

ARTI-FACTS

The Newsletter of the Award-Winning Idyllwild Area Historical Society

Preserving the History of Idyllwild and Surrounding Communities
in the San Jacinto Mountains

AUTUMN 2013

THE MOUNTAIN FIRE: FROM ONE WHO STAYED BEHIND

By Jon Engel

July 17th

Spent all day on the phones again at the fire dept. Most of the questions were about should someone evacuate, and how. You really can't tell someone what to do, only give them pause to think what is important. Only one road was open all day down to Banning, then around 5:30 Caltrans opened 243 toward Mt. Center.

I am amazed by the bravery and dedication of the firefighters. Notice I say firefighters not firemen, because there are women standing shoulder to shoulder with the men. Several ladies brought goodies to the station. Even though I'm not fighting the fire, it's still quite rewarding to be helping out in some small way.

I was watching some of the guys blowing off steam after taking a nap, playing a killer game of dodge ball. They were like kids on a playground, and just hours ago they were putting their lives on the line, face to face with flames.

Getting ready to head back to the station.

July 18th

Idyllwild and Fern Valley were evacuated yesterday around 5 PM. I took BB and Soft Kitty down to Debbie, and packed the car with some clothes, then returned to the Fire Dept. I went to the cabin to sleep around midnight. Gonna take a shower, and get back to work. Can't wait for some rain.

See Mountain Fire, page 3

YOU, TOO, CAN MAKE HISTORY!

The IAHS mission is not limited to collecting and preserving old things. We also try to collect significant documents, photos, and other artifacts of current events, as they happen, to preserve for future generations.

The accompanying account by Hill resident Jon Engel, who volunteered to spend a week answering telephone inquiries during the Mountain Fire, is a fine example. It gives us an unusual peek inside the firefight and how it affected him. It also reminds us all of the previously unknown neighbors who materialize during crises.

As a major event of the 2010s, the Mountain Fire produced a mass of official reports, maps, news stories, and photos. We've collected a thick file of them, but what such public documents typically miss is the subjective, personal side of the ordeal.

IAHS needs such personal accounts in its archive. We invite all of you affected by the fire, whether you evacuated or remained on the Hill, to share your memories, reflections, and photos.

For example, tell us what it felt like to be threatened and how you coped. If you evacuated, what did you take and what did you leave, and how did you decide? Where did you go? How did you spend your days away? What did you learn from the experience?

We are pleased and thankful for Jon's willingness to share with our readers his daily posts to his extended family. So, how about yours?

Send your account to IAHS at PO Box 3320 or info@idyllwildhistory.org.

IDYLLWILD AREA HISTORICAL SOCIETY

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Board meetings are held monthly
on the 2nd Friday at 4 p.m.

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Co-Editors: Adele & Bob Smith
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Carolyn Levitski ends her second term as IAHS president on
a happy note.

FrazierDrake photo

IN 'N' OUT

This year's annual meeting of IAHS members saw the ending of an era. Carolyn Levitski had served as president since 2009, not to mention a prior year as vice president, after the top office was vacated in mid-term. Only the third president in IAHS's history, under her leadership the society made great strides with facilities and archive development, building the Frank & Mabel Moote Archive & Research Center and collaborating with the Garden Club on our new Village Gardens.

Marlene Pierce is eager to maintain the momentum as she takes over the helm.

Although relatively new to our Board of Directors, she already has served ably as secretary and raffle coordinator. She brings a wealth of leadership experience in other volunteer organizations. ✍



Incoming president Marlene Pierce
Bob Smith photo

MOUNTAIN FIRE (cont. from page 1)

July 19th

I'm up and at it again. Slept at home last night a little better. The firefighters from our station are incredible. One returned home early from a well-deserved vacation, and two came in after just having surgeries. Add to that the support from around California, and the command post/base is a small city with vehicles from towns/cities in CA I've never heard of. The station has been host to the Sheriff, American Medical Response teams, US Forest Service, and Cal Fire. Cots and air mattresses all over. There is one goal, and each organization does its part to accomplish that goal. Gee, wouldn't it be nice if this concept spread beyond the borders of the monster fire.

July 20th

It's actually hard to write this morning. On one hand watching the never ending column of smoke, hearing the constant droning of airplane engines and the incessant chatter of the radio dispatching calls, and answering questions only to have the questioner argue with me about the rumor heard from a friend.

