

Tidbinbilla Nature Reserve Firestorm: 18th January 2003.

- What follows is a photographic record of the events of the 18th January 2003.
Note: Some images may be disturbing.



As the firestorm was about to hit, winds funnelled flames into “tornado like spouts”. A colleague & I were driving into the Reserve only a few hundred metres to the left of this “spout” to retrieve a generator at this time.



Soon after returning with the generator, conditions rapidly deteriorated – we never had time to start the generator.

- **After the firestorm passed, the fire area commander & I were the first to enter the Reserve to survey the damage – what we saw was beyond our expectations.**



As we entered the reserve, we could see that the force of the 160+ km/hour winds associated with the firestorm had also taken a toll.



The reptile display in the Education Centre which I had constructed in my spare time in my workshop at “Rock Valley Homestead”.

- **Colleagues & I had relocated many of the critical species from the “Animal House” to the education centre in the middle of the night before the firestorm.**



19th January 2003 - the day after the firestorm. The charred remains of the Education Centre.



A view of the Education Centre from “Turkey Hill” a few weeks after the fires.

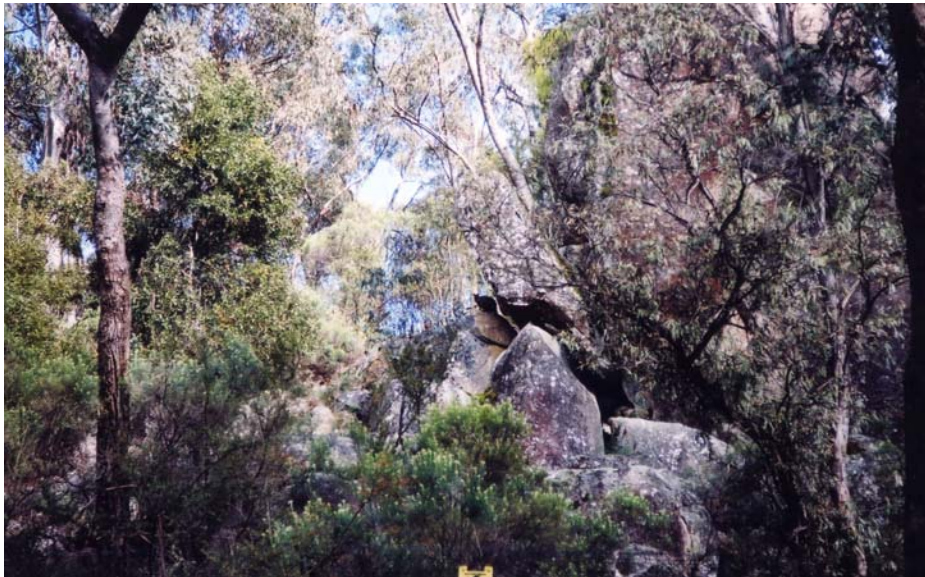
- **Tidbinbilla Nature Reserve had been very successful at a number of endangered species breeding programs, including Brush-tailed Rock Wallabies.**



Not only were we extremely successful at breeding Brush-tailed Rock Wallabies, but the technique of “cross fostering” was also pioneered at Tidbinbilla during my time.



The first successful release of one of our captive bred Brush-tailed Rock Wallabies to the wild.



Much of our breeding success was as a result of the natural exhibits we provided our animals (Brush-tailed Rock Wallaby just visible in centre of image).



After the fires our enclosure was completely incinerated. Amazingly, five animals survived the fires in this exhibit (one later died).



Even my daughter was saddened by the loss of so many animals.
(A drawing she made of a Brush-tailed Rock Wallaby after the fires.)



The road from the main office compound to the “Animal House” was littered with carcasses (note dead kangaroos on and beside the road).



But the worst was not the animals that had already perished, but those that had survived and had to be put down after the fires. Here, an Emu with critically burnt feet and legs.



Large pits were dug to bury the thousands of animals which had perished in the fires.



The track into the “Animal House” – our feed storage and preparation area and our main “off limits” breeding, veterinary and holding facilities.



The “Animal House” the day after the Firestorm swept through.



Nothing remained of the “Animal House” and its surrounding facilities.

- **Our Koala Enclosure was a large (~20hectare) exhibit that held more than 25 animals at the time of the fire.**



The Koala Enclosure was a large section of native forest, fenced to exclude predators.



The day after the fires – the Koala Enclosure had been completely incinerated (note dead animals on path).



Remarkably, one Koala was later found to have survived, however it had suffered severe burns. We were unable to identify any of the animals which had died as their microchips had failed as a result of the extreme heat.



