

# **Chapter 8**

# **The Basin Fire Brigade**

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Summary

Summary

The Basin Bush Fire Brigade was formed in 1927 with Jack Hern Clarke as Captain. The Basin Rural Fire Brigade was constituted in 1949 with John Chandler as Captain. The Basin Urban Fire Brigade was formed in 1984 with Alan Small as captain and is known as The Basin Fire Brigade.

The most serious bushfires in The Basin area occurred in 1939, 1962, 1968, 1980 and 1997.

The 1962 bushfires had the most serious effects in The Basin area. If not for the efforts of Captain Don Maguire, The Basin could have been wiped out. Don Maguire was the most well known Captain of The Basin Fire Brigade, serving for 25 years. He also served on various other related bodies.

The Basin has been the source of many bushfires that have ravaged the Dandenongs. In particular, the 1962, 1968 and 1997 fires all started in The Basin on days of high temperature and strong Northerly winds.

The Brigade has had five “fire stations” during its existence. The first was a small shed behind The Basin Progress Hall used to store equipment and used for over 30 years. The second was the first “real” station built by voluntary labour completed in 1953. The third replaced the previous one and was completed in 1967 to coincide with The Basin centenary. The fourth was a temporary one used for about a year whilst the fifth one was being built which was completed in

1976.

Over the years, there has been a variety of warning devices used. The first was a bell, donated by T. M. Burke, that hung near the shed behind The Basin Progress Hall. The first siren was installed on a tower beside the station completed in 1953. A siren is still used on occasions in conjunction with silent personal devices.

The Brigade has an active Ladies Auxiliary, Junior Fire Brigade and is a member of the Knox Brigades Group.

Regular events are the annual Carols by Candlelight and Christmas eve Santa trips.

Distinguished Resident  
Don Maguire

In January 1962 The Basin, and indeed the whole Dandenongs area was threatened by bush fires. During four memorable days, the safety of The Basin was in the hands of The Basin Fire Brigade Captain Don Maguire. To Don’s credit The Basin came through relatively unscathed. But it did not happen by good luck as Don had fire fighting experience dating back to 1935.

In those days he learnt a great deal from the then captain, his uncle Bert Chandler, especially in the practice of “back burning”. Don was captain of The Basin Fire Brigade from 1955 to 1977 and later became President. He was Chairman of the Ferntree Gully National Park Committee from 1965 to 1977 which were torrid times for Don. He acted as Group Officer of the Knox Fire Brigades Group from 1975 to 1987. He is a life member of the CFA His involvement with the CFA spanned a total of 57 years and he experienced the big Dandenongs fires of 1939, 1962, 1968 and 1983.

Even with his involvement in the CFA, Don found time to excel in other fields. He scored 229, a club and district record, while batting for Church of Christ, and won the district batting averages twice. At football he has represented Boronia and at tennis played country week for AMT. His work at Batterham Reserve is known to most and together with all this he ran a successful nursery, specialising in Boronia and daffodils. He was an active member of Legacy and was on the Board of Glengollan Retirement Village.

Don’s services to the community were recognised in 1974 when he was awarded The Queens Long Service & Good Conduct Medal and in 1977 when he was awarded a B.E.M. for services to the Victorian Fire Services.

Don Percival Maguire passed away on 25<sup>th</sup> August, 1994 at the age of 73.

## Before Organised Fire Brigades

Forest, bush and grass fires have been a part of the Australian scene from the beginning of time. Our flora have developed as part of the overall environmental story where indigenous trees and shrubs adapted to regular and irregular burning by both cool and hot fires, and indeed without the heat so created, the seed would not have gained access to the soil to re-establish the forest balance.

It is not necessary to go far to find confirmation of these facts. Sherbrooke Forest, that magnificent area so close to Melbourne is not the Sherbrooke that early settlers first sighted. The original forest was cut down entirely for use as timber for the growing Melbourne and by the late 1890's the area was almost completely cut out. A similar thing happened on the foothills of The Dandenongs on the western slopes, where the Eucalypts, although not so useful for building timber, were used extensively for firewood, fencing, shedding etc.

Fires which occurred in 1891, 1908, 1914, 1919 and 1926, re-established Sherbrooke to the marvellous forest that we now see and these fires and others, re-established the foothill slopes as well.

Aborigines used fire in all parts of Australia and still use controlled burns to clear areas and replenish new growth so that kangaroos, wallabies and other animals which make up their staple diet, would have food and therefore be more accessible.

A priceless piece of early bushfire fire experience in The Basin comes from the pages of Mrs Janet Dobson's diary (summer 1904-05 and also 15 years later, in 1920) It also highlights the concern and brave resolution with which our pioneer settlers wives faced this ever present threat.

*"Very bad bushfire all over One Tree Hill, another up side of the Observatory [Burke's Look-out], all around Kerrs', Barnes and Mrs Davis nearly burnt out. Joe went over to help, they are burning a break between Baldwin's and Kerrs. Weather fearfully hot."*

31<sup>st</sup> December, 1904

*"Fires still racing."*

1<sup>st</sup> January, 1905

*"It rained some nice showers today."*

2<sup>nd</sup> January, 1905

*"Weather very hot. There is a big fire all around J. Maguire's, A. E. Chandlers and E. Hansen's and another up near Mr Farlands."*

10<sup>th</sup> January, 1905

*"The heat almost unbearable. The fires are raging all day. The wind is blowing quite a gale. There is a big fire all around Hazel Dell and right to the top of the mount."*

11<sup>th</sup> January, 1905

*"Joe went up to Dodds after dinner. The bushfire was all around the house. All their hay got burnt. Joe stopped to help them. It was nearly five when he got home. The fire travelled down to S. R. Matthews in the evening. There were about 20 men up there keeping the fire from the house. Some stayed all night, some of the sheds were burnt down. It is a dreadful fire, it is coming down toward Mr Jacksons now. Weather is very hot."*

13<sup>th</sup> January, 1905

*"The bushfire was all around Mr Jacksons today. The Army boys were over helping him keep it back from the house and the barn. The fire was all around the house at Hazel Dell. They were nearly burnt out. All the Chandlers were up helping them. They had two of their bridges burnt and their fern gully was all burnt out. The fire went from there up to Dickensons. The same went over the mountains and burnt down Mrs Leak's and a Mr Fitzgeralds' house. It is still very hot."*

14<sup>th</sup> January, 1905

*"There was a cool change Saturday night (14th January) and on Sunday morning we had some welcome rain. It rained for two or three hours."*

16<sup>th</sup> January, 1905

*It has been dreadfully hot all day with a hot north wind blowing very hard and there are some dreadful bushfires about. There was a very big*

## Before Organised Fire Brigades

one at Mitcham this afternoon. It burnt down seven houses.

11<sup>th</sup> February, 1905

"There is a large bushfire over near Dickson's and right up around "Switzerland" [This was old name for the area of Government Road hill & Toorak Avenue] Some of the houses have been in danger and the neighbours beat it back. My two boys went over, so did Harry Chandler, Jack Wicks, and Mr Agar, Staff Captain Stevens (Salvation Army), and several others. If it is hot tomorrow it will spread up round the Mill. It looks very red tonight."

19<sup>th</sup> February, 1920

"The fire is still spreading up in Mr McKenzie's property. It looks very beautiful this evening, up the side of the mountain."

20<sup>th</sup> February, 1920

"Today has been dreadfully hot. At dinner

time, a big bushfire started up in Ferndale and came down toward Uncles' (Jack Wicks orchard). They went over and all Mr Griffiths men and Uncle Arthur (Harris) and Mr Agar and several others burnt a break along the Mill track. They carted all the mill wood out through Jack Wicks' paddock. They had to work very hard to keep it from Mr Grumonts house. The boys did not get home until 10.30 pm. There was another big fire over in Goodwins paddock. It started from a burning stump left from last week's fire. It got very close to Mr Medways house. There were more than a dozen men keeping it back. It got into Maguire's cut scrub and it looked something grand at night. We could see our shadows, it was so light."

23<sup>rd</sup> February, 1920

With the coming of European settlement, the face of many parts of Australia changed forever. The early settlers, with no knowledge of the volatile nature of our indigenous flora, must have



Members of The Basin Bush Fire Brigade in 1936 with Como Gardens' Morris Truck.

**Standing on Truck:** Bert Clarke, J. Williams, W. Williams.

**Standing:** A. Jennings, Jack. Manders, Joe Jackson, Unknown, Gretton, D. Smith, Unknown, George Bravery.

**Squatting:** Jack Linton, George Langdon, Lloyd Caughey.

Photo courtesy Knox Historical Society

faced terrifying conditions, when armed only with the experience of the northern hemisphere. They tried their first burn-offs in order to make room for agriculture.

In January 1851 one of the most widespread and devastating fires hit Victoria and was known as "Black Thursday". One can only imagine how much this fire set back the state, just seventeen years old. Records of this catastrophe are sketchy, but it is known that loss of stock and property in isolated areas must have been high and loss of human life a certainty.

