the volume 11 No.2 Official magazine of the Volunteer Fire Fighters Association

President's Report Belowra Station Opening The Bushfire Cycle Revisited



♦ Pilbara to Broome and Central Coast Beaches ♦ Koalas & Catastrophic Fuel Loads













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The VFFA welcomes and encourages members to send in any pictures, photos and articles of interest.

Please email these to feedback@volunteerfirefighters.org.au

Front Cover: Tenterfield 10 minutes after it started

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The Volunteer FireFighter Summer 2019

President's Report



A lot has happened since our last magazine edition and sadly, there has been a lot of inaction from the NSW Rural Fire Service (RFS). The RFS Commissioner, Mr Shane Fitzsimmons has failed to offer support to Volunteer Firefighter, Oliver Maruda.

Oliver was wrongly accused of speeding by another RFS member, Rick Jones. RFS Inspector George Sheppard set the NSW Police upon Oliver in a bizarre chain of legal events that should never have taken place.

On the 3rd of October 2018, District Court Judge Paul Conlan, cleared Oliver of any wrong doing, he was completely exonerated, but left with a massive legal debt of over \$100,000 to clear his name

Can you believe that the RFS Commissioner said under oath at the Upper House Inquiry on September 18th 2017, "In the last seven or eight years since I have been commissioner, I am aware of five applications being received. All of those were supported in respect of ex gratia assistance."

Sorry Commissioner, not ALL were supported. Oliver's claims were ignored.

The 20th of October 2019 marks three years of inaction by Mr Fitzsimmons as the RFS Commissioner.

Why would anyone sign up as a volunteer for the NSW RFS upon hearing Oliver's story?

There are other cases where volunteers have been abandoned because of legal proceedings and when looking for support with Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD).

If a volunteer is broken or is failing to function in a manner that suits the NSW RFS, they are tossed aside and thrown out like yesterday's garbage.

One consolation is that the RFS keeps your name in the register to prop up the claim of 70,000 volunteers.

Social Media Attacks

The recent attacks made against the VFFA are a clear indication that we have touched a raw nerve of the RFS hierarchy, and we will continue to expose the rot within the service even if it creates a few unpleasant social media attacks along the way.

To those who state that "the VFFA does not speak for me", I say that the VFFA has never claimed to represent all volunteers.

We do represent volunteers who choose to join us, unlike the Rural Fire Service Association (RFSA) who gain members by way of the opt-out system.

We will help any volunteer who gets into hot water, even if they don't have a long membership history with our association.

I would also like to take this opportunity to formally acknowledge

that there is a large number of RFS staff and senior volunteers that support the key principles of the VFFA. Many of these supporters are being silenced by the RFS in fear that they could be pushed out, lose their jobs, be bullied or harassed in some way for blowing the whistle or taking a stand.

Most volunteers (VFFA members or not) are dedicated to their local communities but sadly, many are walking away from the RFS as the bureaucracy continues to grow.

RFS Volunteers and the Public are being misled

The RFS Empire has become too powerful and manipulative as they push away the non-conformists from staff and volunteer ranks. They roll out a very influential media machine to hoodwink the public and control the fire related media messages to support their own agendas.

The RFS Empire began to grow long before the current Commissioner, Mr Shane Fitzsimmons took over.

Andrew Clennell, Sydney Morning Herald - Thursday 3rd June 1999, reported that the Rural Fire Service boss, Mr Phil Koperberg "belongs in Hollywood" and has too much power over an outfit that puts excessive focus on uniforms and rank and indulges in "show-pony tactics'.

The article went on to say that "The disquiet has emerged with the perceived decentralisation of power caused by the Rural Fires Act 1997, which followed the deputy coroner's report on the 1994 Sydney bush fires".

Twenty years since that article and the RFS empire has become such a beast that the politicians struggle to control it.

Budgets are growing and the fires are getting worse whilst the RFS blames climate change at every turn without ever mentioning fuel loads.

Many reporters are too frightened to tackle the RFS because they will be cut off and excluded from major fire related information.

Media campaigns and advertising budgets are also used as a tool to control the media.

But the tide is turning, there are many stories emerging that expose the troubles within.

Misleading Volunteer Numbers

For many years now, the RFS has touted a 70,000 plus army of volunteers.

Whilst this figure may represent the numbers of names in a

PRESIDENT'S REPORT continued

have a plethora of firefighters ready to put the 'wet stuff on the red stuff'.

The following data was supplied by the RFS as part of a

freedom of information request. It was reported to the VFFA that

considerable pressure was applied to get these figures and it is

register, it is misleading the people of NSW into believing that we

1. The total number of RFS volunteers who have completed all their training to legally allow them to attend a fire as at 21 December 2018 was 49,073.

expected that they may be conservative at best.

2. The total number of individual RFS members who attended a fire in:

a. 2018 was 20,199

- b. 2017 was 21,884
- c. 2016 was 20,462
- d. 2015 was 19,027
- 3. The number of brigades, and identity of the brigades, where no member attended a fire in each of the following years:
 - a. In 2018, 180 Rural Fire Brigades (RFB) did not attended an incident
 - b. In 2017, 131 RFBs did not attend an incident
 - c. In 2016, 137 RFB's did not attend an incident, and
 - d. In 2015, 215 RFB's did not attend an incident

The VFFA informants from Head Office, many Districts and Ex RFSA agree that the numbers of active volunteers would be closer to 18,500.

Even if we use the RFS information (above), the RFS is misleading the people of NSW into believing that they have an army of 70,000 firefighters (volunteers) when we are lucky to have 20,000.

A Discrepancy of 50,000

It is clear that the NSW RFS has misled the public to the tune of 50,000.

With only 20,000 volunteers (at best) it is no wonder that we struggle to get crews for campaign firefighting activities, and we have to engage firefighters from interstate.

Volunteer Decline Cannot be disputed

Volunteer numbers are in serious decline but the RFS rolls out the media campaigns and uses the good name of the volunteer to add bricks to the Ivory Tower.

There is never a mention of volunteer decline by the RFS Commissioner as he uses clever tactics to report on the army of volunteers that respond to fires.

Continued on next page >>

PRESIDENT'S REPORT continued

LATEST UPDATE ON RFS VOLUNTEER

Some of the worst fire conditions in New South Wales were around Dunedoo in 2017. The Sir Ivan fire burnt out more than 55,000 hectares. A coronial inquiry is looking not just into the cause and origin of the fire, but how it was handled. Faith in the management of fire Services has been shaken and as Landline reporter, Joanna Wooburn discovered the number of volunteer firefighters is dropping.

The Landline program stated that the apparent rift between farmers and the RFS is one of the reasons crews say they're losing volunteers.

In the program, Mike Gorman from the Kangaroo Valley Brigade said their volunteer numbers went from approximately 90 down to 55 and he knows of other brigades with similar problems.

The program confirmed that there is a big discrepancy between the people that are on the books as numbers and the people who actually have a regular input into their local bush fire brigade.

The Landline program also interviewed Justin Barr, a former Group Captain at Cumnock in the state's Central West. He has been with the RFS since he was 15. His old Brigade currently has around 60 members but fewer than 20 turn up. He says apathy is a big factor.

Farmer, Mitch Lee said that he is ready for the next fire, but he won't join the RFS. He said that the last thing he would want to do is to go into the fire station and be told that he can't do anything.

When is the Right Time to Raise Concerns?

It is interesting to note that anyone (not just the VFFA) that raises concerns about fire service failings after a big fire is accused of being insensitive or inappropriate.

Paid staff and politicians hide behind the good name of the volunteer and play the "now is not the time" card as a tool to divert unwanted attention until the pressure is off and the dust has settled.

Just like any other accident or event that puts people at risk, the best time to raise concerns is ASAP, why should we wait years for answers?

We need our Volunteers, let's not forget that...

With Kind Regards

Michael (Mick) Holton

President - Volunteer Fire Fighters Association president@volunteerfirefighters.org.au

Thank You

X-press Kurrajong Heights

LOCALS HELPING LOCALS

The Kurrajong Heights Brigade greatly appreciates the fundraising support helmet at their local IGA store and have been delighted with the response. The Kurrajong Heights Brigade would like to thank their community for their generous support and most particularly John Flanjak of IGA Kurrajong Heights.

The VFFA fully endorses this type of fundraising, as all money donated goes directly to their local Volunteer Rural Fire Brigade.

Photo: Kurrajong Heights IGA proprietor John Flanjak presents a full fundraising helmet to Kurrajong Heights Rural Fire Brigade members – Deputy Captain, Andrew Jones (centre) and Jon Ingersole (right).



Latest Update

on the RFS Volunteer that was charged, then cleared of any wrong doing, then totally abandoned by the RFS & particularly by its Commissioner.

You'll recall in our last edition we pointed out the plight of a young RFS Volunteer who as a DC at his local hazard reduction on Sydney's Northern Beaches in October 2016, was accused by a now "former" Group Officer of dangerous driving & then had the NSW Police set upon him by a local RFS Inspector, all based on the word of the now "former" Group Officer. Then five months later, the Volunteer was charged by NSW Police, he was then later cleared of any wrong doing in Sydney's District Court by Judge Paul Conlan SC but not before he was left to deal with a huge legal bill of \$105,339.20.

The NSW Rural Fire Service & most particularly, the RFS Commissioner, should be ashamed for the way in which they have done everything to shirk their collective responsibilities towards this young man leaving him suffer for three years.

As we go to print, yes it's now been **three very long years** since this thoroughly decent young man has had his whole life left in tatters thanks to the NSW Rural Fire Service.

The RFS Commissioner made very big mistakes in stating; *The RFS did not charge the Volunteer.* Wrong Commissioner, it was your RFS Group Officer who made an unsubstantiated claim to your Salaried Inspector who immediately assumed the Volunteer to be guilty so he promptly called the NSW Police upon him & then, told the Volunteer to; *sit on the grass, don't move, the Police are coming & they want to talk to you.*

It was the RFS Commissioner's Northern Beaches Inspector that had effectively placed the Volunteer under "house arrest" at the fire station on Thursday October 20th 2016.

And yes Commissioner, it was your former RFS Group Officer & his vehicle offsider that had lodged a written complaint to the Police....so please stop trying to hide from the ownership of this great mess. The Police just didn't turn up, your staff called them there & set them upon the Volunteer, your staff did it thus YOU own it

The RFS Commissioner also told the Volunteer that; you were not covered by Workers Compensation until you arrived at the station & got into the tanker, this is an issue of such great concern that even the former RFSA President, Mr. Ken Middleton agrees with

us. This statement by the Commissioner has set many Volunteers talking, it puts every single RFS Volunteer at great risk now & until such times that the Commissioner clarify's his mistake, Volunteers need to be very mindful of his statement & act with the greatest of caution enroute to station.

Now considering the Police said afterwards; we weren't there, we didn't see anything, no one was injured, we're not interested... why then did the Police Officer charge the Volunteer with "Dangerous Driving" and **five months** after they didn't see anything?

"The question that **MUST** be answered; why did the Frenchs Forest Highway Patrol Snr. Constable charge the RFS Volunteer five months after they (the Police) initially said they weren't interested, they didn't see it & no one was injured"

An investigation of the Police actions should proceed by way of the LECC (Law Enforcement Conduct Commission). The Law Enforcement Conduct Commission (LECC) replaces the Police Integrity Commission (PIC) and the Police Compliance Branch of the NSW Ombudsman with a single oversight body with two clearly defined functions; detecting and investigating misconduct and corruption, and overseeing complaints handling.

Around August this year, the Northern Beaches Volunteer had his case handed from the RFS Commissioner to a Case Manager of the Office of Justice to resolve. The Case Manager will work with the Volunteer to try & alleviate his massive personal debts incurred through fighting to clear his name of the unsubstantiated claims labelled against him by the RFS which left him fighting a Dangerous Driving charge which comes with a fine of up to \$3k & a jail term of up to nine months.

Continued on next page >>

LATEST UPDATE ON RFS VOLUNTEER continued

BUSHFIRE CYCLE REVISITED

It's very sad that as the Volunteer concerned has outlined, he no longer trusts the NSW RFS.

The entire Community of this Volunteer's brigade has given him absolute 100% support the entire time & they have written to his District Manager seeking a meeting to work out a way forward as the relationship of the Community & the Northern Beaches District Office is completely broken.

Sadly, but not overly surprising, the District Manager chose not to meet with the Community, rather he pushed the Inspector involved forward as his representative to meet with the Community.

Talk about throwing the Inspector under the Bus!

Government Support:

It's incredibly sad indeed that we can factually report this **Lib/Nat** Government is not interested in supporting our Volunteers at all, so much so that this Association met with NSW Premier Gladys Berijiklian on May 11th 2017 to make her aware of the Northern Beaches Volunteer's predicament. She said she was absolutely appalled at the treatment of Volunteers, yet she never did anything to bring it to a head, she has left the Volunteer to fend for himself.

As recent as October 31st, a resident of the Volunteer's local brigade Community wrote to the NSW Premier about the Volunteer's plight however her Parliamentary Secretary wrote back stating; "Thank you for the information you've supplied, which has been forwarded to the Minister for Emergency Service as he is best placed to consider your enquiry"

If the Premier thinks that by referring this to David Elliot (again) is going to help the Volunteer, then the Volunteer will continue to be

nothing more than a political / bouncing Ball - In political speak, it doesn't pass the pub test, anyone's Pub.

Even Deputy Premier John Barilaro has failed, he said he would help but ultimately did nothing.

It seems obvious that our elected political representatives these days are simply not interested in genuinely supporting Volunteers, you only have to look at what's happening in Victoria. Liberal, National's (same thing), the only time they seem to want to know us is whenever there's a major bushfire break out & they all quickly turn up to share a Sausage Sandwich, a Coke, some selfies & a smile for all the cameras so they can have the Public believe that they're actually there for the Volunteers.

Very sad indeed how the mainstream parties have all failed us.

If only you all knew how totally abandoned by the RFS this young Volunteer has been, how much it has cost him both financially, emotionally & personally, its impacted his wider family, his brigade, his brigade's local Community, everyone we've been able to sit down with & explain by way of Court Transcripts, they've gone away in total disbelief.

