

# Relief for crews, residents

## Evacuees return home as 600-acre blaze nears containment



Shmuel Thaler/Sentinel

A firefighter's clothing is an oasis of color in the sea of the ashen monotone of the Bonny Doon Ecological Reserve on Friday.

### Fire investigators pinpoint start of blaze, mum on cause

By **JENNIFER SQUIRES**  
SENTINEL STAFF WRITER

*Fire & Fire prevention - 2000*

**BONNY DOON** — Most fire evacuees went home Friday and the 600-acre Martin Fire was 65 percent contained, Cal Fire officials reported late in the day.

The news came as a relief to residents who had been away from

their homes for two days while the fire burned heavy brush in steep ravines.

"I guess I might sleep in my house tonight," said Todd Brake, who rents a place on Warren Drive. He was parked at Bonny Doon and Smith Grade roads, reorganizing possessions in the back of his white pickup before mak-

ing the drive into his home Friday afternoon.

Brake was among the 1,500 residents told to evacuate when the Martin Fire erupted at the foot of several narrow drainages in the Moon Rocks, a popular illegal hiking spot inside the Bonny Doon Ecological Reserve, around 3 p.m. Wednesday. Many were told they

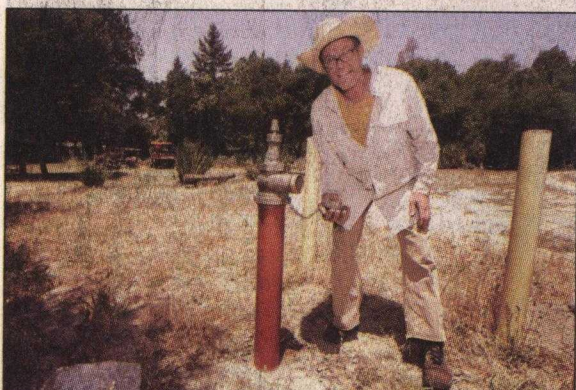
*6-14-08*

could return Friday morning and by 6 p.m., almost all of the evacuation orders had been lifted, Cal Fire spokesman Bill Peters said.

"Everything on the periphery of the fire" was open by Friday evening, he said.

The only closure remaining this

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Bill Lovejoy/Sentinel

Former Santa Cruz city firefighter Andrew Ward shows the fire hydrant he installed on his Martin Road property, which aided firefighters during the early stages of the Martin Fire on Wednesday.

### Many return to find paradise intact

By **MELISSA WEAVER**  
SENTINEL CORRESPONDENT

**BONNY DOON** — Martin Road resident Andrew Ward gestured toward the fire hydrant near his house, grinning as he pointed at the cap hanging from the end. "The cap is off, which shows they used it," he explained.

The now-retired reserve firefighter installed the hydrant three years ago, just in case.

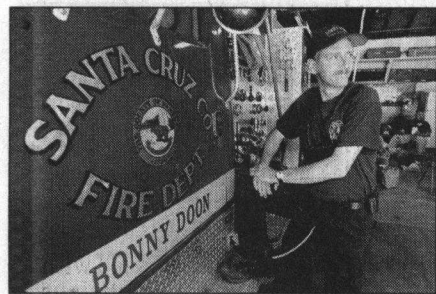
"This is our life," he said of the sprawling property.

Spring water flows from an old mine shaft and down a sloping hill into beds filled with native poppies and herbs. The

house sits below on a large yard filled with fountains and other sculptures that Ward built. Beehives hum on the far edge of his half-acre property. In the six years Andrew and Dori Ward have lived there, they have never taken a vacation. They said they have no reason to; everything that means something to them is there.

Friday, Ward knelt by the spring and scooped water with his hands. Bringing it to his mouth, he said, "I've been waiting for this for three days. I didn't get to take a last drink from my spring before I left and I was worried that would be the last time."

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Bill Lovejoy/Sentinel

Steph Marr is a firefighter with the Bonny Doon Volunteer Fire Department.

## Volunteer, rookie firefighters get on-the-job training

By MELISSA WEAVER  
SENTINEL CORRESPONDENT

Bonny Doon Volunteer firefighter Steph Marr wasn't surprised that engines from as far away as San Diego and Redding came to help.

"That's the fire service," he said. "We're all here to cover each other's backs."