It is roughly around this time that the discovery of gold brought great changes, particularly to central Victoria, and not many years later, volunteer fire brigades being formed in many of the developing country towns. Ballarat Brigade held its centenary in 1983 and Bendigo, Eaglehawk, Castlemaine and Geelong City all had their beginning about the same time. Closer to home, Lilydale had a Fire Brigade about 1890, but it has been difficult to re-establish an actual starting point.

The Basin was a farming community with several large family groups, going back as far as the 1870's. The Dobsons, Colliers, Chandlers, Kerrs, Popes no doubt banded together to support each other in times of crisis, be it flood, fire or accident. The loss of produce due to fire was very real and could have a bad effect on the whole community, who took most of their agricultural produce direct to the Victoria Market.

Bad fires in The Basin area around the turn of the century may well have prompted the locals to organise themselves into some sort of organised Fire Brigade, but facts are sketchy about the 1910's and 1920's. The Great War of 1914-1918 had a devastating effect on every small community in the land, depleting the areas of the fit young men who would normally have been available to volunteer for fire fighting activities.

In early part of the 20th century the only transport available was horse-drawn vehicles and the odd bicycle, together with volunteers on horseback. Communication was practically nil, with the "cooee" being used effectively over short distances and a man on horseback where greater distances were involved. The only fire fighting tools available were rakes and hoes, heavy metal buckets, hemp in bags and branches broken off suitable gum trees to act as beaters. However, it is

incredible how quickly the early pioneers learned to use back burning and other passive methods to achieve their objectives and their knowledge of fire behaviour in a variety of weather situations was remarkable.

### **The Basin Bush Fire Brigade**

#### **Early Days**

During the first few weeks of 1926, a series of disastrous bushfires claimed more than fifty lives in Victoria and laid waste to more than 900,000 acres of prime forest in Gippsland.

No loss of life was recorded in the Dandenong Ranges, but a fire raging from Monbulk to South Belgrave exacted a heavy toll in livestock, property and bush land. This event, and the move to form Fire Brigades in surrounding areas of The Dandenongs, pushed the move toward an organised brigade in The Basin. This was formalised by a The Basin Bush Fire Brigade being formed in 1927 as a member of The Bush Fire Brigades Association of Victoria. The Captain was Herb Clark. His two sons, Graham and Wayne, served with the Brigade in the 1950's and 1960's. Jack Manders later became Captain.

The equipment available to the Brigade was basic, but included buckets, knapsacks and beaters. When The Basin Progress Hall was completed in 1931, the equipment was stored in a small shed beside the hall.

With the lack of equipment, fire fighting was a hit and miss affair. Two trucks eventually become available, an old International truck belonging to Ferndale and Bert Chandler's Morris Commercial truck. The latter served as a Brigade vehicle from 1928 until 1945. Harry Chandler's Morris Commercial truck also gave support over these years.

#### **Doongalla Bushfire 1932**

In 1932, the Brigade was involved with a fire that lasted several days on its eastern boundary. The classic stately home of Doongalla was burnt to the ground on January 19th 1932 and the grandchildren of the owner of that time, T. M. Burke and others, were led to shelter under the bridge on the creek until the fire danger had passed.

## Doongalla Bushfire 1932

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1935-36 was quite a change in leadership with Bert Chandler as Captain, George Langdon as his Lieutenant and George also took on Secretary and Treasurer positions and retained these posts until 1945. The 1930's were bad years for fires, mainly because an arsonist was very active in the area and this continued until an arrest was made in 1938.

### Black Friday (13<sup>th</sup> January, 1939)

Summer of 1938-39 saw much of Victoria drought stricken, particularly the eastern, heavily timbered parts. Uncontrolled fires were burning all through the state and during the week prior to Black Friday, The Basin Fire Brigade was kept busy fighting fires along its eastern boundaries where many houses were saved. Unfortunately many homes were lost, but there was no loss of life.

Much of the subdivided land around The Basin had small sub-standard timber homes on

them. These were known as "Week-enders", where inner suburban people spent the weekends "getting away from it all". These were of course a complete embarrassment to the Brigade in any major fire, with no water reticulation and possibly only a half empty 500 gallon tank to call on for emergency use.

On Black Friday a hot north wind blew at a steady 60 kph with a temperature of over 40 Deg and very low humidity. Fires erupted all over Victoria. These weather conditions continued for 3 days and the smoke over much of eastern Victorian reduced visibility to a few hundred yards. Some of the younger The Basin Brigade members went to Warrandyte to assist fighting the Black Friday fires.

Judge Stretton's Black Friday report to the Victorian Government still makes fascinating reading. Black Friday must go down in history as Victoria's worst fire day of the 20th century. Not only from loss of life (71 persons) and buildings, but complete devastation and destruction of the



*The Basin Rural Fire Brigade first building built in 1953 by voluntary labour on Forest Road opposite the Triangle.  
Doug Greenwell fixing flagpole on top of building.  
Photo courtesy Elsie Greenwell.*



magnificent Mountain Ash, Messmate forests and the loss to the milling industry.

Only 9 months after Black Friday, World War II erupted and many of the young men volunteered in another way, to join one of the three services. The Basin area fared badly with some fifteen to twenty regular Fire Brigade members leaving the district in the next 18 months. Some of these did not return.

### 1939 – 1949

1939 to 1945 saw Captain Bert Chandler with a gallant bunch of oldies taking over a very heavy responsibility. In July 1942, Boronia formed a volunteer Brigade and The Basin had to call on Boronia and Ferntree Gully during those critical times. The Brigade personnel were expected to oversee security and act as air raid wardens should the need arise, as many felt a Japanese in-

vasion of Australia was certain. 1944 was again a drought year, with devastating grass and bushfires over the State, particularly the western district. The Basin had its share of the action, together with its sister Brigades.

Because of the magnitude and loss caused by the 1944 fires, the Victorian Government decided to make widespread changes and The Country Fire Authority came into existence, encompassing both Urban and Bush Fire Brigades and dividing the country area of Victoria into zones and regions.

The end of World War II saw a lot of The Basin fire fighting men returning to the district, but many had made the “supreme sacrifice”. Of those who did return, there seemed to be a reluctance to become involved in organised Brigade activity as many were busy re-shaping their lives to civilian ways. When fires did occur, the response was always very good. However, a full



*The first official The Basin Rural Fire Brigade vehicle, an Austin 400 gallon small town unit c1954. The fire truck is on Forest Road looking South from near Conyers Street just in front of the first Fire Station. Howe's Greengrocer (later Forest Lodge Restaurant) behind fire truck on right. Presbyterian Church, later Scout Hall (in 2017 house on site) in background on left.*

*On fire truck Laurie Turner, Victor Battersby. Left Harold Hardinge. Right Brian Petrie, John Gribble.*

*Photo courtesy Elsie Greenwell*



leadership hierarchy could not be maintained and The Basin Bush Fire Brigade was disbanded.

With some urging from Regional Officer ‘Mac’ McLaren, a public meeting in The Basin Progress Hall saw the Brigade formally reconstituted. Mac McLaren served Australia in a special way during the War. Working in Rabaul when the Japanese invasion took place, he joined that gallant body of Coast Watchers whose efforts will never be fully appreciated and their valiant efforts saved thousands of allied lives.

## **The Basin Rural Fire Brigade**

### **1949 – 1962**

The Basin remained a member of the Bush Fire Brigades of Victoria until 1949 when due to approaches made by Regional Officer H. McLaren, of the newly formed Country Fire Authority, a public meeting was called at The Basin Progress Hall and The Basin Rural Fire Brigade was constituted with John Chandler Captain, Don Maguire 1st Lieut., J. Ashbury Secretary, and F. Eaves Treasurer. Bert Chandler donated a block of land, opposite the present fire station that was later used as the site for the first fire station.. The CFA provided the Brigade with a trailer mounted Furphy tank with a low down pump and a short length of hose.

In March 1953, the first The Basin Fire Station building was completed on the plot of land donated by Bert Chandler in 1949. This was the first official “fire station” building. Before this, equipment was stored in a small shed behind The Basin Progress Hall. Voluntary labour built the Station using funds raised by Brigade members. The Regional spare Austin 400 gallon tanker was housed there and the Brigades first electric sirens installed on a windmill adjacent the Station.

In 1953, Arthur Cooper became President, Charlie Ashby Secretary and V. Poole Treasurer.

In June 1954, Chairman Mr. Seaton presented an Austin 400 gallon tanker to the Brigade which was the first official Brigade vehicle. Don Maguire became Captain and Bill Wright 1st Lieut.

The Basin was reticulated in 1959 and with the spread of housing, additional equipment was needed. After much letter writing a new Austin

Small Town Unit was acquired which proved very useful.

