

112 A day in the life of a fire lookout

By Dom Bromilow

The Mt. Toorongo fire tower is thought to have been operational since the 1930's. Thankfully they have improved it since then. Dom Bromilow looks out for the Noojee and surrounding communities by manning the fire tower during the fire season. Dom describes his work and the development of the 2006-07 fires.

Working as a fire lookout on Mt. Toorongo means spending a lot of time by yourself. Every day begins the same way; driving up the dirt track, climbing the 20 metre tower and setting up the radio. The dangerous days are easy to pick as the hot, north wind is blowing you off the ladder as you climb up to the tower. Wind strength doubles as you get to the top above the tree line. After a visual scan of the horizon you radio in the weather, tune the AM radio to the cricket and settle in for a long day.

The Great Divide Fire of 2007 started from a storm over Mansfield; fifty plus dry, lightning strikes. No rain to slow or stop the fires. They spread quickly pushing up large thermal columns in rugged country. First three columns, then seven, then fifteen or more. The fires close to the roads are fought easily. The fires in steep gullies run. Over the weeks they grow, joining together, becoming enormous, powerful, self generating storms.

The firefighting bombers look like angry wasps circling giants. The smoke is often so thick

around the tower that visibility is zero! I'm there to report the wind changes.

Towards the end of the fire season the wet lightning starts rolling through. Large storms putting fifty or so ground strikes down in fifteen minutes. Mt. Matlock tower is hit often, so is Mt. Tanjil. I sit and wait until the storm abates and then ride carefully home.

Mt. Matlock Tower

