

Stan's Wildfire Story

The sun beat down from a cloudless blue sky as the five friends ambled along the forest track. Stan ran backwards and forwards ahead of them, barking happily.

"Here it is!" shouted Dan to the others as he peeled off the track and pushed his way between the trees to a small clearing in the bush. "This is the spot I was telling you all about."

"Cool!" said Beth. "This will be a great place to have our lunch."

They slung off their backpacks and dropped gratefully to the ground. Sandwiches, fruit, muesli bars and drinks were soon unpacked, and everyone began to eat.

"Great sandwiches," remarked Matt, between mouthfuls, "but that smoked meat sure smells strong."

"That's what I thought, too," replied Frankie. "And I haven't even got smoked meat in my sandwiches."

Stan sniffed the air.

"You're right, there is a smoky smell," he said. "But I don't think it's coming from your sandwiches."

Ana stood up and looked round. Suddenly she pointed to where patches of sky could be seen through the trees.

"Look, smoke!" she yelled.

The others put down their food, stood up, and peered in the direction Ana was pointing. "There shouldn't be smoke way out here," exclaimed Beth. "I think it's a wildfire."

"If it is a wildfire, we shouldn't stay here, because the wind is blowing this way," said Matt. "We better move."

"Let's head downhill," added Beth. "Fires burn stronger towards the top of hills."

They all grabbed their back-packs, made their way back through the trees to the track, and headed down the hill.

The smell grew stronger, and before long they noticed wisps of smoke in the air.

"I think the fire is catching up," gasped Ana.

"OK, guys, then this is what we've got to do," said Matt. "We can't outrun the fire, so we've got to move across the front of it instead. We need to get over to one side of the fire so it passes us by."

"Let's get some spare clothes out of our back-packs first," suggested Frankie. "We can tie them over our noses so we can breathe easier."

"We should wet them with some water from our drink bottles," Dan added.

Quickly fumbling in their packs, they had soon fashioned face-masks out of their spare clothing.

On they ran, until they came to a thinner place in the bush where they could turn to one side. They quickly picked their way through the trees, continually looking over their shoulders at the approaching wall of smoke. They could even see patches of flames now.

"Come on, faster," yelled Matt.

They all picked up the pace, dodging round trees and brushing through ferns and bush. Stan raced ahead, then bounded back, urging them on.

Suddenly Dan stopped. "We've made it," he said. "Look, we're out of the fire's path."

Sure enough, they saw that they were now on the fire's flank, so it would swoop past them, rather than over them.

"No," exclaimed Beth, "don't stop here."

"Why not?" asked Frankie. "We're out of the way of the fire now."

"Beth's right," stated Matt emphatically. "This is dead man's ground".

"Dead man's ground?" asked Frankie, raising her eyebrows.

"That's what fire-fighters call unburned ground on the sides of a fire if there's too much fuel around. It can catch fire from a spark, or if the wind changes." Matt gestured at the bush surrounding them. "We've got to find somewhere clear of bush or other things that can burn."

Stan began to sniff the air, and then disappeared round a patch of thicker bush.

"Where's he gone?" shouted Matt.

Before the others could answer, Stan reappeared. "This way!" he yelled. "I thought I could smell water, and I was right!"

They followed him round the thicket of bush and emerged onto a beach of pebbles beside a babbling stream.

"This is better. Nothing to burn here," panted Beth.

They stood in the middle of the stony beach and watched as, with a roar, the fire raced past them, jumping from treetop to treetop. Flames shot into the sky, and the smoke twisted with an angry fury.

Standing to one side of the fire-front, with nothing around them to catch fire, the group remained safe. Before long, the flames began to die down as the trees and bush were all consumed.

"That was a close one," said Frankie. "Good thing we had you to sniff out this stream, Stan."

"It wasn't just me, though," replied Stan. "You guys didn't panic, and you knew how to survive a wildfire."

Non-Natural Disasters (Wildfires and Pandemics)

1. A wildfire is:
 - A. A planned burn-off
 - B. An unplanned fire that starts in an open space (correct)
 - C. An unplanned fire in a tall building or factory
 - D. An out-of-control fire in a fireplace
2. Wildfires are only a risk if you live in a forest.
 - A. No (correct)
 - B. Yes
3. If you are caught in a wildfire, it is best to:
 - A. Outrun it
 - B. Run across the front of it to one side (correct)
 - C. Take cover and let it burn over the top of you
4. If you are caught in a wildfire, it is best to:
 - A. Move downhill (correct)
 - B. Move uphill
5. About how many wildfires happen per year in New Zealand?
 - A. 500
 - B. 1,000
 - C. 1,500
 - D. 2,000 (correct)
6. What colour means 'high' fire risk on a forest fire danger sign?
 - A. Green
 - B. Blue
 - C. Yellow (correct)
 - D. Red
7. Which is the least safe area in a wildfire?
 - A. Unburned bush beside the fire (correct)
 - B. Previously burned ground
 - C. Open ground
 - D. Wide river bed
8. What is a pandemic?
 - A. When people panic
 - B. A widespread outbreak of an infectious disease (correct)
 - C. A type of medicine
 - D. A kind of infectious disease
9. When is it specially important to wash and dry your hands during a pandemic?
 - A. When you cough or sneeze (correct)
 - B. When you are dirty
 - C. When you are going out
 - D. When you are going to bed
10. How many influenza pandemics occurred last century?
 - A. None
 - B. One
 - C. Two
 - D. Three (correct)

