

# Bonfire '95

Friday  
December 1, 1995

3

## Burning desire

**Bonfire will burn tonight  
30 minutes after sunset.**



Stew Milne/THE BATTALION

Nov. 3, 1994 — Bonfire burns earlier than usual because we didn't play on Thanksgiving day, because of NCAA sanctions barring A&M from tv coverage.

Bonfire fell down on October 26. The stack shifted because of the rain-soaked ground, and the Red Pots decided to rebuild it from scratch. Student participation increased and Bonfire was rebuilt in seven days. Images of the construction of Bonfire and its burning was available on Internet through the World Wide Web.

100 members of the Class of '64 attended Bonfire in memory of the '63 Bonfire that was canceled because of President Kennedy's assassination.

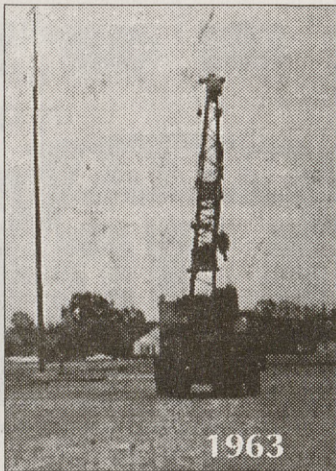
1992 — Bonfire moved from Duncan Field to polo fields, so they would be farther from university buildings and neighborhoods.

A 9-by-12-foot "Jumbo-Tron" television screen, funded by Pepsi, was placed on Bonfire field to show yell practice, Bonfire and season game highlights.

1991 — Replant occurred for the first time. In an effort to contribute back to the environment, students planted 365 trees at a mining site in Carlos, about 30 miles outside College Station.

1990 — A new statement added to the University's official bonfire policy, stating that "Trees for the Bonfire will be cut only if a cut site is available which was already scheduled for clearing. If no site is available in a given year, no bonfire will be built."

A yellow ribbon was tied around the third stack in honor of soldiers serving in Saudi Arabia



1963

1981 — A&M student Wiley Keith Jopling died after he fell under the wheels of a tractor while working on Bonfire.

1969 — Bonfire reached 109 feet, 10 inches tall, and it is set a world record as being the largest bonfire ever in the United States. Now bonfire is limited to 55 feet.

1963 — Bonfire was not finished and was not burned because of the assassination of President Kennedy.

1958 — Bonfire collapsed for the first time because of rain. It was rebuilt in two days and burned on schedule. A "student holiday" was called, and classes were dismissed so students could rebuild it.

1955 — Bonfire, previously held on Simpson Drill field, was moved to the field behind Duncan Dining Hall.

1954 — Bonfire reached 73 feet.



1946

1949 — Bonfire reached 65 feet.

1947 — A 50-foot centerpole made of two logs strapped together was raised to support the stacks.

1946 — The first log centerpole was used.

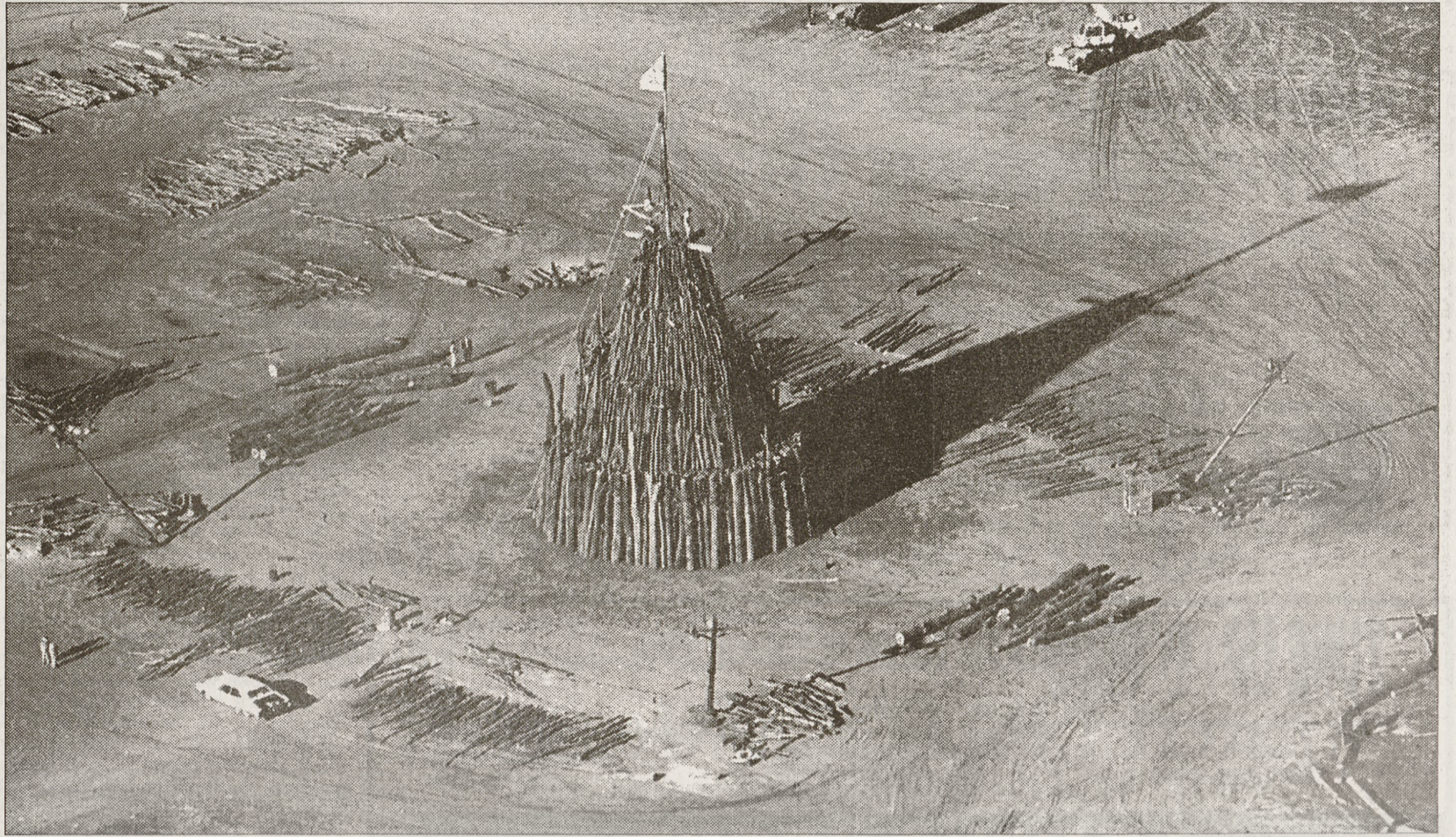
1936 — The first year Bonfire was regulated by the Corps Commandant. This was the first year Bonfire was considered "legal." It



