

### **3. History of the 1938/39 “Black Friday” Fires**

## OVERVIEW OF THE FIRES

Following some of the worst drought years in south-eastern Australia's history, the spring of 1938 saw many small fires lit throughout forest areas mostly for the purposes of fuel reduction. In what Judge Stretton (figure 20) described as "a wicked attempt at state suicide" (Stretton, 1939), these fires were left to burn themselves out, rather than being properly attended or extinguished after they had burnt the desired area. Fires, some of which had been burning since September in Victoria and early December in NSW gradually increased in intensity as the hottest summer in Melbourne's history began to break records in January. The culmination over January 13 to 15 of 1939 was not the product of a single large fire or even a widespread lightning event, but the coming together of many fires, most of which had ironically been lit for protection against the threat of bushfire. As the weather picked up in January, these burns combined with back-burns that had been lit without thought to their own containment, ultimately going "back into the forest where they all met in one huge fire" (Stretton, 1939). The photographs of the time (figures 21 – 24) and the words of Judge Stretton are perhaps the best way to tell this story:



Figure 20. Judge Leonard Stretton, authority presiding over the Royal Commission into the Black Friday Fires. Photo courtesy DSE Vic

*“Men who had lived their lives in the bush went their ways in the shadow of dread expectancy. But though they felt the imminence of danger they could not tell that it was to be far greater than they could imagine. They had not lived long enough. The experience of the past could not guide them to an understanding of what might, and did, happen.*

*And so it was that, when millions of acres of the forest were invaded by bushfires which were almost state-wide. There happened, because of great loss of life and property, the most disastrous forest calamity the state of Victoria has known.*

*These fires were lit by the hand of man.*

*Seventy-one lives were lost. Sixty-nine mills were burned. Millions of acres of fine forest, of almost incalculable value, were destroyed or badly damaged. Townships were obliterated in a few minutes, Mills, houses, bridges, tramways, machinery, were burned to the ground; men, cattle, horses, sheep, were devoured by the fires or asphyxiated by the scorching debilitated air.*

*Generally the numerous fires which during December, in many parts of Victoria, had been burning separately, as they do in any summer, either ‘under control’ as it is falsely and dangerously called, or entirely untended, reached the climax of their intensity and joined forces in a devastating confluence of flame on Friday, the 13<sup>th</sup> of January.*

*On that day it appeared that the whole state was alight. At midday, in many places, it was dark as night. Men carrying hurricane lamps, worked to make safe their families*

*and belongings. Travellers on the highways were trapped by fires or blazing fallen trees, and perished.*

*Throughout the land there was daytime darkness. At one mill, desperate but futile efforts were made to clear of inflammable scrub the borders of the mill and mill settlement. All but one person, at that mill, were burned to death, many of them while trying to burrow to imagined safety in the sawdust heap.*

*Horses were found, still harnessed, in their stalls, dead, their limbs fantastically contorted. The story of the killing of this small community is one of unpreparedness, because of apathy and ignorance and perhaps of something worse.*

*Steel girders and machinery were twisted by heat as if they had been of fine wire. Sleepers of heavy durable timber, set in the soil, their upper surfaces flush with the ground, were burnt through. Other heavy wood work disappeared, leaving no trace.*

*Where the fire was most intense the soil was burnt and destroyed to such a depth that it may be many years before it shall have been restored by the slow chemistry of Nature. Acres upon acres of the soil itself can be retained only by the effort of man in a fight against natural erosive forces.*

*The speed of the fires was appalling. They leaped from mountain peak to mountain peak, or far out into the lower country, lighting the forests 6 or 7 miles in advance of the main fires. Blown by a wind of great force, they roared as they travelled. Balls of crackling fire sped at a great pace in advance of the fires, consuming with a roaring, explosive noise, all that they touched.*

*Houses of brick were seen and heard to leap into a roar of flame before the fires had reached them. Some men of science hold the view that the fires generated and were preceded by inflammable gases which became alight. Great pieces of burning bark were carried by the wind to set in raging flame regions not yet reached by the fires.*

*Such was the force of the wind that, in many places, hundreds of trees of great size were blown clear of the earth, tons of soil, with embedded masses of rock, still adhering to the roots; for mile upon mile the former forest monarchs were laid in confusion, burnt, torn from the earth, and piled upon another as matches strewn by a giant hand.”*

The Royal Commission headed by Judge Stretton had far reaching effects, causing the establishment of the Country Fire Authority in Victoria, and establishing the need for standards in prescribed burning and fire fighting practice. Judge Stretton had much to say regarding the haphazard use of fire, in his view “Settlers, miners and graziers are the most prolific fire-causing agents. The percentage of fires caused by them far exceeds that of any other class. Their firing is generally deliberate. All other firing is, generally, due to carelessness” (Stretton, 1939). The Commission attempted to produce an appreciation that fire when used, should be used in such a way that it is always under the control of a person that knew what they were doing. Much of modern fire management owes its origins to this event.