In 1960, a serious fire prompted the Brigade to raise funds to enable the purchase an ex-Forestry short wheel base Land Rover and equip it with a radio. This vehicle served the Brigade well for many years and acted as a forward control and scout unit, not only for the Brigade, but quite often in Group fires. It was left to the Brigade to outfit the unit and to maintain it entirely as no CFA support was forthcoming due to their policy on second hand vehicles.

The extension of the high level water supply by The Melbourne and Metropolitan Board of Works saw a whole new deal in fire-fighting techniques throughout much of The Basin. Where previously water had to be laboriously carted by tankers to the higher areas, The Brigade could now plug directly into mains with a huge saving in time and efficiency. Another first in techniques was introduced about this time. Blacking out the edges of a large fire in steep and difficult terrain (Ferntree Gully National Park), had always been extremely hazardous and inefficient. Many fires thought to be completely extinguished would break out into unburnt areas and the danger would be on again.

With the increase of available and diverse equipment it was possible to clear a bulldozed break down the fire flanks and run small volume hoses down from the top of the fire, fed by tankers. In this way it was possible to completely blackout the fire edges, remove burning stumps and trees thus making a complete job of security in one effort. The hoses were always taken down and out of the area to a point where they could be readily collected. This method of fighting large fires was an adoption of a successful technique developed by the Dandenong Ranges Group to deal with large static fires with no readily available water supply and was called a “Gunga Dhin”. A large tanker was set up adjacent to the fire and a pumper at the nearest water supply. Smaller tankers were filled by the pumper and ran a water shuttle service until the blaze was extinguished. This also proved a very worthwhile method of dealing with fires under difficult conditions.

The years 1960-1962 saw the Brigade increase in efficiency, although still hampered with

equipment of poor standard and simply not up to the job. The H.F. radios were valve types, large and unreliable and in many cases left overs from Wartime disposals. Quite often a caller could be

picked up in Fiji, but it was impossible to call another fire vehicle on the far side of a small hill.

The small town Austin Tanker, although an honest workhorse, with its 400 gallons of water,

## READERS' LETTERS

KNOX SHIRE AND  
MOUNTAIN DISTRICT FREE PRESS.

Wed., March 13, 1968, Vol. 25 No. 1142

# Urges drastic act against The Basin

Sir, — Once more a madly racing fire has devastated the Dandenongs. Once more dozens of homes were burnt to the ground and human lives endangered, and some even lost. Once more the beautiful Ferntree Gully National Park was burnt — this time completely — just as it had recovered somehow after the 1962 fire.

Once more innumerable native animals and birds lost their lives in the fiery inferno. Sugar gliders, koalas, black wallabies, possums, wombats, and a great variety of native birds, found their grave in the hot ash.

It is feared that this time the lyrebirds, which managed in 1962 to dodge the fire by taking refuge in the deep moist gully running from One Tree Hill to the kiosk, found their way of escape blocked by flames. None of them had time to escape beyond the Park area—the fire was too swift to be overtaken. Only three were known to have been saved by a bird lover.

The magnificent, extremely well-coordinated work of C.F.A., fire brigades and Forests Commission achieved this time something short of a miracle. Despite strong winds the fire was contained within a limited

perimeter and finally extinguished — purely by human effort, as there was no rain to help as in 1962.

The following hellish night with hot northerlies proved how well the job was done. Yet this experience proved, too, that once the fire starts its race from The Basin towards the One Tree Hill "switchboard" it cannot be stopped until it traverses and burns through inaccessible areas and comes closer to the roads, where it could be dealt with.

One glance at the map is sufficient to realise that the settlement of The Basin is actually a fuse leading to the powder barrel of the Dandenongs. Once the fuse is lit the path of the fire is easily predicted. It goes up to One Tree Hill, plunges down into the Ferntree Gully National Park, and sends its lashing tongues everywhere, towards Sassafras, Ferny Creek, Upper Ferntree Gully, Upwey and further, its main direction depending upon the prevailing wind.

Now, if there is a fuse leading to a powder barrel and you want to prevent the explosion, what would you do? You would pull out the fuse. And that is exactly what should be done with the settlement at The Basin. It should be liquidated completely and for good.

It is not a question of a punishment or vengeance. The simple fact is that there is a settlement at a spot on the map where it should have never been. Unless it is bulldozed down to the last shed, the lovely Dandenongs and all their population will remain in mortal danger every summer.

There is nothing unusually drastic in such a plan. Villages bigger than The Basin had in the past to give way to water storages. In a few years East Warburton may share the same fate. But one thing is clear now — we cannot have both the Dandenongs and The Basin. The choice is easy to make. The Dandenongs are Victoria's best tourist attraction; they are Melbourne's lungs and playground; moreover, they are a populated area, and that population rightly expects the Government to protect them from disaster.

Technically, there is nothing particularly difficult. The private land at The Basin could be taken away from owners by any Government department possessing the right of acquisition, and the settlers either compensated in cash or given the option of being resettled by the Government elsewhere. The settlement at The Basin should be bulldozed, all inflammable

rubble removed and burnt, and a two mile wide fire-break should be established at the foot of the hills and kept free of vegetation by ploughing and hormone-spraying. Only when this job is completed, the residents of the Dandenongs could consider themselves safe.

Some people may argue that less drastic measures could probably be sufficient — such as all-the-year around ban on the use of incinerators and obligatory disposal of rubbish by burying it.

Some may say that the whole settlement should not be destroyed.

But such arguments won't hold water. We all know that this summer numerous people used their incinerators on the days of total fire ban—all over Melbourne and suburbs.

The accusing finger of the history of the fires in the Dandenongs points firmly at The Basin as the source of the most catastrophic disasters. There is only one radical way to protect our lovely hills — that wasps' nest called The Basin should be eradicated from the map and from the ground. Nothing less will do. — "NATURE LOVER" (Upper Ferntree Gully).

*The 1968 fires in The Dandenongs prompted considerable discussion in local papers about The Basin being the source of the fires.*

*Article courtesy Knox News*

was too slow in hilly areas and was limited with its two wheel drive configuration. It was found wanting starting cold on the hill up from the Fire Station, particularly as Forest Road was starting to become very busy.

The thought of relocating the Fire Station by purchasing a block was being discussed at this stage, but no positive moves were made until 1965.

## 1962 Bushfires

The 1961-62 fire season shaped up early as a serious one both locally and Victoria wide. A very wet winter, spring was quite warm and things grew well, and by December the area was quite dangerous. To add to the Brigade's worries there was a fire-bug active in the area and the police were alerted. Unless the offender was caught in the act, nothing much could be done.

Sunday 14<sup>th</sup> January, 1962 dawned as a typical blow-up day with northerlies already gusting strongly and temperatures heading toward the 100 degree F. mark (38 degrees C), with low humidity. The scrub and forest had dried out early under the effect of a hot dry summer.

### Sunday

At approximately 10.40 am a fire was deliberately lit about 150 yards up Wicks Road on the eastern side. The Basin Brigade members, already on alert at the Fire Station, were on the road immediately and Captain Don Maguire in his own vehicle radioed a message to Group Headquarters to send all the support possible to the area around Clevedon. Boronia and Ferntree Gully responded as did Sassafras-Ferny Creek and Olinda. The tactics were to try and stop the head of the fire and prevent it taking hold in The Ravine area, where it would by nature of the terrain and the fuel, be lost. The heat of the fire and the speed with which it advanced, led the attack to fail and the units were forced to fall back to The Ravine to again try to contain the head of the blaze. Due to lack of water and some serious incidents where vehicles broke down with vapour locks and other mechanical problems, units were again forced back, and the fire raced on toward Ferny Creek along the northern slopes of the Ferntree Gully National Park.

### Lady Knox

Lady Knox was well known for her community work and in particular, her support for the Fire Brigade.

Her son, John Knox, relates an interesting story about his mother in a letter to the Fire Brigade in 1988. He writes ...

*".... I go back to about 1926 to a terrible fire which started in The Basin and came up the side of Mt. Dandenong along the 1 in 20. My mother and I in her Austin 7 – the first in Victoria – had driven down from the top with tea, drinks etc. to be confronted by the fire with no space to turn the vehicle around. Six very large men picked me, my mother and the red car up and turned it round! My mother wore a red hat and I can still see it. I was four years old at the time. This is my first memory of my mother". ".... There was, I believe, Chandler, among those six men, a Gilbert, all names of families who have made a contribution to the Basin district"*

All the available local Brigades together with many from far and wide were directed to One Tree Hill Road and the Mount Dandenong Tourist Road to try and save some of the homes that were dotted around that area, while brigades initially involved at The Basin found themselves doing a similar job on the eastern flank of The Ravine. A change of wind direction during the afternoon saw the fire take off to the North-East toward Olinda and the Mt. Dandenong Ridge Road. It was during the next hour that the second of the stately homes in The Basin, Ferndale, burnt to the ground, along with a number of other homes. The story of Ferndale and Doongalla are told in another part of this history, but it is interesting to note that both these beautiful homes were destroyed by fire, almost 30 years to the day, apart. Doongalla, 19<sup>th</sup> January, 1932 and Ferndale, 14<sup>th</sup> January, 1962.

