



Heroes. Heritage. Renewal.

*Exerpts from the collection
"When the Mountains Roared"*

Stories of the 1910 Fires

CABINET NATIONAL FOREST

The Cabinet Forest suffered a tremendous loss from fire in 1910, but the greater part of the damage was done in two days when the fires from the St. Joe and Clearwater swept across the Clark Fork valley, and beyond to the Kootenai Forest. There were at least three large fires which came across the divide. The great St. Joe fire, which burned Wallace and DeBorgia, crossed the range and threw a long spur south of Prospect Creek clear to the Clark Fork River. Two fires swept out of the North Fork of the Coeur d'Alene, one from Trail Creek and one from the extreme head of the river. Both these fires crossed the Clark Fork valley, destroying homesteads, towns and sawmills.

The railroad station at Tuscor was burned, and Ed Donland lost his mill at Trout Creek, with most of his equipment, including 25 head of horses, the pigs in the pen and 13 million feet of white pine lumber. Many ranches were burned.

Four firefighters lost their lives on Swamp Creek. The following story is quoted from the official report:

Tuscor Fire

"H.S. Kaufman, Forest Ranger, in charge. Roy Engle of Noxon, Montana, was directly in charge of the party in which loss of life occurred.

"For several days before August 21, 1910, Roy Engle was working on Swamp Creek on what was known as the Swamp Creek division of the Tuscor fire. His crew was composed of about 25 men. On August 21 this crew was working up Swamp Creek about 10 to 12 miles from its mouth. Ranger Kaufman, who was in charge of the fire, was working with a crew along Clark Fork River at the mouth of Swamp Creek. In the afternoon of August 10, a strong wind sprang up and scattered the fires in all directions. Realizing the dangerous position of Engle's crew, Ranger Kaufman set a messenger to Engle, directing him to come out at once with his crew. Engle got this word late at night August 20 and started out in the morning of August 21, following the trail down Swamp Creek. Getting down within four miles of the river, they met a fire coming up Swamp Creek. This was a fire which had come over the divide from Idaho the previous night and was, up to this time, entirely separate from the fire on which the crew was working. When Engle with his crew met this fire it was too large to pass through so Engle took his crew back up swamp Creek from whence he had come, expecting to cross over the burned area through the fire on which he had been working, but on reaching a point where he had expected to pass through the

fire line, he found that the wind had fanned the fire into a raging furnace. Finding that they were cut off from the valley, Engle took his crew on farther up Swamp Creek hoping to reach a large body of slide rock located there. They were soon overtaken by the fire coming up the creek, and made a stand on an open slide rock side hill, several of the party digging holes in the slide rock for further protection. The fire swept up the gulch and side hill, a top fire burning everything in its path and throwing embers among the men who were making their stand on the slide rock. Five of them became panic-stricken and left the crew, starting up the mountain out of the slide rock. Anderson was behind, and when the other four were caught by the fire he abandoned the attempt to escape and came back to the crew badly but not fatally burned. The other four men perished when the fire struck them. Several other members of the crew were more or less burned and all of them were nearly blind from smoke and heat.

“The men were burned some time near midnight on the night of August 21. At daylight on the morning of August 22, the remainder of the crew made its way to the river, where the men were cared for by Ranger Kaufman and his crew.

“The names of the men who lost their lives in this fire were George Strong, George Fease, E. Williams, and A.G. Bourette.”

Excerpt from the collection of “When The Mountains Roared”, (page 33-34) USDA Forest Service