

Colinton Courier

Newsletter of the Colinton Rural Fire Brigade * No 159* February 2015



*Into the forests of WA
(WA photos by Kieran H)*

Committee 2014-2015:

Fire Captain: Graham Povey
Senior Deputy: Nick Goldie
Deputies: Bob Morison, Jeremy Mears, Michael Burton, Barry Woolacott
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Secretary: Sandra Lauer
Treasurer: Bob Morison
Training Officer: Jeremy Mears
Equipment Officers: Michael Burton, Karl Higgins
Community Awareness: Nick Goldie
Fundraising: Gill Robinson
Permits: Graham Povey

NSW RFSA Delegate: Jeremy Mears

Call out:

Nil.

(Can anyone remember a January in which there were no call outs?)

Training:

The Colinton Brigade conducts training every month on the second Saturday, at 2.00 pm 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.

News from WA:

(Kieran is a Colinton member, as well as being a paramedic. This is his story, and his photos. Thanks to Kieran for this graphic account.)

On Friday the 30th January three fires started in southern Western Australia caused by lightning strikes. WA has a lot of bushland including the areas these fires started in that had not undergone hazard reduction maintenance in over 15 years. WA has not had a bushfire emergency in over 45 years and has never seen a fire of this magnitude ever in its history.

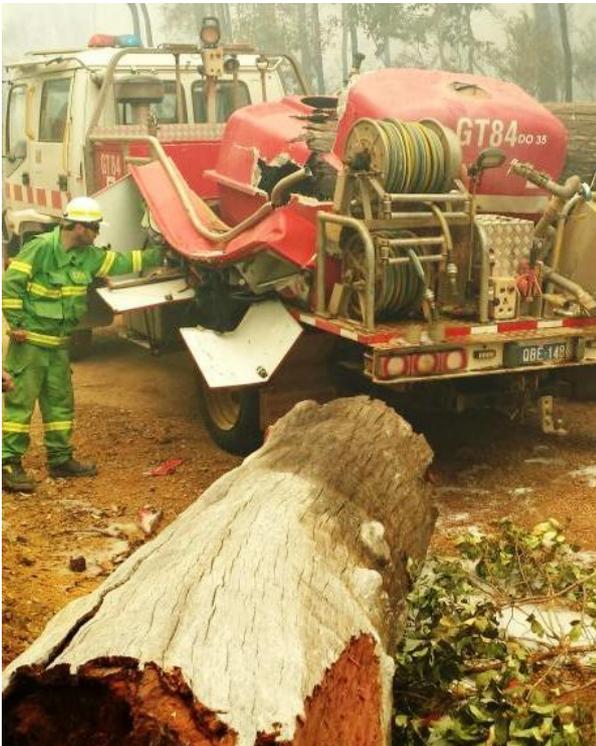
On 6th February I was deployed to WA as part of a joint ACT/NSW Special Operations Ambulance team in support of a 168 person ACT/NSWRFS taskforce following a formal request for help from the WA Government. The fires remained out of control threatening lives and property in 8 communities.

The *O'Sullivan* fire near Northcliffe was 350kms southeast of Perth and spanned

over 320 square kilometres. Three homes and numerous sheds were lost but no lives.

I was deployed with NSW RFS personnel to ensure the general wellbeing of NSW crews and to provide a primary medical response to any injuries on the fire ground. Our coverage area was over 32 sectors covering approximately 290km which meant when called to an incident we needed to be dropped in by helicopter. We worked 12hour shifts with day and night shifts running.

The bushland was predominantly large trees (Karrie & Jarrah) ranging from 50-120mtrs tall surrounded by scrub. These trees were huge at about 1 tonne per metre of tree. The larger ones were hollow at the base due to the sandy soil, which makes them unstable when affected by fire and prone to falling. It's a sight to see when you watch fire crown in a 120mtr tree.

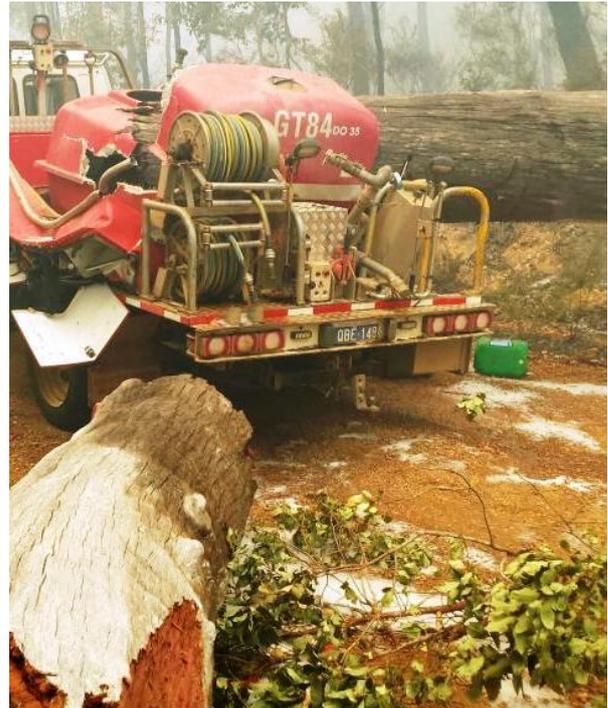


The crew escaped serious injury. Not so the truck.