*Figure 21.* The Glen Guest house in flames. Photo courtesy of DSE Victoria



*Figure 22.* Rubicon Mill Camp, destroyed by the fire. Photo courtesy of DSE Victoria



*Figure 23.* Mill employees carrying burn victims. Photo courtesy of DSE Victoria



*Figure 24.* Men watching the fires in the Erica district. Photo courtesy of DSE Victoria

**TABLE 3  
TIMELINE OF THE BLACK FRIDAY FIRES**

*“In 1939, a big fire swept through the mountains. The burnt country remained open for a few years but afterwards the scrub grew back thicker than ever – too thick for a dog to bark in!”*

Ken Kidman

Melbourne and Canberra weather data was taken from Foley (1947), Cooma data from the daily conditions reported in the Cooma Express for the period and Berridale conditions from the diary of Tom Aitchison and rendered as originally written except for the conversion to °C in brackets.

Locality				
<b>SEPTEMBER 1938</b>				
<b>Buffalo</b>	Buffalo	1	Fire started between the buffalo and King valleys, was not extinguished as it was not near any private property.	Fahy 2004
<b>DECEMBER 1938 – JANUARY 1939</b>				
<b>Victoria</b>	-	1	Throughout December, many fires were scattered through Victoria (and probably NSW/ACT), lit for various reasons but left entirely unattended or as Judge Stretton wrote “ ‘under control’, as it is falsely and dangerously called.” Woods Point (W of Alpine NP) had several fires burning throughout December.	DSE 2004, Stretton 1939b, Fahy 2004
<b>Brindabella</b>	KNP, Brindabella	1	At least 2 fires started at latest early January. No direct reference, but evidence indicates the 2 fronts that burnt through Brindabella and the ACT burnt prior to the main fronts coming from the west. ACT fires were recorded as arson.	Env. ACT 2004a, NPWS 2003, Petersen 1993, Foley 1947, Tum/Ad T. 1938/39
<b>10 DECEMBER 1938</b>				
<b>Paupong / Moonbah area</b>	KNP	1 & 2	Grass fires reported starting 10/12/38-burnt Paupong, Moonbah and Boloco areas, T. Reid’s house reported burnt but later found OK. Two fires believed in the area – one started in “The Gullies” and spread	Cooma Express 1938/39

			towards both Paupong and Moonbah, the other started in Paupong and “worked towards Numbla”. Considered “contained” by Monday 12/12/38.	
--	--	--	--	--

<b>11 DECEMBER</b>				
<b>Plenty Ranges</b>	Baw Baw	1	Fire in pine forest near Whittlesea reported on 11 December 1938	Foley 1947

<b>12 DECEMBER</b>				
<b>Ando</b>	KNP	1	Fire reported “about Ando” on 12/12/38 as having started in intense conditions on 10/12/38	Cooma Express 1938/39
<b>Adaminaby</b>	KNP	1	Fire reported west of Adaminaby on 12/12/38 as having started in intense conditions on 10/12/38	Cooma Express 1938/39

<b>13 DECEMBER</b>				
<b>Wider area</b>	-	1	‘Hurricane’ winds across large areas of NSW / Vic. 144km/h winds recorded in Victoria, 120km/h winds in Sydney fanned bushfires at Lugarno, Hawkesbury, Royal NP, Liverpool and Sydney heads. A fire front extended from Emu Plains to Katoomba. Weather extremely dry through Alps area	Tum/Ad T. 1938/39

<b>14 DECEMBER</b>				
<b>Ingebyra</b>	KNP	1	Police reports state the first fires in the Jindabyne police patrol occurred in the Ingebyra area on Crown lands on 14th December, burning onto the property of A. Rose on the 19th December.	Cooma Express 1938/39

<b>18 -25 DECEMBER</b>				
<b>Moonbah</b>	KNP	1 & 2	Embers falling in Moonbah area the week before Christmas assumed to have come from Victorian Ash forests.	Pendergast, Vaughan 2004, Pendergast, Reg 2004

<b>Nimmitabel / Kybeyan</b>	-	1	Fires reported on 19/12/38 as having burnt for days in timbered and grass country, picked up by wilder conditions on 18/12/38. Flames surrounded "Bell Brother's" house but it was saved, fire continued on 19/12/38 burning between Bell Bros., P.F. Mooney's and Wilson-Bodycott property with a 7-8 mile front moving NE. Still burning quietly on 23/12/38.	Cooma Express 1938/39
<b>Toombellup forest</b>	Alpine	1	Forest south of Tatong on fire.	Fahy 2004

### 25 DECEMBER

<b>Upper Murray</b>	Alpine, Kosciuszko	1	Many fires had been burning as far north as the Upper Murray since Christmas in 1938.	Fahy 2004
---------------------	--------------------	---	---	-----------

### 30 DECEMBER

<b>Valencia</b>	Alpine	1	Bush fires reported "raging" near Valencia 5-10km SSE Alpine NP	Foley 1947
-----------------	--------	---	---	------------

### 1 JANUARY 1939

<b>Toolangi</b>	Baw Baw / Alpine	2	"The fire was noticed by Forest Officer John Alexander Blackmore from his post at Toolangi a little after midday, and he investigated immediately. The fire appeared to have originated on private property on the banks of No.3 Mountain Creek near Kinglake. A north wind drove the fire, slowly at first, in the direction of Mt Slide."	Fahy 2004
<b>Talbingo Mountain</b>	KNP	2	Fire observed by motorist on 1 January	Pendergast, Vaughan 2004, Pendergast, Reg 2004
<b>Guthega / Piper's Ck</b>	KNP	2	Spot fire at Snowy River near Guthega around New Year's Day burnt up to Piper's Ck under strong NW wind.	Petersen 1993, Cooma Express 1938/39

