that wind speeds well above this figure occurred in some fire areas. The time of this change was between 3.45 p.m. (1545 hours) and 3.55 p.m. (1555 hours) and the effect on the fires was dramatic.

By this time the "Narraweena" fire had reached Dismal Swamp, the Clay Wells fire was just north of Mount Burr township and the Mt. Muirhead fire had passed over Mount Burr itself. After the wind change all south-westerly runs virtually stopped and the eastern flanks of all the fires became wide fronts with new head fires heading east with increased speed and intensity.

"The Narraweena" fire near its origin swept quickly across Legges Lane engulfing a grader and utility and killing Mr. P. J. O'Leary, Mr. A. Lemke and Mr. B. Nosworthy as they fled. As it passed over Claun Lane, Mrs. S. M. Prance was trapped in a car and died. At its southern end, soon after 4.00 p.m. (1600 hours) the towns of Kalangadoo and Tarpeena were threatened. On the outskirts of Kalangadoo three men were killed near or in houses, Mr. M. Rogers, Mr. G. L. Ey and Mr. P. Howe. The original head fire then moved into the Penola Forest, and slowed down in the pine plantations. Tarpeena was surrounded and many houses were lost. By 5.30 p.m. (1730 hours) Nangwarry was under threat, however not by the head fire which had passed to the south of the town and was approaching the State border. By 7.45 p.m. (1945 hours) it had reached the border and was stopped just over it, in Victoria.

The "Clay Wells" and "Mt. Muirhead" fires were both driven east out of the pines into the grasslands and soon burnt into the still burning western flank of the "Narraweena" fire which had passed through earlier. The eastern flank of that fire was fragmented and split as it moved through the grasslands with varying fuel loads and irrigated paddocks. By about 6.00 p.m. (1800 hours), with a sharp decrease in wind speed and an increase in relative humidity, the fires slowed and the main run was soon over.

The wind continued to blow strongly from the south west veering to the south overnight and causing many small outbreaks and spot fires to occur. In the Penola Forest this wind caused the fire to continue spreading north and it was not until Friday that it was contained.

To the south of the main fires another at Eight Mile Creek burnt all afternoon and all CFS units in the Port MacDonnell area were committed to this fire. continued burning in peat to a depth of 1.5 metres for many days until irrigation equipment was used to flood the area with millions of litres of water.

continued page 18.

A picture of destruction



"Tongues" of burnt areas show out against unburnt areas near Callendale.
(Photograph by Dean Williamson, Naracoorte).

Much of the land looked like badly sewn patchwork. The fire moved so quickly . . . it jumped paddocks, houses, roads . . . burning some, leaving untouched patches elsewhere.



(Photograph by Peter Morris, Mt. Gambier).

The tops of trees were burnt as the fire sped by . . . many huge gums split in the intense heat of the blaze.

Homes, countless sheds and machinery were lost . . . thousands of hectares of land burnt and countless numbers of cattle and sheep . . . dead.



(Photograph by Kym Robinson, Mt. Gambier)

Where they were struck by fire, stiff black sheep which you think must be dead, still stood refusing to lay down and given in. Burnt out posts and a jumble of metal was all that remain of one set of cattle yards.

Orderly evacuation by children

Kangaroo Inn Area School teachers received praise from a Millicent CFS officer for the organized orderly procedure children boarded buses for Beachport. The kids remained cool and calm and acted very responsibly. Well done children . . . Editor.

Feeding the fire fighters

Mrs Pat Lucas with many other women worked in and around her "food caravan" at Callendale Station to feed hungry fire fighters in the Furner fire areas. Thanks to the remarkable generosity of untold donors, of which there was no shortage.

Let us recap on Mrs. Lucas' reaction to the Wednesday's fires which was typical of local women in each township of the lower S.E. who assisted in some way: Her way was to first bake her own bread, cut loaves into sandwiches, make tea, lots of it and head to Callendale. Arriving at 5.30 p.m. (1730 hours) she stayed with others until after 10.00 p.m. (2200 hours), providing food and cups of tea to exhausted fire fighters who called in.

On Thursday morning while dark, the caravan returned to serve breakfast to those who remained overnight. The caravan became the "food capital" of the area. On Thursday, Friday and part of Saturday 15 to 20 women at a time received, prepared, served and delivered food from the caravan. Naracoorte baker, Bill Morris gave all the bread, pies, pasties etc. People donated food from their own gardens and farms. Block cakes came in a car load from Lochaber some were delivered door to door to homes in fire areas. Car loads of home cooking arrived from the Poolaijelo area (Victoria). Milk, soup, potatoes, food supplied by ladies working from Struan House (Dept. of Agriculture, Naracoorte) was "colossal" much of which was channelled further south to other fire areas.

Food Distributors, Mt. Gambier, gave Mayfair meats and 480 pies/pasties and supermarket chains, fruit markets, hospital, schools, Red Cross and Country Women's Association, and many individuals too numerous to mention contributed. From Thursday to Friday the women also delivered bread, meat, milk and other essentials to fire areas where people who had fire damage, lost property, homes, or did not have much food in their houses were supplied.

Salvos lend a hand

Captain Harry Webb, Mt. Gambier Salvation Army Corps, left on Wednesday at 1.30 (1330 hours) with an emergency trailer stacked with food and hot drinks. On arrival at Kalangadoo Hotel, he helped organize women and children shelter from fires, then leaving two Red Cross ladies in charge, moved onto the fire control bases, where over 300 to 400 cups of tea and food was issued to weary fire fighters and personnel.

First aid caravan

About 3.00 p.m. (1500 hours) on Wednesday, Mount Gambier St. John Ambulance caravan was taken to the fire relief centre set up at Millicent, where many fire fighters sought treatment for smoke inhalation and eye irritation. The first aid unit returned to Mt. Gambier at 9.00 p.m. (2100 hours), but was called out to Tarpeena at 10.00 p.m. (2200 hours).

"We were busy all night and the first aid caravan was put to great use," said volunteer ambulance officer, Mr. J. Rodgers. **But they did much more.**

. . . *And praise for the many St. John paid AND volunteer crews/first aid teams/officers/drivers is sung throughout the South East.*

R.F.W. at the front



Pictured above is the R.F.W. Woods and Forests Fire Truck that

saved a house on the Robe/Penola Road, helped put out a fire around the Furner Oval and covered the Penola Forest with other appliances. The unit was also deployed in many areas after the above mentioned situations. Because of its safe quick speed (cruises at 100 kph) valuable minutes were saved by the Woods and Forest personnel in getting to the point to combat fires, thereby saving quite a bit of property. Also the large 850 gallon (4,000 litre) water tank capacity, enabled the unit to stay at a fire scene longer, making it an effective vehicle in fire suppression.

Buildings . . . our heritage



(Photograph by Dean Williamson, Naracoorte)

In an area of Furner, outbuildings were totally destroyed, roofs of homesteads crumbled in . . . a blackened mass of stone rubble was all that remained — a familiar sight in the fire-torn areas.



Furner Community Hall pictured above, was badly damaged by fire — out of picture was the Furner Fox CFS unit, beside a water refill point.

Footnote: Editorial has already covered the loss of our State's heritage with the destruction of historical old buildings in the Adelaide Hills fires, but it is equally devastating and important to the country community to preserve and protect their own heritage such as the Furner Community Hall that is itself part of the history of the pioneering farmers in the South East.

A CFS Officer and property owner left to fight fires on the Wattle Range CFS unit on returning all they could see was a wall of flame moving away leaving behind the shell of a once fully equipped shearing shed, on burnt ground. Thankfully the house remained intact.

On another property only 800 sheep out of 5,000 survived.

While on yet another 200 out of the 3,000 flock were saved.

The R.S.P.C.A. tendered the suffering animals who had burns to their mouth and eyes and could not eat or see . . . so they had to be put down . . . and the grief continued as the uncontrollable fires sped on.

Heavy losses had been inflicted on homes, buildings, sheds, stock, fences, vehicles and other personal property but what of the pensioners and retired folk who lost their gardens, flower beds etc. that they took great pride in. To them the grief was equally as devastating; to some it was what they had lived for.

There was a report of a lady who returned to see her house still

standing — but everything else was lost, so she left . . . but returned later with dozens of plants and flowers, because she couldn't bear to see the blackness all around.

Because the fire came so quickly another property owner who had a man-made lake around his house jumped into the dingy and rowed out to the centre of the lake with his family . . . this saved their lives.

A house that had a wooden footbridge over a dry creek bed that gave the only access to a side road was burnt down, cutting off the owners' escape route. Miraculously the home stood its ground and the occupants sheltering inside remained safe, while fire burnt around the house, before moving on.

Communications out — repairs begin

Telecom's new radio mast designed to temporarily link up subscribers to truck facilities in the event of a disaster played an important role in the S.E. according to Mr. Bill Coates, Telecom Senior Tech. Officer in charge of the Millicent District. "Furner trunk lines and telephone lines from Mt. Gambier, to Furner, Penola, Coonawarra, Glenroy and Tarpeena were out leaving townships isolated," and over 11 km of aerial telephone lines were destroyed, when Telecom swung into action," said Mr. Coates.

Telecom crews worked around the clock, to restore communications lost in the disaster. The fires destroyed 1073 telephone connections, 261 poles and damaged 610 junction boxes and exchanges at Glenroy, Coonawarra, Penola and Furner. Telecom also operated mobile telephone units for the C.F.S., Police and other emergency services.

Ash rains on Lower S.E.

Fire-ash and rubbish from the South East fires rained down on many towns and districts in the Lower South East, shrouding them in a twilight darkness under smoke and ash laden clouds. The clouds partially obscured the sun which resembled a "blood red ball".

The fires 65 km front was likened to a "wave of fire" which barrelled along the ground taking and killing everything in its path . . . like a mythical monster, it fed and gained energy from the human suffering and destruction it inflicted.

Calls from Victoria's Western District towns as far away as Portland, reported smoke from S.E. fires, enveloping their areas.

When the fire was around the Lucindale area the wind speed was estimated at 65 — gusting to 85 km/h. Towards the mid afternoon on reaching pine forests, speeds were recorded over 100 km/h.

Pines explode

A "fire storm" struck the pine forests of Mount McIntyre and Mt. Burr. Pines exploded in the fierce radiant heat, trunks were snapped like match sticks, while others that fought against the full fury of the wind, heat and fire were left blackened and bent.



A paddock of young pines was reduced to black sticks stuck in the ground. A television tower and the Woods and Forest fire tower on Mt. Burr hill were engulfed in flames, but somehow survived.

On the Kalangadoo/Mt. Burr road along a 5 km stretch 10 houses were totally destroyed at Mt. McIntyre.

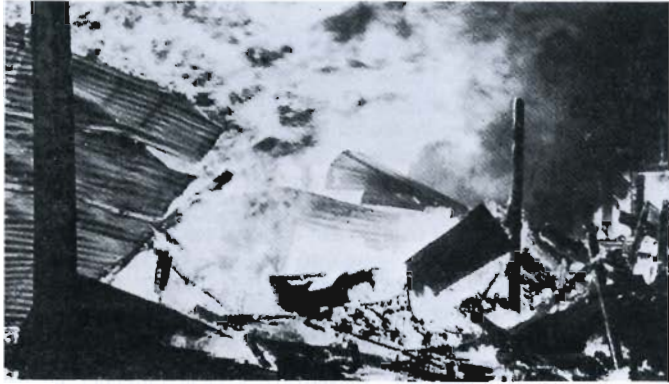
Grave concern was first held for the people missing from these homes. All residents were later found safe, sheltering in another home up the road, which had remained unburnt.

Fire also burnt right up to the Mt. McIntyre C.F.S. fire station, but it remained intact.

Mt. Burr in fire's path

At Mt. Burr townspeople were evacuated as the fire roared out of the Mt. Burr pine plantation and took the premises of 2 private logging contractors.

Two employees of Huckle contractors of Mt. Burr had the insight to take two (2) forwarder machines costing \$130,000 each into swamp land and saved them. Logging machines were also saved by moving them into the swamp.



(Photograph by Kym Robinson. Mt. Gambier)

Mr. Peter Huckle, log contractor, lost a truck, log-skidder, 2 x 4-wheel drive vehicles, a car and entire workshop. R.C. & V. M. Long lost 2 prime movers, a forwarder and the whole workshop.

Beachport Council trucks were stored in the vehicle area of the Mt. Burr timber mill, believed to be a safe area. However although the Mill was saved, the storage area was lost — and with it a Council Mitsubishi truck, Louisville tip truck and Front Loader Caterpillar.



The destruction is pictured above.

Three houses within the town, across the road from the Mt. Burr Mill were singed, but the mill and the town was saved on the wind change.

Teachers had earlier evacuated children from the Mt. Burr School to a "safe area". Overnight they were billeted out and reunited with their parents/families the next day.

Fire severity reduced

The severity of the fire heading to the Mt. Burr township had been reduced by the annual fire protection measures taken by the Woods and Forest Department over the years, in making the surrounding pine forests a "crown free area" by clearing undergrowth and by pruning off the lower branches.

All brigades committed

Mr. R. (Bob) Davis, fire supervisor Mt. Gambier CFS, said, "every unit within the district had been put on standby at 12.45 p.m. 16th February, 1983 and by 4.00 p.m. (1600 hours) they were all committed. Twelve Mt. Gambier units supported by 4 from Port MacDonnell had been at the fire scene since the call out, with crews being relieved when personnel were available," said Mr. Davis.

Emergency/Welfare centres set up

An emergency operations centre for the S.E. was set up at Mt. Gambier High School, with Welfare and registration centres being set up at the Tarpeena Football Club, Kalangadoo Hotel and Mt. Gambier High School Hall, to assist fire victims.

Hacketts Hill fire

The fire that flared up at Hacketts Hill burnt even more farming properties.

At Glencoe as a precautionary measure, houses were evacuated and people gathered on the town's oval with cars, pets, children and some belongings. Rumours spread of the fires' severity and concern showed on their faces, but thankfully the township came under no threat as the fire moved easterly.

Eight Mile Creek fire

25 C.F.S. units were committed to the fire burning in peat fields in the first 2 hours of operation. Then large irrigation equipment was brought in to extensively flood the area.



(Photograph by Kym Robinson. Mt. Gambier)

Two fire fighters were treated for injuries and taken to the Mt. Gambier Hospital. One of the volunteer fire fighters was badly burnt when the new Eight Mile Creek C.F.S. unit was caught in the fire and damaged.

Graveyard of pines/ash



Stately radiata pines in the Penola pine forest, that took over 80 years to grow, within minutes lay broken and burnt among a graveyard of white ash.

Charred fence posts down every road in the fire devastated farming areas . . . and dead and dying stock caught in paddocks and yards, bore witness to the fires' savagery.

Kalangadoo hit

At Kalangadoo, 4 houses were razed and 8 houses in the rural area were also completely destroyed.

Australian History/Heritage

The historic Kalangadoo homestead "Akoolya" was burnt down. It was reported that the entire National Trust designated contents of the building were destroyed. The homestead quickly burst into flames when struck by a "gale of fire" in excess of 100 km/h. The collection of journals, letters, ledgers and newspapers of early life in South Australia was burnt. A library of 3,000 books, collections of

gold, china, crystal jewellery and Persian rugs were also destroyed.

Tarpeena evacuated — support given

At Tarpeena fire cut a swathe through the southern sector of the township leaving in its wake 21 homes gutted.

As the fire neared Tarpeena residents organized people to the oval and helped each other with their belongings, caravans and trailers.

Over 600 residents from Tarpeena and surrounding districts sought refuge on the Tarpeena Oval, as fire raged to the perimeter. But green grass the result of keeping the oval irrigated for summer sports made it a "safe area".

After the fire went through and the power was cut off, residents took to the job of co-ordinating the clean up and start on the town's recovery.

In the light of 21 homes lost in the blaze along with many sheds, fencing and livestock many people had problems which had to be sorted out . . . others just wanted help and needed guidance on where to go and what to do . . .Helpers were there to assist.

Timbermill saved

Sapfor Timber Mill at Tarpeena was saved from destruction when the company's total staff and many townspeople rallied to fight the inferno. As a result only 3 sheds of timber were lost on the southern side of the Mill. The company's fire suppression system installed just over a year ago, with the man power saved the other large timber sheds in the fire's path.

The courage and comradeship of fire fighters and Sapfor timber mill employees and staff was highly praised by the Member for Mt. Gambier, Mr. Harold Allison. He said when the fire came at the Sapfor Mill, management said, "it's on us get out and see to the women and children." However when the immense pall of black smoke cleared Sapfor people and many other townfolk were at the Mill fighting the fire . . . and they saved the mill," said Mr. Allison.



Pictured above the timber storage yard of Sapfor Mill at Tarpeena ablaze. Shortly after a mill employee rescued timber with a forklift, as the Tarpeena power transformer exploded in the flames.

