

Podcast 23 – Black Saturday February 7th, 2009

Learn English while learning about daily life in Australia,
with Rob McCormack

Podcast Number 23 – Black Saturday February 7th, 2009

Hi,

Australia is a great place to live, with great natural beauty and a wonderful climate. But there are also times when the land and the climate can be cruel and dangerous. One such time was February 7th, 2009. On that day, the worst bushfire in Australia's history raged through parts of Victoria, destroying homes, entire towns and taking the lives of 173 people. That day became known as Black Saturday.

Bushfires are always a problem in Australia, as our summers are hot, dry and long. We have lots of native bushland and bushfires can start easily, either from lightning strikes, the sparks from fallen or clashing power lines or, in some cases, deliberately lit by people.

In the week prior to Saturday, February the 7th, 2009, Melbourne had 3 consecutive days with a maximum temperature above 43 degrees Celsius. It was a heat wave. It was worse than anyone could remember.

But Saturday the 7th of February was even worse. The maximum temperature on that day was 46.4 degrees Celsius. This was the hottest day ever recorded for an Australian City. The weather on this day could not have been worse for fire. As well as the very high temperature, there were very high winds and extremely low humidity. By mid-morning, a hot north-

westerly wind was blowing hard, at speeds of more than 100 kilometres per hour. Humidity was only 6%. It was a recipe for disaster. It was like a furnace. A total fire ban had been declared for the entire state of Victoria. That means that no one is allowed to start a fire outside, anywhere. The State of Victoria was like a bomb ready to go off. Unfortunately, it did.

Around midday at Kilmore East, about 90 kilometres from Melbourne, the high winds caused power lines in bushland to fall. This caused sparks and started a bushfire which would become part of the most fearsome and deadly fires ever recorded in Australia. At around 3.00pm, another fire started in bushland at Murrindindi Mill about 100km from Melbourne. It's cause is unknown. These two fires in particular raged at their worst until around 7.00pm. I can remember being at home and wondering if this heat wave would ever end. I was lying on the bed with the air conditioning going full speed but it was not able to keep us cool. I had no idea that, as I sweltered in the afternoon heat, a terrible firestorm was raging just 50 kilometres from where I lay. Homes were being destroyed, bushland was being blackened and people were dying.

We thought we finally had relief in Melbourne when a cool change arrived at around 5pm. This meant that the hot winds from the north west suddenly changed to much cooler winds coming from the ocean. But these winds were still very strong. The temperature dropped 15 degrees in just 15 minutes. You might think that this would cool the fires. Unfortunately these changed winds fanned the Kilmore East and the Murrindindi Mill fires and turned their direction. These winds blew these terrible fires directly onto small towns which had hoped they would be safe. As a result, the towns of Kinglake and Marysville were engulfed by fire in the late afternoon and early evening. In Kinglake, 38 people died and 1,200 buildings were destroyed. In Marysville, 34 people died and nearly 400 buildings were destroyed. These towns were

devastated. Other towns were also badly affected by the many fires which burned on that day and for days afterwards. In all, 173 people died and 414 were injured. More than 2,000 homes were destroyed despite the best efforts of over 4,000 brave firefighters.

Watch this news report.

<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=xJHp4jvE7tc>

These fires and many, many other fires burned fiercely in country Victoria for 3 more weeks and were finally brought under control with the arrival of cooler weather in early March.

To learn the facts about the fires, you should visit

http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Black_Saturday_bushfires

The people of Australia responded immediately to help those affected by the fires. Around \$372 million was donated in a very short time to help those that were affected. The government quickly set up the Victorian Bushfire Reconstruction and Recovery Authority, to coordinate the rebuilding of those towns which had been destroyed. The government also set up a major inquiry and investigation to find out what happened and to find out how we can avoid such tragedies in the future. We have learnt some hard lessons. Many of those who died had not prepared their homes and properties fully for a fire. Those who live in these forest areas must be prepared and have a plan of action. But perhaps the greatest lesson is that, when a bushfire gets too large and too ferocious as it did on February the 7th, the only way to be really safe is to leave, and leave early, well before the fire arrives.

