

The members of the Beenak Cemetery Trust acknowledge the Traditional Owners of the land the cemetery is on;- The Wurundjeri People. We pay our respects to their Elders past and present and the Aboriginal Elders of other communities.

The Beenak Story

Madge Hull

Professor John Hull's mother wrote this fascinating account of her experience as a newly qualified teacher in the Australian outback, for the benefit of her family, in the 1960's. It records how the young Madge Huttley spent two years in the 1920's living and teaching in primitive conditions in a logging settlement. It includes the dramatic story of a very destructive bush fire.

This is an extract

"15th February 1926 'Black Sunday' goes down in history as one of the terrible days when bushfires took tremendous toll of mills, forests, settlements, and human life in many parts of Victoria, particularly in the Powelltown area including Beenak. But though we experienced much of the horror of it, I thankfully record that no lives were lost at Beenak. It is not exaggerating to say we had a rather miraculous escape.

I had only just returned from the summer holidays and had appreciated life in a more civilised way for six weeks. Now the weather was fiercely hot and the country areas tinder dry. For a day or two, smallish fires had been burning around in different directions. Sunday dawned hot and worse with a very strong north wind. We knew we might expect a really big bush fire. Even so many of the men had gone off for the weekend. By midday the bushfire smell was really strong, and a few burnt leaves were falling.

A couple of the boys called up to see if there would be any Sunday School.

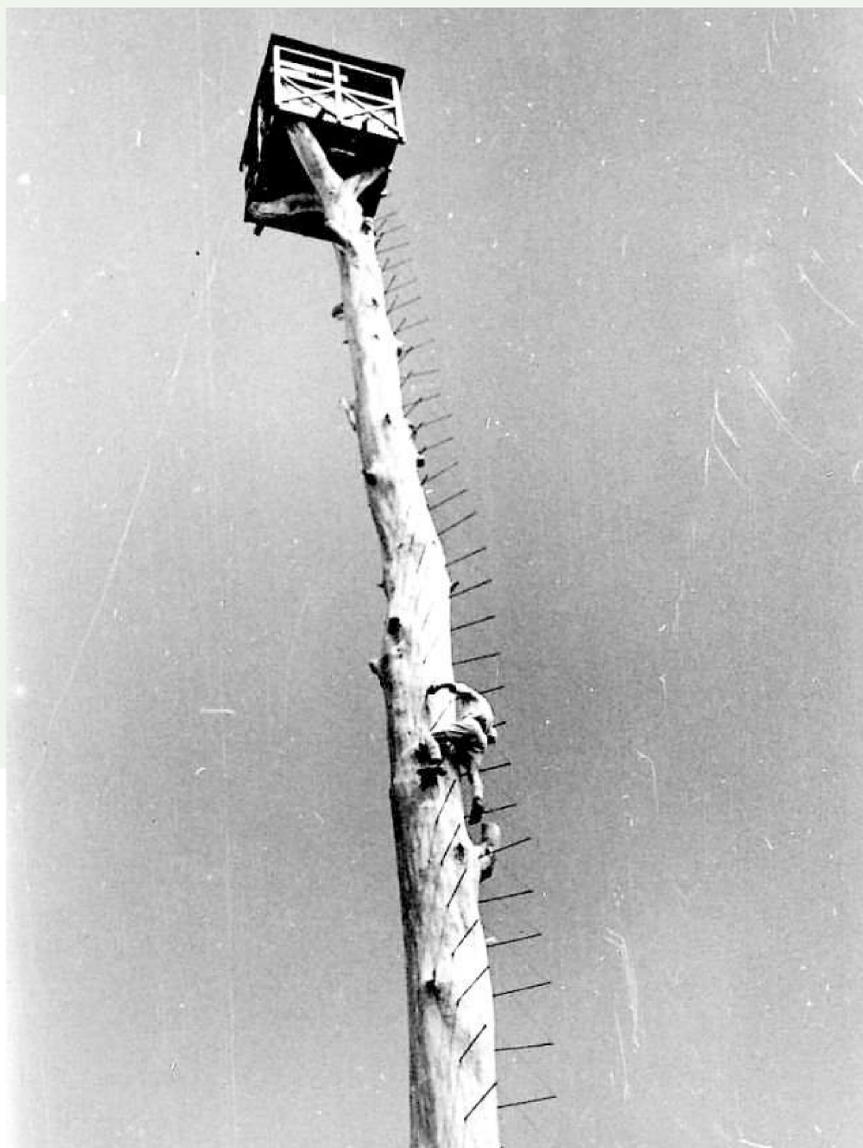
I said "Well, do you want to go? Are you game?"

They answered with definite head shakes, "Yes".

So we went and all the older children turned up. But it was so hot and smoky that we didn't stay long - just long enough to talk about what might happen and to pray for safety and presence of mind and courage. They joined in and then we raced off home. In another hour all the women and children were ordered to pack just a few valuables and get down to the only clear space - in front of the school, the small area used for games. It was pathetic to see Mrs. Brann trying to concentrate on what to take - he was away - and finally we struggled off with our cases and joined the others. All the remaining men put every effort into saving the mill and the homes. The boys joined in and did a marvellous job.

The fire reached us about 4pm. It raced up the Bump at 50mph. You could hear the roar when it was still miles distant. But meanwhile another fire was approaching from the south side, not so fierce. This swept up the gully and met the 50mph one just at the head of the settlement, destroying our water line; but the bad fire was turned off along the hill about 50 yards above the Brann's house.

However, the fire raged everywhere all night. The houses with their rough timber walls and roofs would have gone up like match boxes, but the men and boys kept climbing up putting out the fires as soon as one started, using buckets and filling them from the barrels of water people kept at their back doors. A shed in the middle of the settlement and most of the wooden tramline went. I think the kids really had a great adventure."



Climbing the Mt Beenak Fire Tower 1947