

# Athol VRFF Profile

*The first attempt by Southland County Council to form a volunteer fire brigade in Athol was about 1954/55 and resulted in a public meeting with unknown success. At the time the County was forming a large number of brigades around Southland and equipping them with trailer pumps.*

A letter dated 17 March 1971 to the County Clerk of the Southland County Council from DS Winefield, of Athol, advised a meeting was attended by 25 men from the Athol – Garston area and they had agreed to proceed with the formation of a fire brigade for the district.

At this time the call-out method was through the local store, which would then ring around the area, starting with the closest volunteers. Two separate Fire Chiefs had been elected for the single brigade, one being based in Athol and the second in Garston, each handling fires in their areas co-operatively.

On 2 October 1980, a major fire broke out and as a result the Garston store and part of the pub were burnt down. Difficulties were experienced in controlling the fire and highlighted the need for better organized fire forces in both Athol and Garston.

On 24 October 1980, a meeting was held in Garston to form its own rural fire force under the Queenstown Lakes County Council, the territorial authority at the time. Five men volunteered their services for the newly formed fire force.

Athol also reformed its force at this time under the Southland County Council, responsible for Athol, and assisting Garston when required.



*Athol's first tanker a 4x4 Bedford donated by D. McKnight and converted into a tanker in 1982.*



*Athol fire station in 2007 with the J20 Jeep and the Hino appliance briefly located at Athol.*

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## Purpose of this *newsletter*

This newsletter is to let those involved with the Southern Rural Fire Authority know what is going on around the area. We would like to focus on a Volunteer Rural Fire Force in each newsletter and any other news items.

If you have an article and/or pictures you wish to contribute please let Deputy Principal Rural Fire Officer Elton Smith know.



A Thames Trader fire appliance was purchased from the NZ Fire Service in 1981. The appliance had previously been in service with the Balfour fire brigade. Following this in 1982 a 4x4 Bedford truck, which had been donated by D. McKnight, was converted into a water tanker with a water tank donated by the Southland County Council. These appliances were housed in various locations over the years until 1987 when the current fire station was constructed on land donated by the then Rabbit Board which had maintained a workshop located next door.

In 1988 the Southland County replaced both the Bedford tanker and the Thames Trader fire engine with a 4WD Bedford forestry fire appliance purchased from the NZ Forest Service.

1993 saw a time of change when both the Athol and Garston VRFFs, which both were now responsible to the Southland District Council, were merged to form the Athol - Garston VRFF. This created a single constitution; however both stations were maintained, each with a separate controller. This arrangement continued until 1999 – 2000 when the Athol Garston VRFF was dissolved and each location

was reinstated as separate entities.

In 2003 the Southern Rural Fire Authority took over the control and running of the Athol VRFF. Change came quickly with the addition of a second vehicle, a 1980 J20 Jeep fire appliance, as well as additional training and support for the team. Unfortunately in 2005 the Bedford appliance suffered mechanical problems which ultimately saw its demise. A number of temporary appliances came and went until 2009 when the current brand new Isuzu appliance arrived, paid for by the Southern RFA & National Rural Fire Authority. This compliments the Toyota Hilux also located at Athol, which replaced the J20 Jeep in 2008.

Today the Athol VRFF respond on average to 10 to 20 calls per year. The nature of the calls tends to vary depending on the time of year, with the majority being vegetation fires, medical assists and motor vehicle accidents. All fire fighters within the team are qualified rural fire fighters, with most close to finishing the required unit standards for their level 2 national certificates in fire & rescue services – vegetation, and an additional two completing their level 3 national certificates. This is the result of dedication to structured training over a number of years.



*Above - Athol crew attending a bus accident during a snow event in the mid 1990s. A common call of assistance during the winter months*

*Below - Some of the Athol crew in 2009 during hand-over of Isuzu appliance L-R: Richard Soper, Robert Durling, Barry Skilling, Shane Woods, Winston Soper, Andrew Sellans*

