

PRELIMINARY REPORT

**MOUNT DESERT ISLAND FIRE
(October 17 - 31, 1947)**

TABLE OF CONTENTS

General Statement

Narrative Log of Fire

Acreage and Fire Line Data

Fire Organization

Map-up Instructions

Mount Desert Island Fire - October 1947

General Statement

Fire danger conditions in the vicinity of Mount Desert Island had become increasingly critical for days prior to the start of the fire. Rainfall is said to have been less than during any of the past thirty years. Winds were strong, variable in direction and gusty. The duff and surface fuels were dry and fire hazards were intensified by the early fall of deciduous leaves. This condition prevailed generally over most of the Northeast.

Several large fires developed in widely scattered parts of New England, New Jersey and New York prior to the major blow-up of the Mount Desert Island fire on October 23. The situation became so explosive that the Governor of Maine declared a state of emergency, closing woods to use of fire, general travel, etc. After the 23rd the President declared a national emergency existed.

Sufficient fire fighting personnel to handle the situation were unobtainable from normal sources. The armed forces furnished large numbers of men, equipment and supplies. The Army Air Forces at Dow Field sent fire fighters, mess, communication equipment, transportation and supplies. The U. S. Navy sent two Destroyers and the Coast Guard two Destroyers. The University of Maine and Bangor Theological Seminary permitted upperclass students to volunteer for duty under faculty supervision. The liaison between these numerous forces, the Service, the town organizations and local volunteers was a tremendous job, particularly as the fire was controlled and evidence of need for intensive control action was less apparent to the layman.

The Mount Desert Island fire can be (at this early date) divided into four major phases. The fire started on the 17th and was controlled by the Town of Bar Harbor Fire Department with park cooperation. This was a town fire. On the 21st it broke out and progressively spread in all directions, entering park land at 4:00 p.m. A considerable area was burned on the 22nd, and Regional Office assistance was again requested. In response two foresters were dispatched by air. Intensive control work was continued and by the afternoon of the 23rd a control line was nearing completion. At about 3:30 p.m. the wind increased to 40 m.p.h. and the fire spread with great rapidity, entering the Town of Bar Harbor in the late afternoon. The wind diminished before morning and the fire spread slowed materially. Following the holocaust of the 23rd intensive control action was taken and despite variable and high winds to 25 m.p.h., continued lack of rain, the spread of the fire was halted on October 27 at 4:40 p.m. After that date only one small breakover has occurred to date. The job of mop-up has been one of the most difficult ever encountered in the

experience of any of the supervisors whose experience covers every forest fire type and condition in the country. Mop-up, however, is of vital importance in maintaining control. Several of the other large fires in the State are reported to have broken out again. A maximum of three hundred fifty fire fighters worked under National Park Service supervision during the height of the fire and an additional three hundred organized and volunteer municipal fire crews from adjacent towns on the mainland and Island, crews from two Destroyers and two Coast Guard Cutters, National Guard, State Police, local residents, the University of Maine, Bangor Theological Seminary and other schools provided forest fire fighters, but the major source was furnished by the Army Air Forces.

The Regional Director has been kept advised of all developments regularly by telephone from Park Headquarters, as requested by him. He, in turn, kept the Director's Office informed.

As of this date the fire is not out, and intensive control and mop-up efforts must be continued for some time.

(Sgd.) W. L. S.

Wilbur L. Savage,
Fire Boss.

MOUNT DESERT ISLAND FIRE - OCTOBER 1947

October 17

Fire started adjacent to marsh at Fresh Meadow in northern portion of Mount Desert Island, presumably on or adjacent to a dump on private land, 2-3/4 miles air line north of the boundary of Acadia National Park. It was within territory under the protection of the Bar Harbor Fire Department.

First report of fire was made by telephone by a local resident to the Bar Harbor Fire Department at 4:05 P. M. and immediate action was taken. At the request of the Town Fire Chief, telephoned about 4:45 P. M., the park furnished pumper equipment and a crew to operate it, to work in conjunction with the Town Fire Department under their direction.

October 18

Fire brought under control in morning, after which it was mopped-up and patrolled up to time of the break on October 21.

