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An unrelenting march

Fire + Fire Protection - 2000

SJmn 8/15/09

Wind, heat likely to intensify Santa Cruz Mountains blaze

By Bruce Newman, J.M. Brown, Jennifer Squires and Cathy Kelly
Bay Area News Group

Gusting winds whistling up the Santa Cruz Mountains are driving the first major wildfire of the season from its foothold a short distance from the ocean toward Highway 9. It's one of the most scenic routes through the redwoods that drape the hillsides in a combustible cloak.

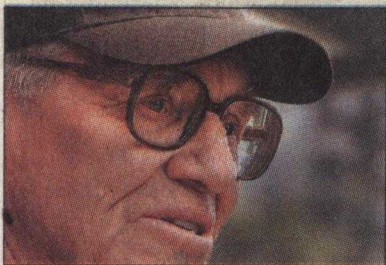
Swirling winds, dropping humidity and higher temperatures expected over the weekend could create a witch's brew when mixed with the roaring flames that have already consumed 5,036 acres in two days. "It's definitely not going to help the fire effort," said Larry Smith, a meteorologist at the National Weather Service in Monterey. "Drier and windier is not going to be a good thing for the fire crews."

Gov. Arnold Schwarzenegger is expected to arrive at the fire com-

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LOCKHEED FIRE UPDATES

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As the Lockheed fire bears down on his family and his land, Bud McCrary says he will not leave his home of more than 40 years.

Legendary logging family stands ground

By Paul Rogers

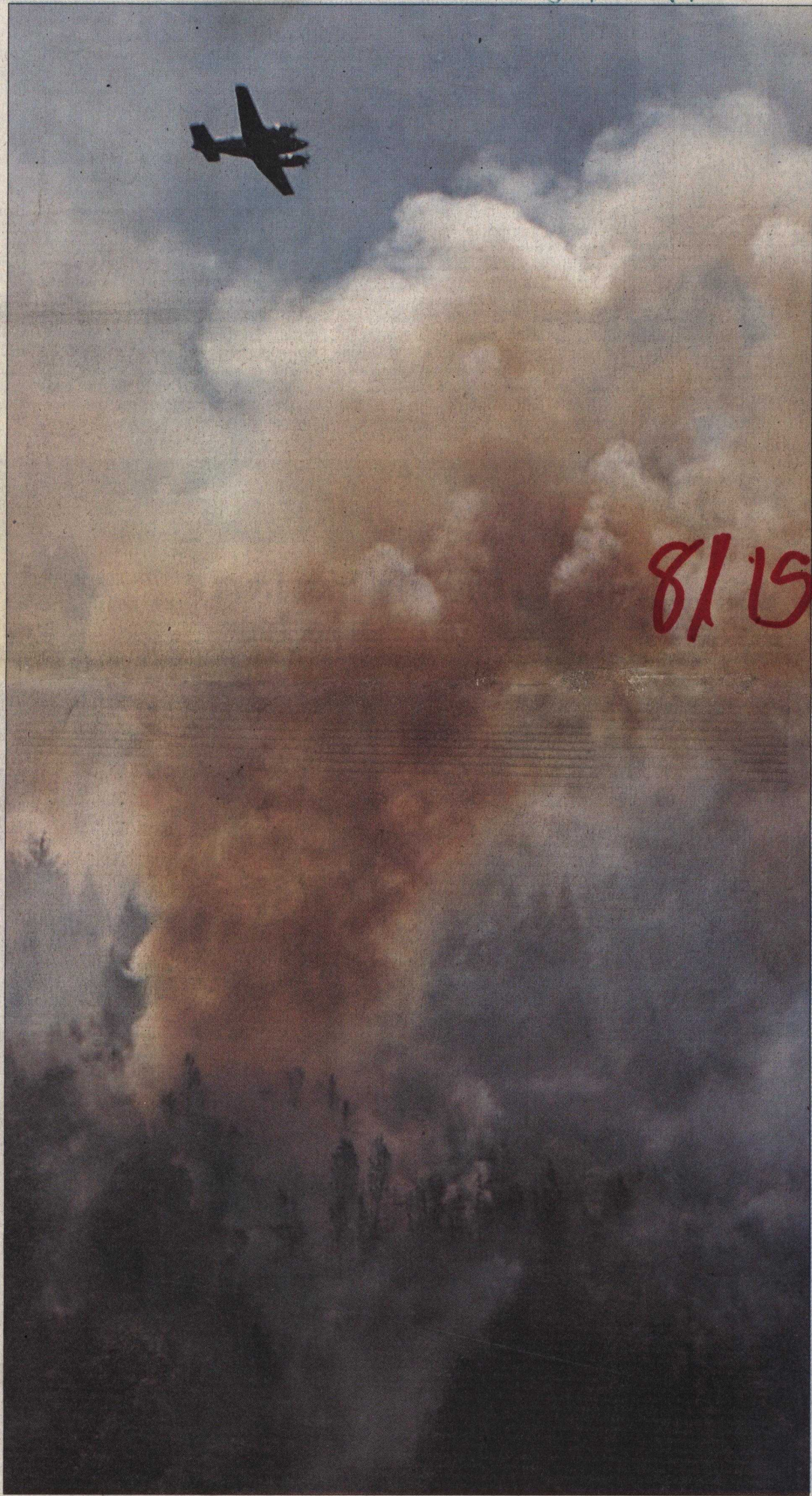
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The crackling of burning trees echoed through the forest. Helicopter blades thudded overhead. Waist-high green ferns turned to carpets of smoldering ash.