I hope I have not been too negative in talking about bushfires in Australia. We all love the summer, but bushfires will always be a threat in Australia during the summer months. We have learned to respect the power of a bushfire and must

always be prepared when the summer months come around.

If you have a question or a comment to make, please leave it by clicking the comments link at the top of this story. You can leave your comment in English or in any language and I will translate it. Or, you can send me an email at rob@slowenglish.info. I would love to hear from you. Tell me where you live, a little bit about yourself and what you think of my Slow English podcast. Perhaps you could suggest a topic for a future podcast. If you would like to take a short quiz to see if you have understood this podcast, you will also find it on my website. Goodbye until next time.

Rob

PODCAST 23 QUIZ

Start

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True or False? - February 7th 2009 is called Black Saturday because of the bush fires

True

False

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True or False? - Saturday 7th February 2009 was a very hot day in Melbourne, but other days had been worse.

True

False

Prev

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True or False? - There were 2 things that made 7th February a bad day for fire - high temperature and high winds.

True

False

Prev

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True or False? - The Kilmore East fire and the Murrindindi Mill fire were both caused by sparks from power lines.

True

False

Prev

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True or False? - Rob lay on his bed on the afternoon of 7th February while the bushfires burned only 50 kilometres away.

True

False

Prev

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True or False? - The wind changed direction at around 5pm and it blew the fires towards the towns of Kinglake and Marysville.

True

False

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True or False? - When a bushfire is too big and too ferocious, the only way to really be safe is to leave early, well before the fire arrives.

True

False

Prev

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True or False? - Bushfires in Australia are not always a threat in summer, but you must still be prepared when summer comes around.

True

False

Prev

See Result

Your score is

The average score is 38%

Vocabulary

- Play air conditioning = keeps the air cool inside a building on a hot day
- Play avoid = to stop something from happening
- Play beauty = when something is very nice to look at
- Play blowing = when wind moves
- Play bomb = something which explodes or blows up

- Play bushfires = fires that go through the forest or bush
- Play clashing = when two things hit one another
- Play climate = the weather
- Play consecutive = one after another
- Play coordinate = when you cause something to be done
- Play cruel = very, very bad
- Play dangerous = when you can get hurt or die
- Play deadly = when something is so dangerous that it can kill people
- Play degrees Celsius = a way to measure temperature. Water boils at 100 degrees Celsius
- Play deliberately = when you mean to do something
- Play destroying = when something is being removed or broken into pieces or burnt
- Play devastated = when something is destroyed and no people can live there anymore
- Play direction = a line leading to one place
- Play directly = when something goes straight to a place
- Play donated = to give something to help somebody else
- Play enquiry = when people ask questions to find out what has happened
- Play extremely = when something is very low or very high
- Play fanned = when the wind blows on a fire and makes it get hotter
- Play fearsome = something to be feared

- Play fiercely = when a fire burns very fast and very hot
- Play firestorm = when a fire is so bad that it is like a storm
- Play furnace = a place where you burn things. A furnace is very, very hot
- Play heat wave = when you have many days with high temperatures
- Play humidity = the amount of water in the air
- Play in particular = when talking about one thing or group of things
- Play injured = when some part of your body gets hurt
- Play investigation = when people ask questions to find out why something happened
- Play lightning strikes = when lightning reaches down to the ground
- Play maximum temperature = the highest temperature
- Play native = things that are grown naturally in Australia
- Play negative = when you talk about bad things
- Play prior = before
- Play power lines = carry electricity from one place to another
- Play properties = buildings, usually more than just a house
- Play raged = burned fast and with great heat
- Play recipe = the things that go together to make something
- Play Reconstruction and Recovery Authority = the name of an

organisation

- Play recorded = when something is written down
- Play respect = when you understand what something can do, you take notice of it
- Play responded = to give something when you are asked
- Play sparks = when you hit rock onto metal, you get sparks. They can cause a fire
- Play sweltered = when you feel very, very hot
- Play threat = when something could be dangerous for you in the future
- Play total fire ban declared = when you are told that you cannot start any fires outside
- Play tragedies = when terrible things happen they are called tragedies
- Play Victoria = a State of Australia
- Play wondering = thinking in your mind about the future and what might happen