October 21

Under a strong northwest wind, the fire flared up in early morning and spread rapidly, covering approximately 1,000 acres. It crossed the Eagle Lake Road and entered the park in late afternoon. About 5:00 P. M. Superintendent Hadley called Richmond and requested assistance. Air Corps furnished fire fighters from Dow Field at Bangor, Maine, on request of Chief Sleeper of Town of Bar Harbor.

October 22

Foresters Savage and Moore left Richmond, Virginia, 3:20 A. M., by plane and arrived at Bar Harbor about 2:00 P. M. Fire in park west of Eagle Lake was headed off, partly by burning out, and partly by direct attack.

At 10:20 P. M. Savage and Hadley reported to Richmond, Virginia, on status of fire and arrangements were made for four supervisors and Larry Cook to be dispatched to assist in direction of control and mop-up of the fire then estimated at 800 to 1,000 acres - inside the park.

A call was made to Regional Forester Arnold at 10:30 P. M. advising him of conditions and arrangements made.

October 23

Line was stabilized and mop-up begun on majority of held line. Wind was moderate southwest. Approximately seven hundred

feet of line remained for closure to Eagle Lake Road. Forces included approximately ninety Dow Field officers and men, six to eight University of Maine students, ten local and park forces directed by Savage and Moore from a Field Headquarters at road intersection near Gilmore Meadow. Tool cache was established at this point which contained all the hand and power equipment including a large tank truck unit and Bucksport Fire Company truck and equipment. Field telephone was available at this point to Park Headquarters. Liaison was established and was working effectively with Dow forces who were encamped at the old CCC camp at Eagle Lake. The fire was contained and was being held at this line. Scouts directed by Field Headquarters reported the line reasonably stabilized to the west, north and east flanks outside the park.

4:00 - 4:30 P. M.

Wind increased suddenly to strong forty-five m. p. h. from the west to northwest. Unofficial reports and rumors were received that the fire on the northeast sector outside the park was advancing through Lakewood section threatening Hulls Cove. Pressure was immediate and heavy from outside, flash fires along and near held lines threatened disaster. Crews were concentrated on holding the line, but breakovers on the flanks with rapidly advancing ground and crown fires threatened holding forces. Lines were held as long as possible without endangering the lives of fire crews. Savage called Superintendent Hadley at 4:00 P. M. advising him of critical fire condition and that he should be prepared for receipt of report of disastrous breakovers and loss of control of fire.

Ranger Paul Favour, directing forces on the extreme northwest flank of our lines near the Eagle Lake Road, reported at 4:08 P. M. that breakover fires to the north and west were out-flanking his line, crossing the Eagle Lake Road and threatening his men. He was instructed to arrange for the safe evacuation of his men. The approach of complete envelopment of the forces along our sectors finally required abandonment of lines and equipment and evacuation of the men.

The Hulls Cove threat was diverted with strong wind shift to northwest, sending the greatest fire head toward and partially enveloping Bar Harbor. From this time conflagration raged unchecked in two heads, one past Bar Harbor over Cadillac Mountain and down toward Otter Creek; the other, up Sargent Mountain toward Jordan Pond.

The fire raced along whipped by heavy forty-five to fifty miles per hour gales. The nature of the conflagration made it impossible to continue control action and retreat of forces under our direction was accomplished in as quick and orderly a manner as possible. There were no injuries to forces under our direction during this activity.

Spread and intensity of the fire is indicated in the increase in acreage at approximately 4:00 P. M., October 23, of 1,800 acres to over 15,000 acres at midnight of the same date. About dawn the velocity of the wind began to subside.

Assistant Chief Forester Cook and four rangers from Shenandoah arrived by Navy plane at Bar Harbor Airport at 2:30 P. M. A State Police car started them toward headquarters but due to fire blocked roads and evacuation confusion they did not arrive at Park Headquarters until 7:30 P. M.

During the night of October 23 the fire destroyed more than two hundred structures, including major hotels on the edges of Bar Harbor. Property damage, including several park structures, exceeded \$8,000,000.

Custodian Foster of Camden Hills Recreational Demonstration Area with Mechanic Robertson driving a fire truck loaded fully with fire equipment arrived at Bar Harbor at about 9:00 P. M. After a conference it was decided to return Foster to Camden Hills because of a threatening fire at that area, the inability to utilize his services or equipment during the night, and need to send messages to the Regional Office. Local telephone service was destroyed.

