



The mountain fires above Kyrenia at the height of the blaze. About 30 square miles of forest have been destroyed and 11 villages damaged

## Britons' village homes escape Northern Cyprus fire

BRITISH residents in the Turkish Republic of Northern Cyprus returned to their properties yesterday as firefighters brought a blaze in the Kyrenia range under control, writes Nick Skeens in Nicosia.

Many found that their homes had escaped destruction. Turkish Cypriot officials said 11 villages were damaged and about 30 square miles of forest burnt. But on Wednesday it

was feared that the village of Karmi, with 170 British homes, had been destroyed.

"Karmi is a village right at the heart of the fire," said Gordon Hayes, 75, from Shropshire, now retired to nearby Bellapais. "But we found that only one or two houses had been a bit singed." Bellapais, too, appears to have escaped serious damage. "The fires whipped through some villages

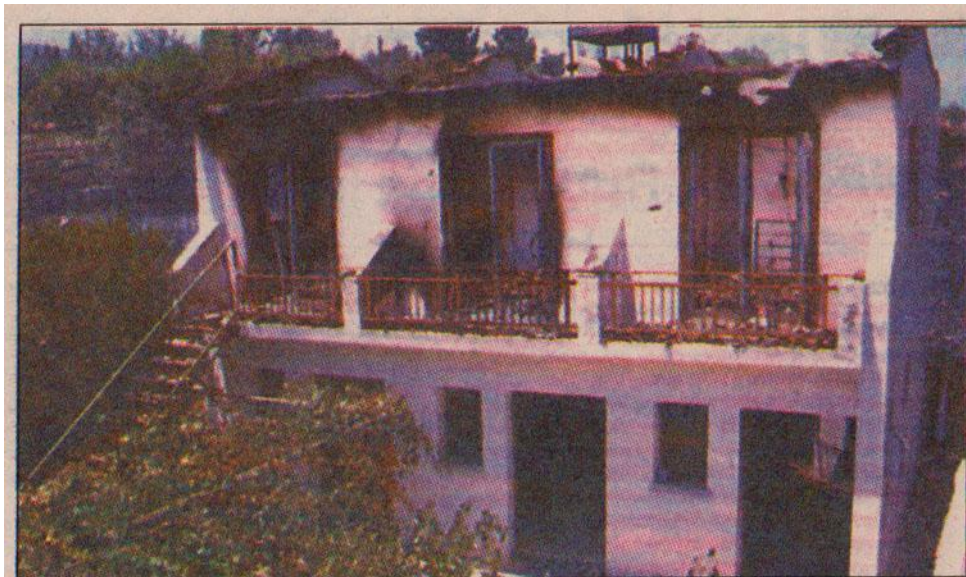
so fast that the flames just burnt up loose scrub and dry vegetation," said a European diplomat. "There wasn't time for houses to catch fire."

The fugitive businessman, Asil Nadir, who fled to Northern Cyprus in early 1993, was not so lucky. Turkish television showed extensive damage to his Olive Tree complex of holiday villas near Kyrenia. Turkish Cypriot police have arrested six

people, three of them foreigners. The three, thought to be Kurd sympathisers, were attacked by a crowd outside a court in Kyrenia.

President Suleiman Demirel of Turkey flew to Northern Cyprus to see the damage. It was his first visit in 30 years in politics.

● *Paul Anast in Athens writes:* Thousands of acres were destroyed by the summer's first forest fires in Greece.



**GUTTED:** One of the houses in the upper quarter of Karaođlanođlu village, west of Kyrenia, seen gutted by the fire which also destroyed a number of cars parked near the houses.

Photo courtesy of The Cyprus Weekly

# Inferno ravages Kyrenia range

A HUGE forest fire raging for the past three days in the Kyrenia mountains in occupied Cyprus has ravaged an area of about 70 sq kms, gutting homes in 14 villages and injuring ten people.

The blaze, fanned by

strong winds, caused damage estimated at £20m and great ecological disaster.

"It will take up to 50 years to restore the damage to the forests," one official said.

"I have been a fireman for 35 years and I have never seen anything so awful," said

a Greek Cypriot fireman working with the British bases as he arrived back at the Ledra Palace checkpoint yesterday.

One other Greek Cypriot fireman with the British base fire brigade was injured as an explosion from an abandoned shell shattered the windows of his fire truck. All the British fire fighting vehicles were withdrawn yesterday, but two Wessex helicopters continued to help fight the blaze.

Nobody knows how the fire started. The Turkish Cypriot regime has already criticised the limp response of the local fire service and admitted it was not ready to cope with such a massive blaze.

One Turkish Cypriot spokesman said the fire must have started from a dropped cigarette. There is also talk that three foreigners were arrested for "sabotage."

The Denktash regime sought help from Turkey and the British bases, but refused to accept assistance from the Greek Cypriot side.

## Indignant

Turkey's President Suleyman Demirel, making his first trip to the occupied north, flew in to inspect the damage and to extend Turkey's support.

Greek Cypriot refugees were indignant at the sight of the blaze and the clouds of dark smoke billowing over the Pentadaktylos mountain range. "It's shocking that we can see our villages being gutted by fire, but are prevented by foreigners from rushing to put out the blaze," one said.

