

Families, Fires and Floods – 1980 to 2014

UPPER PLENTY – 1980 TO 2013

During this period there was an influx of families to Upper Plenty, perhaps looking for a different way of life in a semi-rural community. Among these were the Bott, Maskell, Carlin, Molan and Day families (both John and Gaven). Later were the Holmberg, Bond, Brooks, Kanderovskis and McGregors.

Local businesses

Gill and Rhonda Livesay ran a working dairy farm on Clarkes Road until 2004, when they moved to Northern Victoria to another dairy farming enterprise. The Mugavins still run beef cattle supplemented by selling firewood and stock feed. However, apart from the few local businesses, most residents (those not retired) work in or around Melbourne and properties are more about lifestyle than income and food production – a very different way of life to the early settlers in the district.

Wallan Road Nursery

In the mid-1990s the Wallan-Whittlesea Road was realigned and widened in anticipation of increasing population in the surrounding townships.

This caused major disruption to local and passing traffic for several months and also contributed to the demise of Bill and Glenys Broderick's Glenbillie Nursery and Gardens at the end of Clarkes Road. The hall and school lost their north-south drive through, a new entry to the car park being created off Clarkes Road.

Pictured, left, is the sign for Suzie Pennant's Wallan Road Nursery, now closed, on the corner of Mugavins Road during the road realignment.

Sticks 'n' Stones

Sticks 'n' Stones was started by Chris and Margaret Christodoulou in 2004. They built a home and business premises on the property, first selling firewood and later garden and screening products, fencing materials, feed for livestock and pets and hardware. They sold the business to Len Marx and Janice Dunne in 2012.

Janice and Len, right, lived on the Mornington Peninsula and Len had previously owned a number of businesses around that area. When they were unable to find a suitable new business they looked further afield, eventually settling on Upper Plenty. Since taking over Stick 'n' Stones in 2012, they have expanded the number of products and goods available and have become a popular place to have a chat whilst doing business.

Local place names

The Gap	The north end of the Wallan-Whittlesea Road where the cutting has been made to allow the road through.
Pound Hill	The hill behind the old Upper Plenty Post Office where stray animals used to be impounded.
Cleve Hill	The hill on the northwest corner of Wallan-Whittlesea Road, previously owned by the Cleve family.
Lockerbie Park Wainaring	The old property name for Uncle Nev's Trail Rides. The old Quim/McDougall property on the west side of the Epping-Wandong Road.
Humming Hills	Teresa and Vince Carlin's 126-acre property at the end of Clarkes Road. It was Laurie Mugavin who suggested the name to the then owner, Ray Bradley.
Brooklands	The old Gardiner property on the Wallan-Whittlesea Road.
Merriang Road	The Epping-Wandong Road. Merriang was a small village, no longer in existence, along this road.
Bowsden	The old Barber property on the Epping-Wandong Road, currently occupied by the mobile fridge people.
Willow Bend	The Mugavin property located on Mugavins Lane.
Pattons Track	Off South Mountain Road through the forest.
The Sugarloaf/ Sugarloaf Hill	There are many hills so named but this one is located north of Glenvale and southeast of Conical Hill. The nearest road is Hilliers Road to the west.