### EARLY JANUARY

<b>Erica</b>	Baw Baw	1	Various fires were known in the area from early January.	Foley 1947, Fahy 2004
--------------	---------	---	--	-----------------------

### 2 JANUARY

<b>Kiewa</b>	Alpine / Buffalo	1	Fire burning in the ranges around Tawonga South (western edge of Alpine NP) driven by a strong N wind. 300 men working to protect the State Electricity Commission's Kiewa Hydro-electric Scheme, still under construction.	Fahy 2004
<b>Western Fall of Main Range</b>	KNP	2	Fire burning "near Khancoban" for a fortnight up to the 13 <sup>th</sup> , smoke observed coming from Geehi Gorge from 2nd January.	Fletcher, Fred 2003, Fletcher 1993, Fletcher 1999

### 3 JANUARY

<b>Kiewa</b>	Alpine / Buffalo	1	Fires reported in Kiewa, Woodend district	Foley 1947
<b>Tumut</b>	KNP	1	15 acre fire in pine forest near Tumut lit by kids playing.	Tum/Ad T. 1938/39

### 1<sup>st</sup> to 7<sup>th</sup> JANUARY

<b>Upper Murray</b>	Alpine. Kosciuszko	1	Many fires still burning in remote forests on both sides of the border.	Fahy 2004
---------------------	--------------------	---	---	-----------

### 8 JANUARY

#### Melbourne

43 °C Maximum temp, RH of 33

#### Berridale

"Hot and smoky, over 100° (38 °C)"

#### Cooma

21 – 38 °C Winds E turning N, 13 points (3mm) rain recorded for Cooma

<b>Berridale</b>	KNP	1	Smoke reported in Berridale	Aitchison 1938/39
<b>Toolangi</b>	Baw Baw / Alpine	1	Fires burning at Toolangi since January 1 escape control lines, killing two foresters at 1.20 PM. Other foresters escaping were temporarily cut off by a fire lit by locals without their consultation.	Fahy 2004

<b>Cathedral Range</b>	Alpine, Baw Baw	1	30 mile flank fire burns from Toolangi through the head of Stony Creek in the Narbethong plantation and up into the Cathedral Range. Visible length of the Black Range aflame.	Fahy 2004
<b>Erica</b>	Baw Baw	1	“Bush fires causing widespread destruction. Timber mills burnt; twelve lives lost; many homes destroyed”. Many mills destroyed in the area from the 8th to the 10th January	Foley 1947, Fahy 2004
<b>Toombellup Forest</b>	Buffalo / Alpine	1	“Fire racing through Toombellup forest. Timber mill and house razed. Destruction everywhere.”	Foley 1947

### 9 JANUARY

#### Melbourne

24 °C Maximum temp

#### Berridale

No record

#### Cooma

19 – 27 °C, Southerly change

<b>Kiewa</b>	Alpine	1	Kiewa fires (from 2 Jan) burning on a 25 mile front around Mt Bogong.	Fahy 2004
--------------	--------	---	---	-----------

### 10 JANUARY

#### Melbourne

44.7 °C Maximum temp, 9% RH, wind gusts to 64 km/h

#### Berridale

“Fearfull Hot, 106 (41°C) in shade”

#### Cooma

17 – 40 °C

<b>Toolangi</b>	-	1	Fire burnt out magnetic station and instruments	Foley 1947
<b>Whitlands</b>	Alpine	1	Toombellup fire burning on a 40 mile front, threatening to join with a second fire from Myhrree and having already burnt out 130 000Ha of forest. Under strong northerly winds the 2 fronts burnt towards Whitlands and Moyhu.	Fahy 2004

<b>Dargo High Plains</b>	Alpine	1	Kiewa fire burning on the Dargo High Plains, perhaps joined by some of the Upper Murray fires.	Fahy 2004
<b>Healesville</b>	Baw Baw	1	“17 houses destroyed within an area of 10 square miles”	Foley 1947
<b>Narbethong</b>	Alpine/ Baw Baw	1	“Whole country from Black Spur to Buxton and Alexandra a blazing inferno. Worst bushfires in the history of the district. Township gutted, only the hotel remaining. Devastation everywhere. Seven lives lost.”	Foley 1947
<b>Rubicon</b>	Alpine	2	12 forest workers killed by fires when the wind fanned the 30 mile Black Range flank into a front that burnt 8 sawmills in the Rubicon Forest	Fahy 2004
<b>Acheron Way</b>	Baw Baw / Alpine	1	7 people killed trying to escape fires by driving along the Acheron Way as the Rubicon front progresses	Fahy 2004
<b>Tanjil Bren</b>	Baw Baw	2	“Burning Monster” (large tree) ignited by lightning and extinguished by Ben Saxton and 25 sawmill employees	Fahy 2004
<b>Warburton</b>	Alpine/ Baw Baw	2	Front leaves the Acheron Valley and crosses the Acheron Gap above Warburton between 5 and 6 in the evening.	Fahy 2004
<b>Khancoban</b>	KNP	1	Khancoban ringed by fire, with further fire near Walwa and Kosciuszko.	Fahy 2004
<b>Leather barrel Ck</b>	KNP	2	Fire fighters working on a front coming from the west around through Leather Barrel Ck.	Aitchison, Barry 2004
<b>Batlow</b>	KNP	1	Fire started by lightning in pine plot on Bago State Forest between Pilot Hill and Peel’s house	Tum/Ad T. 1938/39
<b>Canberra</b>	Namadgi, Tidbinbilla	1	Fires around Canberra	Fahy 2004