As flames from the ominous Lockheed fire burned on three sides of their tidy ranch home, Homer "Bud" McCrary and his wife, Emma, sat around the kitchen table Friday afternoon, their family roots as deep as the stately redwoods surrounding them.

The night before, flames had come within 400 feet, destroying their water tank. Their phone was dead.

"We decided we're going to make our last stand here," said Bud. He looked at Emma. Their eyes met



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SHMUEL THALER — SANTA CRUZ SENTINEL

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The Lockheed fire burns Friday in Davenport. The wildfire has consumed 5,036 acres in two days.



PAULINE LUBENS — MERCURY NEWS PHOTOGRAPHS

As smoke hovers above on Friday, Bud McCrary shows how the Lockheed fire has damaged the land owned by his Big Creek Lumber in Santa Cruz.

McCrary

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and his began to mist. "If it gets too close, we'll get in the pool. We'll be all right."

In a state where people come and go like the seasons, Bud McCrary and his family have stayed put. McCrary, now 82, cofounded Big Creek Lumber, a redwood logging business, in 1946 with his brother Frank "Lud" McCrary, and their father and uncle, after he returned home from the Navy in World War II.

homes along the private dirt roads off Swanton Road with foam and water.

Big Creek, which has nearly 200 employees and a mill that sits on a bluff overlooking the Pacific Ocean, threw everything it had at the fire: bulldozers, water trucks, foresters with shovels, maps and chain saws.

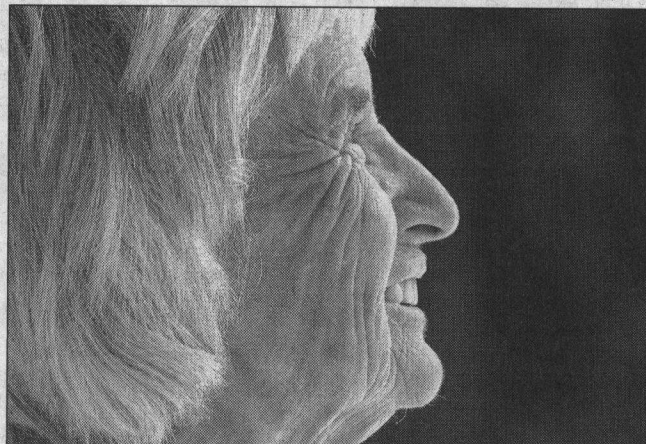
Bud McCrary himself, a soft-spoken man who still works five days a week at the mill, helped direct fire crews, providing valuable information about the remote roads, gates and streams. He and his brother know the area probably better than anyone

