

Colinton Courier

Newsletter of the Colinton Rural Fire Brigade * No 147* February 2014



*Chopper at Murrumbucca
(photos by Sandra)*

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Call out:

A series of electrical storms passed through southern NSW and Victoria in mid-January, and brigades were kept very busy, while major fires burned in Victoria and South Australia. On *Saturday 18 January*, storm activity crossed the more northern parts of the Monaro. The forecast was for 'dry lightning', but in the event there was heavy rain and hail along with many lightning strikes.

Michael B, Graham and Nick spent some time observing from the tops of their various hills, but although the atmosphere was hazy with Victorian smoke, there were no fires to be seen.

At 1800, Colinton *Seven Charlie* (Michael, Karl, Bob), *Bravo* (Graham, Barry) and *Alpha* (Jeremy, Martin, Nick), along with Michelago *Seven Alpha*, were sent with some urgency to two lightning strikes, spotted by helicopter, along the Calabash Fire Trail. One very small fire was dealt with by *Anembo Seven*, and the second was simply not visible, despite a grid reference and a thousand meters of tough bush-bashing by Bob and Jeremy (each holding their state-of-the-art super phones). Crews were home by 2130.

On the afternoon of *Friday 31 January*, a fire was reported from the Billilingara Road, west of Bredbo. It was quickly evident that this was a major fire, and the Cooma, Bredbo and Shannons Flat brigades needed assistance. A general call-out of the brigade to the station saw three trucks, *One* (Michael, Jeremy), *Seven Charlie* (Bob, Karl) and *Bravo* (Graham, Barry) head off to the staging area at the junction of Billilingara and Shannons Flat Roads. *Alpha* (Nick, Tony

R, Sandra) remained on stand-by at the station until around 2100 hours. Crews returned from what was named the Murrumbucca Fire at around 2300 hours.

On *Saturday 1 February*, *Seven Alpha* (Sandra, Andrew, Nick) met many brigades arriving at the staging area at 0700, including Michelago, Bredbo, Numeralla, Cooma, Dry Plains, Shannons Flat, Jerangle, Peak View and National Parks. As *Alpha* and others arrived, ten crews from ACT Parks and ACT RFS were leaving, having had a traditional Salvation Army field breakfast to see them home.

Alpha along with trucks from Bredbo and Dry Plains was given the task of mopping up along an east-west line bounding the north-east of the fire ground. The western end of this line was very steep, where the fire was burning fiercely in inaccessible terrain. Helicopters dumped many buckets of water into the heart of the flames.

After sharing a bread roll with a Smiths Road crew who had joined the party, *Alpha* continued the mopping up operation, using several tanks of water. Suddenly in early afternoon, all vehicles were ordered out of the area as being too dangerous in the face of an approaching wind change.

Alpha and Bredbo *Seven* returned to the staging area, where we were given the task of standing by while replacement plans were formulated. Meanwhile, Colinton *One* (Michael, Barry, Justin, Jacqui) had joined crews protecting the Amaroo homestead.

In late afternoon, the two Colinton crews were abruptly ordered north, along Shannons Flat Road, to protect a bushland property which was directly threatened. This was very much further north than we had anticipated – evidence of the speed of the fire.

With helicopters tirelessly dropping water on the surrounding bush, the two crews laid out hoses on either side of the house, checked the pumps, helped the landowner remove woodpiles and gas bottles, and made ready for the approaching storm.



Property protection (with tea) ...

There was a pager message that a “Section 44” had been declared for the Monaro. This is an official state-of-emergency, which also empowers incident controllers to call in additional resources such as graders, bulldozers and helicopters.

The householder made everyone a very welcome cup of tea.

Helicopters clattered overhead, the smoke plume seemed to lose some intensity, the wind changed – and the house was safe for another day. At around 2000 hours crews were stood down, and thankfully returned home.