The father of two young children joined the volunteer brigade because his home on Pine Flat and Empire Grade is miles from any ambulance, and he wanted to know what to do in an emergency.

He was able to sleep at home Thursday night after being awake for "an excess of 50 hours," he said. He immediately called his kids and returned the 28 voicemails, telling callers, "I'm alive, I'm completely burned out, and I'm going to get some sleep."

He fell into his bed around 10:30 p.m., but showed up at Bonny Doon station again Friday morning.

The sleep was well-earned. After nearly losing the Bonny Doon station only an hour into the fire, firefighters from all over the state battled wind-driven, rapidly moving flames that swept through the area, "like a bat out of hell," as Cal Fire Capt. Tony Akin described it.

"It was a rough night," he said.

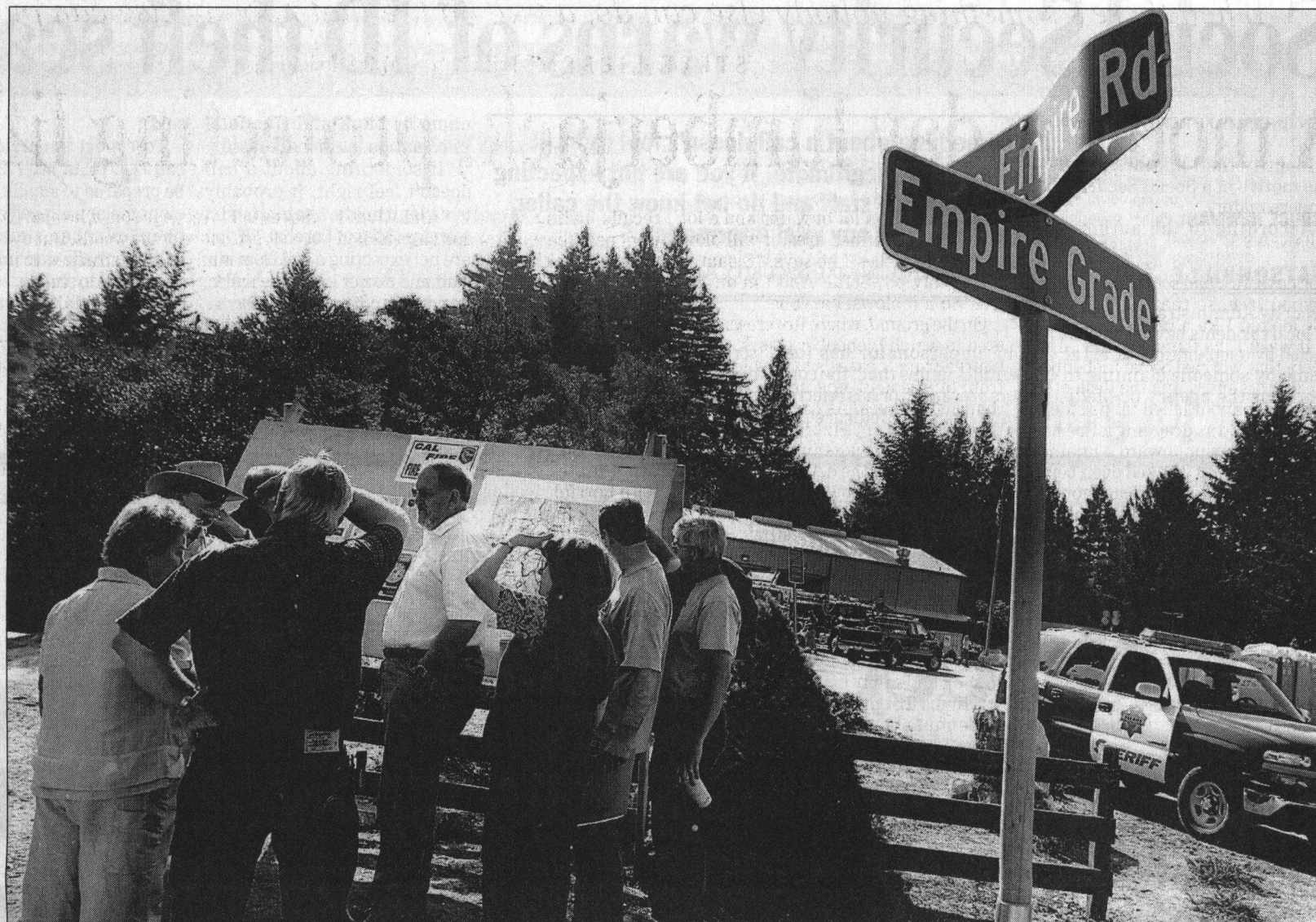
Marr described the overall feeling as "controlled frantic."