On the other hand to receive a call from Panda Express asking if they could send some food up to us, and how many meals would we like. We told them 100 meals would be fantastic. We met them at the Highway Patrol check point, because the road was officially closed. We set up tables and chairs in the bay where the fire trucks are normally parked when not in service. We got on the radio to call all available units to say "soup's on."

One by one they arrived, one truck, then another. Each group would come in, shy and timid, but 20 minutes later we were family. We all sat together intermingled in a sea of yellow PPE's (personal protective equipment). We talked about vacations, families, hopes and dreams. We forgot about the fire for a while. Then someone would look around assessing that everyone in their unit had eaten their full, and would make a move. Hands would clasp, hugs would spread, thanks would be said and off they would go, back to the fight, back to reality, back to



This view looking south from Wellman's Divide shows the fire moving into Tahquitz Valley, triggering evacuation.

Courtesy of Scott Tremor, San Diego Natural History Museum

putting their lives on the line.

This went on all afternoon, until the food was gone. The range of emotions ran the gamut. All the while, in the back of my mind was the thought that my home is in direct line of the fire. There is only one ridge between the fire and the driveway. These unknown people were there for me. Thank you Panda Express, thank you firefighters, thank you pilots, thank you everyone for stepping up to the plate.

July 21st

When I left the station last night around 10, we were all in a pretty good mood for several reasons. The first was the report that the fire was now 49% contained.

The next was our partners from AMR brought

See Mountain Fire, page 5

THE COMPANY WE KEEP

New and Renewing Members – July through September 2013

NEW MEMBERS

Patron

Robert Oetzel, San Francisco

Family

Chris & Ginger Hadley, Idyllwild

Tom & Sharon Killeen, Placentia

Megan Sullaway & Ed Dunbar, Redondo Beach

Individuals

Ruth Capers, Idyllwild

Laurie Cole, Van Nuys

Rand Nishiguchi, San Diego

RENEWING MEMBERS

Benefactor

Anonymous

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Doug & Pat Austin, Idyllwild

Phil & Carol Baily, Temecula

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Jim & Dawn Deshefy, Laguna Hills

Marte & Jack Ganoung, Costa Mesa

Leona McGaugh, Mountain Center

Penny & Mike Mihaly, Columbia

Tom & Marlene Pierce, Idyllwild

Joseph & Raphael Plunkett, Diamond Bar

Harold & Lynn Voorheis, Idyllwild

Business

Café Aroma (Hubert Halkin), Idyllwild

Field Family Photography (Sid Field), Ashland, OR

Wooley's (Pam Allen), Idyllwild

Contributor

Ann & Bill Bashford, Idyllwild

Lana Hapeman, Riverside

Barbara & Bud Hunt, Idyllwild

Terry & Diana Kurr, Idyllwild

Sharen Metz, Idyllwild

Carson & Donna Struthers, San Diego

Larry & Linda Turner, Idyllwild

Gary & Susie Weber, Idyllwild

Family

Darlene & Jerry Beebe, Idyllwild

Barney & Jorgine Brause, Idyllwild

B.J. & Edith Brix, Idyllwild

Rob & Laura Caster, Idyllwild

Susan Cowper & Larry Medinger, Idyllwild

Hodge Crabtree & Katie Boskoff, Chula Vista

Ruthe Donlon & Robert McCullough, Idyllwild

Brent & Jean Dunn, Long Beach

Bob & Peggy Ferguson, Claremont

Bobbie & Gary Glasheen, Idyllwild

Noreen & Stephen Hudson, Palm Desert

Elisabeth & Jan Jaspers-Fayer, Idyllwild

Bronwyn Jones & David Hiemenz, Idyllwild

Kathleen & Dennis Kieferdorf, El Cajon

David Kobosa & Frank Maurer, Los Angeles

Charles & Mildred Krueger, Desert Hot Springs

Catherine & Richard Miller, Palm Desert

Donald & Larissa Sherman, Idyllwild

Bob Simpson, San Luis Obispo

Ralph & Janice Sutton, Riverside

Individual

Corrinna Aragon, Los Angeles

Jim Boyd, Downey

Richard Davis, Moscow, ID

Tuck Ernst, Idyllwild

Peg Holsclaw, Carson City, NV

Barbara Jones, Idyllwild


Ron Kelley, Rancho Mirage

Dorothy Koepcke, Palos Verdes Estates

Steve Lech, Riverside

Jeannine Sherrick, Reno, NV

ARTIFACT DONORS

Memberships help cover expenses, but documents, photographs, and other objects flesh out our mountains' history. We thank the following recent donors: Hill residents Theresa Christy, Lynnda Hart, and Shirl Reid; Sidney Field of Ashland OR; and the San Jacinto Valley Museum. The Field donation is particularly noteworthy—a new history of Avery Field's family, source of some of the Hill's finest photofgraphy. 

