

# Staff Ride

## Resources



Wildland Fire Leadership Development Program

## Cart Creek Fire - Facilitator's Field Guide

**Note to Facilitators:** This is a suggested format. Do not feel limited by the identified stands for discussion items. It is provided as a word document. Users may adapt and revise to suit specific audience and schedules.

### Staff Ride Difficulty Rating:

#### Physical

**Moderate** – Most walking segments are relatively flat with an average slope of 8%. The land tops upward gradually for the last 800 feet with a slope of 17% just above the fire origin and 45% just below the bluffs. Average elevation for the area is approximately 6,400 feet

Bottom elevation: 6,076 feet (Cart Creek Foot Bridge).

Top elevation: 6,672 feet (Stand 5 Hodgkinson site).

From the parking area at the trailhead to Stands 2, 3, 4, and 5 is approximately 3.6 miles round trip.

#### Logistics

**Moderate** – The Firefighters Memorial (Stand 1) is located in the Firefighters Memorial Campground off U.S. Hwy 191 approximately 3 miles east of the junction of Hwy 191 and Utah Hwy 44. The campground is 38 miles from the center of Vernal, Utah. Vernal has ample overnight accommodations. The campground could be utilized going through the reservation process. Access to the site is seasonal and dependent upon snow. **Note:** In heavy snow years the trail up to the fire site may not clear until late April.

#### Hazards

**Low** – Normal wildland hazards (possible bees, etc.). Lightning is very frequent with thunderstorms. Be prepared for all types of weather and check forecasts prior to your trip.

## Stand 1 – Firefighters Memorial Campground

**Note to Facilitators:** The Tactical Decision Games are a method to generate group interaction if participants have a strong fireline background, e.g. FF1, Single Resource Boss, Strike Team/Task Force Leader, or Division Supervisor). Strategic Discussion Points are a method to generate group interaction if participants have Incident Management or Program Management backgrounds, e.g. FMOs, IMT Command and General staff or Agency Administrators.

### Maps

Cart Creek Staff Ride map

Stand 1: Firefighters Memorial Campground

40° 53.585' N, 109° 27.005' W

### Travel Directions

Driving Directions to Stand 1: From Vernal, Utah, take Highway 191, 38 miles north toward Flaming Gorge National Recreation Area.

Turn Right into Firefighters Memorial Campground. Follow the signs to the Firefighters Memorial. Note: Visitors to the Firefighters Memorial are not required to pay an entrance fee to the campground.

### Terrain Orientation

Campground on bluff, steep canyons

### Events to Describe

- Memorial site
- Weather summary
- Activity of crew members

### Discussion Topics

- Historically, the Ashley NF averages 26 fires/year (19 lightning and 7 person caused) and burns 1,721 acres/year.
- This memorial is in honor of Gene Campbell, Dwight Emery Hodgkinson, and David Kay Noel who lost their lives July 16, 1977 on the Cart Creek Fire. The memorial was erected by contributions of money and physical effort by friends and families of the three deceased men. It is located at Firefighters Memorial Campground (formerly Bootleg Campground) on Ashley National Forest.
- The Cart Creek Fire occurred almost 30 years ago. Most of the men/women wore jeans, fire resistant shirts, hard hats, and none carried fire shelters. Few of the fire fighters and not all overhead met qualifications for fire assignments, 18 of the 25 people had the required training.
- The July 16, 1977 weather forecast for the area called for partly cloudy with scattered afternoon showers and thunderstorms. Winds were forecasted to be “light and variable at

all levels, mostly controlled by topography, with gustiness near showers and thunderstorms.” This forecast was essentially correct, but the cumulus buildups began slightly earlier than expected.

