

Bush Fire Relief Working Bee 27th & 28th September 2003

Friday 26th Sep I set off at 11:30am with no real expectation of the adventure that lay ahead.

Five hours & 420 km later I arrived at the small location of Anglers Rest, and decided to camp the night and continue on to Mitta, (as the locals call it), Saturday morning.

Driving through Ensay, Swifts Creek, & Omeo, was a great experience. Having been there through the worst fire this state has seen in a hundred years, it was amazing to see some areas so green with only evidence of fire being black trunks. While other areas north of Omeo are so badly burnt it may take many years for the soil even to recover let alone the Flora & Fauna.

After setting up camp and have dinner, I sat down to enjoy an evening next to a great camp fire I had set under the seeming clear sky. With stars in full view it started to rain and continued accompanied by strong winds all night.

Saturday morning I woke at around 5:30am to the sound of rain on the tarp above my swag. After a quick breakfast and in between showers I packed up and headed off at 7:00am.

The meeting time was 8 – 8:30am, so with 89 km to travel I thought I had plenty of time, boy was I wrong. The road is steep in places and twists it's way around the mountains. Hitting dirt at Glen Valley it was bloody cold and by the time I got to Glen Wills some 2 km up the road there is snow by the road. From about Sunnyside all the way to Lightning Creek there was about 4 to 5 inches cover over the road. The contrast of blackened trees and white snow was amazing to see. Due to the snow and stopping a couple of time to take pics and lock in hubs, I missed the crew, arriving at Mitta at 8:45 and having travelled a total of 493 km from home.

I topped up the tank at the general store and asked if they knew where the work crews had gone. Finding out they were on channel 15 I called up John Turbill and got the direction to the farm they were working on.

So, I finally made it. Meeting up with Tom Walsh (property owner) we travelled up the paddocks to not far below the snow line, where the rest of the crew was hard at work already. After introductions and meeting Tom's brother Mike, (Collingwood supporter) we all got stuck into the work at hand.

Basically the job entailed, digging out old/burnt posts, re-sizing the hoses, setting new concrete posts in place, running 3 runs of barbed wire, straining it, spacing droppers, then fixing wire to posts & droppers with wire ties. This we did on 2 lengths of fence totalling approximately 200 metres. The terrain was very steep and at the end of the day we were all looking forward to a well-earned rest.

Tom & Mike are third generation graziers. The property has been in their family for 95 years and the road up to the house is named Walsh's Road. They lost a number of stock, mainly after the fires due to stress and lack of feed. Also cows that calved were very weak and they lost breeding stock as well as calves.

These working bees have been a great help both physically and emotionally for many property owners and locals as they struggle to recover from the devastating fires. This was the 6th trip that Four Wheel Drive Victoria has organised in the area. The response from the folk of Mitta Mitta is just amazing, and they put on a first class dinner for us in the golf club Saturday night. Most of us turned in around 10pm after a day of hard yakka, belly full of great food, & a few drinks. For me in the swag the night was clear and the air was still, all good.

Sunday morning. I woke to a very white and cold morning, yes it was about -1 over night. After breakfast of bacon & eggs & wheatbix, we all headed off for a half day of work.

Back at Tom & Mike's we completed another section of about 100 metres and then ran 2 plain wire runs through the whole 300 metres of fence completing the whole job by 11:30am, just in time for lunch. Mike & Tom were wrapped with the job. Once again we were very well looked after with fresh sandwiches and a hot cupper.

As I had packed the ute before leaving the caravan park I headed home straight from the property at about 1:00 pm. This time going via Wodonga and down the Hume. Being a shorter run, only 399 km and took 4hrs 55mins.

Sporting a few scratches, sore muscles, and a heap of new mates I conclude that this was an extremely rewarding working bee. This is the last trip for this year but I encourage all members to be involved next year. There are still many kilometres of fencing that needs repairing.

I have some pics that I will bring to the next meeting, I hope my photography is as good as my fencing.

Tim.