



Remembering the Miracle of Wingello

So many tales of people helping others in Wingello

This month we remember the raging bushfires that swept through Wingello on the night of Saturday 4th January 2020. Actually, it is not just the fires we remember, but the brave and stoic actions of the local and supporting RFS volunteers and so many villagers that gave so much to defend Wingello and our homes.

On New Years Eve we had a warning of what was to come when a Southerly breeze pushed a great volume of smoke from the out of control Currowan Fire from across the Shoalhaven Gorge, blotting out the light and covering Wingello in a thick choking haze. Although the history of Wingello over the last hundred years or so told us that fire never came from the South, the drought and build up of fuel meant this was to be a new moment in history.

This warning convinced the majority of Wingello to take their fire plans seriously. Neighbours worked together to clear more fuel from their properties, while most collected more and better masks, goggles, and other fire fighting gear if they intended to stay, and everyone packed bags and made ready.

The official forecast was for embers from the Currowan fire to cross the Shoalhaven Gorge and gradually approach the Southern Villages of Wingello, Penrose and Tallong probably hitting us mid Sunday. But Nature is always full of surprises. The Pyro-Cumulus cloud that formed above the Currowan fire met the brisk Southerly wind, collapsing the cloud and sucking the fire across the gorge to explode directly behind Wingello with 80kph winds pushing the fire full force into the village!

Our local Firies were already tired from their assistance at the Buxton, Balmoral and Burrowang fires in the preceding weeks but were back on the case defending the homes of their friends and neighbours. Trucks from other brigades came rushing in upon hearing that Wingello was under attack and needed help - often arriving before they were officially dispatched.

Defensive lines were started and abandoned a number of times but due to the force of the fires hitting the bone dry forest and accumulated debris they were pushed back until they set up a perimeter along the railway line in the centre of Wingello.

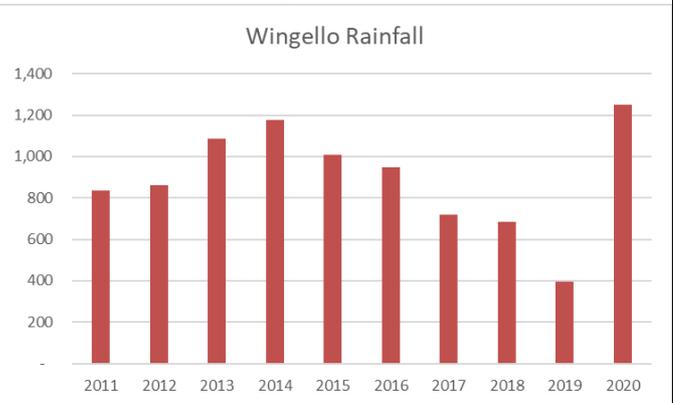
"You shall not pass!" the Firies defensive stance effectively commanded the oncoming flames as trees, fences and houses exploded in fire around them.

Continued overleaf...



Drought and Fuel - a deadly combination

While the annual rainfall decreased over the last few years and in 2020 collapsed, the levels of fuel from unmaintained roadside verges and forest increased.



You shall not pass!	Fire season started 1 October	Library Bus Tuesdays 2:15 to 3:15 In front of the park Jan 5, 19 Feb 2, 16
	NO FIRES without a permit.	

Bin Collection Mondays	Store Opening Hours Phone: 02 4884 4340	
	January 4 ● Yellow 11 ● ● Both 18 ● Yellow 25 ● Green	Mon - Thu: 7:30am - 4:00pm Friday: 7:30am - 4:00pm Weekends: 8:00am - 3:00pm Public holidays: 8:00am - 10:30am We are open Every Day except Good Friday, Easter Sunday, Christmas & Boxing Day.

Remembering the Miracle of Wingello (Continued)

Meanwhile, residents on the Eastern side of the line were escaping as the fire triggered the next stage of their plans, while others stayed behind to defend their homes and those of their neighbours in Camden Street, Railway Parade, Forest Road, Bumballa Road and others. On the other side of the Village many others were doing their part to defend their part of Wingello from the ember attack of flying, burning twigs, leaves and even large branches.

The RFS made forays into the fiercely attacked Eastern side of the village throughout the night to the great relief of those defending their homes. One Penrose RFS team was stuck behind fallen powerlines and stayed saving the surrounding homes.

RFS trucks raced back and forth refilling water from the railway gins and private water tanks as well as longer commutes to the pumps at Paddys River near the Highway. Fire struck again and again, catching alight fences, trees and many back yards.

In the early morning between 3am and 4am, exhausted firefighters were able to move back into the Eastern half of the village fully expecting to see home after home destroyed. Sadly, despite the desperate efforts of the Firefighters, we ended up losing a dozen or so houses. However, based on the suddenness and ferocity of the fire, the exhausted Firies fully expected to see 40 or more houses destroyed. But not this time.

Wingello had its own Miracle.

No one died or was seriously injured during the frantic defence by exhausted firefighters and locals. So many homes were not destroyed, although a great many villagers had much of their properties destroyed other than their home.



The Pyro-Cumulus Cloud collapsing

After the fire a great many people and organisations provided assistance. The St Vincent de Paul Society and Lions Club provided much needed assistance, Red Cross listened when we explained so many lost everything except their houses and updated their financial support. Many individuals offered their time and materials to assist those of us in need. Thank you to all who have helped us.

It was very rewarding to see how so many of the people of Wingello stood together in the fighting of the fires and in the long recovery and rebuilding.

We are very glad to be part of Wingello.

(And very grateful for so much rain this year too!)

Lots more information at:

<http://wingello.blogspot.com/2020/01/>



Pick up the 2021 Wingello Rural Fire Brigadar Calendar from the store.



Some of our local Firies in January 2020