

Newsletter Date

Summer 2005/06



Brigade Newsletter

Barry Freeman appointed to Deputy Group Captain role at Fire Control HQ

You may already know that Barry Freeman has resigned as Captain of the Brigade in order to take up the role of "West 3" at Fire Control Headquarters in Katoomba.

Barry details what the role entails elsewhere in this newsletter.

I think Barry has been an excellent Captain of our Brigade at a time when the job has been evolving rapidly. During this time Barry has increased membership of the Brigade to one of the largest in the Mountains, and has been first to instigate many changes which has made the Brigade the leader in some areas.

He will stay of the Brigade Executive Committee and we will rely on him to advise us of happenings at Katoomba.

We were extremely lucky to have Peter Raines as the Senior Deputy under Barry, and I believe that Peter has the skills to take up the role as Captain. Similarly, we are fortunate in that Doug Wood has accepted the role of Acting Senior Deputy as Peter moved into the Acting Captain's role.

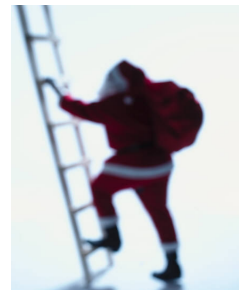
I believe that the Brigade will continue to be the leader in membership and innovation which characterized Barry's time as Captain.

Remember to do the last minute preparation of your property now. Only a month of dry weather is all that is needed to change the fire situation around.

This is the last newsletter for 2005. The Executive hope all Villagers have a Joyous (and fire free) Christmas and a peaceful New Year.

David Howell,

President



Brigade Membership

Membership of your local RFS is a vital factor in demonstrating community support. Not only does this play a part in decision making on resource allocation within the District, it ensures that if you are co-opted to support the Brigade during major incidents, you are covered by insurance.

There are a number of members who are currently unfinancial. If you are not sure whether you renewed your membership at the last AGM in June, please contact the Brigade treasurer, Susie Hope ASAP.

Hazard Reduction across the state is behind schedule

An interesting article by Robert Wainwright, which was published in the Sydney Morning Herald on November 26, 2005

THE Rural Fire Service has only finished half the hazard reduction burns it had planned across the state in preparation for the summer bushfire season, says the commissioner, Phil Koperberg.

The long-awaited break in the state's drought had severely curtailed prescribed burns designed to clear undergrowth and ground fuel in strategic areas of bushland.

Although the service had planned to clear 200,000 hectares by the end of this week, the latest figures suggest the figure could be as low as 60,000 hectares and no higher than 100,000.

As the state continues to be pummelled with unseasonal storm activity, delaying the onset of summer conditions, Mr Koperberg warned against complacency. He said the "double-edged sword" of wet weather had not only delayed burn-offs but had also sparked grass growth that would eventually dry and become bushfire fuel early next year.

The hazard reduction rate "is worse than I would have expected", Mr Koperberg said. "There are so many impediments to this type of operation that you only need a couple of millimetres of rain to put an operation off for a week.

"We have done well in areas around the Hawkesbury and Warringah, but if you look at the Blue Mountains we probably haven't achieved more than 40per cent of what we had planned. On the South Coast, between Nowra and Batemans Bay, it has been relatively dry, so we may have achieved 70per cent."

Mr Koperberg defended the limited success. "It is a simplistic argument to say that all we have to do is burn the bushland in the winter. It's not as if we can stand on the sidelines firing mortars into the bush. They have to be managed, because you can be assured that the first time we burn down a couple of houses [while doing prescribed burns] there will be a public outcry."

Mr Koperberg said long-term weather forecasts predicted the unsettled storm conditions would lift by the middle of next month.

"You only have to go back a few years, to 2000-01, to see that we can still have a dangerous fire season even when it rains into December," he said. "In 1967 it rained through to January, and we had one of our worst seasons. This season will be much shorter than we expected this year but it could still be intense.

"Our main concern is the amount of grass fuel in the central west, probably north of Dubbo down to the Riverina district ... and eastwards to the western escarpment of the Dividing Range. Traditionally it begins to dry out around Christmas and becomes volatile in the first few weeks of January.

"The central west might be the focal point for some fairly serious fires from mid-December right through to February or March. It [wet weather] is a double-edged sword because on the one hand it is good for rural NSW but it has produced very high levels of grass fuel which will eventually cure."