Even those parts of Big Creek property that are burned probably won't be lost to timber production. Fires take out the younger, spindly redwoods, McCrary noted, leaving the older ones, whose bark is nearly fireproof.

As a stiff wind whipped stinging smoke into the eyes of nearby firefighters, he pointed to a moonscape of gray ash and brush.

"There's going to be some nice greenery in a few years," he said.

Near McCrary's house, there was an engine company guarding every home. Capt. Jim Lafuente, running an en-



Emma McCrary said Friday that smoke from the wildfire is close by, but no flames have reached her house.

time we got there, everything was gone except for the chimney. I cried when they pushed it over."

The couple even met during a fire. In 1948, the last time the mountains here burned, Emma was a Palo Alto resident who came to the coast to work on the McCrary Ranch. The Pine Ridge fire burned for three weeks, charring 19,000 acres.

"There was no fire equipment available," Bud said. "And there were no chain saws in those days. Basically, we fought it with shovels and handsaws."

Back then, there were perhaps a dozen sawmills nearby. Today, Big Creek is the last surviving redwood mill in the Bay Area. Of the 5,036 acres burning out of control Friday, roughly half was Big Creek Lumber property.

The McCrarys are legendary along Santa Cruz County's rugged North Coast, where redwood and Douglas fir forests descend to windswept beaches on Highway 1 between Davenport and Big Basin Redwoods State Park. In the past seven decades, they have stood firm against floods, fires, lawsuits, environmental activists, recessions and earthquakes.

And on Friday, Bud made it clear they weren't going anywhere this time either.

His son, Ken, 57, had worked round-the-clock for the past two days, cutting fire lines and helping douse small

McCrory's grandchildren are the sixth generation of his family to live on the property off Swanton Road. His great-grandfather, a Massachusetts sailor who came west to work for whaling captain John Davenport, for whom the nearby town is named, bought the first forest parcel in 1869. A neighbor had his leg torn off by a grizzly bear not long after. The leg is buried in the McCrary family cemetery.

On Friday, walking down a dirt road along roughly 200 acres where he, his children, brother and numerous employees live, McCrary pointed to a towering redwood tree, charred jet black 125 feet up its bark.

"Look at this tree. It's 900 or 1,000 years old. It was just going like a blowtorch last night. But it should survive," he said.

Clara County strike team, had spent the previous 24 hours parked next to Bud and Emma McCrary's home.

His men had doused the roof with water, snuffed out swirling embers, and saved a rental home down the driveway when flames came within 10 feet of it in the middle of the night. After sleeping on the deck Thursday night, the men were eyeing the conditions carefully, even though the McCrary house had brush cleared 100 feet around it.

"We'll stay here as long as it takes. This house is not burning down," said Lafuente.

As logging companies go, Big Creek is regarded around California as one of the better stewards of the land. They have won awards for preserving wildlife and have donated land and money for a salmon

natchery as part of a Santa Clara County strike team, had spent the previous 24 hours parked next to Bud and Emma McCrary's home. Over the years, they have had regular debates with environmentalists, even occasional lawsuits, but they also have garnered accolades from groups such as the Nature Conservancy.

The McCrarys do not clear-cut on the roughly 10,000 acres they own, most of which is in northern Santa Cruz and southern San Mateo County. They take about 40 percent of the trees per acre when they log, producing lumber for decking and fences.

McCrary said he believes cutting some old growth redwood trees is acceptable, and actually helps the forest by allowing more light for the younger trees to grow. Many logging activists believe that all redwood trees older than 200 years should be off-limits.

