



**THE MAJOR FIRES  
ORIGINATING 16th FEBRUARY, 1983**



## 1. CUDGEE/BALLANGEICH

### LOCATION

**General Area:** Cudgee/Ballangeich

**Point of Origin:** **Cudgee Fire**

Property owned by:  
R. Anderson,  
Anderton's Road, Cudgee.

Map ref:  
National Topographic  
Map  
Series 1:100,000  
Mortlake Sheet 7241  
457536

#### **Ballangeich Fire**

Roadside:  
Warrnambool/  
Mortlake Rd.  
Hexham Road  
intersection

Map ref:  
National Topographic  
Map  
Series 1:100,000  
Mortlake Sheet 7241  
449731

### TIME OF OUTBREAK

Cudgee — 1310 hrs  
Ballangeich — 1427 hrs

### SUSPECTED CAUSE

Cudgee — Private  
S.E.C. line  
Ballangeich — Unknown

### RESPONSIBLE AUTHORITY

**For Suppression:** C.F.A.

**For Support:** —

### MUNICIPALITIES INVOLVED

Shires of Warrnambool,  
Mortlake, Heytesbury,  
Hampden

### FATALITIES

**No.:** 9

### ESTIMATED LOSSES

**Area:** 50,000 ha.

**Houses:** 157

**Other Buildings:** 715

**Sheep:** 11,500

**Cattle:** 7,800

**Fodder:** 1,000,000 bales

**Fencing:** 7,000 km.

### OUTBREAK AND CAUSE

The Cudgee/Ballangeich fire was a combination of two fires which joined after the south-westerly wind change.

The Cudgee fire started at approximately 1310 hours on a private property in Anderton's Road, Cudgee. It is suspected to have been caused by either the clashing of conductors or conductors in contact with trees on a private electricity supply line.

The Ballangeich fire started at approximately 1427 hours on the east side of the Mortlake to Warrnambool Road at Ballangeich North. The cause of this fire has not yet been ascertained.

Both of these fires were very destructive, taking the lives of nine people, destroying 157 houses and burning approximately 50,000 hectares.

The fires were almost entirely within the country area of Victoria.

### PROGRESS OF THE FIRES

#### **Cudgee Fire**

After ignition, the fire spread very quickly in a south-easterly direction and in the first 20 minutes is estimated to have burnt about 150 ha and travelled 1.5 km.

After crossing the Cudgee Creek the fire burnt quickly through Naringal, finally reaching Curdie Vale just prior to the wind change at 1758 hours.

Fuel loads varied considerably over the fire area and consequently so did the fire intensity and rate of spread. Flame heights were observed at an estimated 1-1.5 metres in paddocks cut for hay or heavily grazed and from 2-5 metres in paddocks with heavier fuel load. At Naringal flames were reported higher than the trucks — up to 5 metres, and coming in a swirling motion.

The fire travelled 27 kms in 4 hours 40 minutes at an average rate of spread of 5.8 km/hr.

#### **Ballangeich Fire**

After ignition at 1427 hours the Ballangeich fire burnt south east, reaching the township of Framlingham within an hour, and crossing the Princes Highway at 1627 hours.

Fuel loads also varied over this fire area, relatively heavy in the south — estimated 2-3 tonnes/ha — and decreasing in the north to less than 1 tonne/ha. The fire spread rapidly along both banks of the Hopkins River in the early stages, up to 10 km/hr, covering a total distance of 31 km in 3 hours 40 minutes before the change at an average of 8.5 km/hr.

#### **Fires After the Wind Change**

When the wind change arrived at 1758 hours the Cudgee and Ballangeich fires joined and the majority of the eastern flanks of the fires were lost almost for the entire 42 km length.

Weather reported at Colac 1600 hours — wind NW 40-50 km/hr., temperature 43°C and R.H. 8%. At the time of the change wind was 40-50 km/hr. gusting to 80 km/hr.

In many areas to the north of the Princes Highway there was evidence that the eastern flank was controlled prior to the change but material blown from burnt ground started fires outside control lines.

The fire then burnt in a series of tongues towards The Sisters, Terang, Cobrico, Elingamite, Brucknell, Timboon and Cobden.