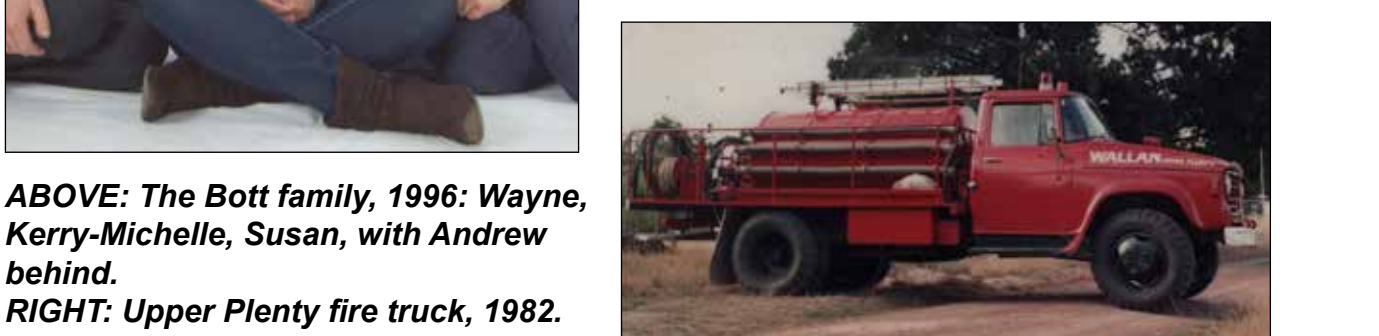
THE 1980S

The Bott family

Susan and Wayne Bott bought their land in Mahadys Road in 1979. Initially they ran a few cows, which Wayne would come up from Bundoora to feed. They built their house in 1984 after deciding they would give living in the country a go for five years. They have never looked back. Both children, Kerry-Michelle (b. 1986) and Andrew (b. 1990) were born in Upper Plenty and went to the local primary school. As the children grew, Kerry-Michelle became interested in riding and a number of much-loved horses replaced the cows, and Andrew took to sports, playing cricket for Wallan and Whittlesea, also football for Whittlesea and Kingleake.

Both Wayne and Susan have been very active community members. Susan ran a large playgroup at the Shack from 1988 to 1996 and is a long-serving member of the hall Committee of Management, as was Wayne for many years. Wayne joined the CFA in 1984, learning a lot from Laurie

Mugavin, a long-time active CFA member who housed a small firefighting truck at his property. Susan joined the CFA in 1986 as a support member and is still a key figure working with the CFA Juniors. Wayne served on the Upper Plenty Primary School Committee 1991–2003. Susan has coordinated the Upper Plenty Garden Club for many years.



ABOVE: The Bott family, 1996: Wayne, Kerry-Michelle, Susan, with Andrew behind. RIGHT: Upper Plenty fire truck, 1982.



Upper Plenty playgroup, 1989.

Upper Plenty playgroup, 1994.

Vinko and Lou Drogenik

"We bought forty acres of bushland in 1980. We used to come up weekends. The block was full of broken glass bottles because the previous owners must have had lots of parties. I don't know how many buckets of broken glass we picked up. We also dug out the bracken that covered everything. We didn't want to use sprays. Where the bracken had been, amazing wildflowers came up. Ericas, tiny orchids, button daisies, milkmaids, running postman, the egg and bacon creeper and the beautiful hardenbergia. At the back of the block we found a concrete slab, which must have been the floor to some kind of shelter for the prisoners of war who were cutting timber on Mr Disappointment. Besides bracken our block was littered with huge tree stumps from the trees the prisoners must have cut down. Oh they must have been enormous trees! It took Vinko months to bulldoze those huge stumps out of the ground so we could start planting trees.

We started an orchard even before we built the house. We planted all kinds of fruit trees – apples, pears, cherries, plums, nashis, chestnuts, walnuts and olives. We organised a small vineyard. That took a lot of work. We started an exotic garden with lindens, an agathis, a row of oaks, a bunya bunya and others. In summer we used to come and water the trees we planted by hand, a bucket each. Of course we had to protect each tree with chicken wire because the kangaroos and rabbits were a menace. We started building our house in 1989 and moved in in 1993. Our son Peter was building a yacht on the block and our other son, Michael, started Year 7 at Assumption College. Our daughters were living in town. By this time we were self-sufficient in fruit, vegetables and even wine.

In 2009, as everyone else in the area, we lost everything except the house. The beautiful trees that we had nursed so carefully and which had grown so well all went up in a puff of smoke. The hard task of re-landscaping and replanting had to start all over. Though now the garden is looking better, we will never be able to sit in the shade of an oak or a linden, that will take many years more than we have left, but our grandchildren will."

Lou Drogenik, 2014

Ash Wednesday

A ten-year drought preceded the devastating Ash Wednesday bushfires of February 1983.

Prior to this, in November 1982, huge fires burned out of control at Wandong East, Mt Disappointment, Upper Plenty and north to Flowerdale. It took four days to control.



YABAMAC fire, 1982.

