

# History

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of miles to Austin.

Unfortunately, bonfire is not without its misfortunes.

Two students have died in bonfire-related accidents during the years, in addition to numerous injuries ranging from splinters to ax wounds.

In 1955, freshman James E. Sarran suffered fatal injuries when he was struck by a swerving car after pushing two other students out of the way.

In 1981, A&M student Wiley Keith Jopling died after falling under the wheels of a tractor.

To prevent more accidents, students at cut site must take classes to learn safety techniques and basic ax use. Additional classes are required for students operating tractors or chainsaws.

Students must have a safety class sticker on their I.D. cards to be admitted to the cut site.

The bonfire tradition comes with its own vocabulary.

For example, "cut" refers to the cutting of trees for bonfire. It begins the first week of October and continues for nine weekends.

"Head stack" is the head of the Bonfire Committee, which coordinates all bonfire activities.

The head stack, a senior, acts as a liaison between University officials and students, performs public relations for bonfire and has the final word concerning activities.

"Pots" are bonfire leaders who

make up the chain of command. This term originates from the safety helmets all workers wear when in the perimeter area of stack. Rank is determined by helmet color.

Redpots lead the the bonfire crew. Senior redpots supervise and junior redpots organize and instruct. Senior redpots also choose centerpole.

Brownpots — three Corps members and two civilian students — all are se-

nior. They help the junior redpots by providing skilled labor.

Graypots, or climbers, are juniors and seniors who work with lights, centerpole and perimeter poles and man the ax-handle stations.

Dorm leaders are called yellowpots. They motivate dorm residents, teach students what to do at cut, walk the woods and are in charge of axes.

Yellowpots are assisted by crew chiefs who coordinate activities on each floor of a dorm.

**Robert Rucker, Class of '38, remembers bonfire as an unorganized event. He says it was built entirely by freshmen, who considered it a privilege.**

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Rucker says his freshman year, 1934, was very memorable. Since bonfire still was made only of trash, he

and his fellow freshmen spent nights scavenging for anything that would burn.

One night he says they found an old, dilapidated shack in a pasture near campus. They were disassembling it, he says, when a man ran out. The man said to just let him out and they could have the rest, Rucker says.

The commandant found out, however, and the next morning he told all freshmen to give 50 cents each to buy the man a new house, Rucker says.

Rucker says the \$900 raised by the

freshmen bought the man a nicer house than he had before.

Mike Ogg, Class of '61, says when he was in school, students got out of class three days before bonfire to work on it.

Most of the work was done from Saturdays to Thursdays while students were out of class. With 5,000 Corps members working full time on it, bonfire was completed quickly, he says.

"It was a big deal back in those days," he says.

Ogg says there were no redpots then. Various units had different jobs, he says.

Strong competition existed between outfits, Ogg says. They competed to see which outfit could bring in the biggest log or have the first log on bonfire, he says.

Ogg says it also was important to be the first unit to march to bonfire behind the band.

"Those freshmen would almost fight to be the first behind the band," he says.

Ogg says he was concerned spirit would decrease as the University grew, but he says the spirit is still strong.

"The spirit isn't like it anywhere else," he says.

Rucker agrees.

"Bonfire is a very integral part of Aggie spirit," he says. "We will always have a bonfire somewhere."

# Pros and Cons

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Bonfire have never been up on stack working, so they have no idea what they're talking about. All they do when they come out is rally."

Harper says AAB is planning more than just rallies against bonfire this year. She says the group will seek legal ways to limit or end bonfire.

AAB is seeking help from the Environmental Protection Agency and the Texas Air Quality Control Board.

The group is trying to find out if an environmental impact study has ever been done to determine how bonfire affects area air, water and land.

AAB is consulting environmental lawyers and once the case is organized, the group plans to pressure the Texas A&M University System Board of Regents into ending or significantly scaling down bonfire's size.

Regents presently support bonfire as is. After last year's bonfire, however, Regents Chairman William McKenzie set up a committee to study bonfire-related issues including safety, location,

sobriety and impact on student welfare.

"The bottom line is that this Board is desirous of assuring that there will be future bonfires at A&M and stresses that the tradition will continue," McKenzie says.

But Harper says she would rather see another tradition take bonfire's place.

"I happen to think bonfire is a bad tradition," she says. "If all the University organizations that promote bonfire promoted something good with the same amount of passion they put into bonfire, it would become a tradition.

"In a couple of years nobody would even miss bonfire and everybody would be just as fired up about whatever new thing we were doing."

Cheever says he doubts bonfire could be replaced with an equally popular event.

"It's ridiculous to attack an institution like bonfire that is so well liked," he says. "Aggies love bonfire — it's as simple as that."



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