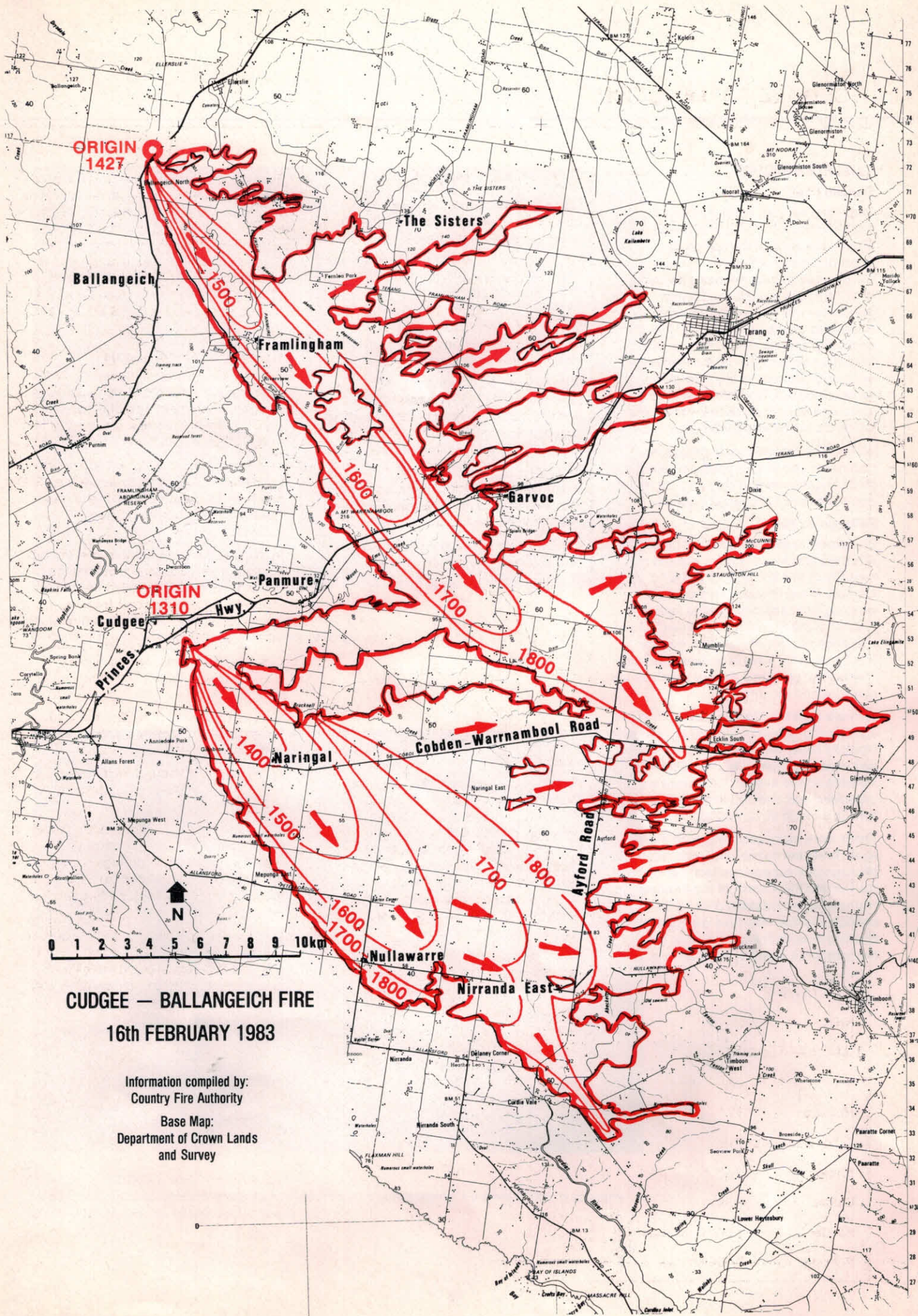
On its easterly travel the fire reached Ecklin South at 1800 hrs. and Brucknell at 1804 hrs.

Because of the strength of the wind and sparse fuels tongues of fire were blown out in some areas.

Whilst the bulk of the fire was contained by the following morning, several breakaways occurred in Region 6 throughout the 17th February, and mopping up continued for a further ten days.

The heavier fuel loadings and hence a slower rate of spread in the Cudgee fire resulted in a wide elliptical fire pattern when compared to the narrow elongated shape of the Ballangeich fire.





**CUDGEE — BALLANGEICH FIRE**  
**16th FEBRUARY 1983**

Information compiled by:  
Country Fire Authority

Base Map:  
Department of Crown Lands  
and Survey