(Photograph by Peter Morris, Mt. Gambier).



A semi-trailer was gutted by fire on the Glencoe-Kalangadoo road. As fire crossed the road in the path of the truck, the brake line caught fire, stopping the truck and the fibreglass cabin was burnt.

(Photograph by Peter Morris, Mt. Gambier).

At Nangwarry fire fighters stopped the inferno right on the edge of the town, leaving the Mill intact, and houses untouched; but the fire continued to burn through pines.

Black out

Two 132,000 volt lines which supply the Lower South East with electricity shut down at 4.30 p.m. (1630 hours) leaving the district without mains power for at least an hour, when lines switched off automatically due to fire. The 33,000 volt lines which supply Mount Burr, Kalangadoo, Penola, Coonawarra, Nangwarry and Tarpeena were damaged by falling trees and intense heat from the fires.

E.T.S.A work gangs had an enormous repair job ahead of them. They worked throughout the night to make repairs to the extensive damage caused.

Prayers given

As the media reported on the holocaust and tragedies of 14 lives lost, of fire threatening townships, razing pine forests, homes, farming properties, outsheds, destroying fencing, discarded vehicles — sadly some with occupants and leaving in its wake bloated burnt dead and dying sheep and cattle; people prayed as concern and terror shook the State.

The public of South Australia prayed for the people in the fire-ravaged areas and all the while residents in the fire areas prayed for their lives . . .

State Disaster declared

At approximately 5.15 p.m. (1715 hours) the S.A. Governor, Sir Donald Dunstan, at Government House, Adelaide, signed the emergency declaration to invoke "THE STATE DISASTER ACT".

Fires, more fires, then rain . . .

Fires, flare ups and spot fires occurred throughout Wednesday.

At no stage were the major fires controllable, until late in the evening when the temperature dropped and a drizzle of rain came down, followed by a heavy shower.

. . . Finally . . . Country Fire Services and Woods and Forests reported "most fires were contained".

Tears of relief?

Weary fire fighters looked through red slits — was it from the smoke . . . the dust . . . just plain exhaustion . . . or tears of relief?

But they all knew their task was not yet over . . . the next step . . . was the "mopping up". . .

The Next Day

By dawn, Thursday 17th February, weary C.F.S. volunteer fire fighters from more than 50 fire units together with St. John Ambulance, Police, Woods and Forests, R.S.P.C.A., Dept. of Agriculture, and Red Cross personnel were still trying to correlate the results of the inferno(s) — as mopping up, fire suppression tactics, relief programmes, stock treatment and agistment swung into full gear.

"Mopping up" began in earnest and continued for over a week. Fire fighters were constantly plagued by "flare ups" and "hot spots".



A fire fighter battles flames during Thursday's outbreaks in the Nangwarry area. (Photograph by Peter Morris, Mt. Gambier).

continued page 22.



An aerial view of radiata pine trees caught in the inferno, east of Tarpeena. (Photograph by Peter Morris, Mt. Gambier).

Injuries

Naracoorte Hospital treated 8 people for minor burns and cuts on Wednesday and Thursday.

Nine people were admitted to Millicent and Mount Gambier Hospitals with injuries from the fires. Millicent Hospital was busy during the crisis. 4 people were admitted with injuries, 60 treated for burns, eye injuries, abrasions and smoke inhalation.

Off duty staff volunteered to help treat casualties and there was no shortage of help. Off duty staff also gathered at Mt. Gambier where an emergency plan was put into action.

St. John first aid unit treated more than 70 people up to Thursday night, 17th February, 1983.

The Naracoorte St. John Ambulance Centre sent a caravan to a Conmurra property to treat fire fighters on Wednesday, then on to Callendale on Thursday, where fire fighters were treated for "smoke eyes".

Protective Bans

Special Protective Bans were imposed by the C.F.S. Director, under the authority of the Country Fires Act for 5 days, for the States fire stricken areas of the Lower South East, Mid North and Mount Lofty Ranges areas. The Bans restricted the lighting and maintaining of fires in the open . . .

Struan House "like command post"

The Department of Agriculture S.E. regional headquarters at Struan House, received reports of the fires and went into action.

The Struan C.F.S. units were put on "standby" and early Thursday morning left for Wandilo where 75% of the Agriculture Department's property was swept by fire, but no livestock were lost.

The other unit joined the action west of Penola. An animal relief programme was established overnight and by 8.30 a.m. Thursday, more than 40 volunteers were formed into 12 teams and were quickly on their way to the worst hit areas.

Their task was to assist in the assessment of the livestock situation. In addition to determining the degree of injury and the fate of thousands of fire affected animals. Their job was also to assess the extent of losses and farm damage involved. This information is vital in establishing fodder and agistment needs. Many stock were saved or consigned to slaughter.

At Struan offers of assistance from the public flowed in.

The switchboard received a steady stream of calls and offers of assistance were recorded.

Everyone at Struan was involved. The girls soon had a sandwich cutting and distribution service organized. Donations of bread, meat and fruit poured in. The C.W.A. were also in the forefront.

Some girls went out on a canvassing tour and came back laden with gifts. Visitors dropped in to help and used their cars to deliver the goods to the disaster areas.

Friday was D-Day — disposal of the dead and dying stock. Teams re-grouped at 7.30 a.m. and moved off to the organized assembly points. Work continued on till the end of the weekend.

Aid supplied

FOOD—

Many burnout families in the S.E. had been struggling to prepare

meals under difficult and make-shift conditions, so volunteers set up a distribution point for prepared meals in food hampers from the Millicent Show Hall.

WELFARE CENTRES—

Minister of Community Welfare, Mr. Greg Crafter, said five welfare centres had been set up in the Lower S.E. to give immediate aid to families and individuals.

CLOTHING AND NEEDY ITEMS—

Mount Gambier's St. Vincent de Paul Society amassed a huge amount of clothing, linen, shoes and furniture supplies for fire victims. Mrs J. Hennessy, President of the women's conference, said the society would provide everything anyone could need. One of the most generous donations received was a car, registered and filled with petrol. "The owner came to give what he could". And a man who needed a car was there so it was given to him, said Mrs. Hennessy.

The Society also delivered needed items of furniture to people unable to provide transport themselves.

Red Cross and Salvation Army also set up collection depots in many areas of the S.E. to assist fire victims.



Pictured above: donations of men's, women's, and children's clothing, shoes, blankets, sheets, sleeping bags and over 70 mattresses were piled high on make-shift tables and racks at the Tarpeena Hall, a result of people opening their hearts to the fire victims. Volunteers worked quietly and tirelessly throughout the day sorting the piles, for distribution to stricken families once their needs became known.

(Photograph by Peter Morris, Mt. Gambier).

MANPOWER—

Y.P. Apex Labour

Apex Clubs on Yorke Peninsula decided that rather than give monetary aid it would be more appropriate to provide labour to assist Lower South East farmers.



(Photograph supplied courtesy "Yorke Peninsula Country Times".)

Thirty-five Apex members from Kadina, Moonta, Maitland and Ardrossan boarded a bus on Friday, 4th March for the S.E. Early Saturday a S.E. farmer met them on the outskirts of the fire area. A co-ordinator for clean-up operations had arranged for members to be dispersed over about 12 farms for the next two days. During which time many miles of boundary fencing was cleaned up, in addition to new fences being erected.

Over 560 man hours were spent by the Y.P. Apexians in the bushfire area.

Apexians saw houses and outbuildings being bulldozed into holes as there was nothing salvageable. Burnt out vehicles in which human lives had been lost, still remained on roadsides. Some houses which were fortunate to escape the fires' fury were surrounded by large expanses of lawn on which many fire fighters had taken refuge.

Special thanks goes to the Kadina Amoco, B.P., Caltex, Mobil and Shell dealers for fuel, Schweppes Drinks, Lucindale Red Cross for providing lunches, Lions Club for refreshments and Allens Bus Service for transport.

Yorke Peninsula acknowledged for generosity

Like so many farming communities on Yorke Peninsula the Kadina district people gave generous donations of hay and money.

The Gordon family of "Glenross" Millicent, S.E. writes: "Please convey our gratitude to the Kadina District people for their generous donations of hay and money. The word thank you doesn't seem sufficient for the way we feel for the help we have received."

Support/Hay/Fodder donations

Since Thursday, 17th February, gifts of hay and grain have poured into the S.E. on farm trucks and semi-trailers to try to save the surviving stock. And a small army of volunteers from many areas of South Australia and Western Victoria have worked tirelessly in the fire stricken areas to dispose of dead stock, transport other stock to agistment or meat works and put up temporary or permanent fencing for remaining stock which will either stay on the properties or be prepared for sale at S.E. markets. Four fodder depots were set up to receive hay and grain — at Callendale Station, Furner Oval, Kalangadoo, and Wattle Range. With two smaller points at Kangaroo Inn and Mount McIntyre Hall U.F.S. field officer, Mr. Pete Bramsen of Naracoorte co-ordinated the receipt and distribution of fodder.

At Tintinara Lion Club member, Mr Doug Bower at Elders G.M. arranged collection and transport.

The response to appeals for hay was magnificent considering its shortage in the Upper S.E. Some farmers even gave a bale or two from their meagre supplies and others with irrigation 100 or more.

In the 3 weeks following the holocaust in excess 65,000 bales of hay had been donated in the fire affected areas, which included 11,000 bales from W.R.E.; approx. 7,000 bales organized by S.E.S. from D.I. Fodders of Meningie and 400 large rolls — and the remainder from various other parts of Australia.

Areas donated hay to date are most parts of the South East, Western Victoria, Echuca in Northern Victoria, Delinquin in N.S.W., Bute, Kadina and Paskerville on Yorke Peninsula, Gladstone in the Mid North, Murray Bridge and Meningie and the Coorong.

At least seven truck loads of hay were sent from Bordertown, and several from Keith and Tintinara.

Among the large gifts of hay the Weapons Research Establishment at Salisbury made available 11,000 bales delivered by semi-trailer. D.I. Fodder at Meningie offered 300 tonnes of hay. About 10,000 tonnes of wheat from local silos available for a subsidized price of about \$70 a tonne for feeding to sheep. Centres at Kingston and Padthaway received about 5,000 bales of hay most of which was sent to Callendale station.

In a practical gift to help the hay movement, B.P. Australia Ltd. gave 1,500 litres of fuel from its Penola Depot to re-fuel trucks returning home after coming to the S.E.

Kadina Lions Club canvassed for donations of hay and fodder and Mr. Dean Newbold at Alford transported it to the S.E. free. Fuel was supplied free by Y.P. Petroleum in conjunction with Mobil Australia.

Brute and District Lions Club gathered 1,200 bales and 18 big rolls and used their own trucks to convey hay to the South East.

Hay Collection from Yankalilla District

Local farmers in the Yankalilla district donated hundreds of bales of hay for the South East with further loads sent to other affected areas in the State.

A former Yankalilla farmer who had moved to a Kalangadoo property in the South East was one of the needy recipients.

Daily consumption of donated hay brought into the South East has been around 5,000 bales per day.

STOCK—

Survivors

Stock that survived the fires were agisted on neighbouring land or were hand-fed.

Farmers in the South East and other parts of the State who had feed or paddocks available opened their paddocks to other farmers' fire stricken animals, regardless of whether they were horses, cattle, sheep or goats.

Assessment

Thousands of sheep and cattle lay dead in paddocks and yards.

A Department of Agriculture team set out to assess stock losses and carry out disposal of dead stock estimated that 60% of stock in the fire affected area was killed in the fire, a further 30% had to be shot by Department officers leaving a 10% survival rate.

Birds had fallen dead to the ground overcome by smoke and dust, still with their wings outstretched as though in flight. Corpses of foxes, rabbits, hares and various native animals lay on the white ash. Dead cattle and sheep were found entangled in fences in a last bid to burst through and evade the fire. Other animals, burnt, suffering shock, once found had to be killed mercifully; it was a scene of complete hopelessness.

Burial



United Farmers and Stockowners President, Mr Michael Shanahan (left) and the organisation's General Secretary, Mr Grant Andrews survey the grim scene of bloated dead stock killed in the South East fires. (Photograph reproduced courtesy of "The Stock Journal").

More than 300 people from the Upper South East assisted with the burial of dead stock. About 100 trucks and front-end loaders made the trip from as far as Bordertown, Keith, Tintinara and Coonalpyn and Strathalbyn. Stock were gathered from farms and dumped by the truckload into trenches dug well above the water table and then covered with dirt. Stock that could not be buried in areas where a high water table existed were instead burned.

Coordinators in the Furner-Callendale area alone counted over 71 tip trucks, 51 loaders, 45 small tray-top trucks and 5 bulldozers involved in the burial of stock, with volunteers from far and wide. The task was hard as bulldozers scooped up corpses and men threw dead animals onto trucks and utes trying to ignore the pitiful saddening sight and stench.

Small wisps of smoke from funeral pyres of dead sheep, cattle and horses rose against a back drop of charred black pine forests and scorched gums.

Stock go on Market

Thousands of sheep and cattle were sold at Millicent sale yards as S.E. producers destocked fire ravaged farms. The sale was organized for farmers who could not keep remaining stock because of lack of feed or fencing. Most stock was bought by slaughter houses as graziers had already taken advantage of cheap drought-affected stock to boost their flock or herd numbers. About 1,400 cattle and 9,700 sheep and lambs were sold. Meat companies paid prices equal to current rates.

FENCING—

The Premier, Mr. Bannon said, "If the country is going to be restaked, fences will need to be rebuilt rapidly", he said. "We will need some special Federal Government assistance for fencing or long-term loans."

"We can mobilize production of fence posts through the Woods and Forests Department and local forestry groups.

"As an interim measure the farmers in fire affected areas need a lot of steel droppers and we will be looking to make sure they are supplied," said Mr. Bannon.

To ensure early restoration of boundary fences destroyed in the fire, the S.A. Government supplied a semi-trailer load of wiring and fence stoppers for free distribution to Kalangadoo and Furner. The re-erection of boundary fences was first priority for properties affected so the farmers could resume their grazing operations and control wandering stock.

A rebate of \$1,200 per kilometre on boundary fencing (fencing roadways or public land) was offered by the S.A. Government.

Teams of volunteers worked on cutting of new posts.

It is estimated between 50 to 60 per cent of fencing was destroyed in the devastated areas.

The United Farmers and Stock Owners of S.A. set up "registration points" to co-ordinate fencing. These points would organize work for volunteers willing to give up a day or more to put up new fences.

On behalf of Coonawarra vignerons, Mr. Vic. Patrick offered the use of post "knockers" and drills used in vineyards to enable quick construction of new permanent fences.

The Department of Agriculture arranged delivery of 1,500 steel droppers and 100 rolls of wire each for depots of Furner and Kalangadoo to get permanent fencing underway. Similar deliveries were made to Callendale Station and Wattle Range.

Fencing Story



(Photograph by Dean Williamson, Naracoorte)

A group of 14 Tailem Bend and Coomandook farmers greatly assisted S.E. fire victims. They took six (6) tractors with post hole boring machines, dug post holes, erected posts to replace fencing destroyed on Ash Wednesday II, to retain what stock the S.E. farmers had left. As it was they had problems rounding up surviving stock which roamed for miles. Spokesman for the group, Mr. Gerald Schubert said the men also took food and camping gear to make themselves self sufficient. All 14 men left Thursday morning and worked throughout the day. On Friday, 10 remained to work on Saturday. Some tractors were loaned by people who could not go while others were "loaned" by employers. Some Tailem Bend businesses donated items ranging from food to diesel fuel.

"This is a practical way of helping the fire victims especially by those who, because of the drought, can't donate stock feed". Mr. Schubert said "I hope what we did will be an example to other people around here," he said.

Fences have now sprung up, others lie in neat lines awaiting their final resting place. Rolls of wire have been deposited at edges of paddocks.

Once the erection of the fences is completed, farmers can start to think about re-stocking and trying to build up flocks and herds again.

FORESTS—

Mr. Fred Pfeiffer, Senior Forester, Woods and Forests, said the fires had originally only been burning along a narrow strip about 2 to 3 kilometres wide . . . but with the wind change the fire became an uncontrollable raging inferno, which then had a 50 to 60 kilometre front. "The fire storm just broke off trees. It was the most severe the district had ever suffered. . . It was savage", he said.

Approximately 23% of the South East Radiata pine forests which made up 19,000 hectares as well as five to ten per cent of the S.E. private forests had been consumed.

Woods and Forests Director, Mr. P. South said it would take 50 years before timber yields returned to those achieved before the blaze, and 10 years before the forests were fully re-established.

Mr. South said an estimated 2.5 million cubic metres of timber was available but weather conditions would determine how much could be salvaged.

Timber Salvage



In less than a week after the fires, upwards of 200 men began harvesting/salvaging the fire damaged pines. The fight against the fire the previous week had turned out a fight to save the timber before the rains came and the mould set in.