October 24

At daybreak on Friday a conference was held in the Superintendent's Office with Superintendent Hadley, Assistant Superintendent Howack, Foresters Cook, Savage, Moore, and Ranger Favour attending to reorganize forces and plan attack on the fire.

Forester Savage was designated as Fire Boss. A request was made to the Regional Office for twenty additional overhead. Savage designated Ranger Paul Favour to secure information and map the burn; Ralph Douglas to collect and inventory all equipment salvaged from the blow-up; Robert B. Moore as Liaison Officer with the Air Forces and Park Naturalist Wilbur Doudna to communications. Following this a conference was held in the office of Bar Harbor Fire Chief Sleeper for the purpose of determining preliminary organization. In attendance were Chief Sleeper, one or two members of his staff, Superintendent Hadley, Assistant Chief Forester Cook, Rangers Favour and Campbell and Forester Savage. It was agreed that the Town of Bar Harbor would handle the fire line north of Eagle Lake Road and east of State Route #198, and the National Park Service would handle all forest fire fighting actions south of the Eagle Lake Road.

Liaison Officer Moore contacted Dow Field immediately near Park Headquarters. Lieutenant Payne was designated by the Convoy Commander as Army Air Forces Liaison to work with Moore on coordination of park and Army Forces. Field bivouac site for Army personnel was established at Otter Creek at this time.

A ground survey of the boundary of the fire was hurriedly made, and an aerial survey via Army plane was made. The Army Air Forces, Navy, Coast Guard, and local volunteers provided personnel and equipment. Fire fighting tools and equipment were ordered through the Regional Office. Custodian Foster of the Camden Hills Recreational Demonstration Area returned bringing his equipment with him. A start was made on fire control with all available suppression personnel, equipment, and limited overhead.

Fire line construction, pumping, and other control activities were carried on continuously day and night on a twelve-hour shift on the line basis with replacement at 6:00 A. M. and 6:00 P. M. until the fire was corralled.

Activity on the twenty-fourth was concentrated on the Jordan Pond - Sargent Mountain sector and Cadillac Mountain - Otter Cove sector.

The Army Air Forces from Dow Field, Bangor, Maine, provided all available personnel, totalling over one hundred men at this time, mess, supply, and communication services which were invaluable.

A plan of action was formulated and suppression action was started with such tools and equipment as could be collected on the twenty-fourth at 1:25 P. M.

The large majority of equipment used in the Gilmore Meadow section, hand tools sufficient to equip over two hundred men, could not be located. Early action was started with equipment brought in from Camden Hills Recreational Demonstration Area.

Supplies and equipment requested began to flow through Dow Field and Bar Harbor Airport and were transported to Bar Harbor by Dow Field.

October 25

Much needed supervisory personnel began to arrive in large numbers. Nineteen National Park Service and nine U. S. Forest Service experienced leaders arrived and were immediately dispatched to the fire lines or held for night supervisory duties.

Several conferences were held with military and local personnel. Liaison Officer Moore was flown to Dow Field, Bangor, for conference with Colonel Stetson, Commanding Officer of the Field, concerning AAF participation on the fire. We were assured of two hundred thirty men for day and one hundred men for night details until the termination of emergency conditions. Additional AAF assistance would include mess facilities for feeding all personnel engaged in fire control, communication equipment, sup-

plies and personnel, transportation equipment and personnel, tool and equipment and supply services. Daily weather reports were radioed from Dow Field to the Fire Boss' Headquarters. Higher ranking officers were appointed to act as liaison and take command of Dow and Slocum forces active on the fire. Field Command Post for AAF was to be moved from Otter Creek to the ball park opposite Park Headquarters. Reconnaissance flights were arranged for air patrol and mapping of the fire. At midnight Major General Webster, Commander First Wing AAF Mitchell Field, New York, conferred with the Fire Boss and staff at Headquarters regarding military assistance on the fire.

October 26

Lieutenant Colonels Smith and Levans, Army Air Forces, Dow Field, Maine, were detailed to correlate military with park fire control efforts. Two hundred ninety-five soldiers were detailed to day shift and one hundred for night duty from Dow Field and Fort Slocum (New York).

Material progress was made on stopping the spread of the fire on all sectors.

A total of one hundred eighty Army Air Force fire fighters were utilized.

