

Staff Ride

Resources



Wildland Fire Leadership Development Program

Loop Fire – Audio Transcript

Interview With Chuck Hartley, Stand #2

[Interviewer] These are excerpts from a July 2003 interview with Chuck Hartley, who is the Dalton hotshot superintendent at the time of the Loop fire.

[Chuck] So our role here was to leap ahead of the two crews that're onboard, pick up the ridge, and go black, take it down, and eventually if things didn't change, we were going to take it to the Pacoima Dam, down in the area below us here. Terrain here is extremely steep once you get off the ridge tops. Loose granite, you slip real easy. Some fairly heavy fuels, that's the stuff that's over your head on the ridge tops, and dropped off on the south side into shorter fuels that would burn rapidly, all of this stuff. This time of year was dry and was readily ignitable. That's kind of it. We tied with them, had some words about our roles, and we went down the ridge and started our project.

[Interviewer] Good, and that was, so, let's progress on through the day then. About how long, or what time of the day was it when you were about mid-slope down there?

[Hartley] Yeah, it's been a few years now but, uh, around noon-ish, we had actually got to where we had gone down the ridge and hooked the corner and was headed east towards the Pacoima Dam. In the meantime, in these hours between when we got here and when we had made the turn a couple of the other crews had come on board-- it was a Del Rosa crew and the El Paraiso crew and we compared notes, which was the way things were done at that-- in those years because radios didn't exist. Communications of my crews consisted of 2 to 5 watt CB rigs that we bought ourselves and we kept communications with ourselves, other than the light 20-pound packs that there was on communications, and it really didn't do you any good if you had, like a crew from San Bernardino because they're on different frequencies. So, radios were almost non-existent. There was a lot of word-of-mouth, and the initial information that you got from the person on board on what they wanted. So ah, we built line and as I say we continued down, and we were in a leapfrog for one crew, with ah, "Go ahead, leave some space, take off" and then when you get to that point, you go around them. And that's what we did with the three crews.

[Interviewer] How big was the fire about this time?

[Chuck] Well, I'd say roughly a hundred acres. It wasn't really that big. And again, the wind had laid down and it was looking pretty good. You know, there was some smoke, but we didn't have any of the conditions that they had the previous night that had caused it to take off, which was high winds that caused the power line to go down.

[Chuck] Our initial marching orders were to follow them, major ridges, major as they could be, and take it down to the dam, Pacoima Dam, very steep again. And then we were fired out. There wasn't too much in here that was worth saving. In fact none, it was the easiest role as far as I'm concerned would have been to just take it down and fire it out.