



New Zealand IMT Contingent to Canada 2015
Alberta Wildfire Management Area
High Level
Update # 4
2 August 2015

Seventeen rural fire experts from across New Zealand based in Alberta Canada helping to combat the extreme wildfire situation happening here.

Greetings to you all.

R & R

The team had a good trip through to Edmonton and settled into their accommodation at the West Edmonton Mall Inn.

They did not take long to unwind after the trip in the trucks, as they were spotted entering the Mall complex across the road from the Inn, and by the time they were caught up with, they looked to be on a mission.

First stop was the Lemonade Parlour, and then into the Steak House!! It was a good catch up for all.

The three Australian aircraft managers who were with the team at Birch were also there.

They had been pulled out a day earlier from Birch so they could transition with their team at High Level for the journey back home.

The South African Liaison was also there catching up with an old friend in the NZ team as well.

From all accounts the night was a fairly quiet one as everyone was in need of a good rest.

A Day at the Mall

The Mall complex is massive and it takes over a day just to try and get around it all, and that is without going into any of the shops. If you go onto ...”West Edmonton

Mall” Canada site, you will see what I mean. Just think of what they had to put up with on the first day of R&R, thinking of those at home of course!!

A number of the shops of choice had been discussed the previous evening and with a good map and GPS, (as we know they can) it was into the depths of the unknown.

At the moment it is the middle of the school holidays over here. Yes, and by the way all year 1 to 12s have 2 months off in 1 hit, which includes all July and August.

Well, after the first day I thought I had better call out and catch up with everyone after a relaxing day with their feet up. Apparently that was not the case so I heard, as I think some of them were only just finding their way back to the front door while I was there, and they happened to run into those in the Lemonade Bar.

Once the dinner bell rang it did not take long for the whole team to arrive, and after another good catch up and yarn about what they had bought and the bargains that were found, the night was finished for some.



On the second day of R&R a number of the team hired two vehicles and headed over to Jasper National Park which is about 4 hours' drive away. A fantastic place from all accounts and awaiting evidence of this.

Visitor to NZFS National Headquarters.

The New Zealand Fire Service National Headquarters received a visit from the Canadian High Commissioner to New Zealand Mario Bot. This was to show his appreciation for the help we are giving Canada at present with the management of a number of fires.

He met with the National Rural Fire Officer Kevin O'Connor and Chief Executive and National Commanding Officer (Acting) Paul McGill to officially thank us.



From Left; Paul McGill, Mario Bot & Kevin O'Connor



Camp

I thought I would come back to the Trailer Park as they are known and fill you in on a couple of details.

The company “Horizons” undertakes contracts with the oil companies during the winter and has been installing them where ever they are required.

In the Fire Season they do this for the Agriculture and Forestry Division of the Wildfire Management Branch.

Being self-contained means everything is processed on site and taken to transfer stations and storage facilities.

This includes the waste from the toilets and washing facilities. They have a process to break down the waste on site and this is stored in very large containers ready for the tankers to collect each day.

The Park also has very large fresh water tanks on site and is topped up as required. These are fitted with automatic pumps and gas califonts for hot water. There were never any complaints.

The Contractors also have installed very large generators that power the whole site and run 24/7, so anyone close enough to them certainly knows that they are there.

The tent village was put on the other side of the camp just for this reason. The whole camp is lit up at night for safety sake and to deter the animals.

The camp also has boardwalk installed right around it so as to keep the place clean and mud free in the buildings and accommodation rooms.

Hand washing facilities are placed at all eating areas and hygiene is high on the priority list at briefings.

Just like home, no boots in the kitchen!!



Local Village



This is one of the small villages of Tall Cree (there is a north & south village), which was in the path of the initial fire that needed to be protected. The fire edge can be seen in the background and was classed as priority one for the Birch Complex.

The Environment



Part of the fire landscape and big trees like this one had to be brought to the ground for safety sake.

After the fire has been through an area there is a very high risk of the trees falling over due to the root plates being damage, as illustrated.
One of the high priority watch outs for the teams in the field.



Hand cut line and melon pile



The safety briefings are carried out before anyone leaves the safety zone, which in this case is the Helicopter Pad.



Both Trappers huts, one not so lucky in this environment





Fire break, helicopter pad, & relay dam hole dug in the ground at centre of photo.



This is the only way in and out of a lot of this country.



Training on the job

What happens when you require a load of gravel to be spread across the compound and the operator of the 20 ton truck has never spread gravel before? “To note the first one did not go so well and the 2 teams that had to level it out by hand did a great job, but there must be a better way.”

You have the Supply Unit Leader, who is a jack of all trades, wander over to the operator when he sees him arrive back with the second load, and have a good old kiwi yarn to him.

Well, the smile on the driver’s face told the story, when he jumped out of his truck on completion of his effort and had a look at what he had achieved. He came over and shook his mentor’s hand and thanked him, as he had been driving trucks for years and had never had to do that before.