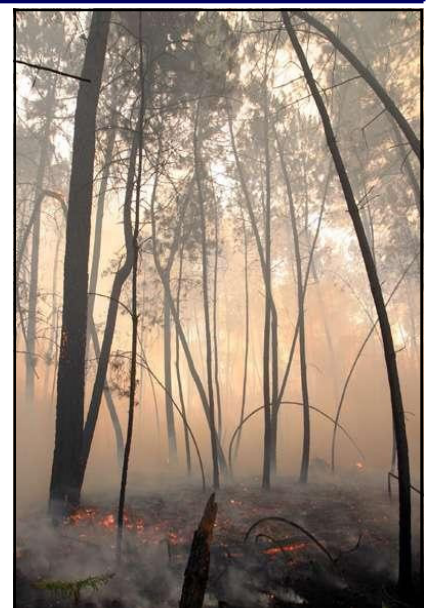
Mr Koperberg was reluctant to make predictions based on long-range weather forecasts. The bureau was saying "that the series of low pressure systems giving rise to unstable weather are diminishing so we should return to normal ... which is dry. But the jury is still out."

Wanted: A Photocopier

The Brigade would like to get a photocopier (new or second hand) capable of copying A3 size sheets. It will be used for copying maps during fires and hazard reductions.

If you know of a cheap source of a new one, or perhaps your company is recycling old photocopiers, please call David Howell on 0418 771 664

Pig & Horn
Saturday 4th February
7.00pm at Mt Wilson Village Hall



Is your property prepared?

The bushfire threat at Mt Wilson & Mt Irvine is classed as High or Extreme for all properties; please take the necessary steps prepare your property against bushfire. Fire preparation will make it a lot safer for our crews to operate on your property and increase the chances of your property surviving a bush fire.

Property owners need to do more to safeguard their assets in particular establishing fire breaks and fuel reduced zones, as well as equipping your property with a fire pump & fire fighting equipment.

BECOME A PART OF YOUR LOCAL RURAL FIRE SERVICE

I would like to take this opportunity to encourage everyone to be involved with our local rural fire brigade. There are many opportunities to help as Active Firefighter or in a support role such as Administration, Communications, Community Liaison or Catering. Non-residents such as family members, property managers, gardeners, relatives and friends are warmly encouraged.

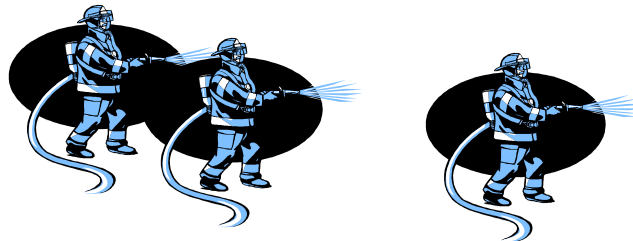
TRAINING

We still need more people to undergo driver training to get truck licenses.

There are also opportunities in the aviation area, starting with "Aviation Basic Knowledge" and moving on to "Air Base Operator" & "Air Base Manager"

Peter Raines

Acting Captain



Barry's new role

As you will know from the Presidents note a few weeks ago, I accepted a nomination from the Captains & Group Leader in the West Sector for the Position of Deputy Group Captain – Learning & Development. This position previously held by Jim Crowther (Blackheath) is commonly referred to as 'West 3'.

There were at least 2 other nominees from within the District for the position, with the selection being made by FCO Mal Cronstedt following consultation with other Senior field officers. The appointment is in an acting capacity until the general elections in May 2006. If I am nominated I will stand for election at that time.

There are two roles for the position. One is the operational aspects of incident management when there is a major Bushfire, Structural Fire or Motor Vehicle accident. The other is functional responsibility for co-ordinating Training in the West Sector.

The brigade is fortunate in having two very capable people to step up to the next level, Peter Raines as Acting Brigade Captain and Doug Wood as Acting Senior Deputy Captain. Both Peter and Doug have served the Brigade well, are trained to the level required and are both experienced fire fighters who know the area. They are ably supported by the Crew Leaders and the Brigade Executive.

Whilst my role is in an acting capacity, and I may yet return to the Brigade in May, my expectation is that I will continue in the Deputy Group Captains Role after the elections (unless I stuff it up). The Brigade Executive have asked me to stay on the Executive team in an advisory role, and I have agreed to do so until the next Brigade elections.

