



Squaw Butte Back Country Horsemen

PRESIDENT'S CORNER SEPTEMBER 2015

Step outside and take in a big breath of Fresh air. Smoke!! That's all I get. I look outside my front window and can no longer see the other side of the valley. Only a thick haze that chokes the ground.

There are some 70 Forest Fires nationwide, 14 in Idaho, over 1.4 million acres gone. No wonder it's hard to see or breathe. You can follow it's progress through NIFC, on our web site under Catch Pen. <http://www.nifc.gov/>

As smoky as it is here, just imagine what it's like to those who are trying to impede the progress of these Forest Fires. Not just the smoke and heat, but the amazing speed that these fires travel make them extremely deadly for all combatants, three lost lives in Oregon this year.

Fire buses, sometime, pick up these combatants, or Fire Crews, either at an airport or Fire Center and take them to a Base Camp close to whatever fire they are needed the most. Crews are normally ten to fourteen people and a Crew Chief. These crews are generally in the field for fourteen days, and a Base Camp can be from one to dozens of different crews.

For three years I signed on to drive Fire Bus, though I never got the chance to participate in a fire, the training and Certification was fascinating. Many tales of chance and bravery,

One, six different buses and crews were sent to a fire line. Approaching this line, over a knob, the buses stopped and the crews disappeared over the top. Once the buses were empty they turned and parked facing the Base Camp, just in case Not much later the crews, came running back over the knob back to the buses. As each bus filled it was gone, not caring what crew was on what bus. As the last bus left, the fire crested the knob. Apparently the wind changed.

In another a Bus Driver parked her bus in what she thought was a safe zone, because it had already burned. Stepping off the bus she started to notice, her feet were getting hot. The ground being still hot enough to probably melt tires she went back in the bus to move it to safety. The bus did not move. She was stuck. Fortunately she was quick minded enough to call in for a water drop and a helicopter dumped one on her bus. Problem solved.

Fire Bus training consists of three sections:

1. Paperwork. Even as Back Country Horsemen, there is an amazing amount of paper work just to "volunteer" to clear trails. Fighting fires you get buried in it. It's a Government thing.
2. How to wrap yourself in aluminum foil like a baked potato. Best case scenario, your life expectancy, in a prolonged burn, is about two minutes and it will be around 150 degrees in there. These "tents" are primarily built for fast moving fires (here and gone) and flash overs (in the tree tops).
3. History of where today's policies of fighting Forest Fires comes from. This I found greatly interesting and rather than try to explain you can read of the "Big Blowup" of 1910
<http://www.foresthistory.org/ASPNET/Policy/Fire/FamousFires/1910Fires.aspx>

Just a man alone on the front line tending for himself, for food and water as well as facing a wall of fire. Just their grit and big brass bravery to keep them alive and going. A lot different today because of what they faced.

Today there is a mass of armaments fighting fires. With ground troops and aerial equipment fighting a common foe under direction of observers watching what these fires are doing, todays fighters have a lot more going for them, but it's still a dangerous business. It was not like this in the beginning.

So stay inside if possible, stay out of the smoke, and a big thanks to those who have opted to be out there fighting.

**Be safe and have fun.
Bill Holt-President-SBBCH**