

Spirited Ags build bonfire, keep tradition

One of the best known of all Aggie traditions, bonfire began in the early 1900s as nothing more than a pile of junk burned by excited students in anticipation of Varsity football games.

During November and December, when the games usually were played, a fire was welcomed for the warmth it added to the chilly night.

Building and burning a bonfire before the University of Texas football game on Thanksgiving gradually became a custom, and by the 1920s it was a tradition, a former commandant and coach at Texas A&M wrote in a letter to the University archives.

Frank Anderson, who saw his first bonfire in the fall of 1920, said the fire consisted of community trash, tree limbs, boxes, lumber scraps and other debris.

The outhouse that sits atop bonfire found its beginning in this era. One of the cadets' favorite materials for building bonfires was untended, unwatched and hopefully, unoccupied outhouses, Anderson wrote.

Speeches and yells accompanied the lighting of the bonfire, but the fire usually was burned out by the time the speeches ended.

Apparently no one considered the early bonfires very memorable, since the first picture of a bonfire didn't appear until 1928 in the Longhorn, the A&M yearbook.

By 1935, bonfire was an established tradition, marked by the enthusiasm of the cadets who gathered junk to build it.

The cadets' resourcefulness began to bring complaints from the community. On the morning after the 1935 bonfire, a very irate farmer visited Anderson's office and said the cadets had carried off his log barn.

Because of the problems in 1935, the building of bonfire was put under the commandant's control in 1936.

Cadets chopped down a grove of dead cottonwood trees near what is now Easterwood Airport. Texas A&M College provided the axes, saws and trucks.

The 1936 bonfire was the first all-log one.

This year's bonfire will be made possible by the combined effort of Cadets and non-regs, on- and off-campus students, and independents and Greeks. Students have been at work for more than a month in order to build the bonfire that represents their "burning desire to beat the hell out of t.u."

The first cut began on Oct. 2 at a cutsite between Carlos and Navasota, and 24-hour push at stack began on Nov. 11. Bonfire will be lit Tuesday night at 8:09 p.m., and a yell practice will follow.



A junior climber sets up swings for stack and fills in the holes between the logs on the first stack.

Photos by Mike C. Mulvey



A redpot hoists up a chainsaw before sunset to top the trees around the first bonfire stack.



On October 2, members of company K-2 carry out a log to the main road where it will be loaded and then taken to Duncan field. This was the first of two mandatory Corps cuts at cutsite, a 30-minute drive from campus.

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