He said that from the second he saw a column of smoke rising over Moon Rocks, he sprang into action.

"I got a big surge of adrenaline mixed with a great deal of trepidation," he said. "I was concerned for people who live here, thinking of where to send engines, cut lines, bulldoze... it was like, quick! Find that file in your head while driving and trying not to hurt anyone and trying to make sure operations are running according to plan. It was true multitasking in the heat of the moment, quite literally."

"Everyone has a fight or flight response," Marr said, "and it's a matter of turning it into fight, fight, fight."

The mood at the Bonny Doon and McDermott stations Friday morning was



Shmuel Thaler/Sentinel

Hungry for information regarding their homes, evacuated Bonny Doon residents gather at a Cal Fire information board Friday.

## Fire

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morning was Martin Road, according to Cal Fire.

In those areas, "there's still some hazard trees that need to be taken down," Peters said.

Santa Cruz County Division Chief of Cal Fire Steve Woodill said most of the containment effort is concentrated on the eastern border of the fire near the Pine Ridge area, where the fire is nonactive but smoldering.

"We don't want to call a fire contained until there is no way it can spread," he said.

The boundaries of the fire have not changed substantially. Fire officials have not said what sparked the fire, but reported locating the ignition point. The investigation could take weeks, and Woodill said the fire would not be "controlled" until a few days from now, at which point residents will be able to re-enter areas not yet safe to go back to.

Rhonda Bradbury, who lives off

### Fire at a glance

**ACRES BURNED:** 600, downgraded after field mapping.

**CONTAINED:** 65 percent.

**STRUCTURES DESTROYED:** Two homes, eight other unidentified structures.

**EVACUATIONS:** Lifted for everyone except Martin Road and Quail Drive residents.

**SHELTER:** Closed.

**CAUSE:** Under investigation.

**COUNTY:** Santa Cruz.

**LOCATION:** Bonny Doon and Martin roads.

**INJURIES:** None.

**FIREFIGHTERS:** 804 firefighters; 26 fire crews, 72 engines, 2 air tankers, 18 water tenders, 4 helicopters, 4 dozers.

**COST:** \$1.6 million.

**FIRE STARTED:** 1400 block of Martin Road.

**ANIMAL EVACUATIONS:** Livestock are being housed at the Graham Hill Showgrounds. Pets are at Animal Services, 27 Janus Way, Scotts Valley.

**ROAD CLOSURES:** Martin Road between Pint Flat and Ice Cream Grade roads, Quail Drive.

**VOLUNTEERING TO ASSIST:** The Volunteer Centers of Santa Cruz County are pre-registering volunteers. Call 427-5070.

understory to become more dense, providing more fuel to fan this week's blaze.

Last year, Cal Fire recorded the severity of fire hazard in the Bonny Doon area as "high" and "very high," the two most severe categories.

"This is the one we've always been worried about," said Warren, a long-time Bonny Doon resident.

Several residents were prepared for a wildland fire and stayed despite the evacuations orders so they could defend their homes. Some of them stayed on their property during the fire.

Terry Long, who lives on Martin Road at Quail Drive with his wife, rushed home from Scotts Valley when he saw the ominous column of dark smoke Wednesday afternoon. He prepped his property — removing debris from around the house, driving their vehicles down the road, moving propane tanks, closing windows and doors and got the garden hoses ready.

"Then we helped our neighbors," said Long, a South San Francisco firefighter.

Fire crews took water from their pool, used their spare bathroom and

### Major fires in the Santa Cruz Mountains

2008 Summit Fire (Eureka Canyon); 4,270 acres, 35 homes and 65 outbuildings destroyed.

2002 Croy Fire (above Uvas Reservoir in Santa Clara County); 3,127 acres, 31 homes and 15 outbuildings burned.

1985 Lexington Reservoir Fire (Santa Clara County) 14,000 acres, 42 buildings.

1980 Last Chance Fire (Big Basin) 400 acre fire. No structures burned.

1960 Gazos Creek (Pescadero) 2,500 acres. No structures burned.

1954 Ben Lomond Dump Fire (Ben Lomond); 1,500 acres, 24 buildings destroyed.

1948 The Pine Mountain Fire (Newell Creek); 19,000 acres.

SOURCES: Cal Fire, Big Creek Lumber

Residents returning home breathed a sigh of relief to know their property was intact.

