

What is The Plug?

The large amount of fire activity in the Blue Mountains, forecast weather conditions and the potential for further property losses and a campaign fire that could last months in the Grose Valley and threaten, potentially, all of the homes in the Blue Mountains, saw fire managers take high-risk and radical action to protect the communities of the Blue Mountains leading up to 23 October 2013.

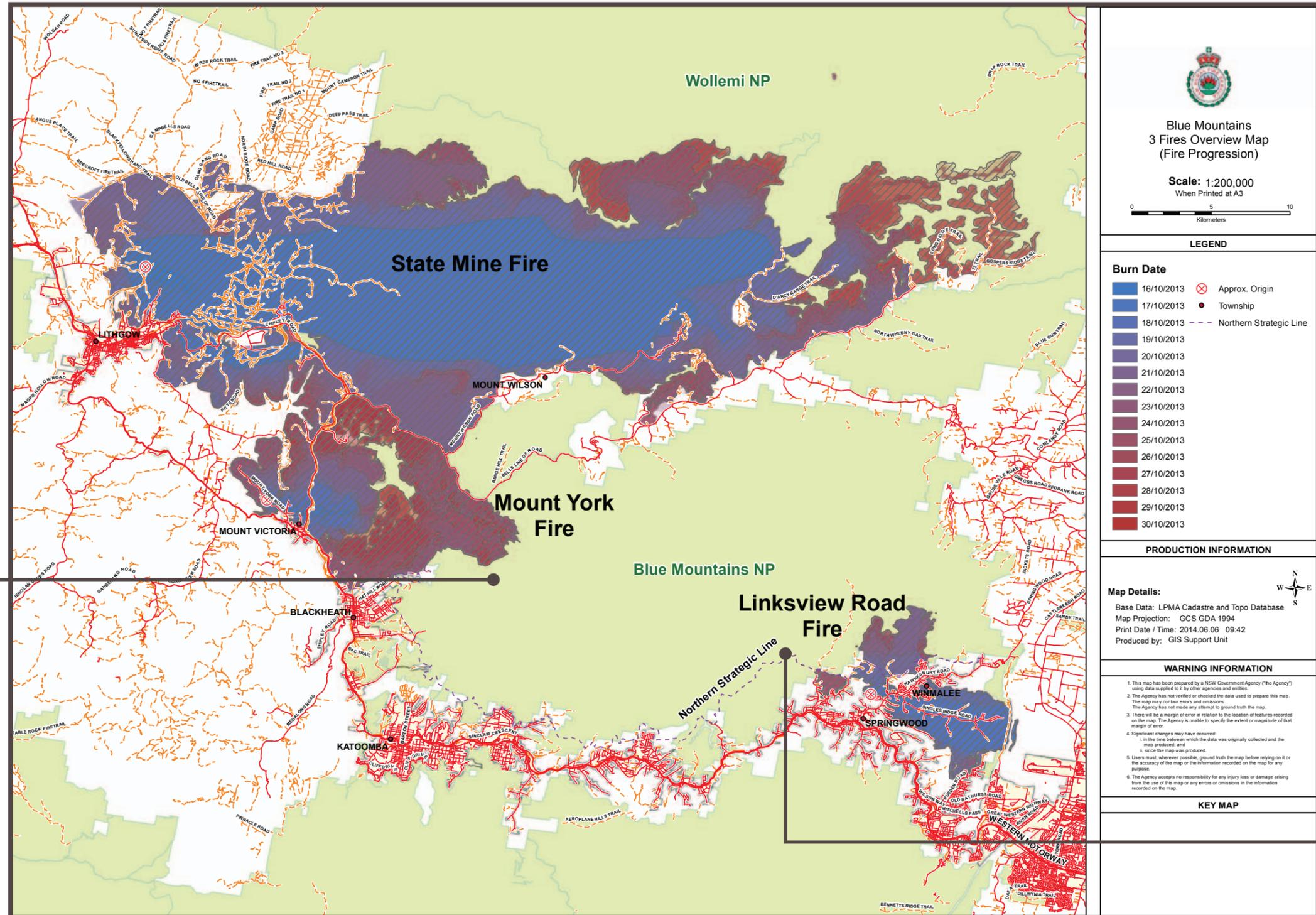
'The Plug', as it would become known, became central to the

fight. This strategy involved back burning off a steep and difficult section of bushland that firefighters could only access by foot or helicopter winch in. This was a high-risk approach due to the potential for fire to breach containment lines, with a fire perimeter of more than 150kms. Remote Area Firefighting Teams were deployed for the task, assisted by helicopters. At times, they had to trek many kilometres through rugged bushland to

consolidate containment lines where crews would back burn. This work continued around the clock in the lead up to October 23, when conditions were expected to deteriorate further. In light of the looming forecast, and due to the scale and extent of the fire activity, a decision was made by the NSW Premier to declare a State of Emergency. This step is very rare for bush fire emergencies and was in recognition of the potential threat. The complexity

of this situation led to the formation of an overarching Incident Management Team (IMT) for the complex of fires burning across the Blue Mountains. While separate IMTs would maintain local control of the incident, this overarching IMT would provide an increased level of coordination and resourcing.

The Plug – high-risk, must-do containment strategy to stop the fires spreading to the whole Blue Mountains. The terrain was so steep that it took RAFT crews three hours to walk in and six hours to walk out. The job of the 40 crew (20 from NPWS and 20 from NSW RFS) was to hand cut a containment line across the narrow valley floor. They spent about 24 hours in the area preparing for and then setting a back burn. Fire managers estimated there was a 30 percent chance it would hold – and it did. Further crews entered the area in the coming days to tend to the fire and ensure its effectiveness.



The Northern Strategic Line is long-term strategy used by fire managers to protect the villages of the Blue Mountains from fire. The line is based on containment lines which are maintained by firefighters through hazard reduction and back burning as well as natural features that would slow or block a fire's spread.