So many people in general, so many of our members have all asked us; how could this ever have been allowed to happen to a Volunteer, why did they do this to him?

Itys simple, just ask Rick Jones & Inspector George Sheppard @ the Northern Beaches RFS whose actions led to the prosecution.

Regardless, we will continue to fight for Justice for this young man & we will make you all aware when common sense has finally prevailed & the NSW Government comes good.

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The Bushfire Cycle Revisited



NE of the classic phenomena in the Australian bushfire scene is "The Bushfire Cycle". It has been revolving to my personal knowledge since 1961, but no doubt goes back much further in history.

It looks like this: **Stage 1: the disaster.** There is a ghastly bushfire, lives are lost, humungous damage done. This is followed within months by **Stage 2: the inquiry.** This might even be a Royal Commission or a Coronial.

Later comes the report, with multiple recommendations on how another bushfire disaster can be prevented from occurring ever again. Stage 2 culminates when the government, with the full glare of the media upon it, and public interest at a peak, accepts the findings and undertakes to implement the recommendations. Premiers and Ministers make grave commitments, the public service gets a serious jolt up it, funds become available and sound investments are made.

All of this results in **Stage 3: the upgraded system.** There is a great improvement to the standard of bushfire management. This, in turn, leads to a period of freedom from bushfire disasters.

But the wheel continues to revolve and we now reach **Stage 4: complacency.** The absence of bushfire disasters is, unfortunately, self-defeating. People (especially the bean counters in Treasury and the urban greens) start asking "Why are we spending so much money on bushfire management, especially on environment vandalism like fuel reduction burning, when there are no bushfires?"

Gradually the cycle moves to **Stage 5: stupidity.** The bushfire management system is allowed to erode, standards of preparedness and mitigation fall away, bushfire authorities become over-confident, believing that jazzy technology will counter all threats.

The final stage of the cycle is now reached. There is a period of below-average rainfall (always known these days as "a drought"). This coincides with high fuel levels in the bush, poorly prepared communities and a fire management approach based on response rather than on preparation and damage mitigation.

Continued on next page >>

BUSHFIRE CYCLE REVISITED continued **BUSHFIRE CYCLE REVISITED** continued



The wheel has now turned full circle. The scenario that plays out is painfully familiar: multiple ignitions in hot, windy conditions. Fires burning for days in heavy, dry fuels. Crown fires, long-distance spotting. Evacuations. Towns burning. Firefighter's overwhelmed and enormous damage done. In short, there is another disaster. The government, of course, immediately sets up an inquiry..... and so the bushfire cycle continues to revolve.

In Western Australia at the moment we are in Stage 3. We had the disasters in 2015 and 2016. We had an inquiry (by Euan Ferguson) which absolutely nailed it; the recommendations were accepted and significant changes to bushfire policy, management and practices followed. Things are still not perfect, but they are hugely improved on where they were five years ago. Parks and Wildlife are serious about fuels management, and our emergency services chiefs are promoting mitigation.

But Stage 4 is not far away, maybe another 3-5 years. A new campaign by environmentalists and academics has commenced with the aim of undermining the fuel reduction burning program, the pillar of the current program. This campaign has no basis in science, history or practical experience, but that does not seem to matter. They are targeting inner-city politicians who are vulnerable to the preferences of green voters. To the weaker-kneed of this species, getting elected takes priority over preventing bushfire damage.

From what I can see, Victoria, NSW, southern Qld and Tasmania are all in Stage 5. The greens and green-bureaucrats are calling the shots. Governments, land management agencies and emergency service chiefs have put their faith in suppression (including water bombers) - a strategy which cannot prevent damage by high-intensity fires, and is costing a fortune. The current drought in eastern Australia, on top of years of failure to undertake effective damage mitigation (especially fuels management), ensures another disaster is just around the corner. Nothing new about any of this. To the old hands of Australian bushfire management, all of this is painfully familiar. But what is new, and even more depressing, is the view that the current bushfire threat is the result of global warming/climate change. This notion is not only illogical and flies in the face of bushfire science and history, it is dangerous. Blaming bushfires on global warming gives everyone a way out, an excuse for failed land management. If the climate is to blame, nobody, let alone any government, public officer or fire chief, can be held accountable.

I could hardly believe my eyes when a group of well-known "fire chiefs" came out in the media recently calling for "action on climate change" so as to minimise the bushfire threat in Australia. It was not clear what action they wanted, presumably a reduction in Australia's emissions of CO2, nor did they explain how the lowering of the mean world temperature by two or three degrees would help to minimise fire outbreaks on bad days in national parks and forests with long-unburnt fuels.

I regard this action by the "fire chiefs" as even more potentially damaging than that of the urban environmentalists and academics who oppose fuel reduction burning. It is all very well for Premiers and Ministers to come out and blame bushfires on climate change - we all know that they are just pandering to their constituency. But "fire chiefs" surely should be making statements based on bushfire experience and with a view to providing community leadership and effective bushfire management programs.

They have not just destroyed their own credibility but have damaged that of Australian firefighters and fire managers as a whole. Worse, they are trying to turn the attention of decisionmakers away from action to prevent today's bushfire threat towards actions that might create some airy-fairy climate utopia, decades hence.

Blaming bushfires on climate change, and relying on water bombers to control high intensity fires burning out of heavy forests "Is it possible to de-rail the Bushfire Cycle, to put a spoke in its wheel, as it were? We think so, indeed this is our priority in The **Bushfire Front in WA.**"

into suburbia, epitomises that old saying: "when it comes to public policy, stupidity nearly always wins". It is an approach that has not been thought-through, one whose inevitable outcome is the exact opposite of what is intended.

Is it possible to de-rail the Bushfire Cycle, to put a spoke in its wheel, as it were? We think so, indeed this is our priority in The Bushfire Front in WA. The onset of apathy, the buckling of leadership and the hankering for the quick fix all of these can be counter-balanced by the stern resolve of professional land managers, powerfully supported by rural people, including firefighters and bushfire scientists.

These are the people I have referred to in the past as "the gatekeepers".... they cannot prevent bushfires from starting, but they can keep the really angry ones outside the gate.

It is crucial that the gatekeepers regain the ground they have lost over the last 20-years, and then keep their nerve in the face of the political counter-attacks from those rolling the Bushfire Cycle into the Stage 5 maw. Otherwise, as the old Scotsman used to say in Dad's Army: "we're all doomed".

Mr. Roger Underwood AM is Chairman of The Bushfire Front Inc in Western Australia



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Property market heats up for Spring

S WE'RE SEEING the end of cooler conditions for firefighters, things are heating up across the property market.

The warmer weather marks an early onset of the fire season. However, spring has also seen a significant turnaround in the property market, with housing values rising 0.8% nationally in August.

It's good news for home owners. But it's even better news for investors and upgraders, who can now take advantage of record low interest rates combined with more affordable property values. This is especially the case in Sydney and Melbourne, where values have fallen by 13.3% and 9.5% respectively since their market peak.

Many regional areas, where values tend to be more affordable, have outperformed metropolitan markets over the last five years.

Regional NSW for example has seen values rise by 22.5% compared to 19.2% growth in Sydney. It's a close call between Melbourne and regional Victoria. Melbourne values have climbed 24.8% in the last five years – not too far ahead of regional property price growth of 21%.

In Brisbane and Adelaide – both relatively affordable markets, values have climbed 7.2% and 9.9% respectively over the last five years.

The upshot is that the property market has continued to deliver strong long term capital growth even in the aftermath of a significant correction.

Buyers held back by lack of confidence

The current property market is dishing up healthy opportunities through a combination of record low interest rates and lower property prices in many areas. Despite this, a new study by Aussie has revealed that only one third of Australians are more confident about buying a property than they were five years ago.

David Smith, Chief Customer Officer at Aussie, explains the confidence gap saying, "With affordability and market volatility an ongoing issue over the past few years it's no surprise so many lack market confidence."

However, one group of buyers is bucking the trend. One in two property investors are confident in the Australian housing market, a figure that jumps to 61% for those

looking to invest in the next 12 months.

Canny investors know that the decrease in housing prices nationally over the past 20 months has created a buyer's market. And with values enjoying an uptick, now could be the time to take action, whether you're looking for your next home or an investment property.

For many of us though, time is something we don't have enough of. Especially fire fighters, who are gearing up for a tough season. The solution can be to partner with a home loan professional.

Leverage the industry insights of brokers

Aussie's study confirmed that four in five seasoned homebuyers such as investors, believe a mortgage broker makes getting a home loan easier. However, a mortgage broker does more than streamline the loan application process.

Aussie Brokers for instance, have access to property market data. It's an advantage that home buyers can leverage to pinpoint the ideal suburb – and even the individual property, that meets their goals.

A broker can also guide you through the loan application process. That matters because the last two years have brought sweeping changes to regulations around lending, making it more important to talk to an expert.

in addition, lenders' 'stress tests' have been relaxed in recent months. This means borrowing capacities may have increased. As property research group CoreLogic notes, "For prospective buyers looking to upgrade into a larger and/ or more expensive property it seems to be an opportune time"

If you've been waiting for the "right" time to fulfil your goal of buying an investment property, or if you're looking to upgrade to your next home, that time may have come.

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KOALAS & CATASTROPHIC FUEL LOADS

LANDLINE

LANDLINE as we know is a programme bringing news from rural Australia to the nation. This multi-award winning show typically features stories, ranging across agri-politics and economics, business and product innovation, animal and crop science, and regional infrastructure.

On Sunday October 20th 2019, Landline ran a story on Firestorm:

Shaken faith in fire management services.

HIS STORY touched on a Coronial Inquiry into the Sir Ivan fire near Dunedoo in 2017, which is investigating its cause and how it was handled. Faith in the management of fires by the RFS & how Volunteer numbers are dramatically dropping were the key focus points of this story.

This was clearly the most accurate reporting we've witnessed on a television programme involving RFS Volunteers in many years & this association applauds the work of the two key journalists who investigated the issues surrounding that fire in 2017 & the fallacy of the continuous claims of us having 70,000 Volunteers, which we all know we do not.

To hear a highly experienced brigade Captain explain how he was ashamed to be in the RFS on that Sunday....he said he & his crew had driven all day the previous day from the South Coast to get up there for the purposes of helping and now we were made to just sit & watch properties burn.

He sought answers from the RFS as to why he & his crew were ordered not to fight, he was told it came from Management.

The Captain said he & his crew were in as safe a location as could possibly be with the wind blowing the fire away from them and the Farmers were out there fighting the fire.

This story identified the huge rift between Farmers & the RFS's hierarchy, which has been developing over the years & has been instrumental in the RFS losing more Volunteers.

Farmer, Mitch Lee, said he would never join the RFS for as he said, if there was a fire here or at a friend's place, the last thing I would want to do is to go into the Fire Station only to be told I can't do anything.

We know from RFS Head Office insiders that around two years ago, a rough audit was carried out indicating that whilst the RFS had around 72,000 names on its books, the number of actual "active" members able to get on a tanker & fight a fire numbered around 18,500 & given an audit undertaken recently through a Freedom of Information (GIPPA) by Landline, they came up with 20,000....so we were never far from the truth.

It is a public disgrace to think that our RFS Commissioner can spruik to the NSW Public that we have an "Army" of some 70,000 Volunteers when in fact, at best we only have around probably 19,000

The lies must stop & what's even worse is that each of the four Emergency Service Ministers we've had under this Liberal / National (same thing) Government, Mike Gallacher, Stuart Ayres, Troy Grant & David Elliott, each of them knew the truth yet go along with the Commissioner & this great fallacy....it's simply shameful.

Major change in the leadership of the RFS must occur now if this organisation is to continue, failure to act will spell the death of Volunteer Firefighting in NSW.

https://www.abc.net.au/landline/firestorm:-shaken-faith-in-the-fire-management-services/11620450

Koalas and Catastrophic Fuel Loads

By Dr. Christine Finlay

PhD in Bushfire Management from UNSW, BA Hons in Disaster Management, JCUNQ, BA UNSW

HILE national parks claim extinction is inevitable,
Magnetic Island's koala colony of about 900 is safe
and having babies! The island's spring burn off was a
miracle for these gorgeous fluffies – not one death or injury, just
little faces peering happily from their mother's pouches.



This is not surprising as DNA developed over millennia hardwires our natives to survive Indigenous burn offs. Animals on the ground scamper away and those in treetops above flaming undergrowth only have smoke to contend with if they decide not to climb down and scamper away.

Firefighters often complain that koalas scream like children as bad fires inflict one of the most agonising deaths possible. Animal rescue teams complain that where once they found maimed koalas and other animals, now fires burn so hot that established wildlife colonies vanish - vaporised into puffballs of smoke, with no trace.

And with far too few burn offs, southern Australia's native animals are facing just such agonising deaths faces and our citizens calamity. But, for some spookily magical reason, the island seems to have saved itself.

The old burn offs are back, like those that once the Wulgurakaba or the canoe people lit before the nor easterly monsoon winds...

In those days the island was called Yuendemu, and according to Wulgurukaba legend, the monsoon winds filled the sails of head-hunters and cannibals from PNG and the Torres Strait, sailing south on a human hunting trip. Before the sails of enemy outriggers appeared on the horizon, the Wulgurukaba had paddled or swum to the mainland to disappear into the hinterland, to escape the expert hunters of humans.



It was not far for the Wulgurukaba to swim or paddle to safety. Before dredges dug a shipping channel, a sandbank extended to within a few hundred metres of the island at low tide. Instead of the Wulgurukaba with their torches, this spring it was a national park helicopter that adapted the old fire-stick farming ways to make the island safe.

The chopper dropped about 126 incendiary devices or "dragon's eggs" along ridges when there was little wind. It was done in several stages over about a month, starting at the northern end.

No one expected every egg to catch – but they did, as fuel loads had not been thoroughly reduced for about eight years. The burn off was textbook perfect. Flames moved down from mountain ridges at a snail's pace, keeping to the undergrowth and leaf litter.

Firefighters easily extinguished the fire when it reached flat land where there is a population of about 3,000 permanent residents and hundreds of holiday visitors in hotels, hostels and bed and breakfasts

There was lots of smoke; but no wildlife casualties, and no property damage, trauma, injury or death.