During the night detail, fourteen University of Maine students appeared on Section B, south section of Cadillac Mountain. This was the first unified force of students to appear on our lines.

Mr. Gerald O'Day, representing Seal Harbor, began effective coordination of local forces from that town. Local fire crews were woven into the fire organization and proved of real assistance on adjoining sectors.

October 27

Fire was quiet most of the day and progress continued on line construction. At 4:40 p.m. the fire was corralled, a total of more than 24 miles of line having been constructed or held by hand tools and water.

At 6:00 p.m. Chief Forester Coffman and Regional Director Allen arrived at Park Headquarters. At about the same time Major General Van Fleet, First Army Commander, Brigadier General Thorson and Colonel Ferris arrived with Major Pooler of the Maine National Guard. All were briefed on fire situation needs and plans.

Liaison Officer Moore made another contact at Dow Field, Bangor, with Colonel Stetson. We were requested by the Dow Commander to reduce the Dow Field and Fort Slooam contingents as soon as possible. Commitments were made by Dow Field at our request to retain present strength of Army forces until midweek.

Additional University of Maine students, totalling one hundred fifty, under the supervision of Mr. Randall, arrived at Bar Harbor and were put into the Cadillac Mountain area. Preliminary contacts were made to arrange radio contact with University at Orono for continued supply.

Fire fighters on line included one hundred ninety Army Air Force men during the day and one hundred during the night.

Weather - partly cloudy, wind - 15 m. p. h., south in afternoon.

October 23

The fire forces under the National Park Service consisted of one hundred fifty University of Maine, eighty Army Air Forces and forty Bangor Seminary students during the day and sixty-seven Army Air Forces at night.

A small breakover of seven chains occurred near Eagle Lake - the only piece of lost line to occur since October 23 and 24 - and was quickly corralled.

The Otter Point section had previously been written off in order to concentrate on the other active edges. With corral on the 27th aggressive action was directed on Otter Point to save the remaining picturesque stands of evergreen along the Ocean Drive.

Radio contact was made with the President of the University of Maine requesting a steady flow of men. Agreement was reached at one hundred by day and fifty by night for sectors handled by Park Headquarters. Liaison was arranged with a Mr. Orcutt directing Jonesville section and it was agreed that an additional one hundred men would be rounded up for use on the Jonesville sector under Orcutt's supervision. A liaison officer, Mr. Giddings, was appointed by the University of Maine to coordinate action of all University forces on the fire.

Contact was also made with Bangor Theological Seminary to secure and maintain a flow of forces up to forty boys for use in control and mop-up. We were assured of assistance to the week-end or until the termination of the emergency.

The three supervisors assigned by the Fire Boss to coordination of University of Maine forces under Mr. Orcutt and local forces on lines west and north of the park reported the fire corralled, with no advance in the fire front, but plenty of hot line requiring continued mop-up.

October 29

Fire control forces under National Park Service direction consisted of one hundred ninety men in the day shift and eighty at night.

Mop-up work was intensively pressed and pumping continued, using all available pumping equipment.

Supervisor Renshaw, U. S. Forest Service, whose observations of fires in various parts of the country date back to the 1910 Idaho fire stated "In all my years of fire fighting I have never seen a harder mop-up job."

A steady flow of relief crews were maintained from forces available from Bow Field, University of Maine and Bangor Seminary. Local forces were gradually increased.

October 30

Fire control forces consisted of fifty Army Air Forces, ten Seminary and fifty University of Maine students during the day and forty-four Army Air Forces during the night.

Conference with Professor Giddings, University of Maine, re student assistance on fire. Apparently satisfactory agreement reached.

Bangor Seminary required the return of last contingent of students at the end of the day shift, none to be returned.

October 31

Conferences with faculty representatives of University of Maine student volunteers failed to obtain further approval for retention of students. Army Air Forces and U. S. Navy also anxious to withdraw personnel as soon as possible.

Conference called by Superintendent Hadley with key representatives of surrounding communities to discuss situation with respect to the fire in an effort to increase and coordinate dependable local manpower to combat it. Selectmen, Town Managers, Fire Chiefs and Mr. LeRevere, Supt. of Mr. Rockefeller's estate, attended. A very satisfactory decision and agreement reached. Towns will arrange to furnish us with required personnel for day shifts, to be paid 65¢ to 75¢ per hour and work under Park supervision. Rate of pay dependent upon rate established by towns for payment of their crews. Colonel Levans will maintain night fire fighting, mess, communication and transportation services.

