

Colinton Courier

Newsletter of the Colinton Rural Fire Brigade * No 170* January 2016



Air Base at Jindabyne – Sandra in action loading retardant

Committee 2015-2016:

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Equipment Officers: Michael Burton, Karl Higgins
Community Awareness: Nick Goldie, Eliška Donaldson
Fundraising: Gill Robinson
Permits: Graham Povey
NSW RFSA Delegate: Jeremy Mears

Fire permits suspended!

ALL fire permits have been suspended until 1 March.

Call out:

A lightning strike during a short but severe electrical storm on the afternoon of *Wednesday 16 December* caused a small fire high on the Booth Range west of Horse Gulley Hut in the Namadgi National Park.



Refuelling at Shannons Flat

ACT crews and a Monaro Strike Team responded, using a very rough bulldozed track heading along a ridge north of Shanahans Mountain. More crews were requested for Friday night.

Seven *Bravo* (Graham, Nick) joined trucks from Anembo, Michelago, and Shannons Flat, and drove north along the Boboyan Road, turning off onto the track at Shanahans Mountain. At the head of the track was a helipad and two small bulldozers, bedded down for the night.

As it was not possible to drive any further - steep terrain covered by dense post-2003 re-growth - crews were sent on foot along a raked perimeter trail, damping out any hotspots close to the edge. *Bravo* was pumping water along 180m of hose.



Table service at the Mt Clear fire

NSW RFS crews were joined by 16 ACT RFS volunteers, brought in by helicopter to a helipad at the north end of the 25ha fire ground.

By ten pm, the fire was judged to be safely contained, at least until the arrival of bulk water in the morning, and the fleet of 7s returned to their bases, *Bravo* having covered just over 200km.

Seven *Charlie* (Bob, Kim, Helen) returned to the fireground the following day, but found little to do.

By Sunday, the *Mount Clear Fire*, as it was named, covered 47ha, the fire danger index was at 'very high' with all fire permits suspended, a Total Fire Ban in place for the ACT and strong winds forecast from the north west.

Cooma Fire Control issued a warning newsletter to residents of Bredbo, Colinton and Michelago.

A headline in Saturday's Canberra Times stated grandly *Mount Clear Bushfire burns towards urban areas*. (Residents of Colinton were no doubt excited to learn that they live in an "urban area".)

Meanwhile the chief of the ACT Rural Fire Service warned that there was a "serious possibility" that the fire could breach the eastern containment lines and cross the Clear Range into NSW.

Happily, this did not occur. ↪

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. ↪

Christmas Fires:

Nearly 120 houses were destroyed along Victoria's Great Ocean Road on Boxing Day. The fire started with a lightning strike on Christmas Day, bringing back unfortunate memories of the Ash Wednesday fires of February 1983. (For an account of these fires, and an excerpt from the diary of Rev. Dr Gordon Powell, see *Burn* by Canberra historian Paul Collins.)

Meanwhile south of Perth in Western

Australia, some 70,000ha has been burned, the historic township of Yarloop (pop. 545) destroyed, with two deaths reported. A number of other townships are threatened. Many hundreds of residents have been evacuated. At the time of writing, this fire is still out of control.

The Bureau of Meteorology has warned that the WA fire is so large that it is creating its own unpredictable weather, with a strong likelihood of further lightning strikes.

Air Base Operators in Action: *(from Jeremy)*

In late December, NSW National Parks & Wildlife Service requested assistance from any qualified Air Base Operators, to help load *Phoschek* retardant on fixed wing aircraft at the Jindabyne Airbase.

The Granuille Fire was burning in a remote forested area near the Victorian Border not accessible by vehicle. Using aircraft was the only feasible way of containing it.

Sandra, Michael E, Terry (Numeralla) and I were available. Sandra and I did Friday 18 December together, Terry and I did Saturday and then Michael did Sunday.

The rest of the crew was made up of more experienced operators from NPWS. A typical ABO crew usually consists of four to five people: two to load the aircraft, one to run the pump and one to control the valves.

Before loading the aircraft we needed to mix up the *Phoschek* from a 2000kg bag of powder with 8000 litres of water. Once mixed this is transferred to a larger tank for filling aircraft. We had two *AirTractor 802* aircraft, each carrying 3500 litres of retardant.

Turnaround was approximately 15 minutes for each aircraft, so every 15

minutes we would see the aircraft coming in and we would get ready to pump.

The crew leader guides the aircraft in. (It can be disconcerting seeing two metres of spinning death trundling straight towards you.)

Once the aircraft has stopped moving two people drag the 20 meters of 65mm suction hose with a nozzle on the end called a banjo and attach it to the aircraft (no, I don't know why it's called a banjo).



Air Base at Jindabyne - Jeremy in action with a drum of retardant

The aircraft engine is running the entire time during loading, so it's noisy and the exhaust is hot. It takes about five minutes to load up and then it's time to shut off the pump, turn off the banjo valve, then the plane valve and finally remove the camlocks and drag the hose away.

Repeat 24 times during a shift!

Friday was the busiest day. On Saturday we did fifteen loads and Sunday, reported Michael, was really quiet.

Having qualified Air base operators is crucial. Without them we will not get aircraft support in this area. So consider doing the very interesting course; the more the merrier.

Thanks to NPWS Jindabyne for giving us the opportunity to work at their base, and enabling me and Terry to re-qualify ready for this fire season. They were very welcoming and patient as I was nervous. It had been some time since I did my course.

There's no margin for error. These aircraft cost over a million dollars each and are oddly fragile, not like good old Seven Alpha ...



**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**



Items for **The Colinton Courier** to Nick Goldie at nickgoldie@bigpond.com
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From the Captain:

Recent rain has not significantly changed the fire risk, and I am asking you to remember that we still have at least two months of summer weather ahead.

Please make sure that you have taken all steps to protect your property: remove flammables from around the house, make sure that the house itself is as fire-proof as possible, ensure that your water supply and pumps are ready for action. Mow and water the lawn, and remove any problem trees or branches.

Remember that IF there is an emergency, the Brigade may be fully occupied somewhere else!

And for all that, I wish you all the best for the New Year. GP.