**7<sup>th</sup> to 11<sup>th</sup> JANUARY**

<b>Crackenback Range</b>	KNP	1	Published Police reports list a fire as starting “on the Jindabyne side of the Hotel Kosciuszko” between January 7 and 11 – possibly either a spot fire from the existing Piper’s Ck fire	Cooma Express 1938/39
--------------------------	-----	---	---	--------------------------

			(weather conditions on the 8th, 10 & 11th January were sufficient for spotting behaviour), or a result of the dry lightning storm.	
<b>Round Mountain</b>	KNP	2	Police reports also list a fire breaking out between January 7 and 11 on the Round Mountain above the Moonbah River making it “impossible to get any volunteers to go to the Ingebyra fire”. Possibly either a spot fire from the Jacob’s River fire (weather conditions on the 8th, 10 & 11th January were sufficient for spotting behaviour) or one of the new lightning ignitions.	Cooma Express 1938/39

<b>11 JANUARY</b>				
<b>Melbourne</b> 34 °C Maximum temp				
<b>Berridale</b> “Fearfull Day, 110 (43°C) in shade”				
<b>Cooma</b> 19 - 39 °C				
<b>Ingebyra</b>	KNP	2	Police report states that “on Wednesday, 11th January, several fires had commenced to burn in the proximity of Mr T. Golby’s house.” About 75 men assembled to fight these fires, temporarily getting them under control but later losing them.	Cooma Express 1938/39
<b>Warburton</b>	Alpine/ Baw Baw	1	Acheron front converges with a second front from Healesville at 4am, progress slows as the wind drops. Warburton had 10 men defending the town	Fahy 2004
<b>Whitlands</b>	Alpine	1	Toombellup fire now the largest single fire in Victoria. Milder weather on the 11th and 12th brought hopes that the fire might be checked	Fahy 2004

<b>12 JANUARY</b>				
-------------------	--	--	--	--

**Melbourne**  
26 °C Maximum temp

**Berridale**  
“Not quite so hot”

**Cooma**  
18 - 38 °C

<b>Jacob’s River Road</b>	KNP	2	Fire assumed to have started from workmen’s camp was battled until evening of 12 January with a fire break built in the Paupong area, probably overrun by the Leather Barrel fire as it came from the west on the 13th. Remembered by some as having started early December, newspapers suggest ignition time to be in the week before 19/12/38, still burning on January 12. Police reports state a fire starting “along the Snowy River” at the time the earlier Ingebyra fire was first under control (following 19th December) burning up into Ingebyra. This fire escalated until on January 7 it burnt onto P. Spellman’s land and was partially extinguished by rain. The report states that “later in the evening a dry electric storm created fresh fires”, but it is not stated where these fires were ignited.	Wellsmore, Ossie 1989, Pendergast, Vaughan 2004, Pendergast, Reg 2004, Spellman 1989, Cooma Express 1938/39
---------------------------	-----	---	---	---

**10<sup>th</sup> to 13<sup>th</sup> JANUARY**

<b>Jacob’s Ladder</b>	KNP	2	Road crews forced to shelter from fire overnight on clearing on Jacob’s Ladder in the days leading up to 13 <sup>th</sup> January.	Cooma Express 1938/39
<b>Hotel Kosciuszko</b>	KNP	2	Piper’s Ck Fire crossed the creek early 11 <sup>th</sup> , burnt Plains of Heaven night of 13 <sup>th</sup> and reached the ridge on Mt Sunrise spotting strongly toward Rennex Gap and beyond under gale force winds. Spot fires and front around Hotel extinguished and back burn lit on western side of	Petersen 1993, Cooma Express 1938/39, Kidman 1988, Costin, Alec 2004

<p>Hotel. Most peat beds in Boggy Plain (near Wilson's Valley) burnt out, Long Corner /Island bend, Smiggin Holes Café, fire on both sides of road. Police reports state "fresh fires had commenced on Spicer's Ck about 3 miles from the Hotel Kosciuszko..." "The Spicer's Ck fire was got under control that afternoon but in the evening a strong wind blew up and several other fires were caused from the main fire. The fires were abandoned at 3am the next morning and all of the men (roughly 300) were taken to concentrate on saving the Hotel Kosciuszko". It is likely from the accounts of the Hotel staff and proprietor that the Spicer's Ck fire and the earlier Piper's Ck fire contiguous, perhaps advanced by spotting behaviour. Fire intensity was greatest on the western fall of Mt Piper.</p>				
<b>Jagungal or Boogong area</b>	KNP	1, 3	Gold miners W. Russell, G. Marks and Richard Ward fought a fire front in the area believing they had it beaten on the 12 <sup>th</sup> January although they had further troubles probably on the 13 <sup>th</sup> .	Cooma Express 1938/39