By Sunday evening the first day of the 1962 bushfire, the area burnt was very substantial. Apart from most of the eastern and north eastern areas of The Basin being virtually burnt out, the fire was lapping Olinda and was now running north through Doongalla Forest. In an attempt to secure the area above Montrose, a back-burn was initiated on Glasgow Road extension using volunteers from below and above. Due to the steepness and rough nature of the area and quirks of wind patterns, this proved a costly error, with the fire jumping the track in a number of places. Captain Don Maguire recalls that apart from all the normal problems such as terrain and a number of ill equipped helpers, he was faced with a number of

serious heat exhaustion cases and three suspected snake bite cases in an area where the only evacuation was on foot to the Glasgow Road, Sheffield Road intersection. It was now well after midnight so the plan had to be disbanded as most volunteers had been engaged for over 12 hours and were completely spent. Another physical problem was quenching their thirst from privately owned knapsacks used for spraying agricultural poisons.

### Monday

Monday morning, 15<sup>th</sup> January saw still weary crews and ill equipped volunteers trying desperately to secure unburnt inaccessible areas before the predicted high temperatures, brought on a further crisis. The main area of concern was the township of Olinda, where a mass of fire vehicles and private pumpers, concrete mixers etc. had been assembled. The first strategy was to deploy volunteers and equipment to hold the fire on the low side of The Basin-Olinda Road and save as many homes as possible in the operation

A few homes were lost, as the fire was constantly spotting on the high side of the road, and this meant that Olinda itself was soon threatened. The township itself came through unscathed, but there was a casualty with the body of an elderly man being discovered during the morning. This meant that if the police established that the fire had been deliberately lit, they had a case of manslaughter to deal with. Acting on information received from a number of sources an arrest was made on Wednesday 17<sup>th</sup> January.

During the afternoon of Monday 15<sup>th</sup> under the influence of a strong southerly sea breeze, the unsecured fire which had been a source of worry the night before, flared up and headed toward Montrose. A plan organised by Captain Don Maguire was to encourage able bodied home owner residents to stay by their homes and together with a sprinkling of Montrose and The Basin volunteers, hold the fire on the high or eastern side and save the homes thus threatened. This plan was working very smoothly with house after house being saved, but it was nearly brought undone by police patrols driving into the area and with loud hailers at maximum power, ordering everyone to evacuate. Some very strong words were exchanged between Captain Don Maguire and the O.T.C. in charge of the police backed up

with some very discouraging exchanges about Captain Maguire's parents!

As the fire moved through toward Mt. Evelyn a mixture of volunteers and home owners saved many homes. Around 5.30 pm on the Monday afternoon, a radio call came through informing Captain Don Maguire to return home as his own house and farm property, which included his Mother's home and sheds, were threatened. Captain Maguire recalls that this came as a complete surprise as the fire above Chandlers Hill was thought to be completely contained and well blacked out. However, the sight that greeted Captain Maguire as he sped along Liverpool Road in his old Chevrolet Ute was one he believes to be unique in his experience of fire behaviour. The fire at the northern end near Montrose was still heading steadily North-East, whilst the fresh outbreak above Chandlers Hill in the region of Short Street, was racing South under the influence of a strong northerly. Thus there was two fires only a few miles apart, heading in almost opposite directions.

The fire in The Basin was indeed serious and was soon completely out of control. It crowned in a most spectacular fashion, right along the ridge in the Ferntree Gully National Park, above Bayview Crescent, and spawned spot fires in Captain Maguire's property and these fires ran right through to Albert Ave/Mount View Road corner. It was indeed fortunate that the usefulness of large cement mixers filled with water were now fully appreciated, and these were used to black out the edges of the fire in Mount View Road most effectively. The use of these units was found to be effective by driving them along the lower sides of roads, with shute extended, sending a cascade of water into the scrub when these roads were being used as a holding point for the fire.

### Tuesday

Tuesday, the third day of the 1962 fires, saw problems in many of the unburnt areas, with temperature again nearing 100 degrees (38C) by mid morning and after reaching the 100's by noon, remaining in that high figure until after 7pm that night. The main areas of concern were Upper and Lower Ferntree Gully on the southern side where Ferntree Gully National Park still had large areas

## 1962 Bushfires

alight. At one stage when the fire in that area was most threatening it was thought that the William Angliss Hospital should be evacuated. However, a late wind change turned the fire back to the North-East and late in the afternoon a fire storm of dramatic proportions developed in the Ferntree Gully National Park, near The Devil's Elbow, which observers described as awesome indeed.

The fire continued to cause grave concern at its Northern extremity, with volunteers and Forestry crews battling to save parts of Mt. Evelyn and West of the Silvan Dam. The State Pine Forest burnt fiercely and was completely wiped out and toward evening was burning east of Olinda and Sassafra and on towards Kallista. It seemed unstoppable and The Basins' unit was sent to Kallista late evening to assist in defending the town. About 11.30 pm the first few drops of rain were felt and about 1 & ½ hours later it was raining steadily and the 4 day ordeal was over. The cost in housing will never be accurately known but homes were lost in every part of the non blackened Dandenongs and hardly a section of the mighty mountain range had escaped, Sherbrooke Forest being a remarkable exception.

### Aftermath

A lot of criticism was levelled at the fire services, voluntary and professional, but the Chief Secretary, Sir Arthur Rylah, roundly supported the efforts of all those who had fought so hard in such

extenuating circumstances. There were plenty of lessons to be learned from this fire and some should be outlined here. The use of untrained personnel, no matter how well meant, was a bad move, for some of the following reasons: Many were undisciplined and were inclined to head off and do their own thing, so that the Officers in charge had extra problems on their hands. Each person who came and volunteered to help, had to be registered and approved in case of accident and injury and this proved extremely time consuming, for already overworked key personnel. Again, many who turned up to help were dressed in shorts and thongs or similar and could not be put in any area of real danger. In addition, there was no useful equipment available to set them up to give real assistance. On the plus side, the use of the large concrete mixers who not only ferried an enormous amount of water to all points of The Dandenongs, but were also put into active fire fighting using their shutters to blackout roadsides.

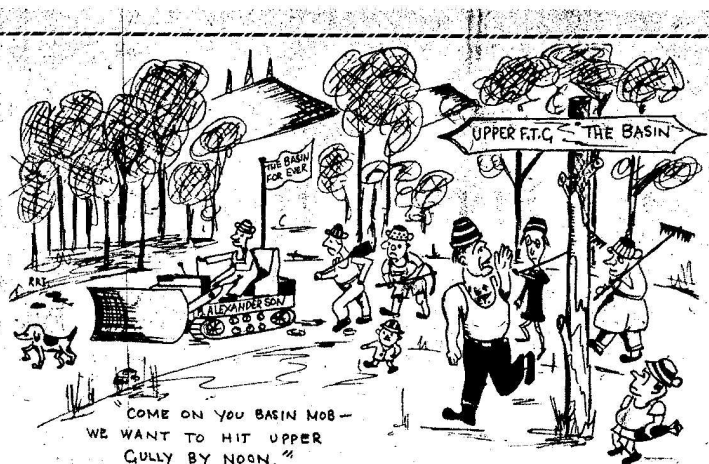
Overall, the Brigade equipment of CFA and Brigade owned units showed many inadequacies over 3 days of continuous work. Engines boiled, vapour locks were frequent and put vehicles in great danger and it is incredible that only minor accidents were reported. Pumps also gave their fair share of trouble, especially when using water from some of the static filling points. The radio network previously mentioned proved totally inadequate, with prolonged break-downs and at the

—KNOX NEWS, Wed., Mar. 20, 1968

### FTG man suggests "BULLDOZE THE BASIN"

It was suggested last week by a resident of Upper Fern Tree Gully that the only way the fire danger in the Dandenongs could be overcome was to "bulldoze" The Basin. The Basin Progress Association has invited the man to speak at a meeting.

The Knox News cartoonist shows The Basin's reaction to such a proposal.



*The 1968 fires in The Dandenongs prompted considerable discussion in local papers about The Basin being the source of the fires.*

*Cartoon courtesy Knox News*

end of the fire, the whole system was in tatters.

The 1962 fire generated enormous interest in Melbourne through radio and television coverage and it was anticipated (correctly) that the following Saturday and Sunday would see the roads into the hills from the city, cluttered with sightseers. The Brigades of The Dandenong Ranges Group set up collection points at strategic spots and over the weekend collected the princely sum of 2001 pounds. Then Lord Mayor of Melbourne had already started a fund to aid those who had lost so much over the whole State and demanded that the collection be added to his appeal forthwith. However, The Group withstood this pressure and as very high frequency (V.H.F.) was just emerging as a viable alternative in radio technology, The Group was able to equip a base station in Upwey and a repeater station on Channel 9's Mt. Dandenong tower, to cover bad areas of reception, as well as enough mobile sets to outfit most of the tankers in The Group. As far as The Brigade was concerned, it seemed that some good had come out of a very ghastly few days.