The fire began near the YABAMAC Scout Camp on South Mountain Road (which was completely destroyed in the Black Saturday bushfires), on a day of Total Fire Ban, and caused spot fires up to twenty kilometres ahead of the front. Helicopters were indispensable in tracking the fire and providing advice to firefighters on the ground.

Broadford District Forester, Al Turnbull, said nearly half the logging resources in the Mt Disappointment forest were wiped out, with substantial losses of mountain and alpine ash ... The whole range was ablaze, and the fire could be seen from many miles away. The spectacular glow was breathtaking, yet frightening to the residents of nearby towns such as Wallan, Lancefield, Kilmore and Broadford.

Kilmore Free Press, 1 December 1982.

The Carlin family

Vince and Theresa Carlin moved to 'Humming Hills' in Clarkes Road, Upper Plenty, from Lalor in Melbourne in 1984 with three of their six children. They purchased it from Colin and Marie Gibbs. It had been part of a much larger property, previously owned by Herbert Day and then by Harold Brown, who subdivided it. Vince had grown up in the country and loved the life. He had attended agricultural boarding school but lived and worked in Melbourne. Thirty years later, they have both retired from work.



Brendan, Teresa and Vince Carlin, 2009.

Francis Payne and Rose King

"We bought fifty acres on Clarkes Road in 1986. Our only child, Sam, was born in February 1987. Our first home was a ten- by seven-metre fibro-cement cottage near the road. It was Francis's dream to build a mudbrick home and our site was levelled on the day I went into labour. Our house was the first mudbrick structure in the shire, built with load-bearing walls as opposed to the more-conventional post-and-beam construction; a plan which caused great consternation in the Shire of Kilmore's Planning Department.

Being optimistic and inexperienced, as are most owner-builders, we anticipated being finished in nine months. It was much more difficult than we expected as we were both working full-time and raising a child.

BLACK SATURDAY – 7 FEBRUARY 2009

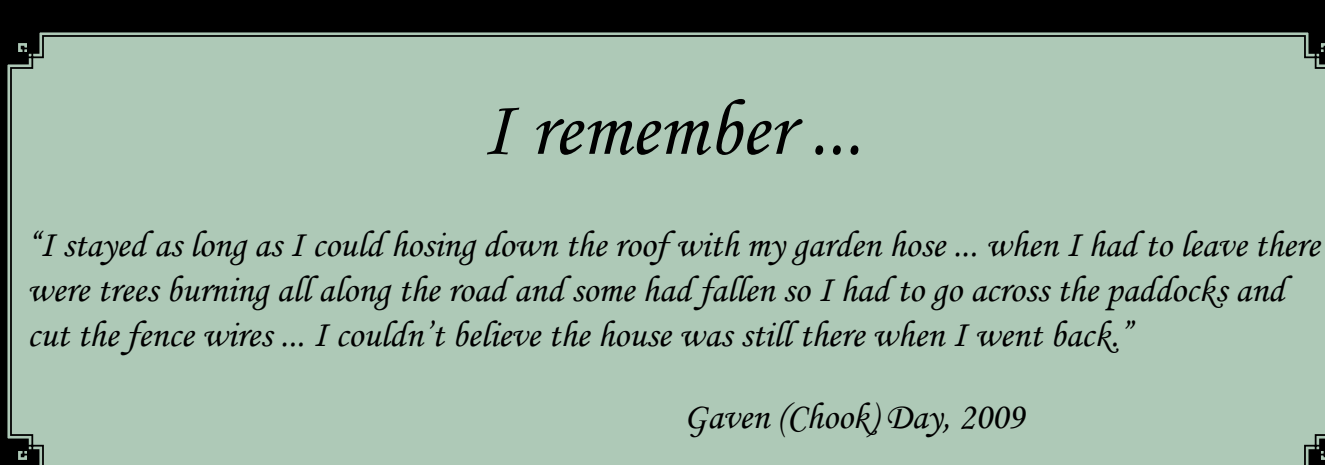
Upper Plenty was one of the many communities impacted by the Black Saturday bushfires. Much has been said and written about these devastating fires. The following is how some residents of Upper Plenty experienced that day and its aftermath.

Hayley Day

"We were told we should leave. I had six pairs of new shoes in boxes under the table and remember thinking I had to take those ... later I found out I had completely forgotten to take any clean knickers."