<b>13 JANUARY – "BLACK FRIDAY"</b>				
<b>Melbourne</b>				
45.6 °C Maximum temp, 8% RH, wind gusts to 74 km/h from N turning NW by 10:30 a.m. Southerly change at 3:35 p.m.				
<b>Berridale</b>				
"Fearfull Hot and dry 110 (43°C)"				
<b>Cooma</b>				
18 – 39 °C				
<b>Canberra</b>				
39 °C Maximum temp, 13% RH, wind NW				
<b>Wangaratta</b>	Buffalo, Alpine	1	"Practically burnt out the Toombellup forest. Enormous damage to famous Cambatong	Foley 1947

			forest”	
<b>Omeo</b>	Alpine	1	Kiewa fire driven south toward Omeo by gale force winds and joined by more northern fires (possibly upper Murray), one life lost in the bush (probably in the 2 days prior). Ember attack on Omeo from the ranges at first, then a fire front burnt through the town destroying the Golden Age Hotel, the hospital, twenty houses and eleven shops before continuing towards Gippsland. The local Swifts Creek brigade spent 28 days on end fighting fires. One Omeo resident was killed by flames north of Bairnsdale as he tried to reach his family in Omeo.	Fahy 2004
<b>Bright</b>	Alpine, Buffalo	1	Buffalo fire (Sept 1938) driven toward Bright by gale force winds and joining up with the Kiewa fire, town saved by a few firefighters who put in a “massive backburn” but 4 lives lost in the bush. Bright eventually considered safe after good rain on the 15th.	Fahy 2004
<b>Warburton</b>	Alpine/ Baw Baw	1	Wind picked up on Friday morning. Firestorm on Mt Donna Buang with a “roar like a tornado” spots across the Yarra River, surrounding Warburton. Front leaves the lower O’Shannassy Catchment at 3pm, spotting toward Noojee, Tanjil Bren and Matlock. Warburton defended by 600 men and eventually saved with the help of a wind shift.	Fahy 2004
<b>Noojee</b>	Baw Baw	2	“Township wiped out except for hotel and one railway house. Second time destroyed” Warburton front spotted toward Noojee under a NW gale, destroying the town and killing one man who died 6 days later from pneumonia resulting from smoke inhalation. Most saved by	Foley 1947, Fahy 2004

			leaving on a train or sheltering in the Latrobe River.	
<b>Tanjil Bren</b>	Baw Baw	2	Saw Mill destroyed, 3 killed in small dugout, 6 others killed just south of the mill.	Fahy 2004
<b>Hill End</b>	Baw Baw	2	1 man killed at Hill End when he refused to leave his home	Fahy 2004
<b>Mansfield, Mt Buller</b>	Alpine	1	Toombellup fire burnt south under gale force winds, spotting over the Buffalo River and continuing south toward Mansfield and the Delatite Valley. Front eventually halted when it met the back of the Woods Point burnt area.	Fahy 2004
<b>Woods Point</b>	Alpine	2, 1	Several small fires had been burning in the hills around Woods Point, at 1pm on the Friday the smoke pall increased and continued to increase as the wind picked up at 2.30pm. A front that had burnt north from the Rubicon fire over the last few days began to pick up and burn southward from the Big River, joining up with a second fire from Gaffney's Creek. The broad front formed a dark convection column, fire swept toward the town from a hill to the east, destroying the hospital. The main front coming from the north burnt through the centre of the town under winds believed to be 80 miles per hour (about 130 km/h). Tar melted from the bridge over the Morning Star Creek, dripping onto those sheltering under it. Three killed in the town and its surrounds. "In three quarters of an hour, town was demolished", (143 houses) "Disastrous bushfire razed every sawmill, Warburton to Woods Point. Sixteen men burnt at Matlock Mills"	Foley 1947, Banks 1982, Fahy 2004

<b>Matlock</b>	Baw Baw, Alpine	2	15 killed at Fitzpatrick's mill in the Matlock forest, the sole survivor (George Sellars, figure 19) survived by wrapping himself in a wet blanket and lying on the ground in the open.	Fahy 2004
<b>Erica</b>	Baw Baw	2	Fronts burning in the area had already caused massive destruction and loss of life on the 8th to 10th January, a hot NW gale caused them to converge on the 13th January, possibly destroying more property but not taking any more lives.	Fahy 2004
<b>Corryong</b>	KNP, Alpine	1	Kosciuszko fires driven south by a N gale over Tintaldra and Pine mountain, Corryong saved by "a shower of rain".	Fahy 2004
<b>Whites River area</b>	KNP	2	Burnt up to the treeline on 13 January, Mt Tate (Adam's Lookout) specifically observed. The main front missed White's River Corridor and part of Gungartan but burnt Dicky Cooper's Bogong and the Rolling Grounds, it was "alight right along the tops above White's River Hut". Numerous spot fires ignited through White's River Corridor but did not spread, "it was that windy the new fires couldn't get going".	Fletcher, Fred 2003, Fletcher 1993, Fletcher 1999
<b>Canberra</b>	Namadgi, Tidbinbilla	1	Firefighters engaged around Canberra on 13th January. "Serious bushfires in mountains to the south. Worst in history of Canberra. Thousands of acres of valuable timber destroyed". Dates given are 13 & 14th January.	Petersen 1993, Foley 1947
<b>Cascades, Big Boggy</b>	KNP	1	Leather Barrel fire burnt through south of Dead Horse Gap on 13th January. Open valleys unburnt or lightly touched	Thompson, Lenny 2004, Pendergast, Vaughan 2004, Pendergast, Reg 2004