On the Friday following the fire, all the Brigade Captains, Group Officers and key personnel were invited to attend a debriefing in the old Upwey Progress Hall. It was attended by The Chief Officer, Mr Alex Larkins, as well as local Victorian M.P. The Hon. Bill Borthwick, who was known affectionately as "Bushfire Bill" because of his support of local volunteer brigades.

The meeting started in a friendly enough fashion until a general plea to the Chief Officer for better (and more) equipment, from most of the brigades present. Bill Borthwick had to excuse himself at this stage to attend another meeting. Instead of answering the questions and requests directly, The Chief Officer unfurled a map covering The Dandenongs and made this extraordinary statement. Pointing to The Basin, he claimed that if the Captain of the brigade at this point had assessed the danger of the situation more seriously, this huge blackened area would not have happened. Captain Don Maguire defended himself strongly but was disappointed that not one of those present gave him any moral support. This was interesting, as although CFA units were predominant during this fire under the old "Marginal Mile", which was in force in Forestry areas, 9/10ths of the area burnt had come under the area

controlled by Forestry and yet they had emerged scot-free as far as criticism was concerned.

Captain Maguire, although deeply hurt by the Chief Officers comments (to the extent that he almost gave the fire service away), decided the service was bigger than individuals and stuck with it for another twelve years.

Soon after the 1962 fires, a public meeting was held in a Church Hall in Bayswater to press for a brigade to be formed there. At this stage Bayswater acted as an out-station in conjunction with Boronia. The need for a Bayswater Brigade was indeed a pressing issue, with a tremendous build up of both residential and factory areas. Although well attended and lots of promises were made, it would be another 7 years before Bayswater was given the green light to form its own Urban Brigade. It was a natural transition with the timing just right, for Bayswater to join and become a very strong member of The Knox Group. The only other brigade to join the group was Montrose, after the changes to the original Lilydale Group.

The Brigade has always been active in other areas including searches for young and old. The Brigade provided considerable assistance with fighting at fires at Strath Creek 1963 and fielded a strong team to the Gippsland fires in 1965. The Land Rover was stationed on Mt "Tassy" and used as a communication vehicle and the old Austin tanker was crewed and sent to Bruthen and finished up at Gelantipy where rain finally extinguished what had been a huge fire. The CFA Officer in charge of this fire was Deputy Chief Officer Arthur Pitfield.

Soon after this, Chief Officer Larkins resigned due to ill health and Arthur Pitfield took over CFA leadership.

In 1965 Captain Don Maguire was invited to join the Committee of Management of Ferntree Gully National Park, becoming its Chairman the following year. The Park, bordered as it was by housing, had always been a worry to the neighbourhood fire brigades and Don found himself walking a tightrope between fire protection and conservation. A lot of hard work was put into building concrete tanks at strategic ridge positions, which served well until the high level M.M.B.W. scheme came into being.

In 1967, a new brick Brigade station was

## 1962 Bushfires

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built on the site where the present fire station is located. The station was completely financed by fund-raising and local contributions. CFA Chairman R. Eason opened the new building as part of The Basin Centenary celebrations.

### 1968 Bushfires

In the summer of 1968 drought hit the Dandenongs. On February 19<sup>th</sup>, which was a hot gusty day, a fire starting in The Basin spread through Ferntree Gully National Park, to Upper Ferntree Gully and Upwey, destroying 65 homes and the Upwey Progress Hall.

On March 18<sup>th</sup>, another fire was lit near Ferndale Road and threatened Sassafras and Ferny Creek. The lives of several Firemen were at risk and Fire Brigade vehicles were damaged and destroyed. The CFA allocated an 800 gallon Bedford tanker to the Brigade to give extra strength. As a State Emergency vehicle, it was often crewed by volunteers from The Basin and sent to fires around the State over the next few years.

After 1968 fires the Chief Secretary, Sir Arthur Rylah directed the Parks Service, Forestry, the C.O.M. and brigades bordering the Park to come up with a fire protection and prevention plan incorporating the entire Park, fire buffer zones and upgrading and extensions to fire access tracks. Many meetings were held and finally "The Ferntree Gully National Park Fire Protection & Prevention Plan" was adopted in 1968.

This plan was upgraded slightly in 1969 and still remains in place as the basic strategy, should fires start within the Park or around its perimeter. The buying back of private land that was unfortunately subdivided in the 1950's had almost ceased due to lack of funds, but a lot of progress was made in a buy-back scheme, particularly on the northern boundary in the old New Mystic Lake Estate and this is now part of the Park's fire buffer zone where a thinning programme of Eucalypts was carried out in the late 1960's and these areas are given cool burns when this is considered necessary. New tracks were created in the park, water storage tanks installed and communication systems upgraded.

Don Maguire remained Chairman of Ferntree Gully National Park Committee of Management until restructuring of the National Parks Service

saw the committee relegated to advisory status. After three years the Advisory Committee disbanded as it seemed to be serving no useful purpose.

The 1968 fires also prompted considerable discussion in local papers about The Basin being the source of fires. An article reproduced on page and a cartoon reproduced on page 12 indicate the feelings of residents of the Dandenongs.

### 1968 – 1983

The years of 1968 to 1971 were torrid years for The Brigade. These were the years of arson, local suspicion, great tension and pressures, Police investigations and Court appearances which finally lead to disenchantment with the Country Fire Authority. Arthur Cooper, as President and Don Maguire as Captain, are to be commended for their leadership in steering The Brigade through this torrid period.

The years of 1972 and 1973 saw many prominent buildings in The Basin destroyed by fire, some under suspicious circumstances. The Scout Hall, Clevedon, Seventh Day Adventist Camp, Salvation Army Special School and a number of houses were lost.

The Fire Station built in 1967 was replaced by a new urban station in 1977 which was opened by Brigadier R. Eason, Fire Brigade Chairman. The new station was financed by the CFA after the foundations of the previous station became dangerous and the building was condemned and demolished. Whilst the new station was being built, a temporary fire station was erected across the road on the site of the second fire station. On a tragic note, a worker was killed during the construction of the new station.

Late in 1977, Captain Don Maguire stood down, after 22 years of service, to take up the job of Knox Group Officer. Alan Small was elected new Captain.

In 1979, a hose drying tower and siren platform was supplied by the CFA. Former Captain Don Maguire was awarded a B.E.M. for services to the community, particularly the Victorian Fire Service. The Brigade raised \$20,000 for a new Ford 350 chassis and cab and built up a high performance pumper unit to serve the needs of the rapidly growing community.

A bushfire in March 1980 burnt out a large



area of the Doongalla forest area. This fire burnt for three days and stretched the resources of the Brigade to its limit.

In 1980, the Brigade purchased two sets of breathing apparatus, followed by two additional sets and four spare cylinders. A grant from Knox Council in 1981, enabled the Brigade, as part of the Knox Fire Brigades Group, to introduce personal pagers as a means of “turn-out”, thus eliminating much of the siren use.

In 1983, a Mazda Diesel Twin Cab was purchased at an initial cost of \$20,000, with a further \$10,000 spent on outfitting it. It served as transport for up to 7 fire fighters and carried a generator, elevated lighting towers, smoke extractors, cutting gear, chain saw and other equipment.

1983 saw Victoria’s worst bushfires in modern times known as Ash Wednesday. In fires across the state, forty-seven people died, including thirteen volunteer fire fighters. Over 2,000 homes destroyed. Entire towns are virtually wiped out. The Basin tanker rushes from fire to fire until its drive shaft disintegrates.

## **The Basin Urban Fire Brigade**

### **1984 – 1996**

The granting of Urban status to The Basin Fire Brigade in 1984 was indeed welcome (after years of trying). The Brigade became a D Class Unit, with 20 uniformed members in reserve and full membership of around 45. In the same year, Roy Ritchie decided to stand down as Secretary, after 19 years of dedicated service.

In 1992, The Brigade owned 2 vehicles of its own, and 2 CFA owned vehicles. The Brigade owns a Mazda Salvage van and a Ford Pumper complete with two sets of breathing apparatus and spares. An Annex was built on the north side of the Fire Station to house the Mazda Van. The Fire Brigade owned vehicles are a Hino Diesel Tanker (Tanker 1) capable of carrying 3,000 Litres of water and also carrying two sets of breathing apparatus, and an International petrol Tanker (Tanker 2) capable of carrying 3,000 Litres of water.

In 1993, five Brigade members received The National Medal for Long Service in the Volunteer Brigade. These are: Ray Cotter, Colin Hart, Kevin Hand, John Gribble and Captain Alan Small.

