

# Colin and Boof

## Tall tellers of tales

“Here’s a funny story ... are we allowed to tell stories?” Boof asks before launching into one of the many stories he has about the people, fire towers and experiences of being in a tightknit group of fire tower operators. Boof works for Colin and they have a symbiotic relationship, with Boof involved in Colin and wife Joy’s diverse rural endeavours, as well as plenty of his own.

“There was a tower operator and it was a really hot day – it gets so hot in those tower rooms with the glass (even when you close the blinds and sometimes it’s hard to get the air flowing) – and so he was just sitting around in his undies and he decided he had to get out onto the tower balcony and get some air. So, he goes out and then the balcony door closed behind him and locked him out! So there he was trapped out there on a boiling hot day in nothing but his undies. In the end he just had to give it a hard shove and he got back in, but he was worried for a bit! With no way to get down...

“I swear it wasn’t me! And it wasn’t Colin,” Boof protests as they both laugh the suggestion away.

Boof has been working in the fire towers for about five years, and Colin has been doing it since about ’96 or ’97. They know job, the area and the history – well the interesting bits anyway. Like the time one of the towers blew down in gale force winds (no one was in it!) and the time that one of the operators passed away in a tower (more on that another day), or ...

“Here’s a good one for you: I reported a fire from Snow Hill and I could see that it was just south of Oatlands. I gave the coordinates over the radio and the STT (Sustainable Timber Tasmania) Fire Duty Officer on call says ‘no that fire’s in Woodsdale’. And Joy – she was at Mt Hobbs Tower at the time and called in – says no it’s in Oatlands, she could get a crossing bearing for us...”

[side note: a cross bearing is when two different towers map the coordinates of the same fire. From the direction that each tower maps, you can draw a line and get a cross bearing, which is a very accurate way to locate a fire.]

“... the STT Fire Duty Officer finally called back and said ‘ummm, what fire tower are you in?’, ‘Snow Hill’, ‘oh, I had you in Mona’s Tier Tower’. Mona’s Tier! It’s never even been used. It was built and then Mt Hobbs was built and it wasn’t needed. He didn’t know that!” Boof roars with laughter and

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everyone joins in as it's as infectious as it is fun. And it's also a fascinating way to learn about the life and times of these absolutely down to earth pillars of the community: our regional fire tower operators.

"We know the landscape and we know where the troublemakers are. If you've got a bit of local knowledge you can pretty much pinpoint where all the fires are, and we know where to look at the start of season when people start lighting deliberate fires for fun, and usually when they are burning off before the fire season starts," Colin explains.

Boof chimes in: "I've said to a few of the farmers: I can see your little fires you keep putting up. Oh, did you see that? Did you report it in? Well yes, I have to report every fire. But I tell them when I report it that's such-and-such a farmer and they're just burning off. I tell them it would be good of them to ring and let us know..."

Colin and Boof both blend a combination of country ease with an air of complete capability. They give the impression that they could be evacuating a town, reporting a fire, fighting a fire, fixing a spare tyre, fetching spare tower keys or telling a tale with the same calm authority. It's amazing how comforting it is to have these two telling tales and taking care of the local community from their perch above.



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Image: Operator Boof at Snow Hill Tower, East Coast Tasmania



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