

£100,000 Fire at Canberra

CANBERRA, Tuesday.
—A devastating bushfire today destroyed the workshop and equipment at the Government Observatory at Mount Stromlo, worth approximately £100,000 in a fire which was the worst in Canberra's history.

It also destroyed two prefabricated houses and 500 acres of pine forest surrounding the observatory, about seven miles from the city area.

At one stage the threat to the city itself was so great that the Minister for the Interior, Mr. Kent Hughes, ordered firefighters to fall back from the main centre of the fire and take up positions to protect the city area.

The fire began shortly after midday after a dry electrical storm and within an hour had a strong hold.

Throughout the afternoon, the national radio station repeated calls for volunteers to fight fires and more than 1000 fighters went to the scene.

To add to the danger, another fire broke out near Hall, a small township about 11 miles from Canberra on the other side of Stromlo, but this was brought under control after threatening several valuable wool-grazing properties.

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the workshop destroyed at Mount Stromlo was one of the most modern of its kind in the world and contained many valuable precision instruments.

Only the back breaking efforts of fire fighters and a sudden change in wind saved the main section of the observatory, which contained sky-sweeping telescopes and time measuring and other equipment valued at more than £100,000.

The two houses destroyed were on grazing land at the foot of Mount Stromlo hill and on the other side of the road leading to the Canberra city area.

When the fire was approaching the observatory, officials evacuated houses in the area and residents took their furniture out into the open, but the fire stopped before it reached them.

The fire also threatened sub-observatories, which have been established by the American Yale and Columbia Universities.

Police sent special buses to a small settlement not far from Mount Stromlo, where they evacuated 30 children and 15 women, but the settlement escaped the blaze.

As a result of the destruction of the power plant at Mt. Stromlo Observatory today the time service supplied throughout Australia and to ships at sea will now be completely out of action.

This means radio listeners in Australia will be unable to receive time signals until power is restored.

Ships on the run between England and Australia will also be without signals until they reach the equator and are able to receive signals from Greenwich Observatory, England.

Destruction of the observatory's workshop in today's fire will render the observatory almost useless until machinery and equipment are replaced.