A visit yesterday to my favourite koala colony found five, including two babies, all happily dozing in the treetops in a balmy late afternoon breeze, blissfully unaware of the fate awaiting their mainland rellies.

John Barilaro

Deputy Premier Member for Monaro Leader of the NSW National's And does not support Volunteer Firefighters!



Giovanni Domenic "John" Barilaro (born 14 November 1971, is the 18th Deputy Premier of New South Wales and currently the NSW Leader of The Nationals since November 2016.

John Barilaro was born in Queanbeyan, after leaving school he worked on the factory floor of his family's business. Before entering politics, he managed Ryleho, a business that manufactures energy efficient timber windows and doors. He's always been active in his local community; campaigning for a high school for the growing suburb of Jerrabomberra, helping to found the Monaro Panthers Football Club (soccer; of course) a decade ago, and then serving eight years as Club President.

John Barilaro was elected as an independent Councillor of the Queanbeyan City Council in 2008 and served on the Council until he ran for the National Party in the seat of Monaro at the 2011 state election.

Prior to his election to the seat in 2011, John Barilaro was always answering his phone to us, nothing was ever an issue (why are we not surprised), and never did he ignore us. When we held meetings at Murrumbateman, he was ALWAYS available & did attend.

He won the seat in March 2011 from incumbent Labor Minister, Steve Whan, with an 8.3 point swing to the NSW Nationals. Following the resignation of Andrew Stoner in October 2014, John Barilaro was appointed to the first Mike Baird ministry as the Minister for Small Business and the Minister for Regional Tourism. Mike Baird rearranged his ministry following the 2015 state election and John Barilaro was sworn in as the Minister for Regional Development, the Minister for Skills, and the Minister for Small Business in the second Mike Baird government.

On 15 November 2016, John Barilaro was elected unopposed as leader of the National Party in New South Wales, following the resignation of Troy Grant who himself as Deputy Premier did absolutely nothing for Volunteer Firefighters, except turn up for self-indulgent camera moments.

Following the resignation of Mike Baird and the election of Gladys Berejiklian as Leader of the New South Wales Liberal Party, John Barilaro led The NSW National's to form the Liberal-National coalition in the Berejiklian ministry that was sworn in on 23 January 2017



Image: Deputy Premier John Barilaro & Premier Gladys Berijiklian

continued DEPUTY PREMIER

At the March 2019 NSW State Election, even as the Coalition suffered a 3.6 percent swing against it and his own party lost four seats, John Barilaro was re-elected to the seat of Monaro.

Given the NSW National's website states; traditionally the Party represented graziers, farmers and rural voters. Today, the party stands for all regional communities – mums and dads, families, the retired, small business operators, sea changers and tree changers, students, and anyone in between.

It should have concluded with the words; but *NOT Volunteer Firefighters*.

It's incredibly sad how we see our elected political representatives treat us these days. Like always, they promise you the world, they'll kiss babies at shopping centres & if cameras are involved, they'll turn up to the licking of a postage stamp, its absolute blah blah blah yet come election day, once they've got your tick in the box they'll forget your name in a flash & ignore you forever more.

And that is exactly what John Barilaro, Deputy Premier of NSW & Leader of the NSW National's has done to Volunteer Firefighters in NSW. We have corresponded with him on numerous occasions but to no avail, our Association President did meet with John Barilaro a few years ago in his Sydney office along with the man John Barilaro replaced, Troy Grant, however Troy Grant quickly tried the stand over tactics upon our President, he tried the big bully boy attitude but our President wasn't fazed in any way, in fact, he wasn't surprised at the attitude one iota because it's what we've come to expect from the NSW Nationals except we would note, from Melinda Pavey.

Prior to the March 2011 State Election, Melinda Pavey (now Water Minister) held the role of Shadow Emergency Services & she knew her role better than anyone we've seen to date. We collectively didn't agree on everything but no one can expect to have agreement on everything, we did have a healthy constructive working relationship with Melinda & that's what we appreciated most in her.

She was smart, she knew her stuff, she knew the portfolio incredibly well & she knew it by getting out & about meeting the Volunteers right around NSW, she was liked by those she came into contact with but most importantly, she knew about the rot within the running of the Rural Fire Service & she was clearly determined to clean it up.....but sadly once this Government came to power on Saturday March 26th 2011, under Barry O'Farrell & Andrew Stoner, for whatever reasons, when O'Farrell announced his new Ministry on Sunday April 3rd 2011, Melinda Pavey was denied what was rightfully her well earnt role.

Mike Gallacher MLC was given the Emergency Service's role, it was piggy backed onto his role as Police Minister & at a meeting in his office at Governor Macquarie Tower @ 10am Monday September 5th 2011, Mike Gallagher told this association;

"Gentlemen, I simply don't have time for the role of Emergency Services but my staff are here today to listen to your concerns & do whatever they can for you"

- ultimately they did nothing.



Image: Melinda Pavey, former Shadow Emergency Services now Water Minister.



Image: Mike Gallacher, former MLC & Emergency Services Minister.

Continued on next page >>

DEPUTY PREMIER continued

As you would have all read throughout the last two editions of this magazine, we have an RFS Volunteer Firefighter who was wrongly charged by Police on the direction of the RFS, the allegation statement provided came from a now former RFS Group Officer, the Volunteer was charged, he spent four days in a local court, he then spent a full day in the Sydney District Court where upon appeal, he was cleared of any wrong doing, completely exonerated of any wrong doing but left with a legal debt of \$105,339.20 & continues to fight the RFS for compensation of his huge legal case. John Barilaro told our Association President Mick Holton that, this situation is simply appalling & after the election I will intervene to help you....but you guessed it, John Barilaro doesn't answer his phone anymore nor answer messages left.

Surprise Surprise

In June 2019 at the NSW National's conference held in Lismore, John Barilaro stated:

"The title of Deputy Premier means I am subservient to a Premier who is leader of another party, which makes it difficult to assert our brand." The brand you had Mr. Barilaro is now gone, the people of the bush have woken, the wider NSW public have woken & Volunteer Firefighters have woken. In 2016, the Nat's lost Orange, in 2019 the Nat's lost Barwon & Riverina....which seats will be next Mr. B?

On July 11th this year, we contacted John Barilaro's electorate office in Queanbeyan & asked one of his staffers if they could get John to please return our numerous calls to him, the young man said he would have John contact us....but just as we expected, nothing.

This is just but one of the many varied reasons people right across NSW have deserted the Nat's, they simply don't care anymore, it's no longer about the people of the bush or the man on the land, he's been forgotten, it's simply about me me me & how they as mainstream politicians can speak the words we want to hear (simply to shut us up), lap up the cameras for self-promotion, then milk the fiscal tax payer funded cow as best they can.

What's even more disappointing about Mr. Barilaro is throughout these most devastating bushfires impacting the Northern Region, specifically the Mid North Coast, Mr. Barilaro has been spruiking that the "fuel" that's on the floor of the National Parks, the branches, the undergrowth and the leaves, has not been adequately burnt back.

Really Mr. Barilaro?

You & your Government has known about all this since you collectively came to power in March 2011 & you've collectively ignored our calls.

On behalf of our members, we would like to thank Deputy Premier, Mr. Giovanni Domenic "John" Barilaro, for his total lack of consideration of the needs of our Volunteer Firefighters across NSW during his tenure as an MP of the State of NSW, especially for the lack of care, the absence of consideration & compassion of the situation one RFS Volunteer found himself

in, no thanks of course to the hierarchy of the NSW Rural Fire Service's upper Management. Oh how proud we Volunteers are to serve you...



Image: John Barilaro, our NSW Deputy Premier

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TRUNDLE



Potato Point could very well become a, Haming Hell

UR WILD Australian bushland is a magnificent natural feature. Many of us have chosen to live close to nature enjoying the peace and tranquility and walking forest trails. It both fascinates and enthralls us with its natural beauty and appealing ruggedness. It's a magnificent part of the Australian landscape admired by us all.

But. In hot and dry conditions, our fuel-laden forests can turn into a deadly and unstoppable killer. In NSW so far this bushfire season, 4 people have died and more than 400 homes have been destroyed in some 56 bushfires.

Much of this impact can be dramatically reduced by adopting relatively simple and low-cost fire mitigation efforts. This requires a plan and action to protect our properties and loved ones <u>before</u> disaster strikes. Allowing combustible material to grow close to homes is inviting disaster. If a fire can be fueled by the trees and vegetation on our properties and potentially cause harm to our neighbor's, we have a community responsibility to do all you can to reduce these dangers.

I witnessed the 2003 Canberra bushfires and have never felt so much fear about the roaring power of flames, burning embers and



heat. It was a miracle that our Tuggeranong Valley home on top of a hill backing a reserve was spared. The flaming hell split left and right and roared past us.

I subsequently volunteered as a member of the ACT Government's Canberra Bushfire Recovery Appeal Board to raise funds for the people affected by the fire. Millions was raised in a nationwide appeal and every dollar was distributed to those in need without a cent spent on costs or overheads. The Coroner's Report on the Canberra Bushfire was critical of the lack of hazard reduction conducted in the many years before the fire. These comments are repeated ad nauseum in almost every inquiry after a bushfire has caused loss of life and destruction of property. A willful lack of preparation that increases the fire dangers runs through many communities.

We have a tendency to ignore or underestimate the bushfire

danger when it hasn't happened recently enough to us so that it's singed into our memory.

Potato Point, a small isolated village in southern NSW, narrowly averted disaster in 1985 when a major bushfire was stopped by a grassland firebreak that stretched 500 metres from the village boundary. Since that time forest regrowth has completely overtaken the previous firebreak and grown to the very edge of the village.

Despite major efforts over the last 9 years to have National Parks and Wildlife Services (NPWS) recognize the ever-present threatening danger and to renew the protection we had before, they have refused. This protective firebreak is low cost and nothing more and nothing less than we had before. It is not a new fire break but simply the restoration of what was there before. In fact, NPWS have spent many times more money than a fire break would cost on stultifying and negative reports justifying their refusal to restore the fire break.

Potato Point is extremely vulnerable to bushfires with just one access road into the village which would be quickly cut in the event of fire.

One of the world's most respected fire experts, former head of the CSIRO's bushfire research unit and one of the pioneers of prescribed burning, Phil Chaney, has reviewed the Potato Point landscape

and in particular its vulnerability to bushfires. He concluded that hazard-reduction is vital to reduce the intensity of flames. His perceptive observations also noted that, "... if you own the fuel you own the fire...".

Fuel loads over eight tonnes a hectare are considered a fire hazard. A fourfold increase in ground fuel loads results in a thirteen fold increase in the heat generated by fire. In the forests surrounding Potato Point fuel loads have been measured in excess of 40 tonnes a hectare. This is 5 times the amount considered a "fire hazard". These fuel loads continue to build up in the absence of serious hazard reduction or prescribed burning to reduce their volume.

Aboriginal communities have a long history of understanding the benefits of managing fire. Australian National University professor Bill Gammage, an expert of traditional Aboriginal burning



says, "Fire can be used for one of three outcomes. The first to encourage native grasses to regenerate and produce new feed, the second to reduce scrub and fuel to prevent intense bushfires, and thirdly to promote biodiversity".

The overwhelming majority of bushfires start in national parks, state forests or other public land. The responsibility for fires caused or exacerbated by the fuel loads in these areas therefore rests with the owners of this land.

While there have been some attempts at hazard reduction around Potato Point, efforts to date have been ineffective.

Moreover, instead of an independent assessment to verify the



effectiveness of hazard reduction, self-assessment results in an all too convenient report up the management chain to say, "... that burn was completely successful, and we did a great job...". Experienced locals know that this is not the case and the bushfire dangers remain high and growing.

Yes-Minister inactions and bureaucratic obfuscation with opportunistic blame sheeted to "climate change" and "unprecedented" weather do nothing to address the issues and are no substitute for the required and methodical prescribed burning.

Politicians and bureaucrats are quick to take action after a bushfire but seem determined to find any excuse for avoiding pro-active defensive measures when they are needed - now.

Gary Green.

* Potato Point is a village in the Eurobodalla Shire lying on the south coast of New South Wales, Australia. It is connected by road to the town of Bodalla, and surrounded by the Eurobodalla National Park. The Yuin are considered to be the traditional owners of the region.

Roy Butler

NSW Member for Barwon



This time last year, I was knee deep in the election campaign for the seat of Barwon. A hard slog over many months that saw me visit every town and community (bar three) in the largest electorate in NSW.

It's a true honour that the people of Barwon placed their trust in me and voted me into NSW Parliament. People often ask me why I decided to run for Barwon. It is a good question I watched jobs disappear from our community; I saw shopfronts close and the population decline. The only opportunity I saw to change things was to be an unrestricted voice in Parliament.

This year I have been standing up and fighting for the future of Barwon communities - sending a message to Government that western NSW is no longer going to accept neglect and the pulling of services and funding from our communities.

At present, there is no greater issue affecting the lives of everyone



who lives in the west and far west of this State than the than this devastating drought.

The drought came off the farm many months ago, its affecting our communities and businesses at a level never seen before. Along with my Shooters Fishers and Farmers colleagues, I have been calling for direct support

to our farmers, communities, and businesses since week one in Parliament. I won't stop until we see real support for our communities.

Alongside calling for increased drought support, I have been highlighting issues with health care in regional NSW. Shockingly in the far west of the Barwon electorate people can expect to live six and a half years less than people do in Sydney. Twenty years ago people in the far west lived two years longer than people in the

With the high level of monitoring the health system is under you have to ask - how has this been allowed to happen? What has the Government been doing?

In Barwon, there are hospitals that cannot deliver basic services like setting a fracture or performing minor surgeries so people are put in ambulances and sent to hospitals hours away. For too long people in Barwon have put up with this poor service, but I'm

I'm pushing for a healthcare system in the west that delivers for our communities, patients, carers and families because at the end of the day it's people's lives we are talking about. I do not accept that poor health outcomes are the price people must pay for living in the country. The Government cannot continue to put regional health care in the too hard basket.

I'll continue raising the issues impacting people in the Barwon electorate, and continue the fight for better in 2020.