<b>Ingebyra</b>	KNP	2	Some open areas left unburnt by fire coming from west, fire reported in Messrs. T & H. Golby's properties. Police reports published at the time give the Ingebyra area as being the source of the main fire that burnt eastward over Paupong toward Delegate.	Thompson, Lenny 2004, Weston, Linda 2004, Cooma Express 1938/39
<b>Grosses Plain</b>	KNP	1	Suspected spot fire from western fire may have ignited north of Grosses Plain late 13th January. Police reports published at the time record another fire already having burnt in Grosses Plain/Moonbah "for some time", having originated somewhere near Ingebyra.	Spellman 1989, Cooma Express 1938/39
<b>Adelong</b>	KNP	1	Numerous small fires started across the Tumut / Adelong / Tumberumba areas, most contained on the same day. Adelong recorded 15 consecutive days of temperatures reaching 40°C. Serious fire started at Ellerslie Station near Adelong in 44°C heat, believed to be extinguished during the night	Tum/Ad T. 1938/39

#### 13<sup>TH</sup> to 14<sup>TH</sup> JANUARY

<b>Kalkite</b>	KNP	1	Kalkite / 'Scrubby Range' (between Tiger's Rest and Thredbo Diggings) burnt out up to Jindabyne	Pendergast, Reg 2004
<b>Reedy Ck</b>	KNP	2	Burnt through night of 13 <sup>th</sup> January in firestorm, burnt again 9.30 am on 14 <sup>th</sup> January	Golby, Greg 1989, Spellman 1989
<b>Paupong / Moonbah area</b>	KNP	1 & 2	Properties destroyed 14 <sup>th</sup> January – Paupong, Tommy Compton's, Tom Reid (Paupong Post Office), Les Reid, Andy McColl, Charlie Kelly & Sid Walters. Numerous spot fires through parts of the valley rather than direct front. Fire reported at Big Yard on 13 <sup>th</sup> . Fire at Paupong passed beneath the hill where the house stood, then climbed the hill from the other	Cooma Express 1938/39, Wellsmore, Ossie 1989, Spellman 1989, Wellsmore, Ossie 1993, Wellsmore, Ossie 1999

side, Wellsmore's sheltered in the sheep dip and removed clothing from children as it caught alight. Flame height in grasslands indicated by scorch on horses about shins and belly. Charlie Kelly's house burnt in firestorm conditions, said to explode such that iron was thrown 200 yards away. Fires coming south-east from the Crackenback Range and north-east from Round Mountain are likely to have converged in the Moonbah area on 14<sup>th</sup> January.

#### 14 JANUARY

**Berridale**  
"Not quite so hot"

**Cooma**  
18 – 37 °C

**Canberra**  
38 °C Maximum temp, 10% RH, wind WNW

<b>Omeo</b>	Alpine	1, 2	Omeo district burnt –lost hospital, 4 shops, hotel, 27 houses	Fahy 2004
<b>"Ventnor"</b>	KNP	2	Destroyed house 14th January	Spellman 1989
<b>Moonbah</b>	KNP	2	Burnt early 14th January, start of spread toward Nimmitabel. Police reports published at the time record another fire already having burnt in Grosses Plain/Moonbah "for some time", having originated somewhere near Ingebyra.	Golby, Greg 1989, Cooma Express 1938/39
<b>Boloco</b>	KNP	2	Homestead surrounded by fire but saved	Cooma Express 1938/39
<b>Guisies Range</b>	KNP	2	Northern spread of fire arrested by rain on Saturday 14th January but fire crossed range in eastward direction at three points.	Cooma Express 1938/39, Cogan, Bill 1989

<b>Jindabyne area</b>	KNP	2	‘Vast area of forest’ on Crackenback Range burnt. Fire around “The Creel” by midday 14th. Fire stopped at western edge of Jindabyne after 6 weeks of fire fighting through the mountains, reached “Hilltop” to the NE of the town on Barney’s Range – it is not known how much further eastward it burnt. Police report states “Several fires were burning within 1½ miles of Jindabyne that evening (January 14th). All that saved the position from becoming serious so far as the town was concerned was that the wind dropped during the evening”.	Petersen 1993, Cooma Express 1938/39, Golby, Greg 1989
<b>Dalgety, Berridale</b>	-	2	‘Fire reached Dalgety but not Berridale’. More specific recollections suggest that the northern edge of the fire was probably not far north of Boloco, the grass fire may have burned country closer to Dalgety in December a few weeks earlier although details are sketchy. Dalgety was used as a refuge area so the town was not impacted directly. The closest fire to the town was probably on Barney’s Range on the 14th.	Golby, Greg 1989, Thompson, Lenny 2004, Cooma Express 1938/39
<b>Matong, Numbla Vale</b>	KNP	1	Fire reported as starting “in the bush west of Matong” and burning for ‘some weeks’ in the hills. Reported as burning through Matong on 13th January by some but a date more consistent with the neighbouring areas was probably the 14th. “Thousands of acres” are said to have burnt, probably referring to acres of farmland burnt on the final blow-up day. Other accounts describe a fire travelling “at tremendous speed” through Murranumbla, Stony Ck, Matong, Coonie and Margalong burning “best on the ridges, particularly uphill, and	Wildash 1988, Cooma Express 1938/39

			among dry tussocks, slowing down on the plain and grass country”. Fire did not affect the properties of Messrs D. and Malcolm McPhie.	
<b>Delegate area</b>	KNP	2	5 homes lost (probably on the 14th), areas mentioned are Dellicknora and Hayden’s Bog. Properties lost or threatened include the Bartley home, Delegate Cottage Hospital, James Thompson and Henry Walker’ houses. Alex Cameron, Hutchinson and Martin are all listed as losing all their grass.	Cooma Express 1938/39
<b>Nimmitabel area</b>	-	1	General reference of fire spreading toward Nimmitabel on 14th January	Cogan, Bill 1989, Golby, Greg 1989
<b>Adelong</b>	KNP	1	Ellerslie fire thought to be extinguished, but 2nd (?) fire spread from Ellerslie Station toward Adelong.	Tum/Ad T. 1938/39