The refugee organisations are to stage a protest gathering near the Ledra Palace Hotel this evening.

President Clerides had sent a personal letter to Rauf Denktash through UN official John-Paul Kavanagh urging him to allow the fire services of the Republic to help fight the fire. He wrote as "one Cypriot to another."

Denktash read the letter publicly, but told newsmen and the UN official that the rugged terrain where the fire raged was inaccessible to fire engines. What were needed were helicopters and aircraft.

Most of the forest destroyed was of pine and cypress trees. There were also



**THREATENED:** The giant fire that spread along the northern face of the Kyrenia mountain range, touched Kyrenia itself, seriously damaging a number of houses in the upper suburbs of the town.



**HELP:** Helicopters from the British bases helped fight the fire in the Kyrenia mountains. Here, one of the helicopters is seen releasing tons of water on the burning forest area.

olive and citrus groves.

There were reports that some Turkish military installations on the northern slopes of the mountains were destroyed. A top ranking official from Turkey's military command accompanied President Demirel on his four-hour visit to the area.

## Bellapais

The inferno laid waste tourist areas and threatened historical sites like the St Hilarion crusader castle and the 12th century Bellapais Gothic monastery. Many villages were evacuated, while hundreds of mainly British expatriates also moved to safer ground near Kyrenia harbour.

Explosions from unexploded mortar shells left scattered in the forest from the 1974 invasion, could be heard throughout the three days of the blaze. Electricity and telephone lines were affected.

The fire first erupted in the slopes west of Kyrenia. By Wednesday night, it had crept over the mountain tops, heading toward Hartzia and Kythrea, north of Nicosia.

By last night it had been largely contained, but was still raging out of control near Bufavento castle.

See also back page



**OBSTACLES:** There were scuffles at the Ledra Palace checkpoint when UN troops tried to prevent reporters and television crews from talking to Cypriot drivers of fire engines from the British bases.

The European Parliament urged Turkey yesterday to pressure Denktash to accept assistance from the Cyprus government to extinguish the Kyrenia fire and to help in restoring the damage to the environment and cultural sites.

This was done through a motion tabled by Greek MPs Yiannos Kranitiotis and Paraskevas Avgerinos.

British Euro MP Pauline Green said she also raised the issue in the Parliament. She said she also sent an urgent message to Turkish Prime Minister, Tansu Ciller.

"I told her she must use her influence today, this minute, not in next week or 3 weeks but now, to tell Mr Denktash that the north of Cyprus is burning and that all the facilities of the Republic of Cyprus are down. I am begging, so for goodness sake, put this fire out," she said.

Courtesy of The Cyprus Weekly newspaper

# Britons flee as fire rips across Cyprus

## Forest blaze destroys island ex-pat villages

HUNDREDS of British residents and holidaymakers fled in terror last night as a forest fire tore through Northern Cyprus.

The inferno raged across a mountain range out of control, destroying a string of villages in a British enclave near Kyrenia.

Several fire-fighters were injured, the 13th Century Crusader castle of St Hilarion was ablaze and there were fears that Bellapais monastery, another historical monument, has also been destroyed.

*"This is a big disaster. Our country is on fire," said the Turkish Cypriot leader, Rauf Denktaş.*

The fire erupted on Tuesday evening near the villages of Karmi, Trimitha, Elea and Ayios Georgios. British residents were given just 10 minutes to pack their bags.

### Flash

"My house went up in a flash," said Elizabeth Davis, 71, who has lived in the area for 25 years.

"I went home to have a nap and smelt the smokey smell as I laid down," she added, her voice still shaking.

"There were the flames at the door and I went outside. There were flames at each side of the house.

"I looked around and decided to let the dogs loose in case I didn't make it. I tried to find my handbag but couldn't. Suddenly I saw some keys, ran, jumped into the car and reversed into my neighbour's wall.

"There was fire all around — my neighbours had gone. I managed to get my car going and drove down the hill through the flames."

Ricky Nunn, 57-year-old tourist from Hartlepool, described the speed at

From **MIKE THEODOULOU**  
in Kyrenia

which the fire moved: "Trees were exploding — there was ammunition of some kind and gas bottles blowing up. I saw one little part of a fire start at the bottom of a tree and then within five seconds it covered an area of many acres — it just burst up into the hills."

His wife, Maureen, said: "Car headlights kept coming out of the smoke. It was wagons with people sitting on the roof and suitcases and polythene bags with all their stuff in."

British evacuees were put up at the Dome Hotel in Kyrenia which was covered by a thick pall of black smoke yesterday.

A spokesman at the British High Commission said no Britons had been injured.

### Damaged

Two Wessex helicopters and four fire engines from the British Sovereign Bases joined the firefight.

"The Wessex have been working non-stop since dawn," said a British bases spokesman, Captain Robert Rider. "Eight villages have been evacuated — they were damaged or destroyed."

Most of the forest destroyed was pine and cypress trees. "They were my children," said forestry chief, Faik Koyuncuoglu.