From my family to yours, have a Merry Christmas and a Happy New Year!

To all our Volunteers across the State - thank you for your dedication to our communities, stay safe out there and look out for your mates.

Roy

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Belowra Station Opening

Saturday August 3rd, 2019



New Station – It's so good to see the words "for our community"

still in use, since it disappeared from most RFS letterheads and signage.

ELOWRA RURAL FIRE BRIGADE was one of the first Brigades formed in the Eurobodalla Shire. The grand opening of their first ever "official" Station was widely attended and supported by people from far and wide and included fellow volunteers, dignitaries and members of the public.

There have been two 'un-official' stations in the past, one of which for many years was a bay in the present Captains Machinery Shed and more recently a one bay Station designed, funded and built by members.

The beautiful and remote Belowra Valley on the headwaters of the Tuross River is situated about one hour west of Bodalla and the Princes Highway. It is accessed from the East through the old Gold Mining Town of Nerrigundah. The road consists mainly of fire trails

meandering through mountainous areas of Forestry & National Parks before descending into the open grazing land of the Valley. There are 12 or so homesteads in the 6000+ha brigade area and to the west is the escarpment climbing up to Cooma, Captains Flat and Braidwood. Telephone is available but the power grid does not extend further than Nerrigundah which is also the closest Brigade backup and is some 40 minutes response time from the Valley.

There is no township nor are there any public buildings and the Valley was first settled by those seeking pastures suitable for running sheep and cattle. Other than a few smallholdings these pursuits remain to this day.

The members at Belowra are as diverse as many larger coastal

Brigades with members drawn from the farming community, Nurses, Educators, Naval Officer, Business Owners, Cartographer &Radiographer. The common factor is that they come together to serve the Community and assist those around them. Belowra Brigade over many years has been able to respond to many small fires caused by lightning strikes or campfires in rugged terrain, and contain or extinguish them long before they became unmanageable and threatened the highly populated coastal villages to the east. The earliest assistance they could expect would take a minimum of 40 minutes to arrive and their

early attack often meant fires with a catastrophic potential were

dealt with quickly and without having to commit a huge amount of

Image: Some of the large crowd attending the opening

Rural Fire Service Assistant Commissioner McKechnie officiated at the Station Opening and presented Service Medals and Awards to Belowra members and other members of Eurobodalla Shire Brigades. He was assisted by former Chief Supt. Ken Hall (at the time, Region South Manager), Eurobodalla Shire Councilors Phil Constable & James Thomson & Bega Valley Manager J. Cullen.



Assistant Commissioner Peter McKechnie congratulated the members for the service they have given and continue to give to the community and acknowledged individual Belowra members achievements. Captain Ewan Thomson it was noted had served for 50 years as Captain and had been a member for a total of 61 years with his wife Kaye clocking up 40 years as a crew member and admin office holder.

Image: Brigade Captain of 50 years, Mr. Ewan Thomson, addressing dignitaries and visitors along with District Manager J. Cullen

BELOWRA STATION OPENING continued

Ewan spoke on behalf of the Brigade and thanked all who attended and those who had assisted with the Station planning and construction.

At the end of the Opening and Presentations a sumptuous Luncheon was enjoyed by all present after being prepared by the hardworking members of the Eurobodalla Catering Brigade. The Volunteer Fire Fighters Association congratulate Belowra on the opening of their new Station and also the NSWRFS & Eurobodalla Shire for providing this great facility to a remote Brigade who carry on the determination and qualities that were instrumental in the formation of the NSW Bush Fire Brigades so long ago.



Image: Former Chief Supt Ken Hall, Captain Ewan Thomson, Asst. Comm. Peter McKechnie & J. Cullen FCO Bega Valley.



Image: L L. to R: Cr Phil Constable, F/F & Brigade Secretary, Sue-Ellen Misfeld, Cr James Thomson & Asst. Comm. Peter McKechnie.



Image: On left, Brigade F/F Kay Thomson.

Continued on next page >>

BELOWRA STATION OPENING continued



Image: On left, Snr. Dep Capt. David (Joe) Byard



Image: On left, F/F Robbie Broomham



Image: On left, Brigade F/F Chris Roberts



Image: Captain Ewan Thomson & Ass.Commissioner Peter McKechnie unveil the Station Plaque



Image: On Left, Brigade F/F Val Byard



Image: Award Recipients from Belowra & other Eurobodalla Brigades

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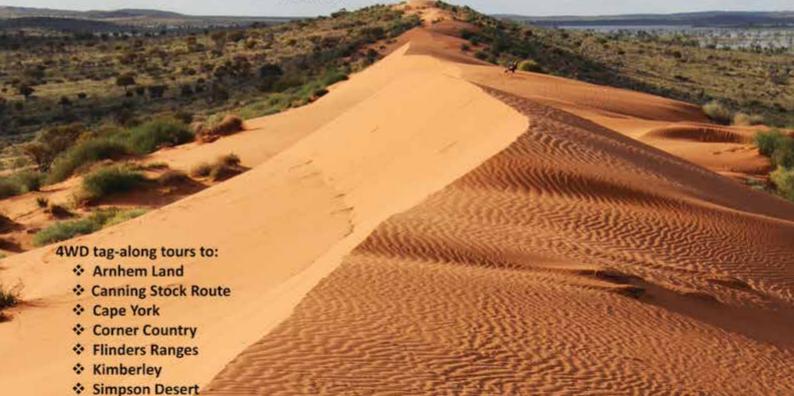


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Driving on Mars

By Vic Widman of Great Divide Tours

Have you ever thought what it might be like to drive on Mars? or maybe the Moon? Well, I agree, it's probably isn't a thought train that most people will have. But if you ever did wonder what the conditions might be like in a totally alien environment, I think I've found a place on Earth where you can experience it -Iceland!

Last June I was lucky enough to be given the opportunity to experience first hand the driving conditions that might be considered close to an out of this world experience. In fact, I even drove down a valley that the first Moon landing astronauts visited to simulate what the environment might be like on the Moon way back in the 1960's.

My four wheel drive touring company, Great Divide Tours, has been exploring Australia for 30 years now and in recent times we have ventured further afield to places such as New Zealand, Namibia and Botswana. Each of these locations hold their own attraction either via dramatic scenery or roaming wild beasts. The scenery on our New Zealand tour is hard to beat, but now that I have driven around and over Iceland, a whole new list of superlatives is needed from the English

language to describe this out of Earth experience.

The biggest battle with this trip was getting there. Iceland is a long long way from Australia! As a minimum you are looking at 30+ hours of travel, mostly sitting

cramped in economy class on long haul plane flights. I've done that once now and never again will I try to get to the other side of the world in one continuous travel regime.

Iceland is a small island about the size of Tasmania just below the Arctic Circle north of Norway and England. For 8 months of the year it lives up to its name and is basically snowed under. My visit was in June which is of course the northern hemispheres summer.

As a result, the first uncanny situation that I had to become accustomed to was the total lack of darkness. Being in Iceland on 20 June (the shortest daylight hours here in Australia) meant the sun only set below the horizon for 34 minutes! Yep, it did



not get dark at all. Waking at 3 am and looking out my hotel window to see the sun shining was pretty weird.

I had taken a group of Aussies over to experience a 12 day 4wd tour around Iceland, (how else did you think I could afford this - things are very expensive in Iceland, as everything is flown in). To add to this adventure we had contracted a company known as Arctic Trucks to supply the self drive vehicles and a local tour guide. You may have seen the Arctic Trucks on an episode of Top Gear when those crazy presenters drove these red 4wdrives on giant wheels up a glacier.

Well, that wasn't just for the TV show, they really do have 4wdrives on giant wheels and really do drive over glaciers. I know because that is exactly what we did!



Arctic Trucks is like another vehicle manufacturer in Iceland and Europe. They take standard style 4wdrives such as Hilux, Navara, Prado etc and perform all manner of serious modifications to them including the fitting of 38-44 inch wheels and tyres (the tyres are specially manufactured for them in China) they extend drive shafts, cut body work, change gear ratios, add on board compressors with self inflating tyres etc etc. About 25% of the vehicles driving around Iceland are 4wdrives sitting on giant wheels. When you remember that for the most part of the year the island is under metres of snow, you begin to

Even though our trip was smack in the middle of the year, some of our planned roads were still under snow. In one spot we drove along a snow ploughed road with the ice and snow towering above the roof of the raised Hilux either side of it. (As a foot note to this, I had a second group do this exact same trip 3 weeks later and all that snow in that part of the country had melted).

understand why this is commonplace.

In geographical terms, Iceland is a relatively new country. Australia on the other hand has been around a lot longer, hence why we really don't have mountains and have a lot of sandy deserts, it's all been weathered away. But in Iceland the country is still growing. Active volcanoes abound (the last eruption was 10 years ago). The island sits astride two tectonic plates which just happen to be pulling in the opposite direction, so Iceland is being stretched apart. We stood looking down into the gaping chasm caused by the pulling apart of the Island, you can't do that in too many places!

Because Iceland is made up of many volcanoes, and is such a young country, the landscape is about as hostile as it can get. Hence the reference to driving on Mars. We drove down valleys filled with volcanic ash, which is fine if it's a calm day, but when the wind blows, the ash lifts and fills the atmosphere. On one such day we met another group of drivers coming up the valley and they strongly advised us to turn back as high winds were whipping up so much ash and black sand that they

said we risked our 4wdrives' paint being stripped from the doors! We took their advice.

There are numerous hot springs, geysers, boiling mud pools and stinking gases scattered around this volatile landscape. But the overwhelming sight was the presence of lots and lots of waterfalls. With so much snow melt occurring in Summer, water just cascades off every mountain top, every valley runs with water, and the numerous jagged cliff faces that line these valleys simply overflow with waterfalls. You will possibly adopt the comment of "not another waterfall!".

However, despite the many highlights of this trip, the one that stood out for me was driving on a glacier! As you approach the glacier over the giant boulders that it has previously scrunched up and spat out, the overwhelming size of this giant sheet of ice is awe inspiring. The lifted red Hilux looked miniscule in this location. Incredibly, our guide advised us to drop tyre pressure on the giant 38's to just 4 psi!

Continued on next page >>



The Volunteer FireFighter Summer 2019















More photos on next page >>



Engage low range and both front and rear diff locks and away we went. What an amazing experience!

We drove for about 2 kilometres up the face of the glacier often in half a metre of deep snow. This led us to an ice cave carved into the glacier where we donned water proof clothing, cleats on our water proof over boots and beanies and gloves to then walk for a kilometre under the glacier. That was pretty cool!

Iceland was an amazing experience and only one more thing could have made it better, seeing the northern lights, but with 24 hrs of sunlight, that was never going to happen. So, you guessed it, I plan to return in 2020 a little later in the year so I can have some dark skies at night which might reveal the beautiful blue/green light show while we drive across a landscape similar to Mars or the Moon. You can see all the details on this trip at www.4wd. net.au

Vic Widman is the owner of Great Divide Tours based in Sydney where he provides 4wd tagalong tours all over the world and 4wd training to nationally recognised levels at his purpose built 4wd training facility near Braidwood, NSW.

