



Living with Fire: People, Nature and History in Steels Creek

Tom Griffiths, Christine Hansen

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Within the Yarra River catchment area nestles the valley of Steels Creek, a small shallow basin in the lee of Kinglake plateau and the Great Dividing Range. The escarpment walls of the range drop in a series of ridges to the valley and form the south-eastern boundary of the Kinglake National Park. The gentle undulations that flow out from the valley stretch into the productive and picturesque landscape of Victoria's famous wine growing district, the Yarra Valley.

Late on the afternoon of 7 February 2009, the day that came to be known as Black Saturday, the Kinglake plateau carried a massive conflagration down the fringing ranges into the Steels Creek community. Ten people perished and 67 dwellings were razed in the firestorm. In the wake of the fires, the devastated residents of the valley began the long task of grieving, repairing, rebuilding or moving on while redefining themselves and their community.

In *Living with Fire*, historians Tom Griffiths and Christine Hansen trace both the history of fire in the region and the human history of the Steels Creek valley in a series of essays which examine the relationship between people and place. These essays are interspersed with four interludes compiled from material produced by the community. In the immediate aftermath of the fire many people sought to express their grief, shock, sadness and relief in artwork. Some painted or wrote poetry, while others collected the burnt remains of past treasures from which they made new objects. These expressions, supplemented by historical archives and the essays they stand beside, offer a sensory and holistic window into the community's contemporary and historical experiences.

A deeply moving book, *Living with Fire* brings to life the stories of one community's experience with fire, offering a way to understand the past, and in doing so, prepare for the future.



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