

## **Black Saturday**

The Australian state of Victoria has been suffering from a drought for the last 50 years. On Saturday 7 February 2009, winds of more than 100 km/h coincided with temperatures in excess of 40 °C. These conditions turned a bushfire into a firestorm.

Smoke was first seen at twenty past eleven on Saturday morning near Kilmore, outside of Melbourne, the state capital. By the evening the firestorm had killed 200 people, obliterated five towns and destroyed 3,500 buildings. It took 60,000 firefighters two weeks to beat the flames and by then, 7,500 people had lost everything they had.

The images of total destruction are shocking and the fact that the fires were started deliberately is impossible for anyone to understand. But it is not the photofit images of the arsonists or photos of the black landscape that used to be five Australian towns, that has caught the attention of people all around the world. The image of Black Saturday is a fireman giving a drink of water from a bottle to a burnt koala bear.

The animal is literally holding the fireman's hand as she drinks. Even stranger is seeing a koala drink, as they obtain all their water from eating leaves. The fireman said the koala had reached out for the bottle and put her other paw in his hand. He said it was amazing.

The fireman, Mr Tree, is a volunteer with the County Fire Authority in Victoria. He is now a celebrated hero around the planet and shares the same publicist as Mick Jagger, singer with the Rolling Stones pop group.

The koala is also famous. Her name is Sammie and she was taken to Southern Ash Wildlife Shelter to be treated for burns to her paws. Her carer, called Ms. Woods, said it would take five months for Sammie to get better.

Sammie met Bob, another koala recovering at the shelter. Ms Woods said that they were inseparable and that Bob kept giving Sammie hugs.

Mr Tree has been to visit Sammie and was introduced to her new boyfriend Bob. Mr Tree said that his heart went out to all the people affected by the fires and that the love story of Sammie and Bob would give people some hope for the future.

Mr Tree met Ms. Woods. But we do not know if he kept giving her hugs.

393 words

Grammar: the passive voice, reported speech