1929

By 1920 — Having Bonfire before the University of Texas game became a tradition.

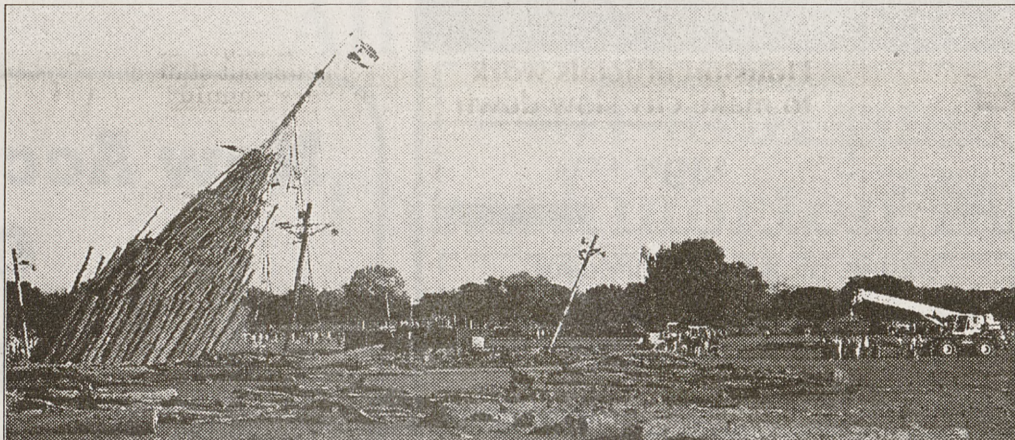
1909 — The first Bonfire was a pile of trash thrown together for November and December varsity games.



Tim Moog, THE BATTALION

Bonfire was almost done as of 3:00 p.m. after Elephant Walk. Today, the extra logs will be cleared from the site, the last two stacks will be built by redpots, and the outhouse will be added to the top of stack.

### Redpots keep Bonfire on track after unstable year



Battalion file photo

Last year's stack collapsed due to shifting soil caused by heavy rains.

By Michael Landauer  
THE BATTALION

Although he admits it may not be true, Dr. Bill Kibler said his favorite Bonfire story is about University of Texas students flying in planes over Bonfire in attempts to light it in the 1950s. They never succeeded, and Kibler says they never could because it takes hours of preparation to get stack ready to burn.

"We're not going to stand around while they pump 300 gallons of fuel on the thing in order to light it," Kibler, a former Bonfire adviser, said.

Bonfire will light up the Polo Fields tonight, the 85th time Aggies have burned a bonfire to show their "desire to beat the hell outta t.u."

After unusual Bonfires in the last two years — stack fell last year, and redpots had trouble lighting 1993's bonfire — this year's bonfire has not had any major problems, Kevin Jackson, Bonfire adviser, said.

"I think we've got some positive momentum taking us into the night of the event," he said.

Part of this momentum comes from the progression of Bonfire's image as an event that unites the campus.

