

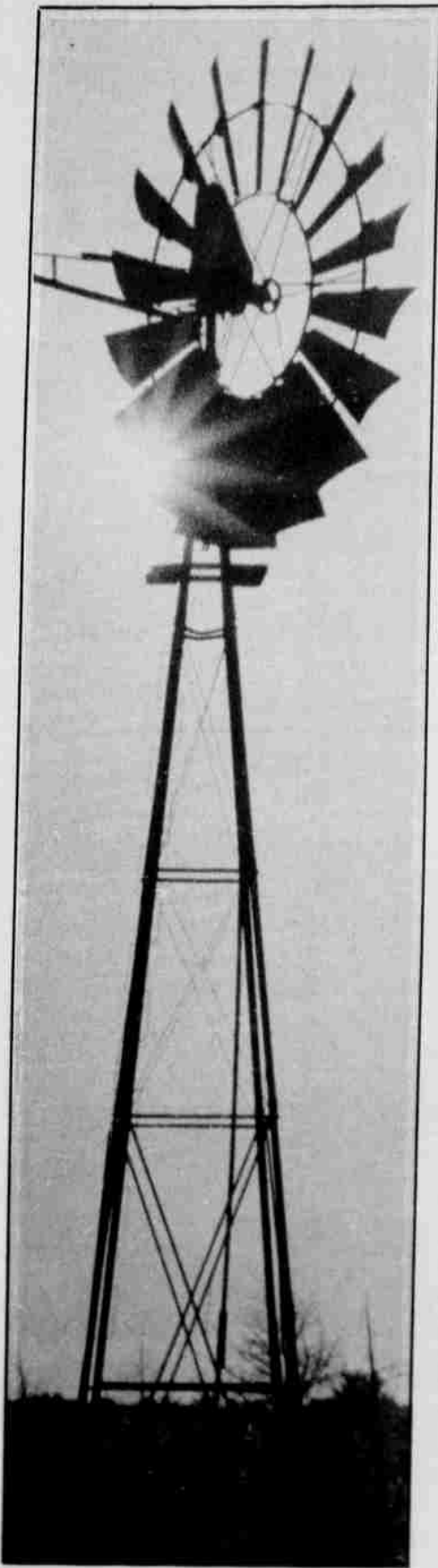
OR. COLL.
E
75
1860
V. 21
no. 17
August
21, 1996
SUP

FIRE!!



University of Oregon Library
Received on: 08 27-96
Spilisy tysoo.

The LeClaire Ranch was destroyed after the fire raced toward the Schoolie Flat area.



Smoke obscured the sun August 13. A windmill on Miller Flats provided a perfect silhouette.

Warm Springs has about had it with disasters this year. The Flood of '96 is still fresh in the minds of local residents. Then, our community gets hit with the biggest fire since the 1930s. The Simnasho Fire, which began Saturday, August 10 about four miles north of Simnasho, has consumed nearly 120,000 acres, or about one-sixth, of the reservation. Ten homes were destroyed as were four out-buildings. Luckily, no serious injuries were reported.

—DAY ONE: SATURDAY—AUGUST 10

Fire Management in Warm Springs learned of the Simnasho burn at 4:05 p.m. Local firefighters were dispatched, but the blaze, moving in a southeasterly direction, traveled too quickly and could not be controlled. By the next morning, the fire had spread considerably, threatening homes and livestock. The fire was "human caused" and the cause is currently under investigation.

—DAY TWO: SUNDAY—AUGUST 11

The National Interagency Incident Management team, consisting of personnel from Federal Wildland Management agencies, arrived in Simnasho Sunday afternoon, putting into action their plan of attack. Additional fire fighting personnel were called in. Strike teams were summoned to help protect homes in the Schoolie Flat area near Simnasho. The fire continued to rage out of control Sunday evening.

—DAY THREE: MONDAY—AUGUST 12

By this day, the Simnasho Fire had grown to nearly 12,000 acres. Warm temperatures, high winds and low humidity of the day before caused the fire to nearly double in size. Over 35 homes in the Simnasho area were evacuated. On this day, there were four 20-person crews, four dozers and 15 engines fighting the fire. Evacuees were housed at the HeHe Longhouse with support from the American Red Cross.

