

Forest fires rage in Spain, Greece

Spain's prime minister has broken off his holiday to inspect the devastation caused by forest fires raging on an island in the Canaries which have forced thousands to flee their homes. In Greece, firefighters supported by water-dropping planes were battling forest fires in the southern Peloponnese peninsula and northeast region of Kavala on Sunday.

The two countries have been among the worst hit by wildfires that have swept across southern Europe in the past two weeks amid sizzling temperatures and fierce winds. About 500 firefighters, forest rangers and soldiers fought the flames on Spain's small holiday island of La Palma as planes dumped water in an effort to bring the blazes under control.

Fanned by strong winds, the fires have now destroyed between 1,500 and 2,000 hectares of pine forest since they broke out on Friday night, local authority president Guadalupe Gonzalez Tano told

reporters.

Spanish prime minister Jose Luis Rodriguez Zapatero, who began his summer holiday on Sunday on the Canary island of Lanzarote, flew in a Spanish air force plane to La Palma later in the day.

Accompanied by local officials, he then travelled to one of the areas affected. The fire was spreading on two fronts, down from three fronts on Saturday when the fast-moving inferno forced about 4,000 people to evacuate their homes. The wind direction also changed and was now blowing against the progress of the fire, local authorities said, adding that they hoped to bring the blaze under control on Sunday. In addition, one of the two fronts was heading towards a sparsely forested area of volcanic rock, which would act as a natural firewall, they said. But one blaze close to the southeastern town of Mazo remained out of control.

La Palma, home to about 85,000 people, is the fifth largest of the seven islands in the Canaries archipelago, located in the Atlantic off the coast of Morocco and a popular tourist destination.

But the volcanic island is relatively undeveloped compared with some of its neighbours, such as the islands of Gran Canaria and Tenerife.

In Greece, four planes, one helicopter, 11 vehicles and 46 firefighters battled a pine forest fire as strong winds fanned the flames in a hard-to-reach area on the Peloponnese's Menalon mountain, the firefighters' press service said.

The civil protection agency raised the fire-risk alert to its second highest level in several parts of Greece including Athens due to high temperatures reaching 35 degrees celsius, drought and strong winds.

Article from Brisbane Times



Greek students receive Premier's VCE Award

Three Greek Australian students are amongst the 305 top-performing VCE students to achieve a Premier's VCE award.

Christine Demiris, Effie Markesinis, and Miltiadis Paikopoulos, were recognised for achieving a study score of 46 or higher in their VCE subjects last year.

Premier John Brumby presented students with their awards on Tuesday at the Melbourne Convention Centre.

Paikopoulos, who was awarded a Top All-Round VCE High Achiever award achieved a perfect ENTER score of 99.95 last year.

The 2008 DUX of Xavier College received study scores of 50 in English, 48 in Classical Greek, 47 in Latin, 45 in Specialist Mathematics and First Class Honours in University Mathematics.

Christine Demiris, who attended MacRobertson Girl's High school was awarded for her academic excellence in Literature, whilst Effie Markesinis, from Balwyn High school received an award for LOTE-Greek. Markesinis was the only student to receive a perfect score of 50 in Greek.

"I could not achieve what I did without my teacher, Mrs Kane's (nee Krilis) ongoing guidance, help and belief in me," she said.

'Ski like the wind': 80-year-old daredevil has no regrets

It was caution, according to 80-year-old Nick Regos, that landed him in trouble while attempting a two-metre ski jump on a black run at Mount Buller on the weekend.

The lifelong daredevil was making a second dash down the resort's 'powder keg' run, for advanced skiers, on Sunday when he noticed a rocky shoal and decided to approach with care.

"I moved back and I went to give myself a run off to have a little bit of speed to jump it but it wasn't sufficient and I landed," he said.

