

BUSHFIRES JANUARY 2003.

Forecast a bad fire day, DRY THUNDER STORMS, and they arrived mid morning.

I was at my property, "BUNROY", upstream from the Biggara valley, some 1300 acres of freehold land adjoining Alpine National Park and crown land. Approx. half the property is cleared and good grazing cattle country.

There were several lightning strikes on the Indi range, N.S.W. Several lightning Vic. Side. All were put out except one on the N.S.W. side behind Damm's property in the National Park. It was reported and they were told "It will be alright. We will get the helicopter up to it." 24hrs. later it arrived and by then it was a huge fire.

They fought for days, behind Damms, to keep it out, but finally it jumped the Indi river into Victoria where it spread out for days going south towards Bunroy. (no.1 fire). The same day another strike up the Thougla valley at Mystery Lane, North-west from Bunroy, treated and left, treated and left 5 times. It escaped each time purely because no-one would stay and look after it.(fire no.2) Another strike south of Bunroy at

Pinnabar, which jumped and spread for days heading to-wards Bunroy.(fire no.3)

The road to Bunroy goes through about 10kms. of bush so the "powers that be"(the I.C.C.), decided that Bunroy was too dangerous for firefighters to go near. We were declared "BLACK. LET IT BURN". That was all the help we could get.

With 2 sons, 2 mates and 2 boys (on holiday) we battled away for about 8 days, back burning at night. The 10kms. of road to Bunroy was all burnt and the danger over but we could not get any help. The I.C.C. said that anyone going to Bunroy would not be insured. At no stage did we see a tanker, yet the Biggara tanker sat in the shed for 4 days. The Biggara man came one day and helped us with our biggest backburn or we would have lost the lot, but NO TANKER.

We ended up with 3 fires arriving at once, a fairly daunting experience!

I think the way the fires were fought was a complete disaster. Too slow to get to the fires in the first place. Up to 5-6hrs. the first day.

Changing over fire teams in Corryong taking up to 3hrs. instead of out at the fire front, and by the time the new crews arrived the fire was gone again. No wonder Mystery Lane got away 5 times. Some of those men were not there to put out fires! Fire in these areas, on the state borders, are a problem because the fires don't respect borders, but the fire chiefs do. How crazy that crews can't go over the river! The helicopter that would not go to a new fire because it was in N.S.W., about 10min. flight away.

There certainly has not been enough burn off over the years, but this year was just so dry that about 1/3 of the leaves had fallen off the gum trees already. I have not seen it so bad before.

I have always had a great repor with the D.S.E. or Parks. Vic, and my thought was, if ever there was a fire, they would be the first ones to help you. What right did some shiney shirt in the office in Corryong have the right to say that "Bunroy would burn".

The Boss D.S.E. man in Corryong, Mr. Jeff Ross, should be congratulated for the job he did, or given a medal. He was the only one who knew what he was doing or where he was going, his knowledge of the district was 2<sup>nd</sup>. to none.

I have written this article some 3mths. after the fires and am still very angry with the C.F.A. chiefs who were quite out of touch with what was going on.

I am your faithfully,

*A H Whited OAM*

Submission No.332