February 1994 saw severe bushfires erupt in NSW. A contingent of CFA members and vehicles travelled to NSW to assist with fighting the fires. The Basin Brigade was represented by Graham Linaker, an experienced member of The Brigade. On returning from NSW, all contingent members were showered with accolades for their services.

### **1997 Bushfires**

The 21<sup>st</sup> January, 1997 was a hot summer’s day with a strong Northerly wind blowing. Around 12.00 noon, a number of fires erupted in the Montrose area. A short time later, fires erupted in Tobruk Avenue, The Basin and at 2 other places around towards Ferntree Gully. The Montrose fires were extinguished in the early afternoon, but the Tobruk Avenue fire raced up the hill at an intense speed towards Ferny Creek and destroyed a number of houses. Two residents sheltering in their homes were killed when their homes were destroyed. The other 2 fires merged in the Ferntree Gully National Park and headed towards Upwey.

Enormous resources were thrown into battling these fires including water bomber planes borrowed from SA, helicopters and vehicles from around the State. In the Alamein Avenue and Tobruk Avenue areas, bulldozers were called in to construct fire brakes to prevent the fires spreading to the West. By late afternoon, the fires were still threatening areas around Upwey, but were no immediate threat to The Basin. The situation changed dramatically around 6.00 pm when the wind changed to a strong South Westerly. This blew smoke back towards The Basin and re-kindled any small fires in The Basin area. Around 7.00 pm the fire jumped Mountain Highway near Alamein Avenue and threatened houses in The Ravine. This fire was quickly extinguished but the smoke in The Basin area was very thick and acrid. This prompted many residents to pack up and leave.

Late evening saw the hillside above Tobruk Avenue glowing from the fires. At least 10 tankers were stationed along the top end of Government Road to prevent the fire sweeping up over Government Road and into The Basin. The fires were eventually contained within the National Park and by midnight the risk to The Basin

## 1997 Bushfires

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was minimal.

Three people died and forty-one homes were destroyed along with a CFA truck. Police investigations in the months following the fires revealed that the fires were deliberately lit. However, by the end of 1997 the Police were no closer to finding the culprits and had conceded that there was little chance of any arrests.

Dandenong Ranges brigades received considerable assistance from strike teams elsewhere in the state. Fully crewed teams from as far afield as Camperdown and Warrnambool were on the road for as much as five hours before they got anywhere near the flames.

Other heroes of the fires included the Ladies Auxiliary who worked throughout the day and night preparing food and drink for the fire crews. Each time a unit called in it was restocked with sandwiches, fresh fruit and cold drinks.

The generosity of local organisations and individuals was overwhelming. GlaxoWellcome donated 2,000 cans of soft drink, 100 loaves of bread, 85 crates of orange juice and milk, 30 kilos of ham, 35 packets of cheese and huge amounts of fresh fruit.

Franklins and The Basin Bakery donated foodstuffs, locals dropped in with cheques, two nuns walked in off the street to volunteer their services, a local woman came by at 10 o'clock one night with a huge plate of freshly baked scones and a truckie donated an esky full of cold cans.

Fires erupted in Sydney in 1997 and The Basin tanker answered the call with both night and day shift crews.

Late in 1997, The Basin Brigade celebrated 70 years of establishment. At a special annual dinner a number of important awards were made. Long Service awards were presented to Ray Cotter (35 years), Allan Small (30 years), John Gribble (30 years), Alan Dixon (25 years), Steve Smith (25 years), Terry Maro (20 Years) and Glenda Gribble (30 years). The DP Maguire Award, founded by former captain Don Maguire, given for community service and as a measure of the recipient's having given of themselves to their fellow people and the community, providing a tangible benefit or support to the fire brigade was given to Matthew Ahern. The Fire fighter of the Year Award was presented to Simon Chapman.

### **"Fire Fighter"**

During the 1962 fires The Basin Hall was like Bourke St. The Red Cross was in full swing and had recruited many of the local young girls to assist them. Reporters were in action and media cameras were whirring. One local fireman was so impressed by all this, that he was seen rubbing charcoal over his face before entering the hall, to ensure he didn't miss out on any attention.

The Captain's Award was presented to Ron Tyler. The Dunkan Award, a nicely polished wooden seating device rescued from a building fire was presented to Martin Jennings.

## **1998 – 2007**

Fires in Sydney over the 2001-2002 summer saw major strike teams deployed from Victoria including The Basin tanker 2 and crews.

For 71 days in 2003 the North-East of Victoria and Gippsland were on fire destroying forty-one homes, three bridges, over 10,000 livestock and 1.2 million hectares of land. The Basin tanker 2 and rotating crews were in the action from start to finish.

In the 2004 Queen's Birthday Awards, Alan Small was honoured with the Australian Fire Services Medal (AFFIRM). Allan had thirty-five years experience as a volunteer fire fighter including two decades as captain of The Basin Fire Brigade and later as President. He was also Group Officer with the Knox Group of CFA Brigades.

The summer of 2006/2007 saw devastating fires in Victoria's high country. Strike teams from The Basin with tanker 2 and the pumper were away almost continuously.

## **2008 – 2013**

On Sunday, 16<sup>th</sup> October, 2009, members of The Basin Fire Brigade gathered with members of the late Colin Hart to unveil a memorial plaque in The Triangle and plant a flowering gum in his memory.

Colin William Hart was born 1916 and died 28<sup>th</sup> August, 2010.

He served with the Fire Brigade for forty years, filling many roles. He is best remembered for the key role he played in the introduction of the Wajax fire hose couplings into the CFA To an

outsider this may seem a small thing, but for any fire fighter who has chased fires through the forests and hills, the quick release coupling is a life saver.

In 2009, the Brigade decided to deregister the The Basin Rural Fire Brigade. After the Victorian Rural Fire Brigades Association and the Victorian Urban Fire Brigades Association combined to form Volunteer Fire Brigades Victoria, The Basin Rural Fire Brigade was no longer relevant.

In March 2013, Terry Maro and Vicki Linaker received certificates in appreciation of over 20 years service to the Victorian Urban Fire Brigades Association and Volunteer Fire Brigades Victoria. Terry Maro received the National Emergency Medal for service during the 2009 bush-fires.

## Fire Brigade Groups

The Dandenong Ranges Fire Brigades Group was formed around 1950 and The Basin Fire Brigade was an active member of the group until 1965 when the Knox Group was formed.

After the 1962 fires, officers in the Brigades in the lower areas, Boronia, The Basin, Lower Ferntree Gully, Lysterfield and Rowville, met to decide their future and a deputation met with Chief Officer Larkins to request that these brigades be allowed to form a new group. This was met with a firm refusal on the grounds that such a group would not be strong enough.

After the Brigades of the lower areas involvement in the Strath Creek fires in 1963, a number of officers put to the Deputy Chief Officer Arthur Pitfield who was in charge of these fires what would be some of the many advantages of the break-away group. Again, this was met with refusal.

In 1965, the Brigades of the lower areas again applied to secede from the Dandenong Ranges Group and form their own Group and their application was upheld. This coincided with the break-

away of Knox from Ferntree Gully Shire and the suggestion was accepted that the group be called The Knox Group of Fire Brigades. This move was not accomplished without a lot of opposition, particularly from members of The Dandenong Ranges Group who felt it would weaken the overall strength of the group.

The Basin Fire Brigade's involvement with the Knox Group has been extensive, with members filling a variety of key roles in administration, as well as operationally, with a Group Officer, Deputy Group Officers, Group Communications Officers and others.

## Ladies Auxiliary

The Basin Fire Brigade Ladies Auxiliary was formed in 1955, with Mrs Betty Turner as first President. They worked tirelessly to raise funds for a number of projects. One of the first major efforts was the raising of funds to construct a meeting room for the first The Basin Fire Station. This was completed in August, 1957 on the north side of the vehicle bay, which greatly improved facilities.

The Ladies Auxiliary has given the Brigade unwavering support. They have always been on hand to feed the volunteers at the fire-front and when they return after operations. They have also raised funds to support and equip the active Junior Fire Brigade.

For many years at Christmas time, the Ladies Auxiliary has organised a raffle for a Christmas stocking. Local shopkeepers have provided enormous support for the raffle which has raised much needed funds.

In 1997, Glenda Gribble was awarded a Life Membership of The Basin Fire Brigade Ladies Auxiliary.

## Christmas Eve Santa Trips

The Christmas Eve "Santa Trips" that started back in the 1960's have grown to an almost embarrassing stage, as has the supplying of Santa's and vehicles for Christmas parties.

On Christmas Eve, Fire Brigade tinsel-covered fire trucks circulate through The Basin with Santa stationed on the back. The routes are carefully planned so that two Santa's are not seen

### Helping Hand for Victims

Loanne Lane, of The Basin, wanted to help the victims of the devastating 2009 Black Saturday fires. On the Monday after the fires she organised a collection and sorting depot at the garage in The Basin. She soon had an overwhelming public response and many truck loads of relief goods were transported to centres close to the fires.