Brake, the tenant on Warren Drive,

a worn-out calm.

"We've pretty much got this thing beat if the wind stays with us," Marr said.

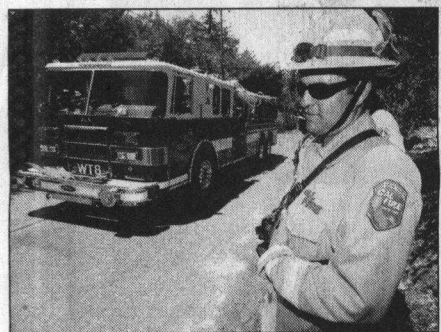
Rookie firefighter Brandon Jai, 28, said he was "100 percent confident (in his abilities)" during the fire because he was surrounded by an experienced staff and he already had upward of 100 hours of training under his belt.

Jai's third day of training at the Cal Fire Academy was interrupted when the fire started. The academy is in the last week of in-field training for new Cal Fire employees.

The 15 academy students had been drilling in the heat all day Wednesday when they got the call around 4 p.m. and headed out.

Dispatched along with seasoned firefighters, Jai said he and the other academy students were told to protect houses in the Pineridge neighborhood, but the fire never made it that far.

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Bill Lovejoy/Sentinel

Brandon Jai's third day of training at the Cal Fire Academy was interrupted when the fire started.

Empire Grade Road with her five small dogs, waited anxiously to return to her home. She had evacuated as soon as the fire broke out.

"I could see it start," she said. "It was frightening. It was very fast."

Bradbury had stayed in a shelter Wednesday night. Thursday, a Boulder Creek woman offered Bradbury the use of a vacant rental. Bradbury and her dogs were in Felton on Friday morning when she was told Pineridge Road had opened, but the person was actually talking about Pine Flat, so she and the dogs waited in her black PT Cruiser in the shade of a pine tree until fire officials let her go home in the afternoon. She praised their efforts.

"They're doing a wonderful job," Bradbury said.

Friday, firefighters were in the Laguna Creek drainage to hold the fire to the west side of the creek. They feared the winds might push the fire across the creek and up the ridge to the Pineridge neighborhood on Pineridge Road off Empire Grade. In an effort to make sure that doesn't happen, they cut a bulldozer line between the Laguna Creek drainage and subdivision Thursday. Fire crews also found an old mining road through the Bonny Doon Ecological Reserve that leads to the Laguna Creek drainage and used it to get better access to the fire, officials said.

For the first time, fire maps Friday included a red, circled "X" marking the suspected point of origin of the blaze, which appeared to be east of the top of Moon Rocks near the 1,750-foot elevation range.

Peters said the cause of the fire remains under investigation, though several Bonny Doon residents have

or visit [www.volunteercenter.org](http://www.volunteercenter.org).  
**DONATIONS:** Santa Cruz County Bank is accepting donations. Call 457-5000 or drop off.

speculated that hikers or transients in the Moon Rocks area, which is closed to public access, accidentally ignited the blaze.

Cal Fire spokesman Greg Grizzell from Tuolumne-Calaveras said the fire started at the base of several steep drainages, which acted like chimneys, funneling the fire up the Moon Rocks.

"There's a lot of drainages up there," he said.

Aaron Wayne lives near the area where the blaze sparked and was interviewed by the Cal Fire investigator about what he'd seen and heard.

"I was outside and I heard a yell," he said. "They yelled something like 'Let's get out of here!' or 'Fire!'"

Warren declined to speak further about the fire, saying the fire investigator advised him to not talk to others to prevent him from influencing other people's accounts of how the fire started.

Most of the fire area had not burned in at least 40 years, according to local forestry experts.

In 1948, the county's largest fire in a century touched parts of the Bonny Doon community, but spared many areas including the Bonny Doon Ecological Reserve, foresters say. Reserve officials say a small fire burned within the reserve in the '60s, but before that it was mostly loggers who would occasionally burn after their harvests.