Thankfully the harvesting fleet sustained relatively minor damage due to the bravery and insight of Woods and Forests and private contractors, in moving some of the expensive and heavy equipment into the swamp saving it from the fire. Some timber contractors however were "wiped out".

Fellers toiled to save pines — Kalangadoo teams of tree fellers in the S.E are racing against time to save as much as possible from the 19,000 ha of State pine forests. In dirty and dangerous conditions they work in small groups slashing down the charred black trees.

"It's eerie, instead of working on a thick carpet of pine needles in a lush green forest with dozens of kangaroos and emus hopping and running through the ferns — you're in blackened earth — black trunks, no foliage and the only kangaroos are a couple of charred corpses," said tree feller, Hayden Merrett of Tarpeena.

Hayden Merrett and Peter Trajanoski of Mt. Gambier are employed as piece-workers by K. W. & B. F. Badenoch, Mt. Gambier cutting pines for South Eastern Australian Perpetual Forests Ltd. at Tarpeena. Hayden fells about 65 to 70 trees per day while Peter trims branches and cuts the pines into lengths. "As well as dirty work, cutting fire damaged pines can also be dangerous, sometimes the tops can suddenly snap off and other trees bent over by the fire can suddenly come down."

Already cut trees have been rejected by mills, because the trees have bends in them. Because of this whole forests of dead trees that are bent, or are too small or too big, are being left standing . . . Many pines have been bent by the wind accompanying the fire.

The timber was in plantations of trees up to 60 years old, covering about 19,000 hectares from the Penola and Mt. Burr radiata pine forest reserves. Salvage of timber would continue for over six months.

It is estimated that 40% of the salvaged timber could be handled. The remaining 900,000 cubic metres would need to be wet-stored to prevent deterioration of the logs.

Lake — log storage

About 200 hectares of Lake Bonney located 10 km east of Tantanoola, will be the new storage area for the next 2 to 3 years for approx. 1 m cubic metres of fire salvaged, pine logs (20,000 cubic metres have been salvaged from Millicent area). The pines are being stored in the lake to prevent the spread of blue stain fungus which discolours the wood.

continued page 25.

Govt. 3 point plan to rebuild S.E.

The Premier of South Australia, Mr. John Bannon, The Governor, Sir Donald Dunstan and Lady Dunstan, the Minister of Community Welfare, Mr. Greg Crafter and CFS Director, Mr. Lloyd Johns, visited the South East in the wake of Ash Wednesday II.

Mr. Bannon accompanied by CFS Director, Mr. Lloyd Johns flew over the blackened pine forests and pasture lands on Friday, 18th February, and later toured some of worst hit areas at Mt. Burr, Furner, Kalangadoo and east to Penola.

South Australian Premier, Mr. John Bannon, put forward a three-point plan to overcome the huge cost following the devastating S.E. fires. Mr. Bannon outlined his plan during his visit.

(1) He said the first priority was to see to the individual person's needs.

(2) Priority would also be given to the stock situation and provision for temporary fencing.

(3) Thirdly, I will be seeking Federal Government funding in a bid to cover the major proportion of the — \$60 m pine forests bill for the S.E.; later estimate of damage was \$73 m.

Personal concern for the people of the fire stricken S.E. brought the State Governor, Sir Donald Dunstan to the region on Friday, 18th February 1983. "There are so many people who have done so much in this terrible disaster and many of them won't get the kindness they deserve. These are the people I hope to see and if possible talk with them," Sir Donald said.

The Governor, with Lady Dunstan and the Minister of Community Welfare, Mr. Greg Crafter, called on all the welfare centres and toured the burnt out areas.

A spokesman for the Premier said the Government regarded the advice of the Governor Sir Donald Dunstan as invaluable (Sir Donald was a former Army Chief of General Staff and has had wide experience in emergency and strategic matters).



The Premier Mr John Bannon (right) and Governor of S.A., Sir Donald Dunstan (left) and Mr Les Brooks looking at the remains of Mr Brooks father's house on the Mt Burr/Kalangadoo Road. (Photograph Peter Morris. Mt. Gambier).

Yet another fire

Penola grass fire on Friday, 18th February at 12.40 p.m. less than 2 km from the outskirts of Penola, started from a spark from a fire burning on Tower Road more than 10 kms away. Fire was reported by a passing motorist. Fire burnt about 10 acres of grass adjacent to stubble on Robert Rymill Drive. More than 30 fire fighters with private farm fire fighting units battled the blaze before CFS appliances from Naracoorte, Wrattobully and Penola arrived. The fire was controlled with 15 minutes of the CFS arrival.

A police force of 85 personnel with special skills were brought in to co-ordinate the S.E. Ash Wednesday II fires aftermath and compile reports on losses of life, property, stock, machinery, etc.

STATISTICS

64 Country Fire Services units together with a total of 20 Woods and Forest and many private farm units and 6 Country Fire Authority units attended the South East fires. One C.F.S. Fire Control Officer and one C.F.S. member died.

The damage to South East farming properties in the Ash Wednesday II inferno had been conservatively estimated at between \$20m and \$25m. Figures are based on estimated property and stock losses — and is in addition to the estimated \$73m loss of the 19,000 hectares of pine forests laid waste.

Fourteen (14) people, died and more than 40 homes were destroyed in the fires that burnt an estimated 120,000 hectares of agricultural, pastoral and forest land.

359 properties were fully or partially burnt.

An estimated 230,000 sheep and 8,500 cattle perished, leaving some 190,000 sheep and 34,100 cattle dependent on emergency fodder supplies.

An estimated 8,500 kms of fencing was lost, which represents 75% loss of fencing on the 359 properties hit by fire.

Replacement costs in conservative figures are: sheep \$5.75 million; cattle \$2.1 million; fencing \$10.2 and fixed assets (including homes, wool sheds, workshops and equipment) \$50 million . . .

. . . But when you take into account lost production on farms this also runs into millions of dollars. It takes up to \$1,200 alone to replace each kilometre of fencing.

Farm machinery and equipment was the other "hidden" loss. Many properties lost everything from shovels to shearing sheds.

Acting Chief, S.E. Regional Officer from the Department of Agriculture, Mr. Ron Ellis said the whole area was under-insured because disasters such as the Ash Wednesday II were just "unimaginable".

"Even those with insurance would be faced with massive shortfalls when trying to rebuild and replace stock," he said.

"In the eight per cent of the region burnt out there will be a tendency by farmers to put in crops to get a cash flow as soon as possible. But obviously this area will be less productive for the next 12 to 18 months bringing down the region's overall rural production and adversely affecting the S.E.'s economy," said Mr. Ellis.

Approximately 23% of the South East Radiata pines were destroyed. The conservative estimate of \$73 million loss represents 9,000 ha lost of the 11,500 ha Mt. Burr forest; 10,000 ha burnt of the 16,000 ha Radiata pine in the Penola Forest; seed orchids completely destroyed; seed extraction equipment; seed store and supply of seed for planting of pines for 1984 and years to come were all lost along with a huge Komatsu 155 dozer and Fiat 640 tractor.

Even a Bunya Pine one of two believed remaining was badly burnt and may not survive.

All insect animals and bird life perished in the path of the fire, including more than 1000 beehives and thousands of kangaroos and emus that inhabited the forests.

Penola's Mayor says thanks

Penola's Mayor, Mr. T. I. Paltridge said, "I know I speak for everybody in the Penola D/C area when I express heart felt sympathy for the sufferers in the Ash Wednesday II bushfire. Particularly to the families of those who lost their relatives and all those who lost their homes and possessions.

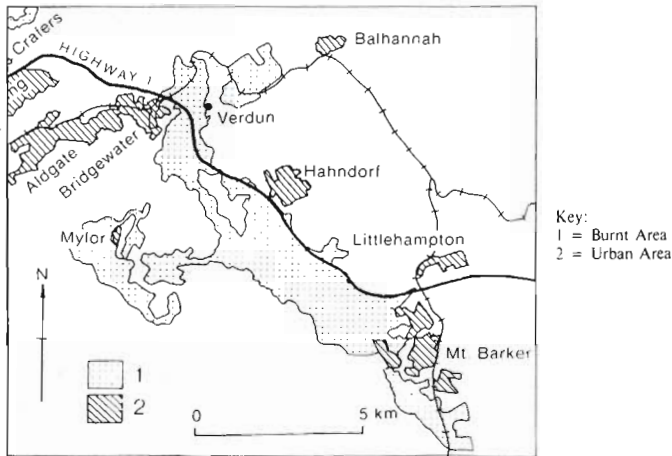
There are far too many people to thank for their wonderful efforts in the aftermath of the fire. I would particularly like to voice our appreciation to the wonderful work of the C.F.S. volunteer fire fighters and Red Cross ladies.

Other CFS appliances came from as far away as Tintinara and the organization of their services and co-operation was most praiseworthy.

Now that the danger has subsided much work remains to be done. Stock have been disposed of; volunteers have poured into the affected areas offering help and machinery. It is wonderful to see how people rally in an emergency," Mr Paltridge said.

continued page 38.

THE HAHNDORF-MT. BARKER / BRIDGEWATER / MYLOR FIRES



Fire area: Map courtesy Australian Geographical Studies

With temperatures soaring over 40°C, winds gusting north/north-west between 20 to 55 kph and relative humidity of less than 13% a spate of fires occurred, at Hahndorf, Bridgewater and Mylor.

THE HAHNDORF FIRE



(Photograph reproduced courtesy "The Advertiser")

The first started at River Road, Hahndorf, and moved south-east burning through pastoral land with patches of scrub, scattered trees and small pine plantings, spotting and spreading.

Paechtown hit.

A flank of the fire moved adjacent to the freeway into Paechtown, destroying ten houses in the historic village, just south of Hahndorf. Among the ten burnt were three (3) of the four remaining 130 to 140 year old German settlers' cottages built around 1850 and classified by the National Trust.



A National Trust-registered home at Paechtown was reduced to a shell by the fire. (Photograph reproduced courtesy "The Advertiser")

All that was left amid the ruins of the carefully restored traditional and original three German settlers' cottages were two chimneys and small sections of bricks that had been framed by

beams in the traditional German half-timber style. Fire still burnt in the oil tank of a heater. A family dog also perished and a historic barn, tractor, pottery work, tools, historical records and vehicles were all destroyed.

At the nearby Hahndorf Nursing Home, 52 patients were evacuated as the fire jumped the freeway.

On the southern flank the fire burnt S.E. along Fairview Road, spotted to Kangaroo Reef Road and swept onto Mount Barker. Fire threatened the north-western side as well as carrying passed the southern side of the township.

Mt. Barker survived — thankfully

Fire raced over Hawthorn Hill and south, destroying the rifle range and virtually encircled the Mt. Barker township. Only desperate fire fighting efforts saved the Mount Barker Primary School, kindergarten, and houses on the fringes of the housing estates and outskirts of the town. Some of which were singed.



With buckets of water women mop up after the fire threatened homes in Albert Road, Mount Barker. (Photograph supplied courtesy "The Courier", Mt. Barker).

Spot fires flared up, as hundreds of civilians armed with bags, knapsacks, garden hoses, tree branches and buckets volunteered to assist the C.F.S. brigades confronting the oncoming walls of flame.



Using bags civilians fought desperately to halt the advancing fire in grassland above the Mount Barker township. (Photograph supplied courtesy "The Courier", Mt. Barker).

Fire even burnt to within 50 metres of the Mt. Barker C.F.S. fire station.

Fires were put out on both sides of the town. The front broke away and raced towards Wistow, but was halted about two kilometres from the town. The southern flank was contained on Wednesday 16th February by about 1930 hours. Mopping up the main fire continued until 1910 hours on Thursday 17th February.

At least one car and trailer was destroyed.

A local man severely burnt when engulfed by a gust of flame, while bravely fighting, died some 7 weeks later from the 80% burns suffered.

The fire was dealt with by 14 C.F.S. appliances, 2 control vehicles and 12 private units.

Only minor injuries received by C.F.S. personnel have been reported.

Area burnt was 1172 hectares.

continued page 27.

THE BRIDGEWATER FIRE

A second fire began at Banksia Road, Bridgewater a heavily populated residential area developed among scenic gullies and hillsides.

The residential area consisted of relatively small blocks (0.1 hectare) with numerous stringy bark trees, native undergrowth and exotic trees in gardens.

The fire developed quickly, spreading in a south easterly direction through the Bridgewater township.

Bridgewater cut off

Fire blazed through the centre of Bridgewater isolating it for four hours. Residents were evacuated and waited anxiously at the town's oval. Three Bridgewater C.F.S. units on their way to a fire at Hahndorf were quickly diverted to fight their own fire. Seventy fire men and 15 units battled the main blaze in the town's south eastern sector.

"Horrorific" winds fanned fire which came within a few streets of the town centre and destroyed a Vimy Ridge garage.

Fire Losses

Fire claimed its toll in the Bridgewater township. Twenty five (25) homes were destroyed, along with two (2) commercial premises, 47 sheds, over 30 cars, two caravans, a trailer, rotary hoe and tractor. The district's land mark Vimy Ridge service station and several premises nearby were among the statistics. Most houses lost were between Germantown Hill and Tree Fern Road.



Remains of the Vimy Ridge Service Station, workshop, offices and vehicles. (Photograph supplied courtesy "The Courier", Mt. Barker).

A Bridgewater resident and owner of the devastated Vimy Ridge service station, Mr. Brian Jarrett, gave this account;

"One minute all was clear, then the fire came over the hill and into the trees . . . and the panel shop . . . there was so much flammable material in a garage . . . the lads didn't even have time to collect their tools. The lube operator ran to get his motor bike . . . but it caught fire as he picked it up . . . all he could do was throw it down and run! The intense heat was incredible."

In the wake the stone building, workshop, panel shop and tyre store along with about 30 vehicles were all gone.

Fire leaves Bridgewater

Fire then broke out of the built up area on the south-eastern side into rural and grasslands, on two main fronts.

It moved through flammable fuels catching odd houses, sheds and vehicles in irregular patterns.

The northern side front burnt along adjacent to the freeway while the southern side front burnt directly through rural pasture land towards Mt. Barker, joining up with the first fire (Hahndorf/Mt. Barker fire).

The Bridgewater fire was contained at about 2130 hours. 18 C.F.S. appliances fought the fires assisted by 20 private units and a C.F.S. tanker.

An estimated 150 C.F.S. personnel were involved.

Oakbank and Balhannah were in the path of the outbreak that spread from Bridgewater through Verdun, but an "all out" effort by the residents and C.F.S. volunteer fire fighters stopped it in its tracks.

Area burnt by Bridgewater fire was 848 hectares.

THE MYLOR FIRE

A third fire which started near Leslie Creek Road, Mylor was first checked to some extent on Bradbury Road, by C.F.S. fire appliances. Gusty winds carried the fire past the western side of Mylor, through to Biggs Flat, along the eastern side of the Strathalbyn Road.

On the wind change the fire burnt first, easterly along Sheoak Gully Road and then turned north-east as the change consolidated, to run into the burnt area of the Bridgewater fire.

The wind change swept the fire past the western and eastern sides of Mylor township. On the eastern side it burnt into the scrub of the Recreation Reserve, where it was contained.

C.F.S. Unrelenting

Despite losses incurred local residents were full of praise for the tireless efforts of the CFS volunteers.

A total of 6 C.F.S. appliances fought the fire with other fire fighting resources supplied by farmers, townspeople and councils.

Like many other CFS stations, the Mylor C.F.S. fire station was continuously manned from early Wednesday morning until late Sunday night. Crews slept at the station and patrolled trouble spots through the night.

Fire Losses

There were two houses destroyed which were in the Meadows district, as well as numerous sheds.

Only one (1) injury was reported.

Area Burnt

The area of the fire was approximately 400 hectares.

Crossed fingers could not save collection

When fire again struck the Mylor area (last hit Wednesday, February 20th, 1983) businessman Bob Hoskings had his second fire tragedy. Three years ago he lost most of his prized collection of classic cars valued at over \$30,000 but fought back to save his home. This time the fire was too relentless, turning his ornate and antique furnished 22-roomed historic mansion, once owned by a former Surveyor-General of S.A., George Goyder, into a twisted mass of rubble and white ash, with a damage estimate of \$350,000. The valuable 1932 Buick and 1936 Ford Roadster cars he saved three years ago were reduced to burnt out wrecks. In trying to drag one clear with a tractor, Mr Hoskings became trapped between two fires and was himself lucky to escape.

