

Building Their Own Tradition

Women turn out to Bonfire in droves to 'build the hell' and defy stereotypes

Story by Michelle Voss

Photography by Rony Angkriwan

Women out at Bonfire aren't just the water wenches anymore. Hundreds romp out to Bonfire cut wielding axes, slashing vines with machetes and carrying logs through the woods.

Forget the curlers - pedicures are useless. These women have a purpose other than primping.

They are the women of Bonfire, building a legacy and forging a new path for future Aggies.

Behind the cutting and the burning, everyone who builds Bonfire has a common drive and a personal bond with the six stacks of flaming logs thousands flock to witness. For the females who wear blisters on their hands, bear the heat and climb the stack, Bonfire becomes a piece of themselves.

Amy Bauman, a freshman political science major, said building Bonfire gives her inner strength.

"When you build Bonfire, you build yourself, you build your inner worth," she said. "You become a much more well-rounded person."

Bauman, who is also a member of the Delta Gamma sorority, said she believes Bonfire is about breaking down stereotypes.

"For me, Bonfire is about proving that you can be a lady and get dirty, too," Bauman said. "Bonfire is honorary testosterone for women."

Tara Gresham, a sophomore general studies major and co-chair for Neeley Hall, said everyone looks at Bonfire and sees their own hard work.

"Seeing this 55-foot-tall structure burn gives me a warm fuzzy in my belly," Gresham said.

Bonfire has its own jargon and rituals, most of which may be odd to the normal bystander.

"Groding," one of the baser activities of Bonfire, is rolling around in the mud.

Brandi Leggett, a sophomore journalism major, said she loves to get dirty at Bonfire.

"It makes you feel like a kid again," Leggett said. "You want to grode the world."

Bonfire becomes the world for the women who participate in the event.

Devoting hours to clearing out

woods and wiring together stacks of logs requires motivation from leaders.

Martha Wilson, a bonfire co-chair in Neeley Hall and a sophomore psychology major, said Bonfire is about pushing yourself to the limit.

"Bonfire is pure unselfishness," Wilson said. "You're working for this big stack of logs, for the whole University, for your parents who went here and for people who don't even go to the University."

Wilson said Bonfire is about unity and achieving a common goal.

"Bonfire is a way of cleansing yourself, like you're making good for something," she said.

Haley Charba, a sophomore community health major, said she wants to dispel the social taboos about women having dirty fingernails.

"At cut you see people in the raw," Charba said. "You can't put on make-up and fake it. You find out who your true friends are."

Charba said enduring a day in the woods requires stamina.

"Bonfire is getting people to be themselves, kind of like finding yourself in the woods," Charba said. "You're out in the wild and being rugged, creating bonds."

With more women being involved in Bonfire in recent years, it is difficult to put a gender on Bonfire. Females are welcomed out at cut, if they are willing to work. However, women do not hold the same position as men in Bonfire.

At Bonfire, there are no women crew chiefs, yellow pots or red pots.

Crew chiefs are leaders who motivate each male dorm and are responsible for the health and safety of the dorm.

Jackie London, a sophomore general studies major, said denying women the role of yellow pot or crew chief is an injustice.

"They're basically saying that we can't trust women to lead us, or to put out the effort and be safe," London said. "They're saying we can't trust women to lead men."

The women of Bonfire are tough cookies, but do not want to be thought of as butch, Charba said.

"For me, Bonfire is about proving that you can be a lady and get dirty, too. Bonfire is honorary testosterone for women."

— Amy Bauman
Freshman political science major



Women participating in Bonfire lead the way to bring a log to the Bonfire site last Sunday.

PLEASE SEE **WOMEN** ON PAGE 4.



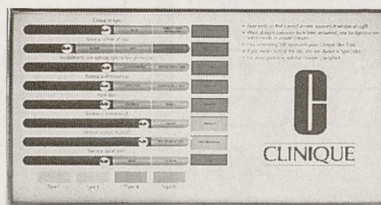
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