- Many District personnel were attending the rodeo at Manila, UT, 30 miles away. The District Office contacted the rodeo site and a call was made over the loudspeaker system for all District personnel to report to the gate. Most of the firefighters had to stop by their homes to change clothes and gather equipment.
- The fire began about noon Saturday, July 16 from a lightning strike on a bench south of the confluence of Cart Creek and Spruce Creek. The District FMO, Dennis Hatch, spotted the fire and drove as close as possible. He estimated the fire to be about one-half acre. He called for the helitack crew based at Dutch John Helibase, 3 ½ miles northeast, to initial attack the fire.
- Fuels over the entire fire area can be characterized as extremely flashy grass-sage with scattered Junipers, Ponderosa Pines, clumps of Bitterbrush, Curly-Leaf Mahogany in the swales and pockets of deeper soil. Fuel volumes increased with elevation. During the winter of 1976-1977, the western United States had experienced an extreme drought. Dead downed and live fuels were exceptionally dry during the summer.
- The helicopter placed a two-man initial attack crew near the fire at 1235. The two men were instructed to wait until additional help arrived before beginning initial attack. The fire was about 1 ½ acres in size.

**Handout Tactical Decision Game #1 or Strategic Discussion Point #1 prior to leaving Stand 1. Conduct these at Cedar Springs Lagoon open parking area.**

**Handout Tactical Decision Game #2 or Strategic Discussion Point #2 prior to crossing the Cart Creek Foot Bridge.**

- Tell participants to have their responses ready when they arrive at Stand 2.

## Stand 2 – The Ponderosa Pine

### Maps

Cart Creek Staff Ride map

40° 53.446' N, 109° 26.355' W

### Travel Directions

- Driving directions to Stand 2: From Stand 1 drive north on Highway 191 approximately 2.5 miles to the locked gate (40° 54.219' N, 109° 26.372' W) located on the right side of the highway.
- Accessing the two track dirt road through the gate will require a Forest Service key. Continue approximately ¼ mile on the two track road to the open area suitable for parking. Leave vehicles at this point and walk along the two track trail to the south approximately 0.5 miles to the foot bridge across Cart Creek (40° 53.818' N, 109° 26.303' W).
- Cross the foot bridge and follow the foot trail and ascend uphill south to the Stand 2 marker located at the large Ponderosa Pine tree.
- If you do not have a Forest Service key, access may be obtained by calling the Ashley National Forest Supervisors Office, (435)789-1181, and ask for one of the following, Forest FMO, Flaming Gorge District Ranger, or North Zone FMO. If you don't have a Forest Service key, and no Forest representative is available, you will have to park at the gate and walk in from there.

### Terrain Orientation

Gentle slope, rocky, sagebrush, and grass fuels.

### Events to describe

- Strategy and tactics
- Location of resources
- Expectation of an insignificant fire

**Conduct Tactical Decision Game #2 or Strategic Discussion Point #2 upon arrival at Stand 2.**

### Discussion Topics

- The helicopter went to Cedar Springs Lagoon, picked up Hatch and firefighter Rich Harned, made an aerial reconnaissance of the fire, and placed Hatch and Harned on the ground with Miner and Dumas at H-1. Hatch recognized the small squad could not control the fire promptly and radioed for a retardant drop and 20 additional firefighters.
- The fire was spreading slowly westerly with the terrain and easterly and northerly with the wind. Experienced firefighters felt the fire could easily be controlled with the available resources. Hatch took two of the firefighters with him and walked partway up the slope to a point near the origin of the fire, and began building a direct line uphill to the south and

west. One helitack was left at H-1 to receive personnel and Helitack Foreman Black returned to Cedar Springs Lagoon to set up a helibase.

- Tom Plasky and Dave Strantz joined Hatch's squad at 1300. The strategy was to build a line along the south flank of the fire uphill and cut it off before the fire reached the ridge to the west.
- At 1340 Sheakley and Uphoff arrived at the fire, established voice contact with Fire Boss Hatch and discussed a plan. Sheakley and Uphoff began to build a section of indirect and unanchored line along the ridge line. Hatch sent 2 firefighters to assist Sheakley.
- At 1350 Coleman, Jenkins, and Hodgkinson unloaded at H-2 and began walking uphill to join Hatch's squad.

**Handout Tactical Decision Game #3 or Strategic Discussion Point #3 prior to leaving Stand 2.**

- Tell participants to have their responses ready when they arrive at Stand 3.