Vince, Teresa and Brendan Carlin

"It was horrific and dangerous and you need some luck." Vince and Teresa had a fire plan and made the decision to stay and defend their property on Clarkes Road, adjacent to the State Forest. It required almost superhuman effort and determination, particularly as Vince was fighting cancer at the time. All of their outbuildings and contents, outside equipment and fencing was destroyed. Teresa, when talking to the Kilmore Free Press related the trauma of watching her son, Brendan, try to enter a burning farm shed to retrieve some valuables. At one time she lost sight of her husband and feared he may have been in the shed.



"I stayed as long as I could hosing down the roof with my garden hose ... when I had to leave there were trees burning all along the road and some had fallen so I had to go across the paddocks and cut the fence wires ... I couldn't believe the house was still there when I went back."

Gaven (Chook) Day, 2009

Francis Payne and Rose King

"We always knew we were living in a high bushfire risk area and the longer we lived here the more likely it would be that we would experience one. In the 1980s and early 1990s, the CFA used to routinely visit properties and offer advice. They made it quite clear that in the event of a fire we should not expect that the CFA would be able to defend our property. We took that onboard and put in place sprinklers and a direct line from the dam to our firefighting system, which also functions as a watering system for the garden.

We noticed the smoke about 11am and started watching closely. Our neighbour, Margaret Patton, rang to let us know there was a fire probably heading our way. The day was predicted to be one of extreme bushfire risk. It was unbearably hot and windy. By around 2pm we thought there was a good chance the fire would impact on us so we got the pumps running and started watering around the house. Robbie Thompson drove up before the fire hit to see if we were here and to ask if we were going to stay or leave. He later told us there had been a group of neighbours down on the road who thought we were mad to stay and we would surely be burnt out.



By 3pm we could see the fire had hit the end of Clarkes Road – thick plumes of black smoke indicating buildings were burning, hearing explosions of gas cylinders, trees and god knows what else. We stood in front of our house on our hill in a full state of preparedness waiting for the fire to hit.

It was a very steep learning curve! There were times when I would have cheerfully bulldozed the lot and moved to a brick veneer in the suburbs of Melbourne. Two and a half years later we moved into an unfinished home, which took another two and a half years to complete. I gradually developed a large garden and orchard with a petrol-powered watering system, which saved our house and most of the garden, though not much else, from the 2009 bushfire.



Harry Potter Castle', above. Our grandson, Christian, loves coming to stay; sometimes we go to the cellar with our headlamps and make 'scary' echoes with our voices."

Rose King, 2014

THE 1990S

The Miller family

"We arrived at 210 Clarkes Road, Upper Plenty, in 1998. Natalie and Royce came in May, along with their horses and ponies. Keith, Ian



was an unbearable wait. Unbelievably, it took another two hours for the fire to spread in a westerly direction to reach us. It was almost in Kingleake by that time. Meantime, we knew that many of our neighbours on the valley floor had already lost their homes. That was an indescribable feeling.

We later realised that our polypipe line from the dam to the fire-fighting water supply had melted in the fire and we had run out of water – a bit scary! We later put it underground, but thought, this will probably never happen to us again in our lifetime."



Black Saturday bushfires. Courtesy: Herald Sun.



"I was patrolling the garden perimeter with our son, Sam, when he suddenly whipped out his phone and started taking photographs in the direction of the sky – an Elvis helicopter was hovering overhead, barely visible through the smoke. We still have that photo. Surrounded by smoke, burning fence posts and garden mulch I felt like I was in an alternate universe.

We took it in turns to patrol our property overnight with spray packs. Night time was surreal – burning trees, fence posts, spot fires, areas re-igniting ... emergency runs to our neighbours, Laurie and Sheena Patton, warning them another fire had ignited on their property ...

We realised we had no battery-operated radio and felt completely cut off from what was happening anywhere. We only knew what was happening to us.

In the morning we went down to the road. Our entire property and the surrounding area was like a black-and-white photograph ... Neighbours were moving around, some taking horses out, others putting out burning trees and power poles ...

