

Soot on our Boots



Teagan Mangan and Mary Hastings

Humula Public School



Creative Catchment Kids

Creative Catchment Kids is an initiative of the Murray Darling Association and Wirraminna Environmental Education Centre. It aims to improve engagement between the Local Land Services and school students by providing opportunities for positive and authentic ventures that encourage students to develop creative solutions to agriculture and natural resource management issues.

Wirraminna Environmental Education Centre

The Wirraminna Environmental Education Centre is located in Burrumbuttock, north of Albury in southern NSW. Since 1995, the centre, which is adjacent to Burrumbuttock Public School, has provided opportunities for discovery and learning about the natural environment, the ecology of the local woodlands and the beauty of native plants. www.wirraminna.org

Murray Darling Association

The Murray Darling Association has membership of over 100 Local Government councils in the Murray-Darling Basin, as well as community groups, businesses and individuals with an interest in ensuring that the Basin continues as a valuable asset for all Australians. Since 1950, the Association has initiated various school and community education programs on managing the Basin's land and water resources. www.mda.asn.au



Enviro-Stories is an innovative literacy education program that inspires learning about natural resource and catchment management issues. Developed by PeeKdesigns, this program provides students with an opportunity to publish their own stories that have been written for other kids to support learning about their local area. www.envirostories.com.au

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School: Humula Public School

Local Land Heroes

In 2014, students involved in the **Creative Catchment Kids** program researched and wrote stories about 'Local Land Heroes' - people, businesses or industries who contribute to productive agriculture and healthy environments along the Murray and Murrumbidgee rivers. The program was generously funded by Murray Local Land Services and Riverina Local Land Services.

Local Land Heroes acknowledges the United Nations 2014 International Year of Family Farming.
www.fao.org/family-farming-2014/en/



Local Land Heroes is part of Enviro-Stories, a Peekdesigns education program.



Design by Peekdesigns, www.peekdesigns.com.au

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On 18 January, 2014 at 4.05pm, a lightning strike in the pines at Minimbah began what could have been a catastrophic event for the village of Humula. The fire took hold quickly and was headed for the village. Everyone was on high alert, working together to save the village and neighbouring farms.

This is our story.



Mr Norm Harvey knows only too well what it is like to fight a raging fire. Norm, and his wife Wilga, have been involved with the Humula Bush Fire Brigade for over 60 years. In that time he was equipment manager for over 20 years and brigade captain for 14 years. Wilga played her part assisting with communication and catering.





Norm can recall another major fire that threatened Humula way back in 1952. The Mangoplah fire burnt to the Carabost Road.

Norm reminisces about the changes, remembering what it used to be like. The farmers were relied upon for equipment and hand operated pumps were used. Equipment was minimal, but they were elated when they 'beat the devil'.





Steve Mead is a local landholder who was affected by the fires. About 80% of his property succumbed to the bushfire. This was about 400 hectares, 15 kilometres of fencing and over 1000 sheep. Luckily the lambs and cattle were close to the house and escaped the fire. The fire burnt to within 100 metres of the homestead.

Steve's wife, Heidi and their young son Thomas were told to evacuate within half an hour of the fire starting. Steve stayed but said that his main thoughts were on making sure that his stock were safe and that no one was injured or in danger. He was very concerned in the early hours of the fire that all would be lost.

Luckily the property has recovered very well. The paddocks are very green and many of the blackened trees are now showing signs of life.



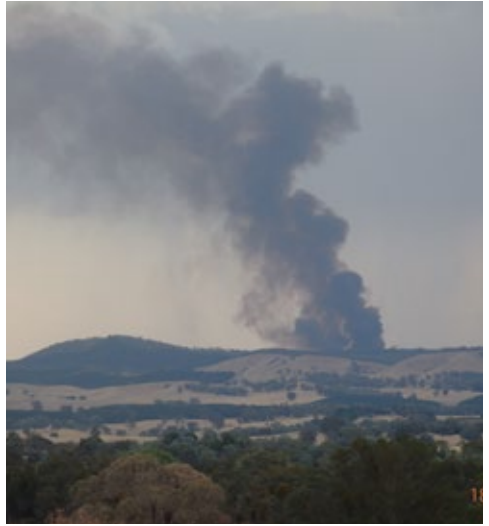


Mr Stephen Sykes is the Captain of the Humula Bushfire Brigade. Being the captain is a very responsible position and one that makes him very involved. At the time of the fire, Stephen mentioned that his primary focus was keeping the people of Humula and their possessions safe.