MOUNTAIN FIRE (cont. from page 3)

up at least 10 different pizzas (they can get through the road blocks), fresh salads, along with double chocolate and carrot cakes and three types of ice cream. I had a great conversation with one of their paramedics during lunch. At the end of the day one of our firefighters told me she was interested in volunteering at our station after seeing how we have such camaraderie.

Third was the arrival of a van from Walmart (we gave it an escort). It was FULL of secretarial, kitchen, bathroom and various other supplies. They called the day before asking what we needed. We made a list,



A few of the thousands who swarmed over the Hill fighting the Mountain Fire this past July.
FrazierDrake photo

called it in, and the lady said there's more money in the donation. We added to the list, and were told still more money. The third call still didn't reach the limit, so the lady said she would just add stuff reaching the limit. The van was PACKED to the roof.

Thank you AMR and Walmart.

When I was ready to leave, a feeling came over me. When I was teaching kids who had very significant handicaps, I was often told by their parents about their gratitude, and how words couldn't express it. On the phones this past week, I also heard similar words in addition to the crazy questions. Now I know this feeling of gratitude myself. Words can't adequately express my gratitude to the thousands who put themselves out to save our community. To my kids' parents, I say you are welcome. To the community, for all the people involved, I say you are welcome.

By the way--it's raining.

July 22nd morning

The threat is over. It's so anticlimactic. I was finally able to give good news to the callers in the morning that passes were available to local residents with ID, and that at 11 PM the roads would be open to everyone. I don't know if that was actually put into effect, but I'll find out shortly. As people arrived home, the calls changed to wishes of thanks. Also people honked as they drove by the station. Later in the afternoon, the presents, banners and in-person thanks started to arrive. A few of us were standing outside the station, and as various units were released they blew their air horns or hit their sirens in fond

fair well. Then the hardest good-byes to the men and women I practically lived with as they were released from their shifts. I'm going in today to help put things back to normal, whatever normal is.

I was talking with two information officers from the US Forest Service, and found out the work really starts now. Crews will descend on the area to put the wildlands back to natural. The dozer cuts will be smoothed out, then

roughed up, the hand lines made will also be made more natural. The fire retardant contained fertilizer, and scientists will be brought in to determine what to plant to restore the watershed. They said it will take months, well into winter, before the effects of the fire will be mitigated.

What an ordeal. I hope this never happens again, anywhere, but if it does, I am confident there are professionals out there who will jump in with both feet, without regard for their own safety, and fight the foe.

July 22nd evening

This will be my last post on the subject, but here is an example of some of the wackadoodle people that called. She was a regular caller, at least twice a day, to find out the latest and greatest. She called while I was eating dinner donated by the

See Mountain Fire, page 6

ANOTHER HOME TOUR HIT

Despite concerns about the recent fires, tour-goers—468 of them, the largest number in 11 years—turned out in droves last month to take in the 2013 Idyllwild Home Tour.

Perfect weather, excellent musical entertainment, delicious food, and a collection of authentic mountain homes left participants praising their experience. A financial success as well, the tour brought in 45% of our annual budgeted income. Coordinators Charlotte Groty, Nanci Killingsworth, and Carolyn Hall can take justifiable pride in the work of their team of more than 40 volunteers.

We deeply appreciate the willingness and cooperation of the residents who opened their homes this year: Diane & Al Thompson, John Mullen & Mike Brase, Tria & Reg Cohen, Joyce & Bill Miller, and Dr. Robert Reyes & Patrick Kennedy.