The lack of fire has left the area's scrub to grow thicker and the forest

one strike team was served breakfast Thursday morning. The fire didn't reach the Longs' home, but he said he was very worried during the first few hours of the fire and felt for those whose property had been damaged.

"A lot of people have a lot invested in their land up here," Long said.

Cal Fire officials reported Thursday that 10 homes had been destroyed. Peters updated the figure Friday to say two homes and eight other unidentified structures burned down.

"Nothing else is confirmed as residences at this point," Peters said, meaning the tally could include outbuildings, like sheds and garages, although the Cal Fire Web site continued to state the blaze consumed "10 residences."

A crew was sent out Friday to assess the damage, but did not complete its work, Peters said. They planned to head out again today, this time with a representative from the county, he said. Several other structures were damaged by the fire.

The Red Cross of Santa Cruz County closed its shelter at Scotts Valley Middle School on Friday morning after sheltering four people Thursday night. Some people still needing shelter will be temporarily housed in local motels, according to the Red Cross. The Santa Cruz County chapter will continue to provide disaster relief, including counseling for those affected by the fire. Today, the Red Cross will provide water, snacks and cleaning supplies in the areas affected by the fire.

The Sheriff's Office reported no problems with looting and credit that to patrols in the area and to residents who have stayed in their homes and reported people in the area who seemed out of place.

used to have renters insurance when he lived in the San Francisco Bay Area, but didn't re-up when he moved to Bonny Doon three years ago.

"I just flat out forgot to get it again," he said, mentally kicking himself for the oversight. "If that thing would have gone up, all of my stuff would have gone up too."

However, unlike many other Bonny Doon residents, Brake said he hadn't thought much about the risk of wildfire. He said he lives under redwoods and that the area remains cool and moist even on warm days. Wednesday afternoon, he realized fire was a very real problem.

"I'm telling you man, that friggin' smoke," he said. "I couldn't see fire on the ground when I was trying to evacuate my stuff, but that smoke ..."

Jerry Rose Johnson and her husband, Kim, waited at the Bonny Doon fire station on Empire Grade Road for news about their Pineridge Road home Friday morning.

"You feel like you're at least near your home, even though you can't be," she said.

The couple called their home phone Thursday and were relieved to hear their own voices on the answering machine. It meant their house was still standing.

But the threat of fire in their rural neighborhood did remind them about what's really important.

"It's all replaceable," she said. "What's really priceless is your perspective changing in the right way."

*Kurtis Alexander, Melissa Weaver and Lisa Hirschmann contributed to this report.*

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## Home

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"When we left, I kept trying to picture it (the house) gone so I could be prepared for the worst," said Dori Ward. "But at the same time I kept switching back and forth between thinking of the worst and hoping for the best."

She said she is so grateful for the firefighters, so relieved and shell-shocked. But the Wards stressed they feel for those who have losses. "So many have lost so much," said Andrew Ward. "It's time for everyone to work together to get us all home."

They said they went back to their property Friday morning because they didn't want to be away any longer than necessary.

"We didn't leave until they

asked us three times," Andrew Ward said of Wednesday's evacuation request.

They left because they didn't want to get in the way of people who knew what they were doing.

Before leaving, they moved fuel-filled tractors and cars away from the house, shut off their propane, laid out hoses, and unlocked their doors — anything, they said, to make it easier for firefighters.

"We parked our bikes by the front gate in case anyone needed to evacuate quickly," he said.

Andrew Ward also left a chair by the road, because "everyone needs a break."

The Wards returned to their home Friday morning with a truck full of soda and a case of chocolate-covered Raisinettes for any hungry firefighters who might pass their way.

They fled around 4 p.m.

Wednesday with some clothes, their honeymoon photo album, and their pets: a dog, a cat, a goose and a duck.

"The animals were a god-send," Dori said. "They gave us something else to focus on."

The goose and duck stayed at Duck Lovers, a shelter in Watsonville that houses fowl, and the dog and cat came with them to Scotts Valley, where Andrew's sister lives.

"I don't think it could have been any closer," Andrew Ward said about the fire, which stopped a football field length away.

Firefighters must have appreciated the Wards' property, because the Wards found packages of vegetable crackers, fudge brownies, pineapple and a crumpled water bottle in their fountain.

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Bill Lovejoy/Sentinel

Andrew Ward waters plants at his Martin Road home Friday. He returned to find his property and buildings untouched by the Martin Fire.