

THE Queanbeyan Age.

TUESDAY, DECEMBER 10, 1918.

Bush and Grass Fires.

SATURDAY NIGHT'S BIG BLAZE.

"Black Saturday" could be well applied to Queanbeyan on Saturday night when the heat was most oppressive and the town was shrouded in dust and smoke from early morning until about 9 p.m., when a sea breeze cooled the temperature and carried back the smoke. The district, in the vicinity of Uriarra and the Cotter, appeared to be alight, fires being also reported from other parts of the district.

In the afternoon, Mr. A. J. McDonald, J.P., President of the Federal Territory Bush Fire Association, was advised by telephone from the outlying districts that a big fire was in progress at Uriarra

and was sweeping across the country, destroying acres of grass and fencing. Mr. McDonald quickly got into touch with the workers of the Association and a large body of men was soon mustered and proceeded to the scene of the conflagration to combat the flames. The volunteer fighters experienced a warm time till early on Sunday morning, when the sea breeze saved the situation and turned the fire back on itself.

In town on Saturday night all kinds of garbled accounts were in circulation as to the extent of damage done; but we are pleased to say that these distorted rumours were entirely without foundation.

Mr. McDonald motored to town and secured the services of many willing volunteers. It was grand to see the hearty response made. There were fat men, lean men, grey-

There were fat men, lean men, grey-heads, baldheads, while rheumatically inclined oldsters and nattily attired professional men proceeded to the fire and slung a beater or wielded a rake in their efforts to beat back the flames.

Provisions and liquid refreshments were also provided, and from the outset the volunteers grafted hard to check the fire.

From reliable authority we learn that the fire was smouldering for weeks in the rough country south of Mount Koree, and five miles south of Uriarra, and fanned by the strong wind prevailing on Saturday it quickly travelled. At about 10 a.m. the fire was noticed by an observer to jump from one hill to another, a distance of about a mile. To the surprise of many an old and experienced bushman, the fire jumped the Murrumbidgee about four o'clock in the afternoon and was alight on the Bulga Creek side when the main fire was about three quarters of a mile away. At one time "Fairlight" homestead, the property of Mr. George Webb, also Mr. Walker's residence were in danger; but willing workers effected a great save. As it was both these gentlemen suffered severe losses to grass and fencing.

The fire spread south from the river on the other side up the range towards Congwarra and along Tidbinbilla ranges.

General Brown sent a detachment of splendid beaters from the Concentration Camp, who were stationed in one of the hottest and fiercest parts of the fire.

General Parnell, on being informed of the fire, and upon being asked for assistance, placed through the adjutant, the whole of the College strength at the disposal of the Bush Fire Committee, and despatched 30 men under Captain Broadbent to Mr. G. J. Webb's at "Fairlight"; and two car loads, under Lieut. Capes, to "Kambah." The cadets proved themselves indispensable as fire-fighters. They

dispensable as fire-fighters. They also materially assisted in provisioning the fighters at "Kambah" and Webb's; while the Molonglo Camp provisioned the Cotter Road gang.

Mr. Sheaffe had all the officials and men from the Administration offices at Canberra on the scene early, and they worked like Trojans right throughout.

This morning we were advised that all danger is now ended.

Thousands of acres of grass were burnt, the principal sufferers from the fire being Messrs. Brown and Bluett (Bulga Creek), Messrs. G. J. Webb, J. E. Walker (Uriarra), and Mr. A. H. Garraway ("Kambah.")

A good deal of fencing was also destroyed, but we are pleased to state that there was no loss of stock.

The loss of grass is very serious to many graziers, as, owing to the drought, it will be very difficult to secure country for grazing.

Mr. A. J. McDonald, interviewed to-day, said he would require columns to give particulars of the splendid manner in which everyone worked to combat the outbreak, and therefore it would be invidious on our part if we mentioned any names specially. From the working man to the grazier, everyone "put his shoulder to the wheel" and rendered yeoman service.

Many local residents did useful work in providing provisions for the fighters.

The "easterly" proved a big factor in being able to control one of the most serious fires that has ever threatened the district. Mr. McDonald expresses the opinion that but for the expeditious way the fighters arrived on the scene, and fortunately being favored with the easterly, there was nothing to prevent the fire sweeping the district. He also desires to thank, on behalf of the Federal Territory Bush Fire Association, the men who volunteered, and to use his own words, said: "I was struck with the splendid response from the volunteers from Queanbeyan:

with the splendid response from the volunteers from Queanbeyan; and too much praise cannot be given to Mr. A. Moore for the manner he despatched his cars to the outbreak; also to the other private car owners who used their cars for the same purpose."

Eye-witnesses describe the fire as a magnificent spectacle, the whole country side being brilliantly illuminated by burning trees and grass.

It is worthy of mention that the wives of the graziers and settlers did grand work in providing the men with refreshments.

The fire is one of the largest seen in the district for many years, and was even larger than the big fire that swept through Gininderra in 1902.

Water Carts were sent from Canberra. Saturday's fire amply demonstrates the need for such an organisation as the Federal Territory Bush Fire Association. Give it a helping hand!