## Christmas Eve Santa Trips

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in the same street together. The trucks have an on-board sound system playing Christmas carols as Santa waves and distributes lollies to children and adults. Some people set up tables on the footpath with cheese and biscuits and wait for the truck. Santa is sometimes lucky and receives food and gifts in return. The trucks are forbidden to use the on-board sirens but occasionally they are “accidentally” set off.

There are plans set up for the eventuality of an incident requiring a call-out during the Santa run. Trucks have been diverted from the Santa run a few times in the past to attend incidents. Santa even attended a fire once.

These trips started when The Brigade only had one vehicle but these days all vehicles are utilised along with other trucks borrowed from other brigades. The first Santa trips only visited Brigade family members with a comic as a gift.

The Basin Fire Brigade considers the Santa trips as an important community service and continues and enhances the service every year. Its become an institution and creates a close affinity between residents and the Brigade.

Les Trotter holds the record of being Santa for 25 years.

### Santa's Letter Box

In 1992, The Basin Fire Brigade introduced a Santa's letter box which is located outside The Basin Post Office every Christmas. The box was made and donated by the staff of The Basin Post Office.

The Basin Fire Brigade help answer all children's Christmas letters and the letter box is now an established tradition, particularly for the kindergarten and primary school children who eagerly await participation in this activity every year.

### Fire Alert Systems

Until 1932, the Brigade had no formal alarm system. A “cooee” was a popular method of raising alarm but this was very limited. For the few residents who had cars or telephones, these were used. Horses and bicycles were also used. Any visible signs of smoke always provoked investigation in case it was caused by an uncontrolled fire.

#### Santa's Drink

The annual Brigade Santa trips are an institution in The Basin with some residents offering refreshments to Santa. One time Santa drank what he thought was ginger ale but instead was whiskey with dire consequences.

In 1932, as a token of his appreciation of the Brigade efforts at his Doongalla property, T. M. Burke donated a large bell, which was mounted on a pole above the shed on the side of The Basin Progress Hall. This was the first formal alarm that the Brigade utilised. The first person in attendance rang the bell by pulling a wire to summon crews to attend any fire. Jack Manders, who lived near Toorak Avenue, also had a bell mounted over his gate.

At this time, the telephone system consisted of a manual exchange in a tiny room at Bayswater with only a small percentage of residents connected to the system. It was operated by one dedicated lady, Miss Baker, who lived on the premises and seemed to be available at all times to pass on messages, particularly when a crisis existed.

In 1953, when the first The Basin Fire Station was completed, the Brigade's first electric sirens were installed on a windmill adjacent the Station. The bell donated in 1932 by T. M. Burke was moved from The Basin Progress Hall to the windmill. For a time sirens were also installed on Wright's and Langdon's stores for local warnings.

In 1967, when the second fire station was completed, the electric siren was moved to the tower built with the station.

In 1979, a hose drying tower and siren platform was erected at the rear of the new station erected in 1976. The bell donated by T. M. Burke was no longer needed and was mounted in a stand and given pride of place in the station meeting room.

The siren was the primary warning device for brigade members to attend the fire station. Certain members of the Brigade also had “Fire Recall Systems” (FRS) installed. This entailed a modification at the local exchange whereby when a certain number was called, the call was also automatically redirected to certain Brigade members landlines.

Fire sirens have always been tested on a weekly basis and residents are used to regularly hearing the siren at the fixed testing times. Until

April 1975, the siren was tested at 8.00 pm. every Tuesday. After complaints from residents with young children, the testing time was changed to 10.00 am. on Sundays. This time conflicted with the St. Mary's bells that were rung at the same time, and the time was changed to 9.50 am. on Sunday.

The original use of the siren was to alert Brigade members, as well as the community, to incidents. Developments in Brigade communication meant that the siren was no longer needed to alert Brigade members of an incident. The introduction of pagers in the 1980's started the move of directly contacting Brigade members. Some residents also complained that the noise of the siren was a nuisance. In the 1990's, the siren use was stopped.

After the disastrous fires in Feb 2009, the use of sirens to alert communities in particular localities was recommended by the Royal Commission into the bushfires. Consequently, in 2013, the use of The Basin Fire Brigade siren was reintroduced. The siren may sound for up to 90 seconds to indicate the Brigade has responded to an emergency incident nearby. A prolonged, 5-minute signal indicates that a current emergency has been identified in the local area and people should seek further information. In addition, the siren is tested every Sunday morning at 10.00 am.

Mobile phones, the internet and social media have dramatically changed the way people obtain information about incidents that may affect them. Information can sometimes be obtained faster than fire or other services can report them. Cheap and sophisticated scanners that can monitor CFA radio frequencies can also be used.

The introduction of smart phones has changed the way fires are managed. Applications such as BART (Broadcast Alert Respond Turnout) allow participants to respond faster, communicate better and work smarter.

The Basin Fire Brigade's main response area covers some 16.18 square Km. This area extends from Canterbury Road area in the north, to the Chandler Track area in the south. To the west to Albert Ave and to the east the Channel 10 Track area. The Brigade also supports neighbouring brigades in response to calls.

### **Carols by Candlelight**

After the disastrous fires in 1983, the Brigade made a determined effort, as a voluntary group and a necessary part of the community, to involve other people in a community activity, with the side agenda of generating fire awareness.

And so began in 1984 the first "Carols by Candlelight" at The Triangle with the help of the Salvation Army, local schools and other local groups. It was so successful that it has become an annual local event. The local Federal member, Steve Crabb, who lived in The Basin at the time, conducted the first Carols by Candlelight and continued for many years.

### **Good Friday Appeal**

As part of the Knox Group, The Brigade assists yearly with the Royal Children's Hospital Good Friday appeal with the Group collecting nearly \$30,000 in 1992.

### **Fire Equipment Maintenance**

Fire Equipment Maintenance (FEM) involves servicing fire fighting, fire prevention and safety equipment predominantly located in business locations.

The Basin Fire Brigade provides the service to areas of The Basin and surrounding suburbs and is conducted by qualified CFA personnel. FEM has been in operation since the 1950's.

All money raised from FEM is used to assist in running the brigade and purchasing replacement equipment. It is undertaken by brigade volunteers in an unpaid capacity.

FEM includes all types of fire extinguishers, (water type, foam type, dry chemical, carbon dioxide CO2 and wet chemical) fire blankets, fire hose reels, hydrants and lay flat hose.

All servicing is done in line with CFA Guidelines, and to relevant Australian Standards.

### **Junior Fire Brigade**

Cr. Guy Turner encouraged the formation of a junior firemen's club in 1959, by donating a trophy for "keenest junior". The concept was to give as-

## Junior Fire Brigade

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piring fire fighters a place to train and prepare them for moving up into the senior ranks. Training is carefully overseen by officers and fire fighters from the senior brigade. Though the Juniors do not attend fires, the training given familiarises them with experience and knowledge of the running of a Brigade, use of equipment and carries this knowledge into the senior ranks. The club continued for many years until interest waned.

The club restarted shortly after the 1983 fires when there was a surge of interest in Fire Brigades. In accordance with modern naming, the club was renamed the Junior Fire Brigade. A running team was formed later that year.

Each year, the team competes in a number of competitions including the State Championships, where in 1992, a second place was gained in an event for two competitors.

Although junior's have a lot of fun, they also learn serious and valuable skills that can benefit them throughout their lives, no matter what career and/or volunteer paths they may later choose. Many junior's go on to join The Basin Fire Brigade as full volunteer fire fighters when they reach 17.

### Community Involvement

As well as managing bushfires, the brigade also deals with other incidents and runs various education programs.

The brigade responds to house fires, car fires and road accidents as well as dealing with fallen trees and power lines during storms. To deal with the various incidents, the brigade draws on the skills of its members trained in everything from first-aid to chainsaw usage. Members are continuously building their skill set, with numerous training courses on offer through the CFA and an in-house training regime.

The CFA runs a number of community education programs, many of which are administered directly by brigade volunteers. From the pre-summer Bushfire-Blitz program which educates home owners on asset protection and fire safety, to brigades in schools which teaches children about fire safety.

A brigade Community Relations Officer coordinates most of the above programs.

In 2012, the brigade commenced using social media to inform local residents of brigade activities and issues of interest to the local community.

A tailored website provides the community with comprehensive information about The Basin Fire Brigade.

A static message board located at the front of the station provides the passing public with immediate notices such as total fire bans days and bushfire education evenings. Electronic movable roadside message boards are also used.

A recent innovation are open days at the fire station which have been very successful. A variety of events are held including demonstrations, fire safety information with fire-fighters on hand to answer questions.

In November, 2013, the brigades Community Relations Officer, April Himmelreich, won the Education Award at the 2013 CFA Fire Awareness Awards. April devised "The Captain Koala and Friends Show as an innovative approach to spreading the CFA's Fire Safety messages and travelled around Victoria staging the show.