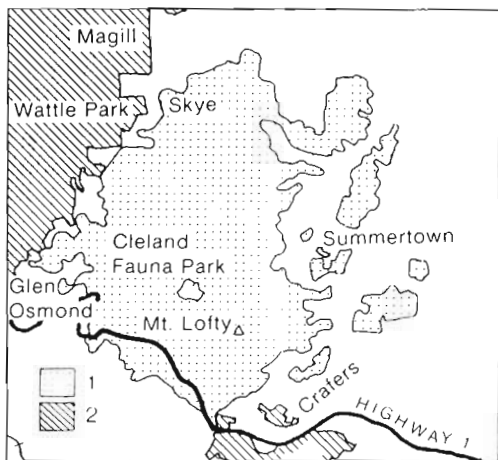
Mylor landmark lost

The next victim to fall to the fires' wrath was the notable landmark of the Mylor area "Warrakilla Homestead", formerly the Wheatsheaf Inn, and home of S.A.'s first Surveyor-General George Goyder, along with numerous outbuildings, sheds, vehicles, and heavy losses of hay and stock, within the Meadows district.



A C.F.S. volunteer fire fighter is pictured racing to help others fighting the fire at the other end of the Warrakilla 23 room historic homestead, as the north wing is gutted. (Photograph supplied courtesy "The Courier", Mt. Barker).

MT. OSMOND/GREENHILL FIRE



Fire area: Map courtesy Australian Geographical Studies.



(Photograph reproduced courtesy "The Advertiser")

The fire started on the Adelaide side of Mt. Osmond adjacent to a residential area, and raced quickly upslope towards houses adjoining the Mt. Osmond Golf Course.

Manuscript/Art/Antiques destroyed

A manuscript representing seven years work, shortly before it was to become the fifth book of Adelaide physiotherapist, Mr. G. Maitland, was destroyed along with his house as the fire roared through Mountain View Crescent at Mount Osmond. Next door, an art collection was destroyed in a \$300,000 mansion, along with priceless antiques and persian carpets. Other residents also lost houses, as fire sped up the Gully above St. Georges to Mountain View Crescent, and the adjacent Mount Osmond Road.

Freeway closed

The south-eastern freeway was reported closed at Glen Osmond because of fire. Motorists were urged to use alternative routes of Greenhill and Upper Sturt Roads. Vehicles, bumper to bumper, crawled in first gear, picking their way through thick smoke. Those travelling home could not guess the extent of damage and loss that lay ahead around the next bend in the hills.



(Photograph reproduced courtesy "The News" and "Sunday Mail")

Out of control

Fires were out of control and there were vehicles speeding away from and towards fires. Some drivers were obviously in a state of panic and near accidents occurred. In one incident a fully manned Brukung C.F.S. fire appliance was almost rammed by a large sedan blindly heading at full throttle through the thick smoke.

On rampage

Strong winds drove the fire across Waterfall Gully into Cleland Conservation Park. The fire also spotted over the golf course and sped up both sides of South-Eastern Freeway to Crafers and Waverley Ridge Road, burnt out the famous Eagle-on-the-Hill Hotel and B.P. petrol station opposite, and met motorists arriving at Crafers via The Upper Sturt Road — it was everywhere.

Wind change

Fire leapt the road ahead of C.F.S. volunteers and as they were about to make a stand at the Crafers Primary School the arrival of the south-west wind change steered the fires back towards Piccadilly and Mount Lofty, burning paddocks and trees.

The change in wind direction to the south-west stopped the fire from sweeping into Stirling . . . it was now heading towards Summit Road instead . . . up the hillsides towards houses on Greenhill and Yarrabee Roads and Yanagin Drive.



A skeleton remains of a forest off Sprigg Road, Mount Lofty. (Photograph reproduced courtesy "The Advertiser")

A group of women and children from neighbouring properties sought refuge on Mt. George Fire Party Leader, Dean Foote's property, which was well protected with large areas of green around the homestead. They anxiously listened on a 10-channel C.F.S. receiver to the fires' progress while Dean and members of the Mt. George, Iron Bank and other C.F.S. units fought and saved houses behind the Church of Epiphany at Crafers.

Summit hit

Fire had reached the Mt. Lofty Summit demolishing the kiosk and cracking the safety glass of the new 30 metre high National Parks and Wildlife Services fire spotting tower, earlier occupied by three officers.

The Summertown C.F.S. unit volunteers including a 17 year old, hosed each other down in the car park and prayed for the fire to subside. Their fire truck had been drive up through the flames in a perilous state, its pump motor had failed.



The new National Parks and Wildlife Services Fire Tower (left) and Mount Lofty obelisk survived the fires — but surrounding buildings (restaurant and facilities) were destroyed. (Photograph reproduced courtesy "The News and Sunday Mail")

At the Mount Lofty Kiosk only the cement obelisk built in 1902 to mark Matthew Flinders visit to the S.A. coast remained.

The 98 year old Flinders Column, built in 1885 as a trigonometric survey station was established to calculate local latitude and longitude of places near Adelaide and as a landmark to aid navigation. A plate commemorating Matthew Flinders was attached to the tower in 1902 by poet Lord Alfred Tennyson, in honour of the discovery and naming of Mt. Lofty Ranges in 1802. Flinders Column used as a fire spotting tower until a few months, was soon to be converted to a museum.

More devastation

Following the path of the fire up the Summit, houses were razed, historic St. Michael's house was in flames. Sheltering face down inside, were five people, while two more manned a radio shack in the garden. On the right a 130 year old Mt. Lofty house believed to be the oldest in the district was also destroyed. Next to burn was the 99 year old house, the home of Mr. Kym Bonython and family. "Eurilla", was sited opposite the NSW-9 transmitter and television towers, which were also threatened.

St. Michael's House at Crafers



Pictured above historic old St. Michael's house built by the Blackwell family in 1800's was the home for the Society of the Sacred Mission brothers from 1946. Sold to the Anglican Church, the house was used as a theological college by the brothers, until it was decimated by the Ash Wednesday II bushfire.

The house, library, chapel its 20 acre grounds, greenhouse, garage, two cars, sheds and a gatehouse used by people wishing a quiet retreat were all reduced to smouldering wrecks. The library had housed about 45,000 books some up to 300 years old and many irreplaceable.

Many priceless irreplaceable articles were lost, including several ancient Russian icons; one of which dated back to the 14th century.

Only the brick constructed Refectory remained untouched and

a figurine of Jesus which Father Jonathon found in the ashes, that had miraculously survived the inferno.

The refectory wall clock stopped at 3.40 p.m. (1540 hours).

Father Jonathon head of the Society of the Sacred Mission Monastery, gave his account of the tragedy to Scott Moore, from "The Hills Gazette":

"St. Michael's had its own fire radio hut where the brothers kept lookout for fires, improving the C.F.S. information network. When news of the fire arrived we began to prepare but the speed and fury of the fire caught the brothers (five in all) and monastery residents by surprise. We expected it in half an hour, but suddenly we were being rained on by hot ash and sparks. When the fire hit we retreated into a small lower room known as the "the dungeon", and lay on the floor. The worst thing was the smell and noise of the roof crashing in . . . we couldn't get out of the house because it was a raging inferno. Then the "dungeon" caught fire, but luckily the fire had burnt away from St. Michael's grounds, making it safe outside.

While the five struggled for their lives inside the once peaceful haven of retreat, outside another drama had taken place in the fire radio hut: St. Michael's groundsman, Brother Geoffrey and resident, Jim McGill, were in the hut when the fire struck. They stayed there until it passed over and made a run for it to safety, when the hut caught fire, being burnt in the process —

Three of the seven at the Retreat suffered burns.

In a grim premonition, Brother Geoffrey had looked at the raging dust storms on the hot, hot morning and said to Father Jonathon, "This is how Black Sunday started".

"It was how the 1955 Black Sunday fire started . . . and how it ended," Father Jonathon said.

Charred fallen fence posts littered a ground, blanketed by white ash up to 5 cm deep. Cavities resembling small moon craters pitted the landscape of twisted blackened tree trunks and limbs; the result of fire burning right down through the tree roots, leaving the ground to cave in. And smouldering houses/debris filled the air with an acrid smoke.

T.V. Towers Saved

Captain of Mt. George C.F.S., Adrian Langley said, "after putting out fires at Carey's Gully our unit was directed to the Mount Lofty summit to be of assistance where we could."

We were fighting the fire near the NWS-9 station and could see fire burning in the trees, but away from the NWS-9 transmission building. Then the wind changed and fire burst out like a train and hit the side wall of the station. Canvas hose being used by NWS-9 technical officers was burnt rendering it useless.

The fire was roaring underneath the T.V. mast when the C.F.S. intervened, to assist there by helping to save the NWS-9 television transmission station valued at over \$3 million," he said.

FOOTNOTE

Mt. George, Stirling and East Torrens C.F.S. were at the scene of the fire and backed up by a concrete truck, converted to a water tanker, rendered assistance to NWS-9.

In addition, Mt. George C.F.S. put out a fire at the NSW-9 house and then with other brigades helped ADS-7 and property owners further along the road . . . Editor.

History now ashes

Historic Mt. Lofty House believed to be the oldest in the district is now just a burnt out shell. Furniture valued at \$150,000 along with an expensive art collection moved in by the new owners just two weeks and three days before the holocaust was lost. The Adelaide Hills mansion, purchased by Mr. J. Morgan, a former Victorian sheep farmer, could now cost up to \$500,000 to rebuild.

"Eurilla", built in 1884, the Bonython family home for the past 66 years was destroyed as the bushfire raced up the Mount Lofty slopes, near the television towers. As Mr. Bonython arrived flames were licking the wooden verandah on one side, within minutes flames were in the roof. Ash landed on the house and fire took hold, raising the 2 storey mansion and destroying a lifetime collection of art, antiques and a world famous jazz record collection, conservatively valued at \$¾ million.

Further up the summit the five storey 130 year old house of John Bonython was also gutted.



The inferno rages inside "Eurilla" on Summit Road. (Photograph supplied courtesy "The News" and "Sunday Mail").

Four generations . . . wiped out!



Drysdale, the Playford home . . . four generations of history wiped out. (Photograph reproduced courtesy of "The Advertiser").

When the fire destroyed "Drysdale" at Norton Summit it also wiped out 10 years of intensive research by Dr. John Playford into the four generations of Playfords, who lived there including the late Sir Thomas Playford, Premier of S.A. for an unequalled 26 years reign. Lost was a collection of irreplaceable personal papers, unpublished letters, rare photographs, books, oil paintings and 27 cabinet drawers of documents.

Drysdale house was built in 1859 by the Rev. Thomas Playford, the first Playford to arrive in Australia.

Fire claims victims

The speed of the fire made it impossible for fire fighters to halt its progress. Twenty-eight houses were lost on Greenhill and Yarrabee Roads. Four local residents were killed whilst trying to save their homes or fleeing the inferno. One man died in his car on Greenhill Road.

Trapped in Greenhill Road

Mr Norm Rennoldson, State secretary of the Textile Worker's Union, had left his office in the Trades Hall, to drive to his home at Forest Range and act as a volunteer fire fighter. He got to Greenhill Road, when a wall of fire hit three cars in convoy.

The impulse was very great to get out, recalled the 45 year old union secretary. "But if I hadn't stayed in my car, I would have been dead," he said.

So Mr Rennoldson switched off the engine and laid down on the floor.

"It was only a matter of minutes as the blaze passed over, but it felt like hours," Mr Rennoldson said.

A few metres away lay the charred remains of a young man who was driving the car in front. The car windows were believed to be wound down at the time.

After the fire passed over, Mr Rennoldson stayed in his car, until a window broke in the heat, so he rushed to the car behind in which Gillian Kotz, 26 of Bridgewater had covered herself with a blanket. Then they both stumbled out and ran down Greenhill Road, where they were eventually picked up by a motorist who did a U-turn and rushed them to Burnside Hospital, despite fears about his own family's safety and his home.



Mr Norm Rennoldson survived the flames by sheltering in his car on Greenhill Road. (Photograph reproduced courtesy of "The Advertiser").

Students in Nightmare of terror

The daily S.T.A. school bus that makes its regular run along Mount Barker Road to drop off its load of 12 to 17 year old students from the Glenunga High School, instead on Wednesday, February 16th was diverted by the S.T.A. to Greenhill road. At that time Greenhill Road was thought to have been a safe area.

Instead the Volvo bus, driven by Bryan Blackwell, of Mt. Barker drove into a nightmare of terror, yet at all times he felt peace and confidence.

"I am a born-again Christian and I believed the Lord would bring us through to safety — and he did", said Mr. Blackwell.

Mr. Blackwell recounted the terror and praised Matriculation student, Kerry Stone, 16, of Stirling, for her calming influence over the students.

"She did well to calm a group of children who were sweltering in choking black smoke, confused, frightened and crying hysterically," he said.

Mr. Blackwell continued: "As we crawled up to the top of the hill we were surrounded by flames and dense smoke. I stopped the bus at one stage as I couldn't see a metre in front of me . . . then a gust of wind cleared a tiny bit of road and I took the initiative and drove on.

We passed through a 10 metre wall of flame and saw people fighting to save their houses . . . all the while the bus crawled slowly on, finally reaching safety near the Piccadilly Post Office," Mr. Blackwell said.



School bus driver Bryan Blackwell and student Kerry Stone are cheered by Glenunga High School students. (Photograph reproduced courtesy of "The Advertiser").

Radio man reports as his home burns



Radio journalist, Murray Nicoll reports from the ruins of his own home. (Photograph reproduced courtesy "The News").

SDN Radio listeners were gripped with fear and awe as 39 year old radio newsman, Murray Nicoll, a former police reporter and CFS volunteer fire fighter reported the destruction of the Greenhill area, and his own home.

He had gone to the hills to save his family and try to save his own home. From a portable two-way radio with a direct link with the SDN radio newsroom and after he was sure of his family's safety he revealed the horror.

Mr Nicoll was with 12 others crouching down behind a farm house — "they are spraying us with water!" reported Mr Nicoll. "The sky is red, then it's white! It's going crazy. The fire jumped 100-150 feet high, right over the top of Greenhill Road, there are something like 120 homes at risk up here. I don't know how many are gone. We are in big trouble!"

Murray Nicoll fought for air in the thickening smoke and heat. "We can't see any houses," he said. Greenhill Road is just wiped out. We can hardly breathe! The air is white with heat! There are women crying and there are children here. We are in trouble!

. . . And there's one Summertown unit gone down the road where the flames came up like an express train. I don't know what's happened to it."

The horror was to continue as Mr Nicoll reported on the burning of his own home. "It's in flames — and there's nothing I can do about it, absolutely nothing," he said. There's been a fire unit here . . . the flames are in the roof . . . it's just beyond belief. My own house! Everything in the area is black! There are fires burning all around me . . . the front section of my house is blazing, the roof is falling in, my water tanks are useless . . . There's absolutely nothing I can do . . . all my belongings . . ."

Mr Nicoll ended his broadcast with a call to his wife — He said "Frankie (Mr Nicoll's wife) if you're listening, I'm OK, the kids are OK. Now if you're OK, well, I guess we'll just have to build again."

Blazing death of Yarrabee Road

Thick black smoke cleared to reveal the virtual death of a street in Adelaide's fire blackened hills.

For several hours before the long winding Yarrabee Road located between a treeless valley and Cleland Conservation Park became a blazing hell for residents trapped, helpless and terrified by massive sheets of flame.

The death toll was four—

Flames "higher than houses" crossed the road to envelope a house then two, miraculously leaving others unscathed and then razing more. Some trees protected homes while others became a deadly fire-menace spreading flames and destruction from tree to roof top.



One of the houses destroyed in Yarrabee Road, Greenhill. (Photograph reproduced courtesy "The Advertiser").

Before the fire hit, telephones and electricity services had been, cut, dust storms had reduced visibility drastically and smoke obscured the raging fury about to engulf Yarrabee Road. It was too late to escape. Greenhill Road was now aflame on both sides which had earlier taken bumper to bumper traffic in both directions—was now closed to traffic.

CFS fire fighters who themselves were residents of Yarrabee Road and Greenhill Road battled along with men like CFS officer Maurice Coudrey, throughout the night, beating back the flames where possible but most of all plucking the endangered to safety. At 7.00 a.m. (0700 hours) Maurice briefly returned to his home only to find it a twisted mass of molten metal.



A house roof catches alight at the top of Greenhill Road. (Photograph reproduced courtesy of "The Advertiser".)

Norton Summit/Ashton C.F.S. men saved

The Norton Summit/Ashton C.F.S. crew had just arrived at the top of Yarrabee Road, as they reeled out their hose a "terrific" gust of wind whipped up the fire. The truck was engulfed and the crew ran for their lives. At the same time a small fire truck was hit and two men on the back burnt their hands as they jumped for their lives. Running from the flames they reached a Cortina containing a hysterical woman and her child.

Although Geoffrey Pedder from the Ashton C.F.S. had burnt his hands he dragged the occupants from the car. They continued running through what seemed a tunnel of fire, finally near exhaustion one man was instructed to light the bank to make a fire break for some protection. "Just then a Holden driven by Robin Camens seemed to drive out from among the flames to rescue them."