And we gratefully thank those volunteers:
Hosts: Maureen Boren, Morry Copeland, Dick Dorisse, Diana Kurr, Marlene Pierce, and Leann Gudmundson

Docents: Jorgine Brause, Diann Coate, Susan Cowper, Ruthe Donlon, Karen Dorn, Bonnie Doshier, Tuck Ernst, Pamela Fojtik, Chris & Ginger Hadley, Shirley Kribs, Lynn Kollar, Virginia Lumb, Larry Medinger, Terry Richardson, Melinda St. Pierre, Vicky Streeter, Nickie Watts, Kay Wanner, Betty Wilcox

Parking: Dan Carpenter, Chic Fojtik, Larry Kribs, Terry Kurr, Danny Richardson, Chuck Streeter

Musicians: Mary Carroll, Vicki Jakubac, Barbara Raylis

Refreshments: Larry & Linda Turner

Tour Booklet: Rebecca Frazier, John Drake, Charlotte Groty, Nanci Killingsworth, Joyce Miller, Bob Smith

Ticket Sales: Sharla Carpenter, Cathy Duncan, Dawn Miller, Adele Voell

Logistics & Signage: Ben & Nanci Killingsworth, Richard & Carolyn Levitski, Bob Smith

Media: Carolyn Levitski, Charlotte Groty

Accounting: George Groty

Database: Mary Carroll 

LOCAL HISTORY ONLINE: IDYLLWILD TOWN CRIER

We've completed the first step toward making old issues of the Idyllwild Town Crier available on-line. Everything that appeared in the paper from 1949 to 1953 can now be accessed on the Web at www.genealogybank.com (along with many more years of Riverside and Hemet newspapers). This resource is already proving to be an extremely useful tool for

historical research on Idyllwild during those five years.

Whether we can expand this collection to the full run of Town Criers from 1946 through the present depends on (1) money, (2) availability of the newspapers, and (3) public interest in using them.


See Online, page 7

MOUNTAIN FIRE (cont. from page 5)

American Legion with seven others in the room. First she thanked me for putting up with her calls and seriously giving as much information as I received from the briefings.

Now it gets good. She told me the coyotes were all back, because they were in her yard. She asked if the other wild animals had returned to the area, because she knew they all left due to the fire. I told her I didn't know the status of the animals, because I was not up in the mountains. She asked how many animals perished, and again I told her I had no idea for the same reason. She asked what was going to be done. I explained the Forest Service rehab plan for

the vegetation.

She asked about the animals. Now I'm exhausted, hungry, tired, and really wanting to get off the phone, so I told her the animals would all be replaced with new animals, truckloads had already been loaded, and birds would be flown in and pushed out bomb-bay doors of the DC 10 used to fight the fire so they could fly in the rest of the way. I think several of the firefighters peed their pants, they were laughing so hard. It was probably mean, but sometimes you just have to add some levity to the situation. She was glad the animals and birds would repopulate the area, thanked me and the rest of the 3,000-plus once again and said there would be a pie on the way soon. I guess we're all gonna get a really small bite. 



Home docents get their orientation from Charlotte Grotz before previewing the tour homes.
Bob Smith photo

NEW MUSEUM RESIDENTS



Here's the latest addition to the Village Gardens on the museum grounds. As part of the Art Alliance of Idyllwild's "Deer Sighting" public art project, IAHS received this family of four deer sculptures, painted with a historical flavor by local artists. Stop by and get acquainted with them. Then pick up a map and tour all the two dozen sculptures installed throughout Idyllwild and Pine Cove.

ONLINE (cont. from page 6)

We got this project started with a grant from the Idyllwild Community Fund, surplus funds in the IAHS treasury, and donations from the Town Crier and Rotary Anns. The first five years cost a bit more than \$2,300; to complete the project will obviously take a major fund-raising effort.

Given the necessary money, we could right now have eight more years scanned and posted (1954-57, 1959-63) with very few missing issues. Beyond that we'll need your help finding the newspapers to borrow. The years 1946-48 and

1957-58 are particularly urgent.

Public interest can be gauged in a couple of ways. One is the volume of inquiries we receive about events, people, and places in those early postwar years of Idyllwild's history. Another is the number of people who use the online newspapers directly. So send us your questions and tell us about your efforts to look up information in the old papers, for example, at the Idyllwild Branch Library or on the Web.

We'd love to hear from you by e-mail at info@idyllwildhistory.org, by phone at (951) 659-2717, or by snail mail to PO Box 3320, Idyllwild CA 92549. ✍

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If a gift membership, please enter donor's name and address:

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Museum Hours:

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**Winter Schedule (Sept. 7- June 16):
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Admission Free

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Reminder: Annual Raffle Drawing, Friday, December 13

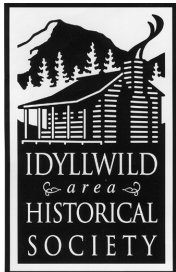
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