

# Bushfire Education



## Ember attack at Kinglake

Extract from *Kinglake-350* by Adrian Hyland

The wind drives the flames up onto the launch-pad ridges. It shatters and snaps the tall trees, whirls the burning fragments into the valleys below or across to adjoining ridges. The experts call this spotting, but that's a feeble term to describe what it looks like to those in its path; maybe 'saturation incendiary bombing' would be more accurate.

Massive winds whip branches and strips of bark from burning trees and whirl them so high they run into winds blowing in other directions. They are chaos in flames, can land anywhere, inflict incredible amounts of damage; particularly dangerous are the long, thin strips of ribbon bark. They burn for a long time and cover enormous distances. The fires that will wipe out farms and wineries along the Yarra Valley are started from debris torn from mountain tops many kilometres away. Fire scientist Kevin Tolhurst estimates that on this day there are embers travelling a record thirty-five kilometres.

One CFA volunteer says later: 'I felt like I was in the middle of a Ridley Scott movie: we were in a gully watching a shower of burning embers arc overhead, catapulting from one summit to another.'

And those 'embers' can be huge. Later that day a policeman is driving up The Windies with no fire in sight when what he describes as a 'firebomb the size of a caravan' comes whirling out of the sky and lands beside him. He's still blinking in shock as the missile ignites the surrounding bush, starting an instantaneous conflagration that goes racing away.

This process is repeated a thousand, a million times over as the fire careers down from Kilmore East. The front is like a spiral nebula, whirling through space and spraying great arcs of energy in every direction.

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