It is important that the Brigade keeps growing and building capability to respond to incidents. It is the growth over the last 4 ½ years that has enabled the Brigade to have a succession plan in place with more Crew Leaders and potential Crew Leaders coming through. Without this our preparedness for the inevitable major fires would suffer. I therefore encourage all new members, wherever possible, to undergo the basic training (see elsewhere in this Newsletter).

I will still turnout with the Brigade, albeit in a different capacity, and I look forward to your continued support for the Brigade.

Barry Freeman

Captain

2006 Basic Bushfire Firefighting Training Dates

Assessments are scheduled for either Sunday May 15th (a.m.) or Sunday July 9th (a.m.)

Course A:

- Friday evening March 10th
- Saturday March 11th
- Saturday April 8th

Course B:

- Friday evening May 12th
- Saturday May 13th

NB: participants can attend any combination of dates from course A & B to suit availability

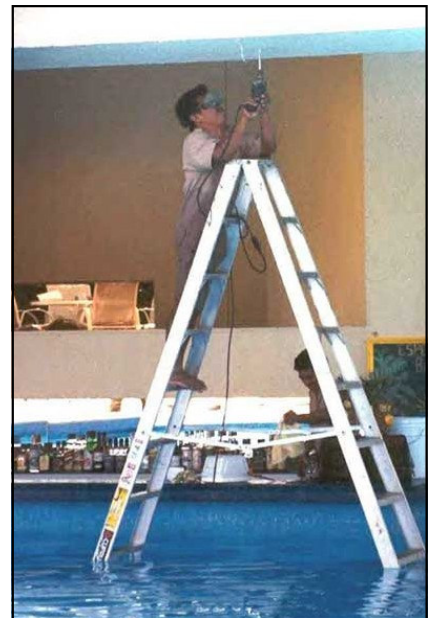
2006 Brigade Training Days: 1st Sunday each month

8th January	5th February	5th March
2nd April	7th May	4th June

9.00am start at Mt Wilson Shed
All welcome!



Firewise



Any professional is quick to remind us that mixing water and electricity can be particularly dangerous.

In the last edition of this newsletter, a Community Awareness article on the installation and maintenance of Smoke Detectors was published. Not long after, there were two separate incidents that resulted in loss of life. Both incidents perhaps could have been prevented with the installation of Smoke Detectors.

NSW RFS issued the following Press Release on 9 June, reproduced in full below:

The Commissioner of the NSW Rural Fire Service, Phil Koperburg has issued an urgent warning to rural communities and farm holders after the discovery of two deceased people yesterday on a property 60km south of Bathurst. The couple had been overcome by toxic fumes as a result of a small electrical fire. In the last month the RFS has attended almost 100 structure fires in regional NSW and there have been 6 fatalities as a result of three of those fires.

"It is imperative that home owners in rural communities and those living on remote properties take every available step to protect them and their families from fire. A working smoke alarm must be installed and an evacuation plan should be known and rehearsed by all family members. Electrical and heating devices should be checked and if possible turned off overnight," said the Commissioner.

"The tragic deaths of 2 children and 4 adults over the last month have necessitated a warning message such as this. Smoke from a house fire is extremely toxic. It is rarely the case that people are killed by contact with flame. That's why it is essential to have a smoke alarm installed so that adequate warning can be given for you and your family to get out of the house. This is even more important when homes are remote and not visible by neighbours."

"Having a smoke alarm is only the one part of protecting your family. You should have a clear evacuation plan for your home and all persons in the home should know what to do and where to meet outside if a fire should occur. This evacuation plan should be rehearsed especially if there are young children in the family."

"All electrical, gas, oil, or combustion type heaters should be checked and cleaned. If possible these devices should be turned off overnight or at least be checked to ensure there is no combustible material nearby. Electric blankets and waterbed heaters should be inspected and ensure power outlets throughout the house are not overloaded."

These simple steps could make a difference if a fire was to occur. As always more information can be found by contacting your local fire station, RFS Fire Control Centre or visit the RFS website at www.rfs.nsw.gov.au or NSW Fire Brigade website at www.fire.nsw.gov.au.

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Comments, contributions and suggestions welcome!

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