Fire fighting forces during the day included one hundred Army Air Forces and University of Maine students and forty-five Army Air Forces at night.

UNITED STATES
DEPARTMENT OF THE INTERIOR
NATIONAL PARK SERVICE
ACADIA NATIONAL PARK
Bar Harbor, Maine

October 26, 1947

MOUNT DESERT ISLAND FIRE

Approximate Area of Fire: 29 square miles or 18,560 acres

Park Area Burned: 16 square miles or 10,240 acres

Length of Fire Line, 10-26-47, 9:00 pm

<u>Sector</u>	<u>Division</u>	<u>Length of Line</u>	<u>Division Length</u>
E	2	3 $\frac{1}{4}$ miles	II = 5- $\frac{3}{4}$ miles
A	2	2 $\frac{1}{2}$ miles	
D	1	3 $\frac{1}{2}$ miles	1 = 7
B	1	3 $\frac{1}{2}$ miles	
C	3	11 $\frac{1}{2}$ miles	III = 11 $\frac{1}{2}$ (Hulls Cove - Richardson Creek)

By map measure
LFC:JMC

FIRE ORGANIZATION
(Typical Day)

FIRE BOSS	-	W. L. SAVAGE
	-	L. P. COOK, Relief
ARMY LIAISON	-	R. MOORE
PROGRESS	-	ARNOLD, COOPER
EQUIPMENT	-	BLACK REYNOLDS (Day)
CAMP COORDINATOR	-	HADLEY
SCOUT	-	FAVOUR
TRANSPORTATION	-	DOUGLAS

DIVISION I

BOSS

NEWCOMB

DAYNIGHT

SECTOR B -

ELLSWORTHGIBBS

SALISBURY

PRICE

BENTON

WIMBIE

R. SULLIVAN

P. JOHNSON

HALL

SECTOR D -

FRYMANLIES

DOUGLAS

VAN WEELDEN

MCKEOWN

MACHAUGHTON

R. JOHNSON

DIVISION II

BOSS

SPRING

DAY

NIGHT

SECTOR A - FOSTER

CAMPBELL

SCHREIBER

LUCK

ROBERTSON

PRENTICE

SANDERS

SECTOR E - RUFF

BERG

DOHN

PILMER

WRIGHT

STEUVER

DIVISION III

SECTOR C - RENSHAN

SMITH

THOMPSON

October 29, 1947.

MOP-UP INSTRUCTIONS MOUNT DESERT ISLAND FIRE

1. Continue maximum use of all power pumps, particularly in daytime. This operation is priority No. 1 throughout mop-up period.
2. No sector to be left unattended during daytime throughout mop-up operations.
3. "Black Out" progressively widening strip to 100 feet.
4. Cut all branches overhanging the line, up to a height of six feet.
5. Dig a trench 12 inches wide to mineral soil or bare rock with mattocks or Pulaski tools immediately on edge of burned area. Cut all dead roots to same width. To avoid chance of scattering smoldering peat, pull the peat into the fire. Clean rocks may be rolled outside, or in, whichever is more convenient. Some places will have boulders too large to move by hand and where fire has been between such boulders, attempt to scratch peat out with a stick or other object. Any exception to the trenching requirement must be approved by the Fire Boss upon specific recommendation by the Division Boss.
6. After the line is dug, cut all green coniferous branches within one foot of the ground progressively back for a distance of 25 feet from the line. These branches to be scattered (not piled) beyond the 25 foot strip.
7. Cut and remove all down limbs or logs that extend across line. These cuts are to be made outside of the burn, and the burned portion placed (not piled) at least 25 feet inside the line.
8. Following completion of above operations, fell burning snags of 5 feet or more height progressively back inside line to a distance of 300 feet.
9. Fire trucks will patrol all hard surfaced roads along the fire line and inside the burned area, mopping up smokes within 300 feet of road.
10. Night operations will be reduced gradually as conditions safely permit, making maximum use of manpower in the daytime for more effective operation.
11. Do not forget to feel for heat.

(Sgd) Wilbur L. Savage
Fire Boss.