www.4wd.net.au





DRIVING ON MARS continued

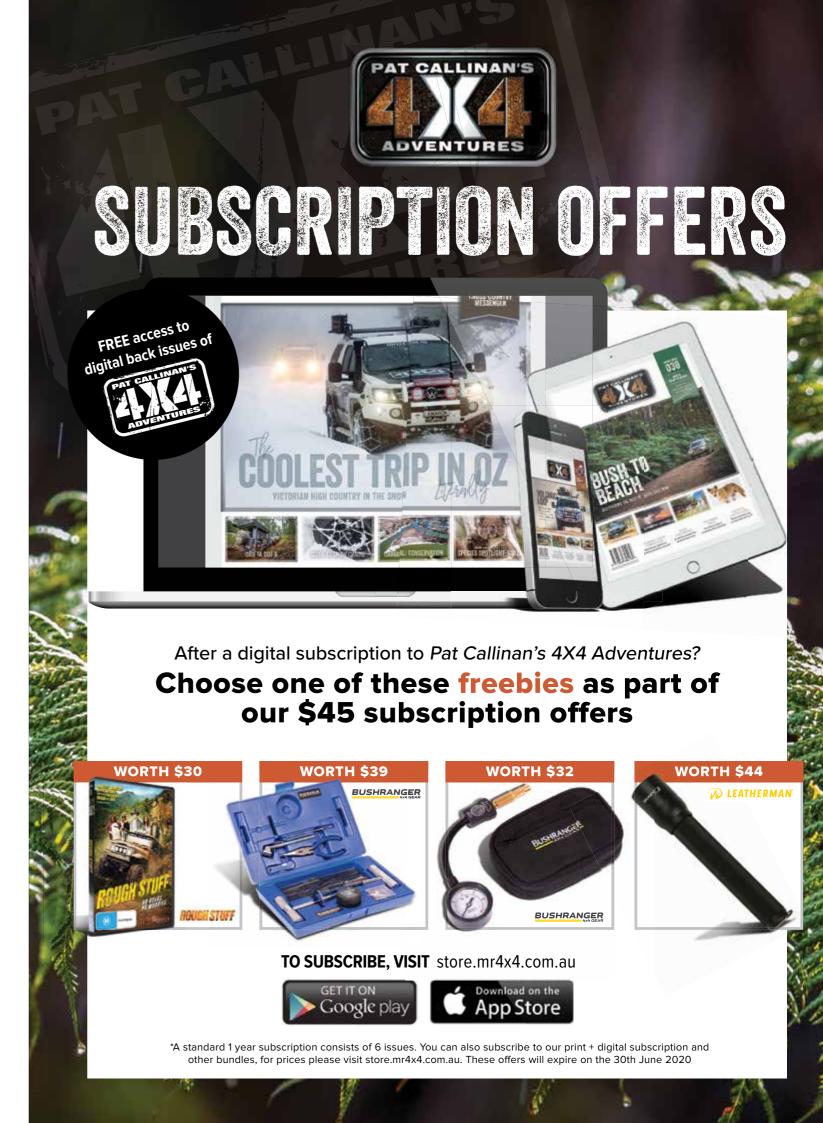


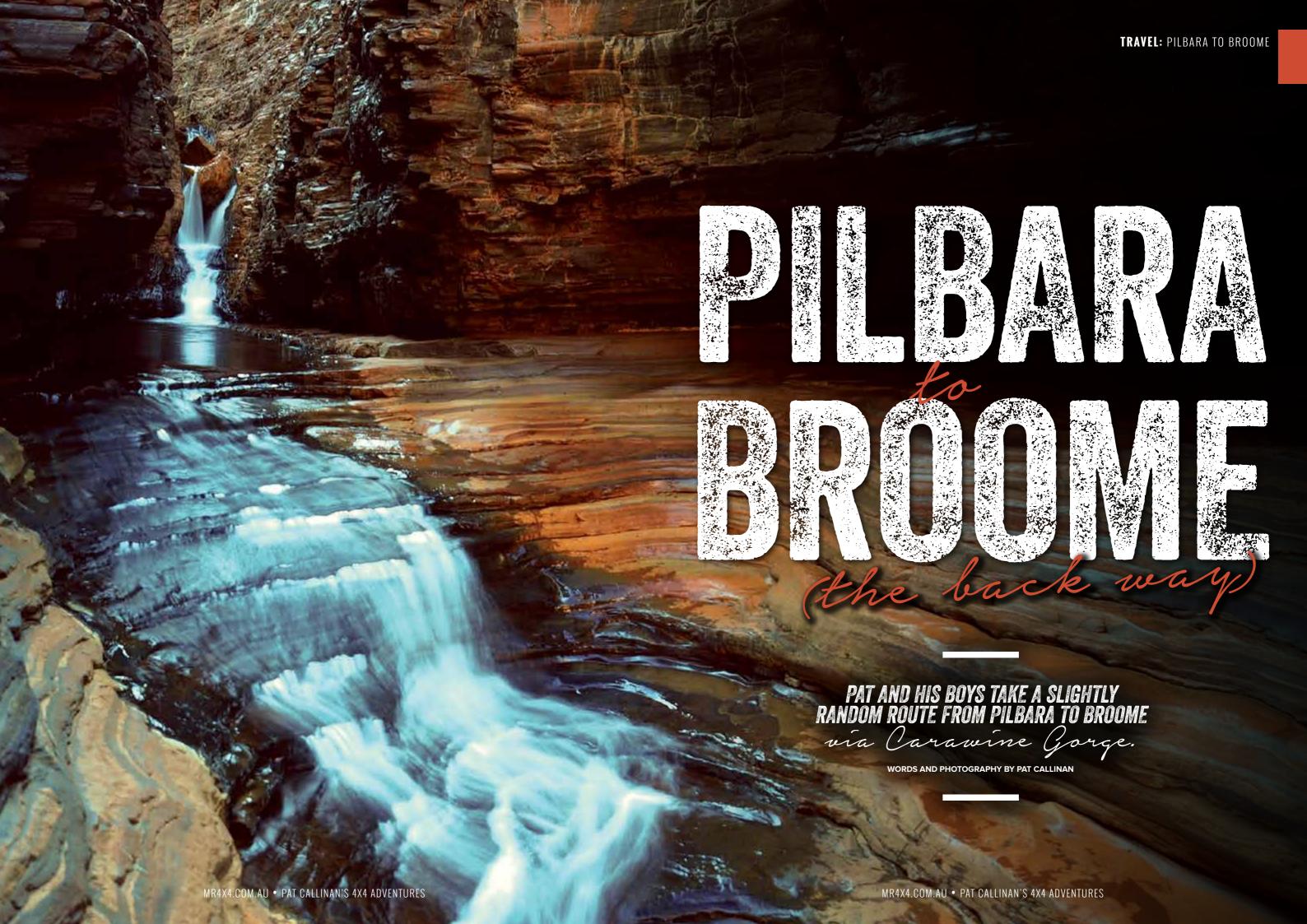










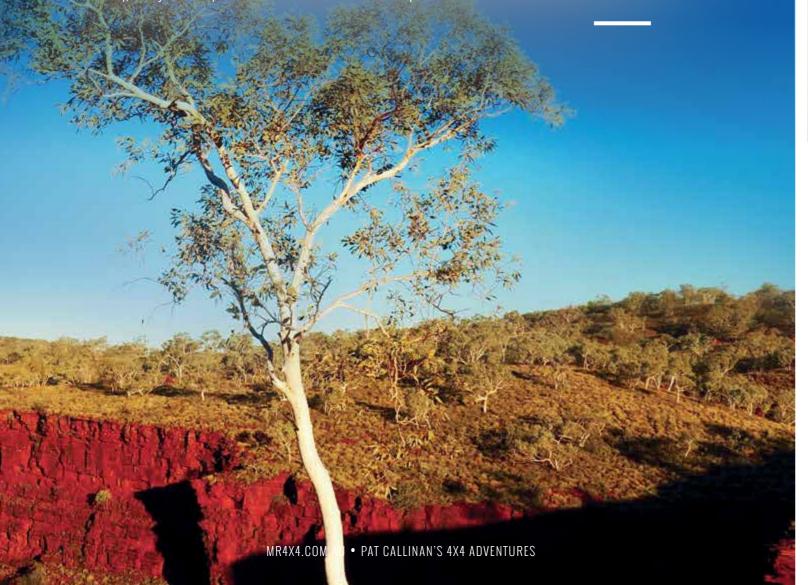


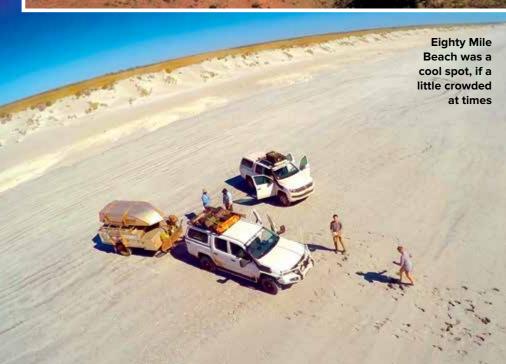
In the words of Lang Hancock ...

"In November 1952, I was flying down south with my wife Hope, and we left a bit later than usual and by the time we got over the Hamersley Ranges, the clouds had formed and the ceiling got lower and lower. I got into the Turner River, knowing full well if I followed it through I would come out into the Ashburton. On going through a gorge in the Turner River, I noticed that the walls looked to me to be solid iron and was particularly alerted by the rusty-looking colour of it; it showed to me to be oxidised iron."

One of the reasons I travel is for the love of colours. Nature's colour palette is infinitely more diverse and interesting than anything a mere human could dream up. And few 4X4 journeys could offer more colour diversity than a journey from the rich ochre reds of the Pilbara to the white sands of Eighty Mile Beach to the sunsets of Broome. And don't get me started on those turquoise coastal waters ... it's like turning up the saturation in Photoshop to eleventeen; the only difference being that this time, the colours aren't fake.

This little adventure begins in a region pioneered by the Hancock family around Western Australia's Tom Price, the Hamersley Ranges. Flying over the region in the 1950s, it became apparent to Lang Hancock that both the colours and the formations meant that something special was happening at ground level. And while there is plenty of evidence of open-cut mining now (just take a drive up Mt Nameless), many of the special scenic features have been preserved.







The access track up to Mt Nameless sits just a few kilometres outside of Tom Price, and it's a superb start to this 4X4 journey. The wide red track winds its way up the mountain, promising better and better views the further you go. It's not overly challenging and could be tackled in high range, although low range (or Hill Descent Control) is an advantage when descending.

On arrival at the summit of what is Western Australia's second-highest peak, the views are breathtaking. Look one way and you'll see the ragged spines of the Hamersley Ranges; look the other and you'll spy open-cut examples of what is thought to be the world's largest iron ore deposit.

The population of Tom Price sits at around 2,500, and as a result the shopping for supplies is easy. So we stocked up at Coles with all the essentials before pointing the Amarok bonnets towards Karijini National Park. I had been here before, but my boys Bill and Gus had not – so I couldn't wait for them to explore this natural wonderland. And hey, what Aussie boy doesn't like to swim and jump off rocks?

We drove straight to Hancock Gorge to start exploring. After a short walk, we were soon descending galvanised steel ladders onto the floor of the gorge. Away from the sun, it was cooler down here ... and we were soon skirting the side of the shallow waterway and jumping on stepping stones. But you can only do that for so long before you have to commit to walking through the waterhole.

The frigid water came up to my thigh, which was exhilarating; but not in a good way.

Further along, we clambered along skinny rock ledges to avoid the deeper sections of pools. Then, rounding the corner which is shaped like an amphitheatre, the Spiderwalk began. With a creek running between your legs, you're forced to clamber like a spider, spreading your hands and feet out on the walls. It's loads of fun, and quite slippery. Then you delve deeper into the darkening gorge and pop out at Kermit's Pool.



TRAVEL: PILBARA TO BROOME

2





We stayed there for half an hour as the boys jumped, splashed and pushed each other in time and time again. You've gotta love kids – the water was freezing, and they couldn't have cared less. The gorge continues on and looks even more spectacular – but from here on in, it's abseiling only. Incidentally, be sure to pack your wet shoes on this walk ... because you will get wet. And

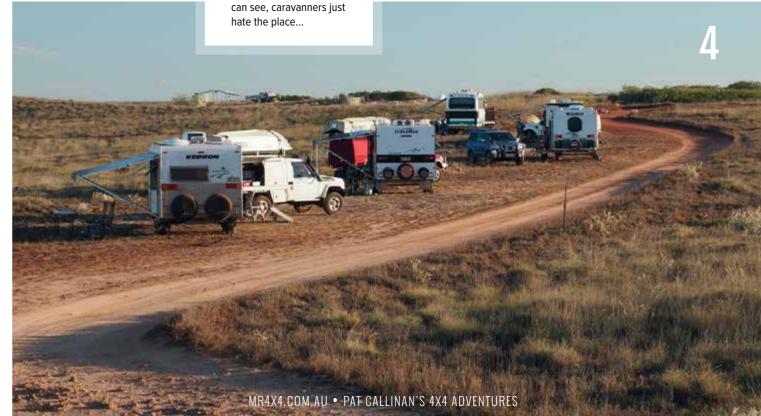
keep an eye on the weather forecast as there is no fast way out

of the gorge, and flash floods have taken lives down here.

That evening we camped at the Karijini Eco Retreat. It's a well-run campground that even has a bar and casual restaurant, but we opted to cook for ourselves back at camp. Barbeques are supplied, so we took full advantage of the amenities (including the hot showers).

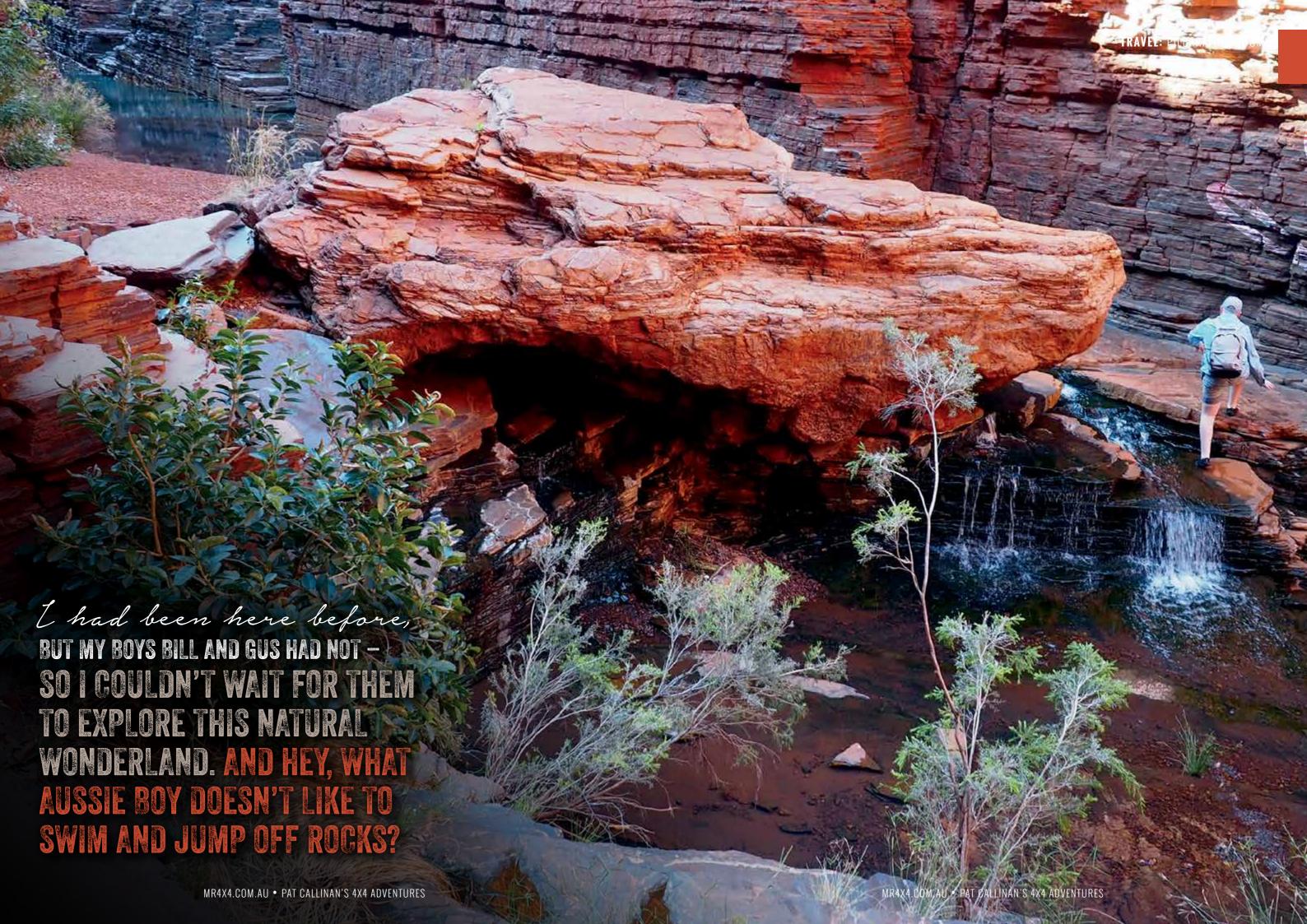
There are loads more things to see in Karijini, and I would recommend you staying at least five days; but our schedule kept us moving. So it was off to Newman, and then up to Carawine Gorge. If you say it fast, it sounds short. It's not. It was one of those legs that I underestimated, and we ended up camping by the side of the track around 20 kilometres south of Nullagine.