The Camp Medic

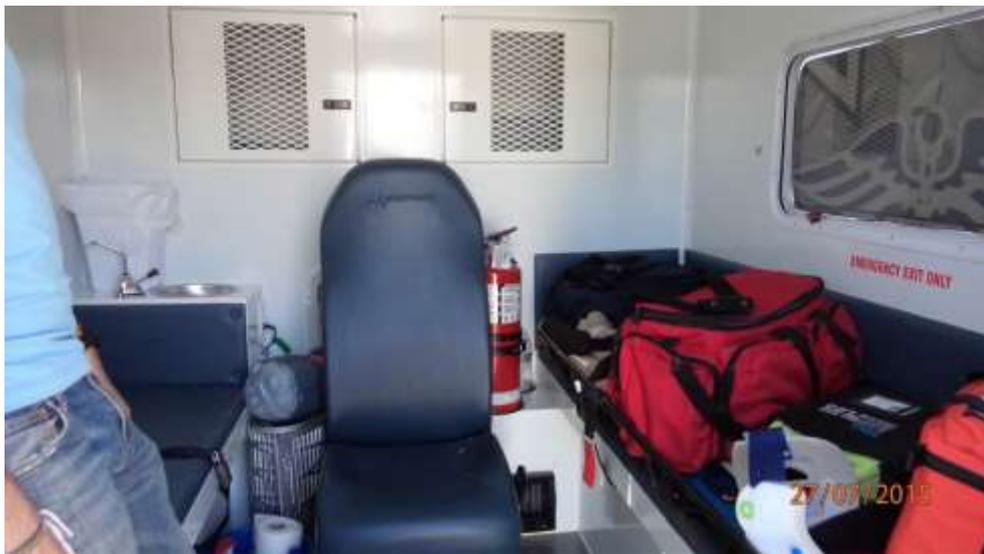
Each of the Complexes has a Medical Practitioner in camp and in some cases two as with Birch. One is a full-time Paramedic and his assistant is just as qualified but needs to be accredited before they can manage a complex on their own.

During the winter they usually go into the Oil Camps or in some instances the Oil Rigs at sea depending on their qualifications.

It can be a lonely quiet life at times and you need to be able to cope with the isolation big time. The money can be a big driver for a lot of the younger ones who undertake this adventure, but this is also an opportunity to undertake further studies in the quiet environment.



A Medic's life on the road



The morning briefing session is also used for rewarding and presentations in front of the whole camp.



When things get wet you need a drying room/tent, 8m x 4m.



Vast areas of this northern region are covered in oil wells as this photo shows. The square pads and the service roads run for hundreds of miles. A lot of the oil is stored in storage compounds and trucked by road.

Where we're based

The team bussed up to Peace River in the North East of the province on the first day of their second rotation. They undertook a local induction on arrival and spent the night there.

The next day they travelled up to their new Base Camp which is in a small town called "Worsely" which is North East of Peace River, (map attached).

The country has a bit more contour to it with valleys and ridges and some steeper slopes.

There is quite a lot of roading throughout this area, but aircraft will still be a major mode of transport because of the location of the fires.

The Camp is smaller than Birch but still with the same makeup and quality of services.

They will all be staying in hard walls or Trailers this time within the camp as this is Bear country and a lot more of them apparently. *(It has been said over a lemonade more than once, that all the bad bears in Alberta are relocated to this region!!)*

The team has three fires that they will be working on. Two are just north of the camp and are called the "Notikewin Complex" *(any fire that is over 200 hectares is given a complex name)*. A total of 60 Mexican firefighters are working with the NZ team.

The third is further to the east and is a fire that has come across the border from British Columbia.

Fire 1 is a small 200 hectare fire that has had a lot of machinery working on it which has caused significant damage to the landscape. This fire is just about extinguished and due to the nature of the area, a major rehabilitation programme has to be undertaken as a priority project. This is being drawn up at present.

Fire 2 has a workforce of Mexican firefighters working on it at present, along with aircraft and a large number of machinery. The fires are burning in recently established forest that was a cutover area, and these have to be put out. They also have an additional problem associated with a 400,000 cubic metre stockpile of pulp chip to contend with. The area is approximately 4,000 hectares in total.

Fire 3 on the boarder is being worked on by 20 Mexican firefighters under one of the NZ Division Supervisors and they are staying in a small town called "Hamburg". They also have a local person as field liaison and a medic within the camp. This fire necessitates aircraft use for transportation and suppression activities because of its location. The overall operational control for this fire is being undertaken from the Worsely IMT Base approximately 120 kilometres away.

More info

If you want to know more about what's happening over in Canada, three good sites to visit online are:

- "Alberta Wildfire" - Once opened up and you click on the fire map, this goes to all the fires across Canada and you can see the details of each one by clicking on the coloured box.
- "Alberta Weather"
- "CIFFC" (Canadian Interagency Forest Fire Centre) website, which posts a public briefing paper each day.

If you need to contact any of the team for any reason while they're on deployment, get in touch with National Rural Fire Authority's Abi Davidson in the first instance:

- DDI: (04) 496 3688
- Mobile: (021) 985 217
- Email: abi.davidson@fire.org.nz.

Please be aware that the team are in a very remote part of Canada and contact or communication with the outside world may not be possible at times.

Plus check out our NRFA Facebook page for more news and photos along the way.

The team are all rested and well.

I'll be in touch soon with more updates for you from Canada.



Cheers,
Russell Barclay - NZ Liaison