## Stand 3 – Helispot 3

### Maps

Cart Creek Staff Ride map

40° 53.432' N, 109° 26.251' W

### Travel Directions

Walking directions: From Stand 2, walk east southeast (bearing 105°) approximately 870 feet to the Stand 3 marker.

### Terrain Orientation

Flat, rocky, sagebrush, and grass fuels.

### Events to Describe

- Firefighters arriving at fire
- Organizing firefighters into squads
- Moving of helispot due to fire moving faster than expected
- Plan of attack
- Expected fire behavior

**Conduct Tactical Decision Game #3 or Strategic Discussion Point #3 upon arrival at Stand 3.**

### Discussion Topics

- Around 1400, a DC – 6 airtanker made several runs dropping retardant on along the ridge line and on hotspots along the west edge of Spruce Creek.
- Three more firefighters arrived on the line to join Hatch's squad, Jenkins, Coleman, and Hodgkinson. Hatch felt they were needed in Sheakley's squad, so they were sent up on top to tie in with him.
- Sheakley had a total of 6 people plus himself. Shortly, it was necessary to return Plasky and Strantz back to Hatch's squad due to the fire activity being more than Hatch and two people could handle.
- Dave Noel, YCC Camp Director, arrived at Cedar Spring's helispot along with others, and began organizing crews.
- From the two loads of crews, J. Martin drew a four-man squad, Crevelt, Searfoss, Simpson, and himself. Noel directed him to proceed from H-2 up the slope to a point east of the initial attack point, but on another ridge.
- During the interval since first attack, the fire had burned east and west outflanking Hatch's line.
- Martin's squad was to begin building a third section of unanchored line uphill and then cut off that segment of the fire by tying into Hatch's line.

- Helispot H-2 was moved 65 yards south away from the edge of the fire. This is now referred to in the report as H-3 but firefighters on the ground were unaware of the name change. In effect, H-1, H-2 and H-3 were not designated helispots, they were merely locations where crewmembers were off loaded. Each successive helispot was moved south as the fire continued to grow.
- Next load came into H-3 consisting of Ray Ruble, Val Norman, Gene Campbell, and Annette Rogers. Purdy was the leader of the squad with Val Norman as a line scout. Purdy was given instructions from Noel to begin at the low end of Martin's line and build line downhill. Purdy's squad walked in single file toward the fire.
- Noel and Campbell followed 20 yards behind the last member of Purdy's squad. They had stepped out of line to retrieve a tool that someone had left leaning against a tree.

**Handout Tactical Decision Game #4 or Strategic Discussion Point #4 prior to leaving Stand 3**

- Tell participants to have their responses ready when they arrive at Stand 4.

## Stand #4 – Campbell and Noel Fatality Site

### Maps

Cart Creek Staff Ride map

40° 53.407' N, 109° 26.270' W

### Travel Directions

Walking directions: From Stand 3, walk west (bearing 269°) approximately 480 feet to the Stand 4 marker.

### Terrain Orientation

Gentle slope, rocky, sagebrush and grass.

### Events to Describe

- Change in fire behavior
- Campbell and Noel cut off from squad
- Campbell and Noel's route

**Conduct Tactical Decision Game #4 or Strategic Discussion Point #4 upon arrival at Stand 4.**

### Discussion Topics

- Helicopter Foreman Black recognized a change in fire behavior and notified those with radios.
- Hatch had noted the change in fire behavior as it moved into heavier fuels and radioed a message to Sheakley to tie their two lines together and cut off the head of the fire.
- Martin's squad also recognized the change and began to move into the safety of the burned area.
- Purdy and his squad were beginning their ascent up to Sheakley's line when Purdy looked back behind him and onto the flat, all he could see was a wall of fire. Purdy yelled for his squad to move ahead rapidly into the burned out area.
- Campbell and Noel were last seen about 15 to 20 yards behind the last person in Purdy's squad. No one in Purdy's squad saw Campbell or Noel, only a wall of flame that was 10 to 30 feet high.
- Campbell and Noel were cut off from Purdy's escape route and turned southeast up a low stony ridge and attempted to outrun the fire. Best estimates on their escape were after they reached about 50 yards up the stony ridge they turned south, perhaps intending to then run east toward the helispot.
- Martin observed Campbell and Noel running toward the east and saw them fall at about the same time.

