

Cape Town takes stock of devastation

● *UCT 'devastated by loss of library collections'* ● *Studying put on hold at campus and schools*

Bekezela Phakathi

More than 200 firefighters battled to contain a runaway fire that gutted historic Cape Town landmarks including a library housing hard-to-find books at the University of Cape Town (UCT) and SA's oldest working windmill.

The flames fanned by strong winds started early on Sunday before spreading uncontrollably on the slopes of Table Mountain, prompting a mass evacuation of about 4,000 students living in UCT residences.

By Monday evening, the City of Cape Town was still struggling to get the blaze under control as it ordered a precautionary evacuation of residents from the suburb of Vredehoek on the edges of Table Mountain.

As they prepared to tally the losses, city officials described the out-of-control flare-ups that torched 500ha of land as unprecedented and the most damaging to cultural heritage.

A portion of UCT's Jagger Library, which houses priceless African studies collections, and Mostert's Mill, Africa's oldest working windmill built in 1796,

were among historic sites that went up in flames.

UCT vice-chancellor Mamokgethi Phakeng said it was too soon to determine the extent of the damage caused to the library.

"We are devastated by the loss of collections in the library ... it's a huge loss. It will never be recovered, but we will recover," said Phakeng.

The Jagger Library is home to rare African studies collections, including about 65,000 volumes as well as works on Africa and SA printed before 1925 and many hard-to-find volumes in a wide range of European and African languages.

Some of the manuscripts and audiovisual files, including Black Sash archives and copies of pioneering Xhosa newspapers such as Imvo ZabaNtsundu, might have been saved after the UCT fire detection system triggered shutters that prevented the blaze from spreading to other parts of the library.

The blaze has disrupted learning, with the university

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