

FOREST FIRE RAZES CANBERRA PLANT £100,000 Damage At Mt. Stromlo Observatory

A raging pine forest fire swept Mt. Stromlo Observatory near Canberra yesterday, destroying the workshop and causing almost £100,000 worth of damage.

Fresh outbreaks of Victorian bushfires yesterday claimed another life and more homes, while two people were killed in a car-van crash in dense bushfire smoke on a NSW road.

CANBERRA, Feb. 5.—The equipment lost at Mount Stromlo will take two years to replace. The workshop was one of the finest of its kind in the world.

Equipment in the workshop included valuable precision lathes and expensive lens grinding and polishing gear.

Of the 15 houses on top of Mount Stromlo, only the observatory was burned.

The Observatory's Director (Dr. E. V. D. E. Woolley) and about 20 of his staff, including four women, fought the fire for three hours.

They managed to save the three telescopes and two-thirds of the building.

About 50 women and children were evacuated from the mountain before fast-moving flames licking the tops of 50-ft. pines encircled the observatory.

Water Falls

Dr. Woolley said that the workshop could have been saved if the water supply had not given out. Pressure for the water was cut off when the electricity sub-station near the observatory was razed.

Although no records were burned, many intended projects would have to be cancelled.

Only a sudden wind change and a heavy hail-storm saved the complete

destruction of the pine forests and many homesteads. A small holding and home at the foot of the mountain were destroyed.

The Minister for the Interior (Mr Kent Hughes) led firefighting at the foot of Mount Stromlo. He was the first firefighter to drive through the smouldering forest to the observatory.

Damage to the forests is estimated to be well over £50,000.

Food Service

Provisions were sent from the Prime Minister's Lodge and Parliament House to augment those given by Canberra housewives, who organised an emergency food service for the firefighters.

Hundreds of public servants left their desks in response to broadcast appeals for volunteers.

Dr. Woolley said that the Mount Stromlo fire was started by lightning at about 11 a.m.

Four other fires around Canberra burned throughout the day, but were reported under control this evening.

The city has been warned of bushfire danger for tomorrow.

This afternoon at one stage, Government House at Yarralumla was in the path of the flames, but a change of wind averted the threat.

N.S.W. Fires

SYDNEY, February 5.—

Widespread bushfires again menaced many NSW districts today. So far there has been no loss of life, and police have not received any reports of homes destroyed.

These fires included outbreaks in 100 State forest areas.

More than 1,000 volunteers, police, soldiers and airmen fought fires in Bowenfels district near Lithgow during the day.

Bega, on the south coast, was ringed by fires, and business houses again closed their doors as employees and employers joined the firefighters.