One of these trees fell landing on a truck between the cab and a bloke standing on

the back, with only minor injuries sustained when they were thrown clear of the truck by the impact.

The damage done to the truck was huge but had there not have been an embankment about the same height as the truck the truck would have folded up like a mouse trap.



Note the size of the tree lying across the truck ...

There's more on a fire ground other than the fire and smoke that can kill you!

I hate the word steal so let's just say "procured." We managed to procure ice-creams and after.... ahhhh borrowing... an esky we made more friends by handing out the ice creams on the fire line.

Another lesson is that no matter how big and tough the fireys, tree fellers and dozer drivers are, if you give them ice cream on the fire ground when it's over 43 degrees they will let you put a Go Pro camera just about anywhere. Just for the record the plastic Go Pro cases are NOT indestructible! Neither are the trucks

when the driver tries to dodge a roo and ends up driving into a tree.



Huge trees in the jarrah forests of WA

By the third day of the deployment the fire was under control, with only a few minor spot-overs. The esky when not used to carry Gatorade and ice creams kept the beers nice and cold for after shift.

All involved in the deployment (NSWRFS, NSW Parks & Wildlife, Forestry and the ACT boys) were a great bunch and all went home safely. The final comment from the WA Fire & Emergency Services Commissioner at Perth Airport was..... "I'd like to thank you all very much. We've had the Victorians here but it took the NSW contingent to stop it and put it out..." Oddly, he sounded surprised. ☞

Canberra firefighters to Nepal:

(Geoff Bartram was a member of the first Australian expedition (1984) to reach the summit of Mt Everest, when Tim McCartney-Snape and Greg Mortimer reached the top of the world They were part of a light-weight

Australian team, using no porters, and ascending a new route up the North Face. Geoff Bartram turned back, within sight of the summit, suffering acute mountain sickness. Still a keen walker, he's an active member of the ACT Fire Brigade. This story is based on a report by Adam Shirley on 666 ABC Canberra.)

In the spirit of volunteering, eight Canberra firefighters will go to Nepal for a month to build community fire units for rural villages.

The group of local firefighters, led by mountaineer Geoff Bartram, will concentrate on the Nepalese villages of Namche Bazaar and Lukla.

Mr Bartram told 666 ABC Canberra he had been overwhelmed by the enthusiasm from firefighters in the ACT fire and rescue team who were prepared to fund the trip themselves.



Geoff Bartram (l) training an ACT community volunteer

"The request came from Nepal, rather than us looking for a project. These villagers in Nepal contacted us and the response from ACT was heartening," he said.

"Because the request came from these Nepalese villages, it's obvious they can see the importance of it and they'll be willing to learn. They're right into it."

Previously if a building in one of those particular towns caught on fire it could rapidly move from one building to the next because the villagers had no capacity to put those fires out.

The Canberra volunteers plan to set up basic infrastructure and teach local Sherpas firefighting techniques.

"They're very quick learners, they really are very remarkable people," Mr Bartram said.

Namche Bazaar and Lukla in Nepal recently introduced basic hydraulic systems set up by Swiss volunteers. Mr Bartram said this made it possible to consider basic fire training for local Sherpas.

"The Sherpas we'll be working with in the Khumbu of Nepal are highly sophisticated, they're very worldly and relatively wealthy in Nepali terms, so they're not asking for donations as much as they're just asking for expertise," he said.

"Because the region has such a big trekking infrastructure it has helicopter access, but much of Nepal has no emergency services at all."

Mr Bartram has previously lived in Nepal and says the training will be welcomed by villagers.

"Our Lukla contact described an incident where a house caught alight and the fire spread to another because the houses are butting one another; they're mostly made of old wood and so they burn well," he said.

"The villagers were very lucky on that occasion that the army happened to be in the village at the time. They demolished one of the adjacent houses to stop it from burning. They tore the house to pieces so it wouldn't spread."

The training will be modelled on the community fire unit program already in operation in Canberra.



Items for **The Colinton Courier** to Nick Goldie at
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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