Mr Robin Camens

The story began when Robin Camens with his brother Bruce, in a trusty F.C. Holden was returning home to secure his house from the fire. A road block meant a detour via Yarrabee Road, which by now was covered in dense smoke and flames. He passed an abandoned fire truck and a burning Cortina, 300 metres ahead a fire fighter ran into the middle of the road and flagged him down.

"Five people got into the back with my pushbike and one in the front, and as I went to move off someone yelled *stop!*" said Mr. Camens. "Two more ran up and hung from the open back doors as we sped to safety." Mr Camens added that his radiator boiled completely dry and burst, driving through the flames... we drove for about five kilometres on a 'cooked engine'," he said.

To the Captain of the Norton Summit-Ashton C.F.S. Mr K. W. Taylor, Robin Camens is his saviour.

"We would not have got out of it, if he hadn't come along with a ride for us. It was not just smoke he came through, it was a wall of flame," said Mr. Taylor.

FOOTNOTE:

One CFS officer clung to an exhausted comrade clutching the door, stopping him from falling when he burnt his hands. Soon after, five fire fighters were dropped off and jumped onto a fire truck in a quarry, and moved off to continue the fight. The remaining man, woman and child were driven to the Uraidla Oval and given treatment by St. John. A small fire was then put out under the car's bonnet. The doors were still too hot to touch and when trying to remove a second bike from the boot where a hessian sack had caught fire, for his heroism, Mr Camens received a second-degree burn to his hands.

More towns endangered

Driven by south-westerly winds the fire raced down the slopes of Mt. Lofty and Mt. Bonython towards Piccadilly, Summertown, Uraidla and Carey Gully.

Three homes were lost in Summertown, several properties seriously endangered. The fire swept along Ridge Road, Tregarthen and Collins Roads, towards Ashton and Norton Summit. Another arm of fire burnt through Piccadilly up along the Richardsons Road area and Parish Hill Road, taking another house before threatening Carey Gully. Only the township of Uraidla remained safe.

Welcome relief

Light rains which began falling about 9.00 p.m. (2100 hours) brought welcome relief to the exhausted fire fighters. C.F.S. brigades worked throughout the night containing and securing the fire areas, and attending to flare ups. However flare ups continued well into Thursday and Friday, with brigades maintaining a constant alert and vigil for further breakaways during the mopping up process. Mopping up continued for the next week, with volunteer fire fighters quelling hot spots, and extinguishing smouldering trees and logs.

Rain felt fantastic

"When the rain came down at 9.00 p.m. (2100 hours) it felt fantastic", said Trevor Sprigg in charge of his seven-man Mitcham Hills C.F.S. crew. Although he does not recall any loud cries of "hooray" from the exhausted fire fighters when the rain fell he was sure they all gave a silent sigh of relief. "Psychologically the rain did a lot for the men," he said.

Forty year old Trevor Sprigg, of Belair, has been with Mitcham C.F.S. for 12 years, and has fought many hundreds of fires, but like the thousands of other volunteer fire fighters who battled Ash Wednesday II he said it was the worst fire he had ever fought.

"No-one could see if the fire was large or small, we could all smell the smoke but had no idea how close it was. It wasn't until the fire jumped us that we could begin to imagine what lay ahead.

Mitcham Hills C.F.S. Group Captain, John Penno was one of the first fire fighters on the scene when the fire broke out on Upper Greenhill Road. In his small command vehicle John was called to help Burnside Unit to fight the fire. Within minutes the Belair unit, part of the Mitcham Hills Inc. C.F.S. group arrived but the fire was so quick, the crews could only watch it roar over their heads towards Mt. Osmond.

Soon the Mitcham Hills three (3) units were all fighting the blaze but when the fire took hold in the Mitcham Hills they moved to protect their own territory.

Faced with the hopelessness of trying to put out the fire, the C.F.S. had to use its full strength to save lives and property. This type of fire fighting is hit and run, save what you can and move onto the next house.

A change in wind direction and a heavy rain shower helped the C.F.S. to contain the fires.

If the northerly had continued for another hour and a half the fire could have got into Brown Hill Creek Conservation Park and if the wind hadn't changed from the North, Mitcham Hills would have been in trouble," he said.

He said the 60 fire fighters from Mitcham Hills had done a magnificent job, "but this was a 'total State effort'. In a fire like this there are no boundaries, each unit works to its highest capacity."

John Penno also paid tribute to the ladies auxiliary for the food and drinks they supplied to the fire fighters.

Thursday, 17th February

By Thursday afternoon more than 400 fire fighters from the CFS, NP & WLS, W&F assisted by *700 service men backed by 12 water tankers were fighting flare-ups; at Greenhill, Skye, Carey Gully, Burnside, Stonyfell, Gandy's Gully and Beaumont in the Hills area.



Firemen from the Lenswood C.F.S. face a wall of flame near Carey Gully on Thursday, following another flare-up. (Photograph supplied courtesy "The Courier", Mt. Barker).



Anxious Beaumont residents herd sheep to safety as the fire approaches the foothills suburb. (Photograph reproduced courtesy "The News and Sunday Mail")

Up to 12 houses in Slapes Gully Road, Burnside were threatened and residents were evacuated along with others at the top of Greenhill Road.

At Carey Gully seven (7) units battled a fire which threatened farm houses.

*Two aircraft were used to ferry fire fighting equipment from El Alamein Army base near Port Augusta, to Adelaide.

Friday, 18th February

Mopping up continued in a number of areas with outbreaks occurring, the largest of which was a fire in inaccessible terrain in Slapes Gully. This fire finally broke out onto the northern-side of the gully at approximately 1800 hours and a massive effort was mounted to contain the fire. By 2300 hours the fire was under control. Mopping up and patrol continued throughout the night.

Saturday, 19th February

A drive up the Mount Barker (South-Eastern) Freeway revealed blackened hills, scorched earth covered with thick white ash, twisted stumps, rubble that before was houses, metal skeletons of farm machinery, twisted galvanized iron sheets that had once made up sheds and outbuildings, small strands of charred wood threaded through wire was all that remained of fence posts, and the awful stench of death and smell of smoke lingered on . . . heavily in the air and in one's nostrils.

Past Devils Elbow, the regular yellow four gallon RAA water drums sat defiantly at regular intervals beside the roadside. On the right a "Floral Art" shop was destroyed but the brightly coloured sign was untouched. To the left, Cleland Conservation "Wildlife" Parks vegetation was gone but a blackened cyclone fence unremoved by the fire contained most of the animals safely.

At Eagle-on-the-Hill the famous hotel had been raised, a B.P. service station was an empty shell and, signs had been erected appealing for bushfire funds . . .

C.F.S. Tragedy

One Country Fire Services volunteer fire fighter died, two were seriously hurt and two received burns when the Carey Gully C.F.S. unit was caught in the fire near Mt. Bonython on Wednesday afternoon. The Carey Gully unit was completely burnt out.



The tragic scene . . . (Photograph reproduced courtesy "The Advertiser").

The dead man, Peter Matthies (27) of Summertown CFS had only recently moved in to the area with his wife and son.

Along with the Carey Gully crew members Don Driver, Trevor Burgermeister, Glynn Liebelt and Greg Michael, Peter Matthies was helping to put out a spot fire when the main front overwhelmed them.

The four survivors received treatment for burns. Trevor Burgermeister and Don Driver were admitted to hospital. Don with severe burns to his arms and left hand.

Harley keeps asking for Dad



Harley Matthies, aged 2, with his father Peter, who died in the Ash Wednesday II bushfires.

Young Harley Matthies, 2, has been asking for his fire fighter Dad. But his father, plasterer, Peter Matthies, 27, an ex country fire authority fire fighter from Fern Tree Gully and a new member of the Summertown C.F.S. died near Mt Bonython, while fighting to contain a fire that broke out.

He was one of three C.F.S. members who lost their lives on Wednesday, the two other C.F.S. fire fighters died in the South-East. Mr. Matthies died when the Carey Gully C.F.S. unit he was fighting with, became surrounded with flames.

Mr Matthies widow, Mrs Joanne Matthies of Summertown said, "Harley had started to miss his father on Friday morning. I don't think he would really understand just yet; he is too young. We will wait until he is older before we tell him of the heroism his Dad displayed," she said.

" . . . Harley will be very proud of his Dad," said Mrs Matthies. "Peter just liked to know he could do something to help; that was why he joined the C.F.S."

Firemen pay last respects

C.F.S. volunteer Peter Matthies was buried on Monday, February 21st, 1983 in the Summertown cemetery among the Hills he fought to save. Family, friends and Country Fire Services mates paid a tearful tribute at his graveside.

Charred cypress trees at the cemetery gates and the surrounding blackened hillsides bore testimony that he was a victim of the Ash Wednesday II holocaust.

Six C.F.S. Summertown colleagues carried his coffin through a guard of honour of fifty C.F.S. volunteers including Director Mr. Lloyd Johns and Deputy Director, Peter Malpas.

His widow, Joanne was flanked closely by family and friends. Young and old C.F.S. wept openly as they marched to the grave and saluted their comrade.

Red-eyed Carey Gully C.F.S. volunteer fire fighter Glynn Liebert, 29, said "Peter Matthies wasn't a member of our unit, that's the tragedy. He was a member of the Summertown C.F.S. but had jumped aboard the Carey Gully unit to help us fight the blaze."

"Peter was burnt when he ran back into the fire to help two of us who were trapped in the fire truck — we had only about three seconds warning before a fireball hit us.

I only knew him for a quarter of an hour, but I know he was a hero . . . a very brave man."

"Greater love hath no man than he who lay down his life to save a friend . . . God Bless You Peter . . . Editor.

"What is there to say in a situation like this?" said Mr. Johns. "There is death and grief — I only know that out of the ashes we must build a better C.F.S. service for the community.

"Nothing will replace brave men like Peter, but we must aim to prevent similar future tragedies," Mr. Johns said.

A fire fighters 'recollections'

Graeme Blakey, F.C.O. East Torrens District Council and Lieutenant of Greenhill C.F.S. said, "we were called out to a fire at Mt. Osmond. At that time with the northerly wind one would assess that everything was fine at Greenhill. We fought some fires, gave some assistance as required, then we heard word that with the change of wind, fire was spotting into Cleland Conservation Park. We moved to protect Greenhill, but were trapped by fire on Greenhill Road, no one was injured, but we were too late to combat the initial blast.

Radio traffic was extremely heavy, we had no idea where the fire was at Greenhill. We were coming up past Quinten Avenue and saw flames up around the corner.

On the fire's return at first it slowly crept down Greenhill Road heading west with a S/W wind, and looked like a controllable side of the fire . . . little did we realize that it would actually turn into the front within seconds.

The fight was on to save houses and people," he said.

When the fire came across the unit, fire fighters turned the high pressure hoses on and sprayed a fine mist in front of their mouths, which they suck in from the fog nozzles to survive.

Mr. Blakey said, "the fire was now half way up Yarrabee Road and it was roaring. We put out a small spot fire down by the Greenhill fire station then ran out of water, and refilled at a swimming pool.

I then left the unit because I could hardly see and with my wife saved the last bits around our house . . ."

Editorial comment . . . with the use of an auxiliary petrol pump Mrs Blakey had turned on the sprinklers and then left on the Norton Summit C.F.S. unit to help others. After the fire passed one could see the scalloped edge of where the fire stopped at the sprinklers, which is rather dramatic.

No wonder Graeme Blakey's recollections from then on were not clear; after fighting fires and then protecting his own home he was admitted to hospital with burns to the eyes and smoke inhalation. F.C.O. Dean Wall also experienced the same fires and was hospitalized along with Graeme.

I later learnt that the Greenhill C.F.S. brigade along with other C.F.S. units were in the fires' path at Mt. Osmond and Greenhill and on both occasions the only way they stayed alive was to turn the hoses on the men and breath through the fine spray . . . Editor.



Pictured above Carey Gully C.F.S. F.C.O. Don Driver, though recovering from burns suffered on Ash Wednesday II was only too happy to receive Norton Summit Primary School children Jason Nicholls (left) and Nathaniel Playford. The children on behalf of the school presented a \$50 cheque towards the replacement cost of the Carey Gully C.F.S. unit that was gutted in the fire. (Photograph supplied courtesy "The Courier", Mt. Barker).

Cleve—Rudall CFS lend a hand

Members from the Cleve and Rudall C.F.S. brigades from Eyre Peninsula were called by CFS Headquarters to Adelaide, Thursday February 17th for service with the Burnside brigade at the Adelaide Hills fires, as the new Cleve fire unit was identical to the Burnside one.



Pictured above is the Cleve C.F.S. fire appliance identical to the Burnside unit that Lieutenant Russell Branson (left) and Cleve and Rudall members operated on in the Ash Wednesday II bushfires. Also in picture is Captain Ross Bates.

The men: Russell Branson, Bryan Trigg, Jeff Adams, Colin Kammermann and Scott Spriggs from Cleve C.F.S. brigade and Peter Mason, Trevor Mason and Geoff Elleway from Rudall C.F.S. lent more than a hand—

Thursday 9.30 a.m. — the men split up into two crews under the leadership of Russell Branson and Bryan Trigg. Their job was to clean up spot fires with knapsacks and hoses in the Chambers Gully and the very steep sections of Waterfall Gully. Mr. Kammermann sprained his ankle on the downward climb and was "out of action" until Friday.

Thursday afternoon — With nothing to eat until the Salvation Army came along at 4.30 p.m. they carried out back burning operations in the Skye area and then attended a fire out of control in the Anstey's Hill area.

Friday 7 a.m. — The Mount Osmond Golf Course was "tidied up". The rest of the morning was spent carrying chain saws and knapsacks up steep hills, extinguishing undergrowth and burning trees and cutting them down. The men were then called to a small outbreak below Eagle on the Hill, which was controlled quickly.

The Cleve and Rudall men worked alongside fellow C.F.S. men from Ororoo, Two Wells, Port Augusta, Jamestown and with units of the S.A. Metropolitan Fire Service.

Mr Trigg said it was a completely different kind of fire fighting: "On Eyre Peninsula you chase fires, in the hills a team stops and reels out up to 500 feet of hose, and it may take eight or nine men to carry the hose up the hill."

The force of the flame and the heat was unbelievable."

"Mag wheels were reduced to liquid from the heat and the sight of the Eagle on the Hill hotel, a stone building, destroyed by fire was shattering," he said.

Before the men returned to Eyre Peninsula, the Mayor of Burnside and Country Fire Services Director, Mr. Lloyd Johns, personally thanked them for their efforts over the two tiring days.

East Torrens . . . Severely Hit

With six deaths and some 33 homes lost, East Torrens Council area was severely hit in the disastrous fires.

Dr. Bernard Lindner, Mayor of East Torrens, expressed his deep sympathy for those who had lost loved ones and property.

He also paid tribute to C.F.S. volunteer, Mr. Peter Matthies, a new resident in the area, who lost his life in a courageous attempt to fight the fire.

"Many losses are irreplaceable," Dr. Lindner said.

"But the friendship, support and direct assistance given by the community is overwhelming.

"The tragedy has drawn people together in common adversity.

"We have had assistance and promises of help from many other council areas, particularly Burnside, making trucks and manpower available to help the clean-up operation."

Dr Lindner said the council would be moving promptly to assist the victims in every way possible.

"Next weekend, council trucks and loaders will be available to help clearing of debris in the Greenhill area, and at other locations as soon as possible afterwards."

"There are so many immediate needs, such as secure agistment, as well as longer term problems — we want to help in any way we can," said Dr Lindner.

STATISTICS—

Fire force: More than 900 Country Fire Services personnel were involved at the Mt. Osmond/Greenhill fires over a three day period fighting fires, protecting homes, property and lives and mopping up afterwards.

A total of 28 C.F.S. volunteer fire fighting brigades were assisted by 10 National Parks and Wildlife Service Units, 10 S.A. Metropolitan Fire Service Units, and co-emergency organizations and Police.

One C.F.S. volunteer fire fighter lost his life while helping to save others.

One C.F.S. fire appliance (Carey Gully) was gutted.

Area Burnt: 3,390 hectares

Lives lost: 4

Homes destroyed: 68 houses, 1 hotel and 1 service station.

NWS-9 acknowledges C.F.S.

NWS Channel 9 acknowledged the efforts of the Mt. George C.F.S. volunteer fire fighters in saving the NWS-9 house which caught alight on Summit Road at Crafers. Assisted by other C.F.S. units and passing council and concrete water trucks, Mt. George also helped save the NWS-9 transmission station and television mast.

In recognition of the service provided NWS Channel 9 network presented a cheque for \$2,000 to the Stirling District C.F.S. Group Committee Trust Fund: "for distribution to C.F.S. Brigades to purchase equipment where the group think it is most needed and beneficial to the protection of life and property." The cheque was accepted by Mt. George C.F.S. Captain Adrian Langley on behalf of the Committee.



