



Assessment Date: ____/____/____ Student: _____ Examiner: _____
Words Read Correctly (WRC): _____ Errors: _____ Notes: _____

Ash Wednesday

Mr J

The Ash Wednesday bushfires, known in South Australia as Ash Wednesday, were a	13
series of bushfires that occurred in south-eastern Australia on 16 February 1983, which	27
was Ash Wednesday in the Christian calendar. Within twelve hours, more than 180	40
fires fanned by winds of up to 110 km/h (68 mph) caused widespread destruction	54
across the states of Victoria and South Australia. Years of severe drought and extreme	68
weather combined to create one of Australia's worst fire days in a century. The fires	83
became the deadliest bushfire in Australian history, until the Black Saturday bushfires	95
in 2009.	97
In Victoria, 47 people died, while in South Australia there were 28 deaths. This	111
included 14 CFA and 3 CFS volunteer fire-fighters who died across both states that	126
day. Many fatalities were as a result of firestorm conditions caused by a sudden and	141
violent wind change in the evening which rapidly changed the direction and size of the	156
fire front. The speed and ferocity of the flames, aided by abundant fuels and a	171
landscape immersed in smoke, made fire suppression and containment impossible. In	182
many cases, residents fended for themselves as fires broke communications, cut off	194
escape routes and severed electricity and water supplies. Up to 8,000 people were	208
evacuated in Victoria at the height of the crisis and a state of disaster was declared for	225
the first time in South Australia's history.	232
Ash Wednesday was one of Australia's costliest natural disasters. Over 3,700 buildings	245
were destroyed or damaged and 2,545 individuals and families lost their homes.	258
Livestock losses were very high, with over 340,000 sheep, 18,000 cattle and numerous	273
native animals either dead or later destroyed.	280



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