Cape Keraudren Style

Cape Keraudren sits
at the southern end of
Eighty Mile Beach. As you











The next day, we jumped on a tour of the Comet Gold Mine, which was particularly interesting. Although even more interesting was to discover that the 'Marble' they refer to in the name 'Marble Bar' was, well, a mistake. While the rock formation at the river looks to be marble, it's actually a jasper bar. Bummer. But I do love the fact there's no talk of changing the name. How very Australian. "She'll be apples maate! Just imagine reprintin' all those maps. Why bother?" Ha ha.

After a short stretch of bitumen, we took the smooth gravel Goldsworthy Road out towards the coast. Near the Pardoo Roadhouse, we jumped on the gravel again to discover the beautiful Cape Keraudren – a caravanners' dream camp. The location alone is fantastic here, with the pretty cape being flanked by two beaches. On the south side, there is even a boat ramp. On the north side, the beach is long and white and you get to experience some of those legendary Kimberley tides (which at the time were running at about 11 metres).

We got lucky here, with a full moon and a great example of the legendary 'Staircase to the Moon'. This occurs when the moonlight reflects off the water, to reveal what looks to be a white staircase all the way up to the moon. Next morning, one of the local 'roos (which had been hand-reared) paid us a visit in return for bribes. Bread was the currency.

We met many lovely long-term campers here, and it was easy to see why they stay. Great fishing and crabbing, great beaches and beautiful sunsets. There's currently a 28-day cap on your stay at this location, but the locals are lobbying to make it longer.

From here on in, the miles were mowed down a lot faster thanks to the bitumen of the Great Northern

Highway. But we did opt to drive onto the famous 80 Mile Beach, at the access next to the caravan park. The sand here is stunning. So is the water colour. Although I must admit that its popularity (and the traffic) did turn me off a little. The park was bursting at the seams; and with loads of cars and quad bikes roaring up the beach, it was a bit of a disappointment. Hey, I don't like crowds unless I'm at a 4X4 show. You can't help but think that if there were more access points to the beach, this would be a more pleasant experience.

I'd have loved to have visited Broome in the 1950s and '60s before it was 'discovered', but despite its popularity it's still a worthwhile dot on your itinerary. Just don't bank on getting into a caravan park without and discovered that many parks were booked four months in advance. On top of that, free camps were non-existent within cooee of Broome, so we were forced to stay in villas in town. But everything has a silver lining – our accommodation was around the corner from Matso's Brewery – which produces one of my favourite drops in all of Australia. Try the Mango Beer ... I know, sounds weird, but it's a great way to end a hot day. Plus, my neighbour in the villa showered us with free freshly-cooked Derby mud crabs, so there was a significant upside to our town stay!

And what better way to end a journey than with a Cable Beach sunset: Those colours never get old.

Just drive your rig out onto the beach, and watch the crowds and the camels go by. Nope, the colours did not disappoint on this 4X4 journey; nor did the company.

I'll be back up here again for sure, to experience the extraordinary.





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TOWN IN FEATURE: CANOWINDRA continued TOWN IN FEATURE: CANOWINDRA continued

ANOWINDRA (pronounced; Canown-Dra) is a historic township located between Orange and Cowra in the central west of New South Wales, Australia, in Cabonne Shire. Canowindra is situated on the Belubula River. The curving main street, Gaskill Street, is partly an urban conservation area. At the 2016 census, Canowindra and the surrounding area had a population of 2,258. The name of the town is derived from an Aboriginal language (Wiradjuri) word meaning 'a home or 'camping place'

Prior to the arrival of Europeans to Australia, the area now known as Canowindra was occupied for tens of thousands of years by a people known as the Wiradjuri. These "people of the three rivers" were hunters and gatherers who exploited the resources available in the rivers and the lands, particularly the river flats.

EUROPEAN SETTLEMENT

The first land grant of 640 acres to a European in the area was to James Collits by Governor Ralph Darling in 1829 as a reward for "pointing out a line of road from Mt. York to Bathurst". Subsequently Collits' father, Pierce, was granted land adjacent to the original grant. There is some evidence that James (or

Image: Noel Butcher / Hot air balloons launching in Canowindra at sunrise for the

2015 International Balloon Challenge

the succeeding owner, Thomas Iceley) named the property "Canoundra". Collits owned other significant tracts of land in the area, together with a store and the first hotel. A settlement slowly grew, and as early as 1844 the village (now referred to as "Canowindra") was the site of a government pound.

A post office opened at Canowindra in 1847 with mail coming from Carcoar, but the village was handicapped as part of a main route to the lower Lachlan, first by the lack of a bridge and later by the construction of the railway to Orange. The first bridge across the Belubula River at Canowindra was opened on 28 July 1875. It was replaced by the Waddell Bridge in May 1901, and by the current John Grant Bridge in 1997.

In October 1863, Ben Hall's gang took over the village for three days

and entertained the whole population, as well as

some stray travellers, all herded into the

inn. An account of the

incident was reported in

the Bathurst Times, also

quoted in the Maitland

Mercury. According to

newspaper reports in

November 1863 and June

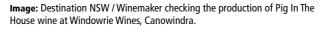
and his associates made two further visits to the town. A monument to Ben Hall, on the site of Robinson's inn, the Travellers' Rest, was erected in 1951, but evidently, further research has indicated that the events recorded here happened at the inn on the other side of the river.

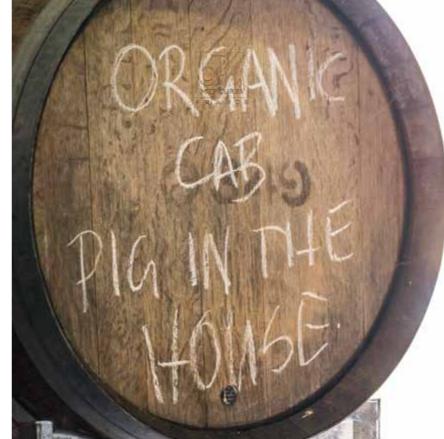
Today the main street, Gaskill Street, has an old-world air, with its kerbside veranda posts lining the dog-leg course of what was once a bullock team track. A total of 34 buildings and features in the town and environs are listed in the New South Wales State Heritage Register including 17 in or adjacent to Gaskill Street.

Image: Destination NSW / Food and wine available from

taste Canowindra's onsite restaurant.







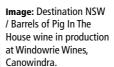
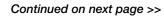




Image: Destination NSW / Hot air balloons flying over central NSW during the Canowindra International Balloon Challenge





SPORT AND RECREATION

A number of sports clubs provide facilities and organised competitions. Such sports include Rugby league (men and women's playing as Canowindra Tigers), Rugby union (Canowindra Pythons), Cricket (Canowindra Sixers), Tennis, Lawn Bowls, Squash, Golf and Swimming. For younger age groups there is a pony club which meets fortnightly at the showground and a Little Athletics centre which participates in the Central Tablelands zone.

The town has a council maintained sports oval with floodlighting, Tom Clyburn Oval.

At the oval there are well maintained fitness stations, basketball courts and skateboarding facilities.

A nine hole golf course is supported by a registered club.

Cabonne Council owns and operates the swimming pool which is open from late spring to mid-autumn.

RV FRIENDLY TOWN

Since 2016, Canowindra has been recognised by the Campervan and Motorhome Club of Australia (CMCA) as an RV Friendly Town™. It provides excellent facilities for caravaners and campers & includes low cost camp sites, it's just a walk across the road to easily access the retail area, access to water and a free user friendly waste dump point is also available.

Highly recommended.

WINERIES

Canowindra is considered to be part of the Cowra wine region, which is a subarea of the Central Ranges wine zone. There are eight wineries centred on the town, some of which offer cellar door sales.

Image: Destination NSW / Grapes on the vine at Rosnay Organic vineyard and orchards in Canowindra. Challenge.



goodwill.

Destination

NSW / Children

enjoying a visit

ACCOMMODATION

enjoy a quality night's sleep, excellent well

equipped rooms & yes, unlike others, they

still do a great Aussie breakfast delivered

to your Room, the hospitality is superb.

• The Old Vic Inn, a comfortable 3 star

Hotel in Gaskill Street where you'll find

• Belubula Ballooning - cosy country

accommodation provides air-conditioned

accommodations with a terrace and free

bathroom, a flat-screen TV, a dining area,

• Montrose House @ 71 Gaskill Street - two room comfortable rooms for Bed

& Breakfast with a luxurious bathroom &

complimentary breakfast at the Deli-Lama

Canowindra is also popularly known as

In April 1988 an endorsed bicentennial

Balloon Championships" was held in the

From 1995[49] to 2005, an event known

as Marti's Balloon Fiesta was held in

Canowindra. Funded in large part by Frank Hackett-Jones, it was primarily

a fun event designed to bring together

activity, "Canowindra 88 Bicentennial

Café just a few doors down.

the Balloon Capital of Australia.

Wi-Fi. The farm stay has 1 bedroom, 1

fully equipped kitchen & a patio with

mountain views.

BALLOONING

great food & country hospitality.

to the Age of Fishes Museum. Canowindra

Canowindra International Balloon Challenge is the largest ballooning event in Australia and takes place in Canowindra every April. In 2010, the Canowindra Challenge created a local balloon event that has since grown to where the event now attracts pilots and balloons from around the globe to build upon the principles of Marti's Fiesta, bringing businesses together to support a weeklong event of ballooning competitions and skill-based activities.

The use of location-enabled (GPS), point-of-view camera technologies was combined with live-to-web broadcasts via an online streaming platform for viewers to share in the spectacle and to join in the

A balloon glow is held as part of the event along with a local food and wine market based on the 100-mile principle where within 100 miles of Canowindra. The last Sunday of the event also features a

This event coincides with food and wine events which brings participation from the greater Cabonne and surrounding districts during April each yearCanowindra also hosted the Australian National Balloon Championships in 2011, 2013 (awarded silver at the NSW State Tourism Awards in the Festivals and Events category) and 2014, creating a larger, more competitive event.

In 2014, the event went fully international

balloonists and spectators from local, national and international locations in a celebration of Central West hospitality and

event virtually and for free.

the products must be made or produced key grab where pilots test their skill in an attempt to grab a large key from the top of a 10 m pole.

and the UK competing. PLACES TO EAT

with pilots from Japan, US, Russia, Brazil

Canowindra has plenty of great old Pubs, the Services Club, the Golf Club, the best part is the food is great, nothing like a good country Steak & the refreshments are cold. There's "Delice Coffee" & the Garden of Roses Café, in Canowindra you won't starve.

Goin Bush highly recommends you making a visit to the NSW Central West Town of Canowindra soon, why not make a visit over Christmas to a real country town filled with real country people that will say G'day & make you feel welcomed like never before. Get out of the big city, get out & enjoy yourself even for just a weekend, you won't wanna go home that we guarantee & besides, you'll be making a huge contribution towards supporting Rural NSW through this terrible drought.

Canowindra....put in in your "Must See"

Image: Destination NSW / Hot air balloons flying over central NSW in the Canowindra International Balloon



The Volunteer FireFighter Summer 2019

Goin? Bush

Learn how to 4wd from a book

By Vic Widman of Great Divide Tours

UR VERY OWN correspondent, Vic Widman, has just finished revising a book he originally wrote way back in 2001. When approached by the CSIRO to write a book on how to operate a 4wd vehicle, Vic thought the prospect of having enough to say on the subject would hardly qualify for a book. However, back in 2001 and after 55,000 words, Vic's book 4WD Driving Skills became the go to manual for those new to 4wdriving and those teaching it.

Things has changed considerably in the 4wd world since the early 2000's and this year Vic convinced the CSIRO that it was time to re-write his book. With Vic Widman now being considered one of Australia's leading 4wd trainers and having established the much applauded 4wd training centre near Braidwood in NSW, he saw the opportunity to not only bring all the data in his book up to date but address the ever demanding requirements of nationally recognised 4wd competencies that corporate clients demand.

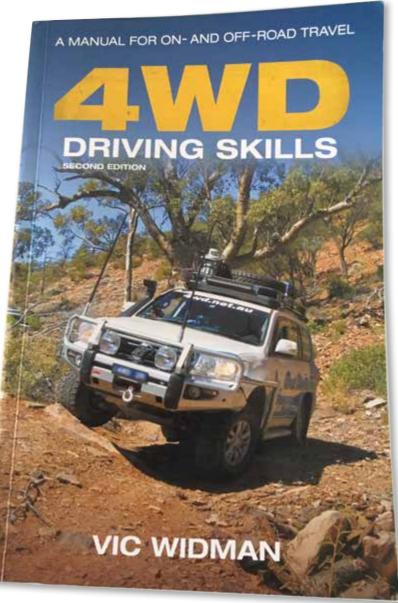
Released in December 2019, the 2nd Edition of 4WD Driving skills has grown in size with over 63,000 words of wisdom from this guru in the 4wd world. The book is now in full colour with some of Vic's fantastic photography which has been featured in the VFFA magazine for the past 4 years. The new book is aimed at both Mum's and Dad's and the corporate client.

It's easy reading style, in no fuss English language (Vic says if you have to grab a dictionary to look up a word, the author is missing the target audience) combined with the dot point summaries at the end of every chapter make this book easy going. Vic has also aimed the book at those that present nationally recognised training, he has made sure it has addressed all the required elements found in the various competencies that are available to the 4wd industry.

The book can be used for both Basic and Advanced levels of four wheel drive application, it also covers the many and varied 4wd recovery techniques and equipment that is available and carefully describes the

various types of 4wd systems that have now flooded the market. Vic has even shared some of his innermost secrets on how to drive a 4wd off road. The book is a must for anyone who drives a 4wdrive either as part of their work application or recreationally.