Humula Bushfire Brigade has a total of 25 registered members. At the time of the Minnimbah fires there were up to 300 personnel working in the fire grounds.

Picture courtesy The Daily Advertiser, Wagga Wagga





Stephen was very concerned in the early hours of Sunday morning as the fire was raging. The fire was gaining momentum very quickly and so Humula and Carabost residents were put on evacuation alert. Thankfully lots of equipment, including Elvis the helicopter, planes and bulldozers were put to work. Many more devices were called in to assist.





Young George Sykes had just been accepted into Humula Fire Brigade and was excited for some action. When the fire broke out he was full of the excitement that his dad and brother talked about. He pulled on his bright orange overalls and climbed in the truck. When he reached the fire front he realised that it was a lot bigger than expected. The flames were as tall as the trees, and you could hear the crackling of the tree trunks. He had mixed emotions, feeling both scared and excited at the same time.

Mr John Hawkins joined the Bushfire Brigade in 1980. Mr Hawkins is the group captain of the Lankey's Creek Brigade. Although not a Humula resident, he has a local tie, being the gardener at the local school. John assisted with saving property from the fire. The Minnimbah fire was not only threatening the farms near Humula, they were heading towards his property as well.



Picture courtesy The Daily Advertiser, Wagga Wagga





The fire was so ferocious on the first day that John was worried that it was unstoppable. He said that because of the sheer scale of the fire more planning and manpower would be needed. Luckily a plan was put in place that helped save many farming properties. John was instrumental in setting up containment lines, saving properties from destruction.

Picture courtesy The Daily Advertiser, Wagga Wagga



The Daily Advertiser

THE RIVERINA'S OWN

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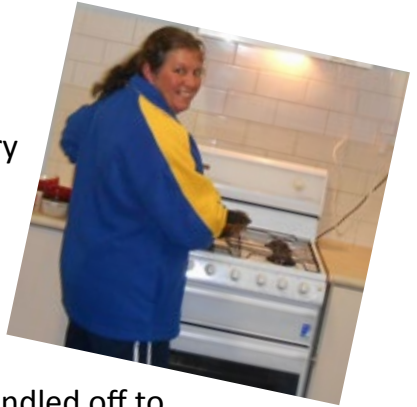
THE AFTERMATH: Properties are unrecognisable yesterday after an inferno tears through 9000 hectares of forest near Carabost. Picture: Les Smith



Mrs Jill Ferguson, the Humula Bushfire Brigade secretary, found out how big a job she had when the fire took hold. Jill has an important role which is vital for the smooth operation of the brigade and its personnel. She was in charge of coordinating communication with the fire field, sourcing uniforms and overseeing the catering. She also had the job of contacting the police when the village was put on evacuation alert. Jill spent days with very little sleep while the fires were burning.



With so many extra personnel assisting with the preservation of the village, feeding the work weary fire fighters was a mammoth chore. Ms Sharon Godber took on the role of coordinating the catering. Over the first two days approximately 300 personnel needed to be fed. This slowly dwindled off to the strike force team which was 80 personnel a day.



Two meals a day and cut lunches were prepared for the weary fire fighters. The meals were served at the Humula Sports Club. Lunches were prepared at the club and transported in eskies to specific drop off points in the fire grounds. The majority of the non-perishable food was donated by the larger communities surrounding Humula. Other catering facilities assisted with donations.

Picture courtesy The Daily Advertiser, Wagga Wagga



The Minnimbah bushfire saw a lot of people from different walks of life come together with one goal - to save Humula village and the surrounding farmland. Although the fire burnt through thousands of hectares of pine plantation, luckily property and stock loss was kept to a minimum. We are thankful to all those that worked tirelessly throughout the fire situation for saving the village.

Credits

The students and staff would like to thank all those people who assisted with the gathering of information and photographs for our book 'Soot on Our Boots'.

In particular we would like to recognise:

- The Humula community
- Rural Fire Service
- The Daily Advertiser, Wagga Wagga
- Ben Pitstock
- Siobhan Heanue
- Grahame Chevalley

And of course all the wonderful volunteers who assisted with extinguishing the fires that threatened our village.



Mary Hastings and Teagan Mangan

2014 Year 6, Humula Public School



Local Land Services
Murray



Local Land Services
Riverina



Australian Government