On *Sunday 2 February*, Colinton *One* and *Bravo* left early for the fireground, crewed by Eliška, Karl, Martin, Jeremy, Lynn, Kim

and Captain Graham. Sunday evening *Alpha* left for the fireground with Michael, Sandra and Justin. The next morning, Michael reported on a long night of very difficult (even scary) driving as crews burned a containment line along the Amaroo Fire Trail.



Drip-torch work at night ...

Seven *Charlie* (Bob, Kirsti, Tanya) left for the fireground well before dawn on *Monday 3 February*. (Tanya notes: "It was a VERY busy day! We protected three houses, and dealt with numerous spot fires as the main fire breached containmant lines.")

Mid-afternoon on Monday, there was a pager call saying simply "Grass Fire". Fire Control reported that they had been called about a grass fire somewhere in the Colinton area, one kilometer from the Highway. *Alpha* (Jeremy, Sandra, Nick) was quickly on the road, while Michael hurried to join Graham in *Bravo*, but before the trucks had done more than a few metres, they were stood down. It was

a false alarm. Meanwhile, the smoke plume from Murrumbucca became more and more obvious as a southerly change came in.

Charlie (Tony C, Sue, Lynn) and *Alpha* (Karl, Helen, Nick) were on their way to the fireground by 0600 on *Tuesday 4 February*. As they arrived at the staging area, they farewelled *One* (Jeremy, Sandra, Kim) and *Bravo* (Graham, Andrew) finishing their night's work.

By this time the fire had been given Divisions, and the two Colinton trucks became part of Division East, staging at the historic Oakvale property on Nightingale Road, at the foot of the Murrumbucca Pinnacle. They spent the morning blacking out the line between paddocks (unburned) and hillside (burned). At noon, they were asked to join the crews working on a high trail west of the Pinnacle, and drove past the spectacular Oakvale dam where helicopters were swooping in, three at a time, to suck up water as they hovered.

Followed a time of waiting, at the top of a nameless peak, watching the smoke plumes approach, be bombed with water, and approach again. "It's not often," said a firefighter "that you look down on a chopper!" Towards evening the decision was made to burn a section of the fire line, so crews from Numeralla and Michelago, along with Colinton, took up position along a newly bulldozed trail, checking that the flames stayed on the correct side.

Crews were stood down some time after 2000, and made their way down the steep trail back towards Oakvale, the burned forest spectacular in the headlights. Along the valley floor, the trail crosses twenty-three steep fords in a few kilometres. Crews were home by 2200.

By *Friday 7 February*, the fire had burned for a week, and Colinton was represented

by *Bravo* (Graham, Andrew) and *Charlie* (Sandra, Kim).

On *Monday 10 February*, *Alpha* was crewed by Gill, Jeremy and Nick, who anticipated a quiet day of patrolling. This was the case for most of the morning then a helicopter, *Firebird 238*, passed overhead and using infra-red technology directed *Alpha*, by radio, to several burning stumps on the same high track that was abandoned on *1 February*. (Jeremy was in his element, both as a firefighter and in his role in air operations.)

The brigade owes a debt of gratitude to call-out officer Noreen and her team. ✍

Training:

The Colinton Brigade conducts training every month on the second Saturday, at two o'clock, at the Station at Colinton. Everyone is welcome.

If possible, crews are asked to arrive at 1330 (1.30 pm) to check the trucks before training. ✍

Membership:

Membership: please pay by cash at training, or cheque to The Treasurer, Colinton Rural Fire Brigade, 88 Weemala Lane, Michelago NSW 2620. Membership fees: \$15.00 for adults, \$5.00 for juniors. Donations are always welcome.

Please provide a return address so a receipt can be mailed to you. ✍

Your Local Painter

Bob Davis

0408 697 070

Have Brush will Travel



✍

Essential numbers

Emergency 000

Fire:
Cooma Monaro Fire Control
(24 hrs)
1 300 722 164
02-6455 0455

Fire:
Captain and Permit Officer:
Graham Povey
02-6454 4150
0419 406 908



✍

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