### 15 JANUARY

**Berridale**  
“A bit cooler”

**Cooma**  
12 - 17 °C

<b>Canberra</b>	Namadgi, Tidbinbilla	1	“Bush fires in the mountain ranges near Canberra burn to within three miles of the national capital and threaten Government House and Parliament House. Charred leaves and debris fall on the roof of the Parliament. Large parties of scientists who are visiting Canberra for the Science Congress fight the outbreak through the night.” This appears to be the more northerly fire of the two to affect the ACT.	Fahy 2004
-----------------	----------------------	---	--	-----------

### 14<sup>th</sup> to 16<sup>th</sup> JANUARY

**Berridale (15<sup>th</sup>)**

“Wet day”

**Cooma (15<sup>th</sup>)**

12 – 23 °C, 37 points (9mm) of rain recorded in Cooma

<b>General</b>	-	1	Widespread rainfall and cooler temperatures came into the south of NSW and the ACT between the evenings of 14 <sup>th</sup> and 15 <sup>th</sup> January, continuing over the next week into a wet autumn. Further to the north and south the rain came later, with the 15 <sup>th</sup> being the worst fire day for Goulburn, Southern Highlands, South Coast, Bathurst, parts of Sydney and the Central Coast. The rain seemed to miss the Tumut – Tumbarumba area. Rain came to most of the Victorian burnt area early on the 16 <sup>th</sup> January. Over 70 lives were lost in Victoria, no lives lost in the Kosciuszko area but 11 homes destroyed, mostly in the Paupong and Delegate areas. Several people injured in NSW, some seriously.	Cooma Express 1938/39, Aitchison, Barry 2004
----------------	---	---	--	--

**17 JANUARY**

<b>Adelong</b>	KNP	1b	Ellerslie Station fire reported as contained between Yaven Ck, Condonblonga and Adelong Common. 5 men injured 2 with serious burns. Edges mapped assuming control lines of Yaven Ck, Yaven Ck Rd, Snowy Mountains Highway, German’s Ck Rd and Adelong Ck. Southern edge not known but marked roughly using known spread.	Tum/Ad T. 1938/39
<b>Talbingo</b>	KNP	1	Fire ignited near Talbingo, burning through Yellowin	Tum/Ad T. 1938/39

**23<sup>rd</sup> to 29<sup>th</sup> JANUARY**

<b>Wider Rules Point area</b>	KNP	2	Fire was also mentioned as having burnt 1000 acres of Mr James Kell’s property in this	Tum/Ad T. 1938/39
-------------------------------	-----	---	--	-------------------

week along with other country.

## 2 FEBRUARY

<b>Talbingo to Rules Point, Goobragandra</b>	KNP	1b	“The fire from Rules Point along the mountain tops was caught by the terrific hurricane of Thursday last (2/2/39), which assumed enormous proportions on a 12-mile front and met the fire from Blowering, Yellowin and Talbingo in the Goobragandra country where some hundreds of men from different parts tried to turn it off or arrest its progress. The flames leapt from mountain ridge to mountain ridge, sometimes spanning a distance of a mile and a half. So fierce was the inferno that to attempt to arrest its progress would be sheer madness in face of the tornado force of the wind.” Also 20,000 acres of F. W. Hughes (Southern Estates) country burnt.	Tum/Ad T. 1938/39
--	-----	----	---	----------------------

## 3 FEBRUARY

<b>Talbingo – Yarrangobilly</b>	KNP	1	“The bush fires which have swept Talbingo Mountain have left a blackened mess of ruin and devastation as far as Yarrangobilly caves.”	Ad/Tum Exp. 1939-39
---------------------------------	-----	---	---	------------------------

## 4 FEBRUARY

<b>Adjungbilly</b>	KNP	2	Fire started at Adjungbilly – spread not known but it is unlikely to have spread as far as the mountains through private land without rating another mention in the local newspapers.	Tum/Ad T. 1938/39
--------------------	-----	---	---	----------------------

## 5 FEBRUARY

<b>Talbingo</b>	KNP	1	New ignition on evening of 5 <sup>th</sup> (Sunday) on the range between Gilmore Valley and Blowering. "...flames coming down the eastern side of the range into McKey's property and spreading towards the north. On Sunday night (5/2/39) it had jumped the river and was burning up the hills near the Blowering waterfall, a great blaze being visible from Tumut for a considerable time"	Tum/Ad T. 1938/39
-----------------	-----	---	--	-------------------

