

FORESTS COMMISSION VICTORIA. Mobile Support Crews for Firefighting.

In the mid 1960's, Ted Gill, Chief, Division of Forest Protection, proposed temporary employment of University students for a small number of specially trained crews to support District Foresters needing additional fire-line firefighters during the summer.



E D Gill

Gill's proposal included:

Each crew be self-contained with their own vehicles, communications , chainsaws, rakehoes and camping gear. The Heyfield Mobile Support Crew also contained a camp cook, on most occasions the cook travelled with the crew when deployed outside the district.

Initial training of University students included driving tests on vehicles used by the Crews. Results of the tests were approved by the Commission's Transport Officer, Noel Paull (see example of test report below).

MEMORANDUM for:-

Mr. S.G. Taylor.

Officer-in-Charge Mobile Support Crew. - Stawell.

Please find hereunder results of driving tests completed by members of your crew :-

Name	Types Driven	Driving Experience and Licence No.	Phone.No.	Suitability and Certificate No.
Stephens. G.A.	Sedans	2½ years 1665146	931848	009 Satisfactory. Licence expires Jan.1967
Burke. J.B.	Sedans Taxi Trucks 5 Ton	2½ years 1663308	3797068	008 Very Good.
G. Colvan	Sedans	2 Years 1715110	859819	010 Satisfactory. Requires extra driving duties.
Tobin. P.	Test not required. (last years crew)			011
Weste G.	Test not required. (last years crew)			012

Shaw T.O

FCVic and Dept Conservation, Forests and Lands Annual reports record the following:

1966/67.

"Support Crews.

Three crews, each comprising eighteen University students were, after initial training, used as mobile support crews in fire suppression."



Self contained Heyfield Crew

Photo Geoff Kennedy

1971/72

“Mobile support crews, each comprising eighteen University students including a crew leader and cook were located at Heyfield and Broadford forest districts. These crews were employed during the University summer vacation to supplement normal district suppression crews in a fire emergency.”

1981/82

“The Commission's field staff of 420 officers and 686 regular employees was supplemented by the employment of 437 additional men during the summer. Four 15-men mobile support crews were based at Benalla, Bruthen, Heyfield and Stawell respectively.”



Heyfield Crew at Warburton(Ash Wednesday) Fire1982 beside stump
Euc. Regnans felled 3 decades earlier for sawmilling.

Photo Andrew Hodgson



Cann River Fire 1985 briefing.

Photo Andrew Hodgson



Crew Leader Rob Woollan. Cann River Fire 1985.

Photo Andrew Hodgson



Cann River Fire 1982

Photo Andrew Hodgson



M S Crews Ford Transit Van Cann River Fire 1985

Photo Andrew Hodgson



MS Crews Trayback Vehicle Cann River Fire 1985

Photo Andrew Hodgson



MS Crew early morning briefing Cann River Fire 1985

Photo Andrew Hodgson

1984/85

“An additional 400 persons supplemented Departmental personnel throughout the State during the fire season. As well, four self-contained 15-person mobile support crews were based in Bairnsdale, Benalla, Horsham and Traralgon Regions.”

1988/89.

“Departmental personnel were assisted by 528 additional seasonal firefighters. They included four highly mobile strike crews located at Benalla, Bairnsdale, Stawell and Heyfield and three specially trained helitack crews based at Benalla, Central Gippsland and Horsham Regions.”

When not required for fire fighting Crews collected seed from Alpine Ash trees felled for sawmilling, planted Alpine Ash seedlings on prepared sites, slashed roadside vegetation, assisted with building the Alpine Walking Track and jeep track maintenance.



Seed Collecting Heyfield Forest District 1982.

Photo Andrew Hodgson.



M. S. Crew planting seedlings Heyfield Forest District.

Photo. Andrew Hodgson.



Heyfield Mobile Support Crew slashing roadside vegetation.

Photo. Andrew Hodgson.

One of the first Crews was led by Forest Overseer John Wilson and based at Connors Plain Camp, Heyfield District. Thereafter, in each summer the Heyfield Crew was based at Surveyors Creek Camp built during construction of the Tamboritha logging road.



Surveyor's Creek Camp 1983.

Photo Andrew Hodgson.

Other Crew Leaders at Surveyors Creek Camp were:

Geoff Kennedy 1975/76 76/77 77/78 78/79 79/80 (5 fire seasons)

Darryl Kennedy 1980/81 81/82 (2 fire seasons)

Rob Woollan 1982/83 83/84 (2 fire seasons)

Jim Browning 84/85 85/86 (2 fire seasons)

Phillip Green 1986/87 (1 fire season)

Max Strachan 1987/88 88/89 89/90 (3 fire seasons)

Records indicate that 1989/90 fire season was the last of the "Mobile Support Crews".