The day after the fires my main priority was to assess what animals had survived so that we could best care for them. Here I was trying to gain access to the Wetlands, only to find the main boardwalk had been burnt out.



Remarkably, many of our captive birds had survived.

- **With no coolroom, freezer or food preparation facilities (all of which had been lost at the “Animal House”) my main priority became getting temporary facilities established and the feed we were going to require to look after all of our animals in the aftermath.**

- **Unfortunately during this time, I also had to relocate to a motel as my daughters and I had also lost our home on the Reserve.**



A hundred year+ pine tree on the driveway into my heritage listed home, “Rock Valley Homestead”



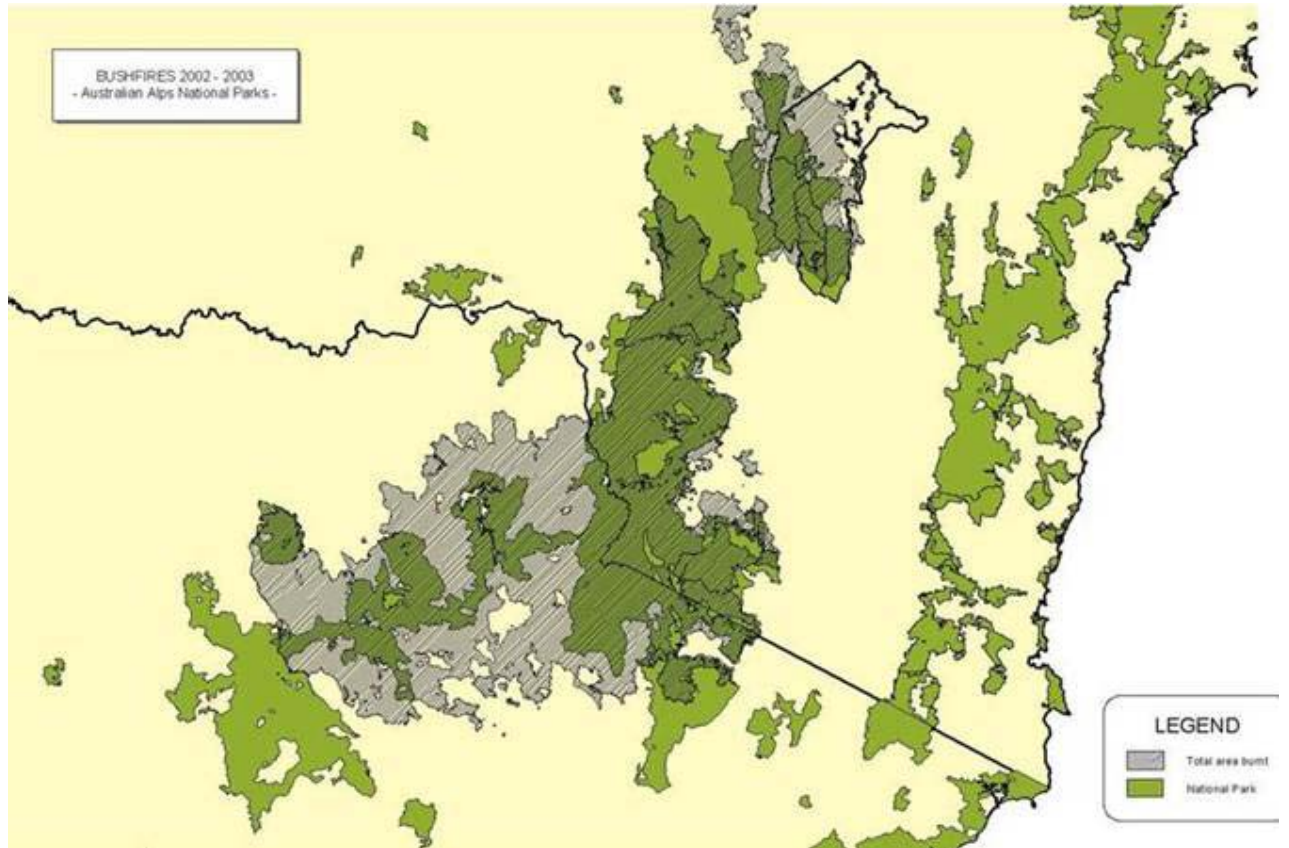
Built from a “pise” (rammed earth) walled construction, the 117 year old “Rock Valley Homestead” had not escaped the firestorm.



A view into the lounge room of "Rock Valley Homestead".



Nothing remained for me to salvage from our home, which had been totally destroyed.



Over a million hectares were burnt across three States by the time the fires were eventually extinguished (burnt area shaded grey, with Tidbinbilla in the top right of the area burnt).