In 1992, when Big Creek announced it was cutting some old growth trees, activists from Earth First chained themselves to logging trucks, put epoxy glue and cement on padlocks and drained transmission fluid from Big Creek machinery.

"They brought in a Greenpeace organizer from Washington, D.C.," Bud said. "I showed her our operation and she said, 'Well it looks good, but we don't want any trees cut at all.' So we had a parting of the ways."

Along with political firestorms, the family is no stranger to real fires.

Emma and Bud's house burned down once before, in 1962.

"I was in town that day shopping," said Emma, now 78. "They said it was probably an electrical fire, from the washing machine. By the

Later, floods wrecked roads and bridges on McCrary land in 1955, 1982, 1983 and 1998.

Disaster is lurking again, threatening to take everything McCrary and his family have spent a lifetime building.

"There's always that potential. It could happen. But we've committed ourselves to this. We're bound and determined to save our house," he said, getting into his pickup truck to meet with firefighters.

The tenacity that keeps the sawmill in business — and the redwood trees growing — convinces McCrary his family will survive this, too.

"We're persistent," he said. He smiled wearily, and drove down the hill.

Contact Paul Rogers at 408-920-5045.

Fire

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mand post at 10 a.m. today as more than 1,500 firefighters struggle to save the town of Bonny Doon and more than 250 residences. As many as 2,400 residents have been evacuated from the North Coast area.

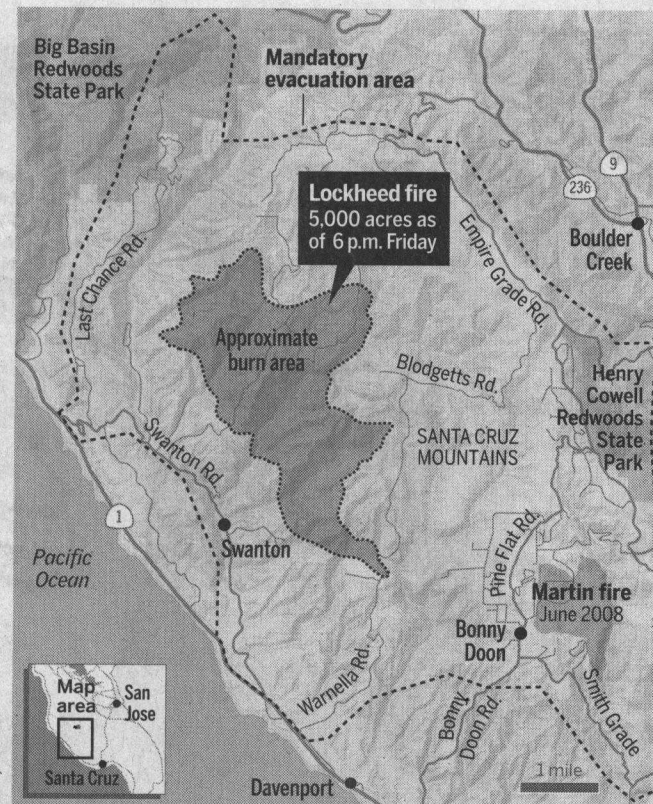
In the first sign that fire crews might be gaining some mastery over the blaze, CalFire announced late Friday that Empire Grade residents living between Felton Empire and Alba Road could return to their homes if they show valid identification. The road remains closed to the public.

CalFire reported the Lockheed fire was 15 percent contained, and a spokesman said full containment wasn't expected for more than a week. Most of the containment was on the north side of the fire, where the blaze ignited Wednesday night.

The cause of the fire is under investigation, said Battalion Chief Julie Hutchinson.

But it was the gusting winds, which could shift again and push the fire southeast toward Bonny Doon, that presented firefighters with their greatest challenge. "Bonny Doon really remains the No. 1 concern for us," said CalFire spokesman Daniel Berlant.

