



Above: Lauriston Girls School year nine girls in their first hike through the fire-ravaged high country.

## New life: the challenge for Lauriston's year nine girls

As the wildfires in the heart of Victoria's mountain country burned out of control before Christmas, everybody in Melbourne also felt the heartache. Personally, they were not losing property; collectively, they were losing the places they had loved, that had been kept safe for the future preservation of Australia's fragile wildlife.

Many schools take secondary students to Gippsland where they can hike and camp, go white-water rafting or kayaking, sleep under the stars.

Lauriston Girls School takes an entire year level and, with carefully designed programs tailored to study the environment, year nines who come from a very different background are plunged into the necessity to use their own initiative and personal resources as well as teamwork to resolve issues.

This time last year, another group of Lauriston girls went up to the spectacular Howqua campus and spent the entire year surrounded by the beauty of the bush and the changing seasons.

What faces the girls this year could not be more different. The bushland around Howqua was devastated by fire just before Christmas and although the buildings and immediate surrounds are safe and just as lush, all their bushwalking and nature activities will be taking on a new turn. The

By SUE GOSS

Howqua campus was intended to give Lauriston students a special sort of resilience which will carry them through joys and challenges for the future. Now they will be sharing this resilience with the bushland in its regeneration, the new growth for which the fires are sadly necessary. So for this year's year nine cohort, staff have devised a very special curriculum.

The Howqua dam was used for water bombing and the buildings were used for CFA headquarters. Once the threat of fires was over, it was obvious that this would be a great opportunity for the girls to learn directly from the environment.

The art program has been altered to focus on the elements, colour and texture which has been emphasised in the natural environment by the burnt bushland. Both the stark contrast and total harmony provides a unique opportunity to explore an environment which is not seen often.

Through the use of print-making and drawing the girls can respond emotionally to their observations and interpretations but will also be able to contrast a burnt and non-burnt environment. The regeneration will be a stimulus for analysis, comment and artistic expression in English and poetry, again, a chance rarely given to girls from such backgrounds. Science and

Environmental Projects have the great opportunity to look at the regeneration of fire-destroyed areas. Impact of flora and fauna, animal habitat and water quality will be a major focus of study.

The outdoor program in term three has been rescheduled due to the damage in Sheep Yard flat. Although the students can not see the fire damage from the campus, the girls are already hiking through the burnt terrain.

During the course of the year the girls will hike through these areas and have the opportunity to explore the new growth, watching the bush return to life.



Above: Firefighters tackle the Howqua fires at their height.