

SMOKE BEGINS TO SETTLE

Wildfire nears containment as evacuations lifted for all

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By JENNIFER SQUIRES

jsquires@santacruzsentinel.com

DAVENPORT — Barbara McCrary motored around her Swanton View Road ranch Monday in her trusty John Deere Gator 6x4 with Bentley, her 1-year-old Australian shepherd, riding shotgun. *

The scene at the 280-acre property was markedly different than recent days: The fire engines were gone, the pastures were blackened but no longer burning and her husband, Lud, had gone to work at Big Creek Lumber as he normally would on a Monday morning.

It seemed a bit lonely, Barbara McCrary remarked.

But by Tuesday morning, the Swanton community should again be full of residents, each with nearly a week's worth of stories to share, after evacuation orders for the community were lifted Monday night.

As many as 500 residents along Swanton and Last Chance roads had been displaced.

"I'm just really happy and ready to go home and clean up my home," said Swanton Road resident Elizabeth Raugust, who as at a dinner party in Davenport with other evacuees when she heard the news.

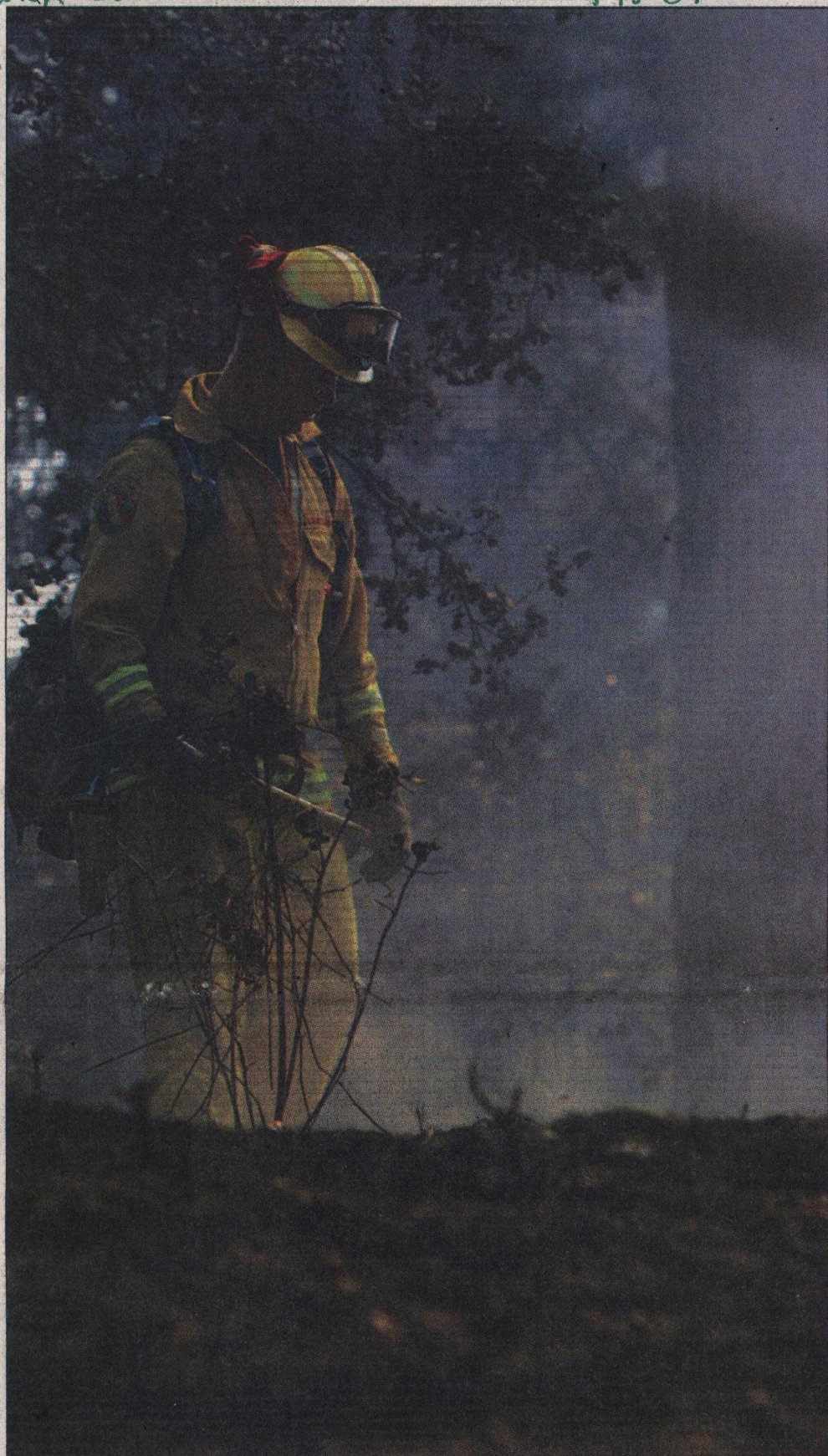
The dinner host, Noel Bock, said the mood was lively Monday night. Several firefighters, including Cal Fire spokeswoman Julie Hutchinson, were invited to the meal.