Along Swanton Road,



Source: California Department of Forestry and Fire Protection, Google Maps, MERCURY NEWS

which runs off Highway 1 and into the heavily wooded area, fire trucks stood vigil at every house, waiting for flames that the firefighters hoped would never come roaring down the hillside. The landscape was a patchwork of blackened grasses, smoldering ash and drifting smoke. There were few visible signs of an active fire, and fire crews took advantage of the lull to cut

away brush and vines, moving mulch piles and clearing defensible spaces.

Cal Fire said nearly 1,506 firefighters were battling the blaze. The estimated cost of fighting the fire so far is \$750,000.

After leaving their station at 4:30 a.m., a crew from the Kings County Fire Department took a stand at the corner of Purdy and

Swanton roads at 8:30 Friday morning. Parked near an old seaside school, Battalion Chief Frank Rohan said the slow-moving fire was eating away fuel without damaging homes. "It's actually doing good," he said. "It's cleaning out the stuff below."

At the nearby Monterey Bay Salmon and Trout Project, Santa Cruz Battalion Chief Matt McCaslin sounded a familiar refrain about the unpredictable winds, which the Weather Service expected to gust to 20 miles per hour in the mountain passes this weekend. "The biggest dangers are out of the way," McCaslin said, "but you could still lose this building if the wind changes."

Fire crews were allowing anything that wasn't threatening a building to burn. Everything else, they doused.

The rugged terrain and the depth at which many of the homes are buried in the woods made it difficult for crews to do much more than slow the fire's progress.

Helicopters zipped back and forth to the ocean filling their buckets at Davenport Landing Beach and points north to feed the thirsty flames. A half-dozen flame retardant drops hit the western edge of the fire in what appeared to be an attempt to ring the fire before it crossed the Scott Creek drainage.

Smoke had not been a

problem during the fire's first day and night, but the shift in the wind from the north was expected to cause breathing problems for people with heart or lung disease. The elderly, children and pregnant women were advised by air quality officials to limit prolonged exertion and stay indoors when possible.

Smoke and ash fell from the sky in places as far away as Salinas, forcing the Monterey Bay Unified Air Pollution Control District to issue an air quality advisory for the Highway 9 corridor between Ben Lomond and Boulder Creek, as well as Davenport and all areas close to the fire. The advisory also extended from Monterey Bay to Carmel Valley and down the Salinas Valley.

Lt. Gov. John Garamendi signed a state declaration of emergency for the Lockheed fire, saying the order will "bring all necessary resources to this fire," including personnel, ground equipment and aerial support. Garamendi was acting-governor Friday because Schwarzenegger was in Massachusetts attending the funeral of his mother-in-law, Eunice Kennedy Shriver.

Big Basin State Park remained closed at Waddell Creek due to extreme fire danger. The California Department of Forestry and Fire Protection ordered fire

engines from around the state to the scene as the flames bore down on homes, and by late Friday, 230 of the reassuring red trucks were scattered across the mountaintops.

The fire consumed 1,000 acres Friday.

"That's significant for the Santa Cruz Mountains," Hutchinson said.

The decision by some homeowners to ignore the evacuation order concerned El Cerrito Fire Department Capt. Terry Pace. "It's kind of scary. When it's time to leave, they're all going to try to leave at once, and the roads up here are narrow," she said.

At the Monterey Bay Salmon and Trout Project, director Dave Streig was monitoring the welfare of the 30,000 San Lorenzo River steelhead, 5,000 Scott Creek steelhead and 1,700 Coho salmon on what was supposed to be his last day before retirement. Pointing to the Coho salmon, which are listed as "threatened," Moss said, "We're really hoping these guys survive."

They weren't the only ones.

Santa Cruz Sentinel staff writers Donna Jones, Alia Wilson and Genevieve Bookwalter contributed to this report.

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