

FLO Retirement from Mt. Buller, Victoria, Australia.



After 37 years of dedicated service, Chris Deutscher had to retire at the start of the 2013-14 fire season due to ill health. Chris served 3 years on The Paps tower and the last 34 years on his beloved Mt. Buller. His expertise, dedication, sense of humour and hat will be sorely missed on the mountain. Chris was able to attend this year's end-of-season gathering and it was great to have him amongst us. He has committed to next year's gathering already, health permitting. We wish him all the best in his well-earned retirement.

Below is the un-edited text that was written by Chris's daughter and read out at the retirement function that DEPI had organised for Chris on the 16th May 2014. It gives an unexpected insight how the work on fire-

towers affects the family at home.

My first memory of a 'fire tower' is the wiggly, bumpy, corrugated road leading up to the "Paps Tower". Up there the grass was always dry and the landscape sparse and barren. Perfect conditions for a fire. There was always an annoying abundance of insects which included moths, cicadas, dragonflies and flies. Dad had an incredible collection of deceased insects pinned to a cork board which may or not have acted as a deterrent to other pests!

There were numerous days during the school holidays when I spent the day with Dad at the tower and lucky for me I was an avid reader and keen on drawing as Dad was always focused on various aspects of his 'watch'.

We moved to 'Corn Hill' and it was there all our family fell in love with the amazing view. Dad worked long and unpredictable hours and for a kid I guess I something you except. Christmas day was always tough as I was only allowed to open one present from under the tree in the morning and then I had to wait until Dad arrived home from work in the early evening to open the rest! Tough choice for a kid! There's not many people who have worked Christmas Day for nearly 37 years besides maybe Doctors, Nurses, Policemen, Firemen and Fire-towermen – all of which are professions that save people's lives. Dad always put the safety of the community ahead of the dates, time and occasions which today is an attribute hard to find. A move to Mirimbah bought him even closer to Mt Buller and also a winter connection.

There were many days of smoke filled sky's but none like that of February 1983. These devastating fires also known as Ash Wednesday burnt out more than 210,000 hectares and killed 47 people. At 8.15am when the school bus stopped at Merrijig we couldn't see the children outside getting on the bus for the smoke. Many townships and communities lost houses, animals and loved ones. The unsung heroes involved in spotting, fighting and controlling the fires worked around the clock, giving continuous support to those that needed information which ultimately kept many more communities safer from the perils of the flames.

The Eastern Victoria Alpine fires of 2003 brought fire very close to home! Once again Dad worked tirelessly, staying overnight at the Buller tower on several nights and doing everything in his power to protect Mt Buller, Mirimbah and Sawmill Settlement from fires which raged incredibly close by! People have said "Deutch saved Buller, he's a bloody legend"! They are right!

When I was in and around Mt Buller in the fire seasons of the past, I always had the sense that Dad was watching over us! I felt safer knowing his keen eyes and knowledge gained over many years on the tower were there to protect us and minimise any dangers looming.

Today you are all saying thanks and farewell to that legend. A man who has irreplaceable and extensive knowledge of fire, mountains, terrain, landscape, fire towers, maps, wind and towermen. It's a shame the DEPI couldn't include in their budget a Helicopter to pick up Chris in the morning and drop him home in the evening because he can still do the "job".

I am proud of my fathers wonderful dedication and devotion as well as his achievements with the DEPI on the tower and know that he will be missed. Chris has a great sense of community and a love of his local area and I am sure his talents will be missed into the future.

Sam Standish, daughter of Chris Deutscher.