

Big Basin Fire Burns 300 Acres

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By MARK BERGSTROM
Sentinel Staff Writer

Firefighters are hoping for full containment by tonight of the Big Basin fire that has burned more than 300 acres of timberland between the park and the Davenport coast.

Sharon Frost, an information officer with the state Department of Forestry headquarters in Felton, said this morning the fire was about 75 percent contained. She said full containment was expected sometime tonight and control by Wednesday night.

She said the 480 firefighters have a line around most of the blaze, except for an area in the northeast corner by Hihn-Hammond Road and East Waddell Creek.

She said that area is very steep and rocky, with some boulders the size of cars crashing down and hampering firefighting efforts.

Because of the steep terrain, firefighters are relying heavily on air support from four air tankers and three helicopters.

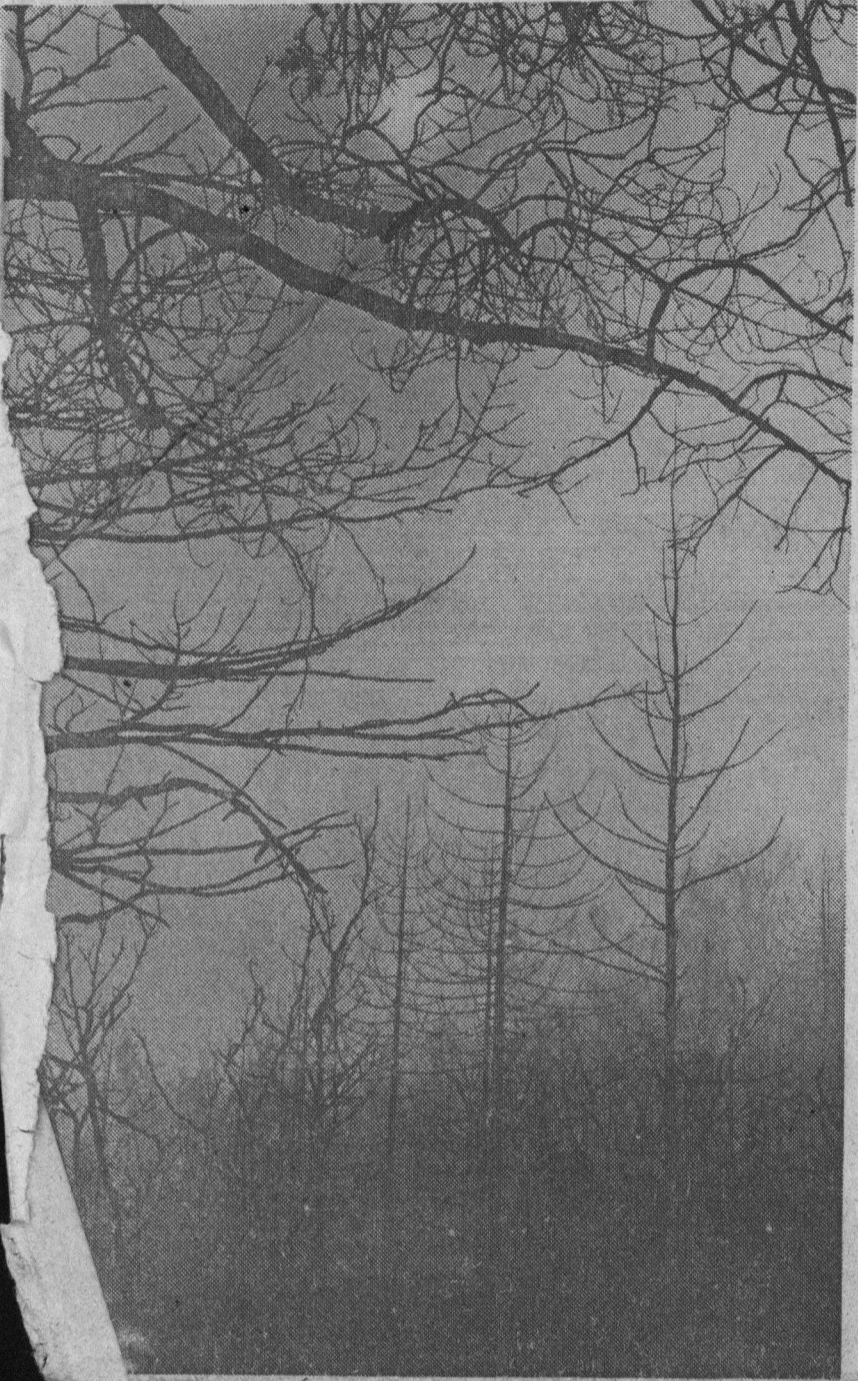
Felton Forestry crews, she said, have been bolstered by crews from Calaveras and Tuolumne counties and from a number of stations throughout Northern California.

Two crews from the Ben Lomond Conservation Camp have been joined by 13 more from similar facilities in Northern California.

Groundcover in the area, said CDF investigator Frank Lewis, is mainly tan oak and brush, with some redwood and Douglas fir trees.

The entire area, he said, is believed to be within the state parks system.

Lewis said this morning he has not been able to pinpoint the specific cause of the fire, though he believes the blaze broke out about 400 feet off Last Chance Road on the east fork of Waddell Creek, above Davenport.



Light rarely shines through the barren scene at Big Basin.

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Helicopters get water from Lockheed pond, then drop it on fire.

Big Basin Fire

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The blaze was spotted at about 10 a.m. Sunday from the Bielwaski tower on Skyline Boulevard. Lewis said the CDF crews have responded to four fires in the area since October. Most, he said, were caused by campfires. "It's a natural travel area from the park to the coast," Lewis said.

Shortly after the fire broke out, CDF summoned the Mid-County Task Force, which sent seven engines and 31 men from Santa Cruz, Live Oak, Soquel, Capitola, Aptos, Branciforte and Scotts Valley Fire departments to the scene to provide structure protection for the homes in the Last Chance area. Those departments, Lewis said, were released late Monday morning when additional CDF units arrived.

None of the homes was threatened.

Whereas CDF and the Mid-County Task Force have conducted joint training exercises, Sunday night's call was the first in an actual emergency, Lewis explained.

He also credited the San Lorenzo Valley Amateur Radio Repeater Club, Lockheed Missiles & Space Co. and Big Creek Lumber Co. with providing valuable volunteer support.

The radio club, Lewis said, quickly set up a repeater line to aid communications between the command post at Sandy Point station at Big Basin and CDF headquarters in Felton.

Helicopters working the fire, Lewis said, have been using the pond at the Lockheed test base for their 200-gallon drops on the blaze. And, he said, Bud and Lud McCrary of Big Creek Lumber have aided with their knowledge of the terrain.

CDF officials reported that James Mahar, a California Conservation Corps worker, was flown from the fireground to Dominican Hospital after taking a fall in the steep terrain on Monday. He was treated and released for superficial injuries, said Frost.