Available for \$39.95 plus postage from the CSIRO or directly from the author himself, Vic Widman, via email at info@4wd.net.au





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NSW MEMBER FOR MURRAY

Helen Dalton

NSW Member for Murray



I've always been a proud supporter of Volunteer Fire Fighters.

One thing I'm fighting for at the moment is better water management in the state....Jobs and lives are at stake in our small rural towns.

The company, Sun Rice, recently sacked 32 workers last month in Leeton and Deniliquin. That's 130 jobs lost over the past 12 months, due to lack of water allocation. This is the equivalent of 33,000 lost jobs in Sydney, given the respective populations. This is killing our towns.

The NSW Water Minister, Melinda Pavey, she could save further job losses with the stroke of a pen. A few simple rule changes would lift Murray River farmer water allocations from 0 per cent to 40 per cent.

For one, the Government could return so-called "voluntary contributions" to farmers.

Irrigators gave up a fixed percentage of their water entitlements in 2002, during wet times. In the current drought, Government should return this "stolen" water to farmers.

Secondly, natural water losses, like evaporation and seepage, are currently subtracted from farmers' productive water allocations. This makes no sense. This water loss should be netted off the environment – to increase farmers' allocation.

I also believe there is a need to declare a state of emergency, to force Government agencies to transport water to dry towns.

We also need to lift the secrecy over who owns our river water.

When I was elected, I was shocked to learn I didn't have to declare my water entitlements in the conflict of interest form they make MPs sign. I have to declare land, property, jobs and shares. But not water.

The first step in fixing our water problems is to have some transparency on who owns it. We know there are politicians, foreign governments, Sydney traders etc. who own water – and manipulate the water trade – but it's impossible to identify them.

Furthermore, the current online NSW Water Register prevents people from searching for the water entitlements of companies and individuals.

I'm introducing a bill to parliament to end the secrecy surrounding water ownership in NSW.



My Bill will:

- 1) Force NSW politicians to declare their water interests on our conflict of interest form.
- 2) Change the online water register to allow people to search for water holdings of people and companies.

I'll keep you updated on the progress of my Bill and fight for better water policy in the next edition.

Wishing all RFS Volunteers & their families a very Merry Christmas, a Happy 2020 & please stay safe where ever your fire calls take you.

Helen



It's so incredibly sad when RFS Volunteers start handing their Medals Back

OR ALL THE MISTREATMENTS of Volunteers by RFS
Salaried Officers that we continue to hear of, now we are
facing the lowest of lows when more & more, our fellow RFS
Volunteers are for a range of similar reasons, handing back their
National, Long Service and their Australian Fire Service Medals
(AFSM).

Recently at our AGM, we heard the story of one long serving RFS Volunteer who is so upset at having had their family members accused by the RFS, so deeply angered & feeling completely let down by the organisation of which their whole life has been devoted, they felt they could no longer bare to accept the AFSM & as such, have handed it back.

What on earth has this organisation come to?

Volunteers created this organisation over one hundred years ago, it was once fun to be a part of it but now sadly under our current leader, the fun has gone.

So many incredibly decent community minded people that give so much of themselves in order to keep everyone around them safe, yet are faced with endless situations of total stupidity that ultimately affects them within. The mental health issues forming among the wider membership of the NSW RFS should be deeply concerning to our NSW Premier.

To think that so many RFS Volunteers are being accused of actions, which lead them to being suspended, then investigated by the RFS's "Kangaroo Court Investigators" over a lengthy period of time only to be declared innocent of any wrong doing & basically told; Look let's forget it, can we just move on.

In one case, it affected the Volunteer so badly that the Commissioner even visited his home to pay him \$200.00 for the two GIPAA applications (Government Information Public Access Act 2009) that the Volunteer had paid for in order to get the truth behind the allegations labelled upon the Volunteer. The Volunteer is no longer contributing to the service due sadly to deteriorating

health, clearly not helped by the actions of the RFS & it's so called Investigators.

As we are discovering, morale across NSW is poor & Volunteers are deserting & let's not forget, whilst we know they have 70,000 names on their books, the real figures are more like 18,000 according to head office insiders. That brings us to the issue where one member contacted us to say his FCO was coming to visit to go over the current ACTIVE status of his brigade, as per Head Office's list. The first person's name he saw had apparently been dead for ten years; he said. The next was a woman that had left to have a baby, the baby is now in High School he told us & on it went to the point that he felt there were more dead people on the ACTIVE brigade list than there were people alive.

It's become a real mess & is anyone doing anything about it?

Look if you treat people poorly, they'll walk.....treat them with respect, fairness & make them know they are appreciated, they'll walk on hot coals for you.

Considering our Commissioner is on an almighty salary of \$420k per annum to "Support Us", we now believe its high time our Commissioner pulled up stumps & moved on. He's been there far too long, his ideas & his actions are stale and done with an added degree of arrogance & he won't dare communicate with anyone that doesn't want to sing from his song book.

He's supposed to be there for us, we're not there for him & we need fresh leadership at the top now to completely revitalise the RFS before it's too late.

Premier Berijiklian, are you listening & do you care at all?

NSW FARMERS



An early start to the Bush Fire Season – a real and ongoing challenge

NSW Farmers Rural

S I WRITE I am very conscious of the ongoing impact that the drought conditions are having on landholders and fire fighters alike.

On behalf of the NSW Farmers' Association I acknowledge the ongoing and selfless commitment of the RFS Volunteers and the Fire Service. Department of Primary Industries, and Local Land Services staff, who have come from across the State to fight the fires still burning across northern NSW and support those affected. It has been a very early and intense start of the fire season.

The fires that have burnt across Busby's Flat, Drake, Long Gully and Bees Nest have impacted many families and farm businesses, resulting in the loss of large numbers of animals as well as grazing land. This is a challenging situation for all involved.

The drought conditions mean that water

Garry Grant Affairs Committee Chair

approaching fire to protect key farm assets rather than control the fire. But these are decisions that have had to be made. In some situations, they have been the only decisions possible under such challenging conditions.

for fire-fighting is in short

strong winds and above

supply. The dry conditions,

average temperatures have

resulted in multiple, and in

some cases, catastrophic

fires that are testing us

all. It is at times difficult

to focus on managing an

Stock has been lost, but the community always gathers round to lend a helping hand. The fire-fighting community transcends local boundaries - when we are called, we respond. As a volunteer firefighter myself, it was difficult to read reports that calls for assistance apparently went unanswered. Such reporting was inconsistent with the response coming from the south, to fires in northern NSW and Queensland. Nevertheless, it is understandable that many volunteers have commitments, exacerbated by drought, that limit capacity for firefighting deployments over several days.

Over recent months the NSW Coroner has held public hearings into the Sir Ivan Doherty Road Fire in Leadville

in February 2017. By the time of publication the Coroner will have made recommendations. NSW Farmers looks forward to working with the NSW Rural Fire Service to inform implementation of these recommendations.

Effective management of fires begins a long time before a fire starts. Effective management relies on clear, effective and consistent communication. This doesn't happen in the midst of a fire. It must begin in the weeks, months and years before to build trust and understanding. All involved in fire management - be they employees or volunteers. Trust in critical incident decisions, when there is little time to explain is only achieved through local communication, understanding ideas, and trusting in local knowledge. That is what landholders, as volunteer firefighters bring to an active fire situation. Our aim is always to deliver the best outcome.

NSW Farmers members will continue to be available to work with the RFS before, during and after - to manage bushfires.









New email address? Have a new mobile phone?

Are your Membership Details up to date?

Quite often we move House, we change Email addresses or Phone numbers and we struggle to think of everything and everyone to notify of those changes.

The last thing we want is that you miss out on getting your Volunteer Firefighter Magazine and emailed Newsletters....and sadly some are.

Please send us any updated contact details to our Membership Officer at: membership@volunteerfirefighters.org.au

Head Office

Unit 12, 8 Leighton Place Hornsby NSW, 2077 Australia

Firefly Office

P.O BOX 52 Laidley QLD, 4341 Australia

Contact details

Phone: (07) 5411 4209 Mobile: 0400 966 899 Email: trevor@tbafirefly.com.au





BUSHFIRE SARKING





BAL-FZ WALL SYSTEM FLAME ZONE CONSTRUCTION





RADIANT HEAT SHIELDS - RFS

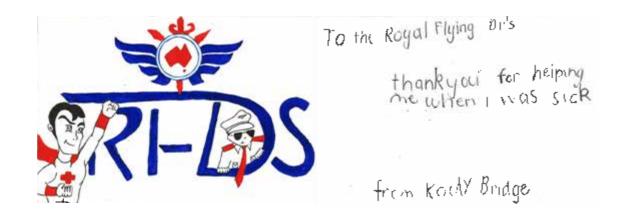
TBAFIREFLY.COM.

MORE THAN A TUMMY BUG

MORE THAN A TUMMY BUG continued

More than a tummy bug...

When seven-year-old Kody Bridge complained of stomach pains for over a week, his mum Toni knew there was something seriously wrong.



Kody had a stomach ache for days when his mum Toni took him to the hospital and local GP.

"It's probably just a viral infection," the doctor said.

But the pain didn't go away and he started to have other symptoms including a fever, diarrhea and vomiting.

"He was crying in pain and he wasn't eating or drinking, so I knew something wasn't right," Toni said.

Desperate to get help, Toni drove him for an hour from their farm near Ogunbil, in North West NSW, to the hospital in Tamworth.

At the hospital a scan showed Kody had a serious condition known as intussusception of the bowel and he needed help urgently.

When this happens one portion of the bowel slides into the next, like the pieces of a telescope. It causes intense abdominal pain and the intestine can swell and bleed, cutting off the blood supply and causing part of the bowel to die.

Although it is most common in infants, it is still rare and Kody is one of the few young children to be diagnosed with it.

With paediatric care unavailable at Tamworth Hospital, he had to be flown by the Royal Flying Doctor Service to the John Hunter Hospital in Newcastle for specialist care.

"It was Kody's first time in an airplane, and I'm not good at flying, but the doctors were so good. They made sure

Kody stayed calm and relaxed through the whole flight," Toni said.

When they arrived in Newcastle around 40 minutes later, Kody was relaxed and happy for the doctors to help him with a procedure that flushed out his bowel. Thankfully he didn't require surgery, but he stayed in hospital under observation for a week.

Kody's dad Dan and sisters Mikaela, 14, and Bridie, 13, drove down to Newcastle to support him in his recovery and then take the family back on the six-hour drive home.

When they got home Kody decided to hold a fundraising event to thank the Royal Flying Doctor Service for their help.

"This is the second time the Flying Doctor has helped our family," Toni said. "They took my daughter Bridie to hospital when she was attacked by a dog nine years ago and needed surgery and a partial facial reconstruction."

"Many people don't know this service exists, or truly understand its vital importance for rural and remote communities."

With the help of the Dungowan Public School P & C (Parents and Citizens) and the Dungowan Hall Committee, Kody held a movie night and fundraiser in the local community hall.

With a school of just 20 pupils and a community doing it tough in the drought, they were thrilled to have around 60 people attend and raise \$224 for the Royal Flying Doctor Service.

When visiting Dubbo in December, Kody presented the cheque and a handmade thank you card to Royal Flying Doctor Service South Eastern Section Board Member Terry Clark.

"We can't thank the Flying Doctor enough—we are forever grateful for your help in our time of need," Toni said.



THE BASE CAMPS



Image: RFS Base Camp - the Big White Tents

If the Base Camps are so good,

why don't the staff stay in them?

E LAST RAN an article about this issue in December 2014 & seems some things simply haven't changed.

With the sudden burst of bushfires breaking out in September, we found many Volunteers being directed to stay in Base Camps whilst some managed to get Motel accommodation.

Feedback to us from the Motel accommodated was; Excellent.

Feedback to us from the Base Camp accommodated was; some said ok, majority said Last time for me.

We do acknowledge the genuine efforts of the RFS Mitigation Staff involved in establishing the base camps to get the best levels of comfort possible for our Volo's. Once the word is given to establish a camp, it takes three days to build it we're told & it's quite often done in very hot uncomfortable conditions so we do know that there is a lot of genuine effort put in to making it happen.

We do know that the base camp team are genuinely working hard to cover all the little things that make it as comfortable as can be for everyone, but the stark reality is, it's still a Big White Tent with uncomfortable hammocks all lined up with a bunch of varied aged guys all belching, burping, sneezing, snoring & other assorted wondrous sounds emitting.

Of late the RFS have been sending out an attached poster relating to fatigue, well sleeping in a tent is hardly quality sleep & for some, it would add to fatigue.

The other issue, which sticks heavily in the craw of so many Volunteers is that RFS Salaried staff still all get single room Hotel / Motel accommodation & so if the "Big White Tent" is so dam comfortable, as its recently been promoted, why then aren't the salaried staff in there as well?

It's been noted that whilst FRNSW, NP&WS & RFS staff all get Hotel or Motel accommodation, the Volunteers get what's left; we we're told which is clearly why so many won't go.

Considering RFS Volunteers are exactly that, Volunteers, they should get first priority & not the other way around.

Funny how recently when the RFS found Volunteers hesitant to go away, someone all of a sudden popped up on their Facebook page declaring the Big White Tents as; Comfy, air-conditioned sleeping quarters, toilet blocks, laundry, hot showers, plenty of food and 24hour supervision and support....what a contrast to those days where we simply caught some sleep on or under the trucks; he said.

Comfy; he says? and no doubt the next night he went back to his 4 Star Motel Room.

Oh well, if this is the way the RFS wants to go, then one can only assume that it's going to be a very long hot & at times, embarrassing summer.



We are Stronger Together when we speak as one to bring positive change on the environment, biosecurity, water, economics, crops, animals, trade and rural affairs.

We are Stronger Together when you get easy access to farming experts, labour advice and education on the latest research and innovation to boost profits and sustainability. We are Stronger Together when you join one of our 100+ branches and get access to the farmers, governments and stakeholders who make decisions.

We are Stronger Together when you join the vibrant NSW Farmers network, which is shaping rural communities and strengthening the industry with no-nonsense advice.