"Everybody started cheering as soon as the firefighters started walking in for dinner. They were clapping and applauding, saying this was so great," Bock said.

Immediately, the group gathered started a phone tree around town to share the good news with other evacuees, many of whom were staying with friends of friends in Davenport.

The Lockheed Fire hovered around 7,000 acres and was 80 percent contained Monday evening, Cal Fire reported. The wildfire, the largest in California during the weekend, ignited Wednesday

SEE FIRE ON A5



PHIL CARTER/SENTINEL

Cal Fire firefighter Jacob Spath of the Lassen-Modoc unit patrols a recently burned area off of Swanton Road Monday afternoon.

LOCKHEED FIRE BY THE NUMBERS

ACRES BURNING: 7,017

STARTED: 7:15 p.m. Wednesday

CONTAINMENT: 80 percent, estimated full containment Aug. 20

LOCATION: Bonny Doon area —

Smith Creek drainage

EVACUATIONS: Monday evening fire officials lifted the mandatory evacuation of the Swanton area, allowing the residents to return home with proper ID. The evacuation order for Bonny Doon was lifted 3 p.m. Sunday. Residents should remain diligent and continue to drive safe while both fire and law enforcement equipment will still be working in the area.

CAUSE: Unknown.

INJURIES: 5.

ROAD CLOSURES: Warnella Truck Trail at Cement Plant, Highway 1 at Lower Station, Highway 1 at Upper Station and Blodgett at Empire Grade.

STRUCTURES THREATENED: 100 houses. Two outbuildings were damaged and one destroyed.

FIRE CREWS: 2,172 firefighters; 36 hand crews; 238 fire engines, 29 dozers, 27 water tenders.

COST: \$12 million.

SOURCE: Cal Fire

Thick brush at fire's start helped fuel the blaze

Little access, poor roads slowed firefighters, allowed flames to spread, officials say

By GENEVIEVE BOOKWALTER

gbookwalter@santacruzsentinel.com

SANTA CRUZ — The Lockheed Fire began near private property whose owners had done little to clear their lots of overgrown brush, thus making access more difficult for firefighters and possibly allowing the flames to gain momentum last week, fire officials said Monday.

"I'm a little surprised that we had no loss of life," said Rich Sampson, Cal Fire division chief in Felton. "As remote as these (locations) are and how difficult it was to make access, it's just as difficult to make an exit."



DAN COYRO/SENTINEL FILE

The Lockheed Fire began about 7:15 p.m. Aug. 11, near Lockheed Martin's Santa Cruz Mountains campus near the end of Empire Grade Road. Officials have yet to determine its cause.

A firefighter defends his fire line against the Lockheed Fire advancing toward a home on Molino Creek Farm Road on Thursday.

SEE BRUSH ON A4



PHIL CARTER/SENTINEL

Smoke rises from a burnt out tree stump in a recently burned area off of Swanton road Monday afternoon.

Smoke fills Davenport on Monday as a convoy of fire trucks head back to the fire lines of the Lockheed Fire.

SHMUEL THALER/SENTINEL



BRUSH

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Flammable native species such as manzanita and knobcone pine, which evolved with fire, were easily ignited in the low humidity and unseasonably high temperatures the evening the fire started, Sampson said. In addition Sampson said, private property nearby was not cleared of flammable brush and duff that often fuel a catastrophic blaze.

