



BUSHFIRES

3PM Wednesday 4 December. Peter (my husband) called me at work, there were fires close to home. We live in Glenorie, one of the badly affected areas. He had a job to do that needed him to be away from home for several hours – what should he do? Go or stay? A quick check of where the smoke was and the direction of the wind dictated that he go. I was just a half hour's drive from home anyway. We would be OK yeah, sure!

As the next 24 hours unfolded, all the things I had learned about bushfires and preparation for them we used absolutely everything so no matter how many times you read the list that the Rural Fire Service produces, all I can say is read it again and again and again until you have it in your head. It will save your house, your property and ultimately your life.

Fill the gutters (we had only had them all replaced 2 weeks before the fire!), check the hoses, get the buckets ready, fill the bath (it flooded the carpet because it leaked!), sink, laundry trough, towels at all the doors, fill as many buckets as possible in strategic places all around the outside of the house, gas bottle off the barbeque, curtains closed, blinds down. Unlock the doors, open the electric gate, divert the house phone to mobile. And sit and think some more. Phone number for nearest the command center for RFS, a street directory/area map, torches.

TASMANIA JANUARY 2003

We have had bushfires here and we have been a bit hectic to say the least. I have lost fences, equipment that was going to build the new kennels, (timber, Koppers logs etc) the new arc weldmesh has been scorched and the galvanising has been ruined. Nearly lost the goats, they have lost their house. I ran in front of the fire and let them loose and they had the sense to get out of the way of the fire. Their paddock was burnt severely, we lost sheds, dog beds and then I had no power for two days, so the frozen foods are gone. BUT we are safe now, we were ready to evacuate on Wednesday morning at two AM, and as there were gale force winds that brought the fire up again. All the dogs were in the van and car and trailer and the goats

SYDNEY DECEMBER 2002

What to take for ourselves if we had to evacuate? It wasn't much, 3 computer drives, some photos, the insurance policy, the contents of Peter's filing cabinet which had his business files (the rest were on the computer), a few personal items, like jewelry and two changes of clothes. Get dressed properly, cotton and wool, long sleeves, stout shoes, a hat. Then we had to start thinking about the dogs. By this time it was getting dark so if we were to move any, it had to be done soon. A call to Lyn and Paul Britza and help on hand from Cathy Murdoch, Paul was there with his wagon and trailer hitched – we moved out 4 Afghan adults (one 7 weeks in whelp), a Toller (the escape artist) and 3x10 week old Afghans. The house dogs stayed, one Afghan and 3 Tollers. If we needed to evacuate, then the house dogs were easy to move. It is lucky we don't have a lot of dogs!

We waited, and waited and waited. It threatened and growled around in the gullies for hours. The water crane was overhead and the choppers with water buckets too. Peter asked "Do you think I should buy a fire pump?" Without even a split second's hesitation I said "Yes!!!" I had been saying for weeks that we should buy one and it turned out that it probably saved the house. Peter was home again within 40 minutes with a fire pump and ready to test it. First try, it blew all the clips on the hoses!!!! Panic stations! But I had some good clips that I had used on a hose on the hydro bath (improvising here!) and we raided those and fixed the fire pump! All ready for action.

From the time that I saw that first puff of smoke it was 24 hours until the fire finally hit us. Amazing then how fast it happens when it does arrive and how you move into overdrive if you know what has to be done. It approached from the side that we thought and in the direction that we

were going to be the last in, but it died down as it reached where it had burnt previously. It was Frank and I who fought this, we had no help until it was over, then Forestry turned up and put the remaining fires out, and they were here until 11pm back burning on Tuesday night.

It has calmed down a bit, however we are expecting 36 degrees here today, and there are still a few fires around. It has been dry and windy to the extreme, and there have been a few dog people that have been in the vicinity of these fires. There are at least 5 individuals on this road alone, Jean Hargraves is over the hill from me. I rang her last night and the fire was 100 metres from their house. The main thing is we didn't lose the house. Frank reckons if it was weather board it would have gone up.

Jillian Wiltshire, Hobart, Tasmania

thought so it was, for us, predictable. We thought it had passed (all in the space of 5 minutes) but as we were putting out some spot fires it roared up through the Casuarinas at the back of the barn and THIS was the ferocious one, flames 40 feet in the air, throwing fireballs and heat so intense, we had to shelter around the side of the barn. By this time we had two fire trucks in our front yard and without them who knows how we would have fared?

I suspect that the paint that we had used on the barn had gone a long way towards saving it – it is heat reflective and had already reduced the heat dramatically in the galvanized iron. The paint didn't even blister! We were quite well prepared, saved the house with the assistance of the fire pump and without a doubt, the efforts of the RFS, the blue wrens reappeared within 24 hours and our tiny ring tailed possum that loves to torment the dogs from the Crepe Myrtle (and I had last seen disappearing into the path of the main fire) was back and doing its acrobatics (uninjured) above the dogs within 2 days. Of course the rabbits were back in less than half a day! Resilient is maybe not the best word.....

Ros Bacich

Thought you might like to see the view that the dogs have (actually it is the same view that we have) since 5 December. The flames stopped about twenty feet from the house and runs, this time they did not go across the front of the house (it went all round and over the house in 1991). This was thanks to The Incredible Hulk and Georgia Peach and several smaller



CANBERRA JANUARY 2003

Thanks to everyone for e-mailing & phoning us. We are okay and our suburb was on alert for the latter part of last night. At its worst, there were 27 suburbs on alert. We were well prepared and had the car packed and the gutters filled with water well in advance. Then a change came through and the temperature dropped by about 10 degrees to around 26. This was at around 9pm. It wasn't until the change came through that we started to relax, but still didn't get to bed until very late and slept lightly. As of this morning there were reports of around 400 homes lost across most of Canberra, but most in Duffy where it backs onto the Stromlo pine forest. Mt Stromlo

helicopters who dumped water on the house and runs. No houses were lost in our street this time, however, two in nearby streets could not be saved. The noise those big helicopters make as they skim over your house and release their water is the most wonderful sound you can ever hear.

The small amount of green at the bottom of one view has actually grown since the fire. It is amazing what dam water from helicopters and a bit of heat can do to the Australian bush. The "black boys" (I suppose I should be politically correct and call them grass plants) that were just black lumps two weeks ago now have about two inches of brown and then about four inches of green sticking out of the tops. The trees are now dropping the burnt leaves and twigs. The ash is still finding its way into the coats of the dogs and cats and during the night you still get whiffs from burnt trees even though they are now fully out. All the normal birds are back, the big goanna has started coming for water and the possums are back to teasing the dogs at night..

Roslyn Thomas

observatory has lost its 3 biggest telescopes and most of the outbuildings. The RSPCA in Weston is totally burnt as was the firing range and the gymnasium at the AFP complex in Weston and a vet's there too. We now have 4 people confirmed dead. Conditions have remained mild today, but are expected to worsen until another change comes through on Wednesday. Authorities today completed a 3-4 dozer-wide firebreak which stretches from Hall to Glenlock Interchange on the Tuggeranong parkway. There are some pictures posted here: <http://www.aus-1.au.nu/bushfire/pics.html> I haven't heard of any Canberra dog people being too badly affected yet, so let's hope it stays that way. Take care everyone, after yesterday, I realise just how precious life is

Regards
Jo Hagan Canberra, ACT



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