**Stop between Stand 4 and Stand 5: Dave Noel Fatality Site**

- Walking directions: From Stand 4, walk west (bearing 270°) approximately 95 feet to the Dave Noel Fatality Site. 40° 53.409' N, 109° 26.287' W

**Handout Tactical Decision Game #5 or Strategic Discussion Point #5 prior to leaving Dave Noel fatality site.**

- Tell participants to have their responses ready when they arrive at Stand 5.

## Stand #5 – Hodgkinson Fatality Site

### Maps

Cart Creek Staff Ride map

40° 53.345' N, 109° 26.474' W

### Travel Directions

Walking directions: From the Dave Noel Fatality Site, walk west southwest (bearing 249°) approximately 960 feet to the Stand 5 marker.

### Terrain Orientation

Steep rocky with Pinyon-Juniper and Sagebrush fuels.

### Events to Describe

- Change in fire behavior.
- Confusion resulting from unexpected fire behavior.
- Situational awareness of escape routes.

**Conduct Tactical Decision Game #5 or Strategic Discussion Point #5 upon arrival at Stand 5.**

### Discussion Topics

- Sheakley noticed the fire behavior change and instructed his squad to drop back off the line and head for the safety of the black and rejoin the rest of the crew.
- The squad moves down the ridge to the east. Sheakley became separated from his squad by a rocky bluff. Sheakley called instructions for the squad and they proceeded in an orderly fashion.
- Within a few seconds, it was realized that there was a substantial increase in fire behavior.
- The squad ran along the bluff for several hundred feet to a point where they could come down through the rocks. As they came down the order was: Uphoff, Coleman, Hodgkinson, and Jenkins. Hodgkinson stepped aside and let Jenkins go ahead, and then followed Jenkins down the rocky slope.
- Word was passed to drop their tools and run. As the squad came down the rocky slope, they ran toward an opening in the fire created by Hatch's line and into the black.
- Hodgkinson was the last person in line and did not come through into the burned out area. Squad members began calling his name out.
- Meanwhile, the helicopter had moved over head and observed Hodgkinson running behind Jenkins, when a juniper flared. Hodgkinson stopped for a moment and turned around and began to run back to the point where he had come from, up the ridge.
- As Hodgkinson struggled up the slope, he apparently became disoriented and may have tried to run back up to the ridge line before the fire overcame him.

## Appendix A: Fire Organization and Staffing

July 16, 1977

### Resources

**Fire Boss** – Dennis Hatch Ashley N.F.

**Squad 1** – Dennis Hatch, Squad Boss

1. Chuck Miner
2. Rich Harned
3. Tom Plasky
4. Dave Stantz

**Squad 2** – John Martin, Squad Boss

1. Pat Crevelt
2. Geary Searfoss
3. Dave Simpson

**Squad 3** – Ray Purdy, Squad Boss

1. Ray Ruble
2. Carel Jackson
3. Val Norman
4. Annette Rogers

**Squad 4** – Barry Sheakley, Squad Boss

1. John Uphoff
2. Karen Coleman
3. Yolanda Jenkins
4. Dwight Hodgkinson

### Helicopter

1. Rick Inskeep – Helicopter Pilot
2. Don Black – Helicopter Foreman
3. Dave Dumas – Assistant Helicopter Foreman

### No Specific Assignment:

1. Dave Noel – Assignment unknown
2. Gene Campbell – Assignment unknown
3. Rick Martin – Unassigned firefighter

A total of 24 people had been delivered to the fire by helicopter when the fatalities occurred. The available personnel were organized into four squads with two people managing the helicopter. The exact assignment for Noel and Campbell are unknown, however, both Martin and Purdy recognized Noel as their supervisor or crew boss.