Pictured above at the presentation held at the NWS-9 television transmitter property: from left — C.F.S. Regional Officer Richard Keynes, Mt. George C.F.S. Captain Adrian Langley; Lieutenant Dennis Mustapha, Mt. George founder, Bill Driver, NWS-9 General Manager, Tyrell Talbot and Fire Party Leader, Dean Foote. Mr. Stewart Lamb (absent from picture), member of the family which owns Channel 9, personally thanked the Mt. George C.F.S. unit crew and paid tribute to the other C.F.S. brigades, councils etc.



Mount Lofty Rotary Club members "Raily" were involved in the clean up programme. Pictured from left: Peter Frazer, Howard Clay, Mike Rule and Bob Overall at work clearing a Bridgewater block, aided by Mr Frazer's daughter Nicola. (Photograph supplied courtesy "The Courier", Mt. Barker).

THE AFTERMATH

Dedication

Numerous incidents occurred both during and immediately after the Ash Wednesday II bushfires which involved the selfless actions and dedication of C.F.S. brigades and individual volunteer fire fighters alike; some of which have already been recorded in this issue of the "The Volunteer", while others are still to be acknowledged and others yet still untold.

Monday, 21st February 1983—Mt. George C.F.S. Fire Party leader, Dean Foote while driving past Devils Elbow on Mount Barker Road noticed a Burnside Council water tanker parked on the side of the road. Further on he approached a heavily loaded truck carrying bales of hay. (Hay was bound for the fire devastated stock area of Kalangadoo in the S.E.)

"As I drew level with his cabin I saw flame coming from between the back of the cabin and the hay . . . so I waved him down, grabbed a knapsack from the back of my Toyota 4-wheel drive ute . . . siphoned it empty then used a fire extinguisher . . . but 10 bales were already alight so we sent a car for the council water tanker. In record time we began to unload the hay . . . the tanker arrived and shortly after ample C.F.S. units attended preventing the fire from spreading into the scrub," said Dean Foote.

The truck driver received slight burns to his left arm while trying to first put out fire with a rug and pillow worried that heavy scrub on the roadside would catch alight. Dean Foote was unscathed.



C.F.S. volunteers extinguish the load of burning/smouldering hay. (Photograph reproduced courtesy "The Advertiser")

The prime mover and more than 250 bales of the 500 were burnt, but hay on the trailer was saved which was loaded onto another truck to complete its journey.

ASH WEDNESDAY 1983 ON MOUNT LOFTY

Professor Peter Schwerdtfeger,
Chairman,
South Australian Country Fire Services Board

February the 16th, 1983 was a singularly hot, dry and windy day with temperatures reaching 42-44°, relative humidity below 15% and wind gusting up to 70 kmh — conditions which facilitated the rapid spread of fires over many districts of South Australia. The preceding long sequence of dry months and strong north-northwesterly winds on that day resulted in a dust storm of intensity unparalleled for several decades which provided a camouflaging screen for the many bush fires.

In the vicinity of Mt. Lofty, few people were able to see the fire until it was almost upon them. Some of the observers in the N.P.W.S. fire tower on Mt. Lofty believe that less than ten minutes elapsed between the engulfing of the Eagle-on-the-Hill hotel and the passage of the fire-front over the Summit.

From the "Eagle", the fire initially by-passed the main summit ridge of Mt. Lofty and actually reached the Crafers freeway interchange where a frontally induced wind-change to a southerly or south-southwesterly direction caused the fire-front to race along the ridge-top. After this reversal by the arrival of the new meteorological system (which had been correctly forecast), the fire appeared to temporarily lose some of its vigour but soon regained intensity and within half a kilometre, either caused damage or destruction to every house on or near the ridge.

The old 19th century houses, generally being larger than the newer homes, proved much more difficult to defend and of the ten original summer residences associated historically with Mt. Lofty, only "Woonaminta" was spared, probably because it was closest to Crafers in the area before the fire had regained its strength after being turned. "St. Barbarie", "Shurdington", "Mt. Lofty House", "Green Gables", "The Glen", "Arthur's Seat", "Eurilla", "Carminow" and "St. Michael's House" were all destroyed, together with many architectural, cultural and horticultural assets of inestimable historical and enormous financial value to both the individuals directly concerned and the people of South Australia.

The fire was so intense, that all vegetation was severely burnt. The horizontal velocity component of the burning gases was so dominant, that many trees and unburnt leaves were left at heights above 25 to 30 metres in spite of branches being severely charred below.

No protection was offered to trees or vegetation isolated by clearings having dimensions the size of tennis courts, a fact also illustrated at Crafers, where the fire was able to traverse the freeway interchange! Under these conditions, no species of plants demonstrated any superior fire-resisting characteristics and all of the normal ground-level "house-keeping" procedures designed to inhibit the spread of fire proved to be in vain. Indeed it can be argued that to have been afforded even marginal protection, "The Glen" would have needed a fire-break of over 500 metres in width!

"The Glen" appeared to have caught fire from inside, accompanied by the failure of unsheltered external windows subjected to intense radiative heat fluxes and subsequently, probably by sparks forced into the ceiling space through even small vents thereby igniting the explosive moisture of air and long settled dust agitated by the strong draft. The verandahs on the other hand, were almost untouched even on the side facing the advancing fire-front, to the extent that wooden outdoor furniture escaped almost un-marked. The only areas within the house to be spared were those in concrete or stone floors, such as the bathroom, laundry and carport, even though the ceilings, were burnt.

The architectural lessons provided have been translated into a building — plan which incorporates a concrete slab floor, concrete ceiling and shutters for all windows. This, however, would not be suitable for the reconstruction of a historic building and also lead to insulation problems, particularly in summer, when the slab would store copious quantities of solar energy! "The Glen" will again have a galvanized iron roof supported by wooden trusses (above the new concrete ceiling) which will be readily accessible for fire-fighting or in the worst case, be easily rebuilt after a bad fire without generating major inconvenience in the living space below.

Serious problems remain to be solved in the old gardens. Native vegetation has generally commenced regeneration but all conifers appear to have little chance of survival. Ironically it must be emphasized that the old European-style gardens on this occasion, not only afforded the houses they surrounded no protection (contrary to the claims of some horticultural authorities!) but also quickly degenerated into a major liability for their owners since many large trees will ultimately require felling.

However, after the fire, timber "sharks" quickly surfaced and some panicking home owners foolishly parted with money and trees which in some instances could have regenerated.

South Australians need to ask themselves whether the former large and beautiful gardens which embellished scenic regions of significance to tourism could ever be regarded as totally "private property", especially if there exists some expectation that these areas will simply be magically re-incarnated into their former state of glory after the ashes finally wash away in the winter rains. Nothing could be more fanciful and the restoration of the old gardens on Mt. Lofty will require as many millions of dollars (or their back-breaking equivalent) as the buildings they gently masked in the past.

Ash Wednesday 1983 has been described as the "fire of the century", since all of the before named residences had survived the rigours of at least 100 years. Unfortunately, the steady increase in human population, access and activity as well as associated fire-provocative technology such as powered vehicles, machinery and above-ground power lines, will ensure that the frequency of fires will increase rather than decrease, unless the public accepts and insists on major behavioural and technological changes. **The following recommendations are offered:**

(1) The law must react mercilessly against those who transgress the law relating to the lighting of fires or operations of fire-hazardous devices during the summer months.

(2) Certain agricultural practices, particularly those pertaining to harvesting on "fire-ban" days should be strongly discouraged since not a season passes by without serious fires emanating from machinery in crops.

(3) If South Australians wish to retain any semblance of a continuous harmonious landscape, the Electricity Trust of S.A. must be encouraged to commence an under-grounding programme immediately. The cost of the Ash Wednesday 1983 fire would have paid for most of the dangerous 11,000 volt lines in the Mt. Lofty Ranges to be buried! Individual consumers who wish to construct underground connections to their properties should not be penalized by E.T.S.A. For example, the latter believe the below ground links cost 50% more than overhead cables. If this is so, then the consumer should only bear one third of the cost of underground connection, with E.T.S.A.'s contribution being exactly that of the normal overhead connection.

Instead, current policy is for the environmentally responsible property owner to suffer the entire cost, i.e. 150% of the "normal" with E.T.S.A. escaping without cost from the point of entry into the ground.

(4) The Electricity Trust should be asked to keep a reasonable number of meter-boxes for emergency installation after fires (or other meter destroying disasters). At present, the onus is on the property owner to initiate all contractual arrangements at a time when power may be most sorely needed but the person concerned least able to obtain or afford help. At "The Glen" a fortnight elapsed before power was restored in spite of the 240 volt cable passing overhead at ladder's length! Telecom, in contrast, provided a brand new telephone and free installation within 48 hours of the fire!

(5) More emphasis needs to be placed on "Red Alert" days. These could be declared at any time by the Director of the C.F.S. assumedly in consultation with the Regional Director of Meteorology. On such days, C.F.S. sirens should transmit a special alarm pattern to warn residents and transients in affected districts.

How Many Victims Were There on Ash Wednesday II?

The radio broadcast warnings of fire-bans on these special days should be heralded by a suitably alarming and attention-seeking acoustic signal, and selected radio stations (whose identity must be made known to the public) should be placed on standby for more frequent broadcasting of emergency information. All non-essential traffic, particularly tourism, should be discouraged at key road-blocks and residents advised to stay at home. Finally, in view of the alarming frequency with which electric power cables and spot fires have been associated, the electrical power should be cut-off during the hotter part of the day in the relevant districts but not normally in the inner metropolitan area. Although there may be some unconsidered protest at this, it should be noted that in some years there will be no need for such withdrawal of power supplies and even during the last summer of 1982-83, on no more than three occasions. During April, 1983, as an example, Mt. Lofty residents have been deprived of power for two day-time periods of 8 hours each for maintenance purposes by E.T.S.A. This seems to have been accepted by the affected residents with the same understanding that ought to be expected of them on "Red Alert" days.

The absence of power in the home will serve as a further reminder to the inhabitants that a potential emergency is in the offering, of especial value to those who may not have heard or taken note of radio broadcasts.

(6) A separate article could (and should) be written with regard to the complex matter of insurance with the aim of listing desirable changes in the responsibilities of both insurers and the insured community. It is simply noted here that in some European countries, houses (but not contents) insurance is just as compulsory as the payment of rates!

This procedure allows insured values to be agreed upon by all parties before, rather than disputed after, claims are made, as well as lessening the magnitude of distress which the loss of uninsured homes spreads through the community.

(7) Much critical comment could be penned with regard to current town-planning and sub-divisional practices which expose families in new homes being built unwisely in some locations to great danger. That most of Crafers, Stirling, Aldgate and Bridgewater escaped from the flames on this occasion was a result of pure meteorological chance and nothing else.

(8) Finally, country people might now ponder on the wisdom of C.F.S. volunteers being forced to engage in degrading practice of soliciting funds for the purchase of equipment, when the need for this has now been made so clearly evident. The valuable time of volunteers would be far better spent in training.

Society needs to be willing to modify its behavioural patterns and demands and not rely totally on new technologies and the efforts of a few members of its communities in fire fighting to achieve security. Unless it demonstrates this willingness, South Australians in well vegetated rural areas will ultimately descend to a troglodyte lifestyle buried in a pyrotechnically devastated environment.

OTHER FIRES — 16th FEBRUARY 1983

Virginia, Smithfield and Two Wells fires

Wednesday, February 16th a small fire at Virginia in the morning was quickly dealt with by the Virginia C.F.S.

Dublin, Mallala and Two Wells I were on standby while Two Wells II C.F.S. unit attended a Smithfield fire.

Two small fires at Two Wells were also quickly "put out".

Other known fire reports Statewide:

Alawoona (Meribah and Halidon C.F.S.); Blackwood (Mitcham Hills C.F.S.); Coromandel Valley (Coromandel Valley C.F.S.); Dunns Wells (Smokey Bay); Goolwa (Hindmarsh Island, C.F.S.); Inman Valley (Inman C.F.S.); Kapunda (Kapunda C.F.S.); Farm property in D/C of Light (Sheoak Log C.F.S. and Private units); Longwood (Aldgate C.F.S.); Murray Bridge — 2 fires (Murray Bridge and Callington C.F.S.); Saddleworth (Tothill C.F.S.) and Woodside (Woodside and Nairne C.F.S.).

The toll of the Ash Wednesday fires, in terms of loss of life, and property, has now been reckoned. Many people only avoided death or injury thanks to a combination of fate and the bravery of C.F.S. members. Yet the threat and distress of the fires do not pass as soon as the fires are extinguished. Only in the past few weeks has the enormity of the task of reconstruction begun to strike home to those who have suffered bereavement and/or loss of livelihood. In a sense, those people are experiencing a second disaster, which is in some ways more difficult to cope with than the immediate effects of the fire. It takes a long time and much pain to rebuild a life devastated by fire and to mourn what has been lost.

Medical research has found that the victims of a disaster such as the Ash Wednesday fires may suffer long-term changes in their physical and psychological health. This was found to be the case after the Brisbane floods in the mid 1970's, when the stress of rebuilding shattered lives contributed to the onset of illness in those who were predisposed.

After the horrors of the crash of the Air New Zealand D.C. 10 in Antarctica and of the Granville (Sydney) train disaster, relief and rescue workers have begun to question the distinction between victim and helper. In both of these disasters, the rescuers had to expose themselves repeatedly to personal danger as well as the gruesome and distressing task of dealing with mutilated bodies. The stress of this experience has had adverse consequences on the health of the rescuers in many cases.

Perhaps surprisingly, only a minority of rescue and relief workers suffer severe long-term distress after their efforts. But even those who cope well in the long term experience acute distress. For example, most fire fighters who were exposed to the full threat of the Ash Wednesday fires may have noticed that they had difficulty sleeping for a while, had dreams about the fires or experienced visual images of the flames. They may have noticed feelings of fear or anxiety, headaches, palpitations or restlessness — or other uncomfortable physical sensations. These usually settle within six weeks.

In some people these symptoms continue, leading to the development of a "post-traumatic stress reaction". Symptoms of this condition include persistent re-experiencing of the fire (e.g. in nightmares, or intrusive thoughts or feelings), a numbing of feelings towards family or friends, and loss of interest in activities which were previously enjoyed. Other features may include hyperalertness, sleep problems, memory impairment and difficulty concentrating. The person may feel "on edge" all the time, unable to relax. It is wise to see your local doctor if these symptoms persist.

Dr. Sandy McFarlane from Flinders Medical Centre is studying the effects of the stress of the Ash Wednesday fires on C.F.S. members. He hopes to increase our understanding of the reasons why some people develop post-traumatic stress reactions, so that preventive care can be offered in the future. The study will also help to develop ways of debriefing fire crews after major fires in the hope of minimizing post-traumatic distress, and will assist in compensation settlements. Members who fought the Ash Wednesday fires will have received a questionnaire from their Regional officer for your region. Your co-operation in filling in this questionnaire and returning it in the reply-paid envelope provided will be greatly appreciated. If you have not received a questionnaire, please contact your Regional Officer.

Thanks to all who fought and served . . .

On behalf of the Meadows C.F.S. Group Committee, I would like to express our heartfelt thanks to all the C.F.S. Brigades who came from near and far to help the Meadows Brigade during and after Ash Wednesday II. It would take several paragraphs to mention all the C.F.S. Brigades that helped, and so with the fear of unintentionally forgetting a name, we sincerely thank you all.

Our thanks also go to the ladies who prepared meals for all the fire fighters — a job well done.

To everyone who helped goes our sincere thanks.

Yours faithfully,
L. E. Oakley, Secretary,
Meadows C.F.S. Group Committee

Appreciation from Supervisors

The Country Fire Services Regional Officer, Region 2 and the Fire Supervisors from the Corporation of the City of Tea Tree Gully and District Council of Gumeracha through the medium of the "Volunteer" wish to express their sincere appreciation to the C.F.S. crews who responded to and were on 'standby' to assist, at the disastrous Gumeracha Fire on Ash Wednesday II, 1983.

The co-operation and teamwork under extreme fire conditions unquestionably resulted in minimizing fire losses and the prompt containment of the fire.

Subsequent community aid rendered by brigade personnel is likewise acknowledged.

Thank you all for a creditable, personal and team effort.

Dean Sandford, Fire Supervisor Corp. Tea Tree Gully
Ross Schlein, Fire Supervisor D/Council Gumeracha
Brian Menadue, Regional Officer, Region 2

Volunteers,

The officers and firemen of the Paracombe CFS wish to thank ALL persons and brigades who fought in our area at the fire of 16th and 17th February, without whose help the task would have been impossible. Thank you.

Roger Brealey, Captain,
Leon Hurst, Deputy District Officer

Tribute to S.E. Fire volunteers

From the Millicent Mayor and Beachport D/C a special tribute has been paid to all who assisted during the tragic fires in the South East.

The tribute was in a joint statement from the Mayor of Millicent, Mr E. J. F. Altschwager and Chairman of the Beachport District Council, Mr D. Chilton.