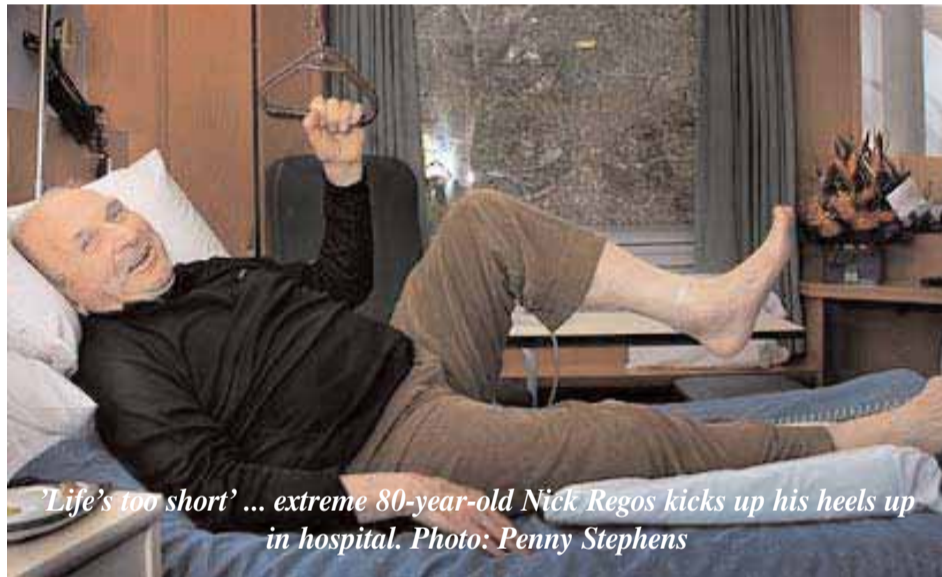
Lying with a fractured upper femur, Mr Regos calmly called out for help and was flown off the mountain by paramedics who asked if he'd considered giving up his alpine adventures.

"Life is too short," was the reply.

Speaking from his Epworth Hospital bed yesterday, Mr Regos praised the quick response of the Mount Buller ski patrol, of which he was once a member.

He said he was keen to return to the slopes to get fit for the ski season in Europe where the powder snow is so fine it "hangs in the air like smoke".

For the past 40 years, Mr Regos has chased the snow - spending winters



'Life's too short' ... extreme 80-year-old Nick Regos kicks up his heels up in hospital. Photo: Penny Stephens

skiing in Victoria and summers in the northern hemisphere - Canada, United States, Austria, France, Italy, Germany and Greece.

"Powder is the great fascination, it's the most beautiful feeling, it's silky," Mr Regos said.

"I think something similar would be catching a good wave and that feeling of weightlessness."

The octogenarian began skiing aged 20 and in 1953 joined Melbourne University's ski club.

Fifty-six years later, he is the University Ski Club's longest-standing member but said an 83-year-old "late arrival" had managed to snaffle the

title of oldest member.

The former physical education teacher taught at high schools in Footscray, Fitzroy, Balwyn, England and spent two decades at University High.

He credits his love of sport for keeping him young and said his role model was an 84-year-old living in Aspen who "skis like the wind" despite a hip replacement.

As well as skiing, Mr Regos works out daily - lifting weights, stretching and walking near his Kew home - and has been quick to dish out fitness advice to his fellow Epworth patients.

"My Greek relatives think of me as being a bit over the top, (they think) 'why don't I lie back and just have an ouzo?'," Mr Regos said.

"I think there's the old saying 'if you don't move you lose it' ... I think any movement is better than immobility for goodness sakes'."

Mr Regos said he enjoyed the camaraderie skiing had brought since the death of his wife, Penny, 20 years ago.

"(I love the) sharing because there's other people that love it, you just chortle as you're going down the slopes, it's a wonderful feeling, you're gambling in nature."

Article from The Age

Crowd control

Greek sporting teams are legendary for their passionate fans. Unfortunately, that passion often boils over into violence in the stands and after games. To combat the issue, Greece and various soccer and basketball teams are introducing personalized tickets and ID cards.

Beginning this season, special tickets will be issued (Atromitos, Ergotelis, Levadiakos and Panionios teams initially) that contain the buyer's name, seat number and attendance record in a bar code. The three big clubs - Panathinaikos, Olympiakos and AEK Athens - will also implement the new ticketing system at the start of the 2010-11 season.

