

<https://www.facebook.com/groups/664163936943293/search/?q=nug%20nug%20fire>

**Mark A Webster**

10 August 2022 ·

My recollections of Ash Wednesday and the Nug Nug fire.

I was working in Mt Stanley that season and worked 7 days a week for six months. David Wiggins from Mt Hotham Tower had joined me on the Wednesday night to enjoy some beers and music at Beechworth's first open mike night then free and sleazy at Tanswells.

We were sitting on the veranda of my parents' house overlooking Beechworth township at about 1:30 am.

We both noticed the town lights blacking out from what looked like a fog rolling in from the west!

When the fog finally hit us, we smelled the smoke, it was from the Adelaide fires!

I quickly phoned the FCV Duty officer Pud Pritchard who was already run off his feet by all the smoke reports in the district. He told me to get up to the tower at first light.

David rang the Bright duty officer and was told the same.

I then turned on the TV and was astounded at the footage of the Otway and Dandenong fires. Straight to bed and up to the tower as the sun came up!

It was like riding my motorcycle through fog as the dense smoke from Adelaide was still pouring into NE Victoria.

Up the tower and opened comms to find all other towers reporting on duty. Also, the radio traffic was frantic as all 5 channels on the STC Radio were being used by different fires as emergency channels across the state. All towers were blind with visibility down to 100 metres for most of the day. So, the NE Region FCV towers listened to the frantic and at times chilling radio traffic.

The smoke kept me blind up until about 17:00 when it parted briefly and I had a view of the Buffalo valley.

Myrtleford FD called me at about 17:15 to ask could I see Nug Nug! I replied yes just as smoke started to appear rapidly brewing behind the Sugarloaf which I immediately reported to Myrtleford.

And so it started. I was told the fire was started by an old wooden tobacco kiln going up in flames. I do recall clear skies and no lightning the Night of Ash Wednesday??? I could be wrong.....

I recall the Benalla hot shots hitting the fire hard in impossible terrain and Peter Parkinson being stranded in the Beechworth Bedford tanker which refused to get to the fire by vaporising its fuel lines.

The FCV managed to send some few locally based firebombing ag planes to try and slow the fire, these had been grounded by the Adelaide smoke.

One bomber in particular made one drop over the fire and while attempting to return to Mansfield was forced to land in a paddock at Whitfield due to the Adelaide smoke closing back in. He reported to me his location and flying blind due to smoke.

I gave him a bearing back to the fire and organised another bomber from Porepunkah to take him to Porepunkah. They joined up over Nug Nug but couldn't get to Porepunkah due to smoke so both diverted just in time to Mt Beauty just to be grounded again.

Comms from Nug Nug to Myrtleford we're almost impossible so I stayed in the tower until Midnight relaying messages. Back up at 06:00 on Friday to resume a comms link.

It was busy as hell all day but I do remember reporting the arrival of the Chinook helicopter and watching as it dusted off the large helipad when it started ferrying troops and supplies onto Sugarloaf.

I watched in horror as the RAAF Hercules did a straight in run and nearly crashed into the side of the mountain. The screams of pull up by the bird dog was chilling.

I had the first-row seat for the duration and maintained radio comms between Myrtleford and the fireground. They were very long days and I can only remark what a terrific job the ground crews did in such impossible terrain to contain that fire!

- **Dave Hocking**

Great recount there Mark👍

**Peter McHugh**

Great account. Cheers😊

**Leith McKenzie**

Good memory Spot

**Hayden Biggs**

Thx Mark

**Terry Campbell**

Our heroes.

**Matt Hall**

Thanks Mark, interesting

**Karen Panlook**

Great recount of your experience.

**Peter Rice**

A day we will not forget!

**Kerrie Howe**

Well done spot 🍷

**Paul Jones**

Could you please submit this to the firelookoutsdownunder dot com page and any other tower info you might have.

**Mark A Webster**

Paul Jones will see if I can find it Paul!

**Mark A Webster**

Paul Jones I found the page but couldn't submit anything...

**Paul Jones**

Mark A Webster I take it will be alright if I send them in.

**Mark A Webster**

Paul Jones go for it Paul, I was the radio traffic controller and tower person at Mt Stanley for three seasons before heading off to the Victorian School of forestry in late 83.

**Peter Polwarth**

Very good as usual. I remember CFA Bedford's doing the same vaporising on a hot day. Petrol vehicles famous for this. We wrapped a wet rag around the carby in attempt to help. Did for a while & eventually made it over big hill kangaroo Flat.

**Lee Gordon**

Greg O'Donohue you might find this interesting

**Greg O'Donohue**

Thanks Lee Gordon, I started work on the Warby Tower the year after this, IIRC and I knew Spot and Dave from our radio comms.

**Lorraine Brookes**

Thanks for this account of horrific events you heard and saw.

**Erica Findlay**

An amazing account Mark. Thank you. I don't know what would have been worse - listening to the radio in smoked out conditions, stuck

pacing the floor of the cabin, or being busy as heck relaying messages. It sounds like a day where you wish you'd been fogged in, not smoked in, and able to enjoy the song of the lyrebirds or whatever feathered visitors your tower had.

**Frank Eder**

Great recollections Mark. Your description really gives us a feel of the urgency, confusion and teamwork displayed by all those responders. Thanks

**David Donehue**

Thanks Mark. How those memories last eh!

**Mark A Webster**

David Donehue burned into the brain box eh Dave!

**David Farmer**

Remember the night of Ash Wednesday, walked out of a meeting, and the glow looked like the Tyers hills were alight. we were at Glengarry, the glow was coming from the Dandenong fires.