They praised the courage and effort of all those affected by or involved in fighting the bush and forest fires.

We also thank those who have made the tremendous efforts to help clean up the mess and get communities going again.

The work of the C.F.S., Police, St. John Ambulance and S.E.S. was of a standard which we will never forget, the statement continued: "Other members of the community — women's organizations, service clubs, farmers, businessmen and women have all played major roles.

The help with man power, fodder, machinery, etc. from outside the district has been of tremendous value."

The statement also mentioned the "visits and personal attention of the Governor of S.A., Sir Donald Dunstan, the Premier, Mr. John Bannon and the then Prime Minister, Mr. Malcolm Fraser.

"We have received a telegram from the Premier and are assured that the Federal and State Governments are going to be of great assistance in getting our corner of the State back to normal as soon as possible."

"Reports have suggested it could be up to 10 years before property owners get back to where they were before the fire.

The whole community has suffered together and now with the help of each other and hundreds, maybe thousands of outsiders, they are rebuilding together."



At a recent ceremony held at S.A. Metropolitan Fire Service Headquarters, Chief Secretary, Mr Gavin Keneally thanked M.F.S. firemen for their work in the Ash Wednesday II bushfires.

At the height of the fires up to 30 S.A. Metropolitan Fire Service appliances fully manned assisted. Units were deployed as far afield as Meadows, Crafers, Kersbrook and the Adelaide Hills-face zone.

Pictured above M.F.S. fire men receiving congratulations from Mr Keneally (centre), are from left: Messrs Peter Vodic (Bridgewater), Mark Vaughan (Lenswood), Station Officer Bob Gill (Tea Tree Gully), Keith Hutchins (Findon), Glen Smith (Modbury North), S/O Bill Ameer (Felixstow) and S/O Bob Melin (Para Hills). Messrs Dave Schmerl (Heathfield), Trevor Castle (Valley View), Greg Middleton (Torrensville) and S/O Michael Pryor also attended the ceremony. (Photograph supplied courtesy, "Hills Gazette", Messenger Newspapers).



After receiving instructions from the Deputy Group Captain, the Blewitt Springs C.F.S. brigade is about to be deployed. (Photograph reproduced courtesy "The News and Sunday Mail")



(Photograph reproduced courtesy "The Advertiser")

ASH WEDNESDAY II



Fire reaches the edge of the South Eastern Freeway (Photograph reproduced courtesy "The Advertiser").



All that remains of a once stately home. (Photograph reproduced courtesy "The Advertiser").



"The Eagle" statue stands defiantly above the ruins of the Eagle on the Hill Hotel. (Photograph reproduced courtesy of "The Advertiser").



Residents who attempted to fight, flee for safety as fire rages Bell Court on the north-eastern edge of the Mount Barker township. (Photograph by Kym Marston, supplied courtesy "The Courier", Mt. Barker).



ASH WEDNESDAY

Down through deep, rock strewn gullies, the bushfire rages on
Then out across the rolling plains, till all before is gone.
A choking, acrid cloud palls up to darken summer skies,
The tortured hills turn ghostly red — the land turns black and dies.

Great stands of virgin scrub explode, then turn to glowing ash
As panic stricken wildlife race lifes' final desperate dash.
And onward, ever onward, creeps the Devil's tongue of fire,
Destroying all before it in an all-engulfing pyre.

And Man can only stand and watch, so helpless and forlorn,
He cannot stop the holocaust of Mother Nature's scorn.
His efforts seem so futile now; such fury and such force
Will not succumb to anything; the flames must run their course.

But yet he tries, although in vain, to stem the blazing tide
To no avail, the stage is set, and Man is swept aside.
As searing winds and scorching sun drive on the flames anew,
Man, like the animals, turns tail — there's naught now he can do.

They named the day "Ash Wednesday" the worst we've ever seen,
That day the very earth caught fire, and black took over from green.
The loss of life, the burning homes, will linger ever on
Etched in the minds of those who saw, when all the scars are gone.

And in the wake there's tragedy — a scorched and blackened sea
Of ravaged earth and smouldering homes, a tortured, glowing tree.
The roaring flames have left their mark upon the very land
But time will heal the sickening scars with Mother Nature's hand.

For Man will always seek to live near bush and towering tree,
He knows the risk and takes the chance — the price of living free.
And he cannot help but wonder if things are as bad as they seem
As he gazes at the ruins of his great Australian dream.

Yet life will shoot from charred remains, the cycle starts anew
As grass grows lush upon the ground, the sky again is blue.
Now for a moment all is quiet as rain anoints the stinging rash
Until again this holocaust converts the land to ash.

© MIKE DALE Lieutenant Northfield C.F.S.
February, 1983



The holocaust . . . (Photograph reproduced courtesy "The Advertiser").



Aerial view of destruction. (Photograph reproduced courtesy "The Advertiser").

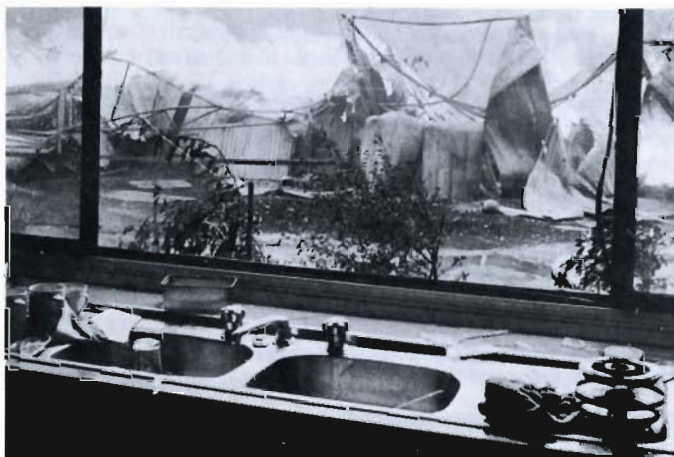
Bushfire

*Someone lit the flame—
Do they get the blame?
Someone can't get out!
No-one is about.
Some poor people died.
Escape? They really tried!
Little children burn;
This is our concern.
Firemen were so brave
Working hard to save
Houses, pets and lives,
Husbands, children, wives.
Hard to count the cost
Of all the country lost
We'll see it come again
The tragedy of fire.*

*Lisa Callow
Year 3, Aberfoyle Park Primary*



Laying a fallen C.F.S. comrade to rest. (Photograph reproduced courtesy "The Advertiser").



Outbuildings caught in the fire — viewed from a kitchen window. (Photograph reproduced courtesy "The Advertiser").



Pine forests ablaze. (Photograph reproduced courtesy "The Advertiser").



In thick smoke and searing heat a C.F.S. volunteer rescues an injured but still somewhat reluctant goat. (Photograph supplied courtesy "The Courier", Mt. Barker).

C.F.S. VOLUNTEERS SUFFERED TOO!

Out of the ashes of the Ash Wednesday II bushfires have come dozens of stories of losses suffered by Country Fire Services volunteer fire fighters whilst they themselves were protecting other people's property. Here are just some examples:

From Cudlee Creek to Prospect Hill many lost houses and property. At the same time they were risking their lives to save others, many suffered burns, smoke inhalation, and eye injuries.

Sadly three Country Fire Services volunteer fire fighters lost their lives in the Ash Wednesday II bushfires.

"Every fire fighting volunteer on both units of the Black Fellow's Creek brigade lost property", said fire party leader, Mr. Malcolm Slade.

"At the peak of the fire we drove past burning houses belonging to members on the truck, but knew there was no point in stopping — we had to get to the houses we could save", he said.

Bridgewater C.F.S. President and Stirling District Fire Supervisor, Mr Geoff Knight was another to lose his house. Meadows C.F.S. Group Captain, Charlie Dunn lost property and part of his house. C.F.S. Board Chairman, Professor Peter Schwerdtfeger lost his home and all possessions.

At Cudlee Creek, C.F.S. volunteer Chris Osbourne lost his home. Many other volunteers in the Meadows District and other fire-torn areas of the State suffered severe losses of property and farm income.

As well as the personal losses of many C.F.S. personnel, there were also the losses inflicted on many brigades from all fire areas; who now have to raise funds for replacement of costly equipment.



(Photograph reproduced courtesy "Messenger Newspapers").



Burial of dead stock. (Photograph reproduced courtesy "The Advertiser").



A futile battle. (Photograph reproduced courtesy "The Advertiser").



This Land Rover was burnt almost beyond recognition as fire raced along Yarrabee Road. (Photograph reproduced courtesy "The News and Sunday Mail")

SUPPORTIVE SERVICES

Support from St. John

Casualties treated

On Wednesday 16th and Thursday, 17th February, St. John Ambulance brigades throughout the State treated about 860 casualties consisting mostly of fire fighters and police; for injuries and heat exhaustion.

Around Adelaide alone 45 people were taken to hospital. South of Adelaide 40 fire fighters and 2 police were treated for burns. Injuries covered serious burns to broken limbs.



A C.F.S. volunteer receives medical treatment from a St. John officer.
(Photograph reproduced courtesy "The Advertiser")

"Florence Nightingales with first aid"

St. John mobilized volunteer ambulance crews to assist the regular paid officers.

The volunteer officers continued manning ambulances at relief areas, control points and first aid posts in fire areas throughout the night. When a recall message was relayed about midnight many volunteered to remain on duty to treat injuries as they occurred, working until 7.00 a.m. the following morning.

By Thursday more than 60 people were still in hospitals around S.A. Most were in a satisfactory condition recovering from burns and smoke inhalation. However one man was in a serious condition with burns to over 80 per cent of his body. He passed away on Thursday, 7th March, 1983.

It is very reassuring for the people of South Australia and the Country Fire Services in particular to know that St. John personnel will respond to any emergency that requires their skills . . . they are truly Florence Nightingales with first aid, one and all . . . Editor.

St. John personnel spent some time collecting fiery memories and close encounters from some of the members who recalled their Ash Wednesday II experiences. For several, Wednesday finished about 1.00 a.m. on Friday . . .

At the Anstey's Hill Fire

Along with several Police Officers and a couple of media men, Des Scroop (Modbury) and John Chadwick (Asst. Supt. Clinics) went forward to assess the situation before committing any more troops. They heard a roar behind them in the trees and turned to see the sky ablaze. Everyone made a dash for a disused quarry nearby. The fire followed them almost to the very bottom:

"It all happened so fast, no-one had a chance to stop and think," said Chaddy. "Several days later, several blokes joked about writing out applications for my job! It was a close one . . ."

At Mount Barker

Nearly a full muster of Mount Barker Brigade members worked through to 11.30 p.m. (2330 hours) on Wednesday, helped by Woodside, Murray Bridge and Strathalbyn volunteers.

Don Truran (Mount Barker Division) reckons the after-effect of the fire was very strange — just deep silence.

"The frightening thing was we couldn't see it coming, and we lost all sense of time during that day. Some people were driving erratically into trees on straight roads."

Everyone had plenty of praise for the women dispensing food and drink to the weary fire fighters.

"And the E.T.S.A. people were terrific," said Don. "They worked like mad, clearing trees fallen on lines."

At Mount Gambier

Fran Moody (Mount Gambier Division) said "Our new First Aid Unit was worth its weight in gold. The locals at Tarpeena had donated a large sum towards it only weeks before, but they never expected to see it working so hard in their town so soon."

Sheila Parsons (Mount Gambier Division) remembers being stationed at Nangwarry on the Thursday night.

"It was a strange feeling to see the sky lit up and yet be so cold," she said. "A lot of us worked through from 1.00 p.m. Wednesday to Sunday afternoon with very little rest. The 75 mph wind was so strong at one point it held the Transit door shut. I finally forced it open and my hat disappeared over the paddocks, only to be returned to me two weeks later, from three miles away!"

Sheila is certain the mock accident exercise held in November 1982 stood everyone in good stead. She found that the terrible tragedies brought people together, even though emotions seemed suspended for a week. Some incredible things happened — Sheila recalled one elderly man told her he was standing in the middle of a green paddock when he saw the rolling wall of flame heading straight for him. The sight paralysed him and he just stood with his hose in his hand. The fire came almost up to him, parted and passed either side of him, giving him just a few singed hairs!

The wind was so strong that Vic Wilson (St. John Mount Gambier Division) couldn't get his ute to pull the First Aid Caravan.

"The SES lent us a 4-wheel drive to help out. We couldn't open the doors of the Centre, it was blowing so hard," Vic said. Over 70 casualties were treated on the first day alone. "Now we're finding that people are refusing to take government and charity assistance. You could say that over-help is a problem here!"

At Naracoorte

Regular Officer, Phil Lawson passes on the story of the fire truck travelling through smoke so thick, one man had to lie on his stomach on the cabin floor to see the edge of the road.

"When they got back to town," Phil said, "they found three cars were following inches behind!"

Special thanks goes to Mrs Louise Badcock and the P.R. team at St. John Council for S.A. Inc. for the above collection of fire stories . . . Editor

SUPPORTIVE SERVICES

POLICE TACKLE HUGE FIRE REPORT TASK

The largest operation in S.A. Police history took place on Thursday, March 3rd at Angas Street Police Headquarters. In the wake of Ash Wednesday II, 20 police officers mopped up mountains of paper work.

The day after the fires about 400 Police (approx. 10% of the force) were mobilized in five teams to investigate deaths, fire causes, losses and damage and gather forensic information.



Police inspect a hills property destroyed in the Ash Wednesday II bushfires. (Photograph reproduced courtesy "The Advertiser".)

From the initial 200 written reports a special primary 20 personnel investigation team under Police Superintendent, P. L. Carroll, have prepared a single master report, which will go to the Coroner, Mr K. B. Ahern.

Information most complex:

Assistant Commissioner for Crime, Mr K. P. E. Harvey, said "Its complexities range from the deaths of 28 people to the 732 vehicles damaged and destroyed in the fires which burnt six times the area of Ash Wednesday 1980 fires.

The fires also resulted in hundreds of people being treated for injuries, at least 312 houses damaged or destroyed, more than 256,000 stock killed or destroyed and huge losses of fencing and farm equipment."

Media support:

"Following tremendous help from the press and media we believe practically all those who suffered some loss or injury did contact police," Mr Harvey said.

"From my point of view all police personnel performed tremendously well . . . it's an outstanding output of work . . . particularly when you bear in mind the trying and dirty conditions they worked in."

Praise:

Mr Harvey gave praise for the support given to police by the C.F.S., S.E.S., other volunteer groups and the local women's auxiliaries.

Efficient operation:

Police Commissioner J. B. Giles said "It was the first occasion in which the State Disaster Plan had been fully activated.

Despite that, the whole operation from a command and control viewpoint, functioned extremely efficiently.

I praise personnel in each of the functional services who responded magnificently, revealing dedication and discipline well above expectations.

Without their co-ordinated and disciplined approach it is very likely the emergency would have been far more tragic."

Salvation Army

Field Unit



Field unit in operation at a clothing centre.

The traditional Salvation Army Field Unit as pictured above, has been called into service many times for various disasters. Such was the case on Ash Wednesday II.

Salvation Army units met the need of people at the bushfire front: at Kalangadoo, Nangwarry, Adelaide Hills and Clare, where many thousands of cups of tea and cordial were distributed. The Salvation Army Officers brought a relaxed atmosphere to those returning in a state of emotional and physical exhaustion, from the many sad disasters which confronted the fire fighters.

Clothing Relief

Once a disaster has been declared the Salvation Army accepts the responsibility for clothing and again this time they were overwhelmed by the supply of clothing, and equally importantly, the personnel who sorted and packed clothing for distribution.

By late Thursday afternoon the Salvation Army's Welfare Office had become a warehouse of boxes of sheets, blankets, clothes, toiletries and food as big businesses and members of the public rallied around to help the fire ravaged community to pick up the pieces of its shattered existence.

Transport assistance came from S.A. trucking companies and Suburban Taxis.

The Salvation Army, Gilbert Street Centre recently purchased for use as an extension to the Whitmore Square Alcohol Rehabilitation programme, was put into effective use, as over 900 volunteers went through the centre — from service clubs, churches and individuals who were concerned to help those in need.

Fire relief work was boosted with a \$500,000 allocation from Salvation Army funds on Thursday 17th March.

"Cash allocations were made by officers who had been in the fire areas of Victoria and South Australia — counselling and providing material aid. Money was used for food, clothing, furniture, emergency accommodation and transport fares.

By Saturday, 19th February, Australia and the world had flooded S.A. and Victoria with offers of financial and material support for the bushfire victims.

Money flowed in from State Governments, businesses and Corporations, from Councils in several States, from overseas; and from the pockets of thousands of South Australians.

Men, women and children had opened their hearts so much, that the Salvation Army, St. Vincent de Paul and Red Cross appealed for a stop to the flow of household goods and furniture "for the time being". With fire victims being offered money and a wide variety of goods and services, from chickens to fine Wedgewood china dinner services.