—DAY FOUR: TUESDAY—AUGUST 13

Fire camp was formally established at Simnasho on this day. The troops rumbled in, set up and were ready to go within hours. The cafeteria was on the spot with hot meals and portable showers were set up for weary firefighters. A not-so-small tent city popped up just beyond the Simnasho School playground. If tent room was not available, the tired fire warriors simply laid down wherever and whenever possible. A fire camp is totally self-sufficient, complete with dining room, general store, first aid station, communication center and much more. The fire scuttled toward the Mutton Mountains, over Schoolie Flat. No homes were burned in Schoolie Flat but homes, near Indian Head Canyon, belonging to Olney Patt, Sr. and the Tom LeClaire family, were destroyed by the fire.

—DAY FIVE: WEDNESDAY—AUGUST 14

Called "Black Wednesday" by some, this day was

most devastating to residents, especially those living in the Upper Dry Creek subdivision. An evacuation notice was given at 10 a.m. and many residents in Dry Creek, Sunnyside and Miller Heights prepared early on for possible disaster. Driven by winds as high as 40 miles per hour, the fire, during this day, tripled in size to 65,000 acres. The wide Dry Creek Valley was blackened by 2 p.m. Eight homes were destroyed as were four out-buildings. Those losing their homes were Norma Smith, Sherry Smith, Leo and Vicky Hellon, Robert Miller, Louis Bagley, Archie Caldera and Thelma Dixon. Losing sheds were Jim and Neda Wesley and Eunice Esquiro. Travel trailers, serving as living quarters for individuals, also burned. Easton and Tina Aguilar lost a garage which stored auto body and construction equipment.

The fire also raced dangerously close to the Industrial Park, which is home to Fire Management, BIA Roads, the tribal Vehicle Pool and tribal Records Center. The Natural Resources Department lost boats stored in a warehouse in the Park and the roads department lost a small shed.

By evening, fire officials decided to evacuate Wolfe Point. Evacuees were sent to Kah-Nee-Ta, which had been sealed off to traffic, coming or going, by severe fire behavior. Highway 3, from Warm Springs to Wapanitia was closed. US Highway 26, from Madras to Highway 216 (Bear Springs Junction), was closed as well. Non-emergency personnel were stranded in Simnasho overnight.

The fire had more than one front: Firefighters had a time of it keeping the blaze from crossing Highway 26 into the town of Warm Springs as it roared down the grade. There were more than a few anxious and smoky moments as residents began to actually realize the gravity of the situation. Fire crews busily and effectively cut short the fire's path near the homes on Walsey Lane behind Warm Springs Plaza and behind Warm Springs Forest Products Industries with back burns.

—DAY SIX: THURSDAY—AUGUST 15

The fire on this day continued its march toward the Deschutes River, prompting officials to continue the river's closure to day use. Total acreage burned neared 85,000. No further structure damage was expected as the fire moved away from housing areas.

—DAY SEVEN: FRIDAY—AUGUST 16

This day, the fire has reached 95,000 and continued to burn hottest near the Mutton Mountains and in the Mill Creek area east of U.S. Highway 26. A large number of firefighters were working in the Mutton Mountain area to stop the spread. A visit to the Simnasho Fire camp shows a much brighter mood, however, many anticipate demobilization to other, more serious fires throughout the Northwest.

—DAY EIGHT: SATURDAY—AUGUST 17

The fire is 60 percent to 70 percent contained this day with a total 108,000 acres seared in the blaze. Fire officials expect containment by August 20. Crews were busy burning out the northeast corner of the fire to secure containment lines near the Deschutes River. The fire crept across the line near the Warm Springs River east of U.S. Highway 26 with very little acreage burned. Eleven crews were released to the Wildcat Fire in eastern Oregon this day.

—DAY NINE: SUNDAY—AUGUST 18

Burnout operations on the northeast side of the fire near Dant went as planned the day before and containment was over 70 percent. Crews were expected to aggressively mop up any hot spots within 300 feet of the fire perimeter. Two task forces patrolled and mopped up in Schoolie Flats and Wolfe Point. Crews continue to breathe more easily as weather conditions remain cool.

More than one firefighter stated during this week-long siege that they had never before seen a fire burn like the Simnasho Fire. Unpredictable winds drove the fire in unpredictable directions at unpredictable speeds. A drive through Dry Creek also causes one to not only feel badly for those who lost their homes but to also be awestruck as to what did not burn in that big valley. Unpredictable and ruthless as the Simnasho Fire may have been, we must count our blessings.



Pulaskis, shovels and hoes are used by personnel to extinguish fires.