We went back to work in Kilmore on Monday morning – at least we had power and water there – and we figured there was nothing left to burn around the house so it would be fairly safe to leave. One of our patients (Francis was a psychiatrist and I managed the practice) came in for an appointment, apologising profusely for losing some self-help literature loaned by the practice – she and her husband had lost everything other than what they could pack in their car. The literature loss seemed pretty minor to us!

It took about ten days to get power back and longer for the telephone, as someone had told the workers we had been burned out and weren't living on the premises.

The next six months are a blur. We thought we were doing okay but there are events we just have no recollection of ... it takes a while to get over. It's a bit like getting concussion – you sort of know what's going on but you don't always connect and make sense of it.

Rose King, 2014



The Miller home after Black Saturday.

and I came in June. We moved here because Natalie and Royce were running out of places to agist their animals in Eltham. As well, our next-door neighbour was a market gardener and when he sold his twenty-seven acres to a housing developer I realised how much I enjoyed the view over his land. We already had three neighbours down our side fence, so we decided it was time to move.

The size of the land was the main reason for living here. Upper Plenty was not too far for Keith to travel to the airport and his various jobs. Natalie and Royce were still able to do their pony rides and not have to worry where to keep the animals.

Black Saturday came, destroying our house, stables and shed. Natalie and Royce were able to move into a demountable building on the property in December 2009. For the rest of the family it took longer. I call 2009, 'the year of filling in forms'. The house was finally completed and we moved in



Keith and Rita Miller's new house.

in April 2011. On a sad note, my father died a week before we moved, so he never saw the house.

Not everyone can say they moved onto the same land TWICE."

Rita Miller 2014

Unclaimed inheritance

The photograph, right, appeared in the *Sunday Herald Sun* on 13 June 1999. The accompanying article suggests that the man depicted in this photo could be Dionisio Dorbello, who disappeared from the family home on Mahadys Road in the late 1940s. His last known relative, his sister Velma, died in 1993 without leaving a will. The Public Trustee tried, without success, to trace Mr Dorbello. There was no evidence of him having left Australia and no marriage or death record could be found.



Unclaimed \$250,000 photo clue

FROM 2000...

Remember the Mechanics

In 2004 the Upper Plenty hall hosted Mechanics' Institutes Victoria Travelling Exhibition, 'Remember the Mechanics'. As part of this exhibition the hall Committee of Management put together a local history display. This display provided the nucleus for this 2014 display. The committee was overwhelmed by the interest shown by local residents who were fascinated by the early maps and asked many questions – who owned this property before me? When did they buy the land? What was life like and how did they live? We hope that the 2014 local history display, funded by the Public Record Office of Victoria, will answer some of those questions but also encourage people to explore our local history further.



The 'Remember the Mechanics' exhibition, 2004.

Left to right: Ethel, Dianne, Ted, Margaret (rear) and Mavis Patton.