Since early days the Salvation Army has endeavoured to meet the total man's need — 'soup, soap and salvation' — and is endeavouring to continue to do this in their modern system.

SUPPORTIVE SERVICES

Red Cross assistance

The Red Cross opened a telephone advisory and enquiry service, for people seeking refuge as a result of the fires, and set up a registration bureau of names and temporary addresses of evacuees.

They were deluged with enquiries from people anxious for news of relatives and friends trapped in fire zones.

Anxious Calls

The Switchboard at Red Cross House was extended to take over 20 lines and was manned 24 hours a day for the first five days by Red Cross staff and volunteers. There were more than 6,000 telephone enquiries, both local and overseas. Between the hours of 12 and 5 of the first morning, there were in excess of 500 telephone calls from the United Kingdom from people wanting information about relatives.



Red Cross staff and volunteers answering telephone enquiries at Red Cross House.

Registration

Red Cross trained volunteers worked in the Department of Community Welfare reception centres throughout the South-East of the State as well as the Adelaide Hills areas where they attended to the registration of the fire evacuees.

12 field stations had been set up throughout fire zones to help with registrations.

Red Cross staff and trained volunteers manned the National Computerised Registration and Enquiry System VDU unit which made it possible for details relating to bushfire evacuees being made available on a national scale. At the closure of this system on 4.3.83 in excess of 22,000 names had been registered for Victorian and South Australian fire evacuees.



Red Cross trained volunteers under the supervision of Secretary for SA Red Cross Tracing and Disaster, Mrs Rhonda McCallum, operating the National Computerised Registration and Enquiry System.

Dispensing Food/Clothing . . .

Many hundreds of Red Cross volunteers throughout South Australia worked for extended hours in the specific role for which they were trained as part of the State Disaster Plan as well as assisting with dispersal of food stuff and clothing to the fire victims.

Aid to Ex-Red Cross Officer

Over the past 10 years Mrs Neila Foggo, a former Red Cross public relations officer has co-ordinated relief programs for some of Australia's greatest disasters.

But now it is her turn to receive relief. She and her husband Geoff lost their house and possessions in the fire at Mount Osmond. She said, "the aid they have received was just incredible, we want everyone to know how pleased we were at the response."

R.S.P.C.A.

ROYAL SOCIETY FOR THE PREVENTION OF CRUELTY TO ANIMALS

Ash Wednesday II and its aftermath, was one of the biggest emergencies tackled by the RSPCA in its 108 years of service to South Australia.

The RSPCA were devoted to helping the suffering animals during the disastrous bushfires, working tirelessly searching out the poor frightened and in many cases badly burnt creatures.

The Society's resources were stretched to the limit as permanent staff, honorary inspectors and many concerned volunteers rescued injured animals or destroyed those beyond help.



Pens of badly burnt sheep being shot. (Photograph by Dean Williamson, Naracoorte).

Calls for help

The RSPCA kept their switchboard open until late Thursday evening to take calls for help to deal with injured pets, burned farm stock and even wild animals caught in the fires.

Working with other animal-related organisations under the State Disaster Plan, the Society was able to care for many injured animals but hundreds more had to be destroyed.

The RSPCA and the Department of Agriculture officers had to kill burnt stock to ease their suffering.



(Photograph by Peter Morris, Mt. Gambier).

continued page 45.

SUPPORTIVE SERVICES

R.S.P.C.A. continued

Losses

Figures put the number of farm animals killed or destroyed at 226,900 sheep and 9,690 cattle, 120 horses and 140 goats. Wildlife losses are believed to have been very high.

Appeal

As soon as the immediate emergency had been handled, the RSPCA launched a bushfire appeal to assist animals affected by the fires. Fodder was needed and water was often scarce for some 225,660 sheep and more than 46,280 cattle throughout the State. The Society organised the transport of 500 bales of hay to the worst affected areas in support of the Department of Agriculture.

Donations were sent in by concerned animal lovers to buy more fodder for the survivors and to help with the high cost of animal rescue or, where unavoidable, destruction. Animal protection groups overseas including the RSPCA in Britain, also offered to help raise money for bushfire relief.

Ag. Dept. in major farm aid drive

The Department of Agriculture set up a major bushfire relief operation for stricken primary producers.

A Department task force under the direction of the Director — Regions, Mr John Potter, co-ordinated a range of immediate agreed relief measures for eligible farmers.

The project consisted of disposing of hundreds of thousands of dead stock, distribution of emergency fodder to surviving stock and pay out of millions of dollars in relief to fire affected primary producers.

For a department that was already working flat out on drought relief the Ash Wednesday II bushfires stretched staff resources to the limit.

Emergency Plan

Within hours of the first news of the disaster a pre-arranged emergency plan for bushfire relief drawn up in 1979 was swung into action.

The first priority, the disposal of dead stock was an operation of tremendous scope in which stock agents, the R.S.P.C.A. and many other groups worked together. The scale of the task can be gauged by the fact that about 230,000 sheep and 8,500 cattle were disposed of in the South-East, 15,000 sheep and 1,000 cattle in the Adelaide Hills and 1,900 sheep and 190 cattle in the Clare Valley area.



Bulldozers scrape out a mass grave for thousands of stock killed by fire on lower South East properties. (Photograph by Peter Morriss, Mt. Gambier)

By early Thursday morning 30 field teams were operating in the various fire ravaged areas co-ordinating the disposal of dead stock, distributing emergency fodder and assessing agricultural damage. Fifteen teams were in action in the South-East and fifteen covered the Adelaide Hills, Southern Hills and Clare districts.

Recipients of fodder have all spoken with immense gratitude and appreciation for the Department and all the donors.



Hay donations desperately needed . . . arrive (Photograph by Dean Williamson, Naracoorte)

The Department has also helped to find agistment for those who require it.

An acute* shortage of strainers and other materials to replace hundreds of kilometres of fencing lost in the Adelaide Hills, led to an instruction to Highways Department teams to make use of fire damaged trees.

Dangerous or fallen trees were first checked by teams for suitability for use as strainers which an Agriculture Department official said currently "can't be bought for love and money".

*The drought had meant a shortage of most farm-fencing materials including wire; as there has been little demand for them. The distribution of strainers was handled by the Department of Agriculture.

State Emergency Centre's role

Wednesday, 16th February — Registration

The Community Welfare Department immediately set up manned State Emergency reception centres, for registration of fire victims, to provide them with food, shelter, clothing, child care, financial assistance and supplies. People turned up by the dozens to help.

Red Cross, the Salvation Army, the Seventh Day Adventist Church, Social Security, Community Welfare, the Insurance Council of Australia and the S.G.I.C. set up counters to help victims.

Thursday, 17th February — Insurance Claims

An emergency *free* legal information service was set up for enquiries relating to the bushfires.

Emergency procedures were set up by the Insurance Council of Australia at a Central Claims Bureau.

Insurance company representatives also manned Welfare Centres, to accept claims.

Insurers, banks, building societies — institutions at the heart of the financial problems to follow, provided all aid possible. All banks asked that fire victims contact their local branch manager as quickly as possible for assistance.

Friday, 18th February — Counselling

The Department of Community Welfare's crisis care unit co-ordinated Social workers to provide counselling for relatives of people killed in the fires and others in need of support.

Saturday, 19th February — Relief Grants

Grants were made to South Australian bushfire victims by the Dept. of Community Welfare as insurance claims were processed.

Monday, 21st February — Donations needed . . .

Money was needed not goods, said Community Welfare Minister, Mr Crafter, "If anybody wants to help they should make a cash subscription . . ." All other avenues have been adequately catered for at this stage."

FIRE AND FLOOD VICTIMS MEET THE ROYAL COUPLE

A ray of happiness permeated the gloom surrounding the Ash Wednesday II bushfire victims and more recent flood victims when the Prince and Princess of Wales came to Adelaide on 25th and 26th March 1983; to pay their respects.

Thousands of fire and flood victims came from the South East, Clare and Barossa areas as well as the Hills, for the opportunity of meeting with Prince Charles and Princess Diana, when they made a scheduled visit to the Stirling Oval on Saturday, 26th March.

Country Fire Services fire units representing the Hills, South East and Clare areas were lined up on one section of the Stirling Oval with the burnt out Cudlee Creek unit in the centre.

The total fire force of 74 men in attendance comprised of personnel from Country Fire Services brigades, S.A. Metropolitan Fire Service, Woods and Forests Department and National Parks and Wildlife Service, along with 15 brigade units and a working party of 35, who prepared and ran the function.

C.F.S. volunteer firefighters, heroes of Ash Wednesday II stood proudly to attention; while thousands of Royalists lined the streets for a glimpse of the Prince and Princess as the Royal cavalcade moved from Government House along the South Eastern Freeway, to the Stirling Oval.

Travelling up the freeway the Prince and Princess of Wales saw a great deal of the devastation in the burnt out hillsides and gutted buildings. On arrival they were obviously shaken by what they had seen.

At the Stirling Oval the Royal Couple were officially welcomed by the Premier Mr. Bannon and Mrs. Bannon; The Chief Secretary Mr. Keneally and Mrs Keneally; The Police Commissioner Mr J. B. Giles and Mrs Giles and The Chairman of Stirling D/C Mr L. C. Leah and Mrs Leah.

The Prince and Princess walked slowly along the pathway, stopping every few yards to talk to people, asked about their losses and expressed their deep concern and sympathy for the victims.

Fire and flood victims in many cases who had a brief chat and handshake with the Royal couple, were deeply impressed with the couple's warmth, sincerity and genuine concern for their losses.



Princess Diana took time off from inspecting the C.F.S. brigades to meet and talk to children and C.F.S. personnel, who were themselves fire victims. When the Princess turned to wave, the waiting crowd promptly responded with cheering. Pictured in the background are C.F.S. men John Ward, Echunga (left) and Charlie Dunn of Bull Creek. (Photograph reproduced courtesy "The Courier", Mt. Barker)

As the Royal couple turned to wave goodbye a Cudlee Creek C.F.S. volunteer fire fighter, Mr David Newman, unrehearsed, presented the parting Prince with a C.F.S. helmet.

Prince Charles accepted the helmet with alacrity, thanked Mr Newman, placed it on his head and with a wave and a grin, stepped into the Royal limousine.

Leaving the Stirling Oval, Prince Charles and Princess Diana travelled along Mt. Lofty Summit Road, stopping briefly to inspect the damage. Returning via Greenhill Road, the Royal car also stopped at Yarrabee Road, but the couple did not alight.

Although the scars of the Ash Wednesday II bushfires and the more recent floods were still brutally evident, the Prince and Princess of Wales had brought joy and hope to fire and flood victims.



Although horrified to see the burnt out Cudlee Creek C.F.S. fire unit, Prince Charles was able to raise a few smiles, when introduced to the Country Fire Services volunteer fire fighters by the C.F.S. Director, Mr L. C. Johns. Messrs Don Driver (far left) and Philip Williams (second from left) were both badly burnt when caught in the fire. (Photograph reproduced courtesy "The Courier", Mt. Barker).



Pictured above: Nairne C.F.S. volunteer Jeff McKenny is introduced to H.R.H. Prince Charles, flanked by fellow C.F.S. volunteer fire fighters John Kaesler (left) of Hahndorf, Mike Franson of Brukunga and Lyall Stout of Nairne. (Photograph reproduced courtesy "The Courier", Mt. Barker)

WORST S.A. BUSHFIRE ON RECORD

Wednesday 16th February 1983, Ash Wednesday II bushfire ranks worse than the Ash Wednesday bushfire in the Adelaide Hills on February 20th, 1980, the Black Sunday bushfires of January 1955 and the February 1948 bushfires and possibly the Black Friday fires of January 1939.

Ash Wednesday I

In 1980 the Ash Wednesday fire consumed 35 houses and 3,700 hectares of grazing and scrub country in the heart of the Adelaide Hills. Property and stock damage was estimated at more than \$6m. In searing 41°C heat and strong N.E. and N.W. winds; wooded paddocks around Aldgate were transformed into a cauldron of fire. Flames travelled on three fronts in an area surrounding Longwood, Bradbury, Mylor and Echunga. About 40 people were hurt.

Black Sunday

The 1955 Black Sunday fires raged over an area of about 1,500 square kilometres of cultivated and bushland in the Adelaide Hills. Among the 50 properties razed was the vice-regal summer residence at Marble Hill. The Hills fires accompanied by 40°C heat, gales and dust storms swept the State, extending from Strathalbyn in the south, above the Gorge Road in the north, to the Adelaide suburbs fringing Mitcham in the west. Bushfires also raged through the districts of Houghton in Tea Tree Gully and McLaren Flat. Separate fires burnt out areas in the S.E. Damage was estimated at 1 million pounds in 10 fires in the Adelaide Hills. Thousands of sheep and cattle were incinerated. Other fires in the South East that day caused about 250,000 pounds damage and destroyed 10 properties near Millicent.

1951 Fire

In 1951, three policemen died in a bushfire at Upper Sturt.

1948 Fire

In the 1948 bushfire a linesman died while repairing damaged wires at Bridgewater. Two other workmen were badly burnt. The devastation extended from Bridgewater through Vimy Ridge to near Hahndorf. Damage was estimated at thousands of pounds and seven houses were burnt. Later in the month of February fire swept towards Balaklava almost devastating the township of Calomba

Black Friday

In January 1939 when the south-east corner of the country was torn by the worst bushfires in Australian history more than 70 people died in Victoria, N.S.W. and S.A. as fires raged out of control and temperatures soared above the 45°C mark. Newspapers dubbed the bushfires Black Friday but the devastation continued for nearly a week as thousands of bewildered and exhausted fire fighters chased flames that roamed across the three States.

CORONIAL ENQUIRY

A Coronial Enquiry will be held to determine the causes of the Ash Wednesday II fires and the deaths that occurred in South Australia. The inquest will be conducted by the State Coroner, Mr K. B. Ahern.



An appraisal of the South Australian Country Fire Services' role will be made following the Ash Wednesday II bushfires.

Some of the areas under review will be:—

1. To evaluate the performance of fire appliances and other equipment used for control and extinguishing the fires.
2. To evaluate the use of rotary and fixed wing aircraft used in various roles during the fires.
3. To evaluate if previous publicity and public relations material and methods applied to the events of the day and to consider generally the future role of publicity and public relations in the education of the public at large and those living in fire prone areas.
4. To consider what pure and applied research should be undertaken and to establish that such research must either compliment or be in harmony with research undertaken in other States and overseas.
5. To consider and review the importance and significance of "Red Alert" days and to establish the criteria for the proclamation of "Red Alert" days.
6. To report on in general and specific terms the survival or otherwise of fire fighters and the general public and on procedures for the orderly evacuation of persons in fire threatened areas.
7. To review the role of the media in major bushfires.
8. To consider the importance of and type of preplanning necessary to establish a progressive reduction in fire hazards through such actions as prescribed burning and the management of roadside vegetation.
9. To consider if changes in the penalties for breaches of the Country Fires Act should be recommended
10. To consider if *any* other sections of the Country Fires Act should be reviewed and changes recommended.
11. To review the role of, and powers of the Country Fire Service in relation to Planning and Building Legislation appertaining to fire prone areas.

“C.F.S. Fire Fighters Honour”

The S.A. Great committee has honoured the Country Fire Services with a Civic Award.



The citation reads:

making
S.A. Great
A GREAT SOUTH AUSTRALIAN SERVICE
SOUTH AUSTRALIAN COUNTRY FIRE SERVICES
Presented by the combined media of South Australia
in the interest of our State.

C.F.S. Director, Mr Lloyd Johns accepted the above pictured citation, on behalf of ALL Country Fire Services members who fought the Ash Wednesday II bushfires.

A tribute to the South Australian Country Fire Services volunteer firefighters.



FATCHEN'S VIEW

The roar of the gale and the fury; the dust
that is rolling its cloud,
The smoke of the raging inferno will wrap
all the day in its shroud,
With terrible conflict of gullies wherever
the firefighter goes,
Unsung in his overalled armor, the battler
with helmet and hose.

The throat that is dry as a sandpit; the eyes
that are red as raw meat,
He goes with a wail of a siren and into the
holocaust heat.
The Bush is a time bomb of terror, the tree
is a fountain of fuel,
The wind is a torrid tormentor with temper
that's fickle and cruel.

The radios harsh with their chatter
(remember the training and drills),
The holding, withdrawing, regrouping to
cover the tinder-dry hills,
And sadly there's wreckage and ruin for
dreams in the ashes will lie.
You can't save it all from disaster but,
man, how you go in and try!

So when on the blackened tomorrow, the
engines are back in their yard,
For a spell from the heat and the
heartbreak, the homes and the people
they guard,
Though the waterbag's lukewarm and
gritty, a toast we would like to propose
To the bloke in his overalled armor; the
battler with helmet and hose.

Max Fatchen

Max Fatchen
The Advertiser, 17/2/83