

Rusty to Suse

Changing of the guard

They spent the morning together – it's Suse's second time in the Tylers Hill Fire Tower and what is heading towards Rusty's last time after 27 years. The sun shines as they stand together and look out over their expansive kingdom – beyond Southport and Dover, across South East Tasmania.

Rusty has been sharing the nuts and bolts of the fire tower operator role, but also some of the sum of his gathered experience and infinite wisdom with newcomer operator Suse. In addition to the mechanics of taking the temperature, relative humidity, wind and cloud cover readings, how to map and report a fire, he also covers how smoke looks, moves and appears different; and how the fire tower network supports and informs each other.

From midday, Suse will be the eyes in the southern forests. Every hour on the hour she will report by radio a range of weather conditions and what her eyes can see. And, luckily, Suse's eyes are a known quantity – because she sure has seen a lot! Prior to taking the reins of Tylers Hill Fire Tower, Suse has spent more than 20 years running her own photography business. Combining her love of travel and photography, she takes small groups on life-changing tours to extraordinary locations.

She has travelled to places like Iran, Iraq, Morocco, Kashmir, Tuscany and Nepal, as she leads people on cultural and photographic journeys. She has captured her experiences in these places with the same eye that she will now use to detect changes in the distant horizons that indicate smoke and fire may be on its way.

When asked “what the hell made you want to do this job?!” Suse throws her head back laughing and puts her hand on Rusty's shoulder – “this guy!”

“Rusty is in the local fire brigade and one day when announcing his upcoming retirement, he was asking some of the guys if they knew anyone who may be interested in taking over the fire tower. Long story short, I was one of the people interested and I went to meet Rusty, and after having a chat with him about the role he said, ‘you're in!’ He was excited to see that I was interested, and so he jumped on it”.

Rusty to Suse – changing of the guard

Erik, Senior Forest Officer Fire at Sustainable Timber Tasmania (STT), describes the changing of guard at Tyler’s Hill tower as a seamless transition.

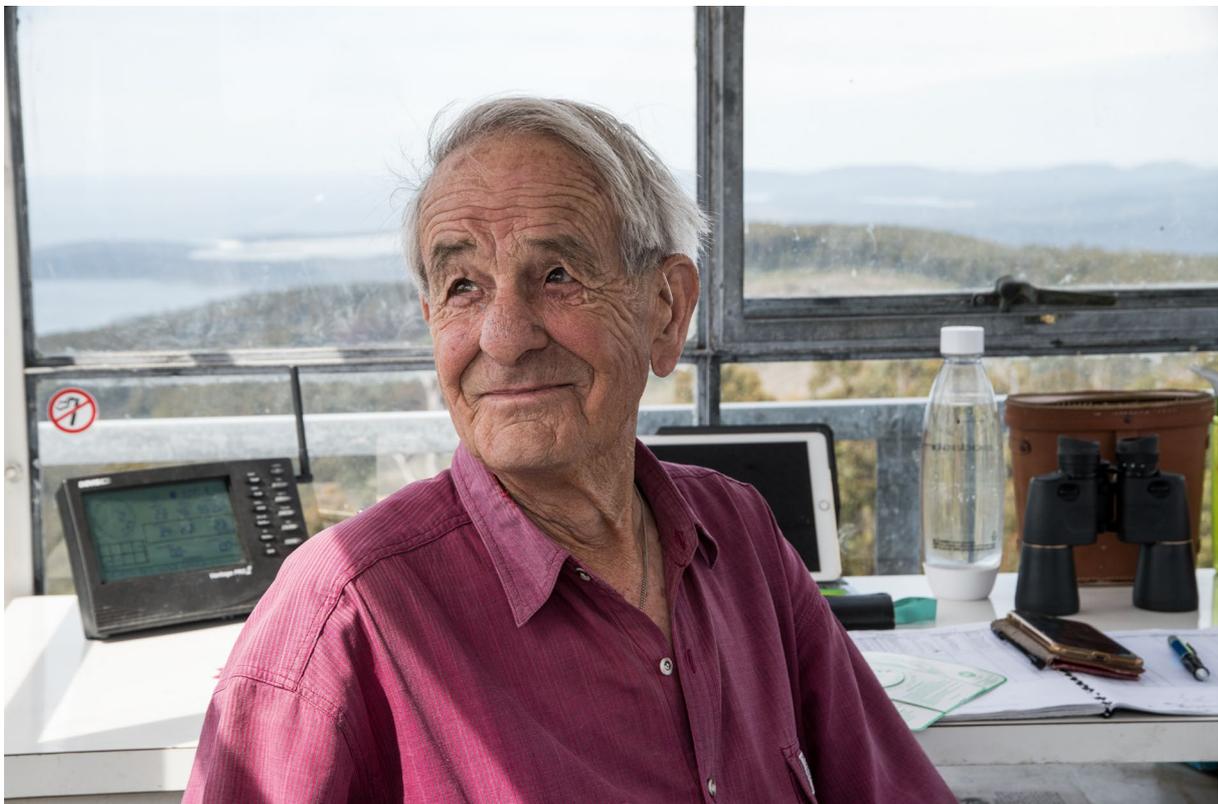
He emphasises how hugely important STT’s fire tower operators are in the early detection of fires – on a hot day with 50km winds, a fire will travel so quickly, and it’s vital that we warn communities and let them know if its heading that way – that’s why these places (and people) are so important.

“It’s not just about watching for fire activity on STT land – it’s about the potential of a fire travelling and impacting significant communities. We need to plan based on the information provided to us, and importantly, act on it. Our people put their lives on the line, to watch and fight fires to protect local communities. What they do is the ultimate community service.”

All Suse knows is that both she, and her family (perhaps surprisingly) are super excited to be taking on this new role.

“Rusty you are my hero, and I keep saying to myself ‘if Rusty can do it (who’s in his eighties), I can do it too!’”

And by all accounts she sure can; by day two, she’s doing a stellar job and has already gained serious respect from those she works with.



Rusty to Suse – changing of the guard

Image: Retiring Tylers Hill Tower Operator Rusty. Rusty has spent 27 years in the Tylers Hill Tower.



Image: Tylers Hill Tower's newest operator Suse.

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