JOIN ONLINE TODAY

www.nswfarmers.org.au

Phil Donato

NSW Member for Orange





OR THOSE who aren't familiar with my journey, in November 2016 I was elected as State Member for the Orange electorate when the Nationals member left the seat to pursue a career in federal politics. I believe the reason why I was re-elected earlier this year, into this role that was once considered a "Nationals safe seat", is that I have treated my role not as a career choice, but as a way to facilitate positive change in our regional area.

That change has included being a genuine voice for the Orange electorate. I stand for our farmers, and have pressured the government to provide urgent financial support until they finally yielded. I stand for our vulnerable, and have fought hard for the much-needed palliative care services which have now been delivered to our community.

I stand for our nurses, and still to this day fight for fair nurse-to-patient ratios in New South Wales. I stand for our small business owners and local contractors, who keep our economy strong and should always be the first port of call for Government tenders. I stand for the everyday people of our community who have every right to be heard and represented. And of course, I stand for our emergency workers—those who risk life and limb to keep the rest of us safe.

During the course of the current year, I met with emergency services workers after they experienced many incidents of collisions and near misses, many of them being in 100km/hr zones. I pressured the government for 40km/hr speed limits around the flashing lights in order to keep our emergency workers safe, as those working so hard for others surely have a right to their own safety being a priority.

The Government bowed to my pressure and my insistence that

we have a duty of care towards our emergency service workers, running a 12-month trial of the 40km limit. However, they failed to provide sufficient public awareness of the campaign, as they said they would, which contributed substantially to this important initiative's failure.

Now, the limit of 40km/hr near emergency service vehicles and personnel on roads only applies to zones of 80kms or less. It's a shame the Government did not properly implement this initiative, including a comprehensive public awareness campaign. I understand that this regulation was not universally popular, but I will always fight to protect those who are risking life and limb to protect us, even if it's a minor inconvenience for some.

I will keep working hard to represent our community, and I thank those who have provided me with their feedback and ongoing support. I will continue to do whatever it takes to ensure our community gets its fair share and in the coming year, as 2020 approaches, I have no intention of getting too comfortable!

As the year comes to an end, while it's easy to focus on the things that are going wrong in the world, it's nice to take a moment to think of what's going right. People such as yourselves, who give generously of your most precious resource – your time – in order to keep others safe, is something to be acknowledged and appreciated.

On that note, I would like to take a moment to wish you all a Happy Christmas. Please stay safe during this time, as we know you are still working hard to protect others. On behalf of our entire community, I'd like to say thank you.

Cheers, Phil Angel. Flight

For further information contact:

Angel Flight Australia

Toll free: 1300 726 567 Phone: 07 3620 8300

Fax: 07 3852 6646

Postal: PO Box 421, Fortitude Valley, QLD, 4006

Since 2003 Angel Flight has been assisting with the transportation of country Australians who deal with the triple trouble of bad health, poor finance and daunting distances.

Inverell local Kurt requires travel assistance to Newcastle to visit a heart Specialist that is unfortunately not available in his home town. With no direct commercial flights from Inverell to Newcastle



Image: Inverell Local Kurt pictured with Driver Lance (Left) and Volunteer pilot Ian (Right).

Kurt would have to face more than a 6 hours drive each way to attend his appointments!

With the assistance of Angel Flight's wonderful volunteers Kurt is able to get Newcastle in just over one hour via light aircraft! This makes a

massive difference to his life as it means that he is now able to spend more time with his family and focus on his health.

During the course of Kurt's trips to Newcastle he has become very good friends with two of Angel Flight's volunteers, Driver Lance from Warner Bay and Pilot lan from Lennox Head (pictured

above.). He has told Angel Flight that having a friendly face great you at the airport or after your appointments makes such a difference when you are travelling for health related reasons.



Image: Kurt pictured with his family from Newcastle.

'Volunteers don't get paid, not because they're worthless, but because they're priceless."

- Sherry Anderson'

Meanwhile, in Melbourne, volunteer and professional pilot Shaun Aisen who has been flying as a volunteer with Angel Flight since 2004, completed his 1000th flight for the charity this week!

When not flying for Angel Flight, Shaun delivers cargo as diverse as stage equipment for well-known celebrities to the relocation of large animals. He gives much of his free time assisting Angel Flight both in the air and also by speaking at events for the charity.

ANGEL FLIGHT

It was an Aisen family affair as Shaun's father, Les Aisen, joined Shaun on this milestone flight. Les who is also a volunteer driver who assists with transporting Angel Flight passengers from the airport to medical centres in the City has also hit his own special milestone this week completely his 350th volunteer drive for Angel Flight!

Angel Flight CEO Marjorie Pagani said Shaun has contributed significantly in making Angel Flight missions possible. Shaun is

Angel Flight's most active pilot, flying the magnificent Turboprop (jet powered) TBM 850.

She said Angel Flight was a not-for-profit charity which

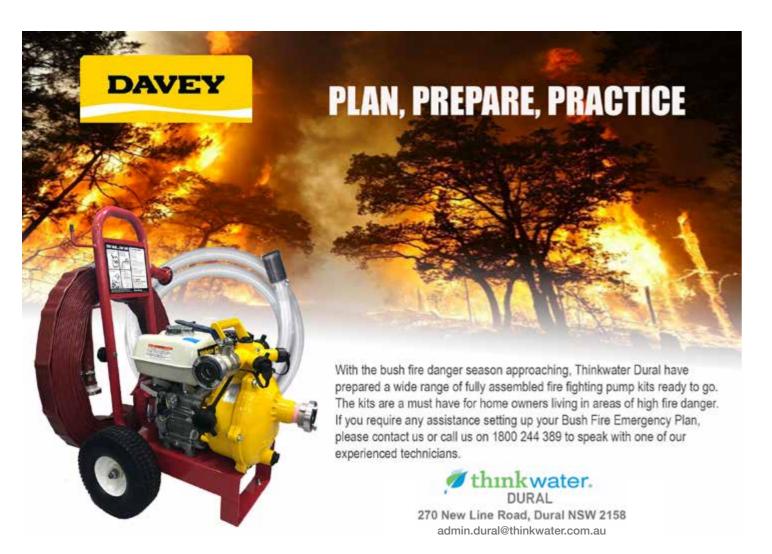


Image: Shaun and Les Aisen en route to Orbost

would not exist if it was not for pilots who not only volunteer their time and skills but also their aircraft to help rural and regional Australians attend medical specialists otherwise unavailable to them, and also integral to the success of the charity are the selfless drivers, who often face long hours in peak-hour city traffic, to get the passengers safely to the medical appointments without stress, cost or inconvenience.

With the assistance of our 1000+ active volunteer pilots and drivers, Angel Flight has completed over 47,000 flight and 45,000 drives to assist people just like Kurt.

If you think that you may benefit from Angel Flight's service or know of someone who may require assistance, please contact the office on 07 3620 8300. Alternatively, you (or the person requiring assistance) can visit a medical professional and have them register via the website or contact the office to discuss.





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The Phantom Says' Thank you!

First of all, congratulations all the Volunteers that have It's an incredible juggling act when the service has spent the last 3 to 4 months fighting fires across the state. We all agree that some significant rain is required across the state.

Whilst there has been no significant fires in Sydney over this time, we have had to wait for the 'official' start to the fire season on October 1 for the annual "do you have a plan" advertisements to appear on TV.

Who actually has a plan? Is this campaign really working? Do we have any facts or figures on the success of this or any other 'community education' campaigns across the state?

As our mates are out there doing their second, third, or fourth deployment in the north of the state, who is covering these members job? We salute the effort of my mates doing their brigades proud, as it's a hard slog in some very dangerous conditions. Thank you.

So whilst we volunteer to go to fires, we have to look at our own sacrifices to extinguish many fires. Loss of income, loss of annual leave or taking special leave and in most cases, very supportive bosses. We feel for those that want to help but cannot get away as they have to help keep many business's going.

This year and after several recent years of earlier fire seasons, it has surely taken a toll on work life, relationships and the finances.

But who helps? Some brigades are going to calls day after day, some brigades are struggling to get crews to go away, some members won't go away at this time of year as summer hasn't hit and again this year it will be the worst fire season ever.

70,000 members and the same people keep going above and beyond day in day out.

We have to sort out our membership, we need to tell those at the Fire Control Centre and ultimately, RFS Headquarters, that there can't be 70,000 members as we can't find the numbers to adequately rest our mates and brigades with all these supposed numbers

I've heard of brigades with 100 members on the books but only 10-15 regularly turn out. But when these active ordinary members sit at meetings and try to adjust the roll, they can't because 'old mate' pays his subs so he must remain on the books and the membership list.

So whilst the current Government Ministers and MP's go out and turn a snag on a BBQ whilst patting members on the back in front of the media, do they really care?

Is there adequate funding for newer trucks and better equipment. Is it acceptable for the replacement age of trucks to go from 15 to 25 years of age? It appears that the true cost of keeping the fleet reasonably modern is playing second fiddle to the planes and helicopters that the RFS buys.

Obviously, it is more beneficial for a politician to stand in front of millions of dollars' worth of pretty aircraft, rather than 100's of new fire trucks needed to attend incidents

Aircraft cannot do the whole job without the crews on

Keep up the good work in these trying conditions and



Looking after volunteer firefighters' mental health

Looking after your mental health in your role as a volunteer firefighter may not be something you think about often. However, the nature of your work means you're likely to be regularly exposed to distressing situations and potentially traumatic events, which may impact your mental health.

The levels of anxiety, depression and suicide among police, emergency services and fire and rescue workers is too high and growing.

In 2014, Beyond Blue established the Police and Emergency Services Program to promote the mental health of police, emergency services and fire and rescue workers to reduce their risk of suicide. The program is for current and former/retired workers, volunteers and their families. As part of this program, Beyond Blue has undertaken the National Mental Health and Wellbeing Study of Police and Emergency Services. This study has established important national baseline measures and provides strong evidence about the issues affecting the mental health of police, fire and rescue, ambulance and emergency services and the best ways to provide

In addition, Beyond Blue provides a range of supports and resources for police, ambulance and fire and rescue workers to take action to manage their own mental health and support colleagues they may be concerned about. If you feel you are struggling in your role as a firefighter or just with life in general - or if you are concerned about someone else - you are not alone. Contact us and we'll point you in the right direction for further



Where to find more information

Beyond Blue

beyondblue.org.au

Learn more about anxiety, depression and suicide prevention, or talk through vour concerns with our Support Service. Our trained mental health professionals brief counselling, and point you in the right direction so you can seek further support.

1300 224 636

Email or chat to us online at beyondblue.org.au/getsupport

- (f) @beyondblue
- (a) @beyondblueofficial
- in company/beyondblue

Head to Health

headtohealth.gov.au

Head to Health can help you find free and low-cost, trusted online and phone mental health resources.

Donate online:

beyondblue.org.au/donations







Volunteer Fire Fighters Association Membership Application

All memberships are free of charge



Your Details							
First Name:							
Last Name: (Surname)							
Date of Birth:			Gender:	Male	: 🗌	Female	
Your Contact Infor	mation						
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Address: (Line 2)							
Town / Suburb:							
State:				Post Code:			
Phone:					•		
Email:							
Membership							
Application Type: (Tick one box below)							
New Membership (NSW RFS Volunteer)				ls	Supporter or Sponsor (Magazine Only)		
Membership Status	S: (Tick all boxe	s that apply)			_		
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You've swapped your disposable plastic water bottles for a refillable bottle and have ditched the dingy grey single-use grocery bags for more durable, reusable options.

But, have you thought about swapping your bank accounts? Just as it's becoming less socially acceptable to bring your groceries home in single use plastic bags, it's no longer enough for banks to simply be a place where you keep your money.

If you wouldn't directly invest in a tobacco company, or an organisation that pollutes the oceans or exploits its workers, you wouldn't want your bank to invest in them either.

How do I find a responsible bank?

This is a big question, and the answer isn't always straight forward. Generally speaking in Australia, a bank can be considered ethical or responsible if they do not invest in activities such as these:

- Fossil fuels and coal mining
- Weapons and armaments
- Tobacco
- Deforestation
- Human exploitation or human rights abuses
- Gambling
- Animal cruelty

A socially responsible bank would also have to show independent verification of any claims.

All Firefighters Mutual Bank¹ mortgages and deposits are certified as responsible investments by the Responsible Investment Association Australasia (RIAA)². RIAA is the peak body representing responsible and ethical investors across Australia and New Zealand.

Build your wealth with a bank that does good

Firefighters Mutual Bank has been operating responsibility and sustainably for over five decades, channelling its profits into doing good. It is built into our foundations and affects who we are, what we do and why we do it.

Dedicated to serving firefighters Australia wide

As a member of Firefighters Mutual Bank, not only will your day to day banking be easy³, you can also be confident that your investments will be managed ethically and responsibly.

Learn more about the dedicated bank for all fire and emergency service workers and their families, at **fmbank.com.au/about** or call **1800 800 225** 8am to 7pm, weekdays and 9am to 3pm, Saturdays.



Serving those who protect

3 Before you decide on any of our products or services, we strongly recommend that you read both the Conditions of use Accounts and access and Fees and charges booklets. You can find these online at our website or ask at any of our offices. We have not considered your objectives, financial situation or needs. For further information call 1800 800 225 or go to fmbank.com.au

Summer 2019 The Volunteer FireFighter

¹ Membership is open to citizens or permanent residents of Australia who are current or retired employees and current volunteers of a fire and/or emergency service or family members of members of the Bank.

² Retail mortgages and deposits have been certified by RIAA according to the strict operational and dis¬closure practices required under the Responsible Investment Certification Program. See www.responsibleinvestment.org for details. The Responsible Investment Certification Program does not constitute financial product advice. Neither the Certification Symbol nor RIAA rec¬ommends to any person that any financial product is a suitable investment or that returns are guaranteed. Appropriate professional advice should be sought prior to making an investment decision. RIAA does not hold an Australian Financial Services Licence.



At Firefighters Mutual Bank, all our new home loan and savings account products have been certified responsible by the Responsible Investment Association Australasia (RIAA)! It's all part of our commitment to being a socially responsible bank.



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