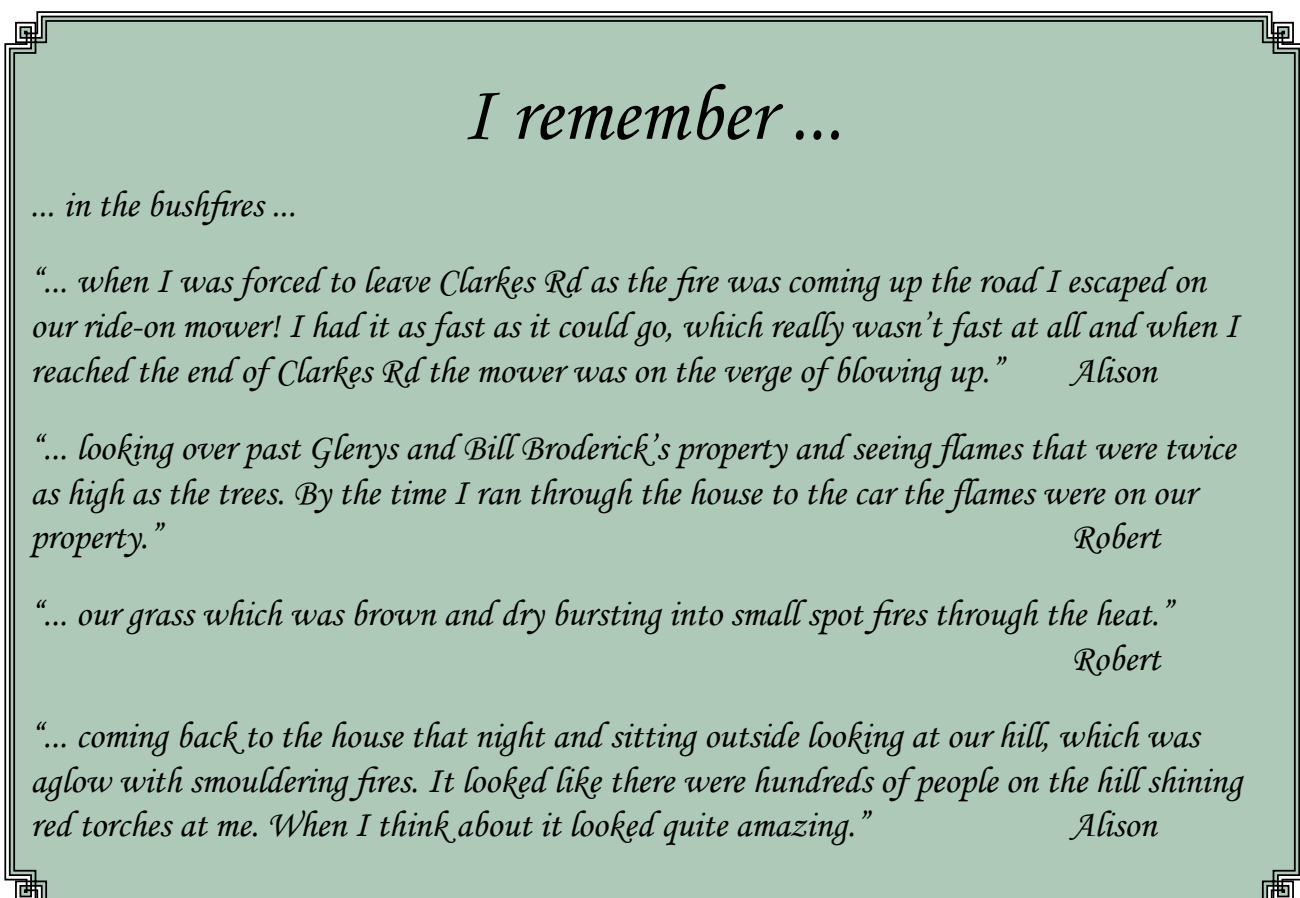
The Holmberg family

In 2004, Robert and Alison Holmberg bought a block of land in Clarkes Road, Upper Plenty. They wanted a bush block with a bit of space and Robert had spent a lot of time up in Mt Disappointment as a young adult; therefore, was interested in buying in the vicinity. The first thing they bought for the land was a tractor and then shortly after built a shed for the tractor. As they were building the shed their living arrangements changed and the tractor-shed with a caravan attached became their home. They moved into it in late 2004 with their three children, Matthew 6, Travis 4 and Brent 1. Planning for their house began and three and a half years later they moved into it. The three boys all attended Upper Plenty Primary School.

Robert runs his own business as a mechanic working on fire pumps and Alison was busy being mum and now works at the local primary school as a Staff Support Worker. Their block is quite hilly but the boys love it as they ride their bikes through the property in their spare time.



The Holmberg family. From back, left to right: Travis, Robert, Matthew, Alison with Brent in front, 2014.



I remember ...

... in the bushfires ...

"... when I was forced to leave Clarkes Rd as the fire was coming up the road I escaped on our ride-on mower! I had it as fast as it could go, which really wasn't fast at all and when I reached the end of Clarkes Rd the mower was on the verge of blowing up."

Alison

"... looking over past Glenys and Bill Broderick's property and seeing flames that were twice as high as the trees. By the time I ran through the house to the car the flames were on our property."

Robert

"... our grass which was brown and dry bursting into small spot fires through the heat."

Robert

"... coming back to the house that night and sitting outside looking at our hill, which was aglow with smouldering fires. It looked like there were hundreds of people on the hill shining red torches at me. When I think about it looked quite amazing."