#### 6 FEBRUARY

<b>Brindabella, Talbingo</b>	KNP, Brindabella, Namadgi	1	6 Feb 1939: "Extensive forest fires were reported to be raging to the west of the Australian Capital Territory about Brindabella and towards Talbingo". The southernmost of the two Brindabella fires- almost certainly the eastern edge of the Bago and Rules Point fires burning into the back of the January 10 – 13 Canberra fire.	Cooma Express 1938/39
------------------------------	---------------------------	---	--	-----------------------

#### 7 FEBRUARY

<b>Talbingo</b>	KNP	1b	2 fires still burning on Talbingo side: Ellerslie & Deltroit near Adelong, and another over Bago, Batlow, Yellowin, Buddong and Talbingo. Eastern side of 2 <sup>nd</sup> fire mapped using control lines along the Snowy Mountains Highway, Tumut River, Bago Range and Adelong Rd	Tum/Ad T. 1938/39
-----------------	-----	----	---	-------------------

#### DATE UNKNOWN

<b>Talbingo / Tumbarumba / Jingellic edge</b>	KNP	1a	Assumed edge between Bago fires and mapped Victorian edge at NSW border. Allows for indications of fire near Tumbarumba.	Pendergast, Vaughan 2004, Pendergast, Reg 2004, Stretton 1939a, Tum/Ad T. 1938/39
<b>World's End</b>	KNP	2	400 y.o. stand of Alpine Ash indicate unburnt areas	Good, Roger 2004
<b>Frost Plains</b>	KNP	1	Local recollections state that the	Taylor, Ted 2004

			open plains did not burn and that no work was needed to protect the huts or buildings such as Currango Homestead. The belief is that the fire came around the plains, burning across the wooded ridgelines. This is consistent with the wider experience that too little fuel was available on the drought stricken, grazed grassland country.	
<b>Happy Jack's</b>	KNP	2	Some dendrochronological evidence of fire in the northern part of Happy Jacks	Good, Roger 2004
<b>Happy Jacks / Goodradigbee edge</b>	KNP	1b	Estimated edge based upon known fire presence in northern area, connecting known points of Happy Jacks and the southern edge of the mapped edge at Goodradigbee / Brindabella. The edge marks the border of the forested country and the open frost plains.	Taylor, Ted 2004, Cooma Express 1938/39, Banks 1982, ACT ESB 2004, NPWS 2003
<b>Finn's River, Gungartan, Island Bend</b>	KNP	1	Harry Reid reported fighting the fire at Finn's River, recalled it burning over Gungartan and thence across the Snowy River at Island Bend. Dendrochronological evidence shows the fire burning down Disappointment Spur.	Reid, Harry 1993, Costin, Alec 2004
<b>Mawson's Hut / Botherum Plain</b>	KNP	2	No burnt country observed on travels between White's River to Snowy Plains via Mawson's and Alpine huts	Fletcher, Fred 2003
<b>Farm Ridge</b>	KNP	2	No burnt country observed	Hedger, Roy 2004,
<b>Nimmitabel / Bombala edge</b>	-	1b	Assumed connection between known edges at Numbla Vale and Delegate, follows rough historic edge of timber as may be expected from the described fire behaviour and wetter conditions ensuing late on the 14th.	Cooma Express 1938/39
<b>Charlotte's Pass</b>	KNP	1	"Another fire occurred possibly crossing from Victoria at the back of the Chalet". As other accounts report no fire crossing	Cooma Express 1938/39, Fletcher, Fred 2003, Costin et al

			the Main Range, this is likely to have been either part of the Piper's Ck fire or a separate spot fire. Photography of the Snowy River valley west of the Chalet shows significant fire damage to the Snow Gum community, which dates from 1939 or earlier. Many patchy fires lit by graziers prior to 1939 had already killed many patches of Snowgum in the area so direct connectivity cannot be established without further work.	2000
<b>The Piper</b>	KNP	2	Snowgum communities killed by very hot fire on The Piper. Regeneration did not occur due to heavy grazing immediately following the fire.	Costin, Alec 2004
<b>Thredbo River</b>	KNP	1	Police report lists a fire burning "behind the Thredbo River". This is likely to be the Leather Barrel Ck fire burning up through the Big Boggy area.	Cooma Express 1938/39
<b>"Big Bend", Mulligan's Mountain</b>	KNP	1	Evidence of intense fire observed after the event	Thompson, Lenny 2004
<b>Lower Snowy area</b>	KNP	2	Mt Trooper unburnt, archaeological evidence, area near Scotchies' Old Yards unburnt – dendrochronological evidence	Pulsford 1991
<b>Pilot Wilderness</b>	KNP	1	General reference – dendrochronological evidence indicates areas burnt	Pulsford 1991
<b>Tooma Dam</b>	KNP	2	Snowy Hydro workers in the 50's had to clear large areas of very old growth <i>E. delegatensis</i> that had been killed by a fire believed and most likely to have been the 1939 fire.	Taylor, Ted 2004
<b>Tom Groggin / Geehi</b>	KNP/Alpine	1	General impression of where Victorian fire may have entered NSW – the Mount Pinnibar area is a known fire path	Golby, Greg 1989
<b>Geehi Dam</b>	KNP	2	Snowy Hydro workers in the 50's had to clear large areas of very old growth <i>E. delegatensis</i> that had been killed by a fire	Taylor, Ted 2004

believed and most likely to have been the 1939 fire.				
<b>Geehi Valley</b>	KNP	2	No dendrochronological evidence of '39 fire in trees examined, many areas clearly missed or burnt cool	Good, Roger 2004