### Sources of Information

- The Basin Centenary booklet.
- "Fire on the Hill, Flowers on the Valley".
- 1962 bushfires and early Brigade history – Don Maguire.
- Local Residents and The Basin Fire Brigade members.
- History of the Ferntree Gully Fire Brigade.
- Various internet sites.

## More Information Required

### 21. When did open days start?

1. Does anyone have the original Certificates of Registration of The Basin Bush Fire Brigade, The Basin Rural Fire Brigade or The Basin Urban Fire Brigade? If not, where can we get them?
2. Appendix II has vehicle information I obtained from your website and Facebook. Estimations of dates used would be useful.
3. Major activities of Junior fire brigade since 1993.
4. Is Good Friday appeal still going? If not when did it stop?
5. Info on Ladies Auxiliary major activities since 1997
6. Anything to add to The Basin involvement in Knox Fire Brigade groups
7. Update honour rolls.
8. Is Carols by Candlelight still going?
9. Have I got all the awards to various people over the years.
10. Any information on plans to move fire station (off The Triangle)?
11. Any recent developments in radio communication in the truck and station?
12. Where is formal training done. Is Fiskville still used?
13. Major Brigade activities 2008 to now. In particular, Brigade involvement in Black Saturday 2009.
14. Uniforms. When did the Brigade start wearing them and who pays for them?
15. Any interesting or strange stories.
16. Marking of places where roadside fire hydrants are marked on sealed roads. Blue reflective markers are used now. How did it used to be done?
17. In the BBCN of Oct 2007, there is photo of first Fire Station. Can I get a copy.
18. See link to newspaper clippings on the internet on page 22. Any others would be useful.
19. Need old photographs of buildings, vehicles, people.
20. The information on Facebook from Ray Cotter about old call signs. Can it be explained?





## Appendix I Honour Rolls

The Basin Fire Brigade Honour Roll					
Captain		President		Secretary	
Year	Name	Year	Name	Year	Name
1927-32	H. Clarke	1947-51	B. Chandler	1932-36	G. Langdon
1932-36	J. Manders	1951-53	A. Cooper	1936-47	E. Gilbert
1936-47	B. Chandler	1953	E. Turner	1947-51	V. Hornsby
1947-55	J. Chandler	1953-78	A. Cooper	1951-53	L. Edwards
1955-77	D. Maguire	1978-99	D. Maguire	1953-63	C. Ashby
1977-99	A. Small	1999-	A. Small	1963-65	R. Robinson
1999-	C. Killian			1965-66	R. Turner
				1966-86	R. Ritchie
				1986-90	G. Linaker
				1990-06	R. Brown
				2006-	P. Shaw

The Basin Fire Brigade Life Members Honour Roll				
D. Maguire	A. Cooper	R. Ritchie	C. Hart	K. Hand
J. Gribble	S. Smith	R. Cotter	A. Small	A. Dixon
T. Maro				

The Basin Fire Brigade Ladies Auxiliary Life Members Honour Roll				
N. Radford	G. Gribble			

The Basin Fire Brigade Ladies Auxiliary Honour Roll					
President		Secretary		Treasurer	
Year	Name	Year	Name	Year	Name
1969-73	H. Robinson	1969-72	M. Dommett	1969	M. Gardiner
1973-76	P. White	1972-74	S. Trotter	1970-74	N. Radford
1976-79	G. Gribble	1974	G. Gribble	1974-77	P. Hartin
1980	B. Collins	1975	H. Robinson	1978	J. Groves
1981-87	V. Linaker	1976-80	D. Lawrence	1980	D. Davies
1988-90	C. Pearl	1982	M. Ahern	1981-83	H. Viney
1990-	V. Linaker	1984	L. Smith	1984-02	G. Gribble
		1986	D. Lawrence	2002	J. Rankine
		1988-90	L. Smith		
		1990-04	N. Maro		
		2004	A. Killian		

Appendix I Honour Rolls

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The Basin Junior Fire Brigade Honour Roll					
Captain		Vice Captain		Secretary	
Year	Name	Year	Name	Year	Name
1985-86	T. Small	1985-86	R. Ahern	1984-87	M. Ahern
1986-87	R. Ahern	1986-88	T. Small	1987	D. Maro
1987-89	M. Ahern	1988-89	D. Maro	1987-89	D. Blood
1989-90	J. Small	1989-90	J. Lawrence	1989-90	T. Maro
1990-91	J. Lawrence	1990-91	K. Linaker	1990-91	B. Lawrence
1991	N. Brown	1991-93	A. Gribble	1991-92	N. Brown
1991-93	K. Linaker	1993-94	D. Linaker	1992-93	D. Linaker
1993-94	A. Small	1994-95	H. Balkwell	1993-94	H. Balkwell
1994-95	D. Linaker	1995-96	R. H. Balkwell	1994-95	D. Smith
1995-96	H. Balkwell	1996-98	D. Maro		
1996-98	R. Balkwell	1998-99	L. McCleary		
1998-99	C. Albantow	1999-00	K. Taylor		
1999-00	K. Tyler	2000-01	K. Tyler		
2000-02	K. Taylor	2001-02	M. Priest		
2002-03	M. Priest	2002-03	R. Priest		
2003-05	R. Priest	2003-04	S. Van Der Velden		
2005-06	S. Riddell	2004-05	C. Riddell		
2006-07	K. Ratcliffe	2005-06	K. Ratcliffe		
2006-07	B. Ratcliffe				

## Appendix II Vehicles

The Basin Fire Brigade Vehicles		
Vehicle	Years Used	Information
Morris Commercial Truck	1926 – 1945	Owned by Bert Chandler.
Austin 400 Gallon Tanker	1954 to late 1960's	Presented to the Brigade in 1954.
Land Rover	1960 -?	Ex Forestry vehicle
C1310 International Tanker	1967	
Austin Tanker (Region Spare)		1980's
International 1410 Tanker	1981 -?	Heat shields later fitted.
Bedford 1968R series 4×4 Tanker	1970 – 1985	Used in Ash Wednesday (1983).
Ford F350 Pumper	1979 – 1999	Water Capacity – 700 ltrs. Pumping Capacity – 1800 ltrs per minute. Equipment included - Breathing apparatus and other auxiliary equipment. Crew capacity – 6. The Brigade raised \$20,000 to purchase and fit out this vehicle complete with 2 sets of breathing apparatus.
1610 ACCO International 4×4 Tanker.	? - 1985	Water Capacity – 3000 ltrs. Pumping Capacity – 910 ltrs per minute. Used mainly for wildfire fire fighting. Crew capacity - 8 (later reduced to 6 with the addition of a role over protection crew cabin on the rear).
Hino FF 4×4 Tanker.	1999 -	Water capacity – 3000 ltrs. Pumping capacity – 900 ltrs per min. Used mainly for wildfire fire fighting. Crew capacity - 8 (later reduced to 6 with the addition of a role over protection crew cabin on the rear).
Izuzu 4×4 Tanker.	? - 2007	Water capacity – 3000 ltrs. Pumping capacity – 900 ltrs per min. Used mainly for wildfire fire fighting. Crew Capacity – 6.
Mazda Crew Cab Salvage.	1983 -	Purchased for \$20,000. Further \$10,000 spent on outfitting. Equipment included – 5kva generator, lighting, salvage tarps, other auxiliary equipment. Crew capacity – 6.
Hino Crew cab Type 2 Pumper.		Pumping capacity – 2000 ltrs per minute. Water capacity – 1800 ltrs. Urban appliance, reliant on reticulated water supply.
Landrover Defender TDI 4×4. Crew support & forward Control.		Equipment included – 5kva generator, lighting, chainsaw and cutting equipment. Crew capacity – 5.
Hino 4×4 Tanker.		Water capacity – 2000 ltrs. Pumping capacity – 910 ltrs per minute. Used for mainly wildfire fire fighting. Crew Capacity – 6.
Izuzu Crew Cab Type 3 Pumper.		Pumping capacity – 3000 ltrs per minute. Water capacity – 1800 ltrs. B Class foam capacity - 200 ltrs. A Class foam capacity - 90 ltrs. Urban appliance, reliant on reticulated water supply. Equipment carried - Breathing apparatus, chemical splash suits, steel cutting equipment, forcible entry tools, Positive Pressure smoke extraction fan, salvage tarps.
Hino Crew Cab 4×4 Tanker.		Water Capacity – 3750 ltrs (3000 for fire fighting, 750 for crew protection sprays). Pumping Capacity – 910 ltrs per minute @ 700kpa. B Class foam capacity - 80 ltrs. A Class foam Capacity - 50 ltrs. Crew capacity - 5. Crew protection sprays fitted around vehicle deliver 100 ltrs per minute water spray to cover vehicle if trapped by wildfire.

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