Alison

The Upper Plenty Advisory Group

Black Saturday was an absolute catastrophe in terms of lives and property lost. It attracted worldwide attention and a huge number of material and monetary donations. As a result, large sums of money were allocated to each bushfire-affected community via the Victorian Bushfire Appeal Fund. A local advisory group – named the Upper Plenty Community Advisory Group (UPCAG) and made up of local residents – was formed to determine how the community wished funds to be spent. Upper Plenty received \$237,000 towards building community infrastructure that would contribute to bushfire

recovery. Most of the funds were directed to the Upper Plenty hall, the community's only public building, and community hub when need arose. As well, a large amount of money was set aside for community recovery activities, such as social BBQs and other events. A Mitchell Shire Community Grant funded a community newsletter, *Stay Connected*, between 2009 and 2011 to keep local residents informed and also to reach out to residents dislocated from the area.

Plane crashes on Mt Disappointment

Following the 2009 bushfires, the Department of Sustainability and Environment and Parks Victoria, along with volunteers from the Light Rail Research Society of Australia, raced against time to locate, inspect, photograph and document historic sites before the bush reclaimed them.

In remote locations across the state the bushfires exposed a vast array of relics, such as old township sites, graves, tools, mine shafts and even old plane crash sites near Mt Disappointment.



ABOVE AND TOP RIGHT: Remains of a Vultee Vengeance aircraft, which crashed on Mt Disappointment in 1944. Five RAFF personnel lost their lives.

RIGHT: Crash of a Wirraway whilst on a night navigation course in 1953. The remains of the crash were found over a year later by a Forestry Commission worker.

Breaking of the drought

After the Black Saturday bushfires the ten-year drought broke rather dramatically. Many heavy and sustained downpours occurred over the next two years, resulting in creeks flooding and roads becoming impassable. Bushfire debris and burnt logs were washed down gullies into dams and creeks.



This photo shows Laurie and Sheena Patton's car, which was swept fifty metres across Clarkes Road after a cloudburst over Mt Disappointment and Upper Plenty in 2010. The rainfall was very localised over a very short period with 100mm falling over South Mountain Road and the end of Clarkes Road, 48mm halfway down Clarkes Road, 25mm at Mugavins Lane but only 2mm at Bruces Creek Road. The local damage was huge – fencing losses from the sheer volume of water and accompanying mud and debris. Sticks 'n' Stones was very badly affected with water tanks and outside products being swept out onto the Wallan-Whittlesea Road; damage being estimated as being in the tens of thousands of dollars. Residents of Clarkes Road reported seeing fish (washed down from higher-up dams) lying gasping on the road as the flood waters subsided.

The McGregor family

"We had been living in a small house in southern England whilst looking for a place to 'spread our wings' within commuting distance of Melbourne CBD. When 1315 Wallan-Whittlesea Road came on the market we felt initially it was too big; however, the beautiful rolling hills and greenery really reminded me of my native England. Peter's family are Australian and the location here makes it easy to see them all. Family members came up to the property and took an assortment of photographs and videos to send to us. We couldn't go past the views and the variety on the land, such as the creek and dam at the bottom, the land for wildlife and an established orchard. It seemed to offer limitless potential for adventure and hobby farming. We bought the property without ever having stepped foot on it.

A couple of years of planning and dreaming later, our house was built – again in our absence – and we moved here permanently at the beginning of 2012. It was a while before the house was actually 'ready' but we made do; after living without it for a couple of months, we will be forever grateful for the magic of electricity!

Two years later and we've achieved a lot, such as establishing a large vegetable garden and aquaponics. Although there is still much to be done with our 'hobby farm dreams', we are loving the space and our menagerie is slowly growing. Our two boys, Charlie (5) and Alex (3), love the outside and we often go on adventures without even needing to leave our land, which is pretty different from England. The boys love being involved with our projects and currently we are hatching ducklings to add to our flock. Unfortunately, only one arrived in our last batch so the boys have taken it under their wings. He's called 'Richard' and he follows them around the house like a little puppy. I'm really hoping we get more soon.



The McGregor family: Peter, Alex, Claire (holding Richard) and Charlie, 2014.

Claire McGregor, 2014