In addition, Sampson said, a lack of signs and well-maintained roads slowed down firefighters as they responded to the scene.

"Access was, let's just say, very restricted," Sampson said. "The roads were not very well-cleared, they were not very (easy) to navigate, there's no road signs, no addresses... out here you can't even tell if you're on

the right road."

In contrast, Sampson and others credited property owners lower in the mountains, like those who own land on and around Swanton Road, with helping to save their own homes through extensive prevention efforts taken before the fire began, such as clearing vegetation within 100 feet of buildings and thinning nearby forest land so firefighters could get in and protect houses.

Eric Huff, assistant officer to the board of California Forestry and Fire Protection and a former forester with Big Creek Lumber in Davenport, especially credited Big Creek and Cal Poly San Luis Obispo's nearby Swanton Ranch with clearing undergrowth from their forests and thus helping keep flames close to the ground.

"You had a really nice, almost prescribed-fire type situation," Huff said.

Prescribed fires are those set on purpose, usually in the cooler spring or fall months, to clear out debris that otherwise could fuel a dangerous blaze during hotter months.

In addition, Sampson credited Cemex, which owns the cement plant near Davenport off Highway 1, with helping create what ultimately would become a line to stop the flames.

"They put in a shaded fuel break along their main haul road, and that's where we stopped the fire," Sampson said.

Bob Berlage with Big Creek Lumber declined to give his employer credit for keeping the flames under control.

"It's too early for an assessment," Berlage said.

However, Berlage said, it "wouldn't surprise me to find that on recently managed lands, the fire would tend to stay more on the ground."

Meanwhile, Sampson said, in recent days, he is hearing from more and more of the private landowners at higher elevations that for so long had been difficult for Cal Fire to reach. Now, he said, they're contacting him for help with prevention efforts.

Many of those property owners, he said, are absentee landlords who live off the grid, hauling in their own water and supplies for short stays.

"We can take advantage of an incident like this to improve things in the future," Sampson said. "Increased public awareness, we definitely saw that after last summer's fires," when flames ripped through Bonny Doon and above Corralitos.

After those blazes, Sampson said, many more homeowners are stepping up to clear the land around their homes.



Smoke rises from beneath the ground in a recently burned area off of Swanton road Monday afternoon.

PHIL CARTER/SENTINEL

FIRE

Continued from A1

evening on State Parks land north of the Scotts Creek drainage. The cause remains under investigation.

Fire crews worked Monday to close up a containment line along Scott Creek on the northwest edge of the fire, by allowing the low-intensity flames to slowly creep down the steep ravine. They also focused on another soft spot in the fire break near Mill Creek off Swanton Road, according to Cal Fire spokeswoman Julie Hutchinson.

"The hope is they will tie it up," Hutchinson said.

Full containment is still estimated for Thursday.

But Monday afternoon, the emergency Red Cross shelter at Vintage Faith Church in Santa Cruz closed and, by evening, everyone was allowed home so long as they could show identification. The Bonny Doon evacuations were lifted Sunday afternoon, though roads in Bonny Doon and Swanton remained closed to all but local and emergency

traffic.

Bodo Langen, who lives on Pine Mountain on Last Chance Road, had bucked the evacuation order, but his wife and sons stayed with relatives and friends during the wildfire.

"My wife will be so happy. She will be so happy to not be locked out," Langen said, adding, "I'm happy to get back to normal."

He also praised fire crews.

"They did a marvelous job," Langen said.

While some crews worked the fire lines Monday, others were trying to make the fire zone safe for people to re-enter by mopping up hot spots and falling dangerous trees, Hutchinson said. PG&E and AT&T also brought in crews to begin repairing damaged utility lines.

But most property owners have not had enough time to assess the damage to their land. No homes were burned. One outbuilding — a large storage barn on Purdy Ranch Road — was destroyed and two outbuildings were damaged by the fire, according to Cal Fire.

At Barbara and Lud McCrary's ranch, the pas-

tures are charred where the bulldozers didn't gorge deep gashes in the grass. There are knocked-down fences, broken gates and the PVC pipes that bring water down the hill to the homestead melted, she said.

"Most of the ranch is black," Barbara McCrary said. "This place has got to have a chance to heal."

Already, concerns about winter rains causing erosion problems on the fire-scarred hills are surfacing.

