

Devastating Bush Fires

Western District Swept

Worst Day in the History of the State

Devastating bush fires swept the Western District on Friday last, which was one of the worst days ever remembered. Black Friday—January 15th by the way—no doubt, it will be known by, and will carry poignant memories for many. The thermometer was well over the 100 mark and at Portland 106 was registered. Heywood was the centre of the inferno, and towards evening had the appearance of a refugees' camp, with women and children pouring in from the burning areas, carrying with them what few household articles they could hurriedly get together. A howling north wind accelerated the fires, which, in the Drum-borg district, carried everything before them. Blinding smoke and the heat of the flames made rescue work most hazardous, but the hundreds of fighters who turned out to face the fires did magnificent work in saving homes and property. To them the highest praise is deserving. The fire, about midday, took complete control, and at one time the town of Heywood was threatened, sawmills in the near vicinity being anxiously guarded.

The fire which swept the Drum-borg district and wrecked havoc to the extent of thousands of pounds, was first seen about 8 a.m. A strong northerly wind aided the fire, which started in the forest and scrub country. A call for volunteers found a ready response, and practically the whole of Heywood turned out in answer to the call. The fire burned most of the country around the Sinclair siding, about five miles along the Mt. Gambier road, north-west of Heywood. At 11.30 a.m. the wind changed to due west and drove the fire from the forest country through Drum-borg township and into the cleared country beyond, finishing up in the Milltown district. At Drum-borg many properties were completely destroyed by the flames. Mr. Ron Clarke's home and practically the whole of his property were destroyed. Mr. James Moore, sen., lost his house, but the stock was saved by a great effort. The Drum-borg post office was consumed by the flames which also destroyed the Drum-borg Hall, school, Wesleyan Church, and Mr. Clarrie Cameron's home and 150 acres of his grassed

Church, and Mr. Clarrie Cameron's home and 150 acres of his grassed property. Crossing to the Hotspur road, the fire burnt out Mr. Frank Carroll's huts, sheds and about 300 sheep. Two hundred acres of Mr. Frank Williamson's property were burned. Mr. Claude Stuchbery's home was saved, but he lost his fences and about 250 acres of grass. Mr. Frank Moore's loss consisted of about 10 acres of grass and some fencing. Mr. Roy Thomas's home was saved, although the flames came within a few feet of his door. Two hundred sheep, and 250 acres of grassed property represented Mr. Edward Frost's loss. Mr. Colliday, a Melbourne visitor, staying with Mr. Frank Carroll, lost his car in the inferno. Mr. James Moore, sen., of Drum-borg, was sent to the Heywood hospital suffering from shock. He is reported, however, to be improving. Mr. D. Wright, president of the Heywood P. and A. Society, lost about 200 acres, the fire being stopped within 100 yards of his home. Mr. W. Cowland lost 40 acres, his house and stock being saved. Mr. W. J. Williamson, of Portland, who has a property at Drum-borg, was the loser to the extent of 160 acres. All his stock was burnt, including many stud sheep, mostly Corriedale ewes. The sawmill at Lyons, the property of Messrs. N. Benbow and Sons, was totally destroyed. The huge railway bridge on the Mount Gambier line was also totally destroyed, and it was stated that in all probability it would be at least two weeks before it was again trafficable. It was about four chains in length, and between 30 and 40 feet in height. At Drum-borg, where the Mount Gambier line passes through, about 2,000 sleepers were burnt.

Owing to the damage, Wirth's Circus has been detained at Mount Gambier. A special train will be chartered to Heywood and the carriage of the circus plant undertaken from Dartmoor to Heywood by elephants. A contract has been let by the Department for the cartage of goods by road from Heywood to Dartmoor during the period the bridge is under reconstruction.

The Milltown railway station and the post office were stated to have been destroyed by the fire, which also destroyed Mr. George Hollis's saw-

been destroyed by the fire, which also destroyed Mr. George Hollis's sawmill. Mrs. Sheriff's house was consumed by fire, which left nothing but ruins of the homes belonging to Messrs. P. O'Shannessey and C. Moore. It is estimated that about ten homes in the Milltown district were destroyed.

The extent of the damage in the Myamyn district is exceptionally heavy. Many homes were destroyed, and the losses of district residents total thousands of pounds. Rail traffic on the Hamilton-Portland line was disorganised by the fires. Any who wished to travel by the train which arrived from Melbourne at Hamilton, and was scheduled to continue on to Portland, made the trip by Ansett's bus, which took them as far as possible along the Portland road. When near Myamyn, a detour was made, and the bus went via Port Fairy to Portland.

When near Myamyn a truck of hay on the train bound from Portland to Hamilton caught fire. The hay was destroyed and the truck badly burned.

Around Portland outbreaks occurred in all directions, and urgent calls for help were given by means of the fire bell throughout the day. Fighters were rushed to Mr. Geoff Hogan's mill at Mount Richmond, but on arrival it was found that the mill was doomed and no human hands could save it. Everything was demolished and the mill razed to the ground. The Gorae forest was soon ablaze and here fighters, by herculean efforts, managed to check the flames within a short distance of Mr. E. W. Hedditch's and Mr. R. Hollis' Orchards were damaged beyond recovery and the loss in this connection will be great. Heathmere experienced an anxious time, and the home of Mr. E. Alexander was saved when the flames were only a few feet away. Mr. Flower's fruit shed was burnt, as was also Mr.

to consider ways and means of assisting the bush fire sufferers.

N. Malceod's sawmill. Too much praise cannot be given to the Heathmere bush fire brigade, and other helpers, only for whom wholesale destruction would have occurred. A cool change arrived on Saturday, and, contriving, all further danger is now past.

Extensive losses of homes, grass and fencing is reported from other parts of the Western District, the damage in the Grampians being particularly heavy. In the hill country round Healesville and other sawmilling parts loss of human life is appalling, and reports are still filtering through of further gruesome discoveries.

A public meeting, convened by Mr. E. E. Bond, M.L.A., will be held in the Mechanics' Hall, Heywood, on Wednesday evening next, at 8 p.m., to consider ways and means of assisting the bush fire sufferers.