"That transition is starting to be made and it's being made because our student leadership is reaching out," he said. "It's going to take a while to gain momentum, but we have taken a decisive step forward."

One way Bonfire has changed is in the way the students are involved. Redpots, who have traditionally been in charge of building Bonfire, now have the responsibility to head up committees that deal with all aspects of the event.

"It's a partnership with students," he said. "We want students to assume the highest level of responsibility as they can."

Jackson said the students have been able to handle the added responsibility. Carl Baggett, head stack, has done especially well in creating a new leadership role on campus, he said. As the person at the top of the Bonfire hierarchy, Baggett has put himself on a level with the student body president, MSC president and other campus leaders, he said.

"People might shoot me for saying this, but I think you have to contemplate

adding head stack into that dimension," Jackson said.

Baggett said his job will pay off when he sees old Aggies come back today to witness Bonfire. But his mind will be focused on the details.

Dress logs, the largest logs that have been carved on by residence halls and Corps companies, are the last logs to be added to first stack. Redpots will build the last two stacks this afternoon, cut off the excess center pole and then add the outhouse on the top.

Then, a trough will be dug by a bulldozer around stack and filled with water. A truck will spray the stack with about 300 gallons of diesel-like fuel, and redpots will attach targets to the bottom of stack. Targets are bed sheets doused with gasoline that are the first things redpots light with their torches.

With all this on Baggett's schedule today, he said one thought will be going through his mind as he watches Bonfire burn.

"I just feel real lucky," he said.

Baggett said he is happy to be part of Bonfire history — especially after being involved with last year's Bonfire.

"I think 20 years from now, that will be the Bonfire talked about," he said.

The stack they will be talking about collapsed due to bad weather and shifty soil. But after one night's work, stack had been completely dismantled and logs were neatly stacked awaiting a new center pole. The stack was rebuilt with time to spare, but Kibler said the legacy of the crisis was an increased student interest in Bonfire.

"The reality was that you had hundreds, maybe thousands, that went out and helped when they might have never worked on it otherwise," he said.

Baggett said the enthusiasm carried over into this year's cut season.

"We had 3,200 at first cut, and that's about 1,000 more than usual cuts," he said. "That's just unheard of."

The increased participation has made things run smoothly this year, Baggett said. Apparently, this year's bonfire will be free from interference by unstable soil, wet logs and even surprise air attack.

"We're gonna burn it; it's gonna light; it's gonna fall," he said. "And we're going to beat t.u."

### Bonfire evolves to more sober affair

By Michael Landauer  
THE BATTALION

Bonfire may have started as a pile of trash, but it has evolved into the largest Bonfire of its kind in the world.

But bigger does not always mean better. As Bonfire grew in the early years, farmers started complaining of missing outhouses, and lumber was borrowed from campus construction sites.

To end such practices, the Corps officially took over Bonfire, and the tradition made strides toward credibility.

Modern problems have been different. Dr. Bill Kibler, a former adviser for Bonfire, said that alcohol, hazing and safety are all issues that Bonfire workers have had to face over the years. He said Bonfire just 10 years ago was a very different event from what it is today.

"It was certainly something I never would have taken my children to," Kibler said. "We had a lot of adults who just stayed away because they were disgusted by the behavior."

As recently as 1990, a group called Aggies Against Bonfire organized protest at Bonfire the night it burned.

Amy Williams, coordinator of the Bonfire Alcohol Awareness committee, said students found ways to improve Bonfire to make people less opposed to the tradition.

"I think eventually, if Bonfire had continued to get more violent and more destructive, the community would not have accepted it," she said. "However, the community has supported us fully in raising alcohol awareness."

The committee does not promote abstinence, but rather urges students to wait until after Bonfire to drink and to drink responsibly.

"What prompted this is that there was a significant number of MIPs (Minor in Possession) PIs (Public Intoxication) and DWIs (Driving While Intoxicated) and the community was starting to become a little bit intolerant of the Bonfire tradition," she said. "Our program was the way we could tell the community, 'Hey look, we can change Bonfire for the better and make it something the community can all take part in.'"

University police have reported decreasing numbers of alcohol-related incidents in the past three years, but Williams said the committee has another way to measure success.

"The community is excited about the tradition and want to bring their children," she said. "I think that's our greatest accomplishment."

Williams said some students believe that drinking is part of the tradition but that those people are missing the point of Bonfire.

"People like that need to consider the freshmen and the community members who are enjoying Bonfire for the first time and be sure not to ruin Bonfire for others," she said. "In that aspect, I think it's a matter of respect."

Although it was the Corps commandant who instigated change in Bonfire's early years, these changes are being brought forward by students. In fact, the chairman of the Bonfire Alcohol Awareness Committee is a redpot.

"Our committee is a student committee," Williams said. "If the students didn't want it, the committee wouldn't be working."

Because of all that it involves, Kibler said that people from other schools wonder why the University allows Bonfire. He said they often ask, "Why in the world would you take on such a thing?"

"The answer is that we don't," he said. "The students do."