"If we get really heavy rains, it's going to be really bad," Barbara McCrary said.

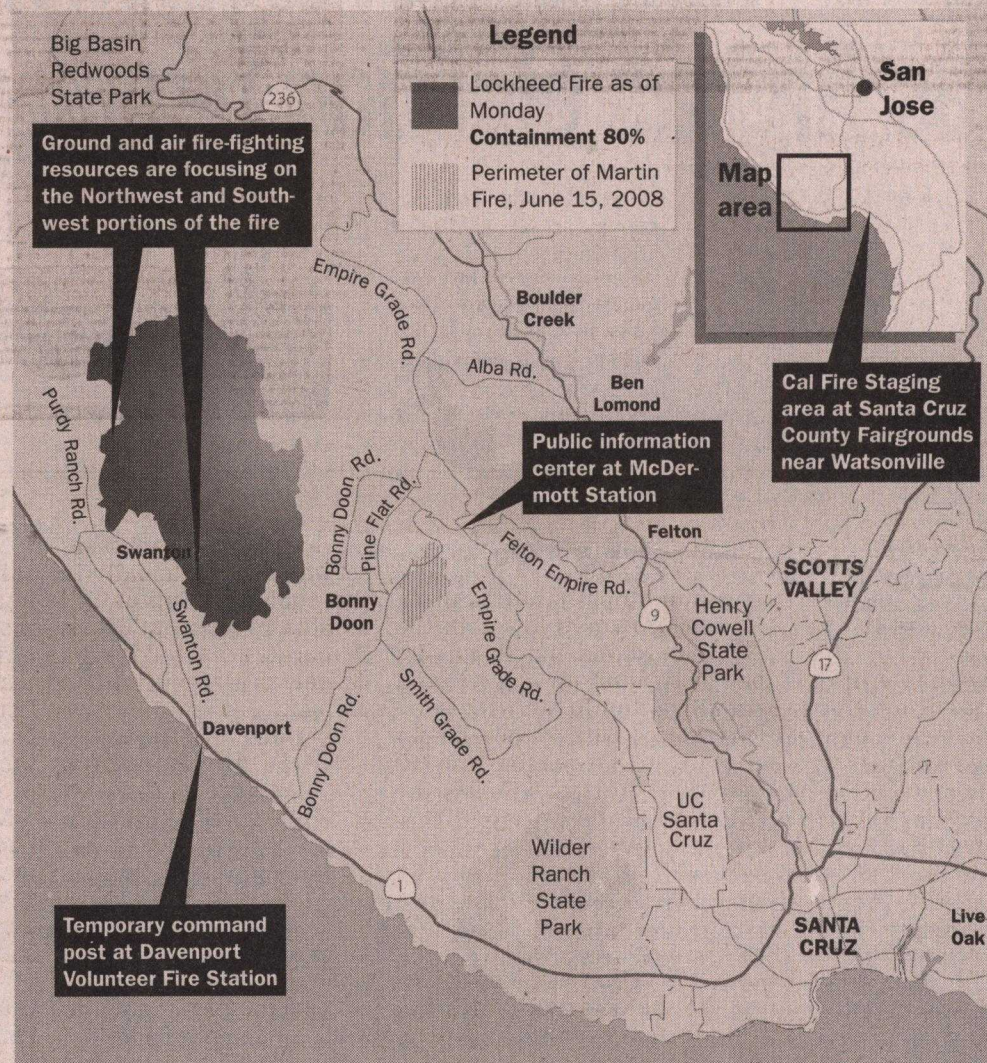
One road over at her nephew's place, Ken McCrary was scoping out the damage to his Big Creek Road property. There, smoke still filtered up from the ashy slopes of the canyon and hung in the air. Piles of vegetation that fire crews ripped away from cabins before the flames came through and charred logs need to be cleaned up.

"We've got a lot of chipper work to do," the life-long Swanton resident said, though he saw the project as a positive. "I look at it as an opportunity to clean it up."



SHMUEL THALER/SENTINEL

Barbara McCrary, who refused the Lockheed Fire evacuation order from her Swanton View Road home in order to watch over her livestock, begins the work of returning her ranch to normal operation on